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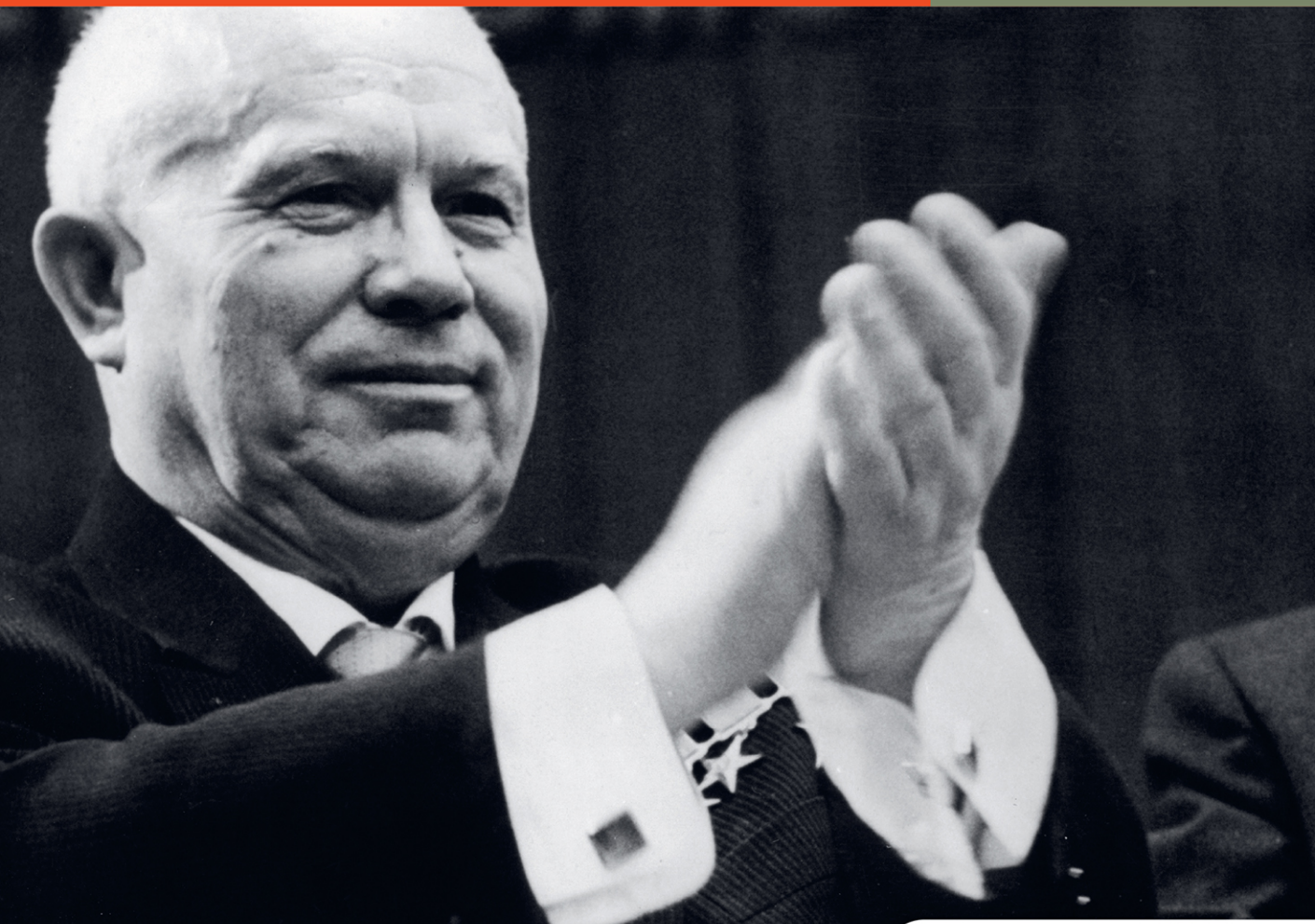
Russia and its Rulers

1855–1964 for OCR

ANDREW HOLLAND

THIRD EDITION



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Context: Russia by the mid-nineteenth century

Geography

By the mid-nineteenth century the Russian Empire was vast, being spread over 8 million square miles (nearly 21 million km^2) and covering large tracts of Europe and Asia. From west to east it was around 5000 miles (8000 km) and from north to south, about 2000 miles (3200 km). The peoples living in this area numbered around 70 million in the middle of the nineteenth century. This was a substantial increase from 1815, when there had been about 40 million, and the population continued to grow after *c.*1850 so that by the time of the first census, in 1897, there were 125 million. The middle of the century, therefore, represents something of a demographic explosion in Russia, which was closely linked to economic change. Most people lived in the western (European) side of Russia, attracted by the relative economic prosperity of the areas surrounding the two main cities of St Petersburg and Moscow. However, the majority (between 80 and 90 per cent depending on which sub-region is focused on) were peasants. Throughout the empire there were many different races, with their own languages, religions and cultures (for example, Ukrainians, Tatars and Latvians). Such minority groups sporadically posed a threat to Russian rulers as many wanted independence.

Society

Russian society was dominated by a landed gentry. A middle class did exist, consisting of merchants, early industrialists and professionals (for example, lawyers), but was much smaller. The gentry managed to control an often volatile peasantry through the adoption of village councils led by village elders (known as the *mir*). These councils more specifically had an important role in establishing and collecting taxes, selecting peasants for the army and allocating plots of land to be worked. About half of all peasants were essentially serf slaves owned by the gentry; the other half were owned by the state. Peasants provided either labour or cash from their labour to their owners, in return for shelter and crop shares produced from a farming system based on the cultivation of common fields. Punishments for breaking such arrangements were harsh, usually consisting of public floggings, and were greatly resented. There were also restrictions on peasant activity other than that related to work. The permission of a noble landlord was needed if a peasant wished to move out of the community or if they wanted to get married. Generally, peasant living and working conditions were appalling, leading to disease, starvation and high rural mortality rates (life expectancy has been estimated at 35 for males and females). Although, by 1855, the dangers of peasant unrest had been acknowledged,

peasant grievances, especially regarding access to good-quality land, remained an issue well into the twentieth century.

With regard to town and city dwellers, many were employed in small-scale textile industries, iron and steel production or mineral extraction; there were roughly 15,000 enterprises employing more than 800,000 workers. But there were already signs of deteriorating urban working and living conditions (inadequate water supplies, poor sanitation and workplace dangers) and the plight of workers was not dissimilar to that of the peasants.

Economy

Economic growth by the middle of the nineteenth century, as measured by the total amount of wealth generated, might best be described as sluggish, particularly when compared with the first industrialised nations of Britain, Germany and the USA. For example, at the start of the nineteenth century, Russia was the world's greatest producer of pig (basic) iron but by 1855 Britain had overtaken it and was producing ten times more. Much of this was due to Russia possessing an undeveloped banking system, which was unable to supply investment capital required for the introduction of modern technology. Thus, a small-scale, domestic (home-based) mode of production prevailed in many areas, keeping the output of goods relatively low. Most economic activity, though, was related to the production of grain, both for home consumption and for export. Nearly half of the value of all Russian exports came from the trade in grain, with most imports being finished products (such as porcelain) imported from Europe and further afield. Trade could have been even more fruitful if transport and communications had been more advanced. Russia lacked a developed railway system; it took until 1851 for a link between St Petersburg and Moscow to be opened, and by the late 1850s there was only 1600 km of track in total (compared with 15,000 km in Britain). The alternative forms of transport were roads and rivers, but their condition varied enormously from region to region, making trans-regional transportation of both bulky raw materials and finished products difficult.

Government and politics

Russia was governed by a tsar who was an autocrat (a person who ruled dictatorially by his own, not shared, power). This contrasted with how many countries in the West were ruled, which was through constitutional governments or monarchies. The tsar in 1855, Nicholas I (1825–55), belonged to the Romanov family or dynasty, which had ruled since the election, in 1613, of Michael Romanov by the National Assembly. All Romanovs were raised to believe that their authority was ordained (given) by God and that they were answerable only to God. All members of the government, drawn almost exclusively from the aristocracy, were appointed by the tsar. The key government institutions of the Imperial Council of State, the Senate and the Personal

Chancellery of his Imperial Majesty all appeared to have a degree of power but, ultimately, it was the tsar who accepted or rejected the advice of ministers and who had the final say over policy. The centre of government was based in St Petersburg, from where directives were passed down to regional assemblies. To ensure that this worked, especially given the vast size of the empire, many bureaucrats were needed: by 1855, there were around 114,000, ranging from provincial governors to assembly members, local judges and police chiefs. Most local officials were unpaid and carried out their duties for reasons of status and moral obligation to the tsar. But a consequence of this was a tendency by some corrupt officials to rake off parts of tax revenues to line their own pockets and to accept bribes. Nicholas had attempted to quell corruption by introducing a reporting system, pressuring officials to record every aspect of their activities in writing and send their reports on to St Petersburg. However, this became too unwieldy and the inefficiencies in local government prevailed. Another key feature of government was the use of the secret police (the Third Section), alongside a more conventional police force, to maintain law and order. When and where the latter broke down completely, the army was deployed. In 1855, the army consisted of about 1.4 million soldiers. Most were conscripted serfs, forced to join up for at least 25 years as part of their serf-based obligations. They were poorly trained and badly looked after, and subsequently performed erratically in conflict situations such as the Crimean War (1853–6). By 1855, the overriding concern of the government was that Russia was falling behind the West and would soon become a second-rate power. This anxiety was to have an important effect in shaping both domestic and foreign policies.

Religion

Religion in Russia was dominated by the Russian Orthodox (Christian) Church. The Church was a very conservative body that supported the authority of the tsar. However, it was not separate from the state, being governed by a Holy Synod which was headed by a government minister. In fact, the tsar had absolute authority over the Church matters, especially those related to finance. This emphasises the importance attached to the Church by the ruling authorities as a means of social control (that is, a way of ensuring that society kept to a moral code and veered from challenging tsarist authority). It is a common assumption that religion was all-pervasive in Russia: peasant homes contained 'red corner' shrines decorated with icons and religious celebrations dominated the many national holidays. Nevertheless, it is difficult to say how many Russians adhered strictly to the tenets of the Church. Indeed, in parts of Russia there were breakaway religious groups such as the Old Believers and Hysts, which challenged the Orthodox Christians and focused on dealing in some rather unorthodox practices (such as indulging in orgies so that 'original sin' could be experienced to justify repentance). An implication is that by the middle of the nineteenth century the Orthodox Church was becoming more detached from the wants and needs of both urban and rural populations.

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Check your understanding of the impact of events that changed how Russia was governed by completing Worksheet 1 at **www.hoddereducation.co.uk/accesstohistory/extras**

Conclusion

For much of the nineteenth century, Russia was feared by the West; it was a 'Great Bear' that had expansionist intentions and that threatened a perceived balance of power in Europe. However, its involvement in the Crimean War was something of a turning point in foreign relations as Russia's performance revealed its military, political and economic weaknesses. Russia's rivals were ready to take advantage. The root causes of Russia's malaise had to be identified and tackled; the war became a trigger for a far-reaching reform programme implemented by Nicholas I's son, Alexander II (1855–81), gaining him the nickname of 'Tsar Liberator'.

A chronological summary of the main periods of rule

Alexander II (1855–81)

Challenges

Before Alexander II came to the throne, serious social unrest over living and working conditions had been mounting. The effects of the Crimean War added to this discontent (see Chapter 3 for details about the causes, course and consequences of the war). Among the higher echelons of Russian society, there was also concern that Russia was falling behind Western Europe and would soon become a second-rate power.

Domestic policies

The tsar implemented a package of reforms, the majority of which naturally stemmed from the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. Changes were made to local government, the military, the legal system, education and the economy which seemed to constitute the start of a more liberal age. But this did not prevent Alexander II from resorting to repression to keep opponents in line. One of the ironies of this period was that as the people became more liberated, they showed an inclination to threaten the security of the ruling elite and were subsequently clamped down on again.

Alexander III (1881–94)

Challenges

The assassination of Alexander II in 1881 illustrated the degree of opposition that had mounted during his reign and that threatened autocracy. Alexander III also had to deal with land ownership issues that resulted from the emancipation of the serfs and clamours for more rapid industrialisation.

Domestic policies

A 'reaction' to the liberal policies of Alexander II occurred. Many of the reforms prior to 1881 were reversed or altered. Of particular note was the 1881 Statute of State Security, which sanctioned greater use of repression. Russification was also introduced to control the discontent among national minority groups. All of this was a marked departure from the freedoms granted by the previous ruler. On a more positive note, the tsar appointed Sergei Witte as finance minister to modernise the Russian economy. However, Alexander never lived to witness the full impact of Witte's efforts as he died prematurely from kidney disease in 1894.

Nicholas II (1894–1917)

Challenges

Unlike his father and grandfather, Nicholas did not have the personal qualities required to be a successful ruler. Opposition to his rule proliferated and became more organised in the form of the radicals (the Social Democratic Workers' Party – the SDs – and the Socialist Revolutionary Party – the SRs) and the liberals (Kadets and Octobrists – see Chapter 1 for more details about these groups). The Bolsheviks, a division of the SDs, went on to seize power from the Provisional Government and to murder Nicholas and his family. To distract the attention of the people from growing economic problems, Nicholas engaged in a disastrous war with Japan (1904–5). The consequences of this fuelled the so-called revolution of 1905 (see Chapter 3 for more details about the war and the link with revolution). Nicholas also committed Russia to fight in the First World War, although initially this was welcomed by the bulk of the population. However, he never got to grips with the enormous challenges this posed. With hindsight, it would appear that his decision to take personal control of the armed forces, thus leaving his wife (and Rasputin) in charge of domestic affairs, was a huge mistake. In 1917, he was forced to abdicate and his regime was replaced by the Provisional Government (see Chapter 1 for more details of this event).

Domestic policies

- *Economic reforms*. Nicholas encouraged Witte to continue with his plan to modernise the Russian economy, with a particular emphasis on the expansion of heavy industries and the railways. Agricultural issues were addressed mainly through the efforts of Stolypin and his land reforms.
- *Political reforms*. As a result of the serious popular unrest of 1905, Nicholas ordered the setting up of a representative political chamber called the *Duma*. Although this appeared to be a step on the road to a constitutional monarchy, Nicholas came to distrust the *Duma* to the extent that he severely restricted its composition and powers.
- *Social reforms*. In the field of social reform, there was some reversion to the ideas espoused by Alexander II. Education was expanded and there was a relaxation in censorship. Nevertheless, Nicholas showed little intention of diverting from autocracy and his general attitude towards the Russian people did not marry well with their changing wants and needs.

The Provisional Government (March 1917 to October 1917)

Challenges

Although the Provisional Government was only ever intended to be a temporary arrangement, it could not disguise the fact that it was unelected, unrepresentative and essentially the 'old guard' in disguise. From the beginning

it was also pushed into accepting a power share with the Petrograd soviet. This meant that the Provisional Government had to rely on members of the soviet to provide support if reforms were to be pushed through. The two biggest problems it faced were demands for fairer land distribution and Russia's war performance. Neither was tackled with any confidence, which led to the opposition gaining momentum and eventually taking over.

Domestic policies

The Provisional Government attempted to halt social unrest by imposing a number of liberal measures:

- The police department was disbanded and all policing was to be carried out by local militias.
- Old-style regional governors and officials were replaced with a new wave of administrators.
- Many political prisoners (for example, Trotsky) were released or given an amnesty to return to Russia.
- Newspapers, books and pamphlets increased in circulation. The net effect was to allow Russian people to voice their opinions more strongly about how they wanted their country to be run in the future.
- From the beginning, the Provisional Government had promised and planned for the creation of a democratically elected Constituent Assembly. In the end, their promises did little to appease agitators and the new liberal climate simply allowed dissent to mount.

The inherent weaknesses of the government plus the context in which it was operating provided an opportunity for the Bolsheviks to take over.

Lenin (1917–24)

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Challenges

Lenin faced two immediate problems after he seized power. First, he had to confront opposition. Second, he needed to tackle Russia's involvement in the First World War. After he had dealt with these issues he had to move on to consolidate Bolshevik power and win acceptance of the new regime from the rest of the world.

Domestic policies

Lenin solved the war problem by authorising the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. This was essentially a peace treaty with Germany and the terms for Russia were harsh. Bolshevik authority was quickly established through the setting up of the Soviet of People's Commissars or *Sovnarkom*. This elite cabinet set out its stall by issuing a number of decrees. A number of these focused on banning opposition and were to be enforced through the use of a new secret police force, the *Cheka*. But opposition either went underground or was difficult to control because of the geographical size of Russia.

The strength and spread of opposition resulted in a civil war, which the Bolsheviks won using the Red Army, the *Cheka* and the policy of War Communism (see Chapter 3 for more details about the war, including the nature and extent of opposition to the Bolsheviks). War Communism was despised and, when the war was over, it was replaced with the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP was the main plank in Lenin's strategy to stabilise Russia and modernise the economy. After Lenin died, a power struggle ensued. One of the issues debated was the viability and efficacy of the NEP. The right wanted it to continue whereas the left wanted it to be replaced. When Stalin emerged victorious from the struggle he quickly imposed a personalised style of rule and a raft of economic and social policies that mirrored his brand of communism.

Stalin (1928–53)

Challenges

Stalin had to deal with the legacy of Lenin, who had been revered, and the fact that there were those in the party who mistrusted Stalin's intentions. There were also the ongoing problems related to agriculture, industry and national minorities. From 1939 to 1945, Russia became involved in the Second World War and was invaded by Nazi Germany. Before his death in 1953, he had yet another war to confront – the Cold War. However, the most challenging aspects of the Cold War had to be dealt with by Khrushchev, who took over from Stalin.

Domestic policies

There was clear continuity in the way that Stalin dealt with opposition. He used the secret police (NKVD) to arrest people, who ended up being jailed, exiled or executed. Such arrests happened in waves and were known as purges. Show trials and other forms of propaganda were used to control the behaviour of the people. The scale of repression was far greater than under any other leader but the importance of it lay in the terror that it created. The fear of the Stalinist regime was of a magnitude that meant that Stalin had absolute control of people's lives.

The problem of agriculture was tackled through the imposition of collectivisation and dekulakisation, which was also intertwined with repression. Agricultural policies were geared towards aiding the development of heavy industry; those employed in growing numbers in factories, mines and industrial plants relied totally on peasants for their food.

Stalin's industrial policy focused on centralised planning (Five-Year Plans) and a move away from any semblance of the free market. This too was integrated with repression; workers who did not reach targets were usually punished severely. Whether these policies were the main factor in helping Russia to repel the Nazis during the Second World War is a matter for debate. What is fairly clear is that after the war Stalin was seen as a hero and he strengthened his position as a prominent world leader.

Khrushchev (1953–64)

Challenges

Although Stalin had become a hero of the Russian people he was still associated with the Great Terror and years of unprecedented repression. Khrushchev therefore had to stamp his own personality on Russian government and change the image of Russia created by Stalin. The latter was especially important given the nature of international relations in the post-war era. Agriculture was still considered to be in something of a mess but heavy industry had progressed, albeit to the detriment of living standards. From Khrushchev's perspective, one of the most important problems facing politicians was the deterioration in working and living conditions. The last thing he wanted was mass social unrest.

Domestic policies

Although Stalin was acclaimed as a war hero, he had gained support through fear and high-level repression. The non-communist world took advantage of this by proclaiming Russia to be the great enemy of the 'free' world. Khrushchev attempted to deal with this by denouncing the rule of his predecessor (de-Stalinisation).

Nevertheless, he carried on with the centralised planning of the economy but with more focus on the enhancement of light and consumer industries. The mainstay of his agricultural policy was the Virgin Land campaign, which was aimed at increasing the amount of land under the plough. A number of important social improvement programmes were put into operation, especially in the field of housing. However, the Khrushchev era continued to witness the use of repression to maintain law and order. Political prisoners were released and the *Gulag* was mostly made redundant but Russian citizens were still subject to rule through autocracy.

CHAPTER 1

The nature of government

The main aim of this chapter is to provide a clear picture of how the nature and structure of Russian government changed in the face of opposition from 1855 to 1964. It also considers the use of repression and reform by Russian leaders as tools to deal with opposition. A key area of debate to consider when looking at the nature of Russian government is the extent to which the communist leaders were 'Red tsars' (that is, the degree of similarity between the way in which the tsars and communists ruled).

In particular, this chapter examines the main characteristics of Russian government from 1855 to 1964, which can be categorised under the following headings:

- Ideologies: autocracy, dictatorship and totalitarianism
- Developments in central administration
- Changes in local government
- Methods of repression and enforcement
- The extent and impact of reform
- The nature, extent and effectiveness of opposition
- Attitude of Russian leaders to political change
- The extent of political change

It also considers the debates surrounding the three in-depth topics:

- How 'liberal' was Russian government from 1855 to 1881?
- To what extent was the Provisional Government doomed to fail from the start?
- How far did de-Stalinisation represent a genuine break from the past?

KEY DATES

1855	Alexander II became tsar
1861	Emancipation Edict announced
1881	Assassination of Alexander II
1894	Death of Alexander III; Nicholas II became tsar
1898	Social Democratic Workers' Party formed
1906	First *Duma* set up; Fundamental Laws passed
1917	Abdication of Nicholas II; formation of Provisional Government; revolutions
1918	Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed
1924	Death of Lenin; power struggle ensued
1927	Stalin controlled Party Congress and expelled main rivals
1936	New constitution issued
1953	Death of Stalin
1953–6	Khrushchev took control of Russia; de-Stalinisation (1956 onwards)
1964	Khrushchev removed from power

1 Ideologies: autocracy, dictatorship and totalitarianism

- *How far could all Russian governments from 1855 to 1964 be described as autocratic?*

Autocracy

From 1855 to March 1917, Russia was governed as an **autocracy**. Tsars had absolute power which was said to be ordained by God. All Russians had to obey the will of the tsar or suffer punishment. The historian J.N. Westwood (2002) has indicated that there were three strands to tsarist autocracy:

- The 'tsar expected willing and total submission of his subjects'. This was a system based on religious faith, and did not require the tsar to be made accountable to the people through elections (or **constitutional government**).
- The tsar was obliged to act as a 'moral judge' on behalf of God. He had a **paternalistic** duty to protect his subjects and control their behaviour for the good of the nation as a whole. He was supported in this role by the **Russian Orthodox Church**.
- Autocracy was viewed as a practical necessity. The Russian Empire was so vast and diverse that it was better if one person had total control over imperial affairs. According to supporters of the tsarist regime, such as Konstantin Pobedonostsev (see profile on page 12), a **liberal democracy** and constitutional government would have been disastrous for Russia, as it would have led to too many people demanding too many different policies. Besides, as the vast majority of the population were illiterate peasants, democracy would have resulted in the governance of Russia by those who lacked 'the ability to reason'.

Continuity in the belief in autocracy

Although there was variation in how autocratic power was used by the tsars throughout the period, the significance of autocracy was continuously enforced through manifestos, speeches and policies.

Nicholas I used propaganda and slogans such as '**Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality**' to promote tsarism. This was reinforced with legislation such as the **Fundamental Laws** of 1832, whose introduction stated:

> *The emperor of all the Russians is an autocratic and unlimited monarch: God himself ordains that all must bow to his supreme power, not only out of fear but also out of conscience.*

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Develop your analysis of the significance of events in the period by completing Worksheet 3 at **www.hoddereducation.co.uk/accesstohistory/extras**

KEY TERMS

Autocracy A system of government in which one person has total power.

Constitutional government A government that is organised and administered according to a set of written or unwritten rules.

Paternalistic Protecting the people.

Russian Orthodox Church A branch of Christianity that was very traditional and that was independent from outside authorities such as the papacy. It taught the people to obey the tsar as he was said to be anointed by God.

Liberal democracy A political ideology that promotes the right of the people to exercise freedom of choice. This would include the freedom to speak what one believes in, and the freedom to choose a representative in government.

Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality The slogan used by the tsars and Pobedonostsev to justify and explain the conservative nature of tsarist rule.

Fundamental Laws Basic laws that reinforced the ideology underpinning tsarist rule.

Konstantin Pobedonostsev

1827	Born
1841	Enrolled at the St Petersburg School of Jurisprudence
1859	Started teaching at Moscow State University and went on to gain a professorship (1860–5)
1864	Judicial reforms; he had helped in the preparation of these
1865	Became tutor to Alexander II's sons (Nicholas and Alexander)
1868	Appointed as a senator
1873	Condemned the jury system; showed signs of being more reactionary
1874	Became a member of the Council of Empire
1880	Appointed chief procurator of the Holy Synod
1907	Died

Konstantin Pobedonostsev was educated in Russian law in preparation for a career in the Russian civil service. After graduating from the St Petersburg School of Jurisprudence he joined the Moscow department of the Senate and quickly rose up the civil service ranks. One of his earliest achievements in government was to help the tsar to draft the judicial reforms of 1864. Pobedonostsev achieved renown as a legal adviser and writer on Russian law. Between 1868 and 1880, he published the three volumes of *A Course of Civil Law*; this proved to be a core text for all aspiring lawyers.

Pobedonostsev left the civil service to pursue a post as professor of civil law. This was relatively short lived as he was encouraged to become the tutor to the tsar's sons, Nicholas and Alexander. Nicholas died in 1865 but Alexander when on to succeed his father as tsar. Pobedonostsev is said to have been a major influence on Alexander III's policy making and manifesto. He was rewarded, in 1880, by being appointed as chief procurator of the Holy Synod. This allowed him to advise the tsar on religious matters, and to have influence in the Church, and over educational and social issues.

Pobedonostsev was a conservative and reactionary for much of his adult life. He was an advocate of autocracy and an enemy of liberal democracy. The clamour for greater freedom was said, by Pobedonostsev, to be influenced by 'the dangerous delusions of nihilistic youth'. As a devoutly religious man he venerated the Russian Orthodox Church; this also helps to explain his anti-Jewish sentiments. His influence, though, faded during the reign of Nicholas II until his death in 1907.

Alexander II did not waver from this sentiment despite showing reformist tendencies. After an assassination attempt was made on him in 1866, he adhered very strongly to the concept of autocracy. His successor and son, Alexander III, blamed moves towards liberalism for his father's eventual assassination in 1881.

Nicholas II – after making 'liberal' concessions in 1905 – introduced another set of Fundamental Laws (1906) which reiterated the need for the preservation of autocracy. The 1906 legislation stated that:

> *The All-Russian Emperor possesses the supreme autocratic power. Not only fear and conscience, but God himself, commands obedience to his authority. The Russian Empire is governed by firmly established laws that have been properly enacted.*

Thus, all of the tsars consistently promoted and justified autocracy. Even when reforms were enacted, it was clear that ultimate power and control, as sanctioned by God, rested in the hands of the tsar.

KEY TERM

Land captains
Landowners who were appointed, from 1889 onwards, mainly to supervise the work of the regional councils, or *Zemstva*, that had been introduced by Alexander II.

Alexander II

1818 Born into the Romanov dynasty
1855 Became tsar as a result of the death of his father, Nicholas I
1856 Made peace with enemies in Crimean War. Announced shortly afterwards that 'it is better to begin abolishing serfdom from above than to wait for it to begin to abolish itself from below'
1857 Created the Secret Committee on Peasant Affairs, which was designed to plan for the emancipation of the serfs (freeing serfs from control by their 'owners')
1861 Introduced the Great Emancipation Statute
1863 Reformed the education system by allowing the existence of private schools, making alterations to the curriculum and establishing an inspectorate
1864 Formed the *Zemstva* (regional councils) to improve local government. Changes to legal structures and processes were also made in the same year
1865 Issued new guidelines for publishers and writers which allowed for greater freedom to express new and challenging ideas
1866 Ended reform programme after first serious attempt on his life
1877 Organised the 'Trial of the 50', the trial of key political opponents
1881 Assassinated by the members of political terrorist group called the 'People's Will'

The Russian people seemed to welcome Alexander II to the throne and were generally happy with his reforms. However, the radicals were not impressed as Russia continued to be governed through autocracy. Ironically, Alexander was about to sign an agreement just before his death that would probably have resulted in a more democratic government.

Alexander III

1845 Born into the Romanov dynasty
1881 Became tsar as a result of the assassination of his father. Immediately passed the Statute Concerning measures for the Production of State Security and the Social Order. The Russification programme was also launched in the same year, starting with pogroms against Jews
1883 Established the Peasant Land Bank to provide cheap loans for the purchase of land
1884 Made further adjustments to the provision of education
1887 Ordered the execution of Lenin's brother (see profile of Lenin on page 18) and four others who plotted to execute the tsar
1889 **Land captains** were appointed to monitor and control the behaviour of the peasants
1891 Forced to deal with terrible famine
1894 Died of nephritis (a kidney disorder) at the age of 49

Alexander III was a military man who believed strongly in autocracy. His period of rule is often seen as one of reaction and repression in response to the more relaxed liberal period of governance under his father. He was intent on returning stability to Russia and on ensuring that social unrest and opposition to tsarism did not get out of hand. His reign proved to be relatively peaceful and some very positive economic reforms were carried out.

Changes in the way autocracy was implemented

There were differences in the way in which the tsars performed their autocratic role. Before an assassination attempt on his life in 1866, Alexander II opted for a string of reforms which appeared to represent a dilution of autocracy (see profile on page 13).

In contrast, Alexander III quickly resorted to a more repressive form of autocracy. Opposition such as the **People's Will** was ruthlessly suppressed, and many of the changes instigated by the previous tsar were reversed. This **'Reaction'** was heavily influenced by Pobedonostsev, who argued that constitutional government or 'parliamentarianism' was unworkable.

Nicholas II continued in the same vein as his father. Constitutional reforms were implemented in 1905, but these were forced on the tsar as a result of economic crisis and the disastrous consequences of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) (see pages 138–41). The **Fundamental Laws of 1906** diluted the effect of the reforms, and by 1917 the *Duma* was little more than a talking shop frequented by politicians committed to autocracy.

Thus, the tsars used their autocratic power differently according to their differing circumstances. But political, economic and social reforms were never made with the intention of the tsar relinquishing any degree of control.

KEY TERMS

People's Will A terrorist group consisting of members of the educated classes who were upset by Alexander II's refusal to continue with his reform programme after the mid-1860s.

'Reaction' Alexander III reacted to the liberal reforms put together by his father by reversing them and introducing more repressive measures.

Fundamental Laws of 1906 Regulations that reinforced the position of the tsar. Law 5, for example, stated that 'Supreme autocratic power belongs to the Emperor of all Russia'.

Dictatorship

The Russian concept of dictatorship was partly derived from the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (see profiles on pages 16 and 17). By the late 1840s,

Nicholas II

1868 Born into the Romanov dynasty
1894 Took over as tsar on the death of his father, Alexander III. In the same year he married the Princess Alexandra, the German granddaughter of Queen Victoria
1905 Announced the October Manifesto and new constitution
1906 Introduced the first *Duma*
1913 Organised the tercentenary celebrations of Romanov family rule
1914 Took Russia into the First World War by signing the general mobilisation order
1915 Ordered Russian armed forces to be placed under the personal command of the tsar
1917 Return to Petrograd halted by rebels. Senior military officials and members of the *Duma* advised Nicholas to stand down. Abdicated to 'save' Russia
1918 Murdered, along with his family, in Ekaterinburg

Although Nicholas II attempted political reforms to appease opposition, his mishandling of Russia's involvement in the First World War led to his downfall and the end of the Romanov dynasty. Nicholas seemed to lack the political knowledge, understanding and skill of his father. If he had worked more cooperatively with the opposition groups in the *Duma* he may have survived. However, his stubborn attitude resulted in strict adherence to autocracy which proved unacceptable to other prominent members of Russian government.

their work was known among a minority of Russian radicals, but it was not until the 1880s that their ideas had really taken root within the Russian intelligentsia.

Marxism

There were three aspects of Marxism that seemed especially relevant to those who opposed autocracy.

Marx and the idea of superstructure

Marx believed that the foundation or base of society was maintained and established by a ruling elite; this base benefited the elite to the detriment of others. In tsarist Russia the foundation was agricultural serfdom, with a small amount of industrialisation. To maintain this, a superstructure of institutions was needed by the ruling class to establish order. Marx believed that this kind of system was unfair and bound to lead to conflict. In his eyes, the only way to change this was to destroy the base. Russian intellectuals took this to mean that serfdom and capitalism should be replaced by a more egalitarian society.

Marx and the labour theory of value

Marx adopted the 'labour theory of value', which claimed that under a **capitalist economy** the **proletariat** would never gain the full value of their efforts. A disproportionate amount of wages would be taken away to provide capitalists with profits far in excess of what was needed to maintain industrialisation. However, this would eventually prove unacceptable to workers as they increasingly realised that they were being exploited. Marx predicted that the result would be a worker uprising to overthrow the system – a revolution. Unsurprisingly, it was expected that this transformation would begin in the advanced industrialised European nations such as Germany and Britain. This was an issue that Russian radicals had to square with what was happening in their homeland; Russia was largely rural and 'backward' and, according to Marx, not the kind of place where a revolution would happen.

Marx and the dictatorship of the proletariat

Marx referred to the likely conflict between capitalists and workers as a class struggle. He argued that it was the final part of an ongoing series of struggles throughout history between different social groups. The conflict between capitalists and workers would be resolved when workers seized control of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Before full **communism** could emerge (a classless society), there would be a **dictatorship of the proletariat**, in which political control would be placed in the hands of the workers and those representing their interests. The Bolsheviks under Lenin and Stalin (see profiles on pages 18 and 19) modified these guidelines to suit the circumstances they found themselves in. Hence, by the end of the Civil War (1917–21), the governance of Russia was based on **Marxism–Leninism** and then, from 1927 to 1953, by **Marxism–Leninism–Stalinism**.

KEY TERMS

Capitalist economy An economy based on making as much profit as possible from industrial and commercial activity.

Proletariat Those who worked in industry and lived in urban areas.

Communism A form of rule which allowed for the control, by the 'people', of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

Dictatorship Absolute rule, usually by one person, with no legal, political, economic or social restrictions.

Dictatorship of the proletariat In theory, when the workers controlled political power. Lenin argued that before this could happen, workers would have to be ordered what to do by the Bolsheviks as they did not have the knowledge, understanding and skill to take full control of governing Russia.

Marxism–Leninism Lenin's interpretation of Marxism which argued that the move to worker control of the means of production, distribution and exchange could be speeded up.

Marxism–Leninism–Stalinism Stalin's version of Marxism–Leninism.

KEY FIGURE

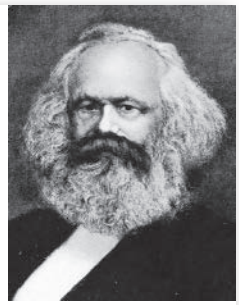
Y.O. Martov (1873–1923)

Initially, friend of Lenin and co-editor of the radical newspaper *Iskra*. However, the two eventually fell out over what tactics to use to achieve their political aims.

Marxism—Leninism

By the early 1890s, Lenin had fully embraced Marxism. Initially, both Lenin and **Martov** supported worker attempts to gain higher wages and better working conditions. However, when help was given to organise strikes in St Petersburg (1895, 1896, 1897), the authorities reacted by exiling the ringleaders. Consequently, when the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDLP) was formed in 1898 to unite Russian Marxists, Lenin and others argued over strategy. Lenin believed that the authorities' reaction to the St Petersburg strikes proved that the 'superstructure' would always prevail to keep workers in their place. Instead of attempting to gain concessions within the capitalist system, Lenin thought it better to overthrow the existing ruling order by attacking the 'base'.

Karl Marx



1818 Born in Trier, in the German Rhineland
1841 Started career as a journalist in Cologne, Germany
1843 Moved to Paris after being expelled from Germany because of his radical views
1845 Moved to Brussels after being expelled from Paris
1848 Returned to Germany to participate in the revolution as a reporter
1849 Settled in London and remained there for the rest of his life
1867 Publication of the first volume of *Das Kapital*
1881 Death of wife, Jenny Marx
1883 Died

Karl Marx was born on 5 May 1818 in Trier in western Germany. His father was a successful Jewish lawyer (although he converted to Christianity to help him progress in his career). Marx followed in his father's footsteps, studying law in Bonn and Berlin, but he also became interested in philosophy, especially the works of Hegel and Feuerbach. He then started a career as a journalist and decided to move to Paris, where he believed his writings would gain a wider audience. In Paris he met Friedrich Engels, the son of a wealthy factory owner, with whom he collaborated to develop ideas about revolutionary communism.

Marx's radicalism got him expelled from France; in 1845 he moved to Brussels, where he continued his partnership with Engels. Together they produced the famous *The Communist Manifesto* (published in 1848). The main message of the tract was that 'the history of all hitherto existing society was the history of class struggle'. The ultimate class struggle would be between capitalists and the proletariats (workers); revolutions would occur that would lead to governance of countries by workers ('dictatorships of the proletariat').

In 1849, Marx moved to London with his family and was again followed by Engels. Marx was plagued by illness and a lack of funds; he relied on the wealth and intellect of Engels to help him develop his ideas. In 1867, the first volume of *Das Kapital* was published. This set out some of Marx's key ideas on political economy, especially those concerning the labour theory of value (see page 15). The remaining volumes of the work came out after Marx's death having been edited by Engels.

In his later years, Marx became less productive as a writer. In 1881, he became depressed by the deaths of his wife, Jenny, and one of his daughters. He died on 14 March 1883 and was buried at Highgate Cemetery in London.

Friedrich Engels

1820	Born in Barmen, Germany
1842	Sent to Manchester
1844	*The Condition of the Working Class in England* published
1845	Moved to Brussels after being expelled from Paris
1849	Settled in London
1878	Married Lizzie Burns
1885	Second volume of *Das Kapital* published
1894	Third volume of *Das Kapital* published
1895	Died

Friedrich Engels was born in Barmen on 28 November 1820. His father was a wealthy German industrialist who owned factories producing cotton textiles in Manchester. In 1842, Engels was sent to Manchester by his father to gain an insight into the management of the Ermen & Engels factory. While he was there, the young Engels became appalled by the poor living and working conditions he observed in the city. His experience prompted him to write *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in 1844. This was an account of what Engels had seen and what he believed had caused such deprivation, the failings of capitalism. In the same year, he wrote articles for the radical journal *Franco-German Annals*, which was edited by Karl Marx. This started a lifelong collaboration and friendship between the two individuals. It functioned very well as Marx was the great thinker of radical ideas and Engels had a flair (and the money) to write material that appealed to a wide audience.

Engels moved to Paris and then Brussels with Marx, but, due to threats of imprisonment for their ideas, they eventually settled in the more liberal climate of London in 1849. When based in Brussels, both were influential in the setting up of an English Communist League (1846). More importantly, the two co-wrote a 12,000-word pamphlet that became *The Communist Manifesto* (published in 1848). The manifesto set out some of the principles of communism, as developed by Marx and Engels, and how the ideology was likely to lead to revolution.

While in England, Engels gave financial support to Marx and his family. He also introduced his friend to members of the Chartist movement. The move to England witnessed the two develop their ideas and more publications followed, including *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850), *Das Kapital*, volume 1 (1867) and *Anti-Dühring* (1878). When Marx died in 1883, Engels spent much of his time, until his own death, editing and writing up the last two volumes of *Das Kapital*.

Lenin set out his 'revised' version of Marxism in a pamphlet entitled *What is to be Done?* (1902). He argued that the **dialectical** phase of Marxism could be speeded up in Russia. He proposed that a Party Central Committee led by professionals could govern in the interest of workers until the latter were ready to take control themselves. This was Lenin's interpretation of the dictatorship of the proletariat (that is, the core of Marxism–Leninism). Lenin's approach caused uproar within the RSDLP and by 1903 a deep split had emerged between Bolsheviks (Marxist–Leninists) and Mensheviks (other Marxists).

After the October Revolution of 1917 (see page 30 for details of the revolution), Lenin began to implement Marxism–Leninism. Opposition to Bolshevik ideology and rule resulted in the Russian Civil War. One school of thought is that Lenin welcomed the war as an opportunity to eradicate the bourgeoisie. Although the Bolshevik **Reds** defeated the **Whites**, this did not safeguard Marxism–Leninism. Within the party, debate continued over strategy. Lenin's toleration of the 'moderates' was evident when he replaced War Communism

KEY TERMS

Dialectical Relating to the ongoing changes in society from one stage to another.

Reds A general term for those who actively supported the Bolsheviks during the Civil War.

Whites A general term for those who actively opposed the Bolsheviks during the Civil War.

with the New Economic Policy (NEP). War Communism was associated with famine, whereas the NEP was more liberal and gave the people freedom to produce goods and services without restriction (see Chapter 2 for more details on these policies). More radical members of the party criticised these 'bourgeois' concessions, and demanded more central control. Others, such as **Trotsky**, pushed for a move towards a 'Permanent Revolution' which entailed spreading communism throughout the world and not just Russia. Trotsky's views were criticised by Stalin, who preferred a policy of establishing 'socialism in one country'. Stalin argued that the Communist Party could not influence the growth of communism elsewhere until it was firmly established within the Soviet Union.

These developments illustrate that Lenin, like the tsars, adjusted his ideology and policies to stave off opposition, but had no intention of veering away from his short-term goal of ruling, with the help of the party, as a dictator. Again, in comparison with the tsars, a policy of appeasement did not fully resolve the issue of opposition within the ruling elite. It took a far more radical approach to do this.

KEY FIGURE

Leon Trotsky (1879–1940)

A revolutionary, best known for his leading role in securing Bolshevik success during the Russian Civil War.

KEY TERM

De-Stalinisation
The denunciation, by Khrushchev, of Stalin's policies.

V.I. Lenin

1870	Born as Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov in Simbirsk, in the Urals. His father was a member of the lesser nobility and worked as a schools' inspector
1887	The execution of his brother strengthened Lenin's will to change the way Russia was ruled
1891	Graduated from university with a law degree
1895	Liaised with Plekhanov, a prominent revolutionary who had been exiled
1897	Was exiled to Siberia. Adopted the name of Lenin (after the River Lena in Siberia) as an alias
1898	Married Nadya Krupskaya
1900	Joined the Social Democrats (SDs) and went into a self-imposed exile abroad
1902	Published *What is to be Done?* (a collection of ideas about how Russia should be ruled)
1903	Led the Bolsheviks as a breakaway group in the SDs. From 1900 to 1903, he edited the main newspaper of the revolutionary movement (*Iskra* or *The Spark*)
1905	Returned to Russia to witness the 'revolution' but was not actively involved
1906–17	In exile overseas once more
1917	Returned to Russia after the Russian Revolution (February). Went on to lead Bolsheviks in displacement of the Provisional Government
1917–20	Strengthened Bolshevik rule and played an important role in ensuring the defeat of opposition during the Civil War
1921	Replaced War Communism with the New Economic Policy (see Chapters 2 and 3)
1922–3	Immobilised after a number of strokes
1924	Died

Although Lenin was often in exile he was a great influence on the revolutionary movement through his writings and actions. He was instrumental in the Bolshevik seizure of power and the establishment of communist rule in Russia. Some historians believe that Lenin laid a firm foundation for future communist leaders to build on. Thus, Stalin and Khrushchev are seen to continue with Leninist ideas and policies rather than to introduce the own brand of communism. Not all agree with this; they point to the highly repressive nature of Stalin's rule and the **de-Stalinisation** under Khrushchev as evidence that there was significant change in the way Russia was ruled by communists.

Totalitarianism

There is debate over the extent to which Stalin introduced a centralised form of dictatorial government that controlled every aspect of the behaviour of the citizens of the state (that is, totalitarianism). At the very least he appeared to formularise his own ideology based on Marxism–Leninism.

Marxism—Leninism—Stalinism

The death of Lenin in 1924 resulted in a power struggle within the party over how Russia would be governed. By 1927, Stalin had gained leadership of the Soviet Union through skilful manipulation of individuals and factions. He quickly promoted a refined version of Marxism–Leninism. There were two parts to Marxism–Leninism–Stalinism:

- Stalin argued that the 'base' of society could only be permanently changed by utilising a particular type of 'superstructure'. He went on to implement

KEY TERM

Cold War A state of tension and hostility between the Soviet bloc and Western powers after the Second World War. However, the hostility did not spill over into actual fighting between the two power blocs.

I.V. (Joseph) Stalin

1879	Born as Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili in Georgia
1899	Expelled from Tbilisi Seminary (college for those training to be priests) for political views
1905	Started to represent local branches of Bolshevik Party (Georgia and South Russia) at conferences
1912	Elected to the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks
1913	Exiled to North Siberia
1917	Returned to Russia and became close ally of Lenin
1917–22	Became specialist in national minorities' issues (appointed Commissar for Nationalities in the first Soviet government). Active as a commander during the Civil War
1922	Appointed as General Secretary of the Communist Party
1923–7	Involved in a dispute with Trotsky, Kamenev and Zinoviev over who was to lead Russia after Lenin's death (see pages 52–4)
1927	Controlled Party Congress and expelled main rivals from the party
1928–33	Introduced the planned economy and the police state
1928	Adopted the first Five-Year Plan (see pages 85–7)
1929	Started collectivisation programme
1933–4	Allowed a 'thaw' in levels of control and repression
1936–8	Instigated the Great Terror and show trials
1939	Appointed Beria (see page 21) as head of the secret police. Also allowed the signing of the Nazi–Soviet Pact (see Chapter 3 for details)
1939–45	Led Russia in a war against Nazi Germany and successfully repelled German invasion
1945–53	Implemented internal reconstruction programme and devised strategies to cope with the initial stages of the **Cold War**
1953	Died (some historians have suggested that he was murdered)

Stalin is usually associated with a level of repression that was unprecedented in Russian history. He is also credited with industrialising Russia and ensuring that the Russian people were able to defeat Nazi Germany. However, there is much debate over the Stalinist era, with a number of historians claiming that Stalin's personal role in key developments has been exaggerated.

this through a **command economy** centred on **Five-Year Plans** and **collectivisation** (see pages 85–7 and 91–3 for details of these policies).

- The superstructure had to be highly personalised under the total control of one individual. This would prevent damaging infighting. Disagreement would be labelled **bourgeois**, and dealt with quickly. The use of propaganda (centring on the **cult of personality**) and repression would enforce Stalin's ideology.

Historians have explained this shift from a Lenin-style dictatorship to totalitarianism in a number of different ways:

- Some argue that Stalin's ideology provided a practical solution to the Soviet Union's problems through the implementation of Five-Year Plans and collectivisation.
- Others believe that Stalin manipulated Marxism–Leninism to serve his own **megalomania**, as shown by his repressive policies, and the imposition of the cult of personality (see pages 52–4 for details about the power struggle).
- A recent view argues that Stalin was continuing the work of Lenin, who had already made the most significant and decisive reinterpretation of Marxism by establishing the Party Central Committee and other institutions designed to control the superstructure. Lenin had also used the *Cheka* to deal with opposition and stabilise central control of the economy.

Although Stalin's motives are unclear, it is evident that his version of absolute rule was taken to a new level. The result was wide-scale terror.

De-Stalinisation

After Stalin's death in 1953, a power struggle ensued. This gathered momentum after an emergency meeting of the **Council of Ministers**, the party **Central Committee** and the **Supreme Soviet of the USSR**. A rationalisation of Stalin's **Presidium** was agreed along with a clarification of the roles of leading communists. From this, four rivals emerged:

- *Malenkov*. He became chairman of the Council of Ministers and head of government. These positions were to be held alongside his role as **first secretary of the party**. However, he was demoted from party secretary two weeks after Stalin's death, since he was suspected of colluding with Beria in order to form a **duopoly** of power.
- *Beria*. He was appointed Minister of Internal Affairs (**MVD**), an office which absorbed the previously titled People's Commissariat for State Security (NKGB). Some believed that **Beria** had been involved in the murder of Stalin. He was soon denounced as a traitor, arrested and executed. After he was shot in 1953, the MVD was placed under the control of the party rather than one individual.
- *Khrushchev*. He gained the post of secretary of the Party Central Committee from Malenkov. On paper, this was not the most significant job, but in

KEY TERMS

Command economy An economy that is controlled totally by the state.

Five-Year Plans These involved setting production targets which were to be achieved on a five-year cycle.

Collectivisation A communal system of farming whereby peasants shared resources to produce food, which was then distributed to ensure that local populations were adequately fed. Surpluses were sent to urban populations.

Bourgeois Anything associated with the wealth and status of the middle classes.

Cult of personality The use of propaganda to build a positive image of a leader so that the population offers total obedience to that leader.

Megalomania An individual's belief that they are very powerful and important.

Council of Ministers Senior politicians who drafted domestic policies.

Central Committee The chief decision-making group of the Russian Communist Party.

Supreme Soviet of the USSR The main law-making body in Soviet government.

Presidium A small group of ministers rather like the Cabinet in the British political system.

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