Question A

How and why did the Czar Nicholas II fail the people of Russia?

Life During the Russian Revolution

by Victoria Sherrow

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The Russian communist known as Lenin led the Bolshevik revolutionaries who called for rapid changes in Russian government.

A fellow revolutionary wrote of Lenin, “There is no other man who is absorbed by the revolution twenty-four hours a day, who has no other thoughts but the thought of revolution, and who, when he sleeps, dreams of nothing but the revolution.”

In 1899, there was another significant demonstration in Russia. University students in St. Petersburg protested the use of police force to disperse student gatherings. They paraded along the streets in school uniforms and organized a general strike that shut down schools all over Russia. The government responded by arresting numerous students, expelling hundreds, and drafting them into the Russian army.

Despite the threat of arrest, revolutionaries continued to meet and organize. The Social Democratic Workers’ Party held a second congress in July and August of 1903. At that time, the group split into two factions, the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks favored more gradual change and reform in the political system; the Bolsheviks wanted more rapid, thorough change. These two groups would play a prominent role throughout the revolutionary period.

A Disastrous War

Except for using police power to stifle revolutionary activity, the government did not address the people’s concerns. In 1904, several of the czar’s ministers suggested that he might unite the Russian people and encourage patriotism by conducting “a small, victorious war.”

As a target, they chose Japan. Russian troops were ordered into Korea, and when the Japanese arrived to drive them back, the Russo-Japanese War began. Russia suffered heavy casualties and was no match for the Japanese navy. When the war ended in August 1905, the government was harshly criticized for having involved the nation in such a fiasco. Before the year ended, Nicholas II would again greatly upset his people.

Bloody Sunday

To survey the activities of workers in St. Petersburg, police enlisted the help of a respected Orthodox priest, Father Gapon. Gapon came from a peasant family in Ukraine and had long believed in social reform as well as nonviolence. As he ministered to factory workers, he urged them to avoid alcohol and gambling. He organized the Union of Russian Factory Workers, a movement that spread across the country. The police saw in Gapon a
desirable leader, someone they need not fear and might even encourage.

In January, metalworkers in St. Petersburg went on a strike that lasted four days. However, the strike had no impact on the government, so Gapon decided on something more dramatic. He wrote a letter to the czar, explaining to him that his ministers were not keeping him informed about the real state of affairs in Russia.

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**Lenin: The Path to Leadership**

The most dedicated leader of the revolution, and future head of the new Russia, was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. He was born in 1870 in Simbirsk, a small town on the Volga River, to a family of hereditary nobles that was not wealthy but quite comfortable. His father, a teacher of physics and mathematics, was Russian; his mother was German-Russian. Vladimir Ulyanov, who would later change his name to Lenin, was the third of seven children. They were religious, industrious people, and Vladimir was an outstanding student. When he graduated from high school, his headmaster wrote,

> Very gifted, always neat and assiduous. Ulyanov was first in all his subjects, and upon completing his studies received a gold medal as the most deserving pupil with regard to his ability, progress, and behavior. Neither in the school nor outside, has a single instance been observed when he has given cause for dissatisfaction by word or deed. I have had occasion to note a somewhat excessive tendency towards isolation and reserve.

The headmaster specifically noted the young man’s good behavior since the family had recently experienced grief and scandal. The oldest brother, Aleksandr, was hanged in May 1887 for having joined in a plot to kill Czar Alexander III. The czar signed a warrant to have the five student conspirators executed. A year earlier, Vladimir’s father had died, so his mother had gone alone to St. Petersburg to plead for mercy for her son, to no avail.

Remarkably, Vladimir finished the school year calmly and took his final exams. His mother tried to interest him in farming, but Vladimir was drawn to the same political ideas that had led to his brother’s death. At the University of Kazan, where he majored in law, Lenin was expelled after only three months for taking part in a student protest meeting.

He went on to work in a law office in St. Petersburg, where he met his future wife, a schoolteacher named Nadezhda Krupskaya. Both were dedicated Marxists and joined the Social Democratic Party. They married in 1898 while in exile in Siberia for their revolutionary activities. Because he had money, Lenin did not suffer greatly in exile. He was able to maintain a home with servants, swim, fish, and pursue his reading and writing. When he was sent to Siberia late in 1896, he carried with him a trunk containing one hundred books.

The term in Siberia did not deter him from attacking the government. After he left, he was more vocal than ever. Using the pen name Lenin, he edited a revolutionary magazine called *Iskra* (the Spark), which was smuggled into Russia from abroad, and wrote fiery materials that made him famous among his peers. Often, his essays attacked the czar, whom the revolutionaries called “Nicholas the Bloody” and “Nicholas the Hangman.”
Women played an active role in revolutionary groups and activities. One of the most prominent women revolutionaries was Aleksandra Kollontay, a Bolshevik feminist born to an aristocratic family in 1872. Her maternal grandparents were a Finnish merchant and a Russian noblewoman; her paternal grandparents were both Ukrainian. Kollontay's father, a military officer, reached the rank of general. Her mother was unusually independent for a woman of her class and time.

Surrounded by vast poverty, this family enjoyed fine homes and clothing, servants, and opportunities for education and travel. They joined other socially concerned members of the educated nobility who pushed the Russian monarchy for reform.

In 1893, Aleksandra married engineer Vladimir Kollontay, a man of lesser means and social status with whom she had fallen in love. The couple had a son, Mikhail (Misha), in 1894. She continued her studies and wrote fiction, but felt stifled by marriage and motherhood. Kollontay told friends they kept her from her work.

Kollontay soon began writing about feminist issues. In those days, women lived with many legal and social restrictions. Among other things, a Russian woman could not obtain a passport without her husband's permission and could not own property. A man's testimony outweighed a woman's in a trial. Kollontay also criticized her family's noble lifestyle and her husband's lack of intellectual and political interests. The couple grew further apart as she became more active in revolutionary activities. She gradually rejected her parents' liberalism in favor of socialism.

By 1905, Kollontay was well known as a Social Democrat and Menshevik and served as a courier for the movement, transporting letters, written materials, and money. She wrote that she and other young Russians “longed for a great mission in life. We reached out eagerly for a new belief.”

In the years that followed, Kollontay continued to voice strong opinions, opposing Russian involvement in World War I. After the revolution, she offended some Communist Party leaders by opposing the strictness and inflexibility of the new regime. However, she remained a political force. Starting in 1922, Kollontay was posted to various countries, including Sweden, as an ambassador.

The people believe in Thee. They have made up their minds to gather at the Winter Palace tomorrow at 2 P.M. to lay their needs before Thee... Do not fear anything. Stand tomorrow before the people and accept our humblest petition.  

It is not known whether Czar Nicholas received or read this letter. He had left the city with his family for Tsarskoe Selo and did not reply. At any rate, the czar did not show any desire to meet with workers or listen to their demands. He did not return to the palace in
St. Petersburg again, and lived at Tsarskoe Selo from that time on.

The thirty-two-year-old Gapon proceeded to organize the march to the Winter Palace to present a petition to the emperor. On January 22, men, women, and children gathered for the march. The crowd swelled to include an estimated two hundred thousand people. Gapon headed the five long lines of people, who bore religious icons and pictures of the czar. They trudged through the snow, singing "God Save the Czar."

Their petition, carried by Father Gapon, asked the czar to institute an eight-hour workday with no overtime and a wage of at least one ruble per day (which equaled about fifty cents). They also asked for an assembly of representatives. Outside the Winter Palace, they waited hopefully for the czar to appear and personally receive their petition.

Fearing serious riots, the minister of the interior ordered military officers to stand outside the palace. These men ordered the crowd to leave, but the marchers ignored their commands, believing strongly in the justice of their cause and convinced that the czar was going to hear their requests.

Suddenly, shots rang out as the palace guard began firing at the crowd, mostly from distances of only ten to twenty yards. Chaos followed, with masses of people screaming and trying to flee from the gunfire. People cried out in fear and pain. Voices in the crowd could be heard shouting, "The Czar will not help us!"

When the shooting stopped, the snow-lined square around the palace was stained with blood. More than five hundred people were dead, and thousands more had been wounded.

This infamous day became known as Bloody Sunday. Father Gapon managed to escape arrest by fleeing to Finland. He was enraged by the carnage in St. Petersburg. He wrote a widely published letter to Czar Nicholas with these ominous words:

The innocent blood of workers, their wives and children, lies forever between thee, oh

On what came to be known as Bloody Sunday, military officers barricaded the Winter Palace of Nicholas II. When a crowd of two hundred thousand Russian citizens approached, the defenders opened fire.

"The Czar Will Not Help Us"
soul destroyer, and the Russian people... Let all the blood that has to be shed, hangman, fall upon thee and thy kindred!}

Bloody Sunday marked a turning point in the way average Russians viewed their czar. Now many saw Nicholas as a heartless man who cared nothing about his humbler subjects. Some called him a murderer.

Life in St. Petersburg grew more violent and unpredictable as strikes and demonstrations increased. Among these strikes was the May 1905 "comma strike," which took place in Moscow. Printers who did piecework went
on strike to demand higher wages. Railroad workers and others joined them. The people of Moscow had no newspapers, streetcar service, or postal services. Bakeries, law offices, banks, and telegraph offices shut down. Red banners and posters urging revolution cropped up more and more in the streets.

After Bloody Sunday, men in the military also showed their anger toward the imperial government. There was rising discontent, especially among Russian soldiers who had been forced to fight in the Russo-Japanese War. These men had been sent out ill equipped and unprepared. Their navy lacked strong ships and armaments. Many had not been trained to properly identify and then overtake Japanese warships, so casualties increased. These men, who no longer felt the same loyalty toward their czar, would later be willing to fight against the empire that had let them down.

Terrorism also surged in this atmosphere. The number of terrorist plots increased dramatically after Bloody Sunday. Government officials had good reason to fear for their lives. During 1905, more than fifteen hundred officials were assassinated.

Revolutionaries living in exile were encouraged by news of this disorder. Lenin wrote letters to Russia urging more terrorism and told his followers to use, among other things, “rifles, revolvers, bombs, brass knuckles, clubs, and rags soaked in oil to start fires with.”

*Bloody Sunday*

**The Czar Answers**

People pressing for reform led Czar Nicholas II to reluctantly issue the October Manifesto, a few reforms that led to an end of the large strike. Some of the czar’s ministers also urged him to make concessions instead of quelling the disorder with police power. Nicholas gave up some of his power to the legislature, the Duma, in a new constitution, the first constitution Russia had ever had. This was significant, since the czar was departing from total autocracy. However, the constitution let the czar maintain all control over the army and navy and handle all matters related to foreign policy and the Ministry of the Interior.

The Duma (from a Russian word meaning “advice”) was to have members elected by the people. They and the Imperial Council, half of whose members were chosen by the czar, would share the authority of advising the czar, but he was free to issue imperial decrees when the Duma was not in session. Nicholas felt ambivalent about the Duma.

Many Russians were still not satisfied. Sailors on the battleship *Potemkin* in the Black Sea staged an angry mutiny. The leader of the mutiny was arrested and executed. Other revolts in various military installations were also stopped by the czar’s police. On December 9, police arrested the leader of the Soviet committee in St. Petersburg. Menshevik Leon Trotsky took over his position and organized the workers to refuse to pay taxes. Trotsky was arrested for these activities, but Lenin and other leaders had returned to Russia to move things along.

Revolutionary activities had been widespread in 1905. Although people throughout Russia were not united against the government, more were talking about the future. Many had given their lives to the cause. By year’s end, almost 15,000 were dead, more than 18,000 wounded, and 79,000 imprisoned. The country was aroused.
CHAPTER 5

Power Struggles

Although Russia now had a constitution and a legislature, the czar did not want to relinquish much power. He struggled to maintain his regime while his political opponents pressed for change. More militant forces continued their struggle in the factories, streets, universities, and underground press.

When the first Duma met in May 1906 at the Tauride Palace in St. Petersburg, it was a rather conservative group committed to slow, steady change. Among it were 150 members of the Kadets (Constitutional Democratic) Party, mostly members of the gentry and middle class. Another 100 men, the Social Revolutionaries, represented the working class and peasants.

The members of the Duma presented the czar with a list of limited reforms they hoped he would make. Land reform was a prime concern. The Duma wanted the czar to distribute some estate lands to the peasants and to reduce burdensome taxes. It also wanted a sharp reduction in the power of the secret police. The czar upset members of the Duma by not appearing in person to answer their requests. Instead, he sent a representative, who informed them the reforms were unacceptable.

An angry Duma voted to censure the imperial government, an unprecedented step in czarist Russia. For two months, Duma members criticized the government's position. The czar finally responded by dissolving the Duma, and locking members out of the Tauride Palace when they arrived on July 22 for another session.

This struggle for power continued for more than a decade, rousing indignation against the czar and his advisers. With each new decision, the imperial family became increasingly unpopular.

In this atmosphere, revolutionary leaders gained more support, especially among intellectuals. Trade unions grew and more members of all classes began to favor a revolution that would completely change the government. Other people wanted reforms that would greatly reduce the czar's power and turn Russia into a constitutional monarchy. Still others thought Russia should be a czarless democracy. Leaders of different parties were even willing to unite because they believed it would promote a revolution. However, revolutionaries were constantly on guard, watched by police and informers. They were often arrested, exiled, or imprisoned.

A Dynamic Leader

The czar managed to calm people somewhat in 1906 by resurrecting the Duma and installing Pyotr Stolypin as its new prime minister. A native of provincial Russia, Stolypin impressed people with his straightforward speaking style and efficiency. When a new Duma was elected, the prime minister urged land reform. Members of the Duma called Stolypin a gifted leader. The czar wrote to his mother, "I have come to like and respect this man."
However, Czarina Alexandra opposed Stolypin and worked to get him dismissed. She resented his power and later said, “Never mention that man to me. He was overshadowing his Emperor.”

Stolypin worked with the Duma and the czar to achieve key reforms. As a result of his efforts, a new class of peasant landowners developed, because peasants could own and buy land for the first time. (By 1916, 6.5 million peasant families would live on their own land, accounting for three-quarters of the farmland in Russia.)

While many praised these reforms, zealous revolutionaries were wary. Lenin, for example, worried that the movement might die if people became satisfied with the progress that was occurring. He wrote pessimistically, “I do not expect to see the revolution.”

Stolypin’s success also angered wealthy conservative Russians, who did not want to lose their land or wealth. Some members of the Duma resented his efforts to limit their power; but Stolypin said this was necessary to prevent the czar from disbanding the Duma again.

On September 1, 1911, Stolypin’s enemies took violent action. He was assassinated while sitting during intermission at the royal opera in Kiev. Czar Nicholas and his two oldest daughters had been sitting near Stolypin but left their seats during the intermission. Nicholas described an account of the murder to his mother:

Women were shrieking and, directly in front of me in the stalls, Stolypin was standing; he slowly turned his face towards us and with his left hand made the sign of the cross in the air. Only then did I notice that he was very pale and that his right hand and uniform were blood-stained. He slowly sank into his chair.

People in the crowd tried to Lynch Stolypin’s killer, but the police took him into custody. The czar and his daughters left at eleven o’clock after this wrenching evening. Stolypin’s assassin was hanged on September 9.

**An Unstable Society**

The czar replaced Stolypin with a more conservative man. With Stolypin gone, revolutionaries became more active again. The number of striking workers soared in 1912. When gold miners in Lena stopped working in April, the local police fired on them, arousing the people’s anger. In 1909, some eight thousand workers had taken part in strikes; in 1912, that number soared to five hundred thousand. Within two years, more than a million Russians would publicly demonstrate to express their political frustrations.
As time went on, members of the Duma became increasingly bold and were willing to attack imperial policies. Some took on more active roles. Duma member Aleksandr Kerensky visited Lena after police crushed the miners’ strike. Shocked by stories about police brutality, he returned more determined than ever to enact reforms.

**Hypnotic “Healer”: Rasputin**

The Duma also launched an official investigation of one of the most infamous figures of this era: Grigory Yefimovich Rasputin. Rasputin was born to a peasant family in Siberia in 1872. Although he was not an educated person and had not been ordained by the church, he wore priest’s garb, including a long, black cassock. Rasputin wandered from town to town, presenting himself as a spiritual leader and healer. People offered him food and lodging and sought his help and guidance.

After he arrived in St. Petersburg in 1905, Rasputin charmed his way into high society. With his long, thick hair and beard, he had an imposing appearance. One admirer commented on his “most extraordinary eyes, large, light, brilliant.” Another observer, who called his gaze “cunning,” said that Rasputin “carried with him a strong animal smell, like the smell of a goat.”

A noblewoman in St. Petersburg became so taken with Rasputin that she invited him to live at her mansion and introduced him to her friends. While some people criticized the “monk’s” crude table manners, sexual escapades, drunkenness, and frequently dirty appearance, his supporters ignored or disbelieved these things. Instead, they revered his so-called spiritual powers.

The royal couple had sought out mystics, clairvoyants, seers, and holy men of various types before. Now Alexandra was convinced that Rasputin was sent by God to help her incurably ill son; she was certain he had healing powers. Somehow Rasputin was able to ease Alexis's symptoms. His voice, words, and gaze seemed to reduce the boy’s pain and help him sleep or even stop bleeding.

The empress became fanatically devoted to the man she called “our friend.” In her letters, she described the peace and relief he brought with his visits, and in a 1909 letter, she called Rasputin “my beloved unforgettable teacher, redeemer, and mentor.”

As Rasputin’s influence grew, some people bribed him to sway the czar. But Rasputin also attracted enemies. Spies followed him and made detailed reports about his drinking, womanizing, and disorderly conduct at taverns, parties, and private homes. Newspapers printed sensational stories and accusations against Rasputin, but the empress refused to listen. Before his assassination, Prime Minis-
ter Stolypin had ordered Rasputin out of St. Petersburg, and he returned for a time to his Siberian village.

Alexandra was deeply upset, especially when Czarevitch Alexis suffered a terrible attack during a family holiday in Poland. He fell out of a boat and was badly bruised, causing internal bleeding into his groin and thigh. The boy seemed close to death, lapsing in and out of consciousness. Rasputin received frantic telegrams from the empress. He sent back a message saying, “God has seen your tears and heard your prayers. Do not grieve. The Little One will not die.”

Alexandra told her husband to shut down the Duma again, or at least to expel Rasputin’s harshest critics. She publicly snubbed the prime minister, Count Vladimir Kokovtsov, for she resented his decision to continue the investigation of Rasputin. In February 1914, Kokovtsov was dismissed. Rasputin returned to St. Petersburg, where he again became a powerful political force.

To avoid hurting his wife, Nicholas ignored those who warned him to spurn Rasputin. One day, the royal tutor saw the czar opening his mail. As he tossed a letter into the wastebasket, the czar said, “Another of those denunciations of Gregory. I get them almost every day and throw them away unread.” A British diplomat who knew Nicholas II later wrote, “It was his...

"They Think I Am Rather Abnormal"

As it became clearer that Empress Alexandra was making political decisions and choosing ministers, animosity toward the czar’s wife intensified. Many Russians mistrusted their German-born czarina. The czar’s enemies accused the couple of German sympathies, even treason.

The dowager empress Marie, mother of Czar Nicholas, feared Alexandra might destroy the monarchy. Late in 1916, she told her son he must get rid of his wife somehow—perhaps send her to a convent or mental institution. Once, she said, “My poor daughter-in-law does not perceive that she is treading on both the dynasty and herself. She sincerely behaves in the holiness of an adventurer and we are powerless to ward off the misfortune which is sure to come.”

The empress viewed herself as an intensely spiritual person, misunderstood by others. She once said, “They think I am rather abnormal; but they are wrong. It is just that I am closer to heaven than I am to earth.” Empress Alexandra was not always in favor with the Russian people. Many distrusted her German ancestry and her influence in government affairs.
crowning tragedy to be Emperor and autocrat in such times and to be surrounded by sinister and fatal influences which he was probably too kindly-eyed to see, certainly too weak-willed to control.”

*At War* World War I

While Russia endured inner turmoil and uncertain leadership, the world outside became embroiled in conflicts over territory. In August 1914, Russia joined its Western ally France to fight against Germany. Most of the Mensheviks and nearly all the Bolsheviks opposed Russian involvement. However, there was a surge of patriotic feeling when war was first declared. Ten thousand people cheered, “Lead us to victory!” and sang the national anthem when Nicholas and Alexandra appeared on the balcony of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, now called Petrograd.

The war became increasingly unpopular as food shortages and inflation spread, and millions of men, mostly peasants, were drafted. Wounded soldiers wrote to their families about the inadequate food and medical services. People grieved for dead family members. By 1916, between 6 and 8 million Russian soldiers had been killed, wounded, or imprisoned.

Many workers were also drafted, and those who remained became more politicized. Between 1914 and 1917, wages rose by about 100 percent, but at the same time, prices increased by 400 percent. The number of striking workers rose steadily to more than 1 million in 1916. The government used police force to firmly subdue strikes and other revolutionary activity. Government officials demanded faster production in factories making shells and other war materials.

The government could not stem the economic and administrative problems brought on by war. The czar made no major policy changes. His wife urged an iron hand. In letters to her husband, Alexandra wrote,

Be more autocratic, my very own sweetheart. . . . Russia, thank God, is not a constitutional country. . . . Be the Emperor, be Peter the Great, John the Terrible.
Emperor Paul—crush them all under you... We have been placed by God on the throne, and we must keep it firm and give it over to our son untouched.\(^4\)

At her urging, during 1915, twenty-one government ministers were dismissed, and men chosen by Rasputin replaced them.

During the war, Alexandra devoted herself to Red Cross work at military hospitals. She and her oldest daughters, Olga and Tatiana, qualified as Sisters of Mercy and could be seen wearing their nursing habits most of the time.

Nicholas continued to change his cabinet. Within three years, he appointed four different prime ministers, three ministers of foreign affairs, three different ministers of war, and five new ministers of the interior. The sixth minister of the interior, Aleksandr Protopopov, was a friend of Rasputin’s, and many people thought him mentally unsound.

Rasputin’s influence now expanded into more affairs of state. The czar’s advisers were chosen or dismissed at Rasputin’s will. During 1915 and 1916, the czar ordered his ministers to discuss all military plans with Rasputin, who had the power to approve or disapprove their plans.
Rasputin also decided military strategy, based on the divine insights attributed to him by Alexandra. She sent Rasputin's instructions to the czar, who often stayed at a military base. In September 1915, she wrote, "Don't forget, before the cabinet meeting, to hold up our friend's small icon and comb yourself several times with his comb." In 1916, she wrote, "Our friend asks you not to order an advance on the northern front."  

Friends warned the czar that people resented Rasputin and were turning against him. The Duma thought the czar was incompetent, but it lacked the power to override his decisions. Grand Duke Alexander warned his cousin Nicholas that the situation was dire, writing, "Strange as it may appear, it is the government itself which is busily paving the way for revolution."  

“Our Day Will Come”

By the end of 1916, anger and misery were felt throughout Russia. Farm produce could not be sold abroad, and many peasants refused to sell it to the government for worthless paper currency. The railway system no longer functioned, and candles, salt, and kerosene did not reach rural areas. People in the cities went hungry and complained of their working conditions. More than 15 million Russian men were serving in the military.

Police in Petrograd saw signs of unrest and anticipated an uprising. An official police report warned of "a threatening crisis that was about to explode. . . . We are on the eve of great events compared with which those of 1905 were mere child's play."  

In December 1916, the body of Rasputin was found floating in the Neva River. He had been poisoned, stabbed, beaten, and shot. Because the three killers were aristocrats and close to the czar's family, they were not executed. Instead they were merely banished from Petrograd: Prince Felix Yusupov went to his country estate; Vladimir Puriashkevich, a member of the Duma, was ordered to the army; Grand Duke Dmitri went to live in Persia.

The empress grieved quietly, as if in a trance, and she often prayed beside Rasputin's tomb. The czar isolated himself even from his close ministers, remaining with his family at Tsarskoe Selo.

Many Russians rejoiced that Rasputin was dead. They called the murderers heroes and lit candles in their honor at churches. People hoped the czar would now respond to their needs, but little changed. Many began considering drastic actions, including plots to kill the czar. Instead, the government decided to hold a plebiscite. Alexander was overthrown, and a liberal government was elected.
Angry Soldiers

Despite initial feelings of patriotism, Russian soldiers fighting in World War I became disillusioned. They lacked ammunition, boots, clothing, and horseshoes. The food was poor, and supplies of grain, cereals, meat, and beans were inadequate. Weapons were so scarce that trainees shared the same rifle, and soldiers at the front hastened to retrieve the guns of comrades who died in action. The troops had no air support. Supplies and food failed to reach the troops because of inadequate transportation. Since army medics were often unavailable, wounded men had to wait for treatment.

By 1917, the amount of necessary supplies fell below 50 percent or more. About half of all able-bodied peasant men had been drafted, which meant fewer people were raising food. As a result, mass desertions took place, and ex-soldiers formed angry bands that attacked estates and took food.

The class system prevailed in military life as well as among civilians. Officers came from the higher classes and regarded the soldiers beneath them as social inferiors. Soldiers were required to address their superior officers as “Your Honor” or “Your Excellency,” even when they were off duty. Laws banned them from using tramway carriages or from dining in restaurants.

Under these conditions, morale sagged. Officers lost faith in the ability of the czar and his advisers to wage a successful war.

General Yanushkevich said, “No amount of science can tell us how to wage war without ammunition, without rifles, and without guns.”

kill the czar or to kidnap the family and prevent the czar from ruling. These plots were planned not just by radicals and revolutionaries but by members of the aristocracy, the military, and the Duma.

Advisers urged the czar to set up a popular government to avoid a crisis. He listened, instead, to his powerful minister of the interior, who was ignored in the Duma. Protopopov, a friend of the royal couple and misled them about how the people regarded their czar. Out of touch with the real mood in Russia, in December 1916, Alexandra wrote to her husband that “a great and magnificent epoch is dawning for your reign.”

Revolutionaries saw a different picture. They communicated their frustrations to Lenin, who was living in exile in Switzerland. On February 19, 1917, Lenin wrote to his close friend Inessa Armand, describing letters he had received from Russia: “They write that the mood of the masses is a good one, that chauvinism [strong feelings of patriotism] is clearly declining, and that probably our day will come.”

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