

Bloody Sunday in 1905

It is the year 1905 and I am Czar Nicholas II of Russia. I have been czar since 1894 and am a firm believer in **autocracy** or total power for the king/czar. At this time most of my Russian subjects are poor peasants who have barely enough to eat due to their poor farming methods. Russia has expanded its businesses, but the living standards of the peasants and workers are still below those of people in Great Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. Taxes are high, some say that my government is dishonest, and there are always strikes. Conditions in factories are extremely harsh. Workers have even tried to organize unions to improve the health, safety, and wages of workers.



My country has been at war with Japan (Russo-Japanese War) for almost a year now. My army has suffered numerous defeats in battle. In addition, the war has caused shortages of food and other goods, and working conditions have worsened. Prices have increased 20 percent faster than wages, so workers are not able to buy many things.

When some members of the workers' union were fired, Father Gapon, a priest in Petrograd, led 110,000 workers in a strike to protest. That is two-thirds of all the factory workers in the city. Last Sunday, January 9, thousands of workers and their families marched on my Winter Palace in Petrograd while I was away, with a petition signed by more than 150,000 people, asking for an eight-hour day; freedom to organize unions; improved working conditions; higher wages for female workers; free medical aid; freedom of speech, press, and religion; and universal suffrage for an elected assembly. I have to admit—the petition was written very nicely. For example, it stated that the petitioners knew that I would do the best for the workers because they look to me, Czar Nicholas II, as their father. The marchers even sang religious songs as they walked to my palace.

The Russian soldiers guarding my palace fired on the crowd as it approached, killing about 100 workers and wounding 300 others. Reporters from other countries were shocked at the blood in the snow, labeling the massacre “Bloody Sunday.” News of the incident set off strikes and uprisings throughout my country. Now, more than 400,000 people are on strike in the Russian empire in reaction to the massacre and all of the universities are closed due to protests. Government spies also report that socialist councils (called soviets) are organizing the workers and peasants to “protect their rights.” I am definitely not happy!

Reading and image adapted from *Russian Revolution Decision Making*. Active Classroom. www.socialstudies.com