

What was Russia like in 1881?

1. Almost 82% of the Russian population were employed in agriculture, most of these were illiterate peasants which meant that there was little use of technology and most farms were smallholdings and not very commercialised.
2. Russia had the largest standing army in Europe.



3. Political parties were banned and the press was heavily censored.
4. There was intense loyalty to the Tsar amongst the majority of the population.
5. Brutal secret police.
6. The Royal Family and aristocracy still owned most of the land – a lot was run by the government and was known as a heavily centralised state. The Tsar's estate was bigger than some countries.
7. Tsar Alexander II freed all serfs (land peasants) in 1861 but peasants were still tied to the land. The emancipation of the serfs meant the aristocracy could no longer sell them and they could marry whomever they wanted to. Some peasants took out government loans to pay for the land that they farmed. The mortgage lasted 49 years. Others rented land off landlords. It should be noted though that the aristocracy still kept 2/3 of the Russian land.
8. After 1861 the organised village community or Mir controlled the peasants. The Mir shared out the land (using the OFS) and had to give permission to any peasant wanted to travel over 20 miles.
9. Local councils were set up in 1864. These were called Zemstva. All classes voted and had seats on the council; they were responsible for minor issues like road maintenance. Prisons, poor relief, arranging military conscription. Votes were weighted so that the aristocracy had control.
10. In 1870 urban areas were given their own councils, which were called Dumas.
11. The beginnings of industrialisation brought the development of a working class and intelligentsia. They had no political vote and so many organisations that they did start were underground.

Russian Society

Social structure according to the 1897 census:

Ruling and Upper Class (Tsar, court, govt, nobility, military officers, higher clergy)	- 12.5%
Commercial Class (factory owners, merchants and bankers)	- 1.5%
Working Class	- 4.0%
Peasants	- 82%

Russian Economy

Russia was economically backward. There was some industry; St Petersburg and Moscow had large textile factories, the Urals had a substantial iron industry, but these activities were relatively small scale. The sheer size of Russia and her undeveloped communication and transport network restricted industrial growth. In addition the banking system was ineffective so loans were not readily available for investment. This meant that most peasants used cottage industry to supplement their incomes.

Therefore the land was the main source of income for the government. But this had major problems. Much of Russia had poor soil or was too far north to be really profitable. In addition there was not enough land to go around. The population was rising. Finally there was the problem of the division and cost of the land. Buying land saddled peasants with a large debt and made it very difficult for them to invest any money into improvements. Farmers still used the old strip system and this made agriculture even more inefficient and limited food supplies.

Who ruled?



RUSSIA WAS POLITICALLY BACKWARD COMPARED TO THE REST OF EUROPE

Russian Orthodox Church

Helped the Tsar to govern. It owned a lot of land and taught the peasants that 'God commands us to love and obey... the Tsar.' The church was also influential over the Russian court.

The Russian Army

Was used to control people. Conscription was used as a form of punishment. Discipline in the army was very harsh. Commissions were bought and only aristocrats could become officers. 45% of the national budget was spent on the army.

Judges

These were appointed by the Minister of Justice (who was appointed by the Tsar). Trials were by jury in open court. But peasants had separate legal status and their own court called the volost. At local and national level the **civil service and the police** were controlled by people who were incompetent, inefficient and corrupt.

Questions

Read these notes and at least one other source of information to answer the following questions. Your answers should be brief and in note form.

1. How did the geography of Russia contribute to its backwardness?
2. Why was Russian farming so backward?
3. What roles did the Zemstva and Mir play in the Russian countryside?
4. Why had industrial growth been so limited?
5. Through which bodies did the Tsar exercise his authority?