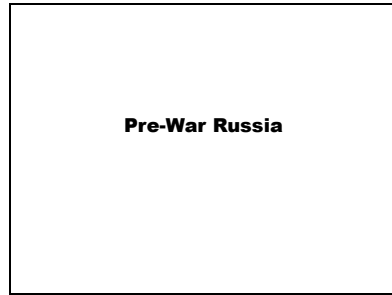


Slide 1



Slide 2



At the turn of the 20th century, Russia was something of an enigma to most Europeans.

Europeans may have been aware that the Russian Empire covered nearly one sixth of the earth's land surface and that it had a population in excess of 120 million people.

However it was most noted for having the potential to be able to field an army of millions of men, which from a military perspective would theoretically make it a powerful military adversary in a war.

However, from an economic perspective, Russia lagged well behind the advanced nations of Europe such as Britain, France and Germany in the first decade of the new century – something that was perhaps not fully appreciated by the leaders of those countries at the time.

Slide 3



Russia's rigid social structure divided its citizens into a hierarchy:

- royals,
- aristocrats,
- land-owners,
- bureaucrats,
- military officers,
- soldiers and sailors,
- the industrial working classes.
- The agricultural working classes.

Slide 4



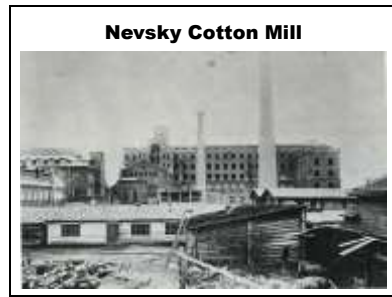
In 1914 Russia's economy continued to be based primarily on manually intensive agriculture, with only a small manufacturing sector, which meant it was relatively under-developed and lagged well behind Western Europe's more industrially advanced nations.

Slide 5



Government incentives in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century enticed some foreign investment into the country's factories and mines, but at the outbreak of War Russia was still quite backward in economic terms.

## Slide 6



Moreover the limited amount of industrialization that had occurred in Russia in the pre war era had enticed some peasant workers to move from agrarian to urban communities to work in the new factories, where they were forced to work long hours in unpleasant and unsafe conditions.

This in turn created new problems for Russia's ruling classes, as workers in urban factories became subject to trade union influences and more prone to demanding increased political rights and economic benefits.

## Slide 7



While Russia's economy had belatedly begun to modernise by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russia's political system still languished in the late Middle Ages, as its Tsars refused to introduce any of the liberal/ democratic processes that had evolved with the British monarchy.

The Russian Empire was ruled by an autocratic Tsar, who believed his position was ordained and protected by God, where he exercised all political decision-making and all sovereign power. There was no constitution to define and limit his authority, and there was no elected parliament capable of exercising any power.

Ministers were appointed and sacked by the Tsar, and so were accountable only to him.

## Slide 8



The Russian Tsar at the outbreak of World War I in 1914 was Nicholas II.

Nicholas was an intelligent but shy man, who came to the throne in 1894, pledging to retain autocratic power and resisting calls for political reform. Like his predecessors Nicholas placed great store on the strength of Russia's military.

However while the Russian army was technically the largest in Europe, a chronic shortage of money meant that the Russian government could only afford to call up a fraction of those eligible each year to serve in the army.

Moreover the Russian army of the day was backward, short of modern equipment and its officers were appointed on the grounds of family connections rather than ability.

Slide 9



The Russian Orthodox Church was the other great supporter of the Tsar. He was divinely appointed and the Church had a specially protected position in Russian life.

However many ordinary Russians saw their local priests as greedy and corrupt individuals who did not live up to Biblical standards.

The influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on matters of state would later become evident with the advent of the 'mad monk' Rasputin.

Slide 10



Nicholas II pushed for the further expansion of his empire, both in eastern Europe and in Russia's Pacific region. Russian territorial ambitions in modern-day Korea instigated a war with Japan in 1904-5.

This was a war against a small fledgling country that Nicholas and his advisors thought would be straightforward and easily winnable.

Slide 11



Instead, the modern and highly efficient Japanese army and navy inflicted humiliating defeats on their Russian counterparts - the first time in centuries that a major European power had been conquered by an Asian nation.

The loss of this war exposed Russia's army and navy as being poorly equipped and badly led, while the empire's lack of infrastructure (railways and telegraph

communications) also became very apparent.

By 1910 some 45% of Russian government spending was allocated to the armed forces.

In comparison, just 5% of the Russian budget was spent on education.

## Slide 12



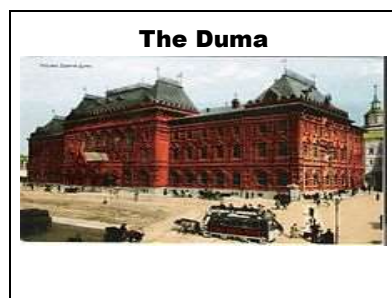
On the home front, the defeat of 1905 caused social and political unrest which bubbled over into revolution. It was driven by liberal and left-wing groups, disgruntled industrial workers and others who sought political modernisation.

Matters came to a head in Petersburg on a Sunday in January 1905 when Russian citizens organised a gathering in the city square near the Tsar's winter palace and attempted to present a petition demanding an end to the war, fairer working conditions and voting rights.

In response the Russian army troops guarding the palace fired on their own citizens and more than a thousand were killed or wounded.

In response, peasant and worker uprisings broke out across the country as peasants seized land and protesting workers went on strike, while several of the Tsar's relatives and advisors were killed in political assassinations. As a result the nation's economy was severely disrupted.

Slide 13



In response to the uprisings Tsar Nicholas II introduced limited reforms and created an elected legislature called the Duma (Parliament) and promised liberal civil rights.

However in 1906 Nicholas reneged on the civil rights promises, while voting for the Duma was restricted to wealthy landowners, and effectively became a powerless 'talking shop'.

In the meantime, radical political agitators were rounded up to be hanged, imprisoned or exiled.

Slide 14



In subsequent years, many units of the army (particularly the Cossacks) were employed keeping down the peasants who frequently revolted against their conditions.

## Slide 15



Russo-German relations during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had been comparatively friendly. The German chancellor Bismarck had worked hard to nurture good relations with Russia, chiefly to avoid his country being hemmed between two hostile powers.

In fact, given their strategic interest in the Balkan region, Russian military planners during the 1800s had anticipated a future war with Austria-Hungary rather than Germany.

Initially the ascension to the throne of Kaiser Wilhelm II did not seem as though it would upset this balance, as the new German Kaiser and the new Russian Tsar were cousins, and therefore on seemingly friendly terms.

This assessment did not take into account the private views of Wilhelm II. Lacking Bismarck's foresight – indeed, devoid of much foresight at all – the Kaiser had a low regard for Russian political influence and military power, and no interest in keeping the Russians on side.



Slide 16



With the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Russia developed a keen interest in the Balkan region in the hope of increasing its influence and possibly extending its imperial ambitions.

Slide 17



For ethnic and religious reasons in the years before the Great War Russia became a supporter of Serbia.

In this process the Tsar's diplomats and officials actively encouraged Serbia's nationalist ambitions to create and lead a Yugoslav (Slavic) confederation by providing covert support for groups that were agitating for Serbian autonomy.

Clearly this policy put Russia at odds with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which had much to fear from a strong and expansionist Serbia, and would, in June 1914, culminate in the event at Sarajevo that ignited the Great War.

## Slide 18

### **Holger Afflerbach, historian**

"Objectively speaking, Russia's entry into the war was the most improbable of all. Russia had the least to gain from continental conflict and the most to lose... For its part, the Russian public had very bitter memories of a recent bloody war, was increasingly antagonistic toward its government, and saw little good coming from a titanic clash with Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Importantly, all of these reasons not to go to war were visible at the time and were clearly articulated prior to the declaration of hostilities."

## Slide 19



Youtube: Pre War Russia – Indie Nidell  
(8 minutes)