Introduction – The Tsar’s control in 1905 was based on the repressive ‘Pillars of Autocracy’. These had helped to convince Russians to the support the Tsarist state, and to crush them if they didn’t. However, in 1905 Russia descended into chaos. Peasants seized land, workers went on strike and regiments in the army mutinied. The 1905 Revolution was caused by a variety of factors; War with Japan, Bloody Sunday, working-class discontent, discontent among the peasantry and political opposition. Some historians have suggested that it was the state’s response to short-term crises that caused revolution, whilst others have emphasized the long-term weaknesses of the Tsarist system and the Tsar’s poor decision-making.

Factor 2 =

**Bloody Sunday**

K – On January 22nd, 1905, workers in St Petersburg, led by Father Gapon, marched to the Winter Palace to deliver a petition to the Tsar. The petition called for better working conditions but the protestors were peaceful and loyal to the Tsar. The Tsar’s troops fired on the protestors and over 200 were killed.

A – The events of Bloody Sunday were extremely significant as they horrified the nation. Workers felt betrayed by the Tsar and that he did not have their interests at heart.

A – Furthermore, Bloody Sunday was important as Liberals were shocked by the brutality of the regime. They felt that Russia needed urgent political reform

CA – However, an argument can be made that Bloody Sunday was a reflection of the Tsar’s poor handling of the country. By not allowing peaceful protest, he had forced loyal workers into revolution.

Evaluation – Bloody Sunday was the spark which ignited the revolution. It was a key short-term reason for the uprising against the Tsar. H – Figes – ‘In a few seconds the popular myth of a Good Tsar was suddenly destroyed’

or

The violence of Bloody Sunday was not a one-off. The Tsar relied on brutality from the army to crush all opposition. Therefore it was the Tsar’s style of government that was mostly to blame for the events outside the Winter Palace.

Factor 1 =

**War with Japan**

K – Russia engaged in a disastrous war with Japan. They suffered crushing military defeats on land at Port Arthur and Mukden. Their navy was destroyed at the battle of Tsushima.

A – The war was crucial as it undermined public confidence in the Tsar. His government was seen as corrupt and incompetent, as the army was so poorly led and equipped.

K – The cost of the war was enormous. Resources were diverted to the army, which created inflation and food and fuel shortages at home.

A- The economic impact of the war can be seen as a key reason for the 1905 revolution. It worsened living conditions for those in Russia’s cities and helped to increase support for opposition parties.

CA – However, one reason for declaring war with Japan was to distract people from an economic slump in the country. This suggests that the economy was struggling before the war even began.

Evaluation – The war with Japan lessened the grip of the Tsar on power. It convinced many Russians that the Tsar was incompetent, and others that he was not invincible. H – Figes ‘Russia's military humiliation...turned a broad section of the public against him’.

or

The war simply showcased the weaknesses in the Tsar’s government. He appointed advisors and commanders based on loyalty, not ability, and this contributed greatly to Russia’s defeat.

Factor 4 =

**Peasant Discontent**

K – Life for the majority of Russia’s peasants was extremely hard. They lacked sufficient land and equipment to farm efficiently. This led to frequent famines. The best land was controlled by nobles and the Zemstvas (councils run by the nobles) were responsible for running affairs in the countryside.

A – Clearly the discontent of the peasants was a key reason for the 1905 Revolution. The land seizures which took place are directly linked to the lack of decent land available to peasants.

K – After peasants were granted their freedom, they were forced to take out large loans from the government, called redemption payments. This led to families falling in to debt, which they could not get out of, no matter how hard they worked.

A- As a result, it can be suggested that peasants were unlikely to remain loyal as they did not have anything to lose. This is especially significant as 80% of Russians were peasants.

CA – However, the counter-argument can be made that the revolution began in the cities with strikes and the events of Bloody Sunday. Therefore peasants followed the example of workers.

Evaluation – As peasants made up the bulk of Russia’s people, their discontent was a fundamental reason for the events of 1905. This can be clearly seen in the land, grain and timber seizures. H- Pipes-‘I t needed only some outward sign of weakening of state authority for the village to explode.’

Factor 3 =

**Workers’ Discontent**

K – In the 1890s, Russia industrialised rapidly. Urban centres such as Moscow and St Petersburg expanded at a tremendous rate. However, living and working conditions were appalling. Accidents were common, wages were low, hours long and housing was cramped and unsanitary.

A – This was significant as it made workers susceptible to anti-Tsarist messages. Revolution was far more likely to start in areas where large numbers of people were gathered together.

K – Strikes were illegal and were harshly punished. However, this did not stop workers striking. 1902, 1903 and 1905 saw widespread strikes.

A- An argument can therefore be made that workers’ discontent was pivotal because they had no avenue for peaceful protest. In addition, unhappy workers were far more likely to join illegal trade unions or opposition groups like the Social Democrats.

CA- However, it is also possible to suggest that many of the events of 1905 cannot be attributed to the workers. The land seizures in particular were down to discontent in the countryside. Indeed, the evidence from the protest on Bloody Sunday backs up the idea that workers were initially loyal to the Tsar.

Evaluation – Link workers’ discontent to Bloody Sunday. The series of strikes and industrial unrest which took place during 1905 can be directly linked to the unrest among the workers. H – Wood – ‘The working and living conditions of the workers created a situation that was conducive to the spread of mass discontent’.

Or

By denying workers any political voice, it was in fact the Tsar who was responsible for forcing them into revolution. If he had listened to their concerns he may have been able to avoid revolution.

Potential Questions

“Defeat in the war with Japan was the main cause of the 1905 revolution in Russia.” How valid is this view?

To what extent was Bloody Sunday responsible for the 1905 Revolution in Russia?

How important was working-class discontent in causing the 1905 revolution in Russia?

“The authority of the Tsarist state was never seriously challenged in the years before 1905.” How valid is this view?

Conclusion

Try to split your conclusion into two sections, which should mirror the argument that you have mentioned in your introduction. The second section should be the viewpoint that you agree with. Make sure that you refer back to the question and answer it.

On one hand it is possible to point to the short-term factors as the main cause of the 1905 Revolution. Bloody Sunday shocked and appalled the nation. The war with Japan led to humiliation and economic hardship.

A case can be made that it was the Tsar’s incompetence and the long term weakness of Russia that were the fundamental reason for the outbreak of disorder. By not allowing any reform, and by failing to deal with the legitimate concerns of peasants, workers, minorities and Liberals, the Tsar forced them to revolt.

Factor 5 =

**Political Repression**

K – The Tsar believed in his divine right to rule. He did not accept that he needed a parliament to reflect the wishes of Russia’s people. He also failed to recognise the role of trade unions as a way of allowing workers to express their concerns.

A – This was key as it alienated groups, such as Liberals and skilled workers, who might otherwise have supported the Tsar. They called for political and economic reform, but when this was ignored they had no choice but to join the revolution.

K – The Tsar insisted on following a policy of Russification. This demanded the dominance of the Russian language and culture across the Empire, especially in schools and the law.

A – Arguably, this was extremely significant as it alienated the millions of non-Russians in the Empire. Its impact can be seen in Georgia, where nationalists declared independence in 1905.

Evaluation – The Tsar’s inability to compromise or to listen to the case for reform was vital in causing the 1905 Revolution. He did not allow any other possibility for groups who had grievances. H – Figes – ‘If there is a single, repetitive theme in the history of Russia...it is that of the need for reform and the failure of successive governments to achieve it.’