Introduction – In February 1917, 300 years of Romanov rule came to an end as Tsar Nicholas was forced to abdicate. As his brother did not want the throne, and his son was too ill to take it, power now lay in the hands of the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. Many factors contributed to the February Revolution, including the impact of World War 1, both military and economic, as well as Nicholas’ poor leadership, the actions of the Tsarina and Rasputin, and political opposition. It would be fair to argue that it was the long-term weakness of Nicholas and the system of autocracy that compounded all the other factors and led to revolution…or… It would be fair to argue that it was the catastrophic impact of the war that caused the sudden collapse of Tsar Nicholas.

Factor 2 =

**Economic Impact of the War**

K – The war had an extremely negative impact on Russia’s economy. People flooded into Russia’s cities, and with food and trains being used to supply the army, there were not enough supplies for civilians.

K – Wages increased by up to 200% during the war. However, prices rose by 400%. This meant that living conditions for workers declined and there were widespread food shortages.

A – This can be directly linked to the outbreak of revolution as it was bread riots in Petrograd which sparked the initial unrest. The strikes which were a feature of discontent in Petrograd can also be closely associated with the economic impact of the war.

CA – However, an argument can be made that the economic impact of the war was not wholly negative. Industries such as munitions boomed, and the high demand for food led to greater profits for farmers.

Evaluation – The economic crisis caused by the war was pivotal in causing revolution as it fueled widespread discontent of the Tsar and his government. H – Figes – ‘It began with bread

or

The problem was not so much the economy, but how the situation was handled by the Tsarist regime. In Petrograd, for example, there was enough bread, it just wasn’t distributed properly.

Factor 1 =

**Military Impact of the War**

K – Russia performed disastrously during the war. They suffered enormous casualties of 1.7 million men, lost battles such as the Masurian Lakes and Tannenburg, and were poorly equipped.

A – The war was crucial as it undermined confidence in the Tsar. Both the officers and troops felt that Nicholas was incapable of leading them and it was their withdrawal of support which led to the escalation of protests.

K – During the war Russian troops were very poorly treated. They were not trained well and medical provision was poorly organized. There was a disastrous lack of equipment. Many regiments only had one rifle for every three soldiers.

A- This was extremely significant as it made the soldier’s far more susceptible to anti-Tsarist propaganda. It also convinced Liberals that the Tsar was not fit to lead the country and that autocracy was grossly inefficient.

CA – However, the Russian army was still a viable fighting force in February 1914. The mutinies and desertions which took place were no worse than those in other countries such as France. These countries did not have revolutions.

Evaluation – The war damaged the army’s confidence in the Tsar. He could no longer rely on them to be a pillar against revolution. H – Figes - ‘A government which made them fight a war they could not hope to win, which had failed to provide them with adequate supplies...was certainly not worthy of further sacrifices’.

or

The war simply showcased the weaknesses in the Tsar’s government. The inefficiency of autocracy led to the army’s poor performance, and therefore it was the rotten system, rather than the war itself, which led to revolution.

Factor 4 =

**The Tsarina and Rasputin**

K – With the Tsar at the front, day-to-day running of the government fell to the Tsarina. She was German-born, and tended to hire and fire ministers rapidly. In addition, the Tsarina would only listen to advice from those who agreed with her.

A – The Tsarina’s influence can clearly be seen as a major cause of discontent. Her German roots caused mistrust among the ordinary people, and her political meddling meant that the best ministers were not always appointed, limiting the effectiveness of government.

K – The Tsarina relied on the advice of Rasputin, a holy man who had ‘cured’ her son’s hemophilia. Rasputin had a wild reputation as a drunken womanizer. He believed that God had given him special powers to help the Tsar.

A- This was significant as it eroded respect in the Tsarist regime. Ordinary people were outraged by the behaviour in court, and the middle-classes and nobility saw Rasputin’s influence as evidence that Russia could not be run properly by the Tsar.

CA – However, the counter-argument can be made that Rasputin and the Tsarina were a problem caused by the system of autocracy and Nicholas’ poor leadership. The fact that people with no political ability or experience could make such important decisions was more a failing of autocracy, than of the individuals.

Evaluation – The Tsarina and Rasputin were vital in causing the complete loss of faith in Nicholas II from all sections of society. H- French Ambassador-‘I am obliged to report that, at the present moment, the Russian Empire is run by lunatics.’

Or

Rasputin and the Tsarina reflected the problems within the Russian system of government, rather than causing them. H – Lynch – ‘The Rasputin scandal had been a bizarre symptom of the disease affecting Russian politics rather than a cause’.

Factor 3 =

**Nicholas’ Weakness**

K – Nicholas was a poor leader and made several disastrous decisions which helped to cause the February Revolution. For example, in 1915, Nicholas moved to the front and took personal control of the army.

A – This was significant as it made the Tsar personally accountable for any military defeats. This issue was made even worse by the fact that the Tsar lacked any military experience and so lost the support and respect of his troops and officers.

K – The Tsar lacked political ability. He refused to work with groups who could help him, such as middle-class Liberals, and was unable to understand the seriousness of events back in Petrograd.

A- This was important as it isolated the Tsar. No one backed him in February. By leaving Petrograd, he also left a power vacuum and was not able to respond to the escalating crisis.

Evaluation – The Tsar’s poor decision-making undermined the Tsarist system. He failed to inspire support and instead alienated crucial elements in Russia, especially within the army. H – Service – ‘The Tsar was more adept at ordering repression than at mustering political support’.

Or

The collapse of Tsarist rule in 1917 was not down to the actions of an individual, but instead a wider set of circumstances. The impact of the war was so enormous that there was little that Nicholas could have done to prevent its terrible consequences in Russia.

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 external factors as the main cause of the February Revolution. The enormous loss of life and the economic hardships which were the result of the war put Russia under tremendous pressure. This allowed political opponents to organize opposition to the Tsar and ultimately to bring him down.

A case can be made that it was the Tsar’s incompetence and the long term weakness of autocracy that was more to blame. It was Nicholas’ poor decision-making that alienated the army and the middle-classes, and allowed the Tsarina to create chaos in Petrograd. By clinging to autocracy, the Tsar was unable to make the reforms and concessions that were needed to preserve the Romanov dynasty.

Factor 5 =

**Political Opponents**

K – The Tsar faced a growing number of political opponents. The bourgeoisie (middle/upper-class Liberals) had formed the Zemstvo Union to help to run the war effort. They soon became disillusioned by the incompetence of the government, and were upset by the constant changing of ministers by the Tsarina.

A – This was key as it alienated a group who might otherwise have supported the Tsar. Politicians began to make speeches against the Tsar, which can only have helped to stir up revolutionary feelings.

K – Workers in Russia were angry at poor working and living conditions. They were therefore receptive to the policies of revolutionary groups such as the Bolsheviks, who campaigned against the Tsar and encouraged strikes.

A – Arguably, this was extremely significant as it was strikes in Petrograd which brought the Tsarist government to its knees. The Bolsheviks were able to convince workers and soldiers to rise up.

CA – However, the counter-argument can be made that the strikes and bread riots in Petrograd were not organized by political parties, but were instead the eruption of discontent among ordinary workers.

Evaluation – The Tsar’s inability to compromise in a rapidly changing country, or to accept advice meant that he had little political support to act as a balance against working–class discontent. H – Hill – ‘The fundamental cause of the Russian Revolution was the incompatibility of the Tsarist state with the demands of modern civilisation.’

Or

The February Revolution was not organized by political opponents, but was instead the result of huge pressure put on ordinary people by the war. H – Chamberlain - “One of the most leaderless, spontaneous, anonymous revolutions of all time.”