

Summary: The Russian Empire

Russia Rules Itself

Ivan IV was Russia's first czar. He was crowned in 1547 at the age of 16. He had a reputation for cruelty, mostly toward Russia's enemies, and was nicknamed Ivan the Terrible. Russia was at war during his 37-year rule.

Russia had an unlimited government that began with the rule of Ivan the Terrible. Czars were often in conflict with nobles. They were afraid that the nobles might take control. Many Russian nobles and church leaders who opposed Ivan the Terrible were killed. Russia's peasants also suffered under the first czars. They were forced to become serfs. Serfs could not leave the farms where they worked.

Peter the Great and Catherine the Great ruled Russia during the 17th and 18th centuries. Russia expanded greatly during this time. These rulers gained new territory by conquering neighboring lands.

Peter the Great made improvements to the army and the government. Like Peter, Catherine the Great was interested in culture. She built new schools and towns. She expanded trade and encouraged art, science, and literature. During this time, however, peasant life did not improve.

A Divided Russia

By the 19th century, Russia was still a divided nation. The many peasants were poor. The few nobles were wealthy. Some Russians were being exposed to the idea that a nation's government should listen to its people.

Serfs and other groups were especially unhappy. They did not like the way the government was treating the poor. Workers in the cities also complained about low pay and poor working conditions. In 1905, a group of workers marched to the royal palace with a list of demands. Government troops shot the workers. As news of this "Bloody Sunday" spread, Russians became angrier with the government.

Conditions grew even worse after Russia joined World War I. Food shortages in the cities caused workers to strike. The workers organized themselves for a fight. The Russian army revolted as well. Finally, the army overthrew the government.



Before You Read

Find and circle each vocabulary word.

czar *noun*, an emperor in Russia

unlimited government *noun*, a government in which the leaders have almost total power



After You Read

REVIEW Why did the Russian people give Czar Ivan IV the nickname Ivan the Terrible? Highlight the sentences that tell why the Russian people gave Ivan IV his nickname.

REVIEW What events led to the Russian Revolution? Underline three or more conditions that led to the Russian Revolution.