

Alexander III

Alexander III represented the very image of an autocrat. He was 6ft 4ins tall, broad-shouldered and extremely strong. His favourite trick was to unbend horseshoes to amuse his children. When he came to the throne, he made it clear that he was going to affirm the principle of autocracy in no uncertain terms. On 29 April 1881, in The Manifesto on Unshakable Autocracy, he announced that the Tsar would 'rule with faith in the strength and truth of the autocratic power that we have been called upon to affirm and safeguard for the popular good from infringement'. He gave the impression of immense power and in this sense fulfilled the role of the autocrat perfectly. Unfortunately, he was limited in intellect and advised by a divided collection of ministers.

Repressive measures

Alexander III rejected his father's reforms as 'ill-advised, tantamount to revolution and pushing Russia on to the wrong road' and considered that they had contributed to his father's assassination. He 'would not grant Russia a constitution for anything on earth' and set about turning the clock back.

- 1 In 1881 The Statute of State Security was passed giving the government powers to:
 - a) prohibit gatherings of more than 12 people
 - b) prosecute any individual for political crimes
 - c) introduce emergency police rule where public order was threatened
 - d) set up special courts outside the legal system
 - e) close schools, universities and newspapers.

Most of these measures remained in force until 1917.

- 2 He brought in strict controls on the universities, reducing student freedom.
- 3 In 1890, the independence of the zemstva was reduced and control became more centralised. The number of people eligible to vote in elections was cut drastically. For instance, in Moscow and St Petersburg only 0.7 per cent of the population could vote.
- 4 Justices of the Peace, an important feature of the previous tsar's reforms, were abolished in 1889 and replaced in the countryside by Land Captains. These were members of the gentry chosen to control the peasants and were deeply resented.

Economic progress

A more progressive approach was adopted on the economy. Bunge, the finance minister and later Prime Minister, laid



Commissioned by Nicholas II, this statue was known as the 'Hippopotamus'. Rather than pull it down the Bolsheviks carved these lines on the pedestal:

'Their well-deserved hangman's fee
My son and sire received.
But, a spectre of ancient slavery,
I ride, through all eternity
Derided by humanity.'

down the basis for future development, encouraging railway building as an economic stimulus and using tariff protection to help several industries to grow. A factory inspectorate was introduced and peasants' redemption payments were reduced. He also established an income tax on businesses. At the end of the reign in 1892, Sergei Witte was appointed Finance Minister and took these policies forward to create the industrial boom of the 1890s (see page 15). Alexander had great faith in Witte, who in turn admired the Tsar.