The abdication of Tsar Nicholas II

Nicholas II Alexandrovich Romanov was the last Russian Emperor. After his abdication of the throne the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty came to an end. The tsar's abdication came as a direct result of the revolution that took place in February of 1917 in Russia. In the midst of World War I the main causes of turmoil appeared to be the relations of the Russian people rather than their relations with other nations. When the revolution broke out, demonstrations and street fighting lasted for a week and the workers of some of Petrograd's largest manufacturing complexes went on strike. In response, Nicholas ordered Russian army troops to restore order. The troops, however, mutinied and refused to use violence against the masses. Nicholas then dissolved the Duma, appealing to his right to do so according to the 1905 October Manifesto. Its members, though, refused to disperse. Realizing that there was no authority in the capital loyal to him, Nicholas abdicated on the 2nd of March. In his final attempt to preserve the Romanov dynasty Nicholas abdicated in favor of his brother, the Grand Duke Michael¹. The proclaimed Emperor Michael II, however, refused to assume power until the “great people” of Russia had “invested him with such power”.²

There were several key events preceding the revolution that led to the tsar's abdication. These events in conjunction with Nicholas's poor decision making on some occasions were the reason that he is remembered in history as Bloody Nicholas.

The days immediately following Nicholas's coronation can – with hindsight – be considered as foreshadowing the series of unfortunate events that subsequently led to the Tsar's abdication in 1917. A few days after Nicholas's coronation in 1898 many people gathered in the Khodynka field to celebrate and as with most mass gatherings the risk of agitation was high. The banquet resulted in the death of
roughly 2,000 people – allegedly after the Grand Duke Serge and the Minister of Court, Vorontsov-Dashkov, ordered the authorities to use violence in order to control the turmoil. The flawed design of the field was one of the many factors contributing to the disaster. According to Alexei Volkov, the tsarina's valet, Nicholas ordered an investigation about who should bear the responsibility for the deaths. The letter depicts a startling image of the tragedy's magnitude.

In the years that followed the implications of Witte's industrialization development program had caused much distress to the peasants and the proletariat. The harsh taxation was closely related to the famine and the military depression had given rise to numerous revolutionary groups. The government strove to draw popular attention away from itself by promoting pogroms, and thereby exploiting the Russian people's rivalry with the Jewish. Von Plehve, assigned as Interior Minister by Nicholas at the time, made no effort to prevent the violent actions against the Jewish population. In the secondary literature about the Russian pogroms we find no contradictions. This suggests that the government had a lot of trouble controlling the masses and persuading them that the industrialization development program would ultimately help modernize the country; this is the reason the government had to resort to such extreme measures.

In another effort to “quiet popular discontent” Nicholas and von Plehve instigated an aggressive foreign policy against the Japanese Empire in order to win control of Manchuria and Korea. Nicholas aspired to “preserve the autocracy and to defend the dignity, honor, and worth of Russia”. He adopted an aggressive foreign policy primarily as means of displaying the power of his nation. Meanwhile, he remained convinced that it would not result in war because 'he did not wish it'. His arrogant stance on the matter left him completely surprised when the Japanese after attempting to negotiate attacked the Russian Far East Fleet and declared war. It is also came as a surprise to him that the Japanese armed forces and navy easily overpowered the Russian armed forces and navy. All sources indicate that the Russo-Japanese War had a very negative impact on Russia. Russia's economic situation had deteriorated, the war resulted in many casualties, and the people, astounded by their
nation's incompetence, continued to lose faith in their Tsar. Even Russia's nobility began to question Nicholas and started holding secret meetings disguised as banquets. Witte accurately stated that “the Tsar was a well-intentioned child, but his actions were entirely dependent upon the character of his counselors, most of whom were bad”\(^7\). It is most likely that Witte was dismissed from his position as finance minister because he had disagreements with the many of Nicholas's counselors. He also did not approve of von Plehve and others close to Nicholas because he believed that they were unable to help him understand that he was taking a big risk by challenging the Japanese before the Russo-Japanese War broke out in the winter of 1904.

Father Georgy Gapon, a priest and working class leader who by 1905 had managed to receive support to create a police union, initiated a strike and encouraged the people to make a peaceful but direct appeal to Nicholas at the Winter Palace. However, the people's efforts failed when troops were ordered to fire against them on January 22, 1905, a date that became known as Bloody Sunday.

The above illustration shows that the people were defenseless against the armed troops who had
formed a front. According to an American journalist's account, “Gapon, the Hero of Bloody Sunday”, “Gapon readily believed that the Czar would receive him, and if, for any reason his Majesty was prevented from so doing, that the soldiers would not fire on him”. The journalist presented Gapon as a man driven by passion. From his own perspective, Gapon ultimately “led workingmen of St. Petersburg to torture and death in a vain attempt to petition personally Nicholas II”. The journalist tried to report what events signified the beginning of the 1905 Revolution. He also included in his article a short passage from Gapon's autobiography stating that 'horror crept into his heart and the thought flashed through his mind: And this is the work of our Little Father, the Czar?'\(^{11}\) The aim of this article seems to have not been to draw sympathy from the American people but rather to distance them from the Russian affairs since the American people were indirectly advised to never allow themselves to be led by a man like Gapon -someone who was characterized as “hypnotized by the revolutionary propaganda” and whose “dead wife visited him in his sleep” - in the rest of the article.

On October 30, 1905 Witte drafted the October Manifesto for Nicholas to sign. The Manifesto granted fundamental civil rights to the people and promised Nicholas's subjects a parliament with legislative powers. In an excerpt on the Manifesto from \textit{The Memoirs of Count Witte} (1921), Witte shows his unhappiness with the results of the Revolution.\(^{12}\) The excerpt suggests that he knew all along that what was promised to the people would not be delivered. He claimed that the Manifesto was drawn up hastily, that he himself “opposed the publication of a constitutional manifesto”, and that he did not really expect Nicholas to sign it. The tone of the excerpt is apologetic and this may be because Witte was insecure about his actions at the time and perhaps because he wrote his memoirs after he was dismissed from his position in 1917. The Tsar was displeased with him; he called the publication of the October Manifesto 'the greatest sin of his life'. This later resulted in the marginalization of Witte and his resignation in 1906. Once again, Nicholas appears to have only been interested in preserving the autocracy. Not much thought was put into publishing a manifesto that promised constructive changes that Nicholas believed in. The only consequence of the manifesto was to delay the revolution until
1917 by giving the people 'false hope'; thus Nicholas managed to retain most if not all of his traditional powers for a few more years.

Tsar Nicholas's biography, diary, and letters by him and by 'those who came closest to his daily life' provide insight to his thoughts and decisions during the critical years before his abdication. These sources reveal some of Nicholas's main weaknesses. In the Tsar's recently written biography, Bob Atchison states that “the lack of friends from outside the clan of European royalty deprived Nicholas of the benefit of understanding the way his future subjects lived. In this he was no different than most of his royal peers. But Nicholas was also purposely cut off from liberal thought and ideas by his parents”.

This biography justifies the fact that Nicholas did not sincerely try to make any reforms to improve the lives of the people, arguing that he did not understand the mindset or practical situation of the people and this is why he ultimately resorted to the Russo-Japanese War and the publication of the October Manifesto in attempts to keep the people faithful to him and the autocracy. In one of her letters in 1906, Amalia Kussner Coudert, an American artist assigned to draw portraits of the Tsar and the Tsarina, said that 'English was spoken exclusively by the Russian family in their private lives'. This choice of language further emphasizes that the tsar distinguished himself from the Russian people. Even though he was traditionally loved and revered by many of the people he was certainly not a leader that they could identify with. This social gap between the royal family and the Russian people was in sharp contrast to the personal appeal of revolutionary leaders. According to Nicholas's biography, because his father, Alexander III, died at such an early age, Nicholas was only 28 years old in 1896 when he had to assume the throne and he was not ready to rule”. The biographer justifies Nicholas's inability to make firm decisions and his failure to establish a group of advisors that he could trust. This source states that Nicholas felt 'surrounded by deceitful, self-driven bureaucrats and sycophants'. The Tsar saw “asking for advice as a sign of weakness and tried to rely on his instincts”, however, it is clear that he lacked “political savvy”. As a result, the people started to see the Tsar as a self-contradicting weak figure, especially after the Russo-Japanese war. Most sources indicate that Nicholas was very
much against the idea of sharing political decision-making. Sources also suggested that any minister who “displayed activity and energy” was perceived as a threat and soon “lost the royal trust”  

Witte is a fine example of a competent minister who worked with sincere zeal and who was dismissed by the Tsar. What is more, primary and secondary sources indicate that Nicholas was a man of delicate nature. This means that he was not driven by power, holding on to it was an act of altruism. Nicholas believed that Russia's future was intrinsically tied to the Romanov family. Amalia Kussner Coudert said that Nicholas “looked kind, there was kindness in his eyes, in his face, in his voice; kindness in every easy, gentle movement of his slight youthful figure”. From Nicholas's diary entries and letters to the tsarina we conclude that “Nicholas forced himself to attend to the affairs of the state but essentially they did not captivate him. Ministers' reports were a heavy burden to him”  

Nicholas's diary entries suggest that in his everyday life he was mostly concerned about the weather, outdoor activities such as gardening, his family, and reading for pleasure; he makes very few references to the situation of the Russian people. The letters that Nicholas and the tsarina exchanged also show that he turned to her and Rasputin for advice. Rasputin was able to influence Nicholas in his decision-making because he had gained the tsarina's trust in his questionable efforts to cure her hemophilic son, Alexei. All sources point to the fact that the majority of Nicholas's advisors were inept and those few who were competent had either lost his trust or had been alienated by him because of Rasputin.
Nicholas V. Riasanovsky in his book *Death of Nicholas I to Abdication of Nicholas II, 1855-1917* (2005) takes for granted that Nicholas's abdication was inevitable and discusses the different perspectives on the reasons that the monarchy came to an end. He suggests that a lot of people felt that the monarchy was outdated and that the Russians had entered a new era of liberalism and political freedom since 1905. Riasanovsky goes on to argue that after 1907 the Duma could no longer be abolished. Additionally, education was spreading very fast and schools were not prone to reinforce the idea of 'obsolete institutions'. According to Riasanovsky, the press became less and less restricted by the government and was able to represent every point of view on political matters. On another note, Riasanovsky argues that the monarchy could not be preserved because of the 'end products of the bankruptcy of the regime' ranging from Rasputin to political terrorism. He also claims that the social and economic problems arising from the 'fundamental inequality and widespread destitution could not be remedied by […] a redivision of the peasants' inadequate land'. Riasanosky views World War I in two different ways; as one of the fundamental reasons that the monarchy collapsed as well as “the tip of the iceberg”. In this secondary source, there is no debate over the Russo-Japanese War. Riasanovsky
concludes that it just proved the inferiority of the Russian armed forces to those of the enemy in the test of war. Moreover, he believes that the increasing educated society of Russians kept leaning towards the idea of the Westernization of Russia and that by 1917 'devotion to the tsar was not prominent'. Another historian, Geoffrey Hosking, in his book *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (1997) supports the idea that one of the main factors that brought on the revolution of 1917 was that the government was undermining the church. However, Riasanosky disagrees with this notion simply because Nicholas was a very religious tsar. Riasanovsky's last point on the matter of the obsoleteness of the monarchy is also very important. He states that 'the Russian empire was a multiethnic state, out of place in the age of nationalism' and he goes to support his argument by pointing out that rossiiskii was the word used as 'the adjective for the Russian empire', whereas ruskii meant Russian ethnically.

Opinions and attitudes regarding the possibility of Nicholas's abdication varied.

Some of the peasants believed that everything would stay the same and that Nicholas would just continue to manage his estates outside the capital as he always had, while the others more attached to the idea of the Tsar were more concerned about the sudden change of the regime after so many years. According to Robert K. Massie, in his book *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1968), Churchill in one of his accounts argued that even though Nicholas was an average ruler no one else “was found capable” to assume power. In essence, Churchill believed that there was no one that could solve the very fundamental economic issues that plagued Russia. This was true since in the immediate years that proceeded Nicholas's abdication no true improvements in the economy of the countryside were made. If more people shared this point of view than the abdication could have been avoided. On the other hand, the members of the Imperial family were very much concerned about their role and could only make sense of the situation by saying that Nicholas would be crazy if he even considered abdicating. This simplistic approach showed how much they had distanced themselves from state matters. Furthermore, the Soviet adopted a new saying, “No more Romanovs! We want a Republic!” and the workers were outraged by the thought that Grand Duke Michael would assume the throne if Nicholas
abdicated. So this eliminated the possibility of the continuum of the dynasty all together. Some members of the Constitutional Democratic Party, according to Massey, believed that “the monarchy was the single unifying force in Russia” whilst Kerensky, the Second Prime Minister, of the Provisional Government argued that if “a new tsar took the throne against the people's will, a new torrent of revolution would be released” and that the Grand Duke Michael would be putting himself in danger.

It is important to also examine the tsar's point of view on the matter. Four days before his abdication, Nicholas, was not aware of the revolution that was going on in Petrograd. He had very little information passed on to him through his officials. Massie claims that Nicholas was under the impression that agitation was only caused by street disorders – and since this had occurred many times throughout his reign, Nicholas did not worry. Nicholas only remarked that they were “intolerable in these difficult times of war with Germany and Austria”. These mild disturbances were perceived as an act of treason and Nicholas did not go through the trouble of trying to analyze the fundamental social, economic and political reasons behind them. Rodziano, the Chairman of the Fourth State Duma, claimed that 'His Majesty and his officials were unable to realize what was happening to the capital - a terrible revolution had broken out' he went on to say that 'power was slipping from his hands as well' and that 'it would be too late in any case to propose any new measures'. This reinforces the idea that Nicholas's abdication was inevitable. Those in the Duma committee that were in favor of the throne had also reached the conclusion that in order for the dynasty to be saved, Nicholas would have to abdicate. It is important to note that Nicholas abdication did not only signify the abdication of a tsar but also the end of monarchy. So historians do not only argue whether Nicholas's abdication was inevitable but also if the end of autocracy was inevitable at this time. Nicholas himself was soon persuaded that his abdication was inevitable. Massie argues that he 'could not find any loyal regiments to march on the city', he did not want to put his family at risk, and he 'cared far more about winning the war than he did for his own crown'.
From Nicholas's signed abdication letter we are able to see that even at the end of the Romanov dynasty, Nicholas had an unrealistically optimistic view about the future. He stated in his abdication letter that 'the hour approached when the glorious Russian army together with its gallant allies would crush the enemy'.¹ This primary source indicates that Nicholas did not have a full understanding of what had in fact gone wrong - the nation was not only in turmoil because of World War I but an extreme social revolution was breaking out. The legislative institution had turned against the government, more revolutionary agitations were arising, and the defeated army was driven by the peasants' desire for land. In a time of anarchy Nicholas was talking about an organized and “victorious conclusion”. Nicholas's inability to make decisions is also reflected by the fact that in his original abdication he abdicated in favor of his hemophilic son Alexei rather than his brother. The Grand Duke Michael's letter, on the other hand, shows that he had an easier time accepting the possibility that the Romanov dynasty under the circumstances would have to come to an end, a stance that Nicholas later reproached in one of his diary entries; he says “God knows who put in his head to sign this stuff”.² The general quartermaster of the Headquarters for the Supreme Commander's recollection of the event of the abdication also stresses the fact that Nicholas was at a loss that day. Nicholas was open to advice from Iurii Danilov, a general in the Russian army, whom he asked to “speak with full candor”.²¹ Iurii expressed his anguish when he told Nicholas that for the sake of his country Nicholas must step down from his position as Tsar. According to Iurii, for the first time he saw signs of Nicholas's anxiety and distress as “his usually expressionless face became unconsciously distorted by a movement of his lips to the side”. It is important to note that the source also indicates that as soon as Nicholas was persuaded that his country's best interests would be served if he were no longer Tsar, he readily accepted the fate of his reign.

After his abdication, Nicholas wanted to say goodbye to the army and drafted an Order of the Day. The former tsar seemed to be very supportive of the Provisional Government which had assumed power, and his Order of the Day he encouraged his troops to 'submit themselves to the Provisional
Government' and to obey their commanders. Nicholas truly believed that apart from beating Germany nothing else mattered. However, his message was suppressed; Massey suggests that the Tsar's support of the Russian army did not get through to the people. What is more, rumors that Nicholas intended to gather troops to fight the revolution and to establish an alliance with the Germans circulated in Petrograd. Meanwhile, the Empress was accused by the Media of treason of having an intimate relationship with Rasputin.

The immediate consequence of Nicholas's abdication was complete chaos. Crime in the cities increased, soldiers in Petrograd murdered their officers, and mobs murdered policemen. This should have come to no one's surprise since the people had been repressed and deprived for many years. A Russian soldier in 1913 stated that his superiors 'tried to beat all human feelings out of him'. This soldier also made a point that gives further insight to the events that followed the Tsar's abdication; he said “what can be expected from a soldier who is used to hating every superior as his worst enemy, whom he would pay back a hundred times at the earliest convenience”. The views that this soldier expressed were apparently shared by many of his fellow soldiers. What is more, Iurii Vladimirovich Lomonosov, who kept a account of the events at the end of March 1917, stated that some of the former ministers who worked under the rule of Nicholas asked to be arrested because they feared that soldiers would come after them. The disturbances that arose after the abdication of the throne were also a result of the fact that no group had a legitimate claim to govern; the problem of replacing the old regime came also at a great cost for the Russian people. This succeeding struggle between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet over who would rule, was characteristically named “Dual Power”.

Nicholas was a well-intended man, but he was not prepared to face the challenges of the 20th century – many of which were are a result of the long standing autocracy in Russia. Nicholas did not receive enough help in order to effectively rule his empire and the circumstances of the 20th century made it very difficult for him to implement policies that the previous generations of tsar had
implemented. Apart from the fact that most of Nicholas's counselors were unable to advise him on important decision-making, Nicholas also had trouble accepting help by those that could. The issue of poverty was an issue that always persisted, foreign threats were arising, and in addition Nicholas had to assume responsibility for numerous of his officials' mistakes. Foreign influences from the West also played a role in creating social problems at the time. Nicholas was also a man that by nature was never inclined to rule an empire; he would rather spend leisure time dealing with his own personal affairs. As a member of the Imperial family he was already distanced from the common people's mentality and he physically distanced himself by residing in his estates outside the capital.

Summary

The abdication of Tsar Nicholas II came as a direct result of the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia and it signifies the end of the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty. In the discussion of the abdication we take into account the circumstances under which Nicholas assumed the throne, his character weaknesses, and the difficulties that Nicholas faced during his reign (i.e. the Khodynka tragedy, the Jewish pogroms, the Russo-Japanese War, Bloody Sunday, and the outbreak of World War I). We also examine the socio-economic problems preceding the abdication, the opinions and attitudes concerning the abdication, and the immediate consequences.
In the days of the great struggle against the foreign enemies, who for nearly three years have tried to enslave our fatherland, the Lord God has been pleased to send down on Russia a new heavy trial. Internal popular disturbances threaten to have a disastrous effect on the future conduct of this persistent war. The destiny of Russia, the honor of our heroic army, the welfare of the people and the whole future of our dear fatherland demand that the war should be brought to a victorious conclusion whatever the cost. The cruel enemy is making his last efforts, and already the hour approaches when our glorious army together with our gallant allies will crush him. In these decisive days in the life of Russia, We thought it Our duty of conscience to facilitate for Our people the closest union possible and a consolidation of all national forces for the speedy attainment of victory. In agreement with the Imperial Duma We have thought it well to renounce the Throne of the Russian Empire and to lay down the supreme power. As We do not wish to part from Our beloved son, We transmit the succession to Our brother, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, and give Him Our blessing to mount the Throne of the Russian Empire. We direct Our brother to conduct the affairs of state in full and inviolable union with the representatives of the people in the legislative bodies on those principles which will be established by them, and on which He will take an inviolable oath.

In the name of Our dearly beloved homeland, We call on Our faithful sons of the fatherland to fulfill their sacred duty to the fatherland, to obey the tsar in the heavy moment of national trials, and to help Him, together with the representatives of the people, to guide the Russian Empire on the road to victory, welfare, and glory. May the Lord God help Russia!

Inspired, in common with the whole people, by the belief that the welfare of our country must be set above everything else, I have taken the firm decision to assume the supreme power only if and when our great people, having elected by universal suffrage a Constituent Assembly to determine the form of government and lay down the fundamental law of the new Russian State, invest me with such power. Calling upon them the blessing of God, I therefore request all the citizens of the Russian Empire to submit to the Provisional Government, established and invested with full authority by the Duma, until such time as the Constituent Assembly, elected within the shortest possible time by universal, direct, equal and secret suffrage, shall manifest the will of the people by deciding upon the new form of government.

The parties, receptions and balls following the Coronation were darkened by the catastrophe at Khondinka, where 2,000 people were crushed to death. The same day as the catastrophe, I was taking a walk along the Khondinka and I met many groups of people coming back from that site and carrying the Tsar's gifts. The strange thing, though, was that not one person mentioned the catastrophe, and I did
not hear about it until the next morning, at the Governor General's palace, where General Prefect of Police Vlasovski brought a special report. Grand Duke Serge Alexandrovich was very depressed by what had happened; he gave Vlasovski orders to return to him every hour with detailed reports on the progress of the investigation into the causes of the disaster. Then, the typical slowness of these matters set in; Prefect General of Police Vlasovski rejected any fault by Grand Duke Serge; the latter himself considered that the blame for the disaster lay on the incompetence of Minister of the Court, Vorontsov-Dashkov. Emperor Nicholas II himself took an active part in the investigation of the matter as to who was to bear responsibility for the Khondinka disaster. The end result was: Grand Duke Serge was found responsible, as was Count Vorontsov-Dashkov, and they were required to submit their resignations. Then, Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich put pressure on the Emperor by declaring that all of the Grand Dukes were going to quit their posts if Grand Duke Serge was to resign.

Emperor Nicholas II gave in, and was it was Vlasovski who was discharged. Some time later Count Vorontsov-Dashkov also left his post. In the days following I witnessed the gruesome sight of the wagons transporting the bodies from the Khondinka field to the morgues. The bodies were stacked up like logs and, with some difficulty, covered with canvas and sacks.


The anti-Jewish riots in Kishinev, Bessarabia, are worse than the censor will permit to publish. There was a well laid-out plan for the general massacre of Jews on the day following the Russian Easter. The mob was led by priests, and the general cry, "Kill the Jews," was taken up all over the city. The Jews were taken wholly unaware and were slaughtered like sheep. The dead number 120 and the injured about 500. The scenes of horror attending this massacre are beyond description. Babes were literally torn to pieces by the frenzied and bloodthirsty mob. The local police made no attempt to check the reign of terror. At sunset the streets were piled with corpses and wounded. Those who could make their escape fled in terror, and the city is now practically deserted of Jews.


Nicholas II and the Russo-Japanese War

By Raymond A. Esthus

Nicholas II is one of the most elusive individuals in Russian history. One reason for this, as Theodore H. von Laue has noted, is that the historical sources that relate directly to Nicholas are very limited.1 Another and even more important reason is that Nicholas' character is puzzling. Those who knew him believed he was easily understood; yet historical records show that the contemporary characterizations of the last Tsar are inadequate. An investigation of the role of Nicholas in the Russo-Japanese War points up this problem, for what emerges is a complex, enigmatic personality.

The contemporary assessments of Nicholas are remarkably uniform. He was described as shy, charming, gentle in disposition, fearful of controversy, indecisive, indulgent to his relatives, and deeply devoted to his family. Aleksandr Mosolov, who headed his Court Chancellerly for sixteen years, wrote that Nicholas, though intelligent and well-educated, never adopted a definite, energetic attitude and loathed making a decision in the presence of others.2 Sergei Witte, who served Nicholas and his father for eleven years as Minister of Finance, commented that the Tsar was a well-intentioned child, but his actions were entirely dependent upon the character of his counselors, most of whom were bad.3 This widely held belief that Nicholas was weak led to much speculation about what persons exerted influence over him. Many believed that he was swayed by the Grand Dukes and by the Tsarine, Aleksandra Fedorovna. The influence of Aleksandra was thought to have been especially strong after the birth of their son Aleksei in 1904 and the subsequent tragic discovery that he suffered from hemophilia.

The problem with these characterizations of Nicholas and the speculations about the influence of others is that they ignore a significant aspect of his character. No doubt there were elements of truth in the descriptions of Nicholas as weak and irresolute. But his role in the Russo-Japanese War reveals another side of his character. Witte was getting close to it when he said of Nicholas: "A soft haze of mysticism refracts everything he beholds.

1 Theodore H. Von Laue, Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia (New York, 1960), p. 123. Research on this article was facilitated by a grant from the Penrose fund of the American Philosophical Society.
2 A. A. Mosolov, At the Court of the Last Tsar: Being the Memoirs of A. A. Mosolov (London, 1905), pp. 6-10.
3 Cecil Spring Rice to Gerald Balfour, 2 October 1905, Cecil Spring Rice Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England.
and magnifies his own functions and person." Nicholas was convinced that he was divinely ordained to rule and that he was responsible to God and to his conscience to preserve the autocracy and to defend the dignity, honor, and worth of Russia. His commitment to the preservation of the absolutist prerogatives had been evident at the time of his coronation when he characterized proposals for political reform as "senseless dreams" and declared his resolve to maintain unflinchingly the principle of autocracy. Almost a decade later his actions and attitudes during the Russo-Japanese War showed a similar stubborn resolve to defend the honor and worth of Russia. Indeed, during that war he was to show a doggedness and consistency that his most observant contemporaries did not fully perceive or comprehend.

The "soft haze of mysticism" that surrounded Nicholas was a significant factor at the very outset of the war. It, along with a great deal of administrative mismanagement, contributed to the outbreak of the war itself, for it caused the Tsar to misread completely the realities that he and his nation were confronting. Shortly before the Japanese attack, he assured Kaiser William that there would be no war because "he did not wish it." When the attack came, according to Cecil Spring Rice, First Secretary at the British Embassy, it left the Tsar "almost incredulous." The months that followed presented more occasions for disbelief as the Russians went from disaster to disaster. The initial Japanese attack on Port Arthur was not decisive, but the successive Russian defeats that followed on land and sea placed a growing strain on the political and economic structure of the country and engendered a sense of national humiliation.

In the face of repeated setbacks, Nicholas maintained a steadfast confidence that Russia would ultimately triumph. Throughout the first summer of the war, many Russians shared this confidence. An "informant" who was sent to Russia by the Japanese reported in July 1904 that the ruling class of Russia, though experiencing deep humiliation from the defeats, expected final victory. Even Witte, who would emerge as the strongest proponent of peace, initially shared this expectation. In June he talked with the British Ambassador, Sir Charles Hardinge, about the terms that a victorious Russia would impose upon Japan.

As the war news continued bad during the fall of 1904, Nicholas made an important decision concerning the future prosecution of the war. By this time the Port Arthur fleet was severely battered and Port Arthur itself was
under siege. No decisive change in the fortunes of war now seemed possible unless Japan’s command of the sea could be broken. Nicholas decided, therefore, to send the Baltic fleet to the Pacific. It was a decision reached only after much agonizing, the Tsar changing his mind three times before finally ordering the fleet to the theater of war. Any hope Nicholas had for victory was probably based more on his belief in God than on confidence in Admiral Rozhdestvenski and his fleet. Rozhdestvenski apparently had little confidence in either himself or a beneficent Providence, for he confided to Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich that the fleet was going to its destruction in the Pacific. This prediction turned out to be all too true. The only victory the fleet was destined to achieve was an encounter on the Dogger Bank on 24 October with British fishing boats, which the Russians incredibly mistook for Japanese torpedo boats.

By the time the Baltic fleet left Russia, popular support for the war was fading. A German banker, Ernest von Mendelssohn, visited Russia in October, and he reported to Chancellor Bernhardt von Bülow in Berlin that only the court, the military, and government officials wanted to continue the war until victory was achieved. In all merchant and banking circles, said Mendelssohn, there was a longing for a quick conclusion of peace and this sentiment was shared by a great majority of the population. Mendelssohn apparently talked with Witte, for he reported his view that Russia could not expect a turn in the fortunes of war and should make peace as soon as possible.

The new year brought more disasters and a growing sentiment for peace. In January 1905 Port Arthur fell to Japanese forces. In the same month Bloody Sunday laid bare the widening gap between the government and the workers in St. Petersburg. As an atmosphere of pessimism enveloped the Russian capital, Ambassador Hardinge reported to London that even members of the government were now openly expressing interest in peace. One of the Grand Dukes told him frankly that Russia was defeated and should make peace. The Grand Duke added, however, that rather than pay an indemnity Russia would fight until the last soldier fell.

Nicholas remained imperturbable amidst the mounting disasters, and he gave every indication of a determination to see the war through to victory. Foreign observers in St. Petersburg were baffled by what they took to be the Tsar’s indifference to the catastrophic events unfolding around him.


14 Inouye Katunosuke to Komura, 13 February 1905, Telegram Series, Reel 63, pp. 4,059–4,090.
Hardinge wrote to Ambassador Francis Bertie at Paris: "Everybody is clamouring for peace, but the Emperor is impervious to everything, sees nobody and spends his time playing with the baby."  

Actually Nicholas could not remain completely impervious to the growing internal unrest, for the violence was moving closer and closer to the throne. The previous summer the Minister of the Interior, V. K. von Plehve, had been killed by a revolutionary bomb, and now on 17 February an uncle of Nicholas, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, was blown to pieces. The mounting dissension caused Nicholas to take the first hesitant step towards political change. Just two weeks after the death of Grand Duke Sergei, he promised that he would permit the election of representatives who would take part in "the preliminary discussion of legislation." Since he accompanied this with a statement on the immutability of the autocracy, it was not surprising that the plans announced six months later for a State Duma limited that body to only an advisory role.

The Tsar's slight softening in the political arena did not signal any change in his resolve to continue the war. Grand Duke Pavel Aleksandrovich, who was living in Paris because of his morganatic marriage, visited Nicholas at this time, and he detected no change in his attitude. On his return to Paris, the Grand Duke told French leaders that Nicholas talked with "alarming complacency" about the war. The Tsar, he said, had not the slightest doubt that Russia would win in the end.

Witte had come to the opposite conclusion about the war, and he now sent a long, blunt letter to Nicholas urging peace. He had little reason to think the Tsar would welcome his views: he had been ousted from the Finance Ministry in 1903, and though he now held the position of Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, it was well known that he was out of favor with the Tsar. As Ambassador Hardinge observed, Witte was distasteful to Nicholas because of his rough manners, brusque speech, and overpowering presence. In his peace appeal, which he dispatched to Nicholas on 28 February, Witte was his usual overpowering self. He stated emphatically that further war expenditures would entirely upset the financial conditions of the country, that General Kuropatkin's army could not hold its position in Manchuria, and that Admiral Rozhdestvenski's fleet could not score a success. Witte did manage to soften these bold assertions by indicating agreement with the Tsar's dedication to the nation's honor. He said that if negotiations were opened and the Japanese terms remained unacceptable, then the Russian people would rise in defense of the Tsar and the nation's honor.

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20 Dillon, Eclipse of Russia, pp. 294-95.
The October Manifesto  
17 October 1905 (o.s.)  

We, Nicholas II, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias, Tsar of Poland, Grand Duke of Finland, etc. etc., declare to all our loyal subjects:

The disturbances and unrest in St Petersburg, Moscow and in many other parts of our Empire have filled Our heart with great and profound sorrow. The welfare of the Russian Sovereign is inseparable from the welfare of His people, and national sorrow is His sorrow. The present disturbances could give rise to profound disaffection among the masses, presenting a threat to the unity and integrity of Our State. The oath which We took as Tsar compels Us to use all Our strength, intelligence and authority to put a speedy end to this unrest which is so dangerous for the State. The relevant authorities have been
ordered to take measures to deal with direct outbreaks of disorder and violence and to protect people who only want to go about their daily business in peace. However, in view of the need for successful implementation of earlier measures aimed at pacifying the country, we have decided that the work of the higher agencies of government must be coordinated. We have therefore ordered the government to take the following steps in fulfilment of our unbending will:

Fundamental civil freedoms will be granted to the population, including real personal inviolability, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association.

Without halting the elections that have already been scheduled, participation in the Duma will be granted to those classes of the population which are at present deprived of voting powers (insofar as is possible in the short period before its convocation). Further development of a universal franchise will be left to the newly established legislature (i.e., according to the law of August 6, 1905, to the Duma and the Council of State).

It is established as an unshakeable rule that no law can come into force without its approval by the State Duma and representatives of the people will be given the opportunity to take real part in the supervision of the legality of authorities appointed by Us.

We call on all true sons of Russia to remember their duty to the homeland, to help put a stop to this unprecedented unrest and, together with this, to devote all their strength to the restoration of peace and quiet in our native land.

Issued at Peterhof on the 17th day of October in the year of Our Lord 1905, in the eleventh year of Our reign.

Original signed by Nicholas II.


Excerpt on the Manifesto from The Memoirs Of Count Witte

The Manifesto was drawn up hastily, and until the last moment I did not know whether His Majesty would sign it. Had it not been for Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich, he possibly would not have done it. It is noteworthy that as soon as the Manifesto came out, the Grand Duke embraced the creed of the Black Hundreds. Prince A. D. Obolenskii, one of its authors, was in a state of neurotic exhaustion at the time he took part in its drafting. Several days after the publication of the act, this earnest advocate told me that his participation in the movement for the Manifesto had been the greatest sin of his life. In the days immediately preceding its publication, His Majesty conducted two parallel sets of conferences. I participated in one, [I. L.] Goremykin in the other. This extreme duplicity at such a critical time greatly discouraged me.

As a matter of fact, I was rather opposed to the publication of a constitutional manifesto. I gave much thought to the alternative plan of setting up a military dictatorship. The original text of the document was drafted against my will and behind my back. Seeing however that those on high were intent upon issuing the Manifesto, I insisted that my own version of it be adopted if I were to be appointed Prime Minister.

The effect of the act of October 17th was in many ways salutary. Thus for instance the Manifesto
destroyed the unified front that had made the opposition camp so formidable. It sobered up the country, so that the voice of patriotism was heard in the land again. Propertied people got ready to do battle and rose in defense of their possessions. But it also had its serious drawbacks.

The \textit{Manifesto} was a bolt from the blue. Most provincial authorities did not understand what was happening, and many clearly lacked sympathy for the new course of policy. Because the \textit{Manifesto} arrived so unexpectedly, regions that had already been in tension were thrown into a frenzy by it. Violent outbreaks -- both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary -- took place all over the country, the reactionary manifestations involving (of course) anti-Jewish \textit{pogroms}. These last were organized (or at least encouraged) by local authorities. That is what I feared, and that was why I opposed the idea of issuing a \textit{Manifesto}. Furthermore, it cast the shadow of undue haste upon all the other acts of the Government.

I did not for a moment doubt the necessity of a parliamentary regime for the country. In those days even the conservatives advocated a constitution. In fact, there were no conservatives in Russia on the eve of October 17, 1905. The \textit{Manifesto} cut Russia's past from its present like a scalpel. This historic operation was surely necessary, but it should have been performed with greater care and more precautions. Still, I thank God that the constitution has been granted. It is far better that the past has been cut off (even though somewhat roughly and hurriedly) than if it had been slowly hacked off with a blunt saw wielded by a bungling surgeon....

\texttt{<http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/AlexPalaceNRbio.html>}. 

Nicholas had an excellent education and was perhaps the best educated European monarch of his time. His parents where astute enough to see the challenges of facing a 20th Century Tsar would be quite different than those of the past and tried to prepare him for his future responsibilities. The very real threat of terrorism loomed over the Imperial Family constantly. Once a bomb blew apart their train car, and only Alexander's powerful shoulders kept the roof from crushing the entire family. A powerful cordon of secret police and military guards protected them, but this meant Nicholas grew up in the isolation of his family. This held him back and he was late in maturing. He never gained a sense of confidence and self reliance. The lack of friends from outside the clan of European royalty deprived Nicholas of the benefit of understanding the way his future subjects lived. In this he was no different than most of his royal peers. But Nicholas was also purposely cut off from liberal thought and ideas by his parents. Since he had almost no contact with Russia's growing intellectual and artistic community he developed narrow ideas of honor, service and tradition which would harm his ability to govern Russia in the future.

While heir to the throne, as Tsarevich, Nicholas achieved the rank of Colonel in the Life Guards. He loved the military and always considered himself an army man. His character and social habits were strongly influenced by his years as a young officer and he made many of his longest lasting friendships among his brother officers. These where his happiest years, when he was almost free of care and worry about the future. His father was still relatively young and Nicholas could expect a few years to fill the role of a dashing, aristocratic officer before he was called to serve his country in an more serious role. The Tsarevich embraced the relative freedom of army life with gusto. He could drink and carry on like the most hedonistic of his fellow officers. Life was full of regimental dinners, concerts, dances and beautiful women. It was during this time he met a young dancer from the Imperial Ballet named
Mathilde Kschessinka, who became his first, real girl friend. It wasn't a serious relationship. Both of them knew it couldn't go anywhere and besides, Nicholas had already given his heart to a young, sad eyed and withdrawn German princess named Alix of Hesse. Many thought it was not a good match. Alix wasn't thought to have the right personality traits and outgoing aggressiveness sought in a Russian Empress-to-be. Nicholas could not be persuaded to consider any other bride than Alix, and the couple where formally engaged in 1893. In fall, 1894, Nicholas' father developed a serious nephritis condition which became progressively worse. Alexander's doctors advised a trip to the gentle climate of the Crimea. The famous healer John of Kronstadt was summoned to the Tsar's bedside died in the arms of his wife at Lividia aged 47 from nephritis.

Nicholas felt he was not ready to rule. He knew the weighty task of ruling Russia was greater than his experience and abilities. Yet he believed, even with all his inadequacies and self-doubt, that God had chosen his destiny. The new Emperor took his coronation oath very seriously and saw anointing as Tsar as spiritual experience. After the crown was placed on his head Nicholas would look for support and guidance first within himself and then to God, who had given him this burden. Quickly realising he was surrounded by deceit and the self-interest of bureaucrats and sycophants, Nicholas concluded that on earth he could trust few people. Bullied and misled by his relatives he increasingly turned to his wife for support. Nicholas became cynical and mistrustful of human nature. Loneliness and isolation would be his lot in life.

Above all else, Nicholas loved Russia first and then his family. He thought the fate of the two was inseparable. No one knew the shortcomings of the Romanov Dynasty better than he and yet he felt the monarchy was the only force preventing Russia from coming apart at the seams. Nicholas was intelligent enough to realise the probably of his assassination was quite high. Alexandra's decision to marry him and share his uncertain future was a commitment he always appreciated.

He held out his hand just as kindly and simply as the Empress had done, and he also spoke in perfect English, asking how the miniature was coming on. Indeed, I was already beginning to know that English is spoken exclusively by the Russian royal family in their private life. This would not be singular where the Empress herself were concerned, since she is virtually an Englishwoman, and has spent years in England; but I recall hearing the Grand Duchess Helene, the daughter of the Grand Duke Vladimir, since become the Princess Nicholas of Greece, say that she could not remember ever speaking anything but English to her father. And this exclusive use of English in their private life may account for the fact that among themselves they always say "Emperor" and "Empress" instead of "Tsar" and "Tsarina." At all events, I never heard any member of the royal family use the Russian title, and before long the Tsar and the Tsarina were the Emperor and the Empress to me also.

I wish it were in my power to tell exactly what I felt and thought at this first sudden and totally unexpected sight of the Emperor. There was something in his appearance that caused a quiet tightening in my throat and a queer thumping at my heart. As I have said, he looked young, gentle, and slight. He stood quietly and naturally, looking straight at me with steady, clear, kind eyes. There was a sort of winning buoyancy, too, in the quiet dignity of his bearing. Above all, he looked kind, there was kindness in his eyes, in his face, in his voice; kindness in every easy, gentle movement of his slight, youthful figure.
Nicholas II forced himself to attend to the affairs of state, but essentially they did not captivate him. The enthusiasm for power was something alien to him. Ministers' reports were a heavy burden to him... The chief distinguishing feature of his character was an all-penetrating self-sacrificing devotion to do the performance of what he considered his royal business...

Mild-natured and therefore incapable of forcing people to bow to the opinion he expressed, he was, however, far from being weak-willed and on the contrary was marked by a stubborn striving for the intentions he formed... The main reason for the outward weak-will of Nicholas II that has been mentioned was his extreme natural delicacy that did not permit him to say anything unpleasant to anyone's face...

Nicholas viewed any taking of initiative on the part of his ministers as an attempt to usurp part of his own royal power... Given the absence in the sovereign's mind of a precise boundary between ruling and directing, in practice it turned out that the more business-like a particular minister was, the more he displayed activity and energy, the stronger the thought established itself in the Tsar's mind that this was an infringement of his royal power and the sooner such a minister lost the royal trust. This was the very lot that befell two of Nicholas II's two most talented assistants - Witte and Stolypin...

While Nicholas II did not know how to command others, his own self-command was, by contrast, complete... If nothing else, we can judge Nicholas II's self-command by the fact that no-one saw him in raging anger or joyful excitement, or even in a state of increased agitation... He took many matters very close to his heart, and some phenomena provoked him to very strong anger, which he nevertheless had the strength to hide completely behind a mask of calm and even indifference...

Exceptional self-possession gave the Tsar the strength to spend hours on end tirelessly reading the reports and detailed memoranda submitted to him. He saw this as burdensome and for him uninteresting occupation as the main performance of his duty and did not shirk from it. "I shall never allow myself to go to bed," he said, "until I have completely cleared my desk."

4 December, 1916.

MY DEAR,
Tender thanks for the severe written scolding. I read it with a smile, because you speak to me as though
I was a child.

It is unpleasant to speak to a man one does not like and does not trust, such as Trepov. But first of all it
is necessary to find a substitute for him, and then kick him out after he has done the dirty work. I mean
to make him resign after he has closed the Duma. Let all the responsibility and all the difficulties fall
upon his shoulders, and upon the shoulders of his successor.

I am sending you two lists of candidates which he left with me, and a letter, sent by him yesterday, in
which he again returns to the question of appointing Makarov as President of the Council of State.

Rouchlov is a very good, spiritually strong and respectable man, who loathes Kokovtsev and the others.
You know that the President of the Council of State is newly appointed every year, as well as all the
members.

Things are not well in Roumania. We have sent and keep on sending troops, but they are obliged to
make long marches (three weeks) because of the shocking condition of the railways. Now it has at last
been decided to put them under our control.

The 17th of December has been fixed as the day for the meeting of the Generals as, up to then, Gourko
has several conferences.

I must finish now. God bless you, my darling, my Sunny! With fond kisses to you and the girls, I
remain

Your "poor little weak-willed" hubby

NICKY.

NOTES: KOKOVTSEV: Count Kokovtsev, a former President of the Council of Ministers, had warned
the Tsar against Rasputin as far back as 1912, soon after Rasputin's appearance at the Court. It goes
without saying that he fell into immediate disfavour.
19 Illustration: "Miss D'Souza's Classes (3 December)." Nonsuch HP: The History and Politics Blog.
december.html>.
20 "1917 Diary of Nicholas II - Alexander Palace Time Machine." Russian History Websites - Romanov
  <http://www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/ndiaries1917.html>

March 16, Friday
I slept long and well. Awoke far beyond Dvinsk. The day was sunny and cold. Talked with those near
me about yesterday. Read a great deal about Julius Caesar. Arrived at 8:20 at Mogilev. All ranks of the
Staff were on the platform. Received Alexeev in the car. At 9:30 I went over to the house. Alexeev
came with the latest news from Rodzianko. It transpires that Misha [Grand Duke Michael] has
abdicated. His manifesto ends with a four-tail formula (Universal, direct, equal, and secret suffrage).
There was no definite time set for the Constituent Assembly for the election of a constituent assembly
within 6 months. God knows who put it into his head to sign such stuff. In Petrograd, the disturbances have ceased-if it would only remain that way.


Additional secondary sources:

Riasanovsky, Nicholas Valentine. "Death of Nicholas I to Abdication of Nicholas II, 1855-1917."

When the government was first formed, it was expected to serve the people and maintain order. However, as the years went by, the government became more powerful and less responsive to the needs of the people. This led to a decline in popular trust and a decrease in the effectiveness of the government.

In recent years, there has been a growing movement to reform the government and make it more accountable to the people. This movement has been fueled by a desire for greater transparency and a recognition of the importance of democracy.

The reform movement has been led by a group of young activists who believe that the government needs to be more responsive to the people. They have organized protests and rallies to draw attention to their cause and have worked to build support for their proposals.

One of the key proposals of the reform movement is to increase the power of the people by giving them more say in the decisions that affect their lives. This would be done through a series of reforms, such as increasing the number of representatives in the government and implementing participatory decision-making processes.

The reform movement has also been advocating for greater transparency and accountability in the government. They propose the implementation of a system of checks and balances to ensure that no one branch of government becomes too powerful. They also call for increased disclosure of government activities and greater access to information.

The reform movement has been met with resistance from those who benefit from the current system. However, they remain committed to their cause and continue to work towards a more democratic and accountable government.
Совет Россия, 1917-1991

Совет России, 1917-1991
Abdication

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

...
In those distant days in the land of Russia, we have stories of how the
people used to come together and share their knowledge. The
wisdom of the old was passed down to the young, and the
young learned from the old. The tales of the past were kept alive
through the telling of stories. The legend of the courage of the
people was passed on from generation to generation. The
themes of bravery and self-sacrifice were celebrated in songs and
poetry.

The people of the land were proud of their heritage and their
ancestors. They believed that the stories and traditions of the
past were important for guiding the future. The stories were
passed on from father to son, and from mother to daughter. The
people were reminded of the importance of hard work and
courage, and the need to always be prepared for what life might
bring. The stories were a way of keeping the past alive and
honoring the achievements of those who came before them.

The people of the land were also known for their love of
culture and their appreciation for the arts. They enjoyed
ceremonies and festivals, and the music and dance were
an integral part of their culture. They believed that the arts
were a way of expressing themselves and connecting with
the natural world. The people were known for their
creativity and their ability to create beautiful works of art.

The people of the land were also known for their
resilience and their ability to endure the hardships of life. The
dangers of war and famine were always present, but the
people never gave up. They continued to work and to
survive, and their strength and determination were an
inspiration to all who knew them. The people were
remembered for their courage and their dedication to their
families and to their country.

The people of the land were also known for their
love of the land and their connection to the natural world. They
were proud of their heritage and their culture, and they
continued to pass on the traditions of the past to the
future generations. The stories and the legends were a
treasure to be cherished, and the people were
reminded of the importance of respecting the
beauty of the land and the wisdom of the
ancestors. The people were a true
collection of stories, and their
legends would continue to
exist for all time.
The incident was over. A crowd of vehicles and people
had gathered around the barricades and
rifles were drawn. "What do you think we should
do?" asked one of the civilians. "I think we should
withdraw and regroup," replied the captain. "But
the enemy is close, and we need to act quickly."
"I agree," said another officer. "We need to
prepare for a fight."

The situation was tense. In the midst of the chaos,
people were calling for peace and others for
victory. The commander of the army was in the
area, trying to maintain control. "This is a critical
time," he said. "We need to make a decision."

The commander consulted with his officers and
finally decided on a course of action. "We will
withdraw to our base," he announced. "We need to
reinforce our positions and plan our next
strategy."

Throughout the night, the situation remained
tense. People continued to gather around the
barricades, trying to understand what was happening.
"We need to be prepared," said one of the
officers. "Every day is a test of our resolve."

The commander was determined to succeed.
"We will not give up," he said. "We will
protect our territory and our people."

And so the battle continued, with the forces of
peace and victory clashing in the streets. The
civilian and military leaders worked together to
recreate a sense of order and calm. Despite the
crisis, they remained committed to their
countries and their people.
Building strength which spans into 1941: the measured goal of
the "build-up" is near. The early months have shown our
strategic forces of ground troops, air, and naval forces to
be in position for action. The opening of the Battle of the
Atlantic in 1941 will be one of the main factors in
the outcome of the war. The oil supplies of the Axis
will be cut off, and we will be able to begin the
reduction of the Axis in Europe. The war in the
East will be brought to a successful conclusion.
The United States will play a vital role in the
success of the war. We must continue to
support the Allies in their efforts to
win the war. The future of the
world is in our hands.

In March, the United States entered
the war, and the war began to
take shape. The United States
joined the Allies in the
war against the Axis.

The war in Europe and
Asia will be

The United States will play a vital role in the
success of the war. We must continue to
support the Allies in their efforts to
win the war. The future of the
world is in our hands.

The muted sound of feet made her heart beat faster. She
looked around, trying to find a quiet place to think.

The clock on the wall chimed, signaling the end of her
workday. She took a deep breath, feeling relieved and
content. She had managed to finish all her tasks for the
day, and now she could relax.

She made her way to the nearest bench, pulling her
laptop out of her bag. She sat down, feeling the cool
stone beneath her. She turned on her laptop, ready to
work on the report she had promised to finish.

As she typed away, she couldn't help but think of the
time she had spent working on this project. She had
put in countless hours, sacrificing her time with family
and friends. But she knew it was worth it in the end.

She continued to work, her fingers dancing across the
keyboard. She was almost done when she heard a
familiar voice behind her.

She turned around, surprised to see her colleague,
Lily, standing there.

"Hey, what are you working on?" Lily asked.

"I'm finishing up this report," she replied.

"That's great," Lily said, "I heard you were putting in
some long hours on this project." She sat down beside
her, watching as she typed.

They talked for a while, catching up on their lives.

"I've been meaning to ask," Lily said, "Have you
considered taking a break? You've been working so
hard." She reached across the bench, reaching for her
coffee cup.

"I'm actually going to take a break later," she said.
"I have a few things I need to do at home." She
smiled, feeling a sense of contentment.

"That's good," Lily said, "You deserve it." She
took a sip of her coffee, nodding in approval.

They continued to talk, sharing stories and
laughing together. It was a moment of respite in the
otherwise busy day.

"Thanks," she said, "for talking with me. It's been
really nice." She turned back to her laptop, feeling
overwhelmed with gratitude.

"Anytime," Lily said, " anytime. It's been nice to
see you too."

"Yeah," she said, "I've missed you." She
smiled, feeling a sense of connection.

They continued to work, their attention focused on
the task at hand. But a sense of camaraderie
permeated the air, a reminder of the strength of
their bond.

As she typed away, she couldn't help but think of the
time she had spent working on this project. She had
put in countless hours, sacrificing her time with family
and friends. But she knew it was worth it in the end.

She continued to work, her fingers dancing across the
keyboard. She was almost done when she heard a
familiar voice behind her.