Commentary

The question remains, however: Why was there no revolutionary uprising in Great Britain? After all, Britain was ruled by an aristocratic or bourgeois elite that excluded democrats, radicals, and workers; further, the government was not fully representative, since in 1832, only 20 percent of the population could fulfill the property qualifications to vote. As explained by historian Mark Kishlansky, England experienced no revolution because its ruling elite, of common background and education, was able to change and adapt to the shifting needs and opinions of modern society.

The Liberals represented the economic and political wishes of the British bourgeoisie--industrial (to some extent), merchant, and professional--and the Conservatives represented the conservative elements of society. Granted, everyone else in society was excluded from voting and, thus, direct representation; however, in many cases, both parties responded to the needs of workers and the poor, most notably the Conservatives. The essential difference between the ruling elites in Britain and those on the Continent was their common background and common philosophy. In Prussia and France, nobles were dedicated to the preservation of their privilege by birthright alone; in England, nobles were dedicated to the preservation of the rights of Englishmen. Granted, to them, "Englishmen" meant fellow nobles and the wealthy; however, the different perspective in terms of rights rather than privilege was more conducive to allowing the English aristocrats to understand liberal demands in the 1840s and respond to them with political and gradual change.

The peace that prevailed in Europe throughout most of the nineteenth century has often been called the "Pax Britannia," like the "Pax Romana" that prevailed during the golden age of Rome. Now, Britain did not use her armies to actively enforce peace throughout Europe and the globe; however, her role as a key victor over Napoleon and unquestioned mistress of the seas kept overt aggression in check until the German army and navy could compete effectively at the beginning of the twentieth century. Besides Britain's foreign policy, domestic policy that ensured peace at home also strengthened London's image as an enforcer of fair peace in the world. Professor Kishlansky sums up the great success of Britain in this era by referring to its great compromise: the reconciliation of industrialists' commitment to unimpeded growth and workers' needs for protection from the state. Only Great Britain succeeded in doing this prior to the great explosion of the welfare state and modern, regulated capitalism.

8."Reform" in Russia (1855-1881):

Summary

The Russian defeat in the Crimean War was a wake-up call to the autocracy. While St. Petersburg could boast that it commanded the largest army in Europe (in numbers), poor roads, antiquated weapons, and low morale prohibited the effective use of that awesome potential power. The defeat proved to the autocracy in charge that Russia had fallen dangerously behind its Western neighbors, making it vulnerable to future attack and invasion.

Why had Russia lost? Looking to Western models and contrasting Russian society to, say, French or Prussian society, one element remained outstanding: the continued existence in Russia of serfdom. Whether out of genuine progressive beliefs or merely a need for an effective conscript army when the next war developed, Alexander II initiated a period of reform in Russia with the February 19, 1861 Emancipation of the serfs.

This "emancipation", however, was barely related to what the peasants themselves were expecting. While the 360-page statute did give them "the status of free rural inhabitants," peasants were still subject to considerable taxes and a passport system to restrict movement throughout the country. In addition, the land settlement was equally as unfulfilling. Not only did freedom from land obligations only come up for termination in 1863, but also those so-called "temporary obligations"
could continue until both the peasants and their local landlords came to a mutually agreeable settlement. When and if that moment ever came, the peasants would receive a small portion of the land through government-financed redemption payments to the landlord—a sum the former serfs would have to repay over a forty-nine year period.

Nevertheless, for autocratic Russia under the Romanov dynasty, this was unprecedented reform. Even more striking were the additional reforms that continued until Alexander's death—the so-called Great Reforms. They can be divided into the following categories:

1. Local government reform: Since vast numbers of new citizens, i.e. former serfs, now populated the countryside, a system of elected local governments, or zemstvos, arose to replace the old institutions of landlord rule. These assemblies, with separate seats for peasants, townspeople, and private landowners, were responsible for maintaining the local infrastructure and industrial development. Through taxation of all classes, the zemstvo built bridges, roads, hospitals, and prisons and provided essential services such as healthcare and poverty relief.

2. Education reform: At the call of the Elementary School Statute of 1864, a litany of elementary schools sprang up across the country, though funding was remanded to the local government, to overcome the massive illiteracy that plagued the former serfs. The 1863 University Statute reorganized colleges and universities into effective self-governing corporations, with considerable freedom for both faculty and students.

3. Judicial reform: The Judiciary Statute of 1864 overhauled the Russian court system based on these liberal principles—equality of all before the law, an independent judiciary, jury trial by propertied peers, public legal proceedings, and the establishment of an educated legal profession.

4. Military reform: The Universal Military Training Act of 1874 established all-class conscription and called for technological improvement, elite reorganization, and new military schools.

5. Expression reform: Alexander's Temporary Regulations of 1865 abandoned pre-censorship, or censorship of journals or groups before publication, in favor of punitive measures after the fact.

Teased by these halfhearted reforms from above, dissatisfied peasants, intellectuals, professionals, and even some liberal gentry sought greater freedom through recourse to violent revolutionary movements to overthrow the Tsarist government. Widely labeled as populist movements whose aims focused on giving all Russian land back to the peasants, these groups used clandestine terrorism in the late 1870s to kill Alexander II, finally succeeding on March 1, 1881. An era of modest reform in Russia was over.

Commentary

Regardless of Alexander II's true feelings, he set out to reform Russian society along moderately liberal (for Russia) lines. Still the most conservative country in Europe, Europe at the end of Alexander's reign was slightly different than before, if we only point to the emancipation of the serfs. However, even a cursory examination of these reforms makes it apparent that these changes were too little, too late. Worse yet, the reforms stimulated liberal reformers—mostly professionals, intellectuals, and students—who urged greater reforms and faster reforms, something the regime refused to give. Ironically, by introducing some reforms, the very limited nature of them ignited radical opposition within the Russian population that would boil over into outright revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is with this argument that some historians point to the Crimean War as the beginning of the road to the Russian Revolution.