

William Tyler | Towards the Abyss: Nicholas II

– So, welcome everyone. Yes, say to all our American friends, "Happy 4th of July". And if there are any British friends who aren't glued to the television watching Wimbledon, then hello to you. I expect I've only got the Canadians watching tonight and South Africans and Israelis. I'd expect everybody else is doing other things. However, we are going to talk tonight, or today, whatever time you are listening at to the story of Nicholas II, the last Czar of Russia. I put a synopsis as I now do weekly on my blog, and I would like to share it with you like I've been doing, to give you an idea of what we're going to be talking about.

Nicholas reigned between 1894 and 1917. And the one thing that everyone knows about Nicholas II is the nature of his death. Because along with his family, he was shot by a communist firing squad in the city of Yekaterinburg in July 1918. Yet Nicholas had reigned for nearly quarter of a century before the two revolutions of 1917 toppled the Russian throne. Russia had entered the First World War in 1914. Like all the participants in that war on a flood of national pride. But in Russia's case, this was quickly replaced by a sense of impending catastrophe, as both on the military and on the home fronts, it was clear that Russia was in a dreadful state. Nicholas himself was, I think, everyone agrees ill-suited to the role of czar. He would've been happier being an English country gentleman than he would ever have been as a czar. Somehow, he and the institutional monarchy, survived as long as 1894 to 1917. And that is very surprising. Because in 1905 they had two disasters. First, the defeat at the hands of Japan in the East. And secondly, revolution at home in St. Petersburg, 1904/1905. To paint the reign as entirely black would be wrong. Why? Because there was the establishment at long last of a Duma, or parliament, but I'll say more about that in a moment or so. And on the economic front, there was genuine progress, a real, real progress in the years before the First World War. On a personal level, he had a loving relationship with his wife, his German wife, Alexandra. But they had tragedy in their home life because after the birth of four very beautiful daughters, she finally gave birth to the son that they wished as an heir to the throne, Alexei. But soon discovered that he was a haemophiliac. And in the early 20th century, there was no cure for haemophiliacs. There is help today but there wasn't then. And the question remains, could anyone have saved Russia from revolution in 1917? Even though Nicholas was a sad figure? Even if there'd been a strong czar, could they have saved Russia? Well, you must make that decision for yourselves. But as far as I'm concerned, I think by the turn of the century, revolution was inevitable. What sort of revolution? That's another question, and that's the question for the next talk I'll give.

So, let's begin with Nicholas' character. Remember, he's an autocrat,

so his character is actually important. This is a book called "The Last Tsar" by Michael Paterson. And Paterson writes this, "Nicholas was in some ways a very positive symbol of Russia and might have begun his reign on a wave of hope for the future. As a figurehead, he certainly looked the part. He was very handsome. He wore his uniforms with flair. He looked impressive taking the salute, inspecting troops, or when mounted at parades. He was athletic, skilled in riding and shooting. He was a man of his time with very modern passions. For instance, he enjoyed motoring." Is that sad? That he should have been such a forward-looking man in many respects, but had no idea how to modernise Russia and maybe didn't even want to modernise Russia. "He suffered no noticeable forms of ill health. He kept fit by walking and being by doing gymnastics. He had charming manners. Diplomats and officials frequently remarked on the courtesy with which they were received. And he could converse fluently in several languages, including in English. He was modest, perhaps you might even say he was shy, but he did talk to people who were introduced to him and on a very friendly way. He was deeply religious." But none of that was what an autocrat needed. None of it. Paterson concludes by saying, "All of these things should have made him popular. But beyond the small circle of friends and courtiers, he developed a general unpopularity that simply went on increasing with every year he was on the throne because of the problems that Russia was facing." We know what happens to political leaders. They begin on a wave of support. And gradually, in a democracy that support ebbs away, sometimes fast, sometimes slowly. But in the end, inevitably, inevitably it ebbs away. But in an autocracy, there isn't another president about to take office. There isn't another prime minister that can come forward. You are left with that autocrat. And Paterson's final word was this, "He was the wrong personality for someone whose task was to rule the Russian Empire and to face down both internal and external enemies." Internal enemies is the rise of an increasingly, increasingly, voluble perhaps is the right word, middle class who want change. Either democratic change or communist change, but they want change. And externally. Externally, Germany, united in 1871 is certainly the new kid on the European block. And it's cheek by jowl with Russia. As I say, I think Nicholas's personality would've been more suited to that of an English country gentleman. I'm sure you all know that Nicholas looked like his cousin, King George V. And George V would've preferred to, I'm sure, to have been an English country gentleman. But then George V was not an autocrat. George V was a constitutional monarch, and he learned to play that role with aplomb. He might not have been the brightest button in the box, he certainly wasn't. But he seemed to grasp the nature of a constitutional monarchy. And during the First World War became a complete symbol of the nation. But poor old Nicholas had no choices. The choices were taken away from him once he ascended the throne in 1894. As I said earlier, there was some progress made. It isn't all a dark gloomy picture. There was economic reform. I'm using here a book that was produced really for A-Level and university undergraduates, "Reaction and Revolution" by Michael Lynch. It's a

very good way to short circuit some of the information for what I want to say this evening. And one of the things I want to say is this. "In the 1880s and 1890s in particular, Russian industry grew so rapidly that the term used in Russia was 'The Great Spurt'." Think of Mao, The Great Leap Forward. This was The Great Spurt. "A major reason for the exceptional growth was the increase in the output of coal and oil." Oil from the Caucasus, which of course Hitler wanted in World War II, you recall. And coal from, you guessed it, Ukraine. Coal from Ukraine, oil from the Caucasus. "Those were the two elements that fueled what you might describe as an industrial revolution in Russia at the end of the 19th century." It was of course capitalist private enterprise that delivered the goods quite literally in this economic spurt. But it was supported by Russian governments. It was supported by the czar. It was supported in all those ways that democratic governments today support the economy in capitalist countries like Britain, America, Canada, Israel, and wherever else you're listening from. It's exactly the same. So, all of this was good news. There's an interesting set of figures which relate to the infrastructure. I talked about infrastructure last time. Infrastructure is very important to economic growth. And the infrastructure that Russia gained, as we talked about last time, was railways. Railways were absolutely essential. And there are figures here, which are staggering. In 1891, just before Nicholas became the czar, there were 19,500 miles of railway. In the year before the war, 1913, the figure had gone up to just under 44,000. And that made an enormous difference. It made a difference to industry. You could move it. Look, we've all been watching television about the Ukrainian crisis, and we know the problems with, not in this case oil or gas or coal, but we've seen it with wheat. The Ukrainians simply can't get their wheat out. So, you need ways of getting things out. And in Imperial Russia in the 1890s and the first decade of the 20th century, the answer was railways. And they had put a lot of money into railways. Private enterprise supported by the Russian government. Around 1900, there was an international trade recession, which hit Russia as it hit everybody else. But interestingly, by 1908, the Russian economy had recovered. And from 1908 through to the outbreak of war in 1914, industrial output rose by 8.5%, 8.5% from 1908 to 1914. But if you read political historians on Russia, you get the picture that everything in Russia was appalling in 1914, everything was falling apart. But it, in truth, it was not falling apart. What was falling apart was the lack of democracy, was an autocracy headed by a man unsuited to the role. The idea of autocracy Russian Romanov-style was out of date by this time. If only he could have learnt from his British relatives. But you would've needed someone of enormous ability to stop, to stop the autocracy and turn instead to a democratic system. It's really difficult to do that without there being blood on the floor. And if there's blood on the floor, the nobility of Russia feared greatly that it would be quite literally their necks on the line. So, they would want to avoid anything like that. And so you just carry on in the hope, in the hope that maybe your life will be lived in peace without revolution.

Of course, the interesting question is, had Russia moved, when Nicholas first came to the throne in 1894, moved towards a democratic structure, would the revolution, the Marxist revolution in particular, have been avoided? There's no answer to that question. I rather suspect it might have been. But all of that, that I've just said, ignores one other factor. And that is the factor of the First World War, which exposed Russia, as I said right at the beginning in my blog, which exposed Russia's weaknesses, its failings, its crumbling nature, to be honest. And it showed up all the weaknesses. You know if you've got a leak in a pipe and you put water through it, it comes out where it's weakest. And that's exactly what the war did to Russia. And the leaks were not just drips but in the end was an overwhelming flood that washed the Romanovs from the throne, and washed the first democratic revolution of 1917 from power, and ushered in Lenin and Marxism. There's one final thing I need to say about industrial reform and industrial growth. It created a very much larger urban working class, which I've mentioned before, working in the factories in cities like Moscow, St Petersburg, and Warsaw in particular, but actually across Russia by 1913/1914. And you can see how huge a change that was. If I just give you the figures for St. Petersburg and Moscow. In 1890, the population of St. Petersburg was only just over a million. By 1914, it was 2.2 million. It had more than doubled. In Moscow, the population in 1880 again was just over a million. And by 1914 was over a million and three quarters. We all know, because you'll remember that I said so last time, and I don't think anyone would disagree with that. That the urban, slightly better educated working class provide the foot soldiers for revolution whether democratic revolution or Marxist revolution. So, by being successful economically meant that the regime would ultimately be unsuccessful politically. There's always buts in history, and this is a big but. But there was political reform. It came in 1905 when the czar issued in October a manifesto. And in that manifesto, he agreed to the establishment of a Duma or parliament. Think the British House of Commons. Actually there were two bits. There was a House of Commons and the equivalent of an Upper Chamber. The Lower Chamber was elected, the Upper Chamber was appointed by the czar. Oh. You see a problem? Because the Upper Chamber could veto anything the Lower Chamber did. But it was a move. But the problem was it was not a heartfelt move. It wasn't somebody doing this because they believed it was the right and proper thing to do. They did it because they had been defeated by Japan in 1905 in the Russo-Japanese war. And they had suffered a very serious outbreak of revolutionary fervour in 1905. And this was their attempt to screw the cap back on to internal affairs in Russia by giving a sop, the sop being the Duma. By the time that it met in 1906, the flaws within it were pretty obvious to anyone looking from outside into Russia. I've already mentioned one, that the second chamber had the right of veto and its members were appointed by the czar. That's a big issue. Secondly, the czar had negotiated a loan of money from France to pay for the deficits incurred because of the war with Japan. And you may

remember English history, that when Charles I was forced before Parliament, it was because he needed money. But by 1906, Nicholas had resolved the problem of lack of money by taking this large loan. So, he didn't have to go cap in hands to the Duma about taxation because he had it. He had the cash. Listen to this. "A still greater limitation on the Duma's influence was the czar's promulgation of the so-called 'Fundamental Laws', which were timed to coincide with the opening of the Duma in 1906. In addition to declaring that supreme autocratic power belonged to the czar, the Fundamental Laws announced that the Duma would be bicameral and the second chamber," as we've seen, "would be appointed by the czar with the right of veto." So, this doesn't look like a constitutional monarchy, which it wasn't. It doesn't look like a parliamentary monarchy, which it doesn't. It doesn't even look like a parliamentary advisory council because the state council overrules the elected members. The elected members, of course is male, only in males with sufficient income as it had been in 19th century England. The Duma met four times, first in 1906, secondly in 1907, third between 1907 and 1912, and finally between 1912 right up to the revolution of February 1917. So, four times. But it didn't help. It didn't move Russia on. This is, you remember, I was using the "Lifelong Passion" book with letters of Nicholas and Alexandra and other members of the family and the court. And this is an extraordinary, extraordinary piece. This is his sister, 27th of April 1906, Nicholas' sister. "A day full of emotions." This is the opening of the Duma. "And hopes for a better future. Thank God everything went off splendidly and in great solemnity just as it should. Mama got dressed upstairs while Olga sat with us. Then we went to Nicky and Alix, the family were waiting in her rooms. The procession began at a quarter to two. Nicky walked alone, the crown and regalia were carried in front of him. In the Armoury Hall there were many society ladies and a large crowd of other people. From there, the Grand Duchesses went through the Romanov Gallery into the St. George Hall where we took our places on a platform to the right of the throne. We were joined by the ladies-in-waiting, Mama, Alix," the czarina, "and the duty guard. The Te Deum had already begun. Directly opposite us were the members of the Council of State and high officials. To the left, the members of the Duma themselves, who included several men with repulsive faces and insolent disdainful expressions. They neither crossed themselves nor bowed, but stood with their hands behind their backs or even in their pockets, looking somberly at everyone and everything."

Now, it all began quite well, that diary entry, didn't it? Until we get to the members of the Duma. This isn't a working class group. These are middle class Russians. It isn't 1706 but 1906. But she writes, "they had repulsive faces and insolent disdainful expressions. They neither crossed themselves nor bowed." Now, if that wasn't giving them some sort of message, I don't know what was. That was the 27th of April. The Duma then meets. Three days later, she writes in her diary, "The Duma is such filth, such a nest of revolutionaries that it's

disgusting and shaming for the rest of Russia in front of the whole world." What's disgusting and shaming is her view of the Duma, not the Duma itself. This is not a Marxist assembly. This isn't a working class revolutionary group. These are middle class educated Russians, many of them professionals, lawyers, bankers, accountants, and so forth. And she can't grasp, she's unable to grasp that if Russia is to move on, then this is the only, maybe one might say the very last opportunity to do so. Her attitude would not have been out of place in the court of Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great. But we aren't in the 15th century. We aren't in the 18th century. We're in the 20th century. We're in the 20th century. Mr. Ford and his motorcars in America. And George V standing up on behalf of women's suffragettes against Prime Minister Asquith in England when Asquith forcibly fed them, George V attempted to intervene. What a different world is that of the West compared to Russia? I've written here, "Arguably the Duma should have been created right at the start of the reign, not 12 years into it. And it should've been established with a liberal spirit by the czar rather than as an attempt to bolster his own autocracy after the two disasters of 1904/1905." So, let me turn to those two disasters that somehow the Romanov regime managed to survive, war with Japan and its consequences at the heart of the regime caused the throne to wobble. The war came in 1904, only a decade before the First World War, only 13 years before the throne does topple in the revolutions in 1917. Although Russia provoked the war because it wanted to, the old Russian thing, it wanted to show it was a powerful country. And it was being shown up as not a powerful country in the West with the rise of Germany. And so it turned to the East. Moreover, it sought a port that would be ice free for 12 months of the year, which Vladivostok wasn't. And so with very little excuse, they turned to war or provoked the war with Japan. Japan actually struck first by hitting the the Far Eastern Fleet of Russia whilst it was still in port. Incidentally, an action which the Americans amongst others thought was a very clever thing to have done. The Americans didn't think it was quite so clever 30 odd years later when the Japanese did precisely the same thing at Pearl Harbour. Interesting isn't it, how opinions can change given changed circumstances? This war should have been successful. They thought that, this is very sort of, I don't know, well, this is the sort of thing that democratic politicians think or have thought in the past. A little short war gives you enormous prestige. Think about the Falklands War giving Mrs. Thatcher enormous prestige. The Russian Interior Minister, that is to say in British terms the Home Secretary, said this before the war began. "We need a small, victorious war to avert a revolution," he said. There's one thing wrong with that. The Russo-Japanese war ended in Russian defeat, the first time that a Western power had been defeated by an Asiatic power and the world looked on. Russia had misjudged the situation badly. Did Putin learn nothing? They misjudged it because Japan was now developing at an enormous pace, not least militarily. It had German advisors, militarily, German weapons, Krupp weapons. It's Navy was grown enormously in size. Its officers were trained in the,

in a college which was an exact replica of Britain's Dartmouth for officers. They even bought British wood over and it was all done exactly as in Britain. They bought ships from Britain and they had British naval advisors. And indeed at the Grand Battle of Tsushima in 1905 off the coast of Japan, they annihilated the second Russian navy, which was the Baltic Fleet sent all round the world to replace the Eastern Fleet, which had been sunk in harbour. The Western Fleet was, well, it was absolutely unbelievably badly run. Once it was still coming down to the North Sea, it fired on British fishing boats believing that they were Japanese torpedo boats. What? In the North Sea? In off the coast of South Africa, they thought they would do a training exercise for the gunnery of the crews. So, they had an old ship towed by a tug, and all the guns of all the Russian fleet were focused, or so they thought, on this old battered ship to see how quickly it would be sent to the bottom. Instead, the Russian gunners managed to sink the tug. And in an act of stupidity beyond belief, the Russian admiral had all his funnels painted primrose yellow. They were caught in the fog in the straits of Tsushima where the Russians were making a dash through those straits. Admiral Togo's Japanese fleet with British officers on the quarterdeck emerged from the fog. And Togo gave a last order. He's been trained by the British. "Japan expects that every man will do his duty." The same message that Nelson gave at Trafalgar. And the tactics adopted were Nelson's at Trafalgar. The Russian fleet is sailing in a single line. The Japanese fleet split into two just as Trafalgar and hit the Russian fleet square on in two places, smashing it and sending it to the bottom. The world looked on and read the ruins. Russia is ill-equipped to fight a modern war. That lesson is well learnt in Berlin. 10 years, well, actually nine years in 1905 before World War I breaks out, the Russians lost Port Arthur, they lost parts of, they lost Russian Manchuria, and they gave Japan a free hand in Korea. It was a absolute disaster for Russia. Michael Lynch writes this, "Within Russia, the incompetence of the czar's government, which the war glaringly revealed, excited the social unrest it had been specifically designed to damp. Russia's dismal performance was a potent factor in the buildup of tension, which led to an open challenge to czardom, the 1905 revolution." Defeat in war led to revolution. One of the reasons Russia provoked Japan was to have a successful war to stifle revolution. They've created the exact opposite. Moreover, they have displayed both on land and sea how incompetent Russian forces were. Shades of Ukraine in 2022. This is what Lynch writes about the revolution. And it goes in this way. "The year 1905 marked the first time the czarist government had been faced by a combination of three main opposition classes in Russia, the industrial workers, the peasantry, and the reformist middle class. This was a broad based revolt that most revolutionaries had been awaiting." And it is in St. Petersburg where the middle class are able to draw upon the industrial working class of the great factories of St. Petersburg that real trouble happened.

The event is known as the events of Bloody Sunday on the 22nd of

January 1905. The intention was for thousands and thousands of ordinary Russians to march on the Winter Palace of the czar and to hand in a petition for reform. It was led by an Orthodox Russian priest, Father Gapon, G-A-P-O-N. Now, all of that seems quite straightforward, except Father Gapon is not straightforward. There are many who still believe he was a czarist plant in order to stop protest leading to revolution. Others believe he was a secret Marxist. He is a shadowy figure and it doesn't perhaps matter too much. He was in fact arrested afterwards by the secret police. And that is the end of Father Gapon. But what actually happened was their marching towards the Winter Palace. Now, I had a friend, a Jewish friend in London, whose mother and father were there on the streets of St. Petersburg on Bloody Sunday. Both his mother and father were pharmacists, chemist shops, pharmacists. There may be a problem with my English, chemist shops, those shops you go in to buy off-the-shelf drugs, pharmacists, that's what they were, both mother and father. Now they, because they were Jewish, were not allowed to join the procession. That's interesting in itself. When they managed to get on a sidewalk, a pavement we'd say in English, on the side of the Nevsky Prospekt leading to the Winter Palace, it's tree-lined and they're on the pavement. The marchers are on the road between the trees. Now, my friend explained what his parents said who were there. The crowd advanced as far as the Winter Palace until they were stopped by the Cossacks who were on guard. Now, as in British Army rioting procedures, the Russians seemed to have followed the same thing. They were given an order, "Stop, go home, or we'll be forced to fire." They're given the order again and they still keep coming. And the problem is they couldn't have turned if they wanted to 'cause there's so many people behind them. They're pushing them, pushing them forward. And so the officer does exactly what a British officer would've done, ordered the soldiers to fire, not at the crowd, but because they, he realised if he fired at the crowd, they'd be overwhelmed. He fired into the trees. My friend's parents saw children fall from the trees dead because parents had lifted their children into the branches to see what was happening. They, you put your children, because this is like, I don't know if any of you been in sporting crowds where everyone pushes to get out of the arenas. I've been in football crowds like that and it's quite frightening. And I've been in them as a child. And that's very frightening. And so you can understand why the parents lifted the children and put them in the trees. But the officers as a, who ordered the soldiers to fire, ordered them to fire into the trees because they thought there was no risk then of anyone being killed because everyone's in the road. And the children fell from the trees. And the crowd went mad. And my friend's mom and dad left very quickly because they realised that this was going to turn into a very nasty event indeed. Just under 200 were shot dead. Hundreds and hundreds were injured. Martin's mom and dad got away. They wouldn't have got away had they been in the crowd. It was a dreadful moment. It could have been worse, it's true. The crowd did disperse. And the irony is the czar wasn't in the Winter Palace at

all. It could have been worse. Think about the invasion of the Capitol Building in America recently. That could have turned out much worse than it did. But here we've got thousands and thousands of people, far more than were in Washington.

And so the czarist regime had to take a deep breath. And part of that deep breath was a realisation they had to give something. And the something they gave was, as we've seen earlier, of a Duma or parliament. But I've written to myself on these notes here. "But the message was loud and clear, 'Too late, too late' was the cry." You couldn't save the autocracy in 1905 by firing on ordinary Russians. On a Sunday. And remember, they, this is a very religious society. Christian Sunday, they fire on them. And then secondly, the Duma which is hobbled from its birth by having a second chamber appointed which can veto the first chamber. It's too late. But before revolution could come, which it came 12 years later in 1917, Russia found itself involved in the catastrophic World War I. But there was one glimmer of hope on a personal level for the czar, because in 1904/1905, great joy was brought to the imperial family by the birth of a boy, Alexei. Four daughters, all healthy. The czarina was overjoyed with the birth of this boy. At birth, everything looked fine. The weight was right. There was nothing physically wrong with him. He looked great. But by the end of 1904, they realised his haemophilia and this is Nicky, Nicholas II, writing in his diary on the 8th of September 1904. "At 11 o'clock I took the children to church. We lunched alone. Alix and I were very worried because little Alexei began bleeding from the naval and it continued on and off until the evening. We had to send for Korovin and the surgeon Fedorov. At about seven o'clock, they applied a bandage. The little one was remarkably calm and gay. How painful it is to live through such moments of anxiety. In the morning there was blood on the bandage. From 12 o'clock until the evening, there was nothing. The little one had a peaceful day and hardly cried at all. And we felt reassured by his healthy appearance." But he wasn't. He had haemophilia and it destroyed the Czarina Alix. She became more and more withdrawn from normal life. More and more dependent upon the figure of Rasputin, who was very peculiar in every possible way.

Monk from Siberia. He was gross. But he managed to calm Alexei when he was suffering from bleeding. He calmed him as far as we can see in two ways now. He calmed him by hypnosis and he calmed him with using drugs, natural drugs, which were common in Siberia. Now with a mixture of hypnosis and drugs, he was able to calm Alexei. And if Alexei was calm, the czarina was calm. And if the czarina was calm, the czar was calm. And there was one last moment of joy for the imperial family. Last one moment of celebration for the house of Romanov. 1913 saw the house of Romanov on the throne for 300 years and they celebrated. They produced coins. I've got one with a picture on one side of Nicholas II and the first Romanov czar, Mikhail. And on the other, the great double-headed eagle of Russia. They toured parts of Russia. There was an outpouring of support. But does it mean anything? We here in

Britain have just witnessed the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, but does that actually tell us anything about the future of the monarchy? I don't think it does. I think it tells us something about one woman. I don't think it tells us much about the institution. And there's been much published in Britain around that issue. And certainly in Russia, it does seem to have been genuinely welcomed. Yet in four years time, the Romanovs are toppled from power. Think of the Shah of Iran celebrating whatever it was, it was a thousand years of Persia. And then he's toppled. May I advise any of you who become a king or a queen, don't celebrate hundreds of years of your dynasty or anything that's a hundred or a thousand years because the chances are you might not survive the next decade. On the 20th of July 1914, in the book on letters that I'm going to read from, Nicholas II wrote this on the 20th of July 1914, "A good day, particularly from the point of view of morale. I went with Maria and Anastasia", his daughters, "to church." "We lunched alone. I signed the manifesto of the Declaration of War. From the Malachite Room we went to the Nikolaevsky Hall where the manifesto was read out and a Te Deum was celebrated. The whole hall sang, 'Save Us Lord' and 'Many Years'. I said a few words. On our return, the ladies rushed to kiss our hands and jostled Alix and myself slightly. Then we went onto the balcony over Alexander Square and bowed to a huge mass of people. At about six o'clock, we went out onto the embankment and made our way to the cutter through a large crowd of officers and public. We returned to Peterhof and spent the evening quietly." Anna, a lady in waiting to the Czarina wrote on the same day, "At this time the telegram arrived from Rasputin in Siberia, which plainly irritated the Czar. Rasputin strongly opposed the war, and predicted that it would result in the destruction of the Empire. But the Czar refused to believe it and resented what was really an almost unprecedented interference in affairs of state on the part of Rasputin." We know what the czar didn't. That Rasputin was right. Three days later on the 23rd of July, Nicholas II wrote, "In the morning, we heard the good news. England has declared war on Germany because the latter has attacked France and violated the neutrality of Luxembourg and Belgium in the most shameless way." And if people are listening from Britain, why the dates are different is because Russia is using a different calendar. Don't let it worry you. So, Russia finds itself at war. It goes gladly, willingly to war. It will teach Germany a lesson. And actually, unbelievably, the war began well for the two armies that Russia sent westwards. Unfortunately, the two generals in charge hated each other, partly because one was anti-Semitic and the other was ethnically Jewish although he'd converted to Orthodoxy. Worse than that, they communicated within each of the armies and between the armies in open. They used no codes at all. So, the Germans just sat back and listened to exactly what the Russians were doing and plotted the Russian advance. The Russians were halted at a battle the Germans called Tannenberg, which was a reference back to a mediaeval battle where they defeated Russians. And the Germans pressed on into Russia. And before very long, Russia was fighting a defensive war. By the end

of 1916, not only in Russia, but on the Western Front for Britain and France as well, this war looked never ending.

And if I can find the book that I've thrown down in my excitement today. Here it is. Paterson's book. Paterson's book, "The Last Tsar", he writes this, "The war dragged on. It's third wretched winter came." '14, '15, '16, winter '16. "The population was sick of the fighting, the grinding down of its armies, and the endlessly continuing loss of men." Did you see in the press today reported in Britain that Russian wives of soldiers serving have, were in a demonstration asking their husbands be brought home? "Transport no longer ran with even semi-regularity. Inflation was spiralling upward and making many things unaffordable for the majority of the population. People were having to sell their possessions or live on a single daily meal." Now, they say there are many things that governments must always do, but the very first thing a government must do is to make sure its people are fed. And the Russians couldn't even feed their army, let alone the people. "Though every section of society hated the autocracy, it was incredibly the upper classes, the aristocracy and the gentry that disliked Nicholas the most. Their passionate and growing hatred would leave him without a single section of society to defend him." He, as the autocrat, is blamed for the poor performance of Russia in this war, for the lack of food at home and at the front, for lack of arms at the front, all of that. "The autocracy which had claimed complete power and loyalty from its subjects had then failed to do anything to help. As one commentator put it at the time, 'The present power'", the czar, "'is incapable of overcoming the chaos because the czar himself is the source of the chaos.'" And Paterson says, "Under the stress of war and the resulting breakdown of normality and order in Russia, the whole of Russia, all social classes had now become politicised. So many were dissatisfied with the existing government that a coup seemed inevitable and would've been welcomed almost universally." And then there was a plus. Rasputin, who was the symbol of everything wrong with Russia, was murdered by a small conspiracy, including members of the imperial family themselves, Grand Duke Dmitri, and by high aristocrats, including Prince Felix Yusupov. Dmitri escapes the revolution and dies in exile in '42 and Yusupov dies in exile in 1967. It's really, really coming adrift by the end of 1916. Is there anything that can be done? The czar takes command of the army, has taken command of the army. And he has no military experience. And disaster is awaiting. He's got his own country totally agin him to the rear. And he's got the Germans to the front. And in his diary on the last day of the year 1916, Nicholas writes in his diary the following. "31st of December, received reports. Before lunch went upstairs to Alexei. His hand is quite better. Went for a walk. To church at six o'clock. Worked in the evening. At 10 to midnight, we went to the service. I prayed fervently that God will have mercy on Russia." But God wasn't listening to Nicholas' prayers for the first revolution of 1917 is now only weeks away. For us, the revolution's a bit closer because it's next week that I'm going to talk about 1917. But I shall

tell the story of the imperial family and their dreadful end at Yekaterinburg in July 1918. And I shall tell the story of how a coup by Marxists led to the overthrow of the short-lived democracy and the arrival of Lenin and Trotsky and all of them. And by the beginning of 1918, certainly by the beginning of 1919, all the glamour of the house of Romanov has been turned to dust. And instead through to 1921, Russia finds itself in a state of civil war. A civil war where European, American, and Japanese forces are supporting the so-called White Russians against the Marxists. Unsuccessfully as it turns out. But that's another story. And that's my story for next time. Thank you very much for listening. I've probably got lots of questions I think.

- [Judi] Yes, there are a few.

- There are a few.

Q & A and Comments

- Oh people are agreeing with me. That's good. Oh, that some, oh, that's very nice. Karen and David from New Jersey say, "We love Lockdown." That's very nice. It's very encouraging to Wendy and to all of us.

- Yes, there is a picture of Nicholas and George V together. And I reckon if I showed it to you, I, well, if I showed it to Americans, I don't think you'd be able to tell the difference. In fact, I've seen a picture in which I'm not entirely sure which is which. When they both wear naval uniform, it's very difficult, British naval uniform. It's impossible I think to tell them.

- "May I make a controversial statement?" Oh, yes, Neil, please. "The main achievement of the Communist Revolution was the extermination of the Romanov family." Well, I'm not sure that's the biggest achievement. The biggest, oh dear, that's a difficult thing if I'm being, if you're being serious and I need to give a serious answer, I would say that biggest achievement to the Communist Revolution was to show that communism in practise does not work.

Q: "Isn't Putin the last czar?"

A: Yes, that's what people say. I at one time expected him to crown himself czar rather like Napoleon crowned himself emperor.

- "Even an autocracy doesn't have to mean that one person runs everything so he could have had able people running things with him." Yes. Well, he did have people, and I suppose he had two people Witte and then Stolypin, the prime minister who was assassinated in 1912. But he also had people like Rasputin and his wife. Not Rasputin's wife, his own wife. So, he was not good at selecting friends. We've

been going through a bit in the British press about some of the people closely involved with Prince Charles. Well, they certainly aren't the sort of people that I would've appointed as advisors. And he's been ill-advised to do that. So yes, or the problem is they can have poor advisors. Whereas in a constitutional monarchy you have, well you may have poor prime ministers. For goodness sake, we know that. But there it's a bit different. He had, he chose poorly. When war came, until Rasputin is murdered, Rasputin was seen by the populace as this evil man who was pushing the czar to war. They also accused him of having an affair with the czarina, which is untrue, almost, I'd put my life on the fact that it was untrue. But also they criticised the czarina because she was German and they claimed that she was a German spy. She was no such thing. But she was a stupid woman. And I, but it's not fair to say she was a stupid woman. She wasn't very bright, it's true. Nor was Nicholas. But her problem was Alexei. And she never recovered from Alexei's illness. And it destroyed her. It destroyed her. By the time the imperial family are imprisoned, it's the older girls that are running things, not their mother. She's gone completely to pieces.

Q: "Were Nicholas and George related by their mother or father?"

A: By mother. George's mother was Princess Alexandra of Denmark. Nicholas's mother was Princess Dagmar, later changing her name to the Empress Maria. Princess Dagmar of Denmark, sister of Princess Alexandra of Great Britain. Both were Danes. The Russian one changes her name when she marries to Maria. And she's the Empress Maria. So, they're linked by mum. The mums were sisters.

– Sorry, I, who's that? Judith? I'm sorry. I haven't seen the Netflix series "The Last Czars". I tend, that sounds, I don't wish to sound standoffish, but I try to avoid those sorts of programmes in the main.

Q: "Please comment on the irony of the brutality and failures of the Russian political system, the incredible cultural," yeah, we've said this before, "and the incredible cultural contributions of Russians in music, dance, literature." Martin's replied, "Akin to the horrors of Nazi Germany, the country of Goethe, Beethoven, and so many more."

A: Sherry, this is a question on which academics argue on and will argue on forever. It is extremely difficult to know why this happens. But it's happened in Germany and it's happening still in Russia. And I'm not sure, I don't know the answer to that question.

– Oops, oops, oops. What else have I got? Oh, here we are.

– This is Jonathan,

Q: "George V refused to give sanctuary to cousins of Russian royal family. And they were executed in Yekaterinburg as a result. Why were they not given sanctuary?"

A: Because George, you are doing the answers. Sorry, this is marvellous. Nicholas says, "Because George V was scared there would be a revolution here." Yes, he was. And he thought that if Nicholas came, they looked like twins. That would stir revolution in South Wales and there would be real problems. Lloyd George, the liberal prime minister, argued that we should save them. In the end, the Empress Maria, Nicholas' mother, was saved and caused enormous problems to George V. She refused to turn the lights off ever in where, in her rooms. And George V was one of these people, I have to say, I'm similar. I can't go past an empty room with a light on without going to turn it off. I think it's boarding school's done that to me. And I guess it was the Navy that did it to George V. In the end, he managed to get shot of her to her family in Denmark. He paid for everything. The Danes didn't pay. But he managed to get shot of her. No, he was very uneasy was George V about revolution here.

Q: "Did the British politicians learn from the mistakes about the second chamber in Russia, the veto, when they framed the 1911 Parliament Act?"

A: No, there was nothing to do with Russia at all. It was entirely an internal British thing. I'm certain in that.

- Did I say "Diamond Jubilee", Fay? You are very good. Platinum Jubilee, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry that that was oh, well, Fay, congratulations for putting me right. You'd get a prize if I was giving prizes.

Q: "What happened to the baby in the end?"

A: Oh, he's shot, sorry, you mean Alexei? He was shot him with the rest of the family in Yekaterinburg in July 1918. So, were all four of the daughters, the wife, and some of their servants. All were shot. And that's a story I will tell next week. Oh, sorry. Oh dear.

- I mentioned Wimbledon. I mentioned 4th of July. And I forgot to mention Canada Day. And I should have known that because just down the prom here, we've had a Ukrainian flag flying all summer. Much to my dismay. Because it's at the Canadian War Memorial for the young Canadians who were billeted here on the south coast of England, in Worthing many of them. And many of them had wives, met girls, and took them back to Canada. And the flag flies, or did before we put up the Ukrainian flag. The Canadian flag flies every day of the year. And there's a service once a year. So, I should have known that 'cause the flag was put back for Canada Day. And hopefully it will not be replaced by the Ukrainian flag. I feel very strongly about that, you know, because the Canadian boys who came were so young and they gave their lives so willingly in the cause of freedom. We have to remember them like we remember our own. Oh, that's, sorry. Some of you know I

like telling silly stories.

- Now this is one I've only come across recently. And this tell, talking about Canada reminded me, this is not a Canadian, it's an American and British story. They said that at the end of the war in one English village here, there was only one woman left because all the others had gone as GI brides back to the states. And the person who told this story was asked, "Well, why was one woman left?" And they said, "Well, she was 78, you know. Anyhow, she would've gone on the boat to America, but she couldn't get up the gang plank. So, she was left behind." But I love that. It's just a silly story. Not true, but just funny. There's lots of stories in Britain about GIs. Do one more and then I'll stop. This was told to me, ooh, 20 years ago now by a lady who said, I had, you know, I was talking about the Americans being in the county of Essex here in Britain. And lady said, "Gorblimey", she said, "you reminded me about Hank." I said, "Who was Hank?" "Ooh", she said, "he was lovely." "He was an American GI", she said. "Ooh," she said, "I made an awful mistake by marrying Fred and staying here instead of going to America." But she might have been one that did not go to Las Vegas, but landed up in the back of beyond. But that's another story. You must stop me doing that.

- Where am I got? I've got some more. Can I just do a few more then? Tim, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Who said that?

- Susan says, "Our democracy is in danger here in America. Happy to listen to this talk." Well, all Western democracies are in problems. We've got major problems.

- Oh, oh, don't, Gene, you're making me jealous. "I'm in North Carolina. Wouldn't miss your lecture for anything. Anyway, it's too-" I love that. "I wouldn't miss it but anyway, it's too hot to go outside." I love it. It's like my friend who was teaching a history course and a woman tried to enrol on his course, adult education. And he said, "Well, no, you don't want to come because it's exactly the same course as I did last year." And she said, "Oh, don't worry." She said, "I think you are a wonderful teacher." And he said, "Well, I may be, but it's the same course." She went, "Well yeah, I can't remember a word of what was said anyhow."

Q: "Did the Russians embrace a Code Napoleon?"

A: Good question. Simple answer I think is no.

Q: "Why did they not send the Romanovs to Canada?"

A: I'm not sure who you meant by "they send". You see, once the Marxists had their revolution in October, they kept the Romanovs prisoners. The only way the Romanovs would've survived is if a one of the Western armies or White armies had reached them before the

decision was taken to shoot them. And there was a White army very close to Yekaterinburg, which probably is the reason that they were shot when they were shot.

Q: "Do you think he should have given shelter to the czar?"

A: I don't think his analysis was right. I don't think the presence of the czar would've made revolution more likely. Interestingly, at the end of the war, the British Commander-in-Chief General Haig said, wrote in his diary on the day of, on the 11th of November 1918, that "if the war had gone the other way," in other words if Britain had lost, "we ourselves would've faced revolution." And that is a quote that's not very often given. Not made up by me. If you look at, get a copy out of the library of Haig's war memoirs, you will see that in there. He really thought that had we lost, our empire, in other words, the royal family would've gone.

Q: "Were Jews drafted in?"

A: Yes, but they had a limit on where they could be promoted unless they converted to Orthodoxy as one of the generals in 1914 had already. Yes, the church and the Romanovs were all incredibly anti-Semitic. Absolutely true.

- Oh, that's nice. Susan says, "Thank you for your kind words via Canada. My father was in the Royal Canadian Air Force and married my British mother." There you go, you see.

- This is Lynn and Rodney. "Many years ago I read a book by Gorsky called 'Mother'. I recall it gave an excellent picture of how the peasants lived and how they became involved in revolutionary actions. Am I remembering it correctly? Do you know the book?" No, I don't know the book, but I'm going to say something about the peasants and the middle classes next week when we look at how the revolution took part.

- "Princess Olga married to a Polish count did get to Canada. And is buried." That's right, that's true. It's not the daughter. All his imperial, all the imperial family were shot. That is Czar, Czarina, the four daughters, and the son. Yeah, I think I've probably, I've probably come to an end, haven't I? Have I come to an end?

- [Judi] Oh, William, if you want to carry on, it's fine.

- I think, Have I got some more?

- [Judi] Let me just check how far you got to.

- I thought I couldn't scroll down anymore.

- Okay.

- I think I've come to the end.
- [Judi] You have, yes. I've just had a look and.
- I've got a same comment. I've got the same comment that I got before.
- [Judi] Thank you so much, William. I got, I was just lost track of time listening. It was one. Thank you so much.
- [William] You're welcome.
- [Judi] Thank you everybody, and we will see you all again soon. Thank you.
- Bye everyone. Bye-bye.
- Bye-bye.