‘The need to **modernise** their **backward** **economy** was the **most** **important** **reason** why the **rulers** of Russia **introduced** **reforms’**. How far do you agree with this view of the period from 1855 to 1956?

‘Candidates who make a strong links between the Russia’s backward economy, defeats in war, and consequent reforms are likely to be successful’.

**Introduction:**

* Explore the preliminary characteristics of Russia’s economy, and its development through reforms, for example, Alexander II to Stalin.
* Explain the characteristics of a ‘backwards economy’
* Briefly look into Russian ideals of becoming a ‘modern state’, how Russia’s economy compared to other European Countries. Eg. France, Britain, Germany.
* Briefly touch on the influences of each reign on economic progress. For example, Stalin’s Five Years Plan.

**Main Body:**

* Tackle the question head on, analysing whether the impact of Russia’s ‘backward economy’ was the ‘most important’ reason, as there are other external factors.
* These external factors compromising of: the influence of war, (failures) on imposing reform, - The Emancipation Edict – Crimea War defeat
* Stalin – ‘old Russia was ceaselessly beaten’.
* Could be argued that the ‘backward economy’ resulted in such defeats, therefore the need for modernising Russia was necessary.
* Could be argued that famine in 1891 or 1921 may have been the catalyst of change, as rulers faced pressure from peasants.
* How such reforms had detrimental effects on certain parts of the economy, not everyone was winners, for example how the peasants were neglected under Stalin?
* Explore how reform was often a reaction to difficult circumstance: for example, October Manifesto of 1905, or the introduction of the NEP in 1921.
* Whether after the Bolshevik revolution, 1917, whether reform was centred on fixing Russia’s ‘backward economy’ or whether it was motivated by communist ideology.

Divide into sections correlating to each theme during the context of this period. For example, economic, social, political/constitutional, foreign policy - as a catalyst, etc..

**Notes:**

* The Great Reforms aimed to modernise Russia, but as we have seen, the tsarist government sought to limit that process to the economic sphere, without allowing a parallel development of modern and social political structures
* Clash between economic reform - would have to reform the political system, become democratic, (political factor), and the consequence would be social reform.
* Bolsheviks - Communist – immense economic and human changes under the communist rule. Consequence - Peasants neglected.
* Neither the Russian Empire, nor the USSR, ever achieved a western-style constitutional democracy, but already in 1905-1906, there was a hint of a kind of constitution appointed.
* In the economic sphere, even in 1945, soviet citizens remained far behind western levels of prosperity, but compared with their grandparents in 1861, one could certainly distinguish very significant economic progress. Thus should take these ideal characteristics of a modern state not as a ‘norm’ or reality but as a model to help us understand the changes that the Russian economy and society underwent over these three generations.
* It was evident; there was social and economic reform, despite Russia’s failure to actually ‘catch up with the west’.
* Why did Russia want to become modernised? The main motivation for Alexander II’s Great reforms was ‘in order to remain a respected and sovereign state in the later nineteenth century, and all the more in the twentieth, a modern industrial economy was necessary’.
* “Backwardness”, Russian national prestige was thus connected with being modern, developing along the lines of Britain, France and Germany.

**Notes:**

The Great Reforms - failure of the Crimean War was a primary motivation for the Great Reforms. Among the goals of reform were a reinvigorated economy, a modern conscript army, a prosperous peasantry, and a more efficient (and less corrupt) bureaucracy that could collect sufficient taxes to pay for state needs while carrying out tsarist policies on the local level’.

A brief look into these policies: (aims)

* a modern legal system
* improvements in education
* more freedom of speech - ‘lessening of censorship, to encourage exchange of ideas
* economic reform – introduction of railroads/railways
* example: Trans-Siberian railroad.
* Railroads – economic development – created jobs, improved transport links for peasants, encouraged immigration.
* Industrial development required investment. – Taxes were imposed on popular goods, eg. Vodka. Single greatest source of income – reflects the cost to society of such social attitudes to excessive alcohol consumption.
* Eventually taxes on land and business profits became more important.

Explore Finance Minister Sergei White economic policies; bring in some sources if relevant to the topic of economic modernisation. Take into consideration the development towards an efficient banking system, and reformation of the legal system.

Briefly take into consideration the social consequences of implementing economic development and reformation to relieve Russia’s ‘backwards economy’ in order to ‘catch up with the west’.

* Industrial strikes, agricultural disorders, 1905, revolution, police firing on unarmed protestors.
* Was the underlying tension with trying to appeal to all factions of the social hierarchy an obstacle to Russia’s aim of relieving their backward economy? For example, the clash between trying to reform Russia industrially, and trying to please the peasants.
* A lot of peasants were wiped out due to famine and bad harvests, therefore was Russia failing to reform its agricultural methods? 1900-1917 was there a failure to improve living standards of peasants? Despite the emancipation of state peasants, their living conditions didn’t exactly change, as they still remained illiterate and poorly clothed. Backward economy, there was a surplus of peasants, as well as the fact that there was excessive labour in rural areas. Was agricultural reform ignored during this period because it wasn’t necessary or was it ignored because it was an obstacle to economic reform?

**Historians:**

Readings:

Robert Bideleux – Alexander II and the emancipation of the serfs

Tucher - Stalin in power – the revolution from above

(Will look into more historians in the half term)

**Sources:**

<http://academic.shu.edu/russianhistory/index.php/Stalin_on_Rapid_Industrialization>

Stalin himself - expressing issues of ‘backwardness’ as well as the constant defeats Russia has continuously faced. Russian state had continuously failed to modernise, and had paid time and time again for its failure. Book: ‘Stalin promised, would cast away this pitiable tradition and become a truly modern state, rapidly and with no consideration of how heavy the human price might be. One can dispute Stalin’s interpretation of the past, but for many Russians – especially for most communists, it seemed compelling.

‘In the past we had no fatherland, nor could we have one. But now that we have overthrown capitalism and power is in our hands, in the hands of the people, we have a fatherland, and we will defend its independence. Do you want our socialist fatherland to be beaten and to lose its independence? If you do not want this you must put an end to its backwardness in the shortest possible time and develop genuine Bolshevik tempo in building up its socialist system of economy. There is no other way. That is why Lenin said on the eve of the October Revolution: "either perish, or overtake and outstrip the advanced capitalist countries.’

<http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Eman.html>

Alexander II – emancipation of the peasants, reform.

‘This system has at best established patriarchal relations based upon the fairness and benevolence of the landowners an affectionate docility on the part of the peasants’ but as manners have lost their simplicity, the paternal ties between the landlords and the peasants have been weakened. Furthermore, as the seigniorial authority falls into the hands of those exclusively intent on their own selfish advantage, those relations of mutual good will have tended to give away and open the door to arbitrariness, burdensome to the peasants and hostile to their prosperity. This has served to develop in them and indifference to all progress.’

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>

Historians:

* A People's Tragedy-A History of the Russian Revolution - Orlando Figes (Main)
* The Whisperers-Private life in Stalin's Russia - Orlando Figes
* The Russian Revolution - Sheila Fitzpatrick (Main)
* The Russian Revolution - Richard Pipes
* New Approaches to the Russian Revolution of 1917 - Rex A. Wade
* The Russian Revolution~1917-1921 - Kowalski
* Lenin and Revolutionary Russia – Lee

Notes:

A People’s Tragedy: 474, 589,

‘to remodel completely the enormous state, which had been entrusted to [Alexander's] care, to abolish an age-old order founded on slavery, to replace it with civic decency and freedom, to establish justice in a country which had never known the meaning of legality, to redesign the entire administration, to introduce freedom of the press in the context of untrammelled authority, to call new forces to life at every turn and set them on firm legal foundations, to put a repressed and humiliated society on its feet and to give it the chance to flex its muscles.’7

It was logical for the tsarist regime to seek to base its power in the provinces on the landed nobility, its closest ally. But this was a dangerous strategy, and the danger grew as time went on. The landed nobility was in severe economic decline during the years of agricultural depression in the late nineteenth century, and was turning to the zemstvos to defend its local agrarian interests against the centralizing and industrializing bureaucracy of St Petersburg. In the years leading up to 1905 this resistance was expressed in mainly liberal terms: it was seen as the defence of 'provincial society', a term which was now used for the first time and consciously broadened to include the interests of the peasantry.

The Emancipation came as a rude shock not just to the economy but also to the whole of the provincial civilization of the gentry. Deprived of their serfs, most of the landed nobles went into terminal decline. Very few were able to respond to the new challenges of the commercial world in which as farmers — and less often industrialists and merchants — they were henceforth obliged to survive. The whole of the period between 1861 and 1917 could be presented as the slow death of the old agrarian elite upon which the tsarist system had always relied.

For the country's military leaders the root of the problem lay in the army's dismal record in the nineteenth century, which many of them came to blame on the policies of the government. Defeat in the Crimean War (1853—6), followed by a costly campaign against Turkey (1877—8), and then the humiliation of defeat by the Japanese — the first time a major European power had lost to an Asian country — in 1904—5, left the army and the navy demoralized. The causes of Russia's military weakness were partly economic: her industrial resources failed to match up to her military commitments in an age of increasing competition between empires. But this incompetence also had a political source: during the later nineteenth century the army had gradually lost its place at the top of government spending priorities. The Crimean defeat had discredited the armed services and highlighted the need to divert resources from the military to the modernization of the economy. Between 1881 and 1902 the military's share of the budget dropped from 30 per cent to 18 per cent.

Comparative: Ten years before the First World War the Russian army was spending only 57 per cent of the amount spent on each soldier in the German army, and only 63 per cent of that spent in the Austrian. In short, the Russian soldier went to war worse trained, worse equipped and more poorly serviced than his enemy.

The army was so short of cash that it relied largely on its own internal economy to clothe and feed itself. Soldiers grew their own food and tobacco, and repaired their own uniforms and boots. They even earned money for the regiment by going off to work as seasonal labourers on landed estates, in factories and mines near their garrisons. Many soldiers spent more time growing vegetables or repairing boots than they did learning how to handle their guns. By reducing the military budget, the tsarist regime created an army of farmers and cobblers.

The special attraction of Marxism stemmed from the importance it gave to the role of the working class and to the idea of progress. The popular Marxist pamphlets of the late 1890s, which for the first time attracted large numbers of workers like Kanatchikov to the cause, drove home the lessons of the famine crisis of 1891: that the peasants were doomed to die out as a result of economic progress; that they were a relic of Russia's backward past who would be swept away by industry; and that the Populists' belief in the commune (to which many of the peasant-workers still adhered) was no longer tenable.

There was clearly no more mileage in the idea of a peasant revolutionary movement; and from the 1880s work among the peasants was condescendingly described by the Marxists as 'small deeds' (i.e. the sort of charity work favoured by the gentry and zemstvo types). The famine crisis of 1891 seemed to underline the backwardness of the peasantry. It showed that they were doomed to die out, both as individuals and as a class, under the wheels of economic development. The peasants were a relic of Russia's savage past — its *Aziatchina* or Asiatic way of life — which would inevitably be swept away by the progress of industry.

The 'scientific' nature of Marxist theory intoxicated the Russian radical mind, already steeped in the rationalism and materialism of the 1860s. Marx's historical dialectic seemed to do for society what Darwin had done for humanity: provide a logical theory of evolutionary development. It was 'serious' and 'objective', a comprehensive system that would explain the social world. It was in this sense an answer to that quintessential Russian quest for a knowledge that was absolute. Marxism, moreover, was optimistic. It showed that progress lay in industry, that there was meaning in the chaos of history, and that through the working class, through the conscious striving of humanity, socialism would become the end of history. This message had a special appeal to the Russian intelligentsia, painfully aware as they were of their country's backwardness, since it implied that Russia would inevitably become more like the advanced countries of the West — Germany, in particular, whose Social Democratic Party was a model for the rest of the Marxist movement in Europe. The Populist belief in Russia's 'separate path', which had seemed to consign her to perpetual peasant-hood, could thus be dismissed as romantic and devoid of scientific content.

The idea that Marxism could bring Russia closer to the West was perhaps its principal appeal. Marxism was seen as a 'path of reason', in the words of Lydia Dan, lighting up the way to modernity, enlightenment and civilization. As Valentinov, another veteran of the Marxist movement, recalled in the 1950s:

The money economy was slowly penetrating into remote rural areas. Urban manufactures were replacing the old peasant handicrafts. New technologies were becoming available to the enterprising peasant. Railways, roads, postal services and telegraphs were opening up the village to the outside world. Hospitals and schools, reading clubs and libraries, local government and political parties, were all moving closer to the peasantry. The growth of rural schooling, in particular, was giving rise to a new generation of 'conscious' peasant men and women — young and literate, thrifty and sober, self-improving and individualistic — who sought to overturn the old village world.

According to a zemstvo survey of the 1880s, two out of three peasant households in the central Russian province of Tambov were unable to feed themselves without getting into debt. 'In our village', recalled Semenov, 'only five or six families managed to survive the whole year on their own. As for the rest, some got by until the Mikhailov holiday [in early November], some until Christmas, and some until Shrovetide, but then they had to borrow to buy grain.' It was the tragedy of millions of peasants that constant debt and taxes forced them to sell off their grain in the autumn, when supplies were plentiful and prices were low, only to buy it back in the hungry spring, when prices were at their peak.

*Page 158 – continue later*

*World Industrial Powers - Production per capita in 1910*

| **Nation** | **Cotton (kg)** | **Iron (kg)** | **Railways** | **Coal (kg)** | **Steam Power (hp)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| USA | 12.7 | 270 | 122 | 4,580 | 180 |
| UK | 19.8 | 210 | 69 | 4,040 | 240 |
| Belgium | 9.4 | 250 | 102 | 3,270 | 150 |
| Germany | 6.8 | 200 | 75 | 3,190 | 130 |
| France | 6.0 | 270 | 87 | 1,450 | 73 |
| Italy | 5.4 | 8 | 38 | 270 | 46 |
| Russia | 3.0 | 31 | 24 | 300 | 16 |
| Japan | 4.9 | 5 | 14 | 230 | 10 |
| Spain | 4.4 | 21 | 58 | 330 | 4 |