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Paper submitted:

**On the Historically Underestimated Power of the Russian Citizen**

An important note:

I feel that some background information on this paper may possibly be of assistance. I wrote this paper as an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in the spring of 2005 for my senior thesis. My faculty advisor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (for this paper) was Dr. S. Majstorovic. I am now in my first year of graduate study at the University of Iowa. The paper has not been edited yet from its original form (as I turned it in as an undergraduate student) due to time constraints.

**Abstract**

Though it has been widely accepted that the direction of political influence in Russia is top-down, there is a significant amount of evidence in support of bottom-up influence and control. The power of the Russian citizenry to effect change and exert control has been enormously underestimated. In order to demonstrate the accuracy of the aforementioned assertions, critical examples of bottom-up influence from each of three major periods in Russian history will be discussed. These three periods include: the tsarist era, the Bolshevik (Communist) era, and the post-Communist era.

**On the Historically Underestimated Power of the Russian Citizen**

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Though it has been widely accepted that the direction of political influence in Russia is top-down, there is a significant amount of evidence in support of bottom-up influence and control. The power of the Russian citizenry to effect change and exert control has been enormously underestimated. Further consideration of Russian history will reveal that the many changes and transitions that have taken place in Russia would not have been possible were it not for the people's possession of certain characteristics that allowed or encouraged such transformations to occur. This topic is of monumental importance to a complete, truthful understanding of the history of a great and influential country and its people.

In order to demonstrate the accuracy of the aforementioned assertions, critical examples of bottom-up influence from each of three major periods in Russian history will be discussed. These three periods include: the tsarist era, the Bolshevik (Communist) era, and the post-Communist era.

### *The Tsarist Era*

One of the more infamous events of the tsarist era of Russian history is what is known as "Bloody Sunday." On January 9, 1905 (Old Style; January 22, 1905, by the new calendar), in St. Petersburg, "some 150,000 people gathered at the six designated assembly points to converge on the Winter Palace and present a petition to the Tsar, Nicholas II, who as the 'little father' of his people would surely be bound to sympathize with them" (Cavendish, 2005, p. 54). These people, who were appealing to the Tsar for more humane working conditions, were met not with the Tsar (who had left for the country on a vacation of sorts) or with sympathy, but instead were met with thousands of armed troops. Hundreds of Russians were killed that day by their own countrymen (Cavendish, 2005). It was this massacre, however, that led to great protests that would eventually force the Tsar to promise a future of democracy. To fully understand the significance of the Bloody Sunday massacre, though, some other events of that period of history require discussion.

In order to be able to appreciate the impact of Bloody Sunday, one must understand historically how it came to be. How could a people with assumedly so little influence and power affect such great change? Upon further analysis, various strands of influence and power can be detected throughout the citizenry. Indeed, Bloody Sunday was not an isolated event. Though Bloody Sunday is perhaps one of the more well-known uprisings in the history of the Tsarist period, it occurs quite near the end of that period. A review of the decades leading up to this event will reveal numerous other acts of defiance by the Russian people against the regime. Peasants fed up with unfair labor practices and unsatisfactory ideals had not simply lived in obedient silence for all of the rest of history, as has been asserted by many, but had indeed rebelled against the system more than once.

In the late seventeenth century, the central Russian government began to attempt to exert religious reforms on its citizens. These reforms sparked numerous peasant-led rebellions whose number and severity have been said to have made the late seventeenth

century “one of the most turbulent periods in Russian history” (Hosking, 2001, p. 170). The Old Believers, as those who resisted the reforms came to be known, moved to the south. It was here that the purpose and meaning of their rebellions began to expand greatly. They were no longer just resisting the religious reforms, but were also addressing such issues as centralization, authoritarianism, and the undermining of the power of local communities (Hosking, 2001). When the Russian tsarist government further turned its back on these people, they found themselves desperate for a means of survival and highly discontented and restless.

This restlessness had reached a boiling point by the time Stepan (Stenka) Razin, whose brother had been executed by the Russian army for disobeying orders, decided that the grievances and injustices of the people were enough that they would be willing to actively rebel against the regime (Hosking, 2001). The peasants were already livid and ready to take action. All they needed was a person who would be able to organize them and gather them together in rebellion. In the summer of 1670, Razin and his fellow peasant rebels had captured Astrakhan and “the major fortress city of Tsaritsyn, where he established a Cossack regime and promised to divide property equally” (Hosking, 2001, p. 171). This rebellion led to a break in tax burdens forced on the people. It further allowed the traditional religious beliefs and practices to survive and indeed grow stronger (Hosking, 2001). Stepan (Stenka) Razin became a legend among the people and many hoped that he would rise after death to lead them in “final emancipation from unjust and tyrannical oppressors” (Hosking, 2001, p. 172). The peasant rebels that he had organized, along with their defiance of oppressive government practices, created a threat to imperial authority for at least a century (Hosking, 2001).

Not only does this rebellion clearly represent a case in which the common peasants of Russia gathered against an oppressive empire, but it also gives some insight into the ideals that have long existed in Russia. That is, it has typically been asserted that Russian communism was forced upon the people by the leaders in government. Throughout Russian history, though, examples of peasants following along communal ideals can be clearly recognized. The equal division of property among the rebels led by Razin is not an isolated incident. Throughout Russia’s history, peasant communities have survived by subscribing to communal ideals that are essentially indistinguishable from the basic beliefs of communism. Russian peasants have forever lived in a harsh and risk-filled environment, so it is only natural that they developed a longing for practices that minimized risk and provided short-term benefits (Hosking, 2001). In order to do just that, peasants would organize their villages around the principle of equality of property and joint responsibility. These ideals that are greatly related to more modern ideas of communism did not originate within the upper echelons of government, but instead among the peasant villages of Russia. The examples of the peasant villages and the seventeenth century uprisings are not the only instances in which the Russian people took quite good care of themselves. Another prime example of the power of the Russian people to affect change is what has become known as the Decembrist Revolt, which will serve as the next topic of discussion.

After fighting and putting their lives on the line for Russia during the war of 1812, many Russian citizens found a return to serfdom unreasonable and unacceptable (Hosking, 2001). Contact with the popular patriotic movements and representative institutions of western Europe bred contempt among the Russian people over Russia's lack of both. Additionally, as the citizens of Russia received military settlements for their work during the war of 1812, they saw other countries and nations being granted constitutions (Hosking, 2001). Upon realizing that the emperor would be of no help in improving the conditions of the Russian people, secret societies began to be formed in an effort to promote the welfare of the Russian citizen. The first such society, the Union of Salvation, had such goals as regulating or abolishing serfdom and "transforming the autocracy into a constitutional monarchy" (Hosking, 2001, p. 260). Though this society has been described as elitist in nature, it must be remembered that it originated by a push of the Russian citizenry and aimed to protect the rights of the Russian people. This highlights an excellent point: one possible reason for the underestimation of the power of the Russian people may be the tendency of the citizens of Russia to create tools of influence, such as the aforementioned secret societies, rather than trying to influence the system as scattered individuals. The people created points or groups in which they could focus their power in order to make their demands more visible and more effective.

The Union of Salvation eventually came to be known as the Decembrists, "because of the attempted coup in 1825 which grew out of their activity" (Hosking, 2001, p. 261). This group rejected social hierarchy and the patriarchal concept of family life, instead promoting equality and civil society. As a result of the Decembrists' attempted coup of 1825, the tsars from that point on began to view the ideas of civil society and rule of law as hostile, effectively splitting the society from the regime (Hosking, 2001). Feeling this separation, the people of Russia began to feel even more alienated by their government.

The ill will felt by the Russian citizens toward the regime after the Decembrist Revolt was further inflamed by the response of the government to widespread unrest at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In January 1878, Vera Zasulich shot and wounded General Trepov, the governor-general of St. Petersburg, in order to protest the continuing existence of the Russian monarchy (Hosking, 2001). To the horror of the Russian authorities, Zasulich was acquitted by the jury, who claimed that she "had no personal interest in her crime," that she was "fighting for an idea" (Hosking, 2001, p. 312). Encouraged by such a verdict, the revolutionist group of Russian citizens known as Land and Freedom (*Zemlia i Volia*) decided on a "policy of systematic terror with the aim of disorganizing and overthrowing the government and replacing it with a regime which would convene a constituent assembly and prepare the way for popular rule" (Hosking, 2001, p. 313). After coming to this conclusion and weeding out the few dissenters, the group reconstituted itself as *Narodnaia Volia* (the People's Freedom or the People's Will) and made its new goal the act of carrying out the sentence of death that it had condemned Tsar Alexander II to for "crimes against the people" (Hosking, 2001, p. 313).

Once again, the people of Russia were able to organize a threatening protest against the tsarist regime. Indeed, Bloody Sunday is an extension of such protests that

essentially call for an end to the Russian monarchy in favor of a more representative and fair form of government. It is no coincidence that Bloody Sunday occurs right near the end of the tsarist period. Weakened by years of protest against it by the Russian people, the tsarist regime had finally been driven to a point of collapse not from above, but from below. It is only by the demands and consent of the Russian people that the tsarist regime was overthrown in favor of a new form of government.

### *The Bolshevik Era*

Following the tsarist period of Russian history is that of the Bolsheviks (Communists). The Bolsheviks seized power in 1917 as a result of the discontent of the people of Russia. The frustrated population hoped that it could turn to the Bolsheviks for support and improved conditions (Hosking, 2001). Were it not for the people's desire to overthrow the tsarist regime, the Bolsheviks would not have had a chance at seizing power (Hosking, 2001). There are again numerous instances of the people of Russia asserting their very real power on the government in this period. Hoping for positive changes that would improve their way of life, many Russians found themselves to be sorely disappointed with the destitute conditions that they continued to live in following the regime change. Many cases of peasant unrest during the Bolshevik era involve worker revolts. Although the revolution that brought about the regime change had been conducted on behalf of the industrial working class, this same class experienced only further misfortune after the revolution (Obolonsky, 2003).

After the 1930s, the number of industrial workers boomed and the ill will that the workers felt toward the government festered. Though the regime took various steps to break up trade unions, this did not stop workers from revolting, though they did so in a less organized manner (Hosking, 2001). In 1912 a massacre of disquieted workers at the Lena goldfields in Siberia infuriated workers around the country, sparking off strikes and demonstrations in a great number of cities (Hosking, 2001). As a result of such unrest, many workers refused to fight for Russia in the First World War. A September 1915 declaration made by the workers of the Old Lessner plant in St. Petersburg clearly outlines this sentiment: “We will stand up for our fatherland when we are given complete freedom to form labor organizations, complete freedom of speech and press, freedom to strike, equal rights for all nations of Russia, an eight-hour [work-] day, and when the landlords' lands are handed over to the poor peasants” (Hosking, 2001, p. 383). Fed up with unfair labor practices and a lack of attention from the government, workers took to tossing unpopular foremen into wheelbarrows and dumping them in nearby rivers (Hosking, 2001). Worker uprisings continued and intensified throughout the Bolshevik period. In the summer of 1953, there were risings in the labor camps at Vorkuta and Norilsk. In the spring of 1954, a rising took place in the Kengir labor camp. Major workers' riots occurred in June of 1962 in Novocherkassk (Hosking, 2001). Tensions continued to rise and the government felt increasing pressure to acquiesce to the demands of the workers.

As the peasants became as disillusioned as the workers, they too began to make their discontent known (Hosking, 2001). They began to sack the landowners' homes and

leave only what the landowners' family would require to subsist. Land and other belongings were divided evenly among the peasants as they reverted back to old peasant values (Hosking, 2001). These were values that had been abided by for centuries in Russia, not new ideas introduced by the Bolsheviks.

While the revolts of the workers and the rebellions of the peasants may be more explicitly visible, there is also a clear resistance in some of the revolutionist writings of the time. Russian authors did not always hold their tongues and many wrote scathing pieces about the Bolshevik regime (Chudakova, 1996; Hosking, 2001; Mahoney, 2004). A few of the more well-known and influential anti-Bolshevik writers include Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn, Mandelstam, Babel, and Bulgakov (Chudakova, 1996; Hosking, 2001; Mahoney, 2004). These authors resented the restraints on creative freedom imposed by the Bolshevik regime, as well as the poor treatment of the people (Hosking, 2001). Pasternak and Bulgakov both wrote critically about Stalin and his regime. Pasternak is perhaps most well-known for his novel *Dr. Zhivago*, which was highly critical of both Communist rule as well as any form of political domination of cultural and intellectual life (Hosking, 2001). Bulgakov is famous for a similarly critical work, *Master and Margarita*. While Pasternak survived with his life (though not much of his sanity) and Bulgakov avoided arrest, they were often prevented from publishing their work or having it performed (Chudakova, 1996; Hosking, 2001). Other authors experienced even worse misfortunes at the hands of the Bolsheviks. Isaak Babel exercised what he called a "genre of silence" for many years, but was still "arrested, accused of espionage and terrorism, and sent to a labor camp, where he died" (Hosking, 2001, p. 481). Osip Mandelstam, who among other things wrote a lampoon on Stalin, was "arrested, convicted of "counterrevolutionary activities," and died in a Vladivostok transit camp in December 1938" (Hosking, 2001, p. 481). Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn spent eight years in a Soviet labor camp and was not released until Stalin was removed from power (Hosking, 2001). He wrote on his experiences while imprisoned in the labor camp, and this work was finally published in 1962 after restrictions on culture had been slightly relaxed after many years of protest (again a sign of the power of the Russian people).

As people were able to read Solzhenitsyn's account of his experiences in the labor camp, a multitude of suppressed feelings burst forth among the population. The post-Stalin relaxation of the laws regarding culture and the arts opened up numerous arenas for nonconformist sentiments. Although Solzhenitsyn's work was prohibited once again by the early 1970s, and Solzhenitsyn himself exiled to the West, many citizens of Russia had already read it and agreed with his conclusions regarding the need for a regime change (Hosking, 2001). The people of Russia had hoped that the regime change of 1907 would bring about positive change, but had since become very disillusioned and cynical about the current regime that had in the end provided only more misery. The brief period of relaxed cultural control was all that was needed in order for the people to come together and realize the need for great change. In contrast to the violent change that replaced the Tsar with the Bolsheviks, however, the change from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation would occur in a relatively more peaceful and incremental manner. The start of this changeover can be seen in the public push for Mikhail Gorbachev to become president of the USSR, as well as in the election of March 1989 for the Congress of the

People's Deputies, in which the votes of the people produced some non-communist victories (Hosking, 2001). The people were beginning to take action on their longtime discontent by ousting those in government whose behaviors and policy decisions displeased them.

While the more radical communists in government were being driven out by the people, Mikhail Gorbachev rose to power. Gorbachev took a more moderate approach to governance. He was horrified by the rampant corruption in government uncovered by his program of *glasnost* (openness) (Hosking, 2001). The people of Russia became quite aware of the dangers of such corrupt, irresponsible, and incompetent officials when in April of 1986, the infamous explosion occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear facility. Gorbachev himself admitted that this terrible event brought much attention to some of the ills of the current system (Hosking, 2001). Gorbachev showed himself to be open to change, and the people of Russia took great advantage of this opportunity to affect such change. The time was ripe for another regime change.

Unlike previous leaders, who would not respond to public demands without the exertion of public violence, Gorbachev gave in to such demands surprisingly easily. During Gorbachev's terms as general secretary and president, media censorship is abolished, private enterprises and cooperatives once again become legal, the leading role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the constitution is abolished, Lithuania, Armenia, and Georgia secede from the USSR, the Ukrainian parliament declares sovereignty, and the Estonian parliament votes for gradual secession (Hosking, 2001).

Even Gorbachev underestimated the power that could be wielded by the people of Russia. As Gorbachev saw the Berlin Wall collapse, he encouraged the creation of a democracy in Germany in hopes of patching up relations with the West. He did not realize, though, the strength of the desires of the people of Russia to adopt aspects of democracy as well, particularly the power of the popular vote. The people began to question the rights of the weakened communist party to maintain any control over the system, given the gross abuses of power committed by the party. As has been argued before, albeit rarely, "the most threatening challenger to the Union [was] the Russian Republic itself" (Hosking, 2001, p. 586).

### ***The Era of the Russian Federation***

The people saw in Boris Yeltsin someone who would stand up to the corrupt elements of the system and fight for social justice (Hosking, 2001). It is for this reason that the people of Russia, by popular vote, elected Yeltsin to be the first president of Russia in June of 1991. By electing Yeltsin, the people of Russia in no uncertain terms have created the necessary impetus for the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Under Yeltsin, Ukraine, Belorussia, and Moldavia secede from the USSR (Hosking, 2001). The USSR is finally dissolved in December of 1991 after much public pressure and realization that communism has failed. Furthermore, the use of the popular election becomes common as the people continue to assert themselves. Pleased with the



change that has taken place during Yeltsin's first term, the people reelect him to serve a second term in June of 1996 (Hosking, 2001). This public satisfaction does not last, though.

In the late 1990s, public discontent toward Yeltsin grows. As Yeltsin's health declines, so does his ability to lead and represent the people. A major anti-Yeltsin protest occurs in Krasnoyarsk, making Yeltsin ever more aware of his waning support (Kranz, Matlock, Flynn, & Crock, 1998). Yeltsin's seven years of economic reform resulted in delayed wages and even more rampant corruption in the government (Kranz et al., 1998). After months of working for no pay, the people of Russia are making their desires known in a more vocal manner. A 1998 poll found that 80% of Russians wanted Yeltsin to resign before the end of his term (Kranz et al., 1998). The people of Russia are turning to the black market for income and are displeased about talk of rolling back some the democratic reforms that they have become so accustomed to. Threats are made of mass protests if conditions worsen or if the democratic freedoms that the people have fought for are lessened (Kranz, 1998).

Protests and discontent at this point, though, are not as severe as they had been in the past. The people of Russia do not want another revolution, but only a change in leadership in the government. This is clear in that the old Communist Party has no chance of returning to power. After 74 years in power, the Communist Party lost public support and has been unable to return to power since that loss of support. Without the support of the people of Russia, opposition parties cannot attain or return to power (Matloff, 1998). So, while the people are only protesting Yeltsin, this should not be interpreted as a sign of weakness, but a very conscious effort of the people to bring about a change in leadership.

At this point, it would be helpful to mention that the power of the Russian people is not always obvious or explicit. This is greatly because, after centuries of turmoil and the exchange of one bad regime for an even worse one, the mentality of the people is to support the "powers that be" (Matloff, 1998, p. 9). They can effect change when they choose to do so, but often would rather avoid change if at all possible because of their typically negative experiences with it. The main reason that Yeltsin did not feel the full brunt of the people's discontent, then, is because they were not yet desperate for radical change considering the risks involved (Matloff, 1998). Therefore, the power of the Russian people is most visible during and after regime changes because it is quite revolutionary in nature. In between such changes, however, the power of the people should not be overlooked. It can indeed still be detected in such events as protests and elections. It must also always be remembered that any current regime is surviving because the people of Russia allow it to by choice. As history has shown, the Russian people are more than capable of toppling regimes if they so choose.

As just recently mentioned, the people of Russia express their displeasure in times between regime changes in ways that provide for more incremental changes. As it turns out, their protests did indeed succeed in ousting Yeltsin from power in 1999 when he

resigns (Hosking, 2001). The incremental changes continue when the people of Russia elect Vladimir Putin as their new president in March of 2000.

Considering that history has taught the Russian people to have very little confidence in those who govern them, the relative popularity of Putin in the early years of his presidency is more than a little surprising (Hosking, 2001). Even more surprising is that Putin's popularity, although down from its early peak, remains quite high (*Economist*, 2005). As time passes, though, conditions again have failed to improve and the discontent of the Russian people has not subsided significantly. Health and life expectancies have declined (Hosking, 2001). The people do appreciate the success of some of the democratic institutions, though, which may go some length at explaining the relative lack of powerful protests from 2000 to 2004. In January of 2005, though, this tranquility of sorts abruptly ended when thousands of demonstrators across the country protested the abolition of numerous social benefits (Heuvel, 2005). These protests, described as "the largest, angriest, and most passionate since President Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000" (*Economist*, 2005; Heuvel, 2005, p. 4), were completely driven by the people and caused Putin to rethink this policy decision (*Economist*, 2005). On January 17, Putin publicly promised a moderate increase in pensions. Rather than taking the blame for the pension reductions, Putin blamed the policy difficulties on the poor implementation skills of the federal and regional officials involved (Heuvel, 2005). The people of Russia are not satisfied with such token concessions, though, and will continue to protest (*Economist*, 2005; Heuvel, 2005). The power of the Russian people, though, can already be seen in the changes in policy that they have created thus far.

This power can also be seen in the continued popularity of Putin. Putin represented to the people the opposite of Yeltsin, which is precisely what they desired in 2000, and what they continued to desire. This was expressed in Putin's reelection in recent years. Putin still faces numerous challenges, such as the ineffective state bureaucracy and the unresolved issues of Chechnya, and the people will surely hold him quite accountable. His success has been said to depend on the continued support of the Russian people (Pushkov, 2004). If the people of Russia had no power, as many tend to assume, why does the success of the leaders of Russia, such as Putin, depend on popular support? The power of the Russian people is very real and just as potent.

As was briefly mentioned in the preceding paragraph, Putin has received much public pressure regarding the war in Chechnya (Peterson, 2004). Part of this public pressure has come from public interest groups, such as Memorial, a Russian human rights group that has been active in observing and critiquing human rights practices in Chechnya (Weir, 2003). The growth of interest groups over the years demonstrates yet another way in which the people of Russia hold power over the government. As the people of Russia turn to more diplomatic or democratic means of influencing their government, the growth of civil society in Russia has been inspiring. Though the people still protest and strike in order to be heard, they are now also using interest groups more and more in an effort to change how the government forms and implements policy (*Social Sciences*, 2003). While the connection between the interest groups to the government may be stronger in Russia than in many Western countries, the groups

nonetheless provide an outlet for the Russian people to express their desires and demands (Hudson, 2003). It must also be remembered that Russia has had a vastly different political and historical past when compared to other, particularly Western, countries. Therefore, when analyzing the existence of interest groups in Russia today, perhaps the most accurate picture can be perceived by viewing them in contrast to the stark lack of interest groups in Russia's past, as opposed to comparing Russia's current situation to that of other countries (Hudson, 2003). When this is done, it can easily be argued that Russia has indeed come a long way in terms of the growth of its own civil society. Whereas overt formation of interest groups was prohibited in the past, it is now on its way to becoming commonplace. Furthermore, the interest groups allow the citizens of Russia to better and more easily organize, so that action may be taken sooner and in a more direct and effective manner (Hosking, 2001; Hudson, 2003). In earlier periods of Russian history, public protests were often disorganized, making it much more difficult to bring about change in a short amount of time (Hosking, 2001). Change was still achieved in past times, but by using interest groups to influence government, Russian citizens can organize faster and demand change sooner, often with less violence than in the past as well.

### *Conclusions and Further Discussion*

As can be seen very clearly in the body of this text, the people of Russia have not simply been along for the ride, so to speak. They have fought for and won great changes in the history of Russia. Indeed, public acts have brought about at least the last two regime changes and have transformed Russia from a tsarist state to a state on its way to democracy. Yet some persist in believing that the people of Russia are powerless to effect any form of change or to influence their government in any way. Why is this so popular a belief?

Many of today's scholars grew up in a period of history that had Russia set in the clutches of communism. The goal was for the central government to have complete control over every aspect of Russian life, public and private (Hosking, 2001; Obolonsky, 2003). The work, wages, schedule, diet, housing, and so on, of the people were to be regulated by the state in an effort to make it more productive and egalitarian. When viewing such a narrow snapshot of history, it does indeed appear that the government had near total control of the citizens.

A broader view of Russian history, as this essay has shown, provides a more accurate representation of the true power of the people of Russia. Communism indeed was an idea first developed not by the upper echelons of government and society, but instead by the poor Russian peasants as a form of communal living created in an effort to maintain order in their villages (Hosking, 2001). The only reason communism found success in Russia is because the people of the country toppled the tsarist regime in order to allow the new regime to ascend. Furthermore, the only reason the communist (Bolshevik) regime survived for so long is because the people of Russia allowed it to do so. When communism no longer held any promise for them, they once again demonstrated their great power and ousted communism (Hosking, 2001).

The current regime is still surviving because the people still see some promise in its future. They have taken a liking to the democratic freedoms that they have acquired and are ready to fight for more through their fledgling civil society (Hudson, 2003). Protests against health care reforms and the war in Chechnya continue to illustrate the fact that the Russian people will not sit quietly while the government conducts business that it finds to be unsatisfactory. The responses of the government to such protests demonstrate the fact that it realizes the potency of the power the people continue to hold.

This essay was written in the hopes that it would refute the old idea that the people of Russia are powerless in influencing their government and leaders. Given the many cases in history that have been outlined in this essay that clearly demonstrate the power of the Russian people, it would seem that its goal has indeed been met. The influence of the people can be seen as a steady force throughout Russia's history, from the Bloody Sunday massacre and its aftereffects, to the end of communism and the beginning of federalism.

There are some logical implications that follow on the coattails of this paper's conclusions. Russia has been a monumental player in the world's history, and given its own history as a country that survives and bounces back from hardships, it is more than likely that its influence will remain strong. It is a country with a rich history, and a clear and accurate understanding of that history will help us to better understand the country as it is today. Beyond the purely academic reasons for desiring such an understanding, there are also practical applications of such knowledge in relation to issues of foreign and economic policy. It is not unlikely that a lack of knowledge regarding the true power and influence of the Russian people may have led or may lead to grave misunderstandings between Russia and other countries, though a more in-depth analysis of this question is far beyond the scope of this paper.

There is a great deal of room for some fascinating future research in this area of study. For instance, it would be vastly interesting to compile and administer a survey of attitudes of the Russian people regarding their appropriate place in the system of government, how they feel they influence the path their country takes, and how much power they feel they hold in the system now in comparison to how much they have held in the past. Do they feel that they have any power or influence on the system? Do they feel that they deserve or have a right to such power? Would they prefer to have more or less power than they currently possess? Any researcher attempting this research, however, would have to always keep in mind any effects that aspects of Russian culture may have on the answers provided (Hosking, 2001).

It would perhaps be even more interesting to examine how those in positions of power in the government feel about the issue. Do they feel that the people do or should have power or influence over the government? It may be difficult to obtain honest opinions in this case, but the results would be intriguing. Russia, however, is a vast country with a very rich history and a fascinating culture that is worthy of study for an infinite number of reasons. Any attempts to better understand its history and people are worthwhile in their own right.

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