

Olga Petrov, peasant mother

January 22nd 1905

The real events of Bloody Sunday 1905

[1] January 22nd will hold a place in my memory for the rest of my days. The gunshots and screams still echo in my ear, the images of people I once knew falling to their death stains my memory just as their blood stains the snow; the tremble of fear still crawls down my spine. All we were asking for was a better quality of life, where the price of food and other goods were affordable and stable, and where we wouldn't have to worry about starvation or famine. We were only petitioning to guarantee that our future was secure and that our little Father still cared for us and this country! Instead we were given more death and violence! When will this stop? When will he listen to the pleas of his people instead of retaliating with more carnage? When will he stop acting a fool and take responsibility for his nation!

[2] I had first heard of the march through my son. He was 18 and was a mill worker in St Petersburg. He had been living and taking care of me since my husband died at the same mill. He came home a few days back, telling me of the talk he overheard at work; how some of the mill and other factory workers were organising a March lead by Father Georgi Gapon, to deliver a workers petition to the tsar! It was to ask for better working conditions; an increased wage and less hours as well as an end to Russo-Japan war. I was in full support of Father Gapon and his amendment; I believed too, my son and many other workers like him were being treated unfairly. I knew this needed to come to an end. My son proclaimed that it would be the end of our poverty that with our soldiers returned home the prices of food and resources would go down and the amount of poverty would lessen. It would assist the Tsar to take his mind off of warfare and help him resume nurturing his people and country.

[4] I awoke in the early hours of Sunday morning and I reached the newly formed crowd at dawn, there were only 400 gathered at that point and I was in clear view of Father Gapon. He spoke to us as we walked. He encouraged us to be brave but to be calm. He talked of the petition he wrote. How he was asking for shorter hours, larger pays, improvements in working conditions and an end to the Russo-Japan war. His confidence was radiating and I was sure our bill would pass. I was adamant that our tsar will show us mercy. He was a kind man despite his political incompetence. We walked for as long as I can remember, passing ramshackle houses, picking up more and more followers as we came closer to our destination. There had been no police interference and the crowd grew large like a snowball rolling down a hill, at the time I was unsure of the quantity of our march but from what I've heard there were as many as 200,000 people. 200,000 over worked and starved Russians walking peacefully towards the winter palace to beg our grace for mercy! What a sight.

[6] Once we neared the palace, I heard faint shouts and felt a decrease in pace. As we got closer the yelling became deep and strong; I assumed it was one of the soldiers guarding the palace, asking us of our business there. How wrong I was. The slight decline in pace that I felt before came to a complete halt, and I could hear the warnings more fluently now: "Move or we will shoot, move or we will shoot, move or we will shoot."

[7] I was still for only a moment when I was forced into the rear of the person in front of me. I tried to resist, tried to move out of the way, tried to warn them of the threats. But no one would listen. We kept progressing forward unwillingly. Until we heard the first shot. It was loud and sharp. It rang in my ear until the next one was fired, then the next and the next. The screams that followed were frightening; the cries were heart-breaking. I stood in fear as I saw the crowd in front of me fall to their deaths one at a time their bodies collapsing to the ground, and their blood staining the snow.

[6] Our peaceful partition had turned to a massacre! We came to propose a means of peace amongst ourselves, a settlement to the poverty we were facing. We came as gentle people with a proposition for our little father and in return we were wounded and killed. Women and children lying in pools of their own blood at the foot of our tsar's door, dead on his soldiers command!

What father does this to his children? Murdering them for requesting his mercy? He is no father of mine. I refuse to serve and love a merciless and hostile man! I was born a Russian, as was my mother and her mother before her. We have Russian blood coursing through our veins. This is our country! This is our home! I will not be a spectator as this fool tries to dictate this nation into destruction. It is time for our people to take back our country! January 22nd will not only be marked as a grim and awful day in our history but also as the beginning of its redemption lead by its people.