

CHAPTER
14

Section 1

PRIMARY SOURCE *from Bloody Sunday*
by Father Gapon

On January 22, 1905, a priest named Father Gapon led a peaceful march of about 200,000 workers and their families to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. The marchers wanted to ask Czar Nicholas II for better working conditions, more personal freedom, and an elected national legislature. As you read the following excerpt from Father Gapon's autobiography, think about what happened on Bloody Sunday.

We were not more than thirty yards from the soldiers, being separated from them only by the bridge over the Tarakanovskii Canal, which here marks the border of the city, when suddenly, without any warning and without a moment's delay, was heard the dry crack of many rifle-shots. I was informed later on that a bugle was blown, but we could not hear it above the singing, and even if we had heard it we should not have known what it meant.

Vasiliev, with whom I was walking hand in hand, suddenly left hold of my arm and sank upon the snow. One of the workmen who carried the banners fell also. Immediately one of the two police officers to whom I had referred shouted out, 'What are you doing? How dare you fire upon the portrait of the Tsar?' This, of course, had no effect, and both he and the other officer were shot down—as I learned afterwards, one was killed and the other dangerously wounded.

I turned rapidly to the crowd and shouted to them to lie down, and I also stretched myself out upon the ground. As we lay thus another volley was fired, and another, and yet another, till it seemed as though the shooting was continuous. The crowd first kneeled and then lay flat down, hiding their heads from the rain of bullets, while the rear rows of the procession began to run away. The smoke of the fire lay before us like a thin cloud, and I felt it stiflingly in my throat. . . . A little boy of ten years, who was carrying a church lantern, fell pierced by a bullet, but still held the lantern tightly and tried to rise again, when another shot struck him down. Both the smiths who had guarded me were killed, as well as all those who were carrying the icons and banners; and all these emblems now lay scattered on the snow. The soldiers were actually shooting into the courtyards of the adjoining houses, where the crowd tried to find refuge and, as I learned

afterwards, bullets even struck persons inside, through the windows.

At last the firing ceased. I stood up with a few others who remained uninjured and looked down at the bodies that lay prostrate around me. I cried to them, 'Stand up!' But they lay still. I could not at first understand. Why did they lie there? I looked again, and saw that their arms were stretched out lifelessly, and I saw the scarlet stain of blood upon the snow. Then I understood. It was horrible. And my Vasiliev lay dead at my feet.

Horror crept into my heart. The thought flashed through my mind, 'And this is the work of our Little Father, the Tsar.' Perhaps this anger saved me, for now I knew in very truth that a new chapter was opened in the book of the history of our people. I stood up, and a little group of workmen gathered round me again. Looking backward, I saw that our line, though still stretching away into the distance, was broken and that many of the people were fleeing. It was in vain that I called to them, and in a moment I stood there, the centre of a few scores of men, trembling with indignation amid the broken ruins of our movement.

from Father Gapon, The Story of My Life (1905). Reprinted in John Carey, ed., Eyewitness to History (New York: Avon, 1987), 417–418.

Discussion Questions

Recognizing Facts and Details

1. When did the soldiers start firing on the marchers?
2. According to this excerpt, who were among the victims of the shooting?
3. **Perceiving Cause and Effect** Why do you think many Russians were outraged by this massacre? Use information from this excerpt as well as your textbook to support your opinion.