NAME DATE CLASS

# Economics of History Activity

## World War I and the Russian Revolution

### Russia's Economy During World War I

*When World War I broke out, Russia was ill-equipped to participate effectively. Lacking sufficient weapons and competent military leaders, the Russian army was at a large disadvantage. Czar Nicholas II’s insistence on personally leading the armed forces left his wife, Alexandra, in charge on the home front. She relied on the advice of the mystic Rasputin to run the government. The series of economic and military blunders that followed led to widespread anger with the czarist regime*.

| Economics Terms to Know |
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| **inflation** an inordinate increase in prices  **rationing** a government policy regarding the planned and restrictive distribution of limited resources and consumer goods; it is usually practiced during times of national emergency, such as war or famine |

By 1917, after three years of war, most of the Russian people no longer had confidence in the czarist regime. Humiliating and costly military defeats had contributed to the unrest. Corruption and inefficiency in the government were rampant. Instead of supporting the czar, the opposition did all it could to undermine his authority, hoping to be in a position to take over once the war ended. One consequence of this infighting was problems with the food supplies.

Even though Russia produced more than enough food to feed its people, various factors such as economic mismanagement and a breakdown in transportation combined to lead to food shortages and price **inflation**. The winter of 1916–1917 was exceptionally severe, causing food and fuel deliveries to the major cities to decline. The capital, Petrograd (the name for St. Petersburg between 1914 and 1924), was hit especially hard by the shortages.

In February 1917, the government initiated **rationing** of the bread supply in Petrograd after the price had risen drastically. This was the last straw for the starving population. When riots broke out over the scarcity of food and 10,000 women took to the streets with their demands, they were joined by the very soldiers who had been ordered to fire upon them. It was clear that the people no longer supported the czarist regime, and one week later, Czar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate.

#### Applying Economics to History

**1. Explaining** What factors led to inflation in 1916 Russia?

**2. Drawing Conclusions** Why did rationing—a common practice during war and times of famine—of bread in February 1917 so enrage the Russian people?