Did Alexander II's reforms create more problems than they resolved? Discuss.

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Alexander II faced lots of challenges after he became the Czar of Russia, such as the problems of serfdom and the backwardness of the economic development. This affected the effectiveness of this ruling. He could no longer stay safe in his throne unless some reforms were carried out. The reforms covered a large range of areas: social and economics, political, judicial and also military. However, not all of them were successfully in coping with all the problems, but rather stirred up some new obstacles.

Social and economics difficulties were ones of the most concerned issues to Alexander II. While the peasants topped the population, they were under the tight control of the nobility with no freedoms at all. The serfdom turned into a problem as discontent grew day by day, threatening the Czar. Besides, as the whole Russia was largely not industrialized, economy could hardly be developed. The farming population attributed to the inadequate supply of labours, worsening the economics progress at the same time.

Apart from that, illiteracy and untouched advance western ideas had bad effect on the improvement of technology, which needed labours with knowledge. The censorship was tight also. At that time, education was still held tightly in Church's hands, making it influential throughout the nation. This harmed the ruling power of Czar.

Emancipation of serfs and loosing control over education and censorship were used to tackle the above difficulties. Serfs were freed from the landowners, whose right was stated clearly in laws. They became the free citizens, gaining one third of the land from the original landowners. This, to a certain degree, helped to solve the discontent of the poor peasants. And not much improvement could be observed in agriculture as “primitive farming method” was still adopted.

Also, a significant drop in illiteracy could be observed with 8 to 14%. The number of university students was doubled while the number of newspaper jumped from 6 to 156. Education was spread widely over the country. After 1863 universities were given much greater freedom, including the right to import scholarly texts of any kind from aboard. Scholarships were set up to support the best students and fact-finding missions aboard were encouraged. Censorship was relaxed. The new schools were under the control of the Ministry of Education rather than churches anymore, this further stabilized the Czar's rule.

But even though the reforms had done a great job in relieving the serfs’ stress from the landowners, it didn't mean a great improvement in their living standard. As long as the landlords held the most of the fertile lands, the serfs could hardly depend on their “good-quality” land to live on. Besides, they had nearly none economic freedom due to the enormous redemption payment to government for 49 years. They had limited geographical mobility as controlled by mir. In a word, they still had little freedoms and rights.
Apart from that, the spread of education encouraged the radical ideas to take place in Russia, like “Intelligentsia”, leading to further agitation and deteriorating the Czar’s rule. The terror's attacks also became more frequent by the newly imported ideas from west. At last, Alexander was even assassinated which greatly disrupted the progress of the reforms.

Politically, comparing with the western countries at that time, you will easily find out that Russia was an autocratic state rather than democratic, ruled by Czar. He appointed every minister in Russia. Even the so-called “the committee of Ministers” was set up to co-ordinate the policy”, it was not in practice actually and totally. People barely had any say in the policy-making or making opinions of the current situation as the government was not represented and the inefficient government posts.

By introducing reform in local administration – the founding of Zemstvos, the efficiency of the government was tremendously increased. The Zemstvos also made progress in the education in the local districts. The government posts were opened to different people, including peasants as they could be elected into the Zemstvos to discuss the local affairs, making the government be more efficient.

Although the local administration was improved, still the main problem- autocracy could not be encroached by the zemstvos and municipal councils. The zemstvos was not as opened as it claimed, but rather noble- dominated as mostly the nobility was elected to the provincial assemblies. Political right was held in these influenced people’s hands. It had still a long way from liberty and democracy. Besides, zemstvos was lacking of executive power as it had no control over police and received orders from the governor. Adding not as many peasants were interested in the district councils as the nobles dominated, the progress in the politics was quite little. Also the demands for rights and political consciousness increased rapidly, affecting the autocratic ruling.

Judicially, nearly all the court cases were judged secretly, without opened to the people. Judges would be easily on noble’s side as the money they received. They may also accept the will of Czar as the court was under his control. Serfs nearly had no say at all.

But things changed. Legal reforms were carried out like introducing the concept of judiciary independent of the government. The judges were asked to have professional qualifications and were paid a substantial salary to avoid corruption. It was also difficult to remove them once they were appointed. This far and independent legal system made the Government could hardly interfere with the decisions of the courts, making them be more trust-worthy. Courts were opened to the public, at the same time, the jury system was also implemented to make the judging be more objective, avoiding wrong decisions. There was even the set up of Justices of the Peace, appointed by Zemstvo, to deal with minor disputes. As the Zemstvo comprised the peasants, they also could have their voice out. It also had positive effect in enhancing the image of the government at the same time.
But unfortunately, not all problems were eliminated yet. For example, the police had unlimited power to detain anyone, say, the political opponents considered to be a threat to the state. This means they could arrest anybody without the judging of courts. This violated the law of equality stated in the reforms. Also, as two separate courts were set up to deal with the minor and serious cases. For the serious ones, all judges were trained jurists nominated by Czar. That implied the new “fair” system was not totally extended to all peasants. Furthermore, the government found itself embarrassed by the jury system which frequently returned verdicts at odds with the “official” position, destroying the government’s authority and its ruling.

Militarily, Russia was large in its land but not strong in its military power. The failure of the Crimean War revealed the shortcomings of the Russian army such as the old-dated arms while the educational level of the soldiers was quite low. Huge amount of money was spent on the army on the colonies, adding financial burden to the fragile economy of Russia. The image of the military was quite low since joining the army was seen as the punishment by the government. The selection of army was largely depended on their social status, destroying the peasants and serfs’ dreams.

By introducing reforms into military area, Conscription was made compulsory to all males over twenty and to every class for about 15 years, ensuring the supply of soldiers. The new-updated weapons replaced the old ones used in the Crimean War. The military colonies were reduced too in order to cut down the tremendous expenditure. The providing of basic education among troops helped to enhance their own fighting power. The abolishing of using military service as a form of civil punishment was greatly improved the image of the military. The victory in the Russo-Turkish War could prove its success. The army officers were selected by their own abilities and merit, establishing an objective selection rule for all people, including peasants and serfs, helping to initiate a trend towards greater social equality.

But it did not bring no harms at all. As the military power was increased significantly, Russia began to anticipate in the international politics much more frequently such as Russo-Turkish War in 1876 and the confrontation to Austria by supporting Serbia in the Balkan. The following war- Russo-Japanese War was powerful in proving the failure of the reforms, triggering the 1905 Revolution and paving the way for the ending of the Czar’s ruling.

To conclude, Alexander II's had tried hard in solving the problems of Russia by introducing reforms to different aspects like political and social. However, the reforms could only solve some or some parts of the questions only, but not the whole, he even had to pay the cost of his life for this at last.