The overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II was not caused solely by one factor, rather a series of underlying causes were responsible for his abdication in March 1917. In this question four underlying causes will be examined. They are the role of the monk Rasputin, the impact of World War One, the autocratic nature of the Tsar’s rule, and the plight of peasants and factory workers.

There was much discontent in Russia during the reign of Nicholas II. One of the causes of this discontent was the mistrust and suspicion surrounding the role of the monk Rasputin in influencing the decision making of the Russian royal family. Rasputin became a trusted member of the royal family due to his perceived ability to help the heir to the throne recover from episodes of hemophilia. However the general public distrusted Rasputin and believed him to be a fake. In Source 1 we can see that the cartoonist is illustrating the popular perception that it was Rasputin that was controlling the Royal family and making decisions that impacted the nation, often in a negative way.

In Source 2 we are provided with a slogan that was popular in Russia at the beginning of 1917 and that illustrates the desire by the citizens of Russia to remove the Tsar, to end the war and to have enough food to eat. These feelings were brought on by the brutality of WW I and the hardships it brought to the soldiers and citizens of Russia. Russia was ill prepared for war militarily and as a result its position on the Eastern Front was dire. Inflation had increased by 400% since 1914 due to shortages in supply and high demand, and this was particularly true for food and raw materials. The blame for these condition was put squarely on the shoulders of the Tsar who was at the front unsuccessfully leading his army and who had left decision making in the hands of his German wife and her advisor Rasputin, both of whom the Russian people didn’t trust. This explains the reasons for the slogan that was asking for an end to the war, a desire for food, and the removal of their perceived author, Nicholas II.

Another reason for discontent in Russia was the autocratic nature of the Tsar’s rule. While many countries in the world were transitioning to forms of government that were more democratic in nature, Russia was stuck in the past with a Tsar or King who ruled by divine right (placed on the throne by God) and did not allow voting or elections by its citizens. Of course Russians were aware of the changes taking place in the world and many citizens desired democratic change in Russia as well. The Tsar resisted any such change as an infringement on his power and authority. While Nicholas II did allow the formation of a Duma (parliament) in 1906 after the trouble caused by the revolution of 1905, it never was able to make decisions without the Tsar approval until he abdicated in 1917.

Finally, peasants and factory workers had a very difficult existence in pre-revolutionary Russia. Peasants had been freed from their landowners in 1861 but their freedom was never followed by land reform. Essentially they did not own their own land but rather had to rent it from the landowners and most were never able to escape the cycle of poverty and hardship that defined their existence. As the war progressed many peasants called for land expropriation from wealthy landowners. Factory workers in Russia faced many problems and difficulties associated with working conditions, the length of the work day, wages and living conditions. These problems were made worse during the First World War as inflation and shortages led many factory workers to form Soviets or workers councils to protest and bring about reforms. It was the factory workers of Petrograd that took to the streets in the winter of 1917 which ultimately led to the March Revolution and the Tsar’s abdication.

To conclude, one can see that there was not one sole cause the led to the revolution of 1917, but rather a series of underlying issues that came to a head in early 1917.