

## **SOCIALISM IN EUROPE & RUSSIAN REVOLUTION**

### **RUSSIAN REVOLUTION**

In Russia the government headed by Tsar Nicholas II was very oppressive. The common people began to hate him. Popular discontentment rose to a new height when Russia was defeated a large number of secret revolutionary parties sprang up. In March 1917, the Tsar was forced to abdicate and a provisional government of moderate social revolutionaries was formed. On November 7, 1917, the Bolsheviks under Lenin brought the downfall of the Menshevik government and established a soviet Republic.

### **THE AGE OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

The French Revolution opened up the possibility of creating a dramatic change in the way in which society was structured. Before the eighteenth century society was broadly divided into estates and orders and it was the aristocracy and church which controlled economic and social power. Suddenly after the revolution, it seemed possible to change this. In many parts of the world including Europe and Asia, new ideas about individual rights and who controlled social power began to be discussed. The development in the colonies, in turn, reshaped these ideas of social change.

Not everyone in Europe, however, wanted a complete transformation of society. Responses varied from those who accepted that some change was necessary but wished for a gradual shift, to those who wanted to restructure Society radically. Some were 'conservatives', others were 'liberals' or 'radicals'.

#### **(a) Liberals, Radicals and Conservatives:**

- (i) Liberals looked to change Society, they wanted a nation which tolerated all religions. They opposed the uncontrolled power of dynastic rulers. They wanted to safeguard the rights of Individuals against governments. They argued for a representative, elected parliamentary government, subject to laws interpreted by a welltrained judiciary that was independent of rules and officials. They did not believe in Universal Adult Franchise, felt man of property mainly should have the vote, also did not want the vote for woman.
- (ii) Radicals wanted a nation in which government was based on the majority of the country's population. They supported women's suffragette movements, They opposed the privileges of great landowners and wealthy factory owners. They were not against the existence of private property but disliked concentration of property in the hands of a few.
- (iii) Conservative opposed to radicals and liberals. After the French revolution, however, even conservatives had opened their minds to the need for change. In the eighteenth century, conservatives had been generally opposed to the idea of change. By the nineteenth century, they accepted that some change was inevitable but believed that the past had to be respected and change had to be brought about through a slow process.

#### **(b) Industrial Society and Social Change:**

- (i) New cities came up and new industrialized regions developed, railways expanded and the Industrial Revolution occurred.
- (ii) Working hours were often long, wages were poor, unemployment was common, and problems of housing and sanitation were growing rapidly. Liberals and radicals searched for solutions to these issues.
- (iii) Liberals and radicals who themselves were often property owners and employers firmly believed in the values of individual effort, labour and enterprise. If freedom of individuals was ensured, if the poor could labour, and those with capital could operate without restraint, they believed that societies would develop.
- (iv) Some nationalists, liberals and radicals wanted revolutions to put an end to the kind of governments established in Europe in 1815. Nationalists talked of revolutions that would create 'nations' where all citizens would have equal rights. After 1815, Giuseppe Mazzini, an Italian nationalist, conspired with others to achieve this in Italy.

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### **(c) The Coming of Socialism to Europe:**

- (i) By the mid-nineteenth century in Europe" socialism was a well known body of ideas that attracted widespread attention.
- (ii) Socialists were against private property, and saw it as the root of all social evils of the time. Rather than single individuals controlling property, they wanted that more attention would be paid to collective social interests.
- (iii) Socialists had different visions of the future : Robert Owen (1771-1858) a leading English manufacturer, sought to build a cooperative community called New Harmony in Indiana (USA). Other socialists, for instance, Louis Blanc (1813-1882) wanted the government to encourage cooperatives and replace capitalist enterprises. These cooperatives were to be associations of people who produced goods together and divided the profits according to the work done by members. Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) added other ideas to this body of arguments.

### **(d) Support for Socialism:**

By the 1870's socialist ideas spread through Europe. An international body was formed namely the Second International. Workers in England and Germany began forming associations to fight for better living and working conditions, set up funds to help members in times of distress and demanded a reduction of working hours and the right to vote. In Germany, Social Democratic Party won Parliamentary seats. By 1905, socialists and trade unionists formed a Labour Party in Britain and a Socialist Party in France. Their ideas did shape legislations, but governments continued to be run by conservatives, liberals and radicals.

## **THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION**

**(a) The Russian Empire in 1914:** In 1914, Tsar Nicholas II ruled Russia and its empire. Besides the territory around Moscow, the Russian empire included current-day Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, parts of Poland, Ukraine and Belarus. It stretched to the Pacific and comprised today's Central Asian states, as well as Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The majority religion was Russian Orthodox Christianity- which had grown out of the Greek Orthodox Church - but the empire also included Catholics, Protestants, Muslims and Buddhists.

### **(b) Economic and Social conditions of Russia before the revolution:**

- (i) Peasants and workers formed most of the Czarist Russia's population including the Non-Russian nationalities. their condition was miserable.
- (ii) Russia was industrially a backward country. The condition of the workers was bad. They were forced to work for long hours on low wages.
- (iii) Both the workers and peasants had no meaningful place in the society. They had no political rights. In, contrast the nobility at the top enjoyed all the privileges in the state.
- (iv) Corruption was widespread at all levels. The condition of the soldiers was also not satisfactory.

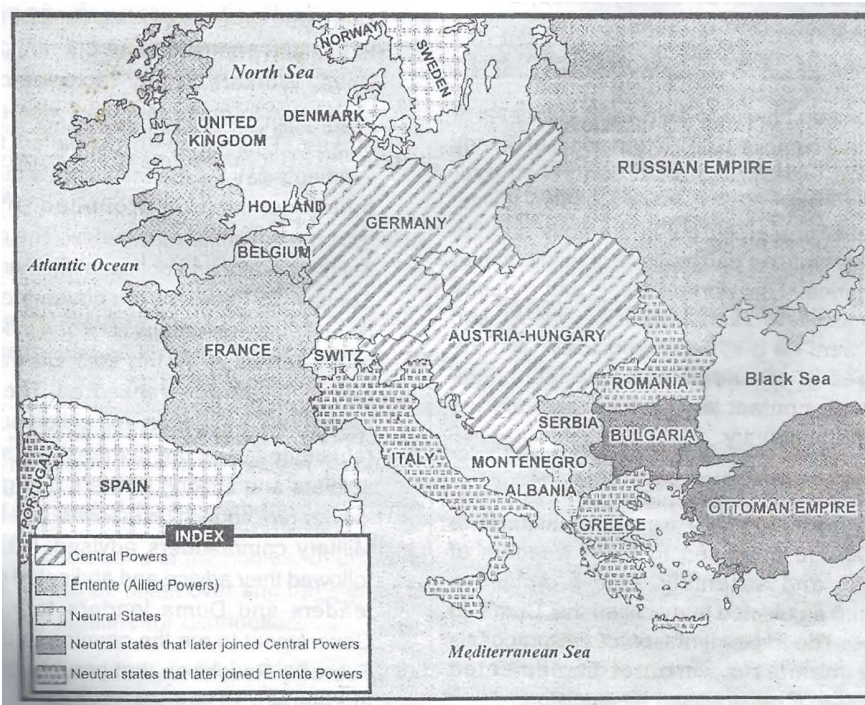
#### **Political Conditions:**

- (i) The Russian Czars continued to enjoy unlimited powers and were cruel and irresponsible as before. They never cared for the welfare of their people.
- (ii) Czar Nicholas II still believed in the old "Divine Right of Kings".
- (iii) People were taxed heavily to maintain armed forces. Only the nobility supported the Czar as all important positions in the state were occupied by it.
- (iv) All high officials were recruited from the upper classes only. They were corrupt and inefficient.
- (v) The Royal family was also corrupt and immoral.
- (vi) The Russian Czars had built a vast empire by conquering diverse nationalities in Asia and Europe. The Czars forced the people there to adopt the Russian language and culture.
- (vii) The Czar's policy of expansion also brought them in conflict or wars with other major imperialist powers.

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### Two classes of the Russian Society:

- (i) The king, the nobles and the clergy were at the top. This privileged class consisted of just ten percent of the total population. Enjoyed all the benefits and occupied all important jobs or posts.
- (ii) The serfs (farmers) who stood at the bottom formed about ninety percent of the Russian population. They led a miserable life. Had to pay heavily for years to own the small holdings they had got.



- (c) **Socialism in Russia:** George Plekhanov a follower of Karl Marx formed the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1883, Many other socialist groups later joined this organization and were known as the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1898. However the party soon split into two groups over questions of organization and policy, They were known as the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. Differences between these two groups were as follows:

- (i) The minority group, led by Plekhanov, was known as the Mensheviks They wanted to bring changes through peaceful and constitutional means, favored the parliamentary system of government.
- (ii) The majority group consisted of extreme socialists who were called the Bolsheviks. Lenin was their leader.

- (d) **A Turbulent time: The 1905 Revolution:**

Tsar was not subject to parliament. Liberals, Social Democrats and socialist Revolutionaries worked with peasants and workers during the Revolution of 1905 to demand a constitution. They were supported by nationalists and in Muslim -dominated areas by Judaists .Prices of essential goods rose, 110,000 workers in St. Petersburg went on strike demanding a reduction in the working day to eight hours, an increase in wages and improvement in working conditions.

#### **Bloody Sunday:**

On January 9, 1905 a body of peaceful workers led by Father Gapon, with their wives and children was fired at in St Petersburg. They were on their way to present a petition to the Czar there. Over a thousand of them were killed and many more wounded in the firing. This day came to be known as 'Bloody Sunday' as the massacre had taken place on Sunday.

#### **A Dress Rehearsal:**

The 1905 revolution proved to be a dress rehearsal of the revolution that came in 1917. The incident of Bloody Sunday caused widespread disturbances all over Russia. Strikes took place in many Russian towns. Mutinies or rebellions broke out in the navy and the army. The sailors of the battleship 'Potemkin' joined the revolutionaries. The work in trade and industry came to a standstill. Workers in factories, docks and railways also went on a strike. The soldiers and the representatives of the non-Russian nationalities came into close contact with the revolutionaries (Bolsheviks) in the country.

### **The Czar's Manifesto:**

Forced by the revolution Czar issued a manifesto in October, 1905. He promised to grant freedom of speech, press and assembly, Also promised a Constitution and an elected body called the 'Duma' to make the laws. The implementation of the proposals given in the manifesto were not implemented effectively and the Czar reversed his decision.

### **Formation of Soviets:**

The 1905 revolution gave birth to a new form of organization, called the 'Soviet'. It was the council of worker's representatives to conduct strikes, but soon it became the instruments of political power. Soviets play a decisive role, particularly in the 1917 October Revolution.

The Tsar dismissed the first Duma within 75 days and the re-elected second Duma within three months. He changed the voting laws and packed the third Duma with conservative politicians, Liberals and revolutionaries were kept out.

- (e) **The First World War and the Russian Empire:** In Russia, the war was initially popular and people rallied around Tsar Nicholas II. Later Tsar refused to consult the main parties in the Duma. The common people's support also declined. The Tsarina Alexandra's German origins and poor advisors especially a monk called Rasputin, made the autocracy unpopular. Though Russia gained initial success in the war but later lost badly in Germany and Austria between 1914 and 1916. The situation discredited the government and the Tsar. Soldiers did not wish to fight such a war. Industries suffered a setback, Railway lines began to break down. As most of the men were fighting on the front, there were labour shortages. Large supplies of grain were sent to feed the army. By the winter of 1916, riots and bread shops were common.

## **THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION IN PETROGRAD**

In the winter of 1917, conditions in the capital Petrograd were grim in food shortages. On 22 February, a lockout took place at a factory on the right bank of the River Neva. Workers in fifty factories called a strike in sympathy. In many factories, women led the way to strikes. This came to be called the international Women's day. As the fashionable quarters and official buildings were surrounded by workers, the government imposed a curfew. The government called out the cavalry and police to keep an eye on them. On Sunday, 25 February, the government suspended the Duma. Demonstrations returned in force to the streets of the left bank on the 26<sup>th</sup>. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, the Police Headquarters were ransacked. The government tried to control the situation and called out the cavalry, who refused to fire on the demonstrators. By that evening, soldiers and striking workers had gathered to form a 'soviet' or 'council'. This was the Petrograd Soviet. Military commanders advised Tsar to abdicate. He followed their advice and abdicated on 2 March. Soviet leaders and Duma leaders formed a Provisional Government to run the country. Petrograd had led the February Revolution that brought down the monarchy in February 1917.

(a) **After February:**

Through the summer the workers' movement spread in industrial areas, factory committees were formed which began questioning the way industrialists ran, their factories. Trade unions grew in number. Soldiers committees were formed in the army. In June, about 500 Soviets sent representatives to an All Russian Congress of Soviets. As the Provisional Government saw its power reduce and Bolshevik influence grew, it decided to take stern measures against the spreading discontent. It resisted attempts by workers to run factories and began arresting leaders. Popular demonstrations staged by the Bolsheviks in July 1917 were sternly repressed. Many Bolshevik leaders had to go into hiding or flee. Meanwhile in the countryside, peasants and their Socialist revolutionary leaders pressed for a redistribution of land. Land committees were formed to handle this. Encouraged by the Socialist Revolutionaries, peasants seized land between July and September 1917.

### **Contribution of Lenin in the Russian Revolution:**

Vladimir Ilyanov popularly known as Lenin is regarded as one of the socialist revolutionists after Marx and Engels. His name has become inseparable from the revolution of 1917.

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- (i) He organised the Bolshevik party as an instrument for bringing about revolution.
- (ii) He set forth 'the fundamental laws for a successful revolution'.
- (iii) Under Lenin's leadership Bolshevik party put forward clear policies to end the war and transfer land to the peasants and advance the slogan "All power to the soviets".
- (iv) Lenin proclaimed the right of all peoples including those under the Russian empire, to self determination.
- (v) Under the able leadership of Lenin Russia and other soviets were united into USSR and it emerged as a super power.

### **Lenin's "Fundamental Law for a successful revolution":**

- (i) The people should fully understand that revolution is necessary and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it.
- (ii) Existing government should be in a state of crisis to make it possible for it to be overthrown rapidly.

### **The four fold demand of the Russian Revolutionaries**

- (i) Land to the tiller. Land of the nobles, Church and the Czar was to be taken over and transferred to the peasant families for distribution.
- (ii) Control of industry was to be handed over to the workers or workers soviets.
- (iii) Peace for all, in particular to soldiers who were suffering heavy losses on the front.
- (iv) Equal status was to be granted to all non-Russian nationalities living in the Russian territories.

### **(b) The Revolution of October 1917:**

Lenin feared the Provisional government would set up a dictatorship. He began discussions for an uprising against the government. On 16 October 1917, Lenin persuaded the Petrograd Soviet and the Bolshevik Party to agree to a socialist seizure of power. A Military Revolutionary Committee was appointed by the Soviet leader Leon Trotsky to organize the seizure. The uprising began on 24 October. Military men loyal to the government seized the buildings of two Bolshevik newspapers. Military Revolutionary Committee ordered its supporters to seize government offices and arrest ministers. The ship Aurora shelled the Winter Palace. The city was taken under control committee's control and the ministers surrendered. At a meeting of the All Russian Congress of Soviets in Petrograd, the majority approved the Bolshevik action. Uprising took place in other cities.

## **WHAT CHANGED AFTER OCTOBER?**

Congress of the soviets met on the day after the October Revolution and issued a proclamation.

- (i) It appealed all peoples and states participating in the war to open negotiations for a just peace. It opposed annexation and paying for war damages.
- (ii) Russia withdrew from the war. Signed a peace treaty with Germany, it surrendered all its territories which it had acquired since the time of Peter the Great.
- (iii) As a result of the decree on land, the estates of the Czar, the Church and the landlords were taken over and transferred to the soviets of the peasants.
- (iv) The control of industries was passed over to shop committees or soviets of workers.
- (v) Banks/insurance companies, large industries, mines, water transport and railways were nationalized by 1918.
- (vi) The new government disowned the foreign debts. It also took possession of foreign investments without payment.
- (vii) A declaration of the 'Rights of People' was also issued. It gave the right of self-determination to all non-Russian nationalities living within Russian territories.
- (viii) The new revolutionary government that came into being was called the Council of People's Commissars. It was headed by Lenin. Its first act marked the beginning of the era of socialism in Russia. It later spread to many other countries.



## **SOCIALISM IN EUROPE & RUSSIAN REVOLUTION**

### **(a) Civil War (1917-20):**

- (i) The autocratic rule of the Czar had ended, but the forces opposing the Russian Revolution had not been completely destroyed. The officers of the fallen Czar's army organized an armed revolt against the new government. The nobility, landlords and the Church also supported them in their efforts to capture power once again.
- (ii) The imperialist forces of the Western powers were determined to overthrow or destroy the world's first socialist government.
- (iii) These countries supported the counter revolutionary forces and even sent their troops to join them.
- (iv) The three year old civil war ended in 1920 with the defeat of the counter-revolutionary forces at the hands of the Red Army of the new state. This army mainly consisted of peasants and workers and was badly equipped. But it succeeded in defeating the far better trained foreign troops.

### **(b) Making a Socialist Society:**

Bolsheviks kept industries and banks nationalised, permitted peasants to cultivate the land that had been socialised. A process of centralised planning was introduced. Centralized planning led to economic growth. However, rapid construction led to poor working conditions. An extended schooling system developed, and arrangements were made for factory workers and peasants to enter universities. Cheap public health care were provided, Model living quarters were set up for workers.

### **(c) Stalinism and Collectivisation:**

By 1927-28, the towns in Soviet Russia were facing an acute problem of grain supplies, Stalin believed that the rich persons and traders in the countryside were holding stocks in the hope of higher prices. Raids were made on 'Kulaks' -the name for well-to-do peasants. As shortages continued the decision was taken to collectivise farms. From 1929 the party forced all peasants to cultivate in collective farms (kolkhoz). The bulk of land and implements were transferred to the ownership of collective farms. Those who resisted collectivisation were severely punished. Many inside the party criticised the confusion in Industrial production under the Planned Economy and the consequences of collectivisation, but were charged with conspiracy against socialism. A large number were forced to make false confessions under torture and were executed several among them were talented professionals.

### **(d) Consequences of the Russian Revolution on Russia:**

The immediate consequences of the Revolution were as follows:

- (i) The autocratic rule of the Czar ended for ever. The revolution destroyed the power of both aristocracy and the church.
- (ii) Russia became the world's first socialist society. The Czarist Empire changed into a new state called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or the Soviet Union.
- (iii) It withdrew from the First World War.
- (iv) The new government signed a peace treaty with Germany. It conceded the territories demanded by its old enemy as a price for peace.
- (v) In order to establish peace, law and order in the new society. Lenin was forced to adopt some drastic measures. These steps were taken under a policy called 'War Communism'.
- (vi) It was during this period (1917-20) that a large scale nationalisation of various enterprises, as described under the proclamation of the Congress of Soviets, took place.

## **THE GLOBAL INFLUENCE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND THE USSR**

The possibility of a worker's state, fired people's imagination across the world. In many countries. Communist parties were formed-like the Communist Party of Great Britain. The Bolsheviks encouraged colonial peoples to follow their experiment. Many non Russians from outside the USSR participated in the conference of the peoples of the East (1920) and the Bolsheviks-founded Comintern (an international union of pro-Bolshevik socialist parties). Some received education in the USSR's Communist University of the Workers of the East. By the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, the USSR had given socialism a global face and world stature. The Bolshevik Revolution contributed greatly to the liquidation of imperialism. The Bolshevik government granted freedom to all its colonies immediately after coming to power. The new Soviet Union came forward as a friend of the subjugated people and proved to be a source of great inspiration to the freedom movements of various Asian and African countries.