

Socialism in Europe and the Russian Revolution

The Age of Social Change

The French Revolution opened up the possibility of creating a new social structure. Before the eighteenth century, society was broadly divided into estates and orders. It was the aristocracy and church who controlled economic and social power.

In India, Raja Rammohan Roy and Derozio pointed out the significance of the French Revolution and many others discussed the ideas of post-revolutionary Europe.

After the French Revolution, new ideas about 'individual rights' and 'societal changes' began to be discussed in Europe and Asia. There were groups who wanted to change society according to their thoughts and visions. Liberals, Radicals and Conservatives were the three main groups that emerged during this period.

Liberals, Radicals and Conservatives

Liberals

- They suggested to change the society and supported the idea based on 'Tolerance of all Religions'.
- They opposed the uncontrolled powers of dynastic rulers.
- They wanted to safeguard the rights of individuals against governments.
- They supported a representative, elected parliamentary government and an independent judiciary.
- Liberals were not democrats as they did not favour Universal Adult franchise (Right to Vote) and they favoured voting rights only for men and not for women.

Chapter Syllabus

- The Age of Social Change
- The Russian Revolution
- The February Revolution in Petrograd
- Changes After October
- Global Influence of Russian Revolution and the USSR

Radicals

- They supported the Government based on majority or minority's population.
- They opposed the privileges given to great landowners and wealthy factory owners.
- Many of them also supported women's suffragette movements.
- They supported private property but disliked concentration of property in the hands of few.

Conservatives

- They opposed the views of Radicals and Liberals.
- Earlier they opposed the idea of change but by the 19th century, they accepted some changes.
- They asserted that past must be respected.
- They wanted change but at a slow pace.

Industrial Society and Social Change

During the Industrial Revolution, many changes came in the society and economy.

Some of them are discussed below:

- New cities, new industrial regions and new railway lines were developed.
- Men, women and children worked in factories.
- Working hours were often long and wages were poor.
- Unemployment was common due to low demand for industrial goods.
- Housing and sanitation were problems since towns were growing rapidly.

Liberals and Radicals searched for solutions to these issues. Many of the factory owners were Liberals and Radicals. Both Liberals and Radicals felt that worker's efforts must be encouraged. They also held that its benefits would be achieved if the working class in the economy is healthy and citizens were educated.

Many working women and men who wanted changes in the world called around liberal and radical groups in the early nineteenth century.

Some Nationalists, Liberals and Radicals wanted revolutions to put an end to the kind of governments established in Europe in 1815. They worked to overthrow existing monarchs in France, Italy, Germany and Russia. Nationalists emphasised on revolutions that would create 'nations' where all citizens would have equal rights.

1 Suffragette movements: Movements for giving women the right to vote.

After 1815, Giuseppe Mazzini an Italian nationalist conspirator with others to achieve this in Italy.

The Coming of Socialism to Europe

By the mid of 19th century in Europe, Socialism was a well-known body of ideas that attracted widespread attention. Socialists were against the idea of 'private property' but had differing ideas on how a society without property could operate.

Some of the names of socialists are as follows:

- **Robert Owen (1771-1850)** He believed in setting up of a cooperative community called New Harmony in Indiana (USA).
- **Louis Blanc (1813-1882)** He was a French socialist who wanted the government to encourage cooperatives and replace capitalist enterprises. These cooperatives were associations of people who produced goods together and divided the profits according to the work done by members.
- **Karl Marx (1818-1883)** He believed that the industrial society was capitalist and the profits of capitalists was produced by workers. The conditions of workers could not improve till the profits was accumulated by private capitalists. He believed that to remove capitalism, workers had to construct a radically socialist society in which all property would be socially controlled. This gave birth to the idea of communist society.
- **Friedrich Engels (1820-1895)** He suggested that workers have to remove capitalism and the rule of private property.

Support for Socialism

The spread of socialist ideas through Europe led to the formation of an international body i.e. the Second International. The Associations of workers like Social Democratic Party and Labour Party began to be formed in England and Germany.

They were formed because:

- To improve the working and living conditions of workers.
- They set up funds to help member workers in difficult times.
- They demanded reduction of working hours and the right to vote.

By 1905, socialists and trade unionist formed a Labour Party in Britain and a Socialist Party in France.

However, till 1914, socialism did not succeed in forming a government in Europe. Socialists were represented by strong figures in Parliamentary politics, but governments continued to be run by conservatives, liberals and radicals.

Check Point 01

1. Who were the liberals?
2. Name the promoters of individual rights.
3. Name the first countries that overthrew the existing monarchies.
4. Who was Robert Owen?
5. In 1905, Labour Party was formed in _____ and Socialist Party in _____.

The Russian Revolution

The decline of monarchy in February 1917 and the events of October are generally known as Russian Revolution. Socialism took over the government in Russia through the October Revolution of 1917.

The Russian Empire in 1914

In 1914, Tsar² Nicholas II ruled Russia and its empire. The Russian Empire included territory around Moscow, present day Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, parts of Poland, Ukraine and Belarus.

The empire 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 along with Catholics, Protestants, Muslims and Buddhists.

Economy and Society

- At the beginning of the 20th Century, about 85 per cent of the Russian empire's population earned their living from agriculture. The percentage of agriculturalists in Russia was higher than most European countries.
- Russia was a major exporter of grain in the Empire; cultivators produced for the market as well as for their own needs.
- Industries were very few in number. Prominent industrial areas were St Petersburg and Moscow.
- Many factories were set up in the 1890's. Russian rail network was extended and foreign investment in industries also increased. As a result, coal production was doubled while iron and steel output increased four times.

- Most of the industries were privately owned. Large factories were supervised under the Government that ensure minimum wages and limited hours of work.
- Factory rules were broken in craft units and small workshops as the working hours exceeds in 15 hours, compared with 10 or 12 hours in factories.
- Workers were divided on the basis of 'skill' as a social group. For example, metal workers were considered as aristocrats because they were more trained and skilled.
- Women made up about 35 per cent of the factory labour force by 1914, but they were paid less than men.
- Despite of divisions, workers were united when they disagreed with employers about dismissals or work conditions.
- In the countryside, peasants were another social group who cultivated land owned by nobility, crown and orthodox church. They were divided on religious basis but united against the nobles.
- Nobles got their power and position through their service to the Tsar, not through local popularity.
- Peasant community was called 'commune' (mir).
- In France, during French Revolution in Brittany, peasants respected nobles and fought for them. In Russia, peasants wanted the land of the nobles to be given to them. They refused to pay rent and even murdered landlords. In 1902, such events occurred in a large scale in South Russia, but later in 1905 such incidents spread all over Russia.
- Russian Peasants were different from other European Peasants as they accumulated their land together and later divided it on the basis of needs of individual families.

Socialism in Russia

All political parties were illegal in Russia before 1914. The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party was founded in 1898 by socialists who respected Marx's ideas. Due to government policies, the party was operated secretly as an illegal organisation. It started its own newspaper, mobilised workers and organised strikes.

Some Russian socialists felt that the Russian peasant custom of dividing land periodically made them natural socialists. Therefore, peasants rather than workers would be the main force of the revolution.

Socialists in the countryside formed the Socialist Revolutionary Party in 1900. This party struggled for peasant's rights and demanded that land belonging to nobles would be transferred to peasants.

2 Tsar: The title of the Emperor of Russia.

Social Democrats disagreed with socialist revolutionaries about peasants. Lenin felt that peasants were not one united group due to financial differences. Due to these differences they could not be a part of socialist movements.

The Social Democratic Party was later divided into two wings, the *Bolsheviks* and the *Mensheviks*.

Vladimir Lenin led the Bolshevik group as he wanted disciplined party with quality members. On the other hand, Mensheviks wanted party to be opened to all in the country.

The 1905 Revolution

In the beginning of 20th century, Russia was still an autocracy and the Tsar was not responsible to the Parliament.

During the revolution of 1905, Liberals wanted to end the rule of Tsar. They joined hands with social democrats and socialist revolutionaries worked with peasants and workers to demand a Constitution.

They were supported in the Russian empire by nationalists (e.g. in Poland) and in Muslim-dominated areas by *judiths*, who wanted modernised Islam to lead their societies.

Some of the reasons responsible for the 1905 revolution are discussed below:

- In 1904, prices of essential goods rose so quickly that *Real wages*¹ of the workers declined by 20 per cent.
- Four members of the *Pudlov* iron works were dismissed that called for the industrial action.
- Many workers in St Petersburg went on strike demanding a reduction in working hours and increase in wages.

The Incident of Bloody Sunday

On a Sunday of the year 1905, the procession of workers led by *Father Gapon* reached the winter place of the Tsar in order to present a petition. However, they were attacked by police and the *Cossacks*². In this incident, many workers were killed and wounded.

This came to be known as *Bloody Sunday* and started a series of events that became known as 1905 revolution.

These were:

- *Trend of Strikes* spread all over the country.
- Universities closed down when students complaining about the lack of civil liberties.
- Doctors, lawyers, engineers and other middle class workers established the *Union of Unions* and demanded a *Constituent Assembly*.
- A large number of trade unions and factory committees, composed of factory workers also existed for short time.
- Severe restrictions were placed on political activities.

Reaction of The Tsar

Under the widespread revolution, the Tsar allowed the creation of an *Elected Consultative Parliament* or *Duma*³. He dismissed the first Duma within 75 days and re-elected the second Duma within 3 months.

He did not want any questioning of his authority or any reduction in his power.

He changed the voting laws and made the third Duma with conservative politicians and liberals and revolutionaries were kept out.

The First World War and the Russian Empire

In 1914, the First World War started between two European alliances that were *Germany, Austria and Turkey* the central powers and *France, Britain and Russia*, later Italy and Romania also joined these countries.

Initially, the war was popular in Russia and the people supported Tsar Nicholas II. Tsar Nicholas II without consulting the Duma had become part of the war.

Anti German feeling got stronger, e.g. St. Petersburg which was a German name remained as Petrograd. The Tsarina Alexandra's German origin and her adviser *Rasputin* (a German monk) made the autocracy unpopular.

The armies in first world war fought from two directions i.e. Eastern and Western. There was a difference between Eastern army and Western army of the First World War. The Western army fought from trenches stretched along Eastern France, whereas the Eastern army fought battle by leaving large casualties.

Russia suffered shocking defeats along with heavy casualties in the war. Russian armies lost badly in *Germany and Austria* between 1914 and 1916.

The Russian army destroyed crops and buildings to prevent the enemy from being able to live off the land. It led to over 3 million refugees in Russia.

The war also affected the industry. The Economy was badly hit with cut off supplies and breaking of industrial equipment.

By 1916, railway lines began to break down. Able-bodied men were called up to the war. This led to shortage of labour and shut down of small workshops. Large supplies of grain were sent to feed the army. This led to scarcity of bread and flour for the people in cities.

The February Revolution in Petrograd

In February 1917, there was acute shortage of food in Russia which made the life of workers very difficult. Parliamentarians opposed the Tsar's desire to dissolve the Duma.

On 22nd February, a lockout took place at a factory. This led to protest and strikers against the factory joined by women. This day came to be known as *International Women's Day*.

Demonstrating workers crossed from the factory quarters to the centre of the capital, *Nevoiki Prospekt*. At this stage, no political party was actively organising the movement.

Curfew was imposed by the government and to restrict the demonstrators, cavalry and police was called out.

On 25th February the government suspended the Duma. Politicians spoke out against this measure.

On 26th February, demonstrators returned on the streets whereas on 27th February the police headquarters were attacked and damaged.

Workers demonstrated on the street, raising slogans about bread, wages, better hours and democracy. The government tried to control the situation through Cavalry but it refused to fire on demonstrators.

An officer was shot at the barracks of a regiment. Three other regiments revolted and voted to join the striking workers.

- The Cavalry soldiers joined the workers and jointly formed a *Soviet or Council* in the same building where the Duma met. This was the *Petrograd Soviet*.
- On 28th February, a delegation went to see the Tsar. Tsar resigned the throne on the advice of the military commanders on 2nd March, 1917.
- Soviet leaders and Duma leaders formed a *provisional government* to run the country. A *Constituent Assembly* was elected on the basis of *Universal Adult Franchise* in Russia. Petrograd led the *February Revolution* that brought down the Monarchy in February 1917.

After February

Some of the changes that took place after the February Revolution are discussed below:

- Army officials, landowners and industrialists played an important role in the Provisional Government.
- Liberals as well as Socialists worked towards an elected government. Restrictions on public meetings and associations were removed.
- The Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin returned to Russia from his exile in April 1917. He wanted the soviets to take over power. Lenin gave his '*April Thesis*' in which he made four demands:
 - (i) The war should be brought to an end.
 - (ii) The land must be transferred to the peasants.
 - (iii) The banks should be nationalised.
- Lenin wanted the Bolshevik Party to be renamed as *Communist Party* to indicate its radical aims.

Worker's Movement

- The Worker's Movement spread throughout the summer. In industrial areas, factory committees were formed which began questioning the way industrialists operate their factories.
- Soldier's committees were also formed in the army. The power of provisional government was reduced and the Bolshevik influence increased.
- The Provisional Government decided to take strong steps against the discontent of the workers. It resisted attempts by workers to run factories and began arresting leaders.
- Popular demonstrations under the Bolsheviks in July, 1917 were strictly repressed.
- In the countryside, peasants and their socialist revolutionary leaders demanded for a redistribution of land for which land committees were formed.
- Peasants were encouraged by the socialist revolutionaries and seized land between July and September 1917.

3. *Bolsheviks* The majority group of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party led by Lenin based on the ideology of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

4. *Mensheviks* The minority group of Russian Social Democratic Workers Party formed in 1898. They favoured a parliamentary model of government like that of Britain and France.

5. *Autocracy* A country that is ruled by one person who has complete power.

6. *Judiths* Muslim reformers within the Russian empire.

7. *Real wages* Reflects the quantities of goods which the wages will actually buy.

8. *Cossacks* A group of predominantly Slav slave people who were members of democratic, semi-military communities in Ukraine and Southern Russia.

9. *Duma* The Russian Parliament or Legislature. Its members were elected and charged with the responsibility of making laws.

The Revolution of October 1917

Intense conflict grew between the Provisional Government and Bolsheviks. Due to this conflict, Lenin feared that the Provisional Government would set up a dictatorship. In September, he began discussions for an uprising against the government.

On 16th October, 1917, Lenin called supporters from across Russia and the Soviet appointed a Military Revolutionary Committee under the leadership of Leon Trotsky for seizing power.

As the uprising began on 24th October, 1917, Prince Mikhail Krasnov left the city to summon troops to fight. In the evening, land military units of government captured the building of two Bolshevik newspapers. Government troops were sent to capture telephone and telegraph offices and protect the winter palace.

In response to these measures, Military Revolutionary Committee ordered its supporters to capture government offices and arrest ministers and the ship *Aurora* fired the winter palace.

Other vessels sailed down the river Neva and took over different military points.

The revolution ended with all Russian Congress of Soviets in Petrograd approving the Bolshevik action. There was heavy fighting especially in Moscow but by December, the Bolsheviks controlled the Moscow-Petrograd area.

Check Point 02

1. In which year was the Russian Social Democratic Party founded?
2. What kinds of members were included in the third group under the Four in Russia?
3. Name the immediate leader of the Bolshevik group.
4. What is Duma?
5. The Bolsheviks controlled the Moscow-Petrograd area by _____.

Changes After October

The important changes that took place after October Revolution were:

- The Bolsheviks nationalised the banks and industries in November 1917.
- The Bolsheviks declared land as a social property and allowed peasants to capture land of nobles, the Church and the Tsar.
- The Bolsheviks banned old titles of aristocracy and big houses were partitioned according to the family needs.

- New uniforms were designed for the army and officials and the Soviet flag (hammer and sickle) was also designed.
- The Bolshevik Party was renamed as the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik).
- The Bolsheviks were totally opposed to private property.
- In November 1917, the Bolsheviks conducted the elections to the Constituent Assembly, but they failed to gain majority support.
- In January 1918, the Assembly rejected Bolshevik measures and Lenin dissolved the Assembly. He believed that All Russian Congress of Soviets was more democratic than its assembly elected in uncertain conditions.
- In March 1918, the Bolsheviks entered into a treaty with Germany at Brest-Litovsk and ended the war with Germany. The Bolsheviks became the only party to participate in the elections to All Russian Congress of Soviets which was the parliament of the country and they won.
- Russia became a one-party state and trade unions were kept under party control. Those who criticised Bolsheviks were punished by secret police (Cheka) and later OGPU and NKVD.
- Many young women and men opposed the party because it stood for socialism and change. This led to improvement in the field of art and architecture after October 1917.
- After October 1917, many Bolshevik followers became disillusioned by the way the party functioned.

The Civil War

The decision of redistribution of land by Bolsheviks caused breakup of army. Clashes between supporters of anarchy, liberals and Bolshevik soldiers started. The pro-Tsarists (the 'whites') and the Socialist Revolutionaries (the 'greens') fought a Civil War with Bolshevik like 'reds' troops during 1918 and 1919.

The pro-Tsarists and socialists were supported by French, American, British and Japanese troops. Supporters of private property among 'whites' took harsh steps with peasants who had seized land. This made them unpopular.

The Bolsheviks with the support of non-Russian nationalists and judges tried to control power by January 1920.

In Khiva in Central Asia, Bolshevik colonists brutally killed local nationalists in the name of defending socialism. In this situation, many were confused about what the Bolshevik government wanted.

In 1922, most non-Russian nationalities were given political autonomy¹⁰ in the USSR created by Bolsheviks. USSR as a state was created from the Russian Empire in December 1922 by the Bolsheviks. But the Bolshevik Government discouraged nationalism¹¹ and this led to partial success to win over the different nationalities of this region.

Making a Socialist Society

During the civil war, the Bolsheviks kept industries and banks nationalised. They permitted peasants to cultivate the captured land to show collective work.

Centralised planning was introduced with the introduction of five year plans. The government fixed all prices to promote industrial growth during the first two 'plans' (1927-32 and 1933-38).

Centralised planning led to economic growth. New factory sites came into being. Industrial production increased between 1929 and 1933 by 100 percent in the field of oil, coal and steel.

Status of Workers

Rapid construction led to poor working conditions for workers. In Magnitogorsk, a steel plant was constructed in three years. Workers did not have even basic facilities of water, health care, etc.

Measures taken to improve status of workers were:

- An extended schooling system developed and arrangements were made for factory workers and peasants to enter universities.
- Canteens (day boarding) were established in factories for the children of women workers.
- Cheap public healthcare was provided and model living quarters were made for workers.
- However, the effect of all these measures was uneven as government resources were limited.

Stalinism and Collectivisation

Planned Economy of Soviet Russia brought with it some disasters and one such disaster was collectivisation of agriculture.

Joseph Stalin became the leader of the Soviet Communist party after the death of Lenin in January, 1924.

By 1927-1928, the towns in Soviet Russia were facing an acute problem of grain supplies.

The government fixed prices at which grain must be sold, but the peasants refused to sell their grain to government buyers at these prices.

Stalin believed the rich peasants and traders in the countryside were hoarding stocks in the hope of higher prices.

So, Stalin introduced the collectivisation of Soviet agriculture. It brought the great majority of peasants into collective and state farms.

In 1928, party members toured the grain producing areas, supervised centred grain collections and called the *Kulaks*¹².

After 1917, land had been handed over to the peasants. For the development of modern farms, it was necessary to eliminate *Kulaks* to take away land from peasants and to establish large state-controlled farms.

Stalin's Policies

From 1929, the Communist Party forced all peasants to cultivate in collective farms (*kolkhoz*). Peasants worked on lands and the profit of the collective farms was shared among them.

Peasants who opposed collectivisation destroyed their livestock. Thus, between 1929 to 1931, the number of cattle decreased by one-third.

Peasants who opposed the collectivisation were severely punished and many were deported¹³ and exiled¹⁴. However, production did not increase immediately due to the collectivisation programme.

The bad harvest of 1930-33 led to one of the most devastating famines in Soviet history, in which over 4 million died.

Many within the party criticised the confusion in industrial production under the planned economy and the consequences of collectivisation.

Stalin and his sympathisers charged these critics with conspiracy against socialism. Many were forced to make false confessions. They faced torture and executions.

10. Political Autonomy: The right to govern themselves.

11. Nationalist lifestyle of those who do not fit in one place, but move from area to area to earn their living.

12. *Kulaks* The name for well-to-do peasants.

13. Deported: forcibly removed from one's own country.

14. Exiled: forced to live away from one's own country.

3

Activity on page 28

- † List two differences between the capitalist and socialist ideas of private property.

Activity on page 33

2. Why were there revolutionary disturbances in Russia in 1905? What were the demands of the revolutionaries?