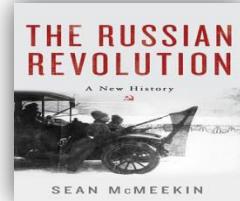


FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS FOR THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION



INTRODUCTION

The revolution of 1917 was the result of the combination of a number of factors: the incompetent handling of the world war, the frustration of the liberals, the growth of the industrial and agricultural discontent, the activities of the revolutionaries, group and food shortage. The working classes and peasants who profited from a boom of war time had increased their power.

THE POLITICAL SCENARIO

Politically Russia was subjected to Autocratic rule of Czar Nicolas II, who ruled the country in a ruthless and oppressive manner. In 1905 a parliament had been established in Russia, but the sovereignty still rested in the hands of the emperor and his henchmen. The aristocracy and the officials who surrendered to the Czar were also in favour of continuing the autocratic and oppose all kinds of reforms. The people insisted on effective share of the government of the country and pleaded for freedom of speech and press as well as equality before law. However, Czar Nicolas II firmly turned down these demands. This naturally provoked the people to revolt against the existing system.

THE ECONOMIC SCENARIO

The economic causes played no less significant role in bringing about the revolution of 1917 in Russia. A large number of peasants left their fields to take up jobs at these factories. However, the conditions of war were quite measurable. The concentration of a large number of unsatisfied laborers and workers gave rise to the feelings of political consequence and contributed to the anti-Czarist sentiments.

The condition of peasants was no better. The Russian agriculture was still dominated by the feudal lords. Russia as far back as 1861 but the condition of the peasants continued to be miserable. However, they had to bear the burden of taxation. As a result the peasants could not produce sufficient to meet their own demands and had to lead a life of virtual starvation.

THE IDEOLOGICAL SCENARIO

The liberal ideas also left a deep impact on the minds of the Russian people. They were particularly influenced by the writing of Karl Marx who pleaded for the abolition of capitalism and establishment of a regime, where the power would be in the hands of the workers and labourers. The other intellectuals whose writing influenced the Russians included Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoevsky etc. The Russians were greatly impressed by this declaration and

determined to fight for the establishment of people rule in their country. It may be noted that as a result of revolution of 1905 the people of Russia were assure some short of participation in the administration of the country, but it was not actually conceded. The people were determined to get this in the actual practice.

COURSE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

FIRST WORLD WAR SCENARIO

1. The military reverses suffered by Russia during the First World War also provided great imputers to the revolutionary movement in Russia in immediate context. The people held the Czar responsible for the reverses suffered by Russia. The suffering caused to the people of Russia due to shortage of food and heavy loses of men and money in the War further agitated their minds. They appealed to the Czar to affect necessary improvement in the condition by assuming personal responsibility for the affairs of the government. However, the Czar did not bother about the demand and whiled away his time in fanciful luxuries. His officials also completely ignored the wishes and interest of the people. All this made of the people think in terms of getting rid to the Czar, and provided an impetus to the revolution.
2. The origin of the Russian Revolution can be tracked back to the down of the year 1917 when large number of demonstrations, strikes and incidence of disorder took place in various part of the country. It has been estimated that there work 1330 strikes during the months of January & February along in which 676, 300 persons participated. Though these strikes were primarily undertaken for the attainment of their economic demands, some of the demands were also politically motivated. These strikes in the main took place at Petrograd (the name given to St.Peterburg in 1914) and Moscow. The government tried to suppress these strikes but could not achieve any success. In view of this failure of the government Grand Duke Alexander urged the Czar to set up an administration which enjoyed the confidence of the people.

RESPONSE OF THE CZAR

1. However, the Czar did not respond favorably and the disorder continued to grow. Ultimately it assumed the shape of a mutiny because the guards refused to fire on the strikers and turned against their own officers.
2. This further aggravated the revolutionary fire, Annoyed with these developments the Czar ordered the dissolution of the Duma and the government tendered its resignation.

END OF THE RULE OF CZAR

A committee of the Duma was formed which acted as the provisional government. This Provisional committee contained leaders like Alexander Kerensky, Nicholas Chkhidze, Miliukov, Guchkov and other progressive members. The committee with the support of the leading generals demanded abdication from the Czar. Nicholas concluded this demand and abdicated in favor of his brother Grand Duke of Michael on 15 March 1917. However, Michael refused to accept the Crown.

FORMATION OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

1. In the meanwhile, on 14 March 1917 about 250 delegates elected from factories and army units in Petrograd organized the Soviet of Workers and Soldier's Deputies. This Council formed an Executive Committee which assumed various functions of government. It set up a Committee to control the supply of food in Petrograd. It also set up a militia workers which were to succeed the police. Thus there were two bodies in Petrograd the Provisional government and the Soviets, and both of them claimed authority abandoned by the Czar. Though the formal power rested with the Provisional Government, the real power was enjoyed by the Soviets, who enjoyed effective control over the workers and troops.
2. The Provisional Government essentially consisted of members of the middle classes who were conservatives by nature and did not genuinely believe in revolutionary methods. The Soviets on the other hand, represented the radical elements. The Soviets fully supported the provisional government and left the administrative responsibility with the provisional government. However, they carried an anti-bourgeois propaganda and incited the peasants to seize the long converted land. They rallied also around the workers to take possession of the factories.

COMING OF LENIN AND SWING TOWARDS RADICALISM

1. It was only with the arrival of Lenin (from Switzerland) and Trotsky (from America) on the scene that the revolutionary movement assumed new direction. They denounced the provisional government as subservient to bourgeois of England and France and laid emphasis on true revolution. A demand was made for ending the war "without annexation and without indemnities".
2. These leaders pleaded for the transfer of all owners to the Soviets and pleaded for abolition of army, the police and the bureaucracy. It favored confiscation of all estates and nationalization of all land. It also pleaded for the merger of all banks into a single national bank under the Soviet control.

WORKING OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT AND GROWING DISCONTENT & UNREST

1. The Provisional government headed by Kerensky continued to work for the introduction of parliamentary institutions of the western pattern in Russia.

2. The Provisional Government and the Soviets were sharply divided on two main issues viz., democratization of the army and the foreign policy. The Provisional Government was opposed to democratization of army, while the Soviets favored democratization of army. On 1st March 1917, the Soviet issued an order which provided for establishment of elective committees in every army unit, the sending of delegates to the Soviet by each unit; the control of all political activities in the army by the Soviets and army committees; the abolition of compulsory salute and simplified formulae for addressing the officers etc.
3. On the question of foreign policy also sharp differences existed between the Provisional Government and the Soviets. While the Provisional Government considered the revolution as a protest against the ineffective conduct of war by the imperial regime and insisted on pursuing the war to victorious end. The Soviet stood for immediate ending of war and demanded peace "without annexations and indemnities". It favored revision of war aims and exerted necessary pressure through mass demonstrations to bring the imperial foreign policy to an end.
4. In view of sharp differences between the Provisional Government and the Soviets, much could not be accomplished. However, it goes to the credit of the Provisional Government that it succeeded in putting an end to autocratic rule of the Czars. It declared Russia as a Republic and courageously tackled the nationality problem. It also put the Poles and the Finns on road to independence. It encouraged co-operatives in place of private enterprises. It also passed a number of laws concerning civil rights, prison reforms, and equal rights for women, universal suffrage and religious freedom. However, its record in the field of land reforms was not quite encouraging. It also failed to exercise proper control over the armies.

ROLE OF LENIN

1. The growing unrest among the workers, peasants and soldiers and the prevailing anarchical conditions in the country were fully exploited by the Bolsheviks. They won popular support by promising nationalization of land as well as banks and industries. As a result they succeeded in gaining popular support in the elections to town and provincial Soviets. They also won over the soldiers to their side by promising them peace, which they had been longing for.
2. Encouraged by its popularity the Bolsheviks decided to organize an armed uprising. They intensified propaganda for direct action and formed their own Red Guards. As a result, large number of soldiers left the ranks and the peasants continued to seize lands of proprietors through plunder and murder. In October 1917 Lenin created the Military Revolutionary Committee, which gave the Bolsheviks an effective control over the troops in Petrograd. They had already raised the Red Guards (armed factory workers.)
3. Lenin wanted to take full advantage of the revolutionary mood existing in the country and favored a revolt at an early date. A Politburo, an inner group of the committee, was formed to take necessary decision in this regard. On the other hand, the Provisional Government headed by Kerensky preceded the certain counter measures to meet the

Bolshevik threat. But as the government did not enjoy sufficient authority it could not succeed.

OVERTHROW OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

1. On 20 October, 1917, the Bolsheviks executed the long planned coup and overthrew the Kerensky government. They seized railways, bridges, telephones and banks of the capital. They surrounded the Imperial Winter Palace and captured it after some resistance.
2. Kerensky who had left a little earlier, escaped but his ministers were arrested. The peace-parliament was abolished and the power passed on into the hands of the Revolutionary Military Committees. It may be noted that most of the areas, except Georgia, the Ukraine and the Cossack, the Bolsheviks did not encounter much opposition and easily captured power.

FORMATION OF SOVIET GOVERNMENT

1. The coup which was accomplished by the Bolsheviks with success was duly approved by All Russians Congress of the Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies which met on 25 October 1917. Next day the Congress authorized the setting up of a new government under the Chairmanship of Lenin.
2. The new government was to be known as Soviet of People's Commissars. This confirmed that the Bolsheviks had acquired full control over Petrograd and Moscow. However, most of the country was still independent of control. This was accomplished during the next three or four years.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION AFTER THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

WAR COMMUNISM (1918-1921)

❖ The policy

1. In War Communism, the Bolshevik leaders paid attention to the economic and social reconstruction of the country while the revolution was still in progress. They prepared a blue print of the future society based on the Marxian principles and introduced system of government control and direction of economic life.
2. They paid special attention to the interest of workers, poor and middle class peasants and resorted to government control over every possible economic activity. This policy was pursued by them from 1918-21 and is popularly known as policy of war communism. The basic features of this policy were lightening of control over farmers, nationalization of industries, greater control over labour, nationalization of trade and commerce.

3. In the first instance they tried to lighten government control over peasants and farmers. They asked the farmers to surrender all their surplus stocks to the government at fixed prices. This collection was mainly made from the Kulaks or the well to do farmers. In 1919 collective farming was introduced through a decree. Three types of collective farms were set up-communes, cartels and associations. It was asserted that the right to decide as to how the land should be used rested with the state.
4. These measures were naturally presented by the farmers who stopped cultivation and killed most of their live stocks so that they could not be confiscated for the benefit of someone else. As a result the country witnessed a severe man-made famine in 1921-22, which resulted in death of over three million people.
5. In the second place, the Soviet leaders adopted policy of centralization and nationalization of industry. Nationalization of industry was felt essential in view of conflict between eh workers and the owners. Through a decree issued on 28 June, 1918 over 3700 large industrial enterprises were nationalized. In 1920 nationalization was extended to enterprises employing more than five workers with mechanical power or ten workers without mechanical power. While nationalizing the various enterprises the government did not pay any compensation to the owners. All the nationalized enterprises were placed under the control of the Supreme Economic Council which was set up in December 1917.
6. Thirdly, the government introduced the principle of compulsory labour. Through a decree issued in December 1918 it was made obligatory for all persons between 16 and 50 years to tender manual work.
7. It was asserted that all those who were exercised to eat must work. Initially there was no restriction regarding the nature of the work to be done by the workers, but later on the skilled workers were compelled to take up any work assigned to them. Through another decree issued in January 1920 all labor was subjected to mobilization.
8. Fourthly, the government nationalized trade and commerce, initially trade only in some industries was nationalized but through a decree issued in November 1918 the entire trade was nationalized. Private commercial establishments were replaced by government owned stores and co-operatives. All articles of individual consumption were purchased by the government and distributed through these stores and co-operatives. Rationing was introduced and social ration was given to industrial workers and soldiers.
9. The peasants were not covered by rationing because they were expected to supply their own food needs. However, sometimes they were provided manufactured goods on rationing. In services like housing, postal and telegraph, medicine and newspapers the workers were paid in the form of gods. As a result the monetary system was to a large extent rendered inoperative.
10. The state also established its monopoly in foreign trade through a decree in April 1918. But actually no foreign trade could take place because the goods were not permitted to move across the frontier.

11. The policy of 'war communism' pursued by the Soviet leaders produced far reaching effects. For a space of two and a half years the economy under its pressure did manage to sustain the war burdened country, albeit at the lowest possible level. The system of grain requisitioning met the food needs of at least the favored urban groups; industry supplied at least the minimum needs of the Red Army; and the system of distribution and transportation continued to function in some way.

❖ The Failure

1. However, it failed; it cannot be denied that as result of this policy the difficulties and suffering of general public greatly increased. By doing away with the incentives of money economy and by adopting compulsive methods, the enthusiasm of the producers was completely damped and they tried to produce the minimum.
2. In agricultural sphere also the production greatly declined due to division of large estates, lack of agricultural machinery and fertilizers and above all the useless money given to the peasants in exchange for the grain.
3. As a result they began to produce only as much as they needed for themselves or could hope to sell or barter on the black market. Likewise the production of commercial goods also sharply declined and there was sharp rise in the prices. The private trade could not be fully eliminated and people continued to indulge in private trade secretly.
4. Growing discontent against the new rules gave rise to hostility among various sections of society and a number of revolts were organized by the peasants against the high-handed policy of the collectors. Though the government succeeded in suppressing these revolts, it was an indication of the simmering discontent prevailing in the country side.
5. The leaders themselves were sharply divided about the desirability of pursuing this policy. Accordingly at the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party at Moscow in March 1921 it was decided that the policy of requisitioning surplus grains should be replaced by fixed taxes in kind and the peasants should be permitted to dispose of their surplus after tax through private trade channels. This marked the end of the policy of 'war communism' and paved the way for the adoption of New Economic Policy.

IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

❖ ON RUSSIA

❖ Positive Aspects

1. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was an event of great significance. It not only extirpated the roots of autocratic rule in Russia which had existed for many

countries but also did away with the class distinction which characterized the Russian society. The Bolshevik within, a period of one year issued a number of decrees abolishing class distinction and established equality.

2. It laid the foundations of a new type of society in which the church ceased to be an important political factor. Private property ownership of land and wealth of every other kind were abolished. The means of production and most of those of distribution were taken over by the state. The state assumed responsibility for trading of all commodities. Every peasant was given as much land as was sufficient to support his family. The management of the factories was entrusted to a council of the workers which worked under the supervision of the national labour organization. No person was to be given food till he had earned it through his labor. The capitalists were deprived of their arms and were entitled to vote only if they worked. Better educational facilities were made available and military education was made compulsory. Education which was so far under the care of the church was nationalized. A department of education was set up which looked after the education. The wards of peasants and workers were permitted to receive free education. All the treaties concluded by the autocratic government of Russia were abrogated. Even the loans contracted by the former governments were cancelled.
3. The new government tried to build up a technologically advanced economy through the instrument of economic planning. In the nineteenth century the industrial development of Europe took place chiefly as a result of the initiative of the individual capitalist. In USSR for the first time the state played a leading role in the industrialization of the country through Five Year Plans. The entire resources of the economy were mobilized to attain an accelerated rate of economic development with a view to achieve social and economic equality. The unprecedented rate of development which USSR achieved fully demonstrated the effectiveness of planning as a means of progress.
4. Another notable impact of the Russian Revolution was that the policy of discrimination towards non Russians nationalities which was a characteristic feature of the Czarist regime was abandoned and equality of all the nationalities was accepted. Provisions in this regard were incorporated in the Constitution of 1924 as well as 1935. All the nationalities were assured equal representation in one of the two chamber of the USSR legislature. The republic formed by these nationalities was given considerable autonomy. They were given freedom to develop their languages and culture.

❖ Negative Aspects

1. On the negative side, the Bolshevik Revolution fed to institution of censorship of press, speech and assembly far rigorous than the one which existed before the revolution.
2. The Bolshevik cultivated all the middle class political parties as well as other Socialist parties. It also marked the beginning of the establishment of first secret political police.

❖ ON INTERNATIONAL SPHERE

❖ Positive Aspects

1. In the international sphere also the Russian Revolution left a profound influence. The successful accomplishment of revolution in accordance with the ideas of Marx provided an impetus to similar revolutions in other parts of the world. The Russian leaders organized the Comintern and tried to promote revolutions on an international scale.
2. They encouraged the formation of the Communist parties in different countries which were affiliated to the Comintern. Thus the Comintern became a common forum where question of policies were discussed and common policies posited for worldwide acceptance. As a result of all these measures the socialism became one of the most widely held ideologies within a few decades of its emergence. It would not be wrong to say that the growing influence of the socialist movement in the post-World War I period was to a larger extent due to the success of the Russian Revolution.
3. The Socialist ideology also had its impact on democracies working on the capitalist pattern. They realized that for a genuine democracy political equality was not enough and it must try to ensure social and economic equality as well. They also came to accept the idea of economic planning by state with a view to improve the conditions of the people.
4. The spread of socialist ideas greatly contributed to the growth of internationalism. The nations of the world came to realize that they must not merely try to promote their own narrow interests and must look at problems in the broader world context. This outlook was totally opposed to the policy of imperialism and greatly contributed to its liquidation. According to Marx a nation which enslaves another can never be free.
5. Therefore, the socialist all over the world organized campaigns to put an end to imperialism and extended support to the colonial people to their struggle for independence. The new Soviet State came to be looked upon as a friend of the colonial people because it openly supported the colonial people in their struggle against foreign rule.

❖ Negative Aspects

1. Finally, the Russian Revolution also sponsored a great ideological conflict in the international sphere. It struck a terror in the minds of the ruling classes of capitalist state.
2. The establishment of the Third international confirmed their suspicion that the revolution was not going to confine itself within its national boundaries. This greatly contributed to the intensification of the class struggle in these countries and created serious problem for the rulers.

