



# **GS FOUNDATION BATCH FOR CSE 2024**

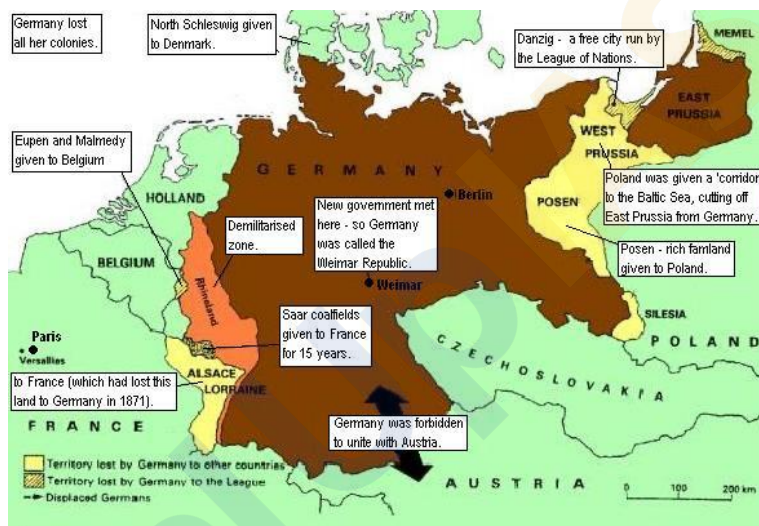
## **World History - 04**

### **(Inter-War period and Russian Revolution)**

## Treaty of Versailles (1919)

### Provisions

- After the end of WW1, the victorious powers that is, England, France, Italy and the USA forced Germany to sign the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.
- The German delegates were humiliated and forced to sign the treaty under duress.
- Germany was forced to accept the 'War Guilt' clause.
- Among the various clauses, Alsace-Lorraine which the Germans had captured in 1871 was given back to France.
- The Saar Valley was also given to France as compensation for the lengthy occupation and exploitation of Alsace Lorraine.
- The Rhineland region was demilitarised and Germans were forced to vacate it. Demilitarisation was to be overseen by French occupation forces.
- Many colonies of Germany were snatched away and entrusted to France and England as mandates.
- Germany itself had to part with some territories such as Sudetenland and the Port of Danzig.
- East Prussia was physically separated from the rest of Germany to give Poland access to the sea.
- Germany was also forced to reduce the size of its army to 1,00,00 soldiers. Its armoured Corps was destroyed and it was not allowed to modernise its navy.
- The impractical amount of 6,600 million pounds was fixed as war indemnity.



### Critical evaluation of the Treaty of Versailles

- Despite American reservations, the British and French pursued an aggressive treaty. The US president Woodrow Wilson wanted soft treatment for Germany. However the French President Clemenceau insisted upon a humiliating and harsh treaty.
- The Germans never forgot this humiliation. The entire country was agitated. The opposition got a big opportunity to criticise the government. They were branded as 'November Criminals'. A section of youth, especially former soldiers and socialists organised the German Workers Party. The arrival of Hitler gave a new lease of life to

this party. In his autobiography 'Mein Kampf' (My Struggle), he said that his objective was to avenge the humiliation of Versailles.

- Similar trends were also visible in Italy which felt cheated after the Treaty of Versailles. The unpopularity of the Italian government after the treaty was one of the factors behind the rise of Mussolini.
- Thus, the treaty instead of bringing peace, sowed the seeds of another war.

### League of Nations (1919)

- During the course of WW I, the American President Woodrow Wilson came up with the idea for the league. This idea started gaining currency when the war escalated leading to large-scale death and destruction.
- Victory for England, France and Italy had proven to be empty. It had been a costly affair and had led to the destruction of their industry, agriculture and workforce.
- Many political thinkers, activists and a section of the civil society started promoting the idea of peace and disarmament. They realised that there are some contentious issues which became the reason for war. They wanted a lasting solution for these issues. In this background, internationalism and the League of Nations became attractive ideas.

#### Objectives

- **The league had well-defined objectives:**
  1. Peace
  2. Disarmament
  3. Resolving disputes mutually
  4. Promoting social harmony
  5. Improving health of ordinary citizens
  6. Improving working conditions for labourers
  7. Standard of life for women
  8. Punishing violators, firstly through diplomatic channels and economic sanctions and finally military action
- **Organs of the league**
  1. General Assembly
  2. Council
  3. Secretariat
  4. International Labour Organisation
  5. World Court

### **General Assembly**

- It was an assembly of all members. Each member country had one vote each. The doors of the League of Nations were open to all, but due to rivalries between nations and contradictions between the League's objectives and actions of its powerful members, several major countries did not join it.

### **Council**

- It was the core body of the League of Nations having four permanent members England, France, Italy and Japan.
- There were four non-permanent members, nominated by rotation. The most crucial decisions and policies were initiated, adopted and passed firstly in the Council and later approved by the General assembly. Thus, the council shaped the destiny of the League of Nations.

### **Secretariat**

- Top executives known as secretaries were posted here to implement the agenda and resolutions of the League. Secretaries were elected by member countries.

### **International Labour Organisation**

- This body was created to fulfil the social objectives of the league i.e. to improve the living conditions of workers in organised and unorganised sectors, to ensure minimum wages, to regulate working hours, provide health and insurance cover, to end discrimination and to provide job security security.

### **World Court**

- It was set up at The Hague with judges to settle disputes among member countries and to hear their grievances.

### **Critical Evaluation**

- The league of Nations registered a modest degree of success in reducing conflict during the 1920s and 1930s. Some possible wars were averted because of its timely intervention. However, by the late 1930s, it had lost its sheen. It failed due to the following reasons:
  1. The objectives of the league and domestic and foreign policies of its important members were often contradictory. All members continued to increase their armed strength and modernise their armies. Even its permanent members such as France frequently violated its conventions.
  2. Border and territorial disputes among member countries especially France, England, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia could not be resolved. This proved to be a constant irritant in European relations.

3. The league did not have its own permanent force. Thus, military action could never be implemented and violations went unpunished. Economic sanctions were often undone because of national economic interests of the members. Even diplomatic pressure proved to be ineffective because of secret understanding between violator and powerful members.
  4. Big powers like the USA and the USSR did not join the league. In fact they often worked against the policy objectives and agenda of the league. Thus, success was bound to be limited.
  5. After the rise of totalitarianism in Italy and Germany, the league became almost irrelevant. Hitler and Mussolini had no respect for this toothless body. They preferred individual heroism over international cooperation. Thus, they ridiculed and finally withdrew from the league.
- **Despite these shortcomings, the league would remain historic because:**
    1. It paved the way for the emergence of the UNO in which many of its shortcomings were corrected.
    2. The International Labour Organisation was a success story of the league. It helped raise labour issues across the globe and persuade many countries to enact progressive labour laws. It created awareness among the labourers to organise and raise their demands. It also helped in raising their standard of life.
    3. The World Court which later transformed into the International Court of Justice was another success of the league. It allowed members to peacefully resolve their disputes without going to war.

### **The Great Depression (1929)**

- The capitalist mode of production is cyclic in nature and is vulnerable to periods of boom and bust. It has been observed that 2 to 3 major shocks occur almost every century. The great depression of 1929 was one such shock. It was triggered by the crash of the New York Stock Exchange, an event which is infamous as 'Black Tuesday'.
- The sudden crash frightened investors. They lost confidence in the economic system and started making panic sales and withdrawals from banks. This pushed the market even further down and almost all major banks were forced to shut their doors.
- After the First World War, the European economy was completely shattered. The process of rebuilding was funded primarily by American loans. As European economies recovered, their industries became more and more dependent upon American banks. The sudden crash was thus felt world over. The lack of demand and lack of availability of loans caused several industries to shut down. Within a year, 14 million Americans, 6 million Germans and 3 million British became unemployed.

- This economic crisis led to political unrest and instability, which was used by political opportunists like Hitler and Mussolini to grab power, establish their totalitarian rule, militarise their countries and threaten world peace.
- Unemployment caused poverty and even starvation. Even agriculture wasn't spared. It had become increasingly mechanised and dependent upon formal credit. The depression had caused agricultural demand to plummet. This resulted in crashing food prices. Instead of selling food cheaply, powerful agricultural lobbies pressurised their governments to dump millions of tonnes of grain into the sea in an attempt to revive prices.
- This paradox is an important feature and shortcoming of capitalist economies.
- On the other hand, the Russians through their socialist model demonstrated that state regulation can prevent such catastrophes and that leaving the economy completely at the mercy of the market is imprudent.
- Many capitalist nations became cautious and instituted regulatory mechanisms to prevent such depressions in the future.
- Keynesian economics (counter-cyclical measures) became popular. After the Great Depression, President Roosevelt of the US introduced the historic 'New Deal' with its focus on 'Relief, Recovery and Reform'. It included the following important programmes/measures:
  - **Tennessee Valley Authority:** for construction works.
  - **Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA):** funds for states and local governments.
  - **Federal Reserve Bank:** for providing loans.
  - **Security Exchange Act 1934:** licence to the stock exchange.
  - **National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) :** Raise worker wages, lower working hours.
  - **Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA):** compensation to farmers, raise agriculture prices.
  - Collective bargaining between employer and workers.
  - Restriction of work hours.
  - **Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC):** to protect depositors' accounts.
  - **Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC):** to regulate the U.S. stock markets.
- The threat of communism increased because of unemployment and poverty during the depression. The success of socialists influenced intellectuals and commoners alike. The ideology became immensely popular in colonies and to a large extent, shaped their freedom struggles and post-independence policies.



## Russian Revolution (1917)

### Russia before the Revolution

- In 1861, serfdom was abolished by Czar Alexander II. This created a large labour force which could be accommodated in Russia's new industries which developed rapidly between the 1860s and 90s.
- The living condition of Russian workers was extremely poor. As a result, Russia became a hotbed for Communist activity. Many socialist political parties had emerged. In 1898 the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party was created.
- Russia's defeat to Japan in the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05) was a huge blow to the prestige of the Czarist regime. It also led to economic difficulties and the prices of essential goods skyrocketed. Food shortages resulted in bread riots and oppression by the royal troops led to the First Russian Revolution of 1905.
- Although the revolution was crushed, Czar Nicholas II initiated some reforms and a Duma (representative assembly) was established. However, the underlying issues of Russian workers and peasants remained unresolved.
- The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party became increasingly popular and in 1912, it split into two groups, the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. The former was led by Karensky and drew its support from the Russian middle class. The latter was headed by Lenin and was popular among workers and peasants.

### Causes of the revolution

- The First World War brought untold misery to Russians. Over 6 lakh Russian soldiers had died and more than thrice that number were wounded or maimed. Most of these soldiers came from poor families and people started questioning the rationale behind the war. They wanted Russia to withdraw from the war.
- The disastrous Russian campaign also earned heavy criticism for the Czar who was personally leading the Russian war effort.
- The war led to a serious financial crisis due to food shortages. The prices of essential items had risen by 4 to 5 times. This led to daily protests.
- Peasants and workers were organised by socialists through local Soviets. They had regular meetings and discussed local issues. Newspapers, pamphlets, posters, street plays etc. also played an important role in creating awareness and class consciousness among the working class.
- Lenin who was in exile in Switzerland gained popularity through his writings. Workers saw in him a liberator. He was also a gifted orator and organiser.
- In February 1917, the Mensheviks with the help of some military officers succeeded overthrowing the 300 year old czarist regime. The Czar and his family were arrested and a Menshevik government headed by Karensky came to power. They brought some important changes:

A. End of monarchy and establishment of a republic

- B. Freedom of the press, thought, speech and expression
- C. Right to life and property
- D. Equality among all citizens; the clergy and nobility lost their powers land and privileges
- However, the Bolsheviks were not satisfied with these reforms and branded them as Bourgeois reforms.
- Lenin returned from Switzerland and organised workers, peasants and red soldiers around the following agendas:
  1. Industries should be under the control of workers.
  2. Land should be under the control of peasants.
  3. Non-Russian is living in Russian territory should be given citizenship.
  4. Russia should withdraw from the First World War.
- In October 1917, the Bolsheviks attacked Moscow, overthrew Karsky's government and established Bolshevik rule.

### Consequences

- National resources such as banks, financial institutions, railways, roads, canals etc. were nationalised and the concept of private property was abolished.
- Several reforms were initiated for workers. Minimum wages were fixed, working hours were regulated and the right to work became a fundamental right. This was the first in modern world history.
- Russia withdrew from WW1 and made peace with Germany. This came at a heavy price and Russia had to part with several Western territories.
- Land was taken away from landlords and churches. Cooperative farming was introduced.
- Non-Russians living in vast parts of Central Asia were declared as Russian citizens and given equal rights.
- However, Russia had to undergo a bloody civil war between 1917–21. The communists i.e. Reds had to fight the reactionary i.e. Whites who are supported by big landlords, old royalists and western capitalists especially the US, Britain and France. They were afraid of the success of the Marxist ideology in Russia and had joined hands to contain its growth.
- Lenin organised the 3rd Communist International. Its declared agenda was to spread communism across the globe. This was a major threat to the capitalist bloc.
- In 1921, Lenin introduced the new economic policy and brought some moderate changes. Heavy industries continued to remain under state control. However small-scale and cottage industries were allowed in private hands. This allowed for rapid planned growth.



### Significance in world history

- The workers of the world celebrated the success of the Russian revolution. They felt that their dignity had been restored. Workers in other countries were inspired by its success. They organised trade unions, held strikes and demanded the same rights as available to Russian workers.
- Most governments were afraid of the rising tide of communism and did not want similar revolutions in their countries. Thus, they too initiated some reforms to provide relief to their workers. Such reforms were made by most European countries and were introduced even in colonies such as India and Sri Lanka.
- The concept of cooperative farming gained popularity, especially in colonies and peasants started organising collective movements.
- Intellectuals across the world were inspired by the Communist success. They started praising Marxist and Leninist thought and challenged capitalism. The Marxist world-view also became predominant in academics, especially the Humanities.
- The success of the Russian revolution was reflected in literature, theatre, painting, sculpture and cinema as well. It inspired the creative urges of artists and protagonists were no longer princess or lords but industrial workers and porters.