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# The World from the 1890s to the First World War

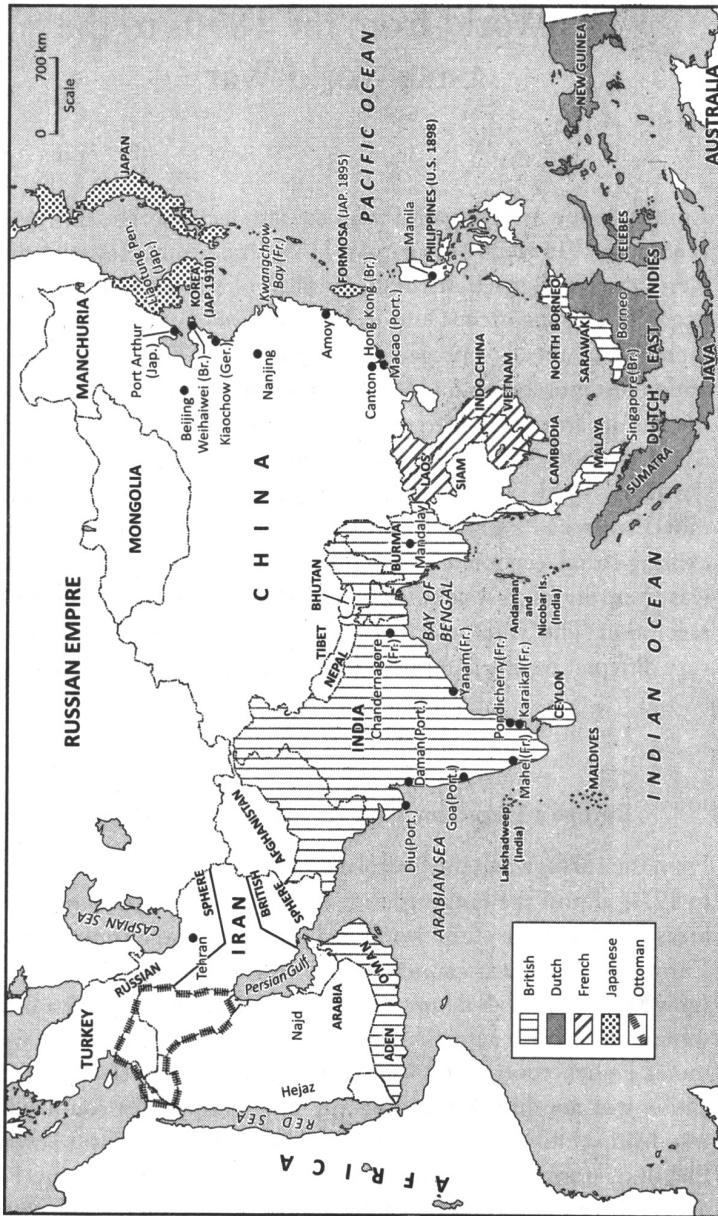
Europe dominated the world from the last decade of the nineteenth century to 1914 when the First World War broke out. However, there were already signs that the beginning of the end of European hegemony had started. Outside Europe, two countries—USA and Japan—had already emerged as major powers. Within the colonies, nationalist movements had begun to take shape. The rivalries among the European imperialist powers over colonial possessions and the conflicts among various European states over European affairs led to the First World War. Within many European countries, powerful movements had emerged which aimed at radical changes in the existing social, economic and political systems. Even before the war was over, the biggest country of Europe, Russia, had a successful revolution. The world which emerged after the First World War was very different from what it had been in the preceding three decades.

### EUROPE

#### Europe's Hegemony and Inter-Imperialist Rivalries

From the 1870s, when the new phase of imperialist expansion began, to 1914, almost the entire continents of Asia and Africa and some areas in other parts of the world had come under the control of one European imperialist country or the other. In Asia, India, Malaya (now Malaysia), Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Burma (now Myanmar) were under British rule; the countries comprising Indo-China were under French control and Indonesia was under Dutch hegemony. China was not directly ruled by any single imperialist country but was divided into 'spheres of influence' among the imperialist powers. She thus, was reduced to the status of an international colony. Her dismemberment was prevented by the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1900).

## COLONIAL POSSESSIONS IN ASIA IN 1914



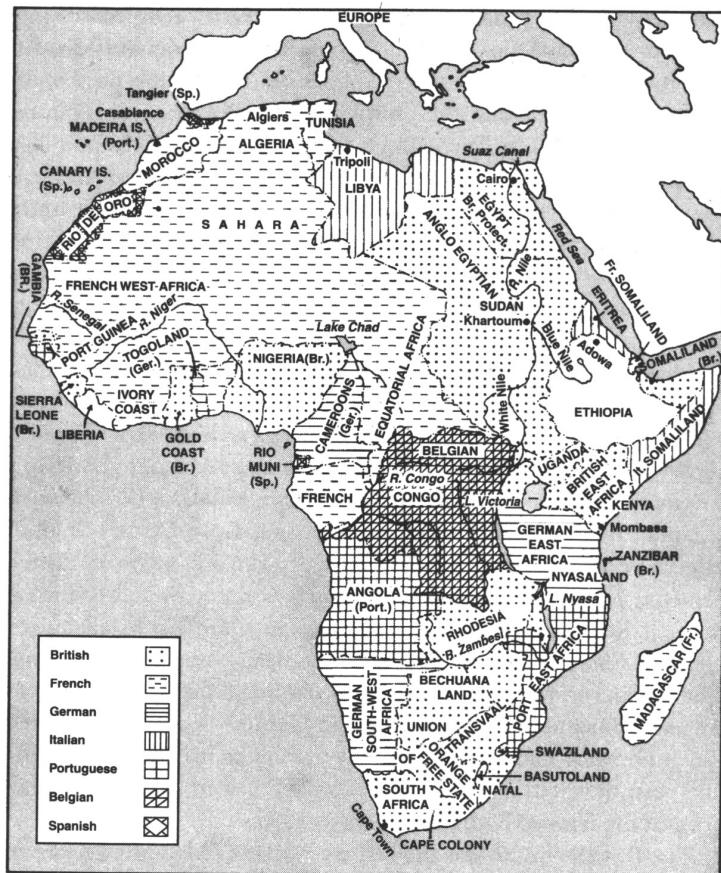
Though the rebellion was suppressed by a joint Anglo-German-Russian-French-Japanese-American force, which occupied Beijing, but it prevented the partition of China. In 1907, Iran was divided into three spheres of influence. Russia dominated the northwest, while Britain controlled the southern portion of Iran. The central part was kept as a buffer between Russia and Britain. Britain also exercised some degree of control over Afghanistan. Central Asia had come under the rule of the Russian empire. The only major country in Asia which was independent was Japan. She had defeated China in 1895 and occupied Formosa and in subsequent years had extended her influence over China. She also defeated Russia in a war over Manchuria. In 1910, she occupied Korea.

Africa, with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, was divided among the European powers. In 1876, Leopold II, King of Belgium, had taken possession of Congo, more or less as his private property. In 1908 it was handed over to the Belgian government. Britain's empire in Africa included Egypt and Sudan, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Uganda, British East Africa, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria and South Africa. The French had taken possession of Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, the Sahara, French Congo, French Guinea, Senegal, Dahomey (Benin) and Madagascar. Germany had acquired German East Africa, South-West Africa, Cameroon and Togoland. The Italian conquests included Libya and Somaliland. Portugal held Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea. Spain had acquired Rio de Oro and Spanish Guinea. Italy's ambition to conquer Ethiopia had been thwarted when her troops were defeated by the Ethiopian army at the famous Battle of Adowa in 1896.

The British empire was the biggest in the world, both in terms of the number of people over whom it ruled and the area under her control. Britain, at this time, had a population of about 45 million, but the population of her colonial possessions extending over an area of 23 million square kilometres was about 400 million. France with a population of about 39 million ruled over an empire of over 10 million square kilometres inhabited by over 50 million people.

Europe dominated the world not only politically but also economically. Three countries of Europe—Britain, Germany and France—controlled about 45 per cent of the world trade and about 60 per cent of the world market for manufactured goods.

## COLONIAL POSSESSIONS IN AFRICA IN 1914



The process of the imperialist conquest of Asia and Africa was accompanied by intense rivalries and conflicts among the European imperialist powers. The competing claims over colonies often created conditions of war. However, most of these conflicts were resolved in the conference rooms of Europe and wars were generally avoided. The European powers generally settled their disputed claims over territory on the basis of quid pro quo or 'something for something', by giving away something in exchange for something else. For example, in 1904, after a long period of conflicting claims, which

had brought them almost to the point of war, Britain and France entered into a secret agreement whereby Britain was given a ‘free hand’ in Egypt, while France was given uninterrupted right of domination over Morocco. When Germany came to know about it, she demanded that France relinquish her claim to Morocco. A series of international crises followed, bringing Europe to the brink of war. The Moroccan issue was finally settled in 1911 when France agreed to give a portion of French Congo to Germany and Germany relinquished her claim over Morocco. Both in creating these crises and in resolving them, the people of French Congo or Morocco, whose territories were being bargained, had no say.

In spite of the “Gentlemen’s Agreements” which resolved most disputes over colonies, there was growing militarisation of the European states. Every country feared and suspected the others and tried to increase its military and naval strength. Most European countries introduced conscription, that is, making military training compulsory for everyone. Europe was being gradually converted into armed camps. Each country, of course, claimed that the increase in her armed strength was for purely defence purpose, while disputed that of others as an instigation for war. Britain opposed Germany for building a strong navy, saying that it was a luxury for her as she had a strong army. On the other hand, Kaiser William II, the German Emperor, declared, “The German Fleet is not built against any one and not against England, but according to our need.... I want to make myself safe, against France and Russia and England too. And I am all for the white man against the black.” Britain was determined to maintain her naval superiority, which she had enjoyed for about three centuries. The feverish manner in which the armed strength of various European states was increasing and the preparations for war were made, led to the steady growth of a feeling that war was inevitable. Further, war came to be considered a part of the natural order of things and was even extolled as a virtue. Preparations for war were accompanied by an extensive propaganda for war. Some philosophers and politicians even started viewing war as one of the “divine elements of the universe” and “a condition for progress”.

When we speak of the economic and military might of Europe, it should be remembered that this was not true of all countries of Europe. When war broke out in 1914, there were about twenty-five states in Europe, big and small. The most industrialised of these were Britain,

Germany and France while most of the rest—Spain and Portugal in the Iberian Peninsula, the Balkan states such as Albania, Serbia and Bulgaria, Greece and countries of Eastern Europe—were still primarily pre-industrial economies, even though some of them had acquired colonial possessions. Russia, the most populous country in Europe and with a big empire was primarily an agricultural country, where industrialisation had just begun, and that too, mainly through investments by other countries. Nor were there any notion of the principle of nationality. The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and Finland were part of the Russian empire. Poland as a state did not exist—one part of it was under Russian occupation, another part was ruled by the Austro-Hungarian empire and the third part lay in Germany. Czechoslovakia was a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire as were many areas of the Slav people (comprising parts of what was till recently Yugoslavia). Ireland had been a British colony for centuries. The political system in these countries also varied. Some were republics, though not all republics were democratic; some were constitutional monarchies, the powers of the monarch varying from country to country; and the rest were autocracies.

### **Conflicts within Europe**

The conflicts among European countries were not confined to the question of colonies. There were tensions and antagonisms between them over European affairs. Of the twenty-five European states, five may be said to have been powerful. These were Britain, Germany, France, Austria-Hungary and Russia. Of these, Britain was the richest and the most powerful. Britain had a parliamentary form of government, though monarchy had been retained. Even after the various Reform Acts passed during the nineteenth century, the House of Commons of the British parliament, which comprised elected members (the other being the House of Lords which comprised hereditary members), was not truly democratic. All men still did not have the right to vote and women had no voting rights at all. One of the major problems that Britain faced was the demand for Home Rule by the Irish. A powerful movement for independence had been growing in Ireland, though many people in northern Ireland, mostly settlers from England and Scotland, were opposed to it.

Germany was emerging as the strongest power, both in terms of her economic capabilities and armed might, and was Britain's main rival. She too had a parliamentary form of government though the position of the German emperor was much stronger than that of the British monarch. The territory of Germany included a part of Poland and Alsace-Lorraine which she had taken from France after a war in 1870–71. France, the third most industrialised state of Europe, had been a republic since 1871. She looked forward to the day when she would avenge her humiliating defeat at the hands of Germany and recover Alsace-Lorraine by a war of *revanche* (revenge). The dominant power in Central Europe was the Habsburg Empire, or the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Emperor Francis Joseph was simultaneously the emperor of Austria and king of Hungary. Politically, Austria-Hungary was the most troubled state in Europe, extending over a large area of Europe. Her territories, besides Austria and Hungary, included areas inhabited by many nationalities, like the Czechs of Bohemia and Moravia, Slovaks, Poles, Romanians, Serbs and Croats, and Italians. In all these territories, there was a resurgence of nationalism, creating deep discontent and divisions. The nationalism of the Slav people in Austria-Hungary was also fanned by Russia and Serbia and created strong antagonism between these two countries and Austria-Hungary.

Russia was the biggest country in Europe and she had established a vast empire which included the Baltic states, Finland and parts of Poland in Europe, and Northern and Central Asia. Economically Russia was a backward agricultural country with an outdated political system—there were some industries concentrated in a few big cities. She was under the autocratic rule of the Czars, as the Russian emperors were called, and until 1905 she did not have even the semblance of a parliament. After the revolution of 1905, a parliament, called the Duma, was created with very limited power. Discontent was rife in the Russian empire among the non-Russian nationalities, because of the oppressive social, economic and political system. Another country of Europe which pretended to be powerful was Italy. She had vast colonial ambitions, but, except for her northern parts, she was industrially backward.

Some of the tensions in Europe were connected with the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire. Till the early nineteenth

century the entire Balkan Peninsula was a part of the Ottoman empire. Throughout the nineteenth century Russia and the Ottoman empire fought each other. Russia's attempts to extend her control over the Ottoman territories in Europe were thwarted by other European countries, notably Britain, Germany and Austria-Hungary. By the early twentieth century, the Ottoman rule over the Balkans had all but ended. Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania had emerged as independent states. However, the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire did not solve the problem of nationalities in Europe. Serbia had emerged as a champion of the Slav people, many of whom inhabited the Austro-Hungarian empire. She depended on Russia's support in her ambition to create Greater Serbia which would include the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina, that were under Austria-Hungary, and the southern areas of Austria-Hungary which were inhabited by the Slav people—the Croats, Slovenes and Serbs. She encouraged discontent in these areas and organised conspiracies against Austria-Hungary. This region became the source of increasing tensions in Europe and finally provided the incident which brought about the First World War.

In 1908, Austria-Hungary formally annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina which, though formally a part of the Ottoman empire, had been under her control. Serbia wanted Russia to go to war with Austria-Hungary on this issue but Germany's threat of supporting Austria-Hungary in the event of a war restrained Russia. There was further intensification of bitterness in Serbia against Austria-Hungary as a result of the Balkan Wars (1912–13). Some of the Balkan states, including Serbia, had united, with Russian support, to conquer Macedonia from the Ottomans. However, after the Ottomans had been defeated, Austria-Hungary, with the support of Britain and Germany, succeeded in making Albania an independent state rather than a part of Serbia, which Serbia had earlier hoped.

### **Formation of Alliances**

During the period, treaties and secret agreements were signed, and threats of war issued and withdrawn, indicating alignments and realignments. There were no permanent friends or enemies amongst them and thus no country could rely on the support of another country.

This mistrust persisted till the very outbreak of the First World War and was an additional source of tension. Coupled with this there was the confusion of who was a friend or an enemy. For example, Russia had threatened to go to war on the question of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In fact, she had earlier reached a secret understanding with Austria-Hungary promising her not to interfere in her plans to annex Bosnia-Herzegovina in exchange for her support in Russia's ambition to have the straits leading to the Mediterranean opened to her. However, in spite of these uncertainties, two rival alliances had emerged by the first decade of the twentieth century. Already in 1882, the Triple Alliance comprising Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy had been formed. Although Germany and Austria-Hungary remained friends, by 1890 it was clear that Italy's loyalty to the alliance would be uncertain. Russia and France had signed secret agreements in 1894 which had brought them together against the Triple Alliance, particularly against Germany and Austria-Hungary. In 1904, Britain and France—who had long been enemies and had often reached the brink of war for their competing claims over colonies—entered into what is known as the *Entente Cordiale*, which was a sort of friendly agreement rather than a formal alliance. The secret clauses of this 'friendly agreement' included France giving up her claims on Egypt in return for freedom to do what she liked in Morocco. The next stage in the process was an agreement in 1907 between Britain and Russia the two had a long history of hostility and war. The purpose of this agreement was to divide Iran. With this was formed the *Triple Entente* comprising Britain, France and Russia. It was an Entente (understanding) and not a formal alliance. The formation of alliances (or understanding), in spite of doubts about the loyalty of allies or friends, in case the war broke out, further built the atmosphere of war and added to the mistrust and fear of each against the other. The alliances also made it, in a way, inevitable that, when the war breaks out, it would not be a local war confined to one or two countries and that it would almost certainly assume wider proportions.

### Social Tensions

Besides the conflicts between states, there were serious tensions and problems within states. The problem of nationalities, which has been

mentioned, was not the only source of internal tension. The socioeconomic changes that had come about as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism made Europe's hegemony over the world possible. However, the social system in almost all countries of Europe was marked by gross inequalities. In the countries where industrialisation had not taken place on any significant scale, the peasantry, which constituted the bulk of the population, continued to live in conditions of misery and oppression. For countries that were marked by industrialisation and had become mighty economic powers, the social setup was based on undisguised exploitation of the workers. In spite of the growth of industries which produced an increasing quantity of goods, vast masses of people lived in unhealthy conditions and led lives of semi-starvation, with the ever-present danger of being thrown out of employment. Their abject poverty became apparent on many occasions. In Britain, for example, during her war against the Boers (Dutch settlers) in South Africa between 1899–1902, the need for recruiting additional men to the army was urgently felt. A large number of people who flocked to the army recruiting centres were, however, rejected, for they were either diseased or considered too weak, to serve as soldiers. Efforts were made to mitigate some of the worst effects of capitalism, but the situation of the downtrodden had not significantly improved even up till the end of the nineteenth century. A British historian of twentieth century Europe has thus remarked:

The poor who thronged the overcrowded slums of the big towns and industrial districts were a lower order of humanity and treated as such, valued only as the necessary pool of labour, always in surplus, on which the social as well as the economic system depended.

### Socialist Movement

The period witnessed the rise of the trade union movement and the spread of the ideas and movements of socialism. Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century the socialist view that capitalism was a system based on exploitation was gaining increasing popularity among the workers of Europe. There was a spate of strikes in pre-First World War Europe. In almost every country of Europe, socialist

parties had been formed and were steadily growing both in strength and popularity. By 1914, the number of people who voted for the various socialist parties in Europe also steadily increased. In 1914, the socialist parties of Germany, France and Italy were the single largest parties in the parliaments of their respective countries.

In 1889 the Second International was formed. One of the decisions taken at the Congress at which the Second International was formed was "to organize, for 1st May, a great international demonstration organised in such a way" that on the same day "the workers in all the lands and cities will simultaneously demand from the powers-that-be a limitation of the working day to eight hours". Since then, May Day is observed throughout the world as the working-class day and a day of solidarity of the workers throughout the world.

There were many differences within the socialist movement and among the parties of each country on the meaning of socialism and the methods of achieving it. Some socialists held the view that capitalism could be ended only by overthrowing the ruling class through a revolutionary struggle while others held that capitalism could be transformed gradually through the growing influence of the working class without a revolution. However, almost all the socialist parties were agreed on the eventual overthrow of the capitalist system. These differences were also reflected in the policies of the Second International and continued to divide the socialist movement in later years.

### **Colonialism, Militarisation and War**

Two major issues which all socialist parties and the Second International were concerned about were that of the colonies and of militarisation and war. There were differences on both these issues although on certain aspects of these issues almost all socialists were agreed. Some advocated the view that the right of every nation to freedom and independence was a fundamental concept of socialism and that colonialism should be totally rejected. Others, while condemning capitalist colonial policies, held that under a socialist government colonialism could play a positive civilising role. The latter view was often used by some sections in the socialist movement to directly or indirectly support the colonial policies of their respective

governments. These differences persisted for many decades and it was only after the collapse of the colonial system that the ‘civilising role’ of colonialism, under a capitalist or a socialist government, lost all its ‘socialist’ adherents.

In spite of these differences, however, the socialist parties of Europe, including those of the imperialist countries, kept themselves aloof from the colonial policies of their respective governments. The Second International, at its Congress held at Stuttgart in Germany in 1907, unanimously passed a resolution which committed the socialist members of the parliaments of different countries to oppose the robbery and subjugation of the colonial peoples and to fight for reforms which would better their lot, protect their rights and “do everything possible to educate them for [their eventual] independence”. The leaders of the freedom movements often established close relationship with the socialist parties and leaders of the colonial countries. Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of India’s freedom movement, attended a Congress of the Second International, and was greeted with “tumultuous cheers and applause, lasting for several minutes”. The president of the session asked the delegates “to treat with the greatest reverence the statement of **the** Indian delegate, an old man of eighty, who had sacrificed fifty-five years of his life to the struggle for the freedom and happiness of his people”. Madame Cama, an Indian revolutionary, unfurled India’s flag of freedom, which she had designed, at a Congress of the Second International.

From its very beginning, the socialist movement had viewed war as an extreme expression of the evils inherent in the existing capitalist system and a barbaric instrument with which the ruling classes of various countries tried to promote their economic and political power. The establishment of peace and human brotherhood had been one of the inspiring ideals of the socialist movement. With the growing militarisation and the danger of war, the socialist parties and the Second International increasingly concerned themselves with these issues. One of their major preoccupations throughout this period was the “question of how the workers of the world could unite to prevent wars”. All socialist parties were agreed that every effort should be made to prevent wars. They were committed to opposing the arms race and voting

against war credits in the parliaments of their respective countries. Many socialist leaders suggested that workers should go on a general strike to prevent war and, in case it broke out, to bring about its speedy termination. Keir Hardie, the British socialist leader, advocated the idea of a strike in the arms industry, transport and mining for preventing wars. The Stuttgart Congress of the Second International unanimously adopted a resolution on "Militarism and the International Conflicts". The resolution stated that wars "are part of the very nature of capitalism" and declared that the struggle against militarism was inseparable from the struggle for socialism. It pledged the socialist parties and their representatives in parliaments "to combat the naval and military armaments with all their might and to refuse the means for these armaments. It is their duty to work for the education of the working-class youth in the spirit of the brotherhood of nations and of Socialism...." The resolution ended by saying:

If a war threatens to break out, it is the duty of the working classes and their parliamentary representatives in the countries involved ... to exert every effort in order to prevent the outbreak of war by the means they consider most effective....

In case war should break out any way, it is their duty to intervene in favour of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilize the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist rule.

The concluding parts of the resolution quoted above were drafted by three socialist leaders—Lenin and Martov from Russia and Rosa Luxemburg from Germany. They remained steadfast in their adherence to the resolution. A great leader who fought all his life against the forces of militarism and war was Jean Jaures of France. He had earned the wrath of the French *revanchists* (the revenge-seekers) for his propaganda against militarism and war. During the Balkan War in 1912 when a European war seemed imminent, he had declared,

Let governments remember that in conjuring up the danger of war they invite the peoples to make a simple calculation—how much smaller a sacrifice a revolution would involve, when compared with the war they are preparing.

On 28 July 1914 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Soon after, a meeting of the Second International was held in Brussels. A call was given at this meeting to the workers of all countries threatened by war to organise peace meetings and to work for the settlement of the dispute between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. The meeting also decided that "the German and French workers will bring even greater pressure on their own governments to make Germany exercise restraint on Austria while France persuades Russia to keep out of the conflict". There was a workers' demonstration in Brussels with the slogan "War on War". Jaurès was among the leaders who addressed the demonstrators. After his return to Paris on 31 July, he went in a deputation to persuade the French government to pressurise Russia, France's Entente ally, against her mobilisation for war. A few hours later, on the eve of the outbreak of the First World War, he was shot dead in a cafe.

When the war, finally, broke out, the socialist parties found themselves powerless to oppose it or to call for an uprising for its termination. Some socialist parties even decided to support their respective governments and made common cause with their respective ruling classes. The war, which was the result of the inter-imperialist rivalries and served only the narrow imperialist aims of the ruling classes, was being viewed by some of the socialists as a fight for the survival of their respective nations. With this, an important phase in the history of the socialist movement came to a close. The spirit of internationalism which had characterised the socialist movement from the very beginning, suffered a mortal blow. There were splits in the socialist movements in almost all countries and these became even deeper after the Russian Revolution.

The period of the quarter century before the First World War was one of tremendous growth in the strength of the socialist movement in Europe. The socialist movement challenged the existing order in Europe—the capitalist system on which it was based, the policy of imperialist conquest and exploitation of colonies, and militarism and war. There was a fear of revolution in Europe though none actually took place except in Russia in 1905 where it was suppressed. "Certainly no European government hesitated to go to war for fear that its subjects would refuse the call to arms or turn their weapons against their own rulers—and they were right". This statement by a

historian correctly sums up the situation as it developed in Europe—except in the case of Russia, where the rulers were proved wrong.

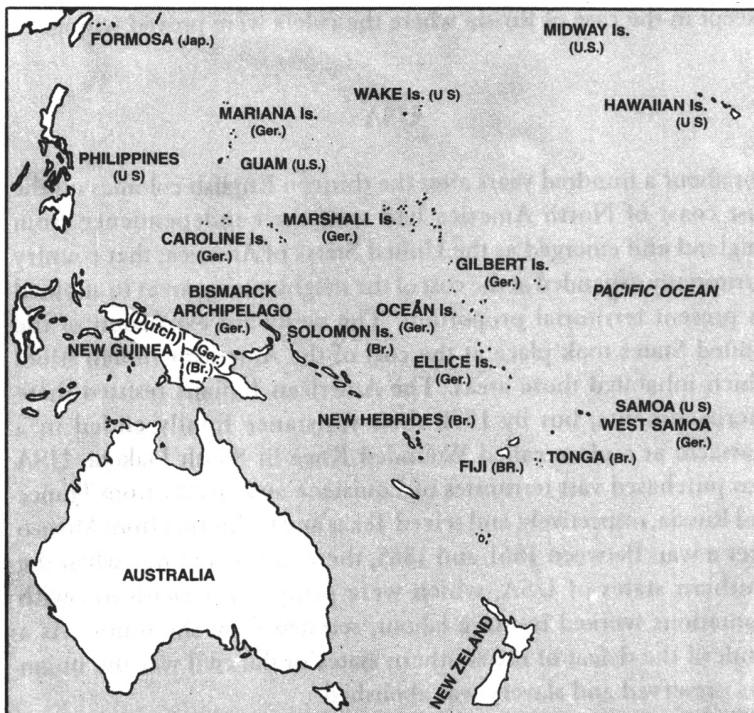
USA

For about a hundred years after the thirteen English colonies on the east coast of North America had won their independence from England and emerged as the United States of America, that country territorially expanded at the cost of the neighbouring areas to attained its present territorial proportion. The westward expansion of the United States took place at the cost of the American Indian tribes which inhabited those areas. The American Indians resisted these encroachments, but by 1890 their resistance finally ended in a massacre at a place called Wounded Knee in South Dakota. USA also purchased vast territories of Louisiana and Alaska from France and Russia, respectively, and seized Texas and California from Mexico after a war. Between 1861 and 1865, there was a civil war when the southern states of USA, which were primarily agricultural with plantations worked by slave labour, seceded from the union. As a result of the defeat of the southern states in the civil war the union was preserved and slavery was abolished.

Within three decades after the end of the Civil War, USA had become the foremost industrial power in the world. By the end of the nineteenth century, she was producing iron and steel in the industry, she outstripped every other country in the world. There were over 300,000 km of railroads in the country, which exceeded the combined railroads in the whole of Europe. She produced and consumed more oil and natural gas than the rest of the world put together. For a long time, the amazing growth of the US economy went unnoticed. One reason for this was that the US herself provided a huge market for her products. The US population had risen from about four million in 1790 to about 92 million in 1910. About twenty-five million Europeans had migrated to the US during the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. In USA there had also been a general lack of interest in European and world affairs.

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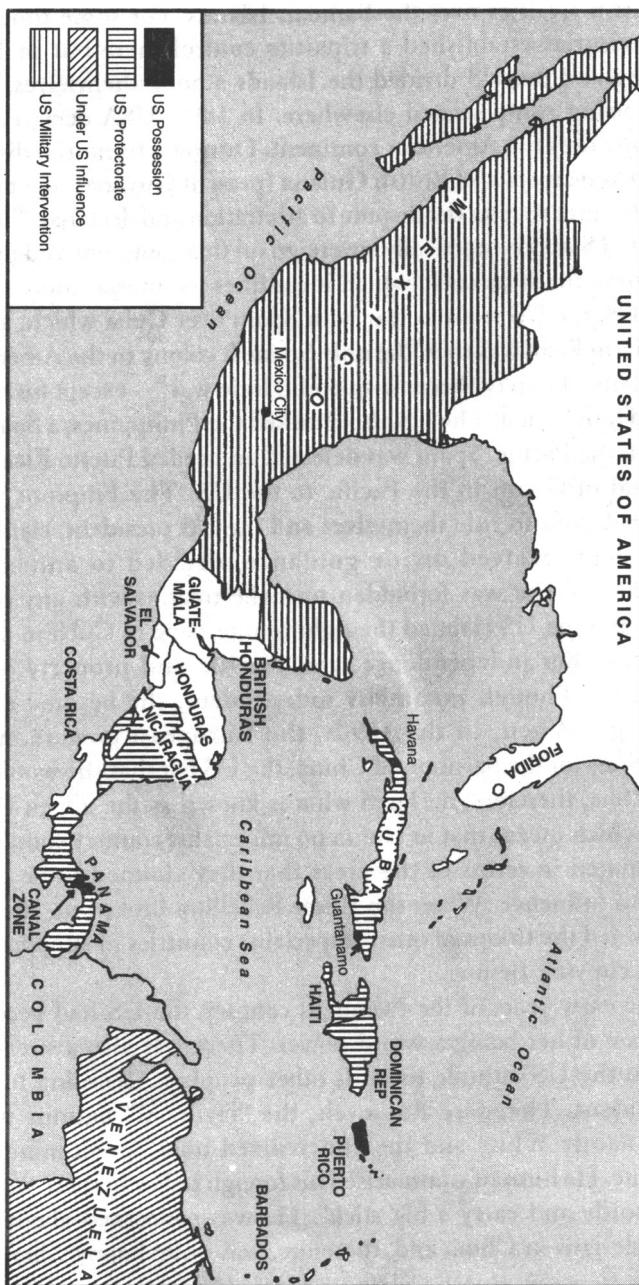
### COLONIAL POSSESSIONS IN THE PACIFIC (UP TO 1914)



### USA as an Imperialist Power

By the 1890s, USA had emerged as a new imperialist power. In 1889, a US senator said, "Today, we are raising more than we can consume. Today, we are making more than we can use. Therefore, we must find new markets for our produce, new occupation for our capital, new work for our labour". Another senator had warned that the US must not fall out of the line of march. Like many Europeans at that time, the Americans also had begun talking about the duty of the civilised nations to uplift the less fortunate ones and the domination by strong nations of the weak ones being in accordance with the laws of nature. The US expansion in the Pacific had started even earlier. By 1881, the Hawaiian Islands were referred to as being a part of the American System, though they were formerly annexed only in 1898. In the 1880s, a war-like situation had developed as a result of the US, German

### EXPANSION OF US POWER IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (UP TO 1917)



and British rivalries over the Samoan Islands. For some time, the three countries established a tripartite control there but in 1899, Germany and the US divided the Islands among themselves, with Britain being compensated elsewhere. In 1893, USA declared her hegemony over the American continent. During a territorial dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana (present Guyana), she forced Britain to agree to refer the dispute to arbitration and declared, "Today the United States is practically sovereign on this continent and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition".

In 1898, the US went to war with Spain over Cuba which, along with Puerto Rico, was then the only Spanish colony in the Americas. It was claimed to have been "a splendid little war"—except for those who had fought in it. The US also attacked the Philippines, a Spanish colony in the Pacific. Spain was defeated and ceded Puerto Rico and the island of Guam in the Pacific to the US. The Filipinos were considered unfit to rule themselves and the US president, claiming that he had received divine guidance, decided to annex the Philippines. Cuba was forbidden to make treaties with any other country and the US claimed the right to intervene in Cuba in order to preserve her independence, and the life and property of its inhabitants. Though nominally independent, she became a US appendage. When, in the 1890s, the European powers made preparations for the partition of China, the US felt that she would be left out. She, therefore, declared what is known as the 'Open Door policy', which meant that in China no imperialist country should be discriminated in terms of the areas that they claimed to be their spheres of influence. When the Boxer Rebellion broke out, the US troops joined the troops of other imperialist countries in suppressing it and occupying Beijing.

By the early years of the twentieth century, the US had become fully aware of her being a world power. There was also a streak of racism in the US attitude towards other peoples. According to the US president, Theodore Roosevelt, the "civilized" nations were predominantly White and the "uncivilized ones" predominantly non-White. He himself summarised his foreign policy in these words: "Speak softly and carry a big stick". He was concerned about the Russian designs in China and, therefore, was quite happy when the

Japanese attacked the Russian fleet in 1904. Later, he mediated to end the Russo-Japanese War and persuaded Russia to recognise Japan's territorial gains which included the control of Korea and southern Manchuria, and a part of the Sakhalin Island which had earlier belonged to Russia. He also entered into a secret agreement with Japan which gave the US the right to trade freely in that region. The US appeasement of Japan's colonial ambitions was to prove costly to the US later as Japan became the main rival to the US in the Pacific.

Latin America had begun to be seen as USA's special sphere of interest, which was open to intervention only by the US. In 1904, Roosevelt declared that the United States had the right not only to oppose European intervention in the American continent but to intervene in the internal affairs of her neighbours to maintain order. This is known as a new 'corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine. For over thirty years, the US kept to herself the control of the custom revenues of the Dominican Republic. In 1906, US troops landed in Cuba to preserve order and remained there for three years.

The completion of the Panama Canal is considered the "most celebrated accomplishment" of Roosevelt. A French company had completed about 40 per cent construction of the Panama Canal in Colombia. The US bought from the French company its holdings but the Colombian government refused to agree to the terms which the US had offered to her for securing the rights to construct the canal in the Colombian territory. Roosevelt called the Colombians "bandits" and "blackmailers". Soon after, a "revolution" was organised in Panama with money being supplied by an American industrialist. The US troops landed in Panama to preserve order (actually to prevent Colombia from suppressing the 'revolution') and, after three days, Panama was recognised as an independent nation. The new government of Panama signed an agreement with the US on the Panama Canal on terms that were much more favourable to the US than those which the US had earlier offered to the Colombian government and which the latter had rejected. The canal was opened in 1914. In the meantime, in 1906, Roosevelt had been given the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending the Russo-Japanese War.

The US policy of intervention in the internal affairs of the Latin American countries continued during the presidencies of William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson. Taft's policy of promoting American investments in the Latin American countries and elsewhere and establishing a de facto control through these investments did not preclude the use of gunboats and armed intervention. The US policy towards Mexico during the presidency of Wilson earned the US the lasting hostility of Mexico. In 1910, a corrupt dictator of Mexico had been deposed by a popular leader called Francisco Madero. In 1913, he was deposed, with US approval, by another dictator, and murdered. This dictator was deposed after some time but the US unsuccessfully continued to intervene in the affairs of Mexico.

### **Protest Movements**

The industrial expansion, which had made USA a leading industrial power and was soon to make her a world power, was accompanied by corruption, intense exploitation and complete disregard for the interests of the people. The owner of one of the largest railroad companies is credited with the most ruthless but frank remark: "The public be damned". By adopting ruthless methods, a few individuals controlling a few corporations had concentrated enormous economic power in their hands. Often this concentration took place through bribery and in crass violation of the existing laws. The holder of a huge industrial empire, when told that what he was doing was against the law, declared: "What do I care about the law? Hain't I got the power." The need to control the increasing concentration of economic power in a few hands became a major issue in the politics of USA from the 1890s. It led to a movement called 'Progressivism'.

What has been said earlier about the conditions of the common people, particularly the industrial workers, in Europe was also true for USA. The working and living condition of the workers was miserable and unemployment was a common feature of their life in spite of the enormous economic growth. Workers were never very far from the prospect of poverty, losing their jobs or facing a cut in their wages. Child labour was rampant and children working at night in the textile mills were kept awake by throwing cold water on their faces. Female children in some industries worked sixteen hours a

day. About 20 per cent of the workers employed in the manufacturing industries were women, who were paid much lower wages than men. Little attention was paid to prevent industrial accidents, which were a common occurrence.

The workers of USA began to organise themselves and there was a wave of strikes from the 1880s. Most of these were ruthlessly suppressed by the state police who used to terrorise the workers. The industrialists also used guards hired for the purpose of breaking strikes and terrorising workers. One agency which provided the services of its guards for this purpose was the Pinkerton Detective Agency and it continued to provide these services for many decades. Killing of trade union leaders was not uncommon. A national workers' organisation which emerged in this period was the American Federation of Labour (AFL). On its call, strikes and demonstrations were held on 1 May 1886 all over the country to press the demand for an eight-hour working day. In Haymarket Square in Chicago, on that day, the police fired at demonstrators who were protesting against police atrocities on the striking workers of the city. Four workers were killed. Someone had earlier thrown a bomb at the police, which had killed seven policemen. Eight persons were arrested on the charge of inciting the person who had thrown the bomb and in what is considered to be one of the most "injudicious trials" in American history. Seven of the accused were sentenced to death. The Second International's decision to give a call to workers to observe May Day was connected with the incidents that had earlier taken place at Haymarket Square in Chicago on 1 May 1886.

Many Americans raised their voice against the gross inequalities in society, the exploitation of child labour and of women workers, the growing concentration of wealth in a few hands, and corrupt industrialists, bankers, politicians and officials. A powerful literature of protest was produced by writers and journalists. There also developed a strong opposition to the imperialist policies being followed by the US government. Some of the earliest socialist groups outside Europe were formed in the US. In 1901, the Socialist Party of America was formed. Its most prominent leader was Eugene V. Debs, who polled about one million votes in the 1912 election for the presidency. Another important labour organisation was the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). When the First World War broke out,

the US, in the words of President Wilson, decided to remain “impartial in thought as well as deed”. In April 1917, USA decided to enter the “war to end wars” and to “make the world safe for democracy”. As has been mentioned earlier, the coming of the First World War brought about a permanent schism in the world socialist movement with some of the socialist parties of different Europe countries supporting the imperialist policies of their respective governments. The American Socialist Party and the IWW, however, stuck to their opposition to the war. The US government had made laws according to which any public expression of opposition to the war was sedition and sabotage. Many Americans were prosecuted for their opposition to the war. Eugene Debs was sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment.

### **Black People’s Struggle for Equality**

There were other tensions and conflicts within the US some of which have persisted till our own times. Vast sections of the American population suffered from various other disadvantages besides the ones created by the concentration of wealth in a few hands. Industrial progress did not mean increased prosperity of the people. In the course of a little over a hundred years, the American Indian tribes, which inhabited North America, were deprived of their lands and their way of life was totally disrupted. By 1890, the process of their total subordination was nearly complete and they had to accept what the Whites left to them.

One of the major issues in the history of USA since the nineteenth century has been the struggle of the Black or Afro-American people for freedom and equality. For about eighty years after USA emerged as an independent nation with a republican form of government, slavery continued in that country. In 1860, in a total population of about 31 million, there were four million slaves owned by about 225,000 people. This was mainly prevalent in the southern states of USA. In 1865, after the civil war, slavery was abolished. For about ten years after the civil war, efforts were made to enforce the rights of the Black people—the former slaves in the former slave-owning southern states. In 1868, ‘citizenship’ rights were given to all persons “born or naturalized” in the United States and these rights could not be

abridged. In 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed, which made it a law that the right of the citizens to vote "shall not be denied or abridged on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude". Earlier, even in the northern states, which did not have slavery, most Black people were denied their basic citizenship rights on one ground or the other. After the Fifteenth Amendment the Black people not only got their right to vote but such a right was enforced even in the southern states. This period which lasted till the 1870s is known as the Reconstruction Period. In many respects, this was the first time that the US had a truly democratic system. It came to an end when power was handed back to the former slave-owners in the southern states. Troops of the Federal government were withdrawn from the southern states, and a period of denial of political and legal rights to the Black people and the practice of racial discrimination and oppression against them started.

By the early years of the twentieth century, the Black people were stripped of their legal and political rights, and segregation between Whites and Blacks was rigidly enforced. Blacks and Whites could not travel in the same train compartments, they could not go to the same parks and beaches, they could not eat in the same restaurants, and they could not go to the same schools, theatres and even hospitals. Segregation was combined with violence, and it is estimated that about 200 Blacks were lynched by White mobs every year during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Racism also became an instrument for perpetuating socio-economic inequalities. The Black people were the most economically depressed section of the American society. But most of the Whites were also poor and were ruthlessly exploited. By arousing racial feelings, common people, Black and White alike, were prevented from forming a united front against economic exploitation. The Black people suffered from discriminatory practices throughout the country; in the southern states, of course, the discrimination was much worse and much more brutal than in the northern states. By the early years of the twentieth century, a powerful movement of protest against racial discrimination began to emerge. The most significant figure in this movement was W.E.B. Du Bois. He remained a key figure for about half a century. In 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

People (NAACP) was formed. Many Whites who were opposed to racism also supported the struggle of the Black people. However, it took over half a century before significant progress began to be made in ending racial discrimination and the inhuman system of racial segregation.

It has been mentioned earlier that even in those European countries that had a democratic system of government, women were denied the right to vote. The same situation existed in the US. The movement for woman suffrage had started in the mid-nineteenth century and it became an important issue in the early twentieth century. However, it was only in 1920 that American women were granted the right to vote by the US Constitution.

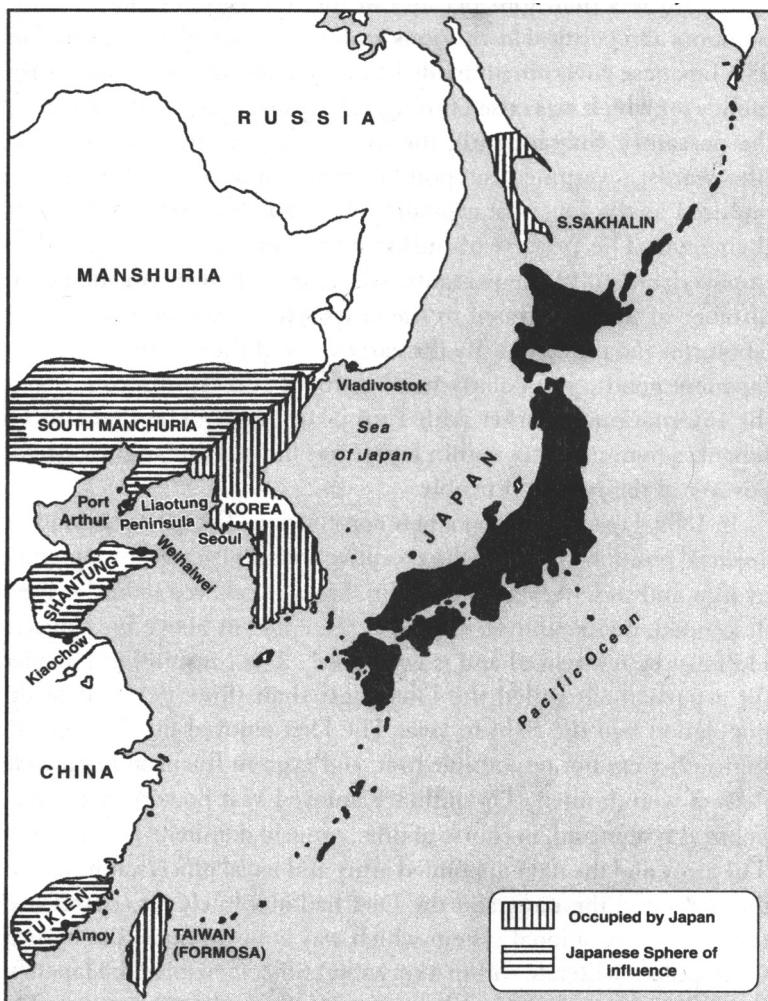
## JAPAN

### **Rise of Modern Japan**

It has been mentioned earlier that Japan was the only Asian country to have escaped imperialist control. For centuries, military generals, called *shoguns*, exercised real power in Japan while the Japanese emperor was a mere figurehead. For over two hundred years, Japan had been almost totally secluded from the rest of the world. In many respects, the Japanese social system was comparable to the social system of feudal Europe. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, Japan was rudely awakened to the modern world when her independence was threatened. Within a few decades she not only succeeded in warding off the danger of foreign domination but also underwent a process of modernising certain aspects of her society that enabled her to emerge as a world power.

In 1853, Commodore Perry went with a US fleet and delivered an ultimatum to Japan. It was stated that “positive necessity requires that we should protect our commercial interests in this remote part of the world, and in doing so, to resort to measures, however strong, to counteract the schemes of powers less scrupulous than ourselves”. Eight months later, when he returned with a bigger fleet, the Japanese government signed a treaty with the US under which two ports were opened to US ships and some amount of trade was permitted. Similar treaties were then signed by several European countries. In 1863 and

### JAPAN'S COLONIAL EXPANSION (1895-1918)



1864, the US and European fleets displayed their military superiority by firing on two Japanese cities.

In 1868, the rule of the shogun was ended and a new set of rulers and advisers came to the fore. They ruled in the name of the emperor, whose authority, in theory, was restored. This event is known as the Meiji Restoration, after the title 'Meiji' which the new emperor took.

Within less than four decades of the Meiji Restoration, Japan's economy and political institutions underwent speedy transformation. The Japanese government made heavy investments in industries, the money for which was raised through heavy taxation and by exploiting the peasantry. Subsequently, the industries were sold to capitalists. Afterwards, government support for starting industries was no longer required as the Japanese capitalists were able to start industries on their own. The process of industrialisation was accompanied by impoverishment of the peasants, who often rebelled. An increasing number of them migrated to the cities where they provided cheap labour for the industries. By the early years of the twentieth century, Japanese goods, particularly textiles, could successfully compete in the international market with European goods. The demand for Japanese manufactures within Japan was limited due to the extreme poverty of the common people.

In 1889, Japan was given a new constitution. The emperor enjoyed a special position as head of the executive and ministers were appointed by him and were responsible to him. He was believed to be "heaven-descended, divine and sacred; he is pre-eminent above his subjects. He must be reverenced and is inviolable". The constitution provided for a parliament called the Diet. Less than three per cent of the population had the right to vote. The Diet enjoyed little power: the ministers were not responsible to it, and even in financial matters, its powers were limited. The military enjoyed vast powers in the new political system and, in course of time, came to dominate it completely. The army and the navy appointed army and naval officers, ministers of the army and the navy, and the Diet had absolutely no control over them. The educational system which was built up made the mass of the population literate within a very short time. It enabled the Japanese to master the technical skills necessary for industrialisation. The educational system was used to promote emperor worship and an attitude of extreme nationalism and chauvinism. Civil liberties and open political struggles were lacking in Japan. The state was controlled by an oligarchy and the repressive apparatus of the state, notably the police, enjoyed wide powers to control the press and even prevent the holding of public meetings and demonstrations. Political dissent was not tolerated. In spite of severe restriction, however, the first socialist group in Asia was formed in Japan.

### **Japan as an Imperialist Power**

By the 1890s, Japan had started pursuing her colonial ambitions. These ambitions were primarily directed at China and aimed at establishing Japanese supremacy in East Asia. Later, the object of the Japanese ambition encompassed the entire Asian continent and the Pacific region. Having built up her armed strength, she went to war with China and defeated her in 1895. She annexed Formosa (Taiwan), which was a part of China, and forced China to recognise Korea, over which she claimed suzerainty, as an independent state. The Japanese objective in all this was not to secure the independence of Korea but to end the Chinese influence there and to gain a free hand for the subjugation of Korea. In 1905, Korea was made a protectorate of Japan and in 1910 was annexed by her. In 1899, Japan's status as a great power was recognised by the US and European countries when they gave up the rights and concessions that they had obtained as a result of the treaties which Japan had been forced to sign with them after 1854. In 1902, the Anglo-Japanese Treaty or Alliance was signed, and Japan became the first Asian country to enjoy the status of full equality with other colonial powers. The British objective in signing the treaty was to deter Russian designs in China. The Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) that followed, ended in the defeat of Russia. Southern Manchuria was recognised as a Japanese "sphere of influence". Japan also obtained half of the Sakhalin Island and acquired control of the Liaotung Peninsula. During the First World War, Japan sought to establish her protectorate over China. Though she did not succeed in achieving this aim, she was able to extend her influence there.

The rise of Japan as a great power, even though she was following imperialist policies in Asia, provided an impetus to the growth of nationalism in many Asian countries. Her war with Russia proved that an Asian non-White country could defeat a major European power. It should, however, be remembered that the main victims of Japanese imperialism were not Europeans but people of other Asian countries.

The emergence of USA and Japan as great powers was an indication that the supremacy of Europe would not last long. The First World War hastened the end of European hegemony.

## ASIA, AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA

We have referred to certain developments in Asia, Africa and Latin America in the context of European, American and Japanese imperialism. From the time when the imperialist countries established their direct or indirect control, they were faced with stiff resistance by the native people. In course of time, the early forms of resistance gave way to the rise of nationalist movements, which aimed at the overthrow of direct or indirect foreign control, asserted their right to equality with other nations and expressed their determination to build up the economies of their countries on modern lines and their political and social systems on the principles of democracy and social justice. These nationalist movements often had to fight against the outdated political systems in their own countries as well as those elements that stood in the way of their progress.

### Rise of Nationalist Movements in Asia

Indian nationalism with its specific features was the first nationalist movements to emerge in the colonies. By the early years of the twentieth century movements for national liberation had begun to emerge in other parts of Asia, notably in Indo-China, Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines and Iran.

In Iran, after a series of revolts, the Shah of Iran had been forced to agree to transform Iran into a constitutional monarchy with a parliament, called Majlis. With the support of foreign powers, particularly Russia, the Shah re-established his despotic rule and the Majlis was abolished.

In China, a number of revolutionary organisations emerged which later consolidated to form the Chinese Revolutionary League. The president of this League was Dr Sun Yat-sen, who played the leading role in the national awakening of the Chinese people and uniting the various revolutionary groups together. The League was guided by three principles enunciated by Dr Sun Yat-sen. These principles were: nationalism, democracy, and livelihood (the last one is sometimes referred to as socialism). In specific terms, these principles meant the ending of the rule of the Manchu dynasty which had been ruling China since the middle of the seventeenth century, and the

establishment of a democratic republic with equitable distribution of land among the populace. In 1911, revolution swept southern China and on 1 January 1912, China was proclaimed a republic with its headquarters at Nanjing (Nanking). Dr Sun Yat-sen was made the president of the republic. In the meantime, in northern China, some steps had been taken to introduce constitutional monarchy in China, with General Yuan Shih-kai as prime minister. To avoid a conflict between the governments in control of northern and southern China, from Beijing (Peking) and Nanjing respectively, a compromise was reached. The Manchu ruler abdicated and thus the imperial rule in China came to an end. Yuan Shih-kai was recognised as the president and he was entrusted with the task of calling the parliament. Yuan Shih-kai was supported by foreign powers. In 1913, he called the parliament but soon dismissed it. He had dreams of declaring himself emperor. In the meantime, Dr Sun Yat-sen had formed the Guomindang (Kuomintang) or the National Party and had given a call for a "second revolution". Yuan was able to suppress the Guomindang, which was banned, and Dr Sun sent to exile. In 1916, Yuan died and China came under the rule of warlords, who controlled different parts of the country and received financial support from foreign powers. When the First World War ended, the national and revolutionary movement in China entered a new phase.

By the early years of the twentieth century the Ottoman Empire had lost most of its territories in Europe. Most of her possessions in North Africa had also been taken over by European colonial powers. In the countries of West Asia—Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Arabia—nationalist feelings had been on the rise. Within Turkey, there were powerful stirrings against the tyranny of the Sultan and for making Turkey a modern democratic and secular state. The movement was led by a group of intellectuals, reformers and army officers, called the Young Turks. Threatened by a rebellion, the Sultan, in 1908, agreed to restore the constitution, which had been first introduced in 1876. Some Young Turks were in favour of giving equal rights to the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire while others were bent on maintaining Turkish supremacy and even extending it. Ultimately, Turkey, due to the failure of the liberal Young Turks, was drawn into the First World War on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary, and the British succeeded in pursuing their imperialist ambitions in the Arab world by making use of the anti-Ottoman Arab nationalist feelings.

### **Anti-Colonial Resistance in Africa**

The European partition of Africa had been more or less completed by the end of the nineteenth century, except for some parts of North Africa, which were acquired by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. The actual occupation of the African territories, however, took the European colonial powers much longer because of the resistance and revolts that they had to face. Some of these revolts took the colonial powers a long time to suppress. There was, for example, the Maji-Maji revolt in German East Africa in 1905–7. Unlike in many other countries of Asia, modern nationalist movements in Africa emerged only after the First World War. When they arose, they had a long tradition of resistance and revolt behind them.

### **Developments in Latin America**

In Latin America, twenty independent states had emerged with the collapse of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. Till the end of the nineteenth century, most of them had backward economies, based mainly on agriculture. Most of them were also ruled by corrupt oligarchies, and strong governments did not emerge, which could resist the economic domination by other countries. The rich resources of these countries, instead of being used for development and welfare of the people, were bartered away to European companies and, later, increasingly, to US corporations. With foreign investments in mines, plantations, railways, shipping, electricity, and almost all important sectors of the economy, Latin America had become what has been called an ‘informal empire’. Almost all the states of Latin America was dominated by the US.

Most Latin American countries had social systems which were marked by gross inequalities. In some countries, slavery had been abolished as a result of the French Revolution. In some others, however, it persisted even after it had been abolished in USA. In Brazil, for example, slavery was abolished only in 1888. However, in spite of the long persistence of slavery in some of the Latin American countries, the kind of racism, racial discrimination and segregation which marked life in USA even in the twentieth century, was absent in Latin America.

Except for later Asian immigrants, the population of Latin American countries comprised American Indians, people of European descent, and Blacks, who were descendants of slaves brought from Africa, and their admixtures. More than half of the population of Latin America was of mixed blood. However, in most countries which had a large American Indian population—such as Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela—all powers were concentrated in the hands of White ruling cliques. Large estates were owned by mainly absentee landlords while the American Indians were forced to live in conditions of extreme poverty. Only in Mexico—a country with a large American Indian population—did united popular movements grow with American Indian participation on a massive scale to put an end to social inequalities, to bring about equitable distribution of land, and to build a state system based on the support of the common people. Mexico, however, underwent a long period of political turmoil, including intervention by USA before the aims of the Mexican Revolution could, to some extent, be realised. Argentina made some progress in building up her economy and democratic institutions. The city of Buenos Aires was regarded as the Paris of Latin America.

By the time the First World War broke out, there were democratic stirrings in many parts of Latin America. Even though Latin American countries had been independent for about a century, they “lingered on the margin of international life”, with no independent role to play. With little industrialisation, they were reduced to the position of suppliers of raw materials. Some of them were transformed into single crop economies for the benefit of their powerful neighbour. This made them further dependent. The contrast between North America and Latin America was too glaring to be missed by the people of Latin America. There was a rise in the aspirations of the Latin American people and a growing sense of hostility to USA.

## THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The inter-imperialist rivalries, the growing chauvinism, antagonism and conflicts within Europe, the formation of opposing alliance

systems, and the growing militarisation and feverish preparations for war, were some of the marked features that characterised the history of Europe since the last decade of the nineteenth century. There had been a number of crises which had been at least temporarily resolved. The tensions in Europe, however, had created a situation in which war had begun to be considered inevitable. Every state was ready with its war plans and strategies. It had also become increasingly clear that once the war broke out, it would not be possible to localise it and that it would become a general war and every country would get drawn into it.

### The Immediate Occasion

The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, and his wife in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 provided the immediate occasion for the outbreak of the war. Sarajevo, where the assassination took place, was the capital of Bosnia which had been annexed by Austria-Hungary a few years earlier. The organiser of the assassination was a secret society, called the "Black Hand" or "Union of Death". They were a group of extremist Serbian nationalists whose aim was to unite all Serbians into a single Serbian state. Historians are generally agreed that the Serbian government, or at least the Serbian prime minister, was aware of the conspiracy to assassinate the Archduke but did nothing to stop it. Convinced of Serbia's complicity in the assassination, Austria (short for Austria-Hungary) served an ultimatum on 23 July making eleven demands on Serbia. Austria did not expect these demands to be accepted and hence fixed a time-limit of forty-eight hours for unconditional compliance. Serbia accepted most of the demands, but not all. Total acceptance of all the demands would have meant total loss of sovereignty by Serbia. Serbia's reply of 25 July did not conciliate Austria, and Serbia, knowing that it would not, had already ordered mobilisation of her troops. Austria rejected Serbia's reply and immediately ordered the mobilisation of her army for an attack on Serbia. She was determined to put an end to this "permanent danger to my House and my territories", as the Austrian emperor called it in a letter to the German emperor. On 28 July Austria declared war on Serbia. On 29 July, the Austrian army bombarded Belgrade, Serbia's capital.

The outbreak of war between Serbia and Austria was soon followed by wars between countries that were militarily linked together. These wars led to the general war or the First World War. In order to pressurise Austria to abandon the war against Serbia, Russia ordered mobilisation against Austria. She could not permit Austrian expansion in the Balkans. Russia had her own ambitions in Serbia which would have suffered if Serbia gets defeated at the hands of Austria. As Germany would come to the aid of Austria, if Russia entered the war against Austria, Russia also prepared for war with Germany. Germany was convinced that in the event of a war between her and Russia, France would join Russia against Germany. This would mean that Germany would have to fight on two fronts, with France in the west and with Russia in the east. To be successful in the war, Germany had made plans to first defeat France in a quick war by mobilising most of her troops for this purpose and then turn to Russia against whom a quick victory was not possible. Thus, the second war was between Austria and Germany on the one side and Russia and France on the other. The British position was still unclear as the British government was divided on the issue of going to war. She responded to the French request for help by promising to defend France's northern coast against the German navy. However, German invasion of neutral Belgium finally ended Britain's indecisiveness, and Germany and Britain were at war. Thus, the rival alliances, formed in the preceding years, had come into play. Only Italy, a member of the Triple Alliance, remained neutral on the ground that Germany was not fighting a defensive war.

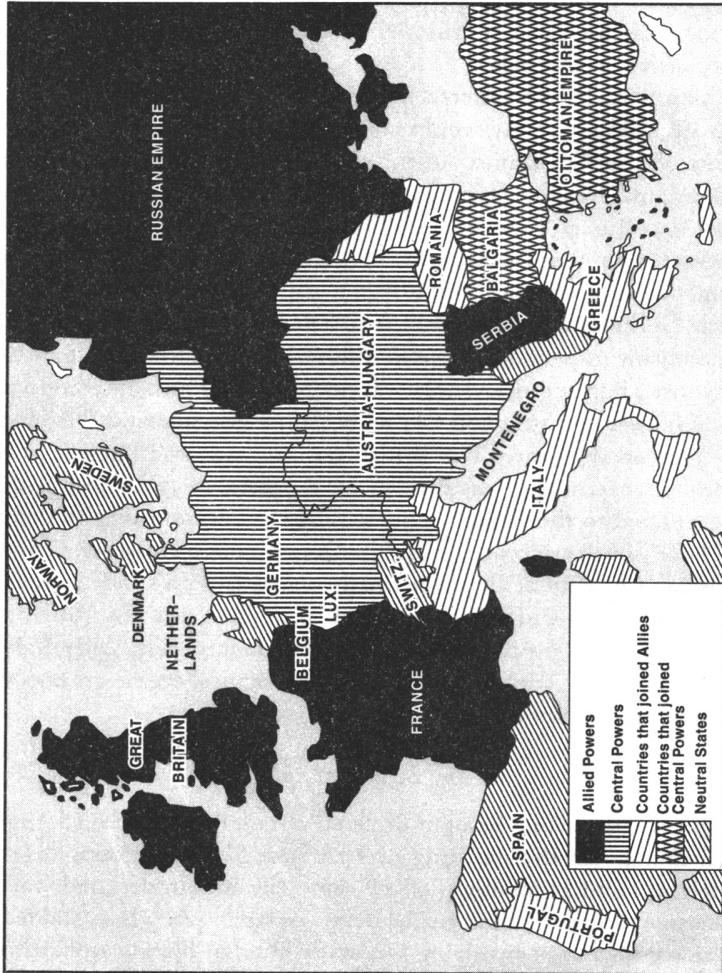
### **The Scope of the War**

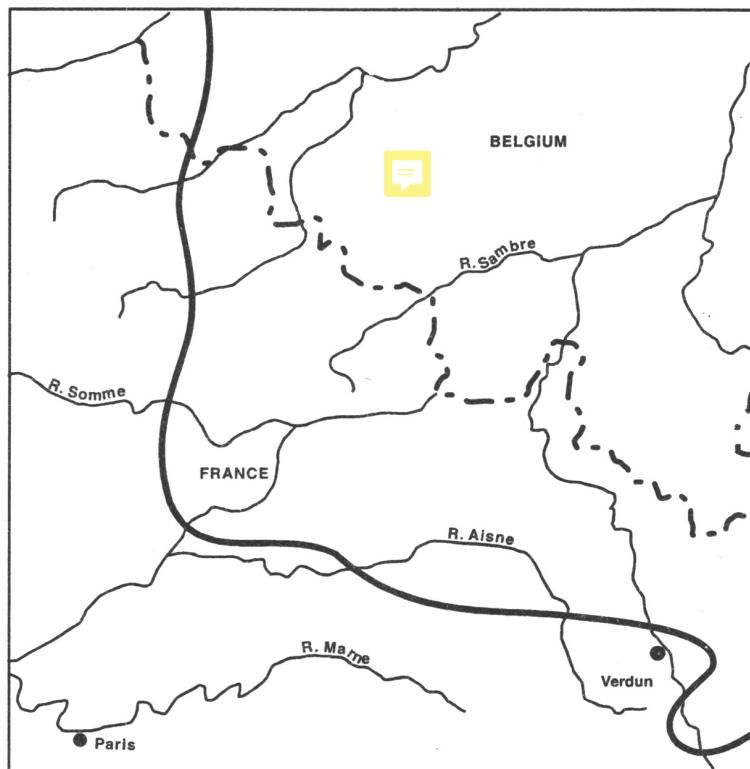
On 1 August 1914, Germany declared war on Russia and on 3 August on France. In the morning of 4 August, German troops entered Belgium and at midnight of the same day Britain declared war on Germany. In the meantime the Serbo-Austrian war which had led to the conflagration involving Germany, Russia, France and Britain, appeared to have become secondary. Till 6 August Austria was not at war with Russia and till 12 August she was not at war with Britain and France. Soon others joined in as a result of efforts by both sides to win allies by promising them territorial gains. In August, Japan

## EUROPE DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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HISTORY OF THE WORLD



**THE TRENCH LINE**

declared war on Germany. She had entered into an alliance with Britain but her main aim was to seize German territories in China and in the Pacific. Portugal, often referred to by Britain as her oldest ally, also entered the war. In May 1915, Italy declared war on Austria. Britain and France had promised her Austrian and Turkish territories. Later, Romania and Greece also joined Britain, France and Russia, and these countries along with their allies came to be known as the Allied Powers. Germany and Austria were joined by Bulgaria in October 1915, having been promised territories in Serbia and Greece. Bulgaria was also given some Turkish territories. Turkey declared war on Russia in November and joined the war on the side of Germany and Austria. These countries—Germany and Austria and their allies—came to be known as the Central Powers. Various other

countries in other parts of the world also joined the war. USA entered the war in April 1917 on the side of the Allied Powers. In all, the number of belligerent countries rose to twenty-seven. These comprised countries from all continents. Thus, the scope of the conflict was widened. About 65 million men (soldiers) were mobilised for the war. Of them over 42 million were mobilised by the Allied Powers and over 22 million by the Central Powers.

### **The Course of the War**

#### *The War in Europe*

The battles of what has rightly come to be called as the First World War were fought in different parts of the world. In terms of the intensity of fighting and killings, the battles in Europe overshadowed the battles in other parts of the world. On the Western Front in Europe, the war began when the German armies, sweeping across Belgium, entered southern France and by early September had reached in the close vicinity of Paris. The French army, in the meantime, had moved to the France-German frontier to march into Alsace-Lorraine. The German army hoped to encircle the French army and achieve a quick victory. The French offensive into Alsace-Lorraine was repulsed but the retreating French forces along with the British forces met the German forces in a battle known as the Battle of the Marne (named after the river Marne near which the battle was fought). The German forces had to retreat and they entrenched themselves along the river Aisne. There were desperate fights, but by the end of November the war entered a period of a long stalemate on the western front when neither side could dislodge the other for about four years.

Behind a long unbroken chain of opposing trenches and barbed wire extending over hundreds of kilometres from France's southern border with Switzerland to the northern seacoast of France, the opposing armies dug themselves in. Protected from the machine gun and rifle fire behind the trenches, neither side could break through the other's line of trenches. Each side conducted raids on the other in the pre-dawn hours with little success, only steadily adding to the number of the dead on both sides. Germany, in 1915, started the use of poison gas to achieve a breakthrough, and Britain, in 1916, introduced the use of tanks, devised recently, for the same

purpose. Neither made much difference. The losses suffered by each side were made up for by bringing in more troops.

On the Eastern Front, Russia achieved some initial successes against Germany and Austria but these were short-lived. In 1915, the Russian armies suffered heavy defeats and the forces of the Central Powers entered many territories of the Russian empire. In 1916, Russia launched another offensive but it was repulsed. After the October Revolution, Russia withdrew from the war. On 2 March 1918, she signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany and ceded many of her territories as the price of peace. Out of a total of 12 million men mobilised by Russia, 1.7 million had been killed, about 5 million wounded and about 2.5 million were either missing or had been taken prisoner. In the meantime, Serbia and Romania had capitulated.

#### *Spread of the War Outside Europe*

Outside Europe, some major battles were fought in North Africa and West Asia. Germany and Turkey united to threaten the Allied possessions and influence in North Africa and West Asia. Britain and France fought these attempts and tried to seize the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire. They also established contacts with Arab nationalists and others and fomented anti-Turkish Arab risings. While pretending to espouse the cause of Arab countries freedom from Turkish rule, Britain and France entered into a secret agreement, known as the Sykes-Picot agreement, in 1916. This agreement provided for the division of Arab countries between Britain and France. In 1917, the British government also pledged itself "to the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people". This 'pledge' by Britain about another country, which was not considered fit to be consulted, was to have serious consequences for peace and stability in West Asia.

During the course of the war, German colonial possessions in Asia and Africa were seized by the Allied Powers. Japan made colonial gains in China by acquiring control over the German sphere of influence and forcing China to make further concessions to her. German South-West Africa was occupied by South African troops, Togoland by British and French troops and Cameroons by British, French and Belgian troops. The fighting between British and German troops in German East Africa continued till the end of the war.

### *The Stalemate in Europe*

In the meantime, what has come to be known as the “war of attrition”, continued in Europe. It meant each side trying to wear out the other side by mobilising more and more men and using enormous amounts of artillery and other weapons. Two catastrophic battles were fought as a part of this “war of attrition”. In February 1916, Germany launched a massive attack on the French fortress of Verdun. The French in turn poured hundreds of thousands of their soldiers into the battle. This battle, which did nothing to end the stalemate, resulted in about 700,000 soldiers killed or wounded, more or less equally divided between the two sides. The other was the battle of Somme (named after the river Somme along which the battle was fought). Here the Allied troops involved were mainly British who launched the attack. On the very first day of the battle, the British dead or wounded totalled about 60,000.

### **The Policy of Blockade**

The war had become a total war. It was no longer confined to battles between armies. It required total mobilisation of all the resources of the main belligerent countries. An increasing amount of munitions and other war materials were required to be produced. This meant changing the production pattern. Every economic activity had to be subordinated to the needs of the war. It also required that no goods—food, raw materials, war materials, anything and everything—should be allowed to enter the enemy’s country from anywhere. This implies a regime of economic blockade, where each side thought that the other would be starved into submission. Britain imposed a naval blockade on Germany and though the naval fleets of the two countries fought only one major battle, and that too indecisive, the British succeeded in their blockade of Germany. To prevent food and other supplies from reaching Britain, Germany started using submarines (U-boat, in German *Unterseeboot*) which it had developed to sink any ship, including those of the neutral countries, heading for Britain. This, among other things, led to the United States entering the war on the side of the Allied Powers.

The use of aircrafts in warfare also started and though cities were bombed from the air and German and Allied aircraft had dog fights, air warfare played little role in deciding the outcome of the war.

### **End of the War**

Russia had withdrawn from the war after the October Revolution and had been forced to accept a humiliating treaty by Germany. However, the war between the Central and the Allied powers was to be decided elsewhere and not on the Eastern Front. The loss of Russia by the Allies was more than made up for by the entry of USA into the war. USA had been supplying goods, including munitions and food, to the Allies from the time of the outbreak of the war and, as a result, the US economy had prospered. Now the armies and the vast economic resources of USA were to be directly used to defeat the Central Powers.

In the meantime, discontent had been rising in the civilian population and among the soldiers of all the major belligerent countries. There were demonstrations and mutinies. The autocratic Russian empire had already fallen. The discontent was much more widespread in the countries of the Central Powers. There was a wave of strikes in Germany and Austria-Hungary and a succession of mutinies in their armies and navies. In Austria-Hungary, there were desertions on a large scale among the soldiers of the "subject nationalities" and many of them were fighting on the side of the Allies. By about the middle of July 1918, the tide of the war was beginning to turn against Germany. Germany had launched a series of offensives on the western front, inflicting heavy casualties on the Allies. But by July, the German offensive was contained and the Allies launched counter-offensives. In the meantime, the Allied forces had started their military intervention in Russia. In the east, thousands of Japanese troops poured into Siberia. While the Allied intervention in Russia was to outlast the end of the First World War, the collapse of the Central Powers had begun.

By the end of August 1918 only Germany remained a major central power to be completely defeated and final Allied offensives against Germany were launched in September. On 29 September 1918, Bulgaria surrendered. By the end of October the Ottoman Empire had ceased to exist. On 12 November, the Habsburg emperor abdicated. Most people of the Austro-Hungarian empire—the Czechs, the Poles, the Yugoslavs and the Hungarians—had already declared their independence. On 3 November, revolution broke out in Germany; on 9 November, the German emperor abdicated and fled to Holland, and on 10 November Germany was proclaimed a republic. On 11 November 1918, the new government of Germany

signed the armistice and, at 11 o'clock in the morning of 11 November, the First World War came to an end.

The destruction caused by the war in terms of human lives was terrible. Out of about 65 million soldiers mobilised by both the powers, about nine million were killed and about 22 million wounded. To understand the true nature of this catastrophe and its impact on European societies, it should be remembered that most of the dead and the survivors, "scarred physically and mentally", were the "flower of Europe", young people between the ages of 18 and 35. Erich Maria Remarque, who had been forced to join the German army, published a novel which in the English translation is entitled *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The dedication page of the novel carries the following statement:

This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war.

## THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

### **Revolutionary Movement in Russia**

During the war years, the Russian Revolution, an event of great historical significance took place. Certain aspects and events of Russian history—Russian colonial empire, the autocratic nature of her political system, the backwardness of her economy, her defeat at the hands of Japan, the role played by her in the European conflicts, particularly in the Balkans, and her entry into the war have already been mentioned. In the nineteenth century, there were various reform and revolutionary movements expressing discontent among the Russian peasantry who continued to live in misery even after serfdom was abolished in 1861. Vast estates were owned by the Russian nobility and the Church, and there were millions of peasants without any landholdings of their own. The industrial workers, a new class that had emerged with the beginning of industrialisation, also lived in conditions of misery. While the common people were obviously opposed to the existing system in Russia, the middle classes and the

intellectuals were also united in their opposition to the autocratic political system and were thus drawn to the revolutionary movement along with the peasants and workers.

Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, socialist ideas had begun to spread in Russia and a number of socialist groups had been formed. In 1898, the various socialist groups joined together to form the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, popularly known as Lenin, was the leader of the left-wing section of the party. In 1903, this section secured a majority in the party and came to be known as Bolsheviks, while the minority section were known as the Mensheviks. The Bolsheviks, while defining their final goal as the establishment of socialism, proposed their immediate tasks as the overthrow of the autocratic rule of the Czar and the establishment of a republic, ending the oppression of the non-Russian nationalities of the Russian empire and granting them the right of self-determination, introduction of an eight-hour working day and abolition of inequalities in land and the end of all feudal oppressions of the peasantry. There was a revolution in Russia in 1905, which forced Nicholas II, the reigning Czar, to agree for the establishment of a parliament, called the Duma, along with other democratic rights of the people. During this period, a new form of workers' organisation had come into being, called the Soviet. It was a body of workers' representatives set up for the purpose of conducting strikes. Later, Soviets of peasants were also formed—followed by Soviets of soldiers—and these sprang up all over the country. The Soviets were later to play a crucial role in the history of the Russian Revolution.

### **The February Revolution**

The Revolution of 1905 had not ended the autocracy in Russia. Though the Duma existed, the power in Russia was wielded by the Czar, the nobility and the corrupt bureaucracy. Russia's imperial ambitions led her to the war but the inefficient and corrupt Russian government was incapable of carrying on a modern war. The war exposed the bankruptcy of the existing system in Russia, aggravated the crisis of the autocratic system and, ultimately, brought about its downfall. The Russian soldiers, 12 million of whom had been mobilised, were ill-equipped and ill-fed. The Russian army suffered

heavy losses during the war. The war had further worsened the already poor state of the Russian economy, further adding to the growing unrest. The country, including the capital city of Petrograd (formerly St Petersburg, later Leningrad, and now again St Petersburg) with its population of two million, was facing prospects of starvation. There were long queues for bread which was in short supply. From the beginning of the year 1917, there was a spate of strikes, which took the form of a general strike. The demand for ending the war and the rule of the Czar grew and on 12 March many regiments of the army joined the striking workers, freed political prisoners and arrested Czarist generals and ministers. By the evening Petrograd had passed into the control of insurgent workers and soldiers. These events of 12 March 1917 marked what has been called the February Revolution (because, according to the old Russian calendar, the date was 27 February). The Czar, who had been away from the capital, had ordered the suppression of the insurgents and the dissolution of the Duma. However, the Duma decided to take over power in its own hands and on 15 March announced the formation of a Provisional Government. That very day, the Czar was forced to abdicate and his autocratic rule came to an end. A few months later, in September 1917, Russia was proclaimed a republic.

The end of the Czarist autocracy was welcomed the world over. But the Provisional Government failed to solve any of the problems that had led to the collapse of the Czarist government. The policy of pursuing the war was continued and nothing was done to solve the land problem. The Bolsheviks were the only party which had a clear-cut programme. As we have seen earlier that two Russian socialists—Lenin and Martov—had drafted a part of the Second International's resolution which called upon workers to utilise the crisis, created by the immanent danger of the war, if it broke out, and overthrow the system which had led to the war. The Bolsheviks were consistent in their opposition to the war. There were five Bolshevik members of the Duma. They opposed the war when it broke out. They were arrested and exiled. When the February Revolution took place, Lenin was in Zurich, Switzerland. He called it only the initial, but by no means the complete victory, and declared:

Only a workers' government that relies, first, on the overwhelming majority of the peasant population, the farm labourers and poor

peasants and, second, on an alliance with the revolutionary workers of all countries in the war, can give the people peace, bread and full freedom.

### **The October Revolution**

At the time of the February Revolution, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies had been formed and it became the most important force in the fast-changing situation. On his arrival in Petrograd in April 1917, Lenin addressed the people with the following appeal:

The people need peace: the people need bread; the people need land. And they give you—war, hunger, no bread; they leave the landlords on the land.

He gave the call: "No support for the Provisional Government, All Power to the Soviets." At this time there was another threat to the Provisional Government. General Kornilov had risen in revolt in an effort to establish his dictatorship. However, the attempt was thwarted by the workers and soldiers who rose up to defend the Revolution. At this time, the Provisional Government was headed by Aleksander Kerensky, who held liberal and democratic views. He, however, failed to make any departure from the policies which had been pursued by the Russian government since the outbreak of the war, and proved himself to be totally ineffective. He was totally lacking in support.

In October, the Bolsheviks made careful preparations for an uprising. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies had been convened on 25 October. The uprising to overthrow the Provisional Government had been timed to coincide with the Congress. The uprising began in the early hours of 25 October in Petrograd and within a few hours, almost every strategic point in the city was occupied by the revolutionary soldiers and workers under the guidance of the Bolsheviks. At 10 a.m. Lenin's address, "To the Citizens of Russia", was broadcast. He said,

The Provisional Government has been deposed.... The cause for which the people have fought, namely, the immediate offer of a democratic

peace, the abolition of landed proprietorship, workers' control over production, and the establishment of Soviet power—this cause has been secured.

The date of this event was 25 October according to the old Russian calendar, hence it is called the October Revolution. It actually happened on 7 November. At 10.40 p.m. the meeting, of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies began. At about the same time, the assault on the Winter Palace, the headquarters of the Provisional Government, started. At 1.50 a.m. on the next day (26 October according to the old calendar), the Winter Palace had been occupied and the members of the Provisional Government put under arrest. The head of the Government, Kerensky, had, however, escaped. At 9 p.m. the second session of the Congress of Soviets started. According to the eye-witness account of John Reed, an American journalist, Lenin was received with a "long-rolling ovation" as he stood up. As the ovation finished he said simply, "We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order!"

The first act of the new government was the adoption of the Decree on Peace (adopted at 11 p.m.). It expressed the resolve of the government to immediately enter into negotiations to conclude a peace without annexations or reparations. The workers of Germany, France and Britain, the Decree said,

will understand the duty imposed upon them to liberate humanity from the horrors and consequences of war, and that these workers, by decisive, energetic and continued action, will help us to bring to a successful conclusion the cause of peace—and at the same time, the cause of the liberation of the exploited working masses from all slavery and all exploitation.

As a consequence of such a policy, Russia withdrew from the war even at the cost of losing many of her territories which Germany had made a condition for agreeing to peace.

The second step taken by the revolutionary government, headed by Lenin, was the Decree on Land, which was adopted at 2 a.m. on 27 October (9 November). This Decree abolished private property in land and declared land to be the property of the entire nation. Soon it renounced unilaterally all the unequal treaties which the Czarist

government had imposed on countries such as China, Iran and Afghanistan. The right of all peoples to equality and selfdetermination was proclaimed.

### Civil War and Foreign Intervention

The uprising in Petrograd, which led to the establishment of the Bolshevik government, was followed by similar uprisings in other parts of the former Russian empire, and by February 1918, the new government had established its authority throughout the country. Soon, however, Russia was involved in a civil war. The forces loyal to the old regime, known as the White Russians, had organised themselves to overthrow the revolution. The Allied powers—Britain, France, USA, Japan and others—also started their military interventions in Russia, to bring Russia back to the war, to exploit her resources for the war and to aid the counter-revolutionary forces. The civil war and foreign military interventions, however, ended by 1920.

The dynasty of the Czar was the first to fall during the First World War. Two other imperial dynasties—the German and the Austro-Hungarian—fell before the war was over. Another—that of the Ottoman Sultans—fell soon after the war.

The significance of the October Revolution extended beyond the boundaries of Russia. Soviet Russia, later the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, became a major influence in the subsequent history of the world.