

CHAPTER-2

SOCIALISM IN EUROPE AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

QUESTION AND ANSWERS

Ques.1. What were the social, economic and political conditions in Russia before 1905?

Ans. The following were the social, economic and political conditions in Russia before 1905.

(a) Social Conditions: The majority religion was Russian Orthodox Christianity— which had grown out of the Greek Orthodox Church. But the empire also included Catholics, Protestants, Muslims and Buddhists. The non-Russian nationalities were not treated equally to that of Russian nationalities. They were not given freedom to follow their culture and language. Workers were a divided group on the basis of skill and training. Peasants formed their group called commune or mir.

(b) Economic conditions: Majority of Russians were agriculturists. Grain was the main item of export from Russia. Industries were few. Prominent industrial areas were St Petersburg and Moscow. Much of the production was done by the craftsmen. There were large factories alongside the craft workshops. With the expansion of Russian rail network, foreign investment in factories grew. There were huge coal, iron and steel production. There were equal numbers of factory workers and craftsmen. The workers were exploited by capitalists who made their life miserable.

(c) Political Conditions: Russia was a monarchy. (Tsar Nicholas II ruled Russia and its empire that extended to current- day Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, parts of Poland, Ukraine and Belarus. It stretched to the Pacific and comprised today's Central Asian states, as well as Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan). The Tsars believed in the divine rights of kings. They were not responsible to the Parliament. All political parties were illegal in Russia.

Ques.2. In what ways was the working population in Russia different from other countries in Europe, before 1917?

Ans. (i) Compared to the condition of the people of Europe, Russian people, especially the working class like the farmers and the factory workers was very deplorable.

(ii) The main reason for it was the autocratic government of the Tsar Nicholas II, who exploited these people day by day by his corrupt and

oppressive policies.

(iii) Much of the produce of the peasant workers went into the hands of the landowners and the privileged classes. Large properties were owned by the nobility, the crown and the Orthodox Church.

(iv) In European countries, the peasants respected nobles and fought for them whereas in Russia, the peasants wanted the land of the nobles to be given to them.

(v) They often refused to pay rent and even murdered the landlords. This was because of the various oppressive policies and their built up frustration.

(vi) The factory workers faced equally miserable situation. They could not form any trade unions and political parties to express their grievances.

(vii) The private industrialists exploited the workers and many times did not give them minimum fixed wages also. There was also no limit set for the working hours.

Ques.3. Why did the Tsarist autocracy collapse in 1917?

Ans. The following points present the background of the miserable conditions of the working population of Russia, which were also the reasons for the collapse of the Tsarist autocracy in 1917 —

- There was a widespread discontent against the autocratic rule of Tsar. The Russian people wanted the end of war and conclusion of peace. But Tsar who had already mismanaged the war, still insisted to continue the war. The peasants were the worst sufferers. They wanted that cultivable land should be given to the tillers, but the autocratic and corrupt government did not pay any heed to their demands.
- The condition of the workers was also very deplorable. They could not form any trade unions and political parties to express their grievance. Most industries were run by the private industrialists. Many times these workers did not get even the minimum fixed wages. There was no limit of working hours as a result of which they had to work from 12-15 hours a day.
- The autocratic rule of the Tsar had become quite inefficient. He was a self-willed, corrupt and oppressive ruler who never cared for the welfare of the people of the country.
- The teachings of Karl Marx also encouraged the people to raise a standard revolt.
- The Tsar's participation and defeat in the First World War proved the last straw to break the camel's back.

Ques.4. Make two lists: one with the main events and the effects of the February Revolution and the other with the main events and effects of the October Revolution. Write a paragraph on who was involved in each, who were the leaders and what was the impact of each on Soviet history.

Ans. Main events and effects of the February Revolution, October Revolution (who was involved, leaders, impact on Soviet history)

(a) The February Revolution - In February 1917, acute food shortages were felt in the workers' quarters; parliamentarians were opposed to the Tsar's wish to dissolve the Duma. On 22nd February, a factory lockout occurred and many women led the way to the strikes. The strikes continued, with the workers surrounding fashionable quarters and official buildings at the centre of Petrograd — the Nevskii Prospekt. On 25th February, the Duma was dissolved. This resulted in a ransacking of the Police Headquarters on the 27th. The cavalry refused to fire at the protesting crowd, and by evening, the revolting soldiers and the striking workers were united as a "soviet" or "council" called the Petrograd Soviet. The Tsar abdicated his power on 2nd March, and the Soviet and Duma leaders formed a Provisional Government for Russia. The February Revolution had no political party at its forefront. It was led by the people themselves. Petrograd had brought down the monarchy, and thus, gained a significant place in Soviet history.

(b) The October Revolution - This arose out of the conflict between the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks. In September, Vladimir Lenin began to bring together Bolshevik supporters for an uprising. On 16 October 1917, he convinced the Petrograd Soviet and the Bolshevik Party for a socialist seizure of power. A Military Revolutionary Committee was appointed under Leon Trotskii to organise this capture of power. When the uprising began on 24 October, Prime Minister Kerenskii left the city to bring in the troops to prevent the situation from going out of control. In a swift response, the Military Revolutionary Committee attacked government offices; the ship Aurora shelled the Winter Palace, and by nightfall on the 24th, the city was under Bolshevik control. After some serious fighting, the Bolsheviks gained full control of the Moscow-Petrograd area. The actions of the Bolsheviks were unanimously accepted at a meeting of the All Russian Congress of Soviets, in Petrograd. The October Revolution was primarily led by Lenin and his sub-ordinate Trotskii, and involved the masses who supported these leaders. It marked the beginning of Lenin's rule over the Soviet, with the Bolsheviks under his guidance.

Ques.5. What were the main changes brought about by the Bolsheviks immediately after the October Revolution?

Ans. (a) Industries and banks were nationalised. This meant that the government now had their ownership and management. Land was declared social property and peasants were allowed to seize the land of the nobility. In cities, Bolsheviks enforced the partition of large houses according to

family requirements.

(b) Use of the old titles of aristocracy was banned. New uniforms for the army and officials were designed.

(c) The Bolshevik Party was renamed as the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik).

(d) Despite opposition by their political allies, the Bolsheviks made peace with Germany and withdrew from the First World War.

(e) In the later years, the Bolsheviks became the only party to participate in the elections to the All Russian Congress of Soviets. It became the Parliament of Russia.

Ques.6. Write a few lines to show what you know about:

1. kulaks

2. the Duma

3. women workers between 1900 and 1930

4. the Liberals

5. Stalin's collectivisation programme

Ans. (a) Kulaks: They were the well-to-do peasants who were supposed to be holding stocks in the hope of higher prices. They were raided so that they may be eliminated in order to develop modern farms and establish state-controlled large farms.

(b) The Duma: The Duma was a consultative parliament that was created on the permission of the Tsar during the 1905 Revolution.

(c) Women workers between 1900 and 1930: Women made up 31% of the factory labour force, but were paid between 1/2 and 3/4 of a man's wages. They actively led the strikes in many factories. They even worked in the collective farms.

(d) The Liberals: They were a group which looked to change society. They wanted a nation which tolerated all religions and opposed the uncontrolled power of dynastic rulers. They argued for a representative, elected parliamentary government subject to laws interpreted by a well-trained judiciary independent of rulers and officials.

(e) Stalin's collectivisation programme: Stalin hoped to solve the problem of food shortage by combining small farms with large and modern farms. This was collectivisation programme that began in 1929. Peasants were forced to work in these state controlled collective farms called Kolkhoz.