

CHAPTER- 2

SOCIALISM IN EUROPE & THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Question 1:

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

Answer 1:

The social, economic and political conditions in Russia were very deplorable before 1905 which brought about a big revolution there known as '1905 Revolution'.

At the beginning of the 20th century about 85% of the Russia's population was agriculturists. Russia was a major exporter of grains. Industry was found in pockets only. Most industries were run by the private industrialists. Because of wide spread corruption and exploitations, sometimes workers did not get even the minimum wages and also there was no limit of working hours. Russia was an autocracy and was ruled by the Tsar. The Tsar, especially Tsar Nicholas II was a self-willed, corrupt, oppressive ruler. He ignored public welfare as a result of which the conditions of the peasants and workers had also become very deplorable. The workers and peasants both were divided. Peasants frequently refused to pay rent and even murdered landlords. Being influenced by the democratic experiments by the Western European countries, the Russians also demanded a responsible government but all their demands were turned down. Consequently, even the moderate reformers began to talk of revolutions.

During the rule of Tsar Nicholas II the privileged had got special rights while the general public including the workers and farmers had no say in the government. The situation had become so explosive that even the liberals campaigned to end this state of affairs. The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party was founded in 1898 by socialists who respected Marx's ideas. In 1903, this party was divided into two groups - Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks, who were in majority, were led by Lenin who is regarded as the greatest thinker on socialism after Marx.

Question 2:

In what ways the working population in Russia different from other countries in Europe before 1917?

Answer 2:

The condition of Russian people, especially those of the working population like the farmers and the factory workers was very deplorable as compared to other European countries. It was mainly due to the autocratic government of the Tsar Nicholas II who antagonized these people day-by-day by his corrupt and oppressive policies.

The peasants worked as serf on the land and much of their produce went into the hands of landowners and the privileged classes. The nobility, the crown and the Orthodox Church owned large properties. Although these peasants were generally deeply religious but they had no

respect for the nobility. In European countries the peasants respected nobles and fought for them. But in Russia, peasants wanted the land of the nobles to be given to them. Due to the various oppressive policies and out of frustration, often they refused to pay rent and even murdered landlords.

The condition of the factory workers was equally miserable. They could not form any trade unions and political parties to express their grievance. Most industries were run by the private industrialists. They exploited the workers for their selfish ends. 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. Their conditions were so miserable that they had neither political rights nor any hope of gaining any reforms until the beginning of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Question 3:

Why did the Tsarist autocracy collapse in 1917?

Answer 3:

The condition of Russian people, especially those of the working population like the farmers and the factory workers was highly miserable. It was mainly due to the autocratic government of the Tsar Nicholas II who antagonized these people day-by-day by his corrupt and oppressive policies. As a result of such policies, his autocracy collapsed in 1917.

The following points indicate the background of the miserable condition of the working population of Russia which was also the main reasons for the collapse of the Tsarist autocracy in 1917:

- The peasants worked as serf on the land and much of their produce went into the hands of landowners and the privileged classes. Land hunger among farmers was a dominant factor. Due to the various oppressive policies and out of frustration, often they refused to pay rent and even murdered landlords.
- 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 or the country.
- The teachings of Karl Marx also encouraged the people to raise a standard revolt.
- The revolution of 1905 also proved a dress rehearsal of the revolution of 1917.
- Last but not the least, the Tsar's participation and defeat in the First World War proved the last straw to break the camel's back.

Question 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.

Answer 4:

February Revolution

- On 22 February: A lockout at a factory.
- Demonstrators thronged the centre of the capital, and curfew was imposed.
- 25th February: Suspension of Duma.
- 27th February: Formation of Soviet.
- 2nd March: Tsar leaves power and provisional government formed.

The February Revolution ended the autocratic Tsarist rule in Russia and paved the way for an elected government. There was no leader of this movement.

October Revolution

- 16th October: Formation of Military Revolutionary Committee
- 24th October: Pro-government troops called in to deal with the situation.
- Military Revolutionary Committee controls the city by night and ministers surrender.
- The Bolshevik take control of the power.

The October Revolution was led by Lenin. This event paved the way for complete control of the Bolsheviks over Russia and the beginning of a single-party rule.

Question 5:

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

Answer 5:

The main changes brought about by the Bolsheviks immediately after the October Revolution are listed below:

- The Bolsheviks were not in favour of any private property. Hence most industries and banks were nationalized.
- Land was declared social property and peasants were allowed to seize the land on which they worked.
- In cities the large houses were partitioned according to family requirements.

- Use of old titles of aristocracy was banned.
- To assert the change Bolsheviks introduced new uniforms for the army and officials.
- The Bolshevik party was renamed as the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik).
- Russia became a one-party state and Trade unions kept under party control.
- For the first time they introduced a Centralized Planning on the basis of which Five Year Plans were made.

Question 6:

Write a few lines to show what you know about:

- (i) Kulaks
- (ii) The Duma
- (iii) Women workers between 1900 and 1930.
- (iv) The Liberals.
- (v) Stalin's collectivization programme.

Answer 6:

(i) Kulaks

They were well-to-do peasants. By 1927-28 the towns of Soviet Russia were facing an acute problem of grain supplies. Kulaks were thought to be partly responsible for this. Also to develop modern farms and run them along industrial lines the Party under the leadership of Stalin thought it was necessary to eliminate Kulaks.

(ii) The Duma

During 1905 Revolution, the Tsar allowed the creation of an elected consultative parliament in Russia. This elected consultative parliament in Russia was called Duma.

(iii) Women workers between 1900 and 1930

During Russian revolution of 1905, the February Revolution of 1917, the women workers also took part in shaping the future of Russia. Women workers made up to 31% of the factory labour force by 1914, but were paid less than men.

Women workers had not only to work in factories but also, had to look after their families and children. They were also very active in all affairs of the country. They often inspired their male co-workers. For instance, let us take the incidence of Marfa Vasileva, a female worker in the Loverz Telephone Factory who raised her voice against the rising prices and the high-handedness of the factory owners and also organized a successful strike. The example of Marfa

Vasilva was followed by other women workers and they did not sit idle till they established a socialistic state in Russia.

(iv) **The Liberals**

The Liberals in Russia were those persons who wanted a nation which tolerated all religions. They wanted to safe-guard the rights of individuals against the governments. They opposed the uncontrolled power of dynastic rulers. They agreed a representative, elected parliamentary government subject to laws. They wanted an independent judiciary but the liberals did not believe in Universal Adult Franchise. They also did not want the voting right of women.

(v) **Stalin's collectivization programme**

By 1927-28 the towns in Soviet Russia were facing an acute problem of grain supplies. Stalin, who was the leader of the party at that time, investigated the causes of this problem and introduced some emergency measures accordingly. Stalin's collectivization programme in 1929 was one of these measures. Under this programme the party forced all farmers to cultivate in collective farms (Kolkhoz). The profit or the produce from a collective farm was shared by the farmers worked on it. However, those farmers who resisted collectivization were severely punished. They did not want to work in collective farms for a variety of reasons. Stalin's government allowed some independent cultivation, but treated such cultivators unsympathetically.

In spite of Stalin's collectivization programme, production did not increase immediately. In fact the bad harvests of 1930-33 led to one of the worst famines in the Soviet History.