Socialism in Europe and the Russian Revolution

Social Changes in Europe

Many social changes were taking place in Europe in the eighteenth century. The French Revolution inspired the people with the ideals of liberty, equality and justice. Many people had different views about how the Government should work and about the rights of people. While some people wanted the establishment of democratic principles, the others supported the monarchical form of the government.

- French Revolution (1789) gave ideas to the world like Equality, liberty and fraternity.
- Raja Rammohan Roy and Derozio explained the significance of French Revolution in India to the elite classes.

The three main groups of people at this time were

The Liberalists
- They wanted a change in society. They wanted nations to be tolerant of all religions.
- They believed in safeguarding the rights of people against the Government. They also argued for elected Parliamentarian Government.
- The liberals however were not democrats as they did not favour the principle of universal adult franchise. They were in favour of voting only by men and the propertied class.

The Radicals
- The radicals wanted a government duly elected by the majority of the country's population.
- Many radicals supported women's movements to achieve voting rights.
- They opposed the privileges enjoyed by landowners and wealthy factory owners.
They were not against the notion of private property but were against the concentration of money in the hands of few sections of society.

**The Conservatives**
- The conservatives opposed the views and ideologies of the liberals and the radicals.
- They believed in the privileges enjoyed by the nobility and the wealthy class. However, after the French Revolution, conservatives believed in bringing changes at a slow pace in society.
- The conservatives believed that the past should be respected and changes in society should be made gradually.

**Industrial Revolution**

The Industrial Revolution first began in the eighteenth century in England. Later, it spread to the other parts of Europe. Industrialisation also resulted in large-scale migration of people from the villages to the cities in search of work opportunities. Workers worked for long hours at extremely low wages. Housing and sanitation facilities were not given to workers. Unemployment was also growing.

**The Coming of Socialism in Europe**
- By the mid-nineteenth century, ideas of socialism had become well known in Europe. Socialists believed that factory owners earned profits because of the hard work being put in by workers, but the factory owners did nothing to look after the welfare of workers.
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were well-known socialists who believed that the profits earned by factory owners are produced by workers. Marx contented that all property should be owned by society. Such societies would be communist societies.
- These ideas spread to Europe by the mid-nineteenth century. Socialists over different regions formed the Second International to coordinate their efforts to spread socialist ideas.
- In Germany, the Socialist Democratic Party was formed. Socialist Party was formed in France and Labour Party was formed in Britain. These parties were however not able to form governments in their countries.
The Russian Revolution

Conditions in Russia on the Eve of the Russian Revolution

- Russia was ruled by Tsar Nicholas II.
- About 85% of the Russian population was engaged in agricultural activities. Industries were located only at few places such as in St Petersburg and Moscow. It was in the 1890s that many industries began to be set up in Russia.
- Sometimes, the workers had to work for 15 hours at low wages. Workers in Russia came from different backgrounds. The workers formed unions and declared strikes whenever the working conditions in the factories deteriorated.
- Most of the lands in Russia belonged to the nobility and the Church. Russian peasants had no respect for the nobility and wanted the lands of the nobles to be given to them.
- The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party was founded in 1898 by the socialists. However, because political parties were illegal in Russia, the party had to work as an illegal organisation.
- The Socialist Revolutionary Party was formed in 1900 which struggled for the rights of peasants. The Social Democrats differed from the Socialist Revolutionary Party on the issue of farmers. The latter under Lenin believed that peasants cannot be part of the socialist movement as some peasants were poor, some were rich and some even employed workers on their fields.
The Revolution of 1905

The Tsar in Russia was an autocrat and enjoyed all powers. Liberals along with socialists were campaigning to make Russia a democratic state. In 1904, the prices of bread rose and the real wages declined. Over the next few years, more than 1,000,000 workers went on a strike in St. Petersburg demanding reduction in working hours and an increase in wages.

When the procession of workers led by Father Gapon reached the Winter Palace of the Tsar, they were attacked by the police. About 100 workers were killed and more than 300 were wounded. This incident came to be known as ‘Bloody Sunday’.

‘Bloody Sunday’ marked the beginning of strikes in the cities with students, lawyers, doctors and engineers staging walkouts complaining about the lack of civil liberties.

- Under such circumstances, the Tsar allowed the creation of an elected Parliament called the Duma. He however tried to control the Duma.

Impact of the First World War

- In 1914, the First World War broke out between Germany, Austria and Turkey on one hand and France, Britain and Russia on the other hand. Initially people of Russia supported the Tsar but as the war progressed, the Tsar refused to consult the Duma.
- During the war, anti-German feelings ran high and Tsarina Alexandra’s German origins and poor advisors, especially a monk named Rasputin, made the autocracy unpopular in Russia.
- Russian armies suffered greatly in the hands of the German and Austrian armies.
- The First World War impacted the

Impact of the First World War on Russia

- Supplies of essential commodities were badly hit.
- Agricultural and industrial production declined. Because several people participated in the war, many small shops, industries and small shops closed down.
agricultural production and industries in Russia.

- As they retreated, the Russian army destroyed crops and buildings to prevent the enemy from being able to live off the land.
- The destruction of crops and buildings led to over 3 million refugees in Russia.
- Russia's own industries were few in number and the country was cut off from other suppliers of industrial goods by German control of the Baltic Sea.
- As a result, there were labour shortages and small workshops producing essentials were shut down.

The February Revolution in Petrograd

- In February 1917, there were food shortages in Russia. While the working class was disgruntled because of the shortages of food supplies, the Parliamentarians opposed the decision of the Tsar to dissolve the Duma.
- On 22 February, there was a lockout at a factory by the workers. More workers from other factories joined them. Many women led the strike in factories. In many factories, women led the way to strikes. This came to be called the International Women's Day. This came to be known as International Women's Day. Curfew was imposed by the Government.
- In next few days, more people joined the revolution. Politicians, workers and middle class people began demonstrations demanding less working hours, more wages and democracy. They were later joined by the cavalry and soldiers. Workers formed a 'soviet' which later came to be known as the Petrograd Soviet.
- The Tsar abdicated the throne, and a new provisional government was formed by the Soviet leaders. The Petrograd Revolution finally brought an end to the Russian monarchy in February 1917.

Lenin

- In April 1917, Vladimir Lenin returned to Russia. He had earlier demanded that the war should be brought to an end, land should be distributed among the peasants and banks should be nationalised. This came to be known as Lenin's 'April Theses'.
- During this time in Russia, the committees of workers were formed to look into the working of the industries. Similarly, peasants under the Socialist leaders formed their own groups and land committees were formed to handle the distribution of lands to peasants.
While the February Revolution led to the end to monarchy in Russia, October Revolution led to an end of provisional government. Russia was declared as a socialist country after the October Revolution.

Changes in Russia after the October Revolution

- The Bolshevik Party was renamed the Russian Communist Party.
- After the Bolsheviks held power in Russia, land was declared as a social property and peasants were allowed to capture the lands of the nobility.
- Most of the industries and banks were nationalised by 1917.
- In cities, large houses were divided into several quarters according to the size of the family.
- Later, the Bolsheviks conducted elections to the Constituent Assembly, but they failed to gain majority votes. Lenin dismissed the Assembly.
- The Bolsheviks became the only party in Russia which could contest the elections. Thus, Russia became a one-party state. Police sentenced and punished those people who criticised the Bolsheviks. While on one hand, many people supported the Bolsheviks as they stood for socialism, on the other hand, people were also disillusioned with the party because of the censorship imposed by them.

The Civil War

- The Bolshevik uprising was criticised by socialists, liberals and nobility. The leaders of these groups moved to South Russia and organised troops to fight against the Bolsheviks. They were supported by France, Britain, Japan and America as these countries were worried over growth of socialism in Russia.
- As a result, a civil war began in Russia.
- Supporters of private property among 'whites' took harsh steps with peasants who had seized land. Such actions led to the loss of popular support for the non-Bolsheviks.
By January 1920, the Bolsheviks controlled most of the former Russian empire. They succeeded due to the cooperation with non-Russian nationalities and Muslim jadidists.

The mechanism of centralised planning was introduced, and five-year plans were made. This led to the industrial growth of Russia. This also led to poor working conditions.

The schooling system supported by the state developed, and peasants and workers were encouraged to enrol into the universities. Cheap public health care was provided to the workers.

Many housing quarters were also set up for workers.

Since the government's resources were limited, the effects of these measures were uneven.

**Stalin and Collectivisation**

- Russia was facing a crisis of shortage of food grains. The peasants refused to sell grains at the prices fixed by the Government, resulting in the shortage of grain supplies in many cities.
- Stalin took over the reins of the party after the death of Lenin. He introduced strict measures. In 1928, the party members visited many villages and raided rich peasants known as the 'kulaks'.
- The party converted small landholdings of many peasants into one collective large farm. All large collectivised farms were cultivated by the farmers with the help of tools pooled together. The profits of the farms were shared among the cultivators.
- Many peasants resisted the policy of collectivisation. They were severely punished by the state. Many of them were deported and exiled. Stalin allowed only some independent cultivations.

Many party leaders who criticised the policy of collectivisation were punished and executed.

Stalin put many of his critics into labour camps and prisons.

Many professionals were also executed by Stalin under the pretext of opposing the government.

Many innocent people were also executed.
Russian Revolution and the World

- Many people across the globe criticised the capture of power in Russia by the Bolsheviks. However, many workers and peasants in other parts of the world supported the Russian Revolution. The Bolsheviks founded Comintern—an international communist union of people supporting the Bolsheviks.
- Many non-Russians from outside the USSR participated in the Conference of the Peoples of the East (1920) and the Bolshevik-founded Comintern.
- By the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, the USSR had given socialism a global face and world stature.
- By 1950, it was realised that the Russian Government was not working according to the principles of socialism.
- Although Russia had become an industrial power and agricultural activities improved, it was contended that basic freedoms of the people, such as the right to speech, were denied and that development was a result of repressive policies of the Russian Government.

Russian Revolution and India

- India was also impacted by the Russian Revolution. Several people in India attended the Communist Universities.
- The Communist party was formed in India by mid-1920s.
- Jawaharlal Nehru and Tagore wrote about the Soviet Socialism.
- Several prominent Indian political and social leaders visited Russia to understand the principle of Socialism.
- Various writer wrote about the Russian Revolution.
- In Hindi, R.S. Avasthi wrote in 1920-21 Russian Revolution, Lenin, His Life and His Thoughts, and later The Red Revolution. S.D. Vidyalankar wrote The Rebirth of Russia and The Soviet State of Russia. There was much that was written in Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu.