

## 2. NOTES OF SOCIALISM IN EUROPE AND RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

### The Age of Social Change

After the revolution, individual rights and social power began to be discussed in many parts of the world including Europe and Asia. Colonial development reshaped ideas of societal change but everyone was not in favour of the complete transformation of society. Through the revolution in Russia, socialism became one of the most significant and powerful ideas to shape society in the twentieth century.

### Liberals, Radicals and Conservatives

Liberals wanted a nation which tolerated all religions. They opposed uncontrolled power of dynastic rules and argued for a representative, elected parliamentary government, subject to laws interpreted by a well-trained judiciary that was independent of rulers and officials. They wanted a government based on the majority of a country's population. Conservatives, after the nineteenth century, accepted changes but also believed the past needed to be respected and change should begin slowly.

### Industrial Society and Social Change

Industrial Revolution led to changes in social and economic life, new cities came up and new industrialised regions developed. Men, women and children came to factories in search of work. But, unfortunately, working hours were long and wages were poor. There was unemployment during the time of low demand for industrial goods. Liberals and radicals made wealth through trade or industrial ventures. According to them, society can be developed if freedom of individuals was ensured, if the poor could labour, and those with capital could operate without restraint. In France, Italy, Germany and Russia, revolutionaries overthrow existing monarchs. Nationalists talked of revolutions to create 'nations' with equal rights.

### The Coming of Socialism to Europe

Socialism was a well-known body of ideas by the mid-nineteenth century in Europe. Socialists were against private property and saw it as the root of all social ills of the time. They wanted to change it and campaigned for it. Robert Owen (1771-1858) sought to build a cooperative community called New Harmony in Indiana (USA). Louis Blanc (1813-1882) wanted the government to encourage cooperatives and replace capitalist enterprises. Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) added other ideas to this body of arguments. According to Marx industrial society was 'capitalist' who owned the capital invested in factories, and the profit of capitalists was produced by workers. Capitalism and the rule of private property were overthrown. Marx believed that a communist society was the natural society of the future.

### Support for Socialism

By the 1870s, socialist ideas spread through Europe and they formed an international body – namely, the Second International. Associations were formed by workers in Germany and England to fight for better living and working conditions. The Labour Party and Socialist Party were formed by socialists and trade unionists, by 1905.

## The Russian Revolution

In the October Revolution of 1917, socialists took over the government in Russia. The fall of monarchy in February 1917 and the events of October were termed as the Russian Revolution.

### The Russian Empire in 1914

In 1914, Russia was ruled by Tsar Nicholas II and its empire. The Russian Empire included current-day Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, parts of Poland, Ukraine and Belarus, stretching to the Pacific and comprised today's Central Asian states, as well as Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Majority of the population was Russian Orthodox Christianity.

### Economy and Society

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Russian population was dominated by agriculturalists, who used to cultivate for the market as well as for their own needs. St Petersburg and Moscow were prominent industrial areas. Craftsmen undertook much of the production, but large factories existed alongside craft workshops. In the 1890s more factories were set up after and foreign investment in industry increased. Large factories were supervised by the government to ensure minimum wages and limited hours of work. Workers were a divided social group. They were also divided by their skill. Despite divisions, workers united to stop work when they disagreed with employers about dismissals or work conditions.

Peasants cultivated most of the land but the nobility, the crown and the Orthodox Church owned large properties. Nobles got power and position through their services to the Tsar. In Russia, peasants wanted the land of the nobles.

### Socialism in Russia

Political parties in Russia were legal before 1914. In 1898, socialists founded the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party who respected Marx's ideas. Some Russian socialists felt that the Russian peasant custom of dividing land periodically made them natural socialists. Throughout the nineteenth century, socialists were active in the countryside and formed the Socialist Revolutionary Party in 1900. The party struggled for peasants' rights and demanded land belonging to nobles be transferred to peasants. The party was divided over the strategy of organisation. According to Vladimir Lenin in a repressive society like Tsarist Russia, the party should be disciplined and should control the number and quality of its members. Mensheviks thought that the party should be open to all.

### A Turbulent Time: The 1905 Revolution

Russia was an autocracy and even at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Tsar was not subject to Parliament. During the Revolution of 1905, Russia along with the Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries, worked with peasants and workers to demand a constitution. For Russian workers, bad times started from the year 1904 as prices of essential goods rose and their real wages declined by 20 per cent. Workers went on strike demanding a reduction in the working day to eight hours, an increase in wages and improvement in working conditions. The procession was attacked by the police and the Cossacks when it reached the Winter Palace. The incident, known as

Bloody Sunday, started a series of events which resulted in the 1905 Revolution. During the 1905 Revolution, the Tsar allowed the creation of an elected consultative Parliament or Duma. After 1905, most committees and unions worked unofficially, since they were declared illegal.

### The First World War and the Russian Empire

In 1914, war broke out between two European alliances – Germany, Austria and Turkey (the Central powers) and France, Britain and Russia (later Italy and Romania). This was the First World War. The war became popular and as it continued, the Tsar refused to consult the main parties in the Duma. Support wore thin. The First World War was different on the eastern front and on the western front. Between 1914 and 1916 Russian army lost badly in Germany and Austria. Russian army destroyed crops and buildings to prevent the enemy from being able to live off the land. The country was cut off from other suppliers of industrial goods by German control of the Baltic Sea. railway lines began to break down by 1916. For the people in the cities, bread and flour became scarce. By the winter of 1916, riots at bread shops were common.

### The February Revolution in Petrograd

Petrograd city is divided among its people. On the right bank of the River Neva workers quarters and factories were located and on the left bank located fashionable areas such as the Winter Palace and official buildings. Food shortages deeply affected the workers' quarters. On the right bank, a factory was shut down on February 22. Women also led the way to strikes and it is called International Women's Day. The government imposed a curfew as the fashionable quarters and official buildings were surrounded by workers. Duma was suspended on 25th February. The streets thronged with demonstrators raising slogans about bread, wages, better hours and democracy. The government called out the cavalry but they refused to fire on the demonstrators. Soldiers and striking workers gathered to form a 'soviet' or 'council' in the same building as the Duma met and it is termed as the Petrograd Soviet. Soviet leaders and Duma leaders formed a Provisional Government to run the country. Russia's future would be decided by a constituent assembly, elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage. Petrograd had led the February Revolution that brought down the monarchy in February 1917.

### After February

Under the Provisional Government, army officials, landowners and industrialists were influential. Liberals and socialists worked towards an elected government. Restrictions on public meetings and associations were removed. In April 1917, the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin returned to Russia from his exile. Lenin demanded three things termed as 'April Theses'. He wanted war to end, land to be transferred to the peasants and banks to be nationalised. He also emphasised on renaming the Bolshevik Party to the Communist Party. Workers movement spread throughout the summer. Factory committees formed and trade unions grew in numbers. When the Provisional Government saw its power reduced and Bolshevik influence grew, they decided to take stern measures against the spreading discontent. In the countryside, peasants and their Socialist Revolutionary leaders pressed for a redistribution of land. Encouraged by the Socialist Revolutionaries, peasants seized land between July and September 1917.

## The Revolution of October 1917

The conflict between the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks grew. On 16 October 1917, Lenin persuaded the Petrograd Soviet and the Bolshevik Party to agree to a socialist seizure of power. To organise the seizure, a Military Revolutionary Committee was appointed by the Soviet under Leon Trotskii. The Military Revolutionary Committee ordered its supporters to seize government offices and arrest ministers. By nightfall, the city was under the committee's control and the ministers had surrendered. At a meeting of the All Russian Congress of Soviets in Petrograd, the majority approved the Bolshevik action.

## What Changed after October?

Industry and banks were nationalised in November 1917 which meant that the government took over ownership and management. Land was declared as social property and peasants were allowed to seize the land of the nobility. The Bolshevik Party was renamed the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). Elections were conducted in November 1917, to the Constituent Assembly, but they failed in majority. In January 1918, the Assembly rejected Bolshevik measures and Lenin dismissed the Assembly. Despite opposition, in March 1918, the Bolsheviks made peace with Germany at Brest Litovsk. The Bolsheviks participated in the elections to the All Russian Congress of Soviets, which became the Parliament of the country. Russia became a one-party state. After October 1917, this led to experiments in the arts and architecture. But many became disillusioned because of the censorship the Party encouraged.

## The Civil War

The Russian Army broke up and their leaders moved to south Russia and organised troops to fight the Bolsheviks (the 'reds'). During 1918 and 1919, the Russian Empire was controlled by the 'greens' (Socialist Revolutionaries) and 'whites' (pro-Tsarists) backed by French, American, British and Japanese troops. These troops and the Bolsheviks fought a civil war. By January 1920, the Bolsheviks controlled most of the former Russian empire. In the name of defending socialism, Bolshevik colonists brutally massacred local nationalists. Most non-Russian nationalities were given political autonomy in the Soviet Union (USSR) – the state the Bolsheviks created from the Russian empire in December 1922.

## Making a Socialist Society

During the civil war, industries and banks kept nationalised. Peasants were permitted to cultivate the land. Centralised planning process was introduced. Officials worked on how the economy will work and set targets for a five-year period. During the first two 'Plans' the government fixed all prices to promote industrial growth (1927-1932 and 1933-1938). Centralised planning led to economic growth. But, rapid construction led to poor working conditions. Schooling system developed, and arrangements were made for factory workers and peasants to enter universities. For women workers, crèches were established in factories for the children. Cheap public health care was provided. Model living quarters were set up for workers.

## Stalinism and Collectivisation

The period of the early Planned Economy led to disaster of the collectivisation of agriculture.

By 1927- 1928, the towns in Soviet Russia faced an acute problem of grain supplies. Stalin introduced firm emergency measures. In 1928, party members toured the grain-producing areas, supervising enforced grain collections, and raiding 'kulaks' – the name for well to-do peasants. After 1917, land had been given over to peasants. From 1929, the Party forced all peasants to cultivate in collective farms (kolkhoz). Peasants worked on the land, and the kolkhoz profit was shared. Between 1929 and 1931, the number of cattle fell by one-third. The government of Stalin allowed some independent cultivation, but treated such cultivators unsympathetically. In spite of collectivisation, production did not increase immediately and due to bad harvests of 1930-1933 over 4 million people died. Throughout the country, accusations were made, and by 1939, over 2 million were in prisons or labour camps.

### The Global Influence of the Russian Revolution and the USSR

In many countries, communist parties were formed, like the Communist Party of Great Britain. Non-Russians from outside the USSR participated in the Conference of the Peoples of the East (1920). The Bolshevik-founded Comintern (an international union of pro-Bolshevik socialist parties). Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the USSR had given socialism a global face and world stature. The USSR became a great power and its industries and agriculture had developed and the poor were being fed. By the end of the twentieth century, the international reputation of the USSR as a socialist country had declined.