

Russian Revolution



October Revolution of 1917

DR.SR.VALSA.M.A
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
LITTLE FLOWER COLLEGE, GURUVAYOOR

- The Russian Revolution of 1917 is regarded as one of the most important events since the French Revolution- influenced the course of the world history in the 20th century.
- It was the first successful communist revolution in the world.
- E.H Carr pointed out “ *Russian Revolution was the first great revolution in history to be deliberately planned and made*”.
- Strategically organized revolution with well planned programmes and clear idea about the government to be formed after revolution
- The revolution was geared by Communist party under **leadership of Lenin and Trotsky** .
- The impact of Russian Revolution was not limited to Russia only, but all over the world either in the form of socialist countries or in the form of continuing revolutions

Causes

- **Political cause : despotic rule of the Russian Czars.**
- The Russian govt under Nicholas II who was absolute autocrat.
- He was the head of both state and church and strong believer in *Divine Right of Kings*
- Divine Right theory : The idea is that the king is given his authority directly by God. Because of this, he had the 'right' to rule completely and totally, with no need for approval from the people or any representative body such as a parliament.

- Nicholas II followed the repressive policy – maintained a powerful secret police called “Cossacks” to watch the activities of Russians
- NO POLITICAL LIBERTY- restriction on press and education.
- Besides , royal family was discredited by a number of scandals.
- It was widely suspected that Nicholas II himself was involved in the murder of Stolypin, the prime minister of Russia.
- More serious was the royal family’s association with Rasputin, an unscrupulous monk.
- Nicholas II followed the directions of Rasputin in all matters.
- Rasputin – the real power behind throne- attracted public criticism by his drunkenness and affairs with court ladies
- Administration was corrupt and inefficient and alienated three most important sections in society – peasants, industrial workers, intelligentsia

Economic cause

- Even in 1914- Russia was rural. 80% of the total population were peasants
- **Feudalism** existed in its worst form.
- Most of the land was in the hands of the upper classes- *clergy, nobles, big landlords and members of tsars family.*
- Many peasants were left with only very small landholdings.
- *Land hunger of the peasantry* was a major social factor which contributed to the revolution.

- Condition of urban working class was no better.
- Both foreign and native capitalist exploited them
- The Russian capitalist competed with foreign capitalist by reducing workers wages.
- Workers suffered mainly from long hours of work, low wages and brutal exploitation.
- workers were not permitted to form their unions and deprived of political rights.
- Led to labour unrest and labour strikes – common after 1870.
- The discontented workers naturally became the bulwark of revolution

□ Intellectual background of the revolution

Many radical thinkers and writers created an intellectual climate for the revolution

- Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and Maxim Gorky realistically portrayed the decadence of Russian society
- Many of the intellectual were drawn to the revolutionary movements along with peasants and workers.
- Radical schools like Nihilism, Populism, Anarchism and Marxism were appeared in Russia.
- However most powerful ideology responsible for the revolution was Marxism

Prelude to Revolution

□ Emergence of political parties:

- Czar Alexander III (1881-1894) was very harsh towards public activities
- During his reign, Russia witnessed the emergence of several secret associations due to his harsh attitude.
- Most of secret associations centred around problems of agricultural sector. But “Narodniks”, secret organization of socialist, was an exception who had worked for all sections of society.
- Its leader Plekhanov escaped to Switzerland to avoid arrest where he contacted other Russian immigrants and finally formed Russian Social Democratic Party(RSDP) in 1883

- ❑ After 2 years a Marxist group was organised at St. Petersburg, secretly under the leadership of Vladimir Illich Ulyanov Lenin, who was exiled to Siberia under Czar.
- ❑ In 1898 various socialist groups joined together and formed **Russian Social Democratic Labours Party**
- ❑ but in 1903 the party was split over the questions of organisation and policies
- ❑ One group led by Kerensky and Plekhanov was known as Mensheviks (Russian word for minority)- stood for parliamentary system through peaceful and constitutional methods.
- ❑ Other groups – led by Lenin known as Bolsheviks (meaning Majority)- stood for Revolution- Revolution of Proletariat.
- ❑ In 1912 the Bolshevik party published a newspaper *Pravda* (*Truth*) which played an important role in spreading Bolshevik Ideas
- ❑ *Bolsheviks* gave priority to the party with disciplines cadres from the workers and peasants.

A Turbulent Time: The 1905 Revolution



- ❑ Russia was an autocracy. Unlike other European rulers, even at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Tsar was not subject to parliament.
- ❑ The year 1904 was a particularly bad one for Russian workers. Prices of essential goods rose so quickly that real wages declined by 20 per cent. The membership of workers associations rose dramatically. When four members of the Assembly of Russian Workers, which had been formed in 1904, were dismissed at the Putilov Iron Works, there was a call for industrial action. Over the next few days over 110,000 workers in St Petersburg went on strike demanding a reduction in the working day to eight hours, an increase in wages and improvement in working conditions.
- ❑ The first stage of Russian Revolution began in 1905 with defeat of Russia in Russo- Japanese war.

- Significant development during this period was the formation of new organization of workers called Soviets
- It was a council of workers representatives set up for the purpose of conducting strikes.
- Later soviets of peasants as well as soldiers were formed.
- Soviets played crucial role in Russian Revolution.

- On a **Sunday 9 January 1905**, a big mass of workers led by a priest (Father Gapon) made a peaceful procession to Moscow to submit a mass petition to the Czar.
- But the Czar ordered to disperse the demonstration.
- The army opened fire killing hundreds- incident is known as “**Bloody Sunday**” in Russian history
- This event stirred up violent protests throughout Russia
- The revolution forced Nicholas II to agree to grant a parliament called ‘Duma’ and other democratic rights of people.
- Lenin called the revolution of 1905 a “dress rehearsal” of more important one in 1917.

Immediate cause of the Revolution

- The failure of Russia in the First World war was the immediate cause
- Russia was dragged to war when she was totally unprepared for it
- Lacked economic strength to fight against industrially superior countries
- Shortage of equipments, poor transport facilities, scarcity of bread caused Russian army to suffer heavy reverses.
- Moreover , Nicholas II took direct control of the army despite his lack of military training.
- Russia met continuous failure in the war by the hands of Germans.
- People began to think that Czar were responsible for Russia's military reverse in the war.
- Aggravated by other socio, economic and political issues, people rose against Czars which resulted February Revolution of 1917.

February Revolution

- In the winter of 1917, conditions in the capital, Petrograd, were grim.
- Layout of city – workers and factories were on the right bank of river Neva
- On the left side of bank were fashionable areas, the Winter Palace, and official buildings, including the palace where the Duma met.
- In February 1917, food shortages were deeply felt in the workers quarters.
- On 22 February, a lockout took place at a factory on the right bank. The next day, workers in fifty factories called a strike in sympathy. In many factories, women led the way to strikes.(march 8)
- They crossed the factory area and surrendered Petrograd.
- Demonstrators dispersed by the evening, but they came back on the 24th and 25th. The government called out the cavalry and police to keep an eye on them.

- On Sunday, 25 February, the government suspended the Duma.
- On the 27th, the Police Headquarters were ransacked. The streets thronged with people raising slogans about bread, wages, better hours and democracy.
- Czar ordered army to disperse the demonstrators and striking people.
- But many regiments of the army joined with striking workers.
- Soldiers and striking workers had gathered to form a soviet or council in the same building as the Duma met. This was the **Petrograd Soviet**.
- As army also had joined the revolutionaries, the Czars had no other option except abdication. He abdicated on 2 march which marked the end of the three-century old Romanov rule in Russisa.

- Duma declared Russia a Republic and set up a provisional government with George Lvov as Prime Minister.
- In July he was replaced by Alexander Kerensky, a moderate Socialist.

It was not an organised revolution- spontaneous outburst of popular unrest.

OCTOBER REVOLUTION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF USSR.

- The newly formed republican govt allowed political freedom in the country which helped the return of the exiled revolutionaries including Lenin and Trotsky to their mother land.
- When Kerensky declared that Russia would continue in the world war, people got disillusioned.
- People lost faith in new provisional govt .once again the revolutionary movement gathered momentum and they demanded “war be brought to a close, land be transferred to the peasants, and industries to be put under the control of the workers”

- The instrument that Lenin utilised to gain control of the revolution was the “Soviets”.
- The slogan was “ all power to the soviets”
- The Bolshevik program of “peace, land and bread had won the party considerable support among urban workers and the soldiers
- The central committee of the Bolshevik party decided to capture power in October itself
- The revolutionary army was formed with Trotsky as its commander.

On October 24-25 (November 6-7) the Bolsheviks staged a nearly bloodless coup, occupying government buildings, telegraph stations, and other strategic points. They also occupied Winter Palace, the headquarters of the government

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- As the Russian army refused to give support to Kerensky, he left power and fled to USA.
- The Russian Soviet Congress took over power on 25 October (November 7).
- Lenin was elected as the President and Trotsky as the External Minister
- The first important action of new Bolshevik govt was the signing of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 with Germany.

- New govt took decision to capture the land under the nobles, lords and the Christian church without compensation and entrust them to the peasant committees.
- The control of the industries was handed over to the committee of the workers.
- Banks, mines, railways, insurance, water transport etc were nationalised.
- The new government captured the foreign capital invested in the country in various industries.
- Immediately after this , the new state was involved in a civil war.
- The army officers supporting the Czar organized an armed rebellion against the Soviet state.
- They were joined by many anti communists and supported by foreign countries like England, France, Japan and USA.

- This anti soviet army (called White Army) was defeated by the Red Army of communists by 1921.
- With this victory the Bolshevik govt was established on stable foundations.
- In 1923 all Russian territories were united into a federation known as the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.**

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The Russian Revolution was a unique event in the history of modern world.

- ❑ Brought radical reconstruction of Russian society by destroying autocracy and the power of church.
- ❑ Destroyed the bases of capitalism and created the first socialist state and society.
- ❑ Destroyed the roots of social inequality- foundation to classless society.
- ❑ Inspiration to the Revolutionaries all over the world- inspired the national movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America.