



**Defeat of Russian Army:** Defeat of Russian Army was shocking and demoralising. Russian army lost badly in Germany and Austria between 1914 and 1916. There were over 7 million Russian casualties by 1917. As they retreated, the Russian army destroyed crops and buildings to prevent the enemy from being able to live off the land. It led to over 3 million refugees in Russia. The situation dishonoured the government and the Tsar. Soldiers did not wish to fight such a war.

### Impacts of the War:

- The war had a severe impact on industry. The country was cut-off from other suppliers of industrial goods by the Germans.
- By 1916, railway lines began to break down.
- Able-bodied men were involved in the war. It led to acute labour shortage and small workshops producing essential goods began to shut down.
- Large supplies of grain were sent to feed the vast army. Food scarcity became common, which sometimes led to riots in bread shops.

**THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION IN PETROGRAD:** In the winter of 1917, conditions in the capital, Petrograd, were awful. The layout of the city seemed to emphasise the divisions among its people. On the right bank of the river Neva, workers' quarters and factories were located. On the left bank were the fashionable area i.e. the Winter Palace and official buildings, including the palace where the Duma met. In February 1917, there was acute shortage of food in Russia. The winter was very cold and the heavy snow and frost made the life of workers very difficult.

Parliamentarians were opposed to the Tsar's desire to dissolve the Duma. On 22nd February, a lockout took place at a factory on the right bank of the river Neva. The next day, fifty factories called a strike in sympathy. In many factories, women also led the way to strikes. This day came to be called International Women's Day.

**Suspension of Duma:** Demonstrating workers crossed from the factory quarters to the centre of the capital, the Nevskii Prospekt river Neva, the government imposed a curfew. The quarters and official buildings were surrounded by workers. All the demonstrators dispersed by the evening, but they came back on the 24th and 25th. The government tried to control the situation and called out the cavalry and police. The Duma was suspended on Sunday, 25th February.

### Events Subsequent to Suspension of the Duma

- Politicians spoke out against the measure.
- Demonstrators returned in force to the streets of the left bank of the river Neva on the 26th February.
- On the 27th February, the Police Headquarters were attacked and damaged.
- Workers demonstrated in the streets, raising slogans about better hours, bread, wages and democracy.
- The government tried to control the situation and called out the cavalry once again, but the cavalry refused to fire on the demonstrators.
- An officer was shot at the barracks of a regiment. Three other regiments revolted and voted to join the striking workers.
- The cavalry soldiers joined the workers and jointly formed a 'Soviet' or 'Council' in the same building where the Duma met. This was the Petrograd Soviet.

**Soviet Leaders and Duma Leaders:** On the next day, a delegation went to see the Tsar. The Tsar resigned the throne on the advice of the military commanders on 2nd March. Soviet leaders and Duma leaders formed a Provisional Government to





run the country. Russia's future then was decided by a Constituent Assembly, elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

The Petrograd Soviet had led the February Revolution that brought down the monarchy in February 1917.

**After February:** In the Provisional Government, army officials, landowners and industrialists played an important role. In these groups, the liberals and socialists worked for an elected government. Restrictions on public meetings and associations 'were removed. 'Soviets' like the Petrograd Soviet were formed everywhere. The Bolshevik leader, Vladimir Lenin, returned to Russia from exile in April 1917. Lenin and the Bolsheviks had opposed the war since 1914. He felt that it was time for the Soviets to take over power. Lenin gave his 'April Theses' in which he made three demands

- (i) The war be brought to a close
- (ii) The land be transferred to the peasants
- (iii) The banks be nationalised

**Workers' Movement and Its Effect:** Lenin wanted the Bolshevik Party to be renamed as the Communist Party to indicate its new radical aims.

Throughout the summer the workers' movement spread. In industrial areas, factory committees were formed. Trade unions grew in number. Soldiers' committees were formed in the army, In June, about 500 Soviets sent representatives to an All Russia Congress of Soviets. As the power of the Provisional Government was reduced and the Bolshevik influence grew. The Provisional Government decided to control the spreading discontent. It resisted attempts by workers to run factories and began arresting leaders.

Popular demonstrations staged by the Bolsheviks in July 1917 were strictly repressed. In the countryside, peasants and their socialist revolutionary leaders pressed for a redistribution of land. Land committees were formed. Peasants seized land between July and September 1917.

**The Revolution of October 1917:** The conflict between the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks grew. In September, Lenin decided for an uprising against the government. Bolshevik supporters in the army, Soviets and factories were united. Lenin persuaded the Petrograd Soviet and the Bolshevik Party to agree to a socialist seizure (capture) of power on 16th October, 1917. The Soviet appointed a Military Revolutionary Committee under the leadership of Leon Trotsky to organise the seizure.

**The Nature of Revolution:** The uprising began on 24th October, Prime Minister Kerenskii left the city to summon troops in fear. At dawn, loyal, military men of government seized the buildings of two Bolshevik newspapers. Pro-government troops were sent to take over telephone and telegraph offices' and protect the Winter Palace. In response to these measures, Military Revolutionary Committee ordered its supporters to seize government offices and arrest ministers. Later in the day, the ship Aurora shelled the Winter Palace. Other vessels sailed down the Neva and took over different military points. By nightfall, the city was under the committee's control and the ministers had surrendered. The Bolshevik action was approved by the All Russian Congress of Soviets. There was heavy fighting between pro-government troops and the Bolsheviks. By December 1917, the Bolsheviks controlled the Moscow-Petrograd area.



**Changes after october:** The Bolsheviks opposed to private property, so they nationalised the banks and industries in November 1917. All the owned by the Church and the Tsar were seized. Land was declared a social property and the peasants were allowed the land of the nobles. They banned old titles of the aristocracy and in big cities partition of big houses according to family needs was enforced. New uniforms were designed for the army and officials. Also the Soviet hat (budeonovka) was need. The Bolshevik Party was renamed the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik).

**Elections for constituent assembly:** In November 1917, the Bolsheviks conducted the elections to Constituent Assembly, but they failed to gain majority support. In January 1918, the assembly rejected Bolshevik measures and Lenin dismissed the assembly. Lenin believed the All Russian Congress of Soviets was more democratic than an assembly.

**Creation of soviet union:** In March 1918, the Bolsheviks entered into a treaty with many at Brest Litovsk and ended the war with Germany. Bolsheviks became the only party to participate in the elections to the All Russian Congress of Soviets which was the parliament of the country and they won, Russia became a one-party state. The secret police (called the Cheka first and later, OGPU and NKVD) punished those who criticised the Bolsheviks, Many young writers and artists rallied to the party & cause it stood for socialism and change.

**The Civil War:** When the Bolsheviks ordered land redistribution, the Russian army breaks up. The soldiers, (mostly former peasants) deserted the army to take their share of land. Non-Bolshevik socialists, liberals and supporters of autocracy opposed Bolshevik uprising. Their leaders moved to South Russia and organised troops to fight Bolsheviks. The pro-Tsarists (the 'whites') and the Socialist Revolutionaries (the 'greens') fought a Civil War with Bolshevik (the 'reds') troops during 1918 and 1919. The pro-Tsarists and socialists were backed by French, American, British and Japanese troops. Non-Bolsheviks took harsh steps against the peasants. This made them unpopular. The Bolsheviks took the help of the non-Russian people and Muslim jadidists to take control of most of the former Russian empire by 1920. Most non-Russian nationalists were given political autonomy in the USSR created by the Bolsheviks in 1922. But the Bolsheviks followed many unpopular policies, like harshly discouraging nomadism. The Bolshevik's attempts to win over different nationalities were only partly successful.

**Making a Socialist Society:** During the Civil War, the Bolsheviks kept industries and banks nationalised. They permitted peasants to cultivate the land that had been socialised. Bolsheviks used seized land to demonstrate what collective work could be.

**Process of Centralised Planning:** A process of centralised planning was introduced. Officials assessed how the economy could work and set targets for a five-year period. On this basis, they made Five Year Plans. The government fixed all prices to promote industrial growth during the first two Plans (1927-1932 and 1933-1938). Centralised planning led to economic growth. Industrial production increased (between 1929 and 1933 by 100 per cent in the case of oil, coal and steel). New factory cities came into existence.

**Status of Workers:** Rapid construction brought poor working conditions for workers. In Magnitogorsk, the construction of a steel plant was achieved in three



years. But workers lived hard lives, resulting in 550 stoppages of work occurring in the first year. In the living quarters, during winter, with temperature at 40° below the workers had to climb down from the fourth floor and across the street in order to go to the toilet. Measures taken to improve status of workers were

- An extended schooling system developed and arrangements were made for factory workers and peasants to enter universities.
- Crèches were established in factories for the children of women workers.
- Cheap public healthcare was provided. Model living quarters were made for workers.
- The effect of all this was uneven as government resources were limited.

**Stalinism and Collectivization:** The period of the early planned economy was linked to the disasters of the collectivization of agriculture. Joseph Stalin became the leader of the Soviet Communist Party after the death of Lenin in January 1924. By 1927-1928, the towns in Russia were facing an acute problem of grain supplies. The government fixed prices of grains, but the peasants refused to sell their grain to government buyers at these prices. Stalin believed that rich peasants and traders in the countryside were holding stocks in the hope of higher prices. So, Stalin introduced the collectivization of Soviet agriculture. It brought the great majority of peasants into collective and state farms. In 1928, party members toured the grain producing areas, supervising enforced grain collections and raiding the Kulaks. After 1917, land had been handed over to the peasants. For the development of modern farms, it was necessary to eliminate Kulaks, take away land from peasants and establish large state-controlled farms.

**Stalin's Policies:** From 1929, the Communist Party forced all peasants to cultivate in collective farms (Kolkhoz). Peasants worked on lands and the profit of the collective farms was shared among them. Those who opposed the collectivization were severely punished; many were deported and exiled. Many peasants 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. But the production did not increase immediately. The bad harvests of 1930-1933 led to one of the most devastating famines in Soviet history in which over 4 million died. Those who criticised Stalin's policies were charged with conspiracy against socialism. By 1939, over 2 million were imprisoned or sent to labour camps. A large number of people including talented professionals were forced to make false confessions under torture and executed.

**GLOBAL INFLUENCE OF RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND THE USSR:** Existing socialist parties in Europe did not approve the way the Bolsheviks took power and kept it. However, the possibility of a workers' state fired peoples' imagination. Across the world. In many countries, communist parties were formed like the Communist Party of Great Britain.

### **Influence of Bolsheviks**

- The Bolsheviks encouraged colonial people to follow their experiment. Many non-Russians participated in the Conference of the Peoples of the East (1920) held in Baku, USSR with the Bolshevik-founded Comintern (an international union of pro-Bolshevik socialist parties).
- Some received education in the USSR's Communist University of the Workers of the East.





- By the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, the USSR had given socialism a global face and world stature.

**Style of Working of the USSR:** Yet, by the 1950s, it was acknowledged within the country that the style of government in the USSR was not in keeping with the ideals of the Russian Revolution. It was recognised in the world Socialist Movement also that all was not well in the Soviet Union. A backward country had become a great power. Its industries and agriculture had developed and the poor were being fed. But it had denied the essential freedoms to its citizens and carried out its Developmental projects through repressive policies. By the end of the 20th century, the international reputation of the USSR as a socialist country had declined, though it was recognised that socialist ideals still enjoyed respect among its people. In each country. The ideas of socialism were rethought in a variety of different ways.

### Writing About the Russian Revolution in India

The Russian Revolution inspired many Indians. Several attended the Communist University. By the mid-1920s, the Communist Party was formed in India. Its members kept in touch with the Soviet Communist Party. Important Indian political and cultural figures took an interest in the Soviet experiment and visited Russia. Among them prominent ones are Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote about Soviet Socialism. In India, writings gave impressions of Soviet Russia. In Hindi, RS Avasthi wrote in 1920-21 Russian Revolution, Lenin, His Life and His Thoughts and later, The Red Revolution. SD Vidyalkar wrote The Rebirth of Russia and The Soviet State of Russia. There was much that was written in Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu.

