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Socialism in Europe and the Russian Revolution

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

Answer

The Social, economic and political conditions in Russia before 1905 was backward:

→ Social Conditions: 85% of Russia's population was agriculturist. The industry was existent, but rarely in which most of was privately owned. Workers were divided on the basis of their occupation. They mainly migrated to cities for employment in factories. The peasant community was deeply religious but did not care much about the nobility. They believed that land must be divided amongst themselves.

→ Economic Condition: Russia was going through bad period economically. Prices of essential good rises while real wages decreased by 20% leading to the famous St.Petersburg strike. This strike started a series of events that are together known as the 1905 Revolution. During this revolution, there were strikes all over the country, universities closed down, and various professionals and workers established the Union of Unions, demanding the establishment of a constituent assembly.

→ Political Condition: Political parties were illegal before 1914. The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party was founded in 1898 by socialists who respected Marx's ideas. In

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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.

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

Answer

The working population in Russia was different from other countries in Europe before 1917 because not all Russian workers migrated from the villages to work in the industrial sector. Some of them continued to live in villages and went to work daily, to the towns. They were a divided group, socially and professionally, and this showed in their dress and manners too. Metal workers were the "aristocrats" of the working class because their occupation demanded more training and skill. Nevertheless, the working population was united on one front - strikes against work conditions and employer tyranny.

3. Why did the Tsarist autocracy collapse in 1917?

Answer

The Tsar first dismissed the initial two Dumas and then packed the parliament with the conservatives. During the First World War, the Tsar took decisions without consulting the Duma. Large scale casualties of Russian soldiers in the war further alienated the people from the Tsar. Burning of crops and

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buildings by the retreating Russian armies created a huge shortage of food in Russia. All of these led to the collapse of the Tsarist autocracy in 1917.

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

February Revolution:

→ 22nd February: Factory lockout on the right bank took place,

→ 25th February: Duma was dissolved.

→ 27th February: Police Headquarters ransacked. Regiments support the workers. Formation of Soviet.

→ 2nd March: The Tsar abdicated his power. The Soviet and Duma leaders formed a Provisional Government for Russia.

The February Revolution had no political party at its forefront. It was led by the people themselves. Petrograd had brought down the monarchy, and thus, gained a significant place in Soviet history. Trade Unions grew in number.

October Revolution:

→ 16th October: A Military Revolutionary Committee was appointed by Soviet.

→ 24th October: The uprising against provisional government begins. Military Revolutionary Committee controls the city by night and ministers surrender. The Bolshevik gained power.

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The October Revolution was primarily led by Lenin and his subordinate, Trotskii and involved the masses who supported these leaders. It marked the beginning of Lenin's rule over the Soviet, with the Bolsheviks under his guidance.

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

Answer

The main changes which were brought about by the Bolsheviks immediately after the October Revolution:

- Banks and Industries were nationalised.
- Land was declared social property, thereby allowing peasants to seize it from the nobility.
- In urban areas, houses were partitioned according to family requirements
- Old aristocratic titles were banned, and new uniforms were designed for the army and the officials.
- New uniforms were introduced for the army and the officials.

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.

Answers

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(i) It is the Russian term for wealthy peasants who Stalin believed were hoarding grains to gain more profit. 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) 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) They made up 31% of the factory labour force by 1914 but were paid almost half and three-quarters of the wages given to men. However, interestingly, it was the women workers who led the way to strikes during the February Revolution.

(iv) They espoused a nation that was tolerant towards all religions; one that would protect individual rights against the government. Although the liberals wanted an elected parliamentary form of governance, they believed that the right to vote must only belong to men, and that too the ones who were property holders.

(v) Stalin believed that collectivization of agriculture would help in improving grains supplies in Russia. He began collectivization in 1929. All peasants were forced to cultivate in collective farms (kolhoz). The bulk of land and implements were transferred to the ownership of the collective farm. Many peasants protested such attempts and destroyed livestock to

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show their anger. Collectivization did not bring the desired results in the food supply situation turned even worse in subsequent years.

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