

# History of the USSR : From Revolution to World War II

## PYQ 2022

**Q1. Critically evaluate the changes in the Russian town and countryside from the second half of the 19th century. What role did the peasants, workers and soldiers play in the downfall of the Tsarist autocracy?**

Ans1. The second half of the 19th century saw significant changes in both the Russian town and countryside, primarily driven by industrialization and urbanization. The period was marked by a rapid growth of industry, accompanied by the migration of peasants to towns and cities, seeking work in the newly established factories. However, these changes came with their fair share of challenges and problems.

One of the most significant changes in the Russian town was the growth of industry, which led to the emergence of a new working class. The workers played a crucial role in the downfall of the Tsarist autocracy, as they formed the backbone of the revolutionary movements in Russia. They organized themselves into labour unions and political parties, demanding better wages, improved working conditions, and political rights. The working class was also instrumental in the 1905 Revolution, which was sparked by a series of strikes and demonstrations organized by workers in St. Petersburg.

The peasants also played a significant role in the downfall of the Tsarist autocracy. The rapid growth of industry led to a decline in agricultural production, resulting in rising food prices and increased poverty in the countryside. This forced many peasants to migrate to towns and cities in search of work, contributing to the growth of the working class. Moreover, the peasants were heavily taxed by the Tsarist government, and their land was often taken away by wealthy landowners. These grievances led to widespread peasant uprisings, which were brutally suppressed by the government.

The soldiers also played a role in the downfall of the Tsarist autocracy. The soldiers were mostly recruited from the peasantry and working class, and they often sympathized with the revolutionary movements. During the 1905 Revolution, many soldiers sided with the revolutionaries and refused to suppress the protests. This led to a wave of mutinies in the army, which further weakened the Tsarist regime.

In conclusion, the changes in the Russian town and countryside during the second half of the 19th century were significant and were accompanied by a range of social and political challenges. The workers, peasants, and soldiers played crucial roles in the downfall of the Tsarist autocracy, with their grievances and demands fueling the revolutionary movements that ultimately brought an end to the centuries-old regime.

**Q2. Discuss the reasons for the fall of the Provisional Government and the eventual success of the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution of 1917.**

Ans2. The fall of the Provisional Government and the eventual success of the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution of 1917 can be attributed to several factors:

**Weaknesses of the Provisional Government:** The Provisional Government lacked legitimacy and support, as it was seen as a continuation of the Tsarist regime, which had been overthrown earlier in the year. The government was also weak and ineffective, unable to address the urgent social and economic problems facing the country. It failed to end the war, redistribute land to the peasants, and provide bread to the starving population, leading to widespread disillusionment and anger among the people.

**Bolshevik Propaganda:** The Bolsheviks were able to capitalize on the weaknesses of the Provisional Government through effective propaganda. They presented themselves as the true representatives of the people, promising to end the war, redistribute land, and provide bread to the population. They also used slogans such as "All Power to the Soviets" to appeal to the working class and the soldiers.

**Military Support:** The Bolsheviks were able to gain the support of the military, particularly the Red Guards, who were organized by the Bolsheviks to defend the city against a possible counter-revolution. The Red Guards were able to neutralize the remaining military forces loyal to the Provisional Government, giving the Bolsheviks control over Petrograd.

**Lenin's Leadership:** The Bolsheviks were led by Vladimir Lenin, a charismatic and determined leader who provided the party with a clear strategy and direction. Lenin's leadership was crucial in the success of the Bolsheviks, as he was able to rally support and provide a clear vision for the future of the country.

**Timing:** The timing of the October Revolution was also significant. It took place during a period of political and social turmoil, with the Provisional Government facing multiple challenges, including the ongoing war, food shortages, and a growing revolutionary movement. The Bolsheviks were able to take advantage of this instability and seize power.

In conclusion, the fall of the Provisional Government and the eventual success of the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution of 1917 were the result of a combination of factors, including the weaknesses of the Provisional Government, effective propaganda by the Bolsheviks, military support, Lenin's leadership, and timing. These factors enabled the Bolsheviks to seize power and establish the world's first socialist state, which would eventually become the Soviet Union.

### **Q3. How far did the Great Debate go in addressing and achieving the goal of 'socialism in one country'?**

**Ans3.** The Great Debate was a discussion within the Soviet Union's Communist Party in the 1920s about the future direction of the Soviet state and its relationship with other socialist movements around the world. One of the main issues debated was the concept of "socialism in one country," which argued that the Soviet Union should focus on building socialism within its own borders, rather than trying to promote socialist revolution abroad.

The Great Debate resulted in a victory for Joseph Stalin and his supporters, who argued in favor of socialism in one country. Stalin's policies emphasized industrialization, collectivization of agriculture, and centralization of power, all of which aimed to build a strong Soviet state capable of defending itself against capitalist aggression.

In terms of achieving the goal of socialism in one country, the Soviet Union did make significant progress under Stalin's leadership. The country rapidly industrialized, becoming one of the world's leading economic powers by the mid-20th century. However, this success came at a great cost, including widespread famine, forced labour, and political repression.

Ultimately, the concept of socialism in one country proved to be controversial within the international communist movement, with many arguing that socialism could only be achieved on a global scale. The Soviet Union continued to support revolutionary movements around the world, but its focus remained on building socialism at home. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the end of this experiment in socialism in one country.

**Q4. What was the impact of collectivisation in the Soviet Country side in the 1920s and 30s? Can collectivisation be called a 'war on the Peasantry'?**

Ans4. Collectivization in the Soviet countryside in the 1920s and 30s was a process of consolidating small landholdings and peasant farms into larger, collective farms owned and operated by the state. The goal of collectivization was to increase agricultural productivity and transform the Soviet Union into an industrial power by freeing up labour for industrialization.

The impact of collectivization was mixed. In the short term, there were significant disruptions to agricultural production, including crop failures and livestock losses, due to forced collectivization and the elimination of private property. Many peasants resisted collectivization, seeing it as an attack on their traditional way of life and their individual rights.

Additionally, collectivization was often accompanied by violence, with Soviet authorities using force to collectivize reluctant peasants, sometimes resulting in deaths or imprisonments. The forced requisition of grain from peasants, to be sold abroad or used to feed the rapidly growing industrial workforce, caused widespread famine in some regions, such as Ukraine, leading to millions of deaths.

As a result, collectivization can be called a "war on the peasantry" by some historians, as it was often imposed on peasants against their will and at great human cost.

In the long term, collectivization did increase agricultural productivity and laid the foundation for the Soviet Union's industrialization, but it also left a legacy of mistrust and resentment among many rural Russians towards the Soviet state, which persisted well into the post-Soviet era.

**Q5. Critically evaluate the changes in the nature of the Soviet party and the state from the late 1920s till the beginning of the second World War.**

Ans5. The late 1920s marked a significant turning point in the history of the Soviet Union, as the country's leadership underwent a profound transformation under the leadership of Joseph Stalin. In this period, the nature of the Soviet party and the state underwent substantial changes that had far-reaching consequences, both for the Soviet Union and for the world at large.

One of the most notable changes in the Soviet party and state during this period was the consolidation of power under Stalin. By the late 1920s, Stalin had emerged as the undisputed leader of the Soviet Union, having outmaneuvered and eliminated his rivals through a series of purges and show trials. This consolidation of power led to a concentration of authority in the hands of a single individual, which had significant implications for the functioning of the Soviet state.

Another key change in the nature of the Soviet party and state during this period was the adoption of a policy of rapid industrialization and collectivization of agriculture. Under Stalin's leadership, the Soviet Union embarked on a program of forced modernization, which involved the rapid expansion of heavy industry and the collectivization of peasant farms. This policy had far-reaching consequences for the Soviet economy, as well as for the social and political fabric of Soviet society.

The collectivization of agriculture, in particular, led to widespread famine and hardship in the countryside, as millions of peasants were forced to give up their land and join collective farms. This policy also had significant political implications, as it eroded the traditional power base of the rural elites and created a new class of party officials and bureaucrats who were loyal to the central government.

Alongside these economic and social changes, there were also significant shifts in the ideological orientation of the Soviet party and state. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Soviet Union embraced a more nationalist and authoritarian form of socialism, which emphasized the need for a strong, centralized state and a single, unified party. This shift in ideology was accompanied by a crackdown on dissent, as the Soviet government sought to eliminate alternative forms of political thought and opposition.

Overall, the changes in the nature of the Soviet party and state during the late 1920s and early 1930s had far-reaching consequences for the Soviet Union and for the world at large. The consolidation of power under Stalin, the adoption of a policy of forced industrialization and collectivization, and the shift towards a more nationalist and authoritarian form of socialism all contributed to the emergence of a new kind of state, one that was more centralized, more powerful, and more repressive than any that had existed before. These changes ultimately set the stage for the Soviet Union's role in the Second World War and the subsequent Cold War, as well as for the country's eventual collapse in the 1990s.

**Q6. Can Soviet policies on the ethnic minorities and nationalities be described as an example of an 'affirmative action empire'?**

Ans6. The Soviet Union's policies towards its ethnic minorities and nationalities can be described as an example of an 'affirmative action empire' to some extent. The Soviet government recognized the diversity of the Soviet Union and took active steps to address the concerns of the various ethnic groups and nationalities within its borders.

One example of this was the creation of autonomous republics and regions, which were designed to provide greater self-rule and autonomy for ethnic minorities. These regions were granted their own government structures, language rights, and cultural institutions, and were intended to address the historic grievances of these groups and foster a sense of national identity.

Additionally, the Soviet government also implemented affirmative action policies to promote the advancement of ethnic minorities in education, employment, and political representation. These policies included quotas for the admission of minority students to universities, preferential treatment for minority candidates in government positions, and the creation of cultural institutions to promote the study and preservation of minority languages and traditions.

However, it is important to note that the Soviet Union's policies towards its ethnic minorities were not entirely altruistic or free from coercion. The creation of autonomous regions and affirmative action policies was often accompanied by strict control and censorship of ethnic minority cultures, and many minority groups faced discrimination and repression under Soviet rule. Moreover, the Soviet government often used the language of 'brotherhood' and 'internationalism' to justify its policies towards ethnic minorities, but in practice, these policies were often motivated by strategic and political considerations rather than a genuine desire for equality and justice.

In conclusion, the Soviet Union's policies towards its ethnic minorities and nationalities can be described as an example of an 'affirmative action empire' to some extent, but this characterization should be balanced by an awareness of the limitations and contradictions of Soviet policies towards minority groups.

**Q7. What were the reasons that led Stalin to sign the Non-Aggression Pact with the Germans prior to the commencement of the second World War? Was it due to Stalin's sense of betrayal or disillusionment vis-a-vis the allied forces?**

Ans7. The signing of the Non-Aggression Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany on August 23, 1939, was a surprising and controversial move, given the longstanding animosity between the two countries. There were several factors that led Stalin to sign the pact, including his desire to buy time to prepare for a possible war with Germany and his hope to prevent the creation of a united front against the Soviet Union.

One of the main reasons behind Stalin's decision to sign the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany was his concern about the threat of war. Stalin was aware that Germany was rapidly expanding its military and that war with Germany was a possibility. Signing the pact gave Stalin time to strengthen the Soviet Union's military and industrial capabilities, which were still relatively weak at the time.

Another factor that played a role in Stalin's decision to sign the pact was his desire to avoid being caught in the middle of a conflict between Germany and the Western powers. Stalin was keenly aware of the divisions and rivalries within Europe and was concerned that the Western powers might try to draw the Soviet Union into a war against Germany. By signing the pact, Stalin hoped to stay out of the war and avoid being dragged into a conflict with the Western powers.

Finally, it is important to note that Stalin was motivated by a sense of realpolitik in his decision to sign the pact with Germany. Stalin was aware that the Western powers had a long history of colonialism and imperialism, and he was skeptical of their willingness to support the Soviet Union in the event of a war with Germany. By signing the pact with Germany, Stalin hoped to play both sides against each other and protect the interests of the Soviet Union in the face of an uncertain and unpredictable international situation.

In conclusion, while Stalin's decision to sign the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany was a controversial and surprising move, it was motivated by a range of factors, including his concern about the threat of war, his desire to avoid being caught in the middle of a conflict between Germany and the Western powers, and his sense of realpolitik. It was not due to any sense of betrayal or disillusionment with the allied forces.

**Q8. Write short notes on any two of the following:**

**(a) Leo Tolstoy**

Ans8 a Leo Tolstoy was a Russian writer, philosopher, and social activist who lived from 1828 to 1910. He is best known for his epic novels "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina," which are considered among the greatest works of fiction in the Western literary canon.

Tolstoy was also a prominent thinker and advocate of nonviolent resistance and social justice. He believed in the importance of living a simple life and rejecting materialism, which led him to embrace a form of Christian anarchism.

Later in life, Tolstoy became increasingly critical of the Russian Orthodox Church and organized religion in general, and developed a more radical political philosophy that emphasized the importance of individual conscience and moral responsibility.

Tolstoy's works continue to be widely read and studied today, both for their literary merit and for their insights into important social and philosophical issues.

**(b) Scissors Crisis**

Ans8 b The "Scissors Crisis" was a period of economic instability in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, characterized by a sharp rise in industrial prices and a simultaneous decline in agricultural prices. The term "scissors" refers to the graphical representation of the phenomenon, which shows the two lines diverging from each other like the blades of a pair of scissors.

The crisis was caused by the Soviet government's policy of industrialization, which prioritized the development of heavy industry at the expense of agriculture. This led to a shortage of food and other agricultural products, as well as a lack of incentives for farmers to increase production.

At the same time, the rapid industrialization led to an increase in demand for industrial goods and a rise in their prices. The resulting price gap between agricultural and industrial goods created a situation in which the purchasing power of the rural population declined, leading to social and economic tensions.

The Scissors Crisis was a significant challenge for the Soviet government, which responded with a series of policy changes aimed at improving agricultural productivity and balancing the economy. The crisis also highlighted the difficulties of rapid industrialization and the importance of balancing economic development across sectors.

### **(c) Stakhanovism**

Ans 8 c Stakhanovism was a movement in the Soviet Union in the 1930s that aimed to increase labor productivity through the promotion of model workers who set records for output. The movement was named after Alexei Stakhanov, a coal miner who reportedly set a record by extracting 102 tons of coal in a single shift.

Stakhanovism was part of the broader Soviet policy of socialist competition, which aimed to motivate workers by rewarding those who exceeded production targets. Model workers were celebrated as heroes and given special privileges, such as better living conditions and higher wages.

The Stakhanovite movement was highly influential in the Soviet Union and led to a significant increase in labour productivity. However, it also led to a focus on quantity over quality, and there were concerns about the use of coercion and manipulation to achieve record-breaking results.

The movement gradually declined in the 1940s as the Soviet Union shifted its focus to post-war reconstruction and the development of heavy industry. However, its legacy continued to shape Soviet labour policy and influenced labour movements in other countries, particularly in the socialist bloc.

### **(d) Soviet Working women**

Ans 8 d Soviet working women played a significant role in the industrialization and modernization of the Soviet Union during the early to mid-20th century. Under Soviet rule, women were encouraged to participate in the workforce and were given opportunities to receive education and training in various fields.

During World War II, Soviet women played a vital role in the war effort, serving in the military, working in factories and farms, and filling in the jobs left vacant by men who were drafted into the military. After the war, women continued to contribute to the Soviet economy and society, often balancing work and family responsibilities.

However, despite these opportunities, Soviet working women faced many challenges, including discrimination and gender-based stereotypes. Women were often paid less than men for the same work, and they faced limited opportunities for career advancement.

Overall, while Soviet working women made significant contributions to the Soviet Union, they also faced many obstacles and limitations, and their experiences highlight the ongoing struggle for gender equality and women's rights.