
UNIT 5 THE SOCIALIST WORLD-I

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

You have been introduced to liberal democracies, socialism and right-wing regimes. As you are aware, socialism as an idea had been in vogue throughout the 19th century. But it was translated into a concrete polity only in 1917 in Russia through a revolution. This Unit talks about the Russian revolution and gives you some information about the years following the revolution till 1928. The development after 1928 will be taken up in the next Unit. After reading this Unit, you will learn about the :

- conditions in Russia which led to the first socialist revolution;
- process of building socialism in Russia after the revolution;
- details of ‘war communism’ and the New Economic Policy as significant stages in the building of socialism in Russia; and
- attempt by the socialist state in Russia to spread socialism in the rest of the world through the formation of ‘Communist International’ (Comintern).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

You have already read something about the socialist vision of society. The linkages that socialist parties developed with the workers' struggles in the early 20th century added a new dimension to popular struggles in Europe. Both, the workers' struggles and the activities of the socialist parties became powerful mass movements in the 20th century. Their association generated new symbols of revolution and working class power such as demonstration, general strikes, the workers theatre, the red flag, May Day as workers day, 8 March as International Women's Day. Though their activities were spread throughout Europe, their greatest impact was, however, in Russia where the radical movements assumed an overwhelmingly anti-capitalist stance and a socialist vision. The late 19th and early 20th century was marked by a succession of revolutionary waves culminating in the first socialist revolution. In this Unit we will talk about this first socialist revolution in history, known also as the October Revolution or the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. We will also talk about the first experience of socialist construction and see the ways in which its policies were distinct from those of a capitalist state.

5.2 FIRST SOCIALIST REVOLUTION — WHY IN RUSSIA?

What exactly was happening to Russian society to make all this possible? Karl Marx, in his later years, had appreciatively commented on the rise in revolutionary temper in late 19th century Russia, but the entire thrust of the socialist thought had been towards arguing for revolution in the countries of mature and most developed capitalism. It was envisaged that the capitalist system would be most vulnerable where it was most mature because its 'contradictions' or conflicts and tension, in the form of private ownership and socialised production were starker in those countries. The working classes there would truly have nothing to lose but their chains. In actual fact, the first socialist revolution was made in 'backward' Russia, a society that was capitalist with strong remnants of feudal social and economic power intact, a working class still linked with land, and a peasantry that primarily aspired to individual land ownership. Essentially, it was the increasing contradiction of late and growing capitalism that created the social premises for the revolutionary outbreak in Russia.

5.2.1 The Political Structure

In Western Europe the growth of capitalism had led to the evolution of liberal-constitutionalism and parliamentary democracies. In Russia right up to 1917 there existed an autocratic form of government, ruled by the Tsar. All the individual, civil and fundamental rights which the citizens of Europe took for granted, and all democratic forms of collective expression such as the right to form organisation, strikes and election were not permitted in Russian territory and the Russian speaking people. It also consisted of a number of non-Russian groups and nationalities, such as Ukrainians, Siberians, the Baltic States, etc. The Russian autocracy oppressed all the other nationalities of the Empire, and stood firmly against all democratic movements in Europe, earning for

itself the label 'Policeman of Europe'. The nature of the Russian state, therefore, became increasingly incompatible with the new demands that the new changing social and economic forces engendered.

5.2.2 Peasantry and Working Class

Traditionally Russian agriculture was characterized by the practices of bonded labour attached to the land and the landlord. This practice, known as serfdom, was abolished in 1861 and the 'serf' was now replaced by free and mobile peasantry. But the 1861 agrarian reforms did not resolve the 'agrarian question' in the Tsarist Empire. Even as capitalism developed in agriculture, the landed aristocracy remained dominant, the peasant poor, and agriculture still backward. Even as peasant agriculture became commercialised and there emerged a 'kulak' rich peasant strata, the fundamental conflict in the countryside on the urgent question of land, rents, wages and rights over commons remained that between the landed aristocracy, which still held the major portion of the land, and the peasantry as a whole.

The continuing social and economic dominance of the landed aristocracy helped retain the political aristocracy, while the conflict within the post 1861 rural structure led to the creation of a modern peasant movement that grew increasingly political. Expropriation of landed estates and land for the peasant was a demand that neither the Tsarist autocracy nor any other political group, except the Bolshevik, was prepared to endorse. This enabled peasant uprisings and land take-over by them to become the motive force of the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917, as well as for the consolidation of the socialist regime.

The timing and nature of Russian industrialization created scope for a workers movement that was both very militant and political, while the specific features of Russian society and politics contributed to its assuming a revolutionary rather than a reformist character. Late industrialization and the necessity to 'catch up' with Western Europe meant large enterprises in the early stages of industrialization, unlike England or France where it was a gradual and steady development. In turn this resulted in an early and rapid growth of class consciousness and an organised mass movement before the bourgeoisie could assume social and political dominance. In Russia the thrust of the workers movement was as much against the bourgeois as against gentry rule, as much against capitalism as against the autocracy. Besides, in the absence of effective legislation on trade union rights even struggle over economic demands tended to assume political forms because the very act of strike meant breaking the law. The weakness of representative institutions led the working class movement to adopt the revolutionary alternative of overthrowing the system rather than seeking to control it through greater representation for the socialist political groups, as was done in England, France and Germany. Trade-unions were in fact born in midst of the revolution of 1905. The location of big factories in the countryside, outside the limits of city and urban boundaries, and a varied and differentiated working class (skilled artisans, skilled and unskilled factory workers, those engaged in the *kustar* or the domestic system, apart from telegraph, railway, construction workers) a very great percentage of whom retained their links with the land enabled this movement to have a appeal and reach than in just the big urban centres.

5.2.3 National Self-determination

Freedom from national oppression in the Tsarist Empire coincided with the victory of the socialist revolution. Apart from the alienation felt by the peoples of the Baltic region, Central Asia, Transcaucasia and other areas as a result of political and cultural discrimination, the economic backwardness that Tsarist economic policies entailed for these regions ensured that they remain predominantly agricultural with a strong stake in the land question. There emerged strong movements for national self-determination, demanding right for their own languages, culture, equal opportunities and even a separate political identity. The Bolsheviks supported land for the peasant as well as the right to secession and a voluntary union. The peasantry in these areas, therefore, played a crucial role in the victory of the socialist alternative to the tsarist autocracy, completely bypassing all liberal solutions to nationalist aspirations.

5.2.4 Ideas and Organisations

In the early 20th century the main political tendencies were the Socialist Revolutionaries who represented the class interests of the peasantry and looked on the peasantry as the motive force of revolution, liberals of various hues whose blueprint for Russia was the parliamentary democracy of Western Europe, and the Marxists or social democrats (communists) whose inspiration and strategy derived from Marx's Communist Manifesto and his critique of the Gotha Programme. Most radical intelligentsia were moreover, strongly influenced by Marx's critique of capitalism and the experience of the 1848 revolution in Europe in which the bourgeoisie had 'betrayed' the revolution, and the workers had been the most consistent revolutionary force. Therefore, overwhelmingly Russia imbibed from Western Europe its most radical thought rather than liberalism in retreat.

Bourgeois-liberalism was, from the beginning, weak in Russia, and the socialist orientation of the radical intelligentsia and revolutionary leadership a key factor. The Bolshevik victory represented the victory of socialism as state policy of the post-revolutionary regime.

Lenin was the most important leader of the Bolshevik party. The Bolsheviks did not simply transfer Marxism to Russia. They found viable answer to their specific revolutionary problematic in Russia within the framework of Marxism. They argued that in the condition of Russian backwardness and the relative weakness of the bourgeoisie, its role would be vacillating even in bringing about a bourgeois-democratic revolution. The Russian bourgeoisie, faced with the workers movement would not duplicate the role of the French or the English bourgeoisie. The 'hegemony of the working class' was, therefore, necessary in the first bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolutionary, as well as its second socialist stage. Their second major contribution to revolutionary strategy was the 'alliance of the working class and the peasantry' in the context of a numerically small working class and a peasant majority. Thus they preserved the idea of a two stage revolution and the leading role of the working class, while transforming their strategy to bring them about. The revolutionary upsurges from the early 20th century largely vindicated their strategy.

Check Your Progress 1

1) How was the political structure in Russia different from that of European countries? Answer in five lines.

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2) Write five lines on the different political groups active in Russia.

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5.3 THE STAGES OF REVOLUTION AND BOLSHEVIK VICTORY

The Russian Revolution may be said to have gone through three distinct stages and took almost twelve years to complete. The first stage led to the creation of a parliament, called the Duma. The second stage, known as the February revolution in 1917, led to the establishment of a Provisional Government at the centre though the rule of the tsar still prevailed. Finally, the Revolution completed its third and final stage in October 1917 when the rule of the tsar was overthrown and a peoples’ republic was established. Let us look at the three stages in detail.

The first major assault on the autocracy occurred in 1905, sparked off by firing on peaceful demonstration of workers on 9 January 1905. This day came to be known as Bloody Sunday. The workers and peasants began to demand a ‘democratic republic’. They also created the first soviets, grass-root, elected political organisations of workers, peasant and soldiers, which Lenin later called the ‘embryos of revolutionary power’ and which eventually formed the basis of the post-revolutionary state, and from which the socialist state derived its name USSR. World War I which adversely effected the economy and livelihood of the Russian working people, also created greater opposition to the existing regime and contributed to the Russian Revolution.

The final assault on the autocracy came with the February Revolution of 1917. Beginning with a demonstration of women workers over shortage of bread in Petrograd, it spread to other cities and to the countryside. Strikes by all sections of society, peasant uprising, and revolutionary action by the soldiers sealed the fate of the autocracy. The Russian autocracy was overthrown and replaced by a Provisional Government dominated by the liberal bourgeoisie.

The February 1917 Revolution achieved political freedom for the first time. Fundamental and civil rights were created. Hundreds and thousands of pamphlets were distributed by thousands of little organisations, and found their way into factories, barracks, villages, streets. Factory committees, village councils, soldiers, groups became the forum through which the people sought

to shape their destiny. Soviets were once again elected — in towns, in villages, at the front, and the Central Soviet one again (as in 1905) emerged as the alternative source of revolutionary power opposed now to the Provisional Government.

The liberal bourgeoisie represented in the Provisional Government had completed its revolution; the working people were only beginning theirs. That was the major contradiction in the new post-February revolution regime, and it could not continue for long. The peasants were disappointed that they did not get any land, the entire working people and soldiers were disappointed that the war still continued.

Discontent expressed itself in the form of strikes and demonstrations, peasants spontaneously taking over lands, riots over high prices and shortage of food, and desertion by soldiers who wanted an end to war and to partake of the land distribution. The Bolsheviks easily emerged as closest to the popular mood with their slogans of:

- land for the peasant,
- immediate end to war,
- workers' control over industries,
- right of nationalities to self-determination, and above all
- bread.

Peace! Land! Bread! Democracy! became the immediate demands. The Bolsheviks gained majority in all the mass organisations, and had the majority of the workers and soldiers on their side. Contrary to general impression later created by a hostile press, the revolution thus had a popular character, and was almost bloodless. The army — largely peasants — simply went over to the side of the revolutionary forces. The provisional Government was overthrown. The first socialist revolution in history had become a reality. The new state declared itself a workers state. A very vivid account of this October 1917 revolution appears in 'Ten Days That Shook the World' by John Reed, an American journalist.

5.4 SOCIALIST CONSTRUCTION OR BUILDING SOCIALISM

Building socialism in the country of revolution was in many ways as heroic a struggle as making revolution was. There was no model of an actually existing socialist society for the Bolsheviks to model their experiments on. Neither did there exist a detailed blue-print of what socialism in practice entailed, comparable to Marx's analysis of capitalism. The early Russian revolutionaries had only their ideals to rely on and certain broad principles worked out by socialist thinkers. Russia was still backward in terms of economic development as compared to other European countries, and it was not so easy to chalk out a strategy of economic growth that would outpace capitalist economy. Besides, socialist Russia had to face the united assault of the capitalist countries, hostile and in actual war against the new state, and civil war from former landlords and capitalists within Russia.

Rapid economic growth, social justice, and guarantee of individual fundamental rights were not as easy to combine in real life as it was in theory. There were bitter political differences, debates over strategies and goals, and experiments with successive policies over building socialism. Many dreams remained unfulfilled, many ideals fell by the wayside, many aspirations were denied in the face of the harsh realities of backwardness, hostility of the entire capitalist world and civil war. The revolution in the other countries of Europe did not materialise, although the Bolsheviks predicated many of their policies in Russia on a 'socialist world revolution'. The workers state had to be defended in many ways, and many more people died defending the revolution than in making it. But they succeeded in presenting to the world an alternative model for development and modernity and their achievements were in some respect quite remarkable.

5.4.1 The Nature of Change — Early Legislation

The early legislation aimed at destroying the legal and economic bases of capitalism and in laying the foundation for socialism. It almost meant a reversal of the earlier foreign policy and the entire capitalist ethic of private profit, individualism and consumerism.

Among the earlier measures were the abolition of private resources in industry, and the establishment of workers' control. The factories were taken over by the workers to keep a check on the production processes through their representatives, while also ensuring the right of workers in their factories. While state ownership of industry remained a consistent and continuing feature of socialist planning in the USSR as well as in other socialist countries, workers control came under severe strain in the conditions of war, and centralised planning in later years.

A second major intervention was in agriculture. By the Land Decree of November 1917 landlordism was abolished, and the entire land was nationalised and given over to peasants for hereditary use under individual production. The amount of land given to a peasant family depended on the number of family members. The income from the land and from the labour on this land continued to be individual or private i.e. of his family members, the only limitation being it could not be sold by them or used in any way to exploit the labour of others. The exploitative relationships that characterised the agrarian sector were thus ended, along with the abolition of private property in land, although production and ownership were not socialised.

On 28 December 1917 all private banks were nationalised, and in February 1918 all shareholders in banks expropriated and all foreign debts repudiated. The Russian Revolution also destroyed class society as we know it. The differences in salary were still there and people did not get as much as they worked and deserved, because of war condition and limited productivity but the demands of social justice were met to a greater extent than under capitalism because physical labour was no longer devalued, the wage differential between workers and 'white collar' remunerations were much less, and no one could derive income without working or by making someone else work for him.

Politically the new state characterised itself as 'dictatorship of the proletariat', i.e. a socialistic democracy. By this was implied the domination of the interest

of the majority over the minority, as the working people constituted the majority of the population. Secondly, through it the revolution expressed the political domination of those who work, as opposed to those who, under capitalism and a bourgeois democracy, live by their private control over the nation's resources. Thirdly the new state sought to apply a more positive concept of democracy where the state was responsible for a lot more of an individual's needs-incorporating the French heritage-rather than the 'laissez faire' concept where freedom for the individual comes from non-interference by the state, and the individual is largely left to fend for himself.

Within a few months of the revolution the government published all the secret treaties of the old government, and proclaimed that all treaties and agreements between Soviet Russia and other countries will be open and public. With the same Decree on Peace they offered peace without any annexation, conquests or indemnities, and withdrew their claims over areas the Tsarist government and also the Provisional government were fighting over. They took a public stand against colonialism, and in support of all national liberation struggles. Without the Russian Revolution there would have been no Wilson's Fourteen Points at the end of World War I. In all the areas that had constituted the Tsarist Empire, the Bolsheviks recognised the rights of all nationalities to self-determination, including the right of secession.

5.4.2 The Nature of Change: Popular Initiatives

Even as the Bolshevik leadership tried heroically to fulfil its promised mandate of destroying the institutional framework of the old regime and creating a new one, the workers and peasants were lending their own substance to the revolutionary transformation. The early years carry the imprint of their spontaneous and organised activity at local levels. The land communes, the village gatherings and peasant soviets acted as autonomous organs of social and political transformation in the countryside. The agrarian revolution sanctioned by the Bolsheviks was in actual fact effected by them, and they formed the nucleus of the post-revolutionary rural structure. Within the space of a few years millions of acres of land changed hands and was divided among the peasants. The old state apparatus in the countryside was completely destroyed.

In the cities there was a similar tendency to put into effect the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' and workers control, with two-thirds of the nationalisations of particular factories being local decision, a workers control being identified as workers take-over of factories and production. The vast network of trade union factory committees, workers soviets, and partly organisations achieved the real expropriation of capital.

The trend in general was toward democratisation, de-centralisation, local initiative and popular decision making. These became the bases of the new institutional framework emerging out of the legislation of the Bolsheviks and the dynamics of the revolution all over the former Tsarist Empire. The Bolsheviks were intrinsically linked with this process, although there were numerous pushes and pulls between these initiatives and the attempts by the central leadership to consolidate the gains of the revolution through the creation of an administrative network, a public distribution system and the institutionalisation of the peasant-worker alliance for the entire country.

5.5 WAR COMMUNISM 1918-1921

This entire process of revolutionary change was brought to a crisis by mid-1918. The revolutionary forces were confronted by Civil War in the form of armed hostility of the forces of the former landed aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, which merged with an equally determined armed intervention by the capitalist countries to dislodge the new socialist regime. Production collapsed, distribution was disrupted, vast economically significant territories fell outside the control of the Soviet government and Soviet held areas were cut off from essential sources of materials and food. There was wide spread hunger and starvation, inflation, disease, disruption of transportation, and near anarchy as peasants and workers locally interpreted their new found power in their own way and acted spontaneously, intensifying class conflicts on all fronts.

The Bolsheviks responded in June 1918 with a series of economic and political measures that have subsequently been designated as War Communism. The term derives from the fact that the measures were adopted during the War and to meet the exigencies of the war situation on the one hand, and because in many ways they reflect some of the characteristics that Marx and other Communists identified with developed socialism or communism.

5.5.1 Economic Initiatives

The problem of food was no doubt intensified by the war situation, but it was equally linked to the structural arrangements created by the revolution. Distribution of land to the peasant reduced agricultural production to small scale peasant production where the peasant would strive for optimum production only if he could convert his labour into higher income and consumer goods that would enhance his standard of living. Loss of economically rich resource areas during war, and the emphasis on production for war effort and machinery to broaden the production base, led to decline in production of consumer goods. The peasant in this context withdrew from the market by producing only for his own needs, resulting in severe food shortages in urban areas and on the war fronts. This threatened the very survival of the regime, a much from its potential for conflict between town and country, the peasant and the worker, as from hunger.

The Soviet Government responded with forced requisition of grain surplus from the peasants in order to feed the urban poor and soldiers, and state control of all enterprise in order to revive industry. Requisition of grain, and later all foodstuffs, at fixed government prices, through organised food procurement campaigns by urban brigades were accompanied by a ban on private trade, rationing and a public distribution system. The peasant, in turn, lowered his production even more. The volume of grain procured after the initial thrust steadily declined, further aggravating the food crisis that culminated in the famine of 1920-1921. There was, by then, massive hoarding by the peasantry, a flourishing black market causing higher prices, and a virtual breakdown of the state infrastructure of the procurement process. Once the Civil War was won, the peasantry came out openly in revolt against the Soviet Government: until then it stood by the Bolsheviks as the only safeguard against

the return of landlords. Experiments were made with setting up of co-operative and even state farms to promote the spirit and economic of collectivism, but this formed a very tiny component of the agricultural sector.

Nationalisation of industrial enterprises was accelerated for maximum mobilisation of resources. By a March 1918 decision the railways were taken away from 'workers' control and placed under semi-military command. By September 1919 about 80-90% of large scale industry had been nationalised, by November 1920 even small workshops with less than five workers were placed under state control. This extreme nationalisation created its own chaos, as allocation of material, production and marketing became virtually impossible through centralised decision-making and administrative organs. Most transfer and accounting began to assume the form of paper accounting in this anarchy, and as the Rouble collapsed, most exchange became simple barter. The gross output of the manufacturing and mining industries in 1920-21 was less than 1/6th of the pre-war output. Consumer goods production declined even more. The conflict between the peasant and the worker loomed larger.

5.5.2 Political Aspects of War Communism

War Communism is too often identified solely by its economic measures, and the reaction to them. In actual fact, it had much larger dimensions. Opposition to it came not only due to the hardships it entailed. Notions of democracy, the relationship between the individual, the state and popular organisations were debated. War Communism created a very real dilemma between reliance on the specialist or the revolutionary (the 'Red') as incharge. Between needs as experienced by the workers and peasants and the requirements of socialist construction, between the needs of the peasants on the one hand and that of the workers, all of which assumed the form of class struggles that effected the composition and nature of the Soviets and party organisations. While the failure on the economic front led to peasant wars and urban disaffection, the growth of black market encouraged an ethos inimical to socialist ideals. The spirit of voluntarism came under severe strains even as the 'world socialist revolution' in Europe failed to materialise. Recruitment for the Red Army became a problem. Workers opposition to the principle of state control and the uprising of Kronstadt sailors in February 1921 was the final straw after the wide spread peasant rebellions. Lenin was forced to announce that change of policy has become necessary. But not everything that was resorted to as a temporary measure in a critical situation could be reversed, as many Bolsheviks were to realise later – particularly the institutional structures modified or evolved to implement their policies. The crisis for socialist democracy in its political form dates to this War Communism experience and the let down that the Bolsheviks were to realise later – particularly the institutional structures modified or evolved to implement their policies. The crisis for socialist democracy in its political form dates to this War Communism experience and the let down that the Bolsheviks felt from the revolutionary movement in Europe.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What led to the Russian Revolution? Write in 100 words.
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2) What were the new measures taken by the socialist state in USSR? Write in ten lines.

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3) Why did the socialist government resort to war communism?

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5.6 NEW ECONOMIC POLICY

The New Economy Policy (NEP) was a response to a political and economic crisis even though at its core was economic changes that marked a change in the strategy of transition to socialism. NEP, as it came to be known, involved a change in the socio-economic balance of forces.

The decisive change that brought this about began in March 1921. Grain requisition was replaced by a fixed tax on income to be paid in kind, what was much lower than the requisition targets, and the peasants could keep for themselves and trade privately in whatever else surplus that remained with them. Since agriculture was still based on individual production this amounted to allowing 'profit' through exploitation of the labour of others.

In 1924 the tax in kind was replaced by a money tax, followed by legalisation of private trade. In 1925 the restrictions on leasing of land and hiring of labour were eased, and the agricultural tax further reduced. The tax now, levied on the net income, varied from a minimum of 5 % for those holding less than a quarter of an hectare to 17 % for those holding more than three hectares. In spite of this differential rate, the other aspects such as freedom to trade and choose one's customer once the tax had been paid, and to lease more land and hire labour, encouraged differentiation, and the emergence of a significant and rich or 'Kulak' strata within peasantry. It also meant re-introduction to market links between different sectors of economy, greater role for money as medium of exchange, the curtailment of the sphere of centralised distribution system, and individual contracts.

There were accompanying changes in the industrial sector and its organisational forms. On 17 May 1921 the decree nationalising small scale industry was revoked and smaller units were actually de-nationalised, some of them being resorted to their former owners. Only banking, foreign trade and large scale, heavy industry remained state controlled – those that Lenin called the

‘commanding heights of economy’. By July 1921 every individual citizen was given the right to organise small scale industrial enterprises although on lease. State enterprises were to operate on the basis of commercial accounting, services and wages were to be paid in cash. Industrial enterprises were supposed to make their own arrangements for acquiring raw materials and marketing to their products through independent contracts with other industrial enterprises or agricultural producers. All this entailed a degree of decentralisation of decision-making, competition, and commercialisation, and the recreation of a new class of private entrepreneurs. It promoted a capitalist ethos and ethic which affected even the cooperatives and the large scale state structure that still controlled major production.

5.6.1 NEP as a Strategy for Transition to Socialism

Just as War Communism had enabled the Bolsheviks to tide over the immediate difficulties and to consolidate the Revolution, the NEP (New Economic Policy) changes made possible economic recovery in the ensuing years and also won the confidence of the majority of peasants. Like the policies of 1918-21, it carried over into the future much that was designed to be temporary.

The economic recovery which began after 1920 after an initial impact of famine, reached 1/3 of the pre-war level by 1923. But if we compare with the War Communism phase, agricultural productivity increased by around 40%, the total sown area by 45% and the grain area by 39-43% by 1928. This rate of growth was much higher than the rate of growth in industry, with the result that prices of industrial goods went up, and there was a sizeable widening of the gap between the price levels of industrial and agricultural goods in favour of industry which, however, also created marketing difficulties. This potential for conflict again between town and country, the peasants and working class, was avoided by putting pressure on industry to reduce prices. The problem however, remained in a long term sense, given the fact that the private sector was predominant in agriculture throughout NEP, and a lot of industry was still a state monopoly.

Secondly, the NEP changes could not resolve the problems and social contradictions that derived not merely from the war situation or specific policies but from the larger social contradictions that arise when the revolutionary working class is called upon to build socialism in the midst of a vast peasant majority. In individual peasant economy while there is little scope for class exploitation, nevertheless it is an expression of bourgeois relations. As long as land is held individually, worked on individually as a family and income derived from it privately, there is little incentive for the peasantry to transform agriculture along socialist lines. The NEP solution was that through cooperation peasantry would voluntarily realise the benefit of collectivism. But cooperating to buy tractors or work agricultural machinery collectively on land held together did not resolve the problem, because cooperative and collective forms functioned on the same principles of market and profit as the individual peasant did.

The introduction of market and the consequent stratification in agriculture, and the emergence of the individual entrepreneur worked against the egalitarianism inherent in communist ideology. Voluntarism was replaced by economic incentive. Rather than see the fruits of his/her labour transformed

into collective social benefits, it promoted in the peasant individual solutions to social problems.

Advanced socialism where each could derive goods/benefits according to need, required increased industrial productivity. NEP provided little scope for transfer of resources to the socialised sector from the individual or private sector of economy. Given the fact that Soviet Russia was not open to exploitation of colonies this was a major problem. From all evidence the transformation of Soviet Union into an advanced socialist society, the transformation of the quality of life of individual citizens, and creation of a more human, scientific and equality oriented man was unlikely through the NEP changes. When trade-units, soviets and other popular organisations gained greater rights they were already dominated by the spirit of economic incentive as opposed to voluntarism. It is in this larger context that we must see the later debates within the Party, the collectivisation drive, and the conflicts between party and popular organisations.

5.7 CULTURAL ASPECTS OF SOCIALISM

Socialist achievements in the early years were limited only in terms of their own vision and the agenda they had set for themselves. Given what existed before Revolution in Russia, and the priorities and ethics of the capitalist world during the same years, their achievements were many. The early socialist state heroically experimented with guaranteeing full employment, free and equal education for all, free health care, equal access to culture and cultural advance, and equality for women. In giving recognition to the legal right of every citizen to a good life the Bolshevik socialist revolution enlarged the realm of freedom to include also social and economic equality. In adopting the principles of right to employment and 'to each according to his or her work', it guaranteed the implementation of this equality. The area of freedom and rights now ranged from freedom from hunger to freedom of access, in real terms, to leisure and culture. The abolition of private property and the creation of welfare infrastructure were meant to ensure its guarantee to all, including minorities and women. By creating economic equality the Revolution also sought to bridge the gap between elite and popular culture, and a revival of the music and languages of the minorities. Much of the very high quality of artistic production in the later year as well as the big scale of books production were a result of this enlargement of the realm of freedom. The revolution presented an alternative vision of modernity to the world.

It also experimented with a new relationship between party, individual and the state, with new forms of collective political expression, made people the central focus of national policies, achieved popular participation of people in local and national affairs. It sought the abolition of ranks and privileges and changed the very scale of participative democracy.

In all this their actual achievements over the years were mixed. The early years were heady and hard. The civil war and allied intervention impinged on all aspects of policy and political life. But in the early years the Revolution had set for itself standards by which it was to be judged not merely by others, but by the revolutionaries themselves and the entire Soviet people.

5.8 COMINTERN

For the Bolsheviks the Russian revolution was always inseparable from the world socialist revolution. Before they made their own revolution the Bolsheviks and other Russian revolutionaries thought that the revolution in Russia would follow the socialist revolution in Western Europe. Once they made their revolution ahead of Europe, they expected Europe to follow suit. This, together with the cardinal Marxist principle of the unity of the interest of working classes all over the world, and their socialist vision of an oppression-free world, was the basis of their internationalism. This internationalism was given shape in the form of the Socialist International.

When the social-democratic parties of Western Europe refused to oppose their own ruling classes in the interest of the working classes in Europe, as the Bolsheviks saw it, the Bolsheviks broke away from them, changed their name to communist party, and accordingly formed a new Communist International. For the Bolsheviks their revolution had to spread elsewhere, as backward Russia did not have the productive capacity to sustain advanced socialism. The Communist International was envisaged as the vanguard of this revolution.

Because of the atmosphere of international civil war in which the Comintern came into existence, its conditions of membership as well as policies reflected the Bolshevik position on national self-determination, the nationalities question in former Russian territory and the strategy for world revolution. It also reflected the experience of the Bolsheviks with the peasantry, particularly in relation to national-liberation movements.

As soon as the Bolsheviks proclaimed in November 1917 the right to secession as part of self-determination, the Allied powers made this issue a part of their armed intervention. The Comintern, at this stage modified their right to be that of the workers and peasants in the different areas. It developed the idea of a United Front between national liberation movements and the Communist Parties in Europe and Soviet Russia. The strategy of the communists in these areas was strongly influenced by the Comintern, where the national-liberation struggles were seen as not only against the imperialist powers and the feudal landlords in their own country, but also against the bourgeoisie in their own country. The agrarian revolution was seen as the basis of the national liberation struggles with the workers playing the leading role. In the 1920s as the Bolshevik's struggle with their peasantry seemed muted with the NEP changes, a similar accommodation occurred in the Comintern policy towards the correlation of social forces in the national liberation struggles. The Comintern recognised and supported the 'positive' role of the bourgeoisie in these countries against Imperialism. This policy continued well into the 1920s and Communist Parties were formed in many Asian countries. The links with China were particularly strong, and early strategies of the communist groups in China, India, Turkey and Afghanistan were strongly influenced by Comintern policies. Communist members of these countries were also represented in Comintern.

Check Your Progress 3

1) In what ways was the New Economic Policy different from War Communism?

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2) Write a note on Comintern.

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5.9 LET US SUM UP

This Unit has focussed on three important aspects related to the creation of the socialist world: the situation prior to the socialist revolution, making of the socialist revolution, and the functioning of the socialist state with all its constrains and problems.

As you are aware, socialism as a vision of human society had dominated the thinking of many intellectuals in Europe in the 19th century. The socialist revolution, the first of its kind, actually occurred in 1917 in the Russian empire only. This Unit talked about the factors which created a revolutionary situation in Russia and finally led to the revolution. The revolution occurred in three stages- with the creation of a parliament in 1905 to the creation of a liberal bourgeois regime in February 1917, to finally the capture of power by workers soviet under the leadership of the Bolsheviks in October 1917.

The new socialist state was confronted with tremendous problems and opposition — a hostile capitalist world and a civil war led by the old order in Russia. It resorted to a phase of a War Communism which continued from 1918 to 1921. In 1921 began yet another phase called the New Economic Policy, which was to last till 1928. But the consolidation of the new socialist state was far from over. The story of the socialist state from 1928 onwards will be taken up in the next Unit.

5.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) You should mention the absence of liberal constitutionalism and parliamentary democracy in Russia. See Section 5.2
- 2) You should refer to the socialist revolutionaries, liberals and social democrats as some of the leading political groups in pre-revolutionary Russia. See Sub-Section 5.2.4.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) You should emphasize the different stages from 1905 onwards through which the revolution was carried out. See Section 5.3
- 2) You should mention the change brought about through legislation and popular initiative. See Section 5.4.
- 3) You should point out the challenges posed to the new regime from the former landed aristocracy and the capitalist counties as well as the economic crisis in the immediate post-revolutionary period, which forced the new socialist state to resort to war communism. See Section 5.5

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Read Sections 5.5 and 5.6 and point out the changes in government policy on nationalism and agriculture and industry.
- 2) See Section 5.8.

