

The World Between Wars

1900-1950 Part II

Russian Socialist revolution

Tsarist Russia was a vast land mass spread over two continents and making it a Euro-Asian power. It had the third largest population in the world, viz. 156 million, after China and India. It comprised of several nations like the Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkomania, etc. The livelihood of most Russians was derived from agriculture and control over land was the basic cause for struggle between peasants and feudal lords. The feudal lords owned most of the lands and most peasants paid rent for the land they tilled.

Tsar Nicholas II ruled over his vast Russian empire like any autocrat with the help of the army and bureaucracy. But the Russian economy was bled in the extreme by the World War. The Russian army was the largest in the world before World War I. Yet, by 1917, the Russia had lost two million soldiers and civilians and became the biggest loser of human lives in World War I. The diversion of food to the War front led to shortages in the cities. On March 8th 1917, around 10,000 women of the capital, St Petersburg, took out a procession demanding 'Peace and Bread'. Workers joined them in this protest. Unnerved at the protest in the capital, Tsar Nicholas II ordered the army to suppress the demonstrators, even by firing at them. Instead, the soldiers joined the demonstrators. In just two days, the situation

went so much out of hand that the Tsar abdicated and non-aristocratic Russians made a Provisional government. This was the first Russian revolution of 1917 and it was called the March Revolution.

A bigger revolution was made later in October 1917 and it was not spontaneous. The liberals and aristocrats, who ruled Russia after the abdication of the Tsar, decided to continue the War to preserve the honour of the fatherland.



Fig 14.1 : Bolshevickhs marching on red square, Russian Revolution of 1917

Fatigued by military reverses and upset at economic shortages, the common people did not want the War. They began organising themselves in councils which were called Soviets. Such Soviets of soldiers, industrial workers and also people in rural areas were the expression of common people's power which was channelised by a group of Russian Communist party called Bolsheviks.

The Bolsheviks were led by Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924). Bolsheviks were able to win the confidence of the Soviets (councils of peasants, workers and soldiers) because they took up the demand for immediate and unconditional peace, nationalisation of all land and its redistribution to the peasants and control over prices and nationalisation of all factories and banks. The Soviets under the Bolshevik leadership seized power from the Provisional Government in October-November 1917 and immediately took steps to end the war and redistribute land. Full peace could not return to Russia because there started a civil war led by White armies of Russian monarchists and anti-communist soldiers with help from Britain, France, USA and Japan. These were all defeated by 1920. The Bolsheviks also announced the ending of the Russian empire and permitted the various nations under it to become independent. However, gradually most of the former Tsarist empire's nations agreed to join the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) which was set up in 1924 by the Soviet government of Russia.

With this began a great experiment of building a country without exploiters like feudal lords, Kings or capitalists. The USSR tried to build a society that was industrialised and modern and yet did not have inequality or exclusion of people on basis of birth, gender, language, etc.

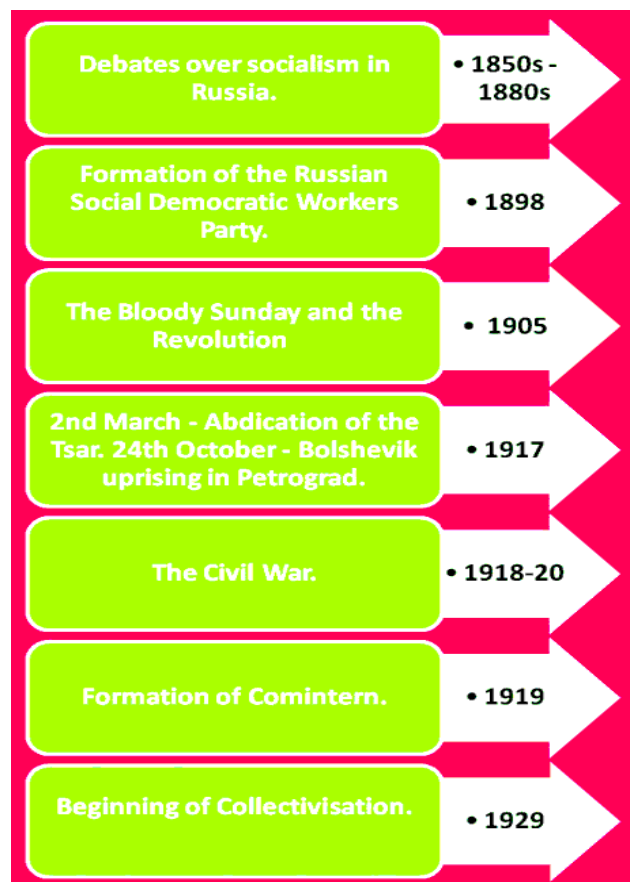
Rise of Stalin

After the death of Lenin in 1924 Stalin emerged as the leader of the Communist

Date of the Russian Revolution

Russia followed the Julian calendar until 1 February 1918. The country then changed to the Gregorian calendar, which is followed everywhere today. The Gregorian dates are 13 days ahead of the Julian dates. So by our calendar, the 'February' Revolution took place on 12th March and the 'October' Revolution took place on 7th November.

Timeline



Women in the February Revolution

'Women workers, often inspired their male co-workers ... At the Lorenz telephone factory, ... Marfa Vasileva almost single handedly called a successful strike. Already that morning, in celebration of Women's Day, women workers had presented red bows to the men ... Then Marfa Vasileva, a milling machine operator stopped work and declared an impromptu strike. The workers on the floor were ready to support her ... The foreman informed the management and sent her a loaf of bread. She took the bread but refused to go back to work. The administrator asked her why she refused to work and she replied, "I cannot be the only one who is satiated when others are hungry." Women workers from another section of the factory gathered around Marfa in support and gradually all the other women ceased working. Soon the men downed their tools as well and the entire crowd rushed onto the street.'

From: Choi Chatterji, *Celebrating Women* (2002)

party. Over the next decades he established his absolute control and put an end to all opposition. He used his undisputed power to build the economy of USSR.

USSR began a programme of planned economic development with its Five Year Plans in 1928. This pursued a twin policy of rapid industrialisation and collectivisation of agriculture. USSR under the leadership of Joseph Stalin tried to end small peasant production by forcing all small and large farmers to surrender their lands and join 'Collective Farms'. These farms pooled in all the land in the village along with tools and machines and animals. Farmers worked together and the produce was divided among the members

of the farms. The idea was to shift from small holding farming to large scale farming so that new techniques and machines could be used. Thousands of peasants especially the large farmers resisted this and had to face imprisonment, deportation and even death. This caused a severe famine in 1929-30 leading to the death of a



Fig 14.2 : Lenin addressing workers

very large number of people. After an initial period of decline, agricultural production soon rose and helped USSR to also build its industries on an unprecedented scale. All industries were owned by the state which did not allow free market and sold the industrial products to the consumers directly.

However, rapid construction led to poor working conditions. In the city of Magnitogorsk, the construction of a steel plant was achieved in three years. Workers lived hard lives and the result was 550 stoppages of work in the first year alone. In living quarters, 'in the wintertime, at 40 degrees below, people had to climb down

from the fourth floor and dash across the street in order to go to the toilet’.

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 working women. Cheap public health care was provided. Model living quarters were set up for workers. The effect of all this was uneven, though, since Government resources were limited.

USSR achieved full employment for all its citizens and was able to improve their standard of living substantially. It also managed to universalise literacy and primary education. Precisely during this period, the western world began to face the ‘Great Depression’ in which factories closed down and millions of workers lost their jobs, thousands of peasants found the prices of their goods crashing down as demand for them collapsed due to the shutting down of factories. The USSR prided itself in escaping the impact of the Great Depression. USSR was able to escape the effect of the Depression because it was not integrated with the international market. Secondly, it had a planned economy in which the

The October Revolution and the Russian Countryside: Two Views

1) ‘News of the revolutionary uprising of October 25, 1917, reached the village the following day and was greeted with enthusiasm; to the peasants it meant free land and an end to the war. ...The day the news arrived, the landowner’s manor house was looted, his stock farms were “requisitioned” and his vast orchard was cut down and sold to the peasants for wood; all his far buildings were torn down and left in ruins while the land was distributed among the peasants who were prepared to live the new Soviet life’. From: Fedor Belov, *The History of a Soviet Collective Farm*

2) A member of a landowning family wrote to a relative about what happened at the estate:

‘The “coup” happened quite painlessly, quietly and peacefully. ...The first days were unbearable.. Mikhail Mikhailovich [the estate owner] was calm...The girls also...I must say the chairman behaves correctly and even politely. We were left two cows and two horses. The servants tell them all the time not to bother us. “Let them live. We vouch for their safety and property. We want them treated as humanely as possible....”

...There are rumours that several villages are trying to evict the committees and return the estate to Mikhail Mikhailovich. I don’t know if this will happen, or if it’s good for us. But we rejoice that there is a conscience in our people...’

From: Serge Schmemmann, *Echoes of a Native Land. Two Centuries of a Russian Village* (1997).

- Read the two views on the revolution in the countryside. Imagine yourself to be a witness to the events. Write a short account from the standpoint of: 1) an owner of an estate 2) a small peasant 3) a journalist.

Central Asia of the October Revolution: Views

M.N.Roy played an important role in 'comintern' an international organisation set to promote communist revolution in the world. He was in Central Asia at the time of the civil war in the 1920s. He wrote:

'The chieftain was a benevolent old man; his attendant ... a youth who ... spoke Russian ... He had heard of the Revolution, which had overthrown the Tsar and driven away the Generals who conquered the homeland of the Kirgiz. So, the Revolution meant that the Kirgiz were masters of their home again. "Long Live the Revolution" shouted the Kirgiz youth who seemed to be a born Bolshevik. The whole tribe joined.'

M.N.Roy, Memoirs (1964).

An Indian arrives in Soviet Russia in 1920

'For the first time in our lives, we were seeing Europeans mixing freely with Asians. On seeing the Russians mingling freely with the rest of the people of the country we were convinced that we had come to a land of real equality. We saw freedom in its true light. In spite of their poverty, imposed by the counter-revolutionaries and the imperialists, the people were more jovial and satisfied than ever before. The revolution had instilled confidence and fearlessness in them. The real brotherhood of mankind would be seen here among these people of fifty different nationalities. No barriers of caste or religion hindered them from mixing freely with one another. Every soul was transformed into an orator. One could see a worker, a peasant or a soldier haranguing like a professional lecturer.'

Shaukat Usmani, Historic Trips of a Revolutionary.

state decided what has to be produced and how much. This enabled them to maintain a balance between demand and supply.

However, all this was built through an enormous centralisation of political power in the hands of the Communist Party and its leaders and denial of ordinary democratic liberties to the citizens and doing away with any opposition through the use of force including large scale execution of opposition leaders. All this was done on the plea that it was necessary to build socialism and defeat the designs of capitalist powers which were constantly trying to undermine the USSR.

The experience of the USSR inspired people all over the world who were committed to the ideals of equality and national liberation. A large number of them now became communists and tried for a communist revolution in their countries. Many of them like MN Roy, Tagore and Nehru were inspired by it even though they did not agree with many aspects of communism like suppression of opposition political parties.

Many others were also horrified by the violent elimination of opposition and denial of multiparty democracy and freedom in the USSR. George Orwell wrote his famous satire 'Animal Farm' to highlight how the ideals of Russian Revolution were compromised in USSR.



Fig 14. 3 : A poster from USSR during World War II saying “more metal more weapons”.

- Make a brief assessment of the Soviet experiment. How far was it successful in building a world based on equality, freedom and prosperity?
- Do you think it is justified to execute thousands of people for the sake of such experiments?
- What were the criticisms raised against communist system?

Rabindranath Tagore wrote from Russia in 1930

‘Moscow appears much less clean than the other European capitals. None of those hurrying along the streets look smart. The whole place belongs to the workers ... Here the masses have not in the least been put in the shade by the gentlemen ... those who lived in the background for ages have come forward in the open today ... I thought of the peasants and workers in my own country. It all seemed like the work of the Genii in the Arabian Nights. [here] only a decade ago they were as illiterate, helpless and hungry as our own masses ... Who could be more astonished than an unfortunate Indian like myself to see how they had removed the mountain of ignorance and helplessness in these few years’.

The Great Depression

The Great Depression began around the end of 1929 and lasted almost till 1939 when the Second World War began. During this decade there was a worldwide economic decline triggered by a decline in demand and fall in prices. The decline in demand led to closure of factory production which in turn meant further decline in the purchasing power of people leading to further decline in demand. This cyclical effect caused massive unemployment and decline of real incomes of ordinary people as well as governments across the world. It initially began with a stock market collapse in the US, but before long affected almost every country.

As many as 25% Americans were unemployed and nearly 33% in many other countries. As factories closed down and trade declined cities became centers of decline. This in turn caused a collapse of prices (upto 60%) for agricultural produce causing pauperisation of millions of farmers and stopping of cultivation. This was the longest and most severe economic decline faced by modern economy till today. It had devastating social consequences sharply increasing poverty, desolation, homelessness etc.

Economists and politicians have argued ever since over the causes of this decline, ways to get over it and possible ways of preventing its recurrence. Marxist economists argued that this kind of crises is an essential nature of capitalism and can be got rid of only with the establishment of socialism. On the other hand economists like JM Keynes argued that the state has a crucial role to play in keeping the economy going and if it fails to intervene effectively it can lead to situations of depression. Keynes argued that during time of economic decline when demand decreases, the state should invest funds and generate employment which will help people to earn money and demand goods in the market. This generation of demand through state action will help the economy revive. However, the governments of capitalist countries in 1920s and 1930s were reluctant to intervene in the economy and this intensified the crisis.

Roosevelt who became the President of US announced “the New Deal” which promised Relief to the victims of depression, Reform of financial institutions and steps to ensure economic Recovery (The Three Rs) by undertaking large public works. However, the real break came from the outbreak of war when state expenditure on armies and armaments suddenly increased giving a big boost to factory production and demand for farm produce. He also introduced the much needed social security system in the US. It established a permanent system of universal retirement pensions (Social Security), unemployment insurance, and welfare benefits for the handicapped and needy children in families without father present. It established the framework for the U.S. welfare system. In fact Great Britain had taken the lead in this direction even before the Depression when the war was still on. These basically consisted of unemployment insurance and old age pension schemes. At the close of the Second World War Britain too adopted extensive social security measures like unemployment doles, sickness coverage, health schemes, Child care etc. All this went on to make the idea of Welfare State in which the state ensured a certain basic

minimum dignified life for all citizens and took care of their most elementary needs like food, housing, health, child and old age care and education. To a large extent the state also took on the responsibility of providing employment to the able bodied citizens. In this way the state tried to mitigate the ups and downs of market based capitalism.



Fig 14.4 : A New Yorker offers to sell his roadster after losing his money in the stock market crash.

- Imagine yourself to be a worker who lost job suddenly and had no employment for the next few years. Write an account of a day in your life in first person.
- Imagine yourself to be a farmer who finds that the price of his crop has fallen to less than half. Write your reaction in three hundred words.
- What aspects of the Welfare State do you find functioning in India today?

Rise of Nazism in Germany

German economy faced severe crisis after the war as it was saddled with the burden of paying war damages etc. So much so that the German Government began to print currency notes on a large scale and this resulted in unheard of inflation. It is said that people had to carry currency in carts to buy one loaf of bread! USA at this stage helped to bail out Germany by giving loans and rescheduling the payment of war damages. This helped German economy to stabilise by 1928. However this was short lived as USA itself was deeply affected by the onset of the Depression in 1929 and could no longer help Germany.

The German economy was the worst hit by the Depression. By 1932, industrial production was reduced to 40 per cent of the 1929 level. Workers lost their jobs or were paid reduced wages. The number of unemployed touched an unprecedented 6 million. On the streets of Germany you could see men with placards around their necks saying, 'Willing to do any work'.

Unemployed youths played cards or simply sat at street corners, or desperately queued up at the local employment exchange. As jobs disappeared, the youth took to criminal activities and total despair became common place.

The economic crisis created deep anxieties and fears in people. The middle classes, especially salaried employees and pensioners, saw their savings diminish when the currency lost its value. Small businessmen, the self-employed and retailers suffered as their businesses got ruined. These sections of society were filled with the fear of pauperisation, an anxiety of being reduced to the ranks of the working class, or worse still, the unemployed. Only organised workers could

From Hitler's speech

Hitler argued that it is the right of the most powerful race to conquer the world; 'For this earth is not allotted to anyone nor is it presented to anyone as a gift. It is awarded by providence to people who in their hearts have the courage to conquer it, the strength to preserve it, and the industry to put it to the plough... The primary right of this world is the right to life, so far as one possesses the strength for this. Hence on the basis of this right a vigorous nation will always find ways of adapting its territory to its population size.'

Hitler, Secret Book, ed. Telford Taylor.

- Is Hitler the idea of World conquest here? Do you think world should belong to those who have power and strength alone?

Indoctrination

Nazis tried to teach their children right from the beginning in only one way of thinking. Nazi ideology of racial superiority of Germany and the greatness of Hitler and hatred for Jews and other people. How was this done?

All boys between the ages of six and ten went through a preliminary training in Nazi ideology. At the end of the training they had to take the following oath of loyalty to Hitler: 'In the presence of this blood banner which represents our Fuhrer I swear to devote all my energies and my strength to the saviour of our country, Adolf Hitler. I am willing and ready to give up my life for him, so help me God.'

From W. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*

Robert Lay, head of the German Labour Front, said:

'We start when the child is three years old. As soon as he even starts to think, he is given a little flag to wave. Then comes school, the Hitler Youth, military service. But when all this is over, we don't let go of anyone. The labour front takes hold of them, and keeps hold until they go to the grave, whether they like it or not.'

Women under Nazis

In an address to women at the Nuremberg Party Rally, 8 September 1934, Hitler said: We do not consider it correct for the woman to interfere in the world of the man, in his main sphere. We consider it natural that these two worlds remain distinct...What the man gives in courage on the battlefield, the woman gives in eternal self-sacrifice, in eternal pain and suffering. Every child that women bring to the world is a battle, a battle waged for the existence of her people.

Hitler at the Nuremberg Party Rally, 8 September 1934, also said:

'The woman is the most stable element in the preservation of a folk...she has the most unerring sense of everything that is important to not let a race disappear because it is her children who would be affected by all this suffering in the first place...That is why we have integrated the woman in the struggle of the racial community just as nature and providence have determined so.'



Fig 14.5 : Women accused of protecting Jews being publicly punished.

- Do you agree with the view that women should confine themselves to pain and suffering of bringing up the children?
- Do you think men and women can participate equally in all aspects of life including child rearing and work in factories, offices, and fields?

manage to keep their heads above water, but unemployment weakened their bargaining power. Big business was in crisis. The large mass of peasantry was affected by a sharp fall in agricultural prices and women, unable to fill their children's stomachs, were filled with a sense of deep despair. This caused acute political instability as government after government collapsed and could not provide a stable rule.

In such a situation Nazi Party's propaganda stirred hopes of a better future. Hitler was its unquestioned leader. In 1928, the Nazi Party got no more than 2.6 per cent votes in the Reichstag – the German parliament. By 1932, it had become the largest party with 37 per cent votes.

Hitler was a powerful speaker. His passion and his words moved people. He promised to build a strong nation, undo the injustice of the Versailles Treaty and restore the dignity of the German people. He promised employment for those looking for work, and a secure future for the youth. He promised to weed out all foreign influences and resist all foreign 'conspiracies' against Germany.

Hitler devised a new style of politics. He understood the significance of rituals and spectacle in mass mobilisation. Nazis held massive rallies and public meetings to demonstrate the support for Hitler and instill a sense of unity among the people. The Red banners with the Swastika, the Nazi salute, and the ritualised rounds of applause after the speeches were all part of this spectacle of power.

Hitler mobilized his supporters on the promise of establishing the racial supremacy of Aryan Germans over the world and by targeting minority communities like the Jews as the main cause of all problems. He also attacked Communism and Capitalism terming both of them as Jewish conspiracies and promised to build a strong state which will counter both. He appealed specially to the middle class which felt threatened by capitalism and the Great Depression and at the same time was opposed to working class movement led by the Communists and Socialists.

Hitler came to power and immediately took steps to establish an undemocratic and autocratic rule and dismantle all democratic institutions like Parliament. This included arbitrary arrest of political opponents, especially the Communists and putting them in concentration camps.

Timeline



Resistance

Pastor Niemöller, a resistance fighter, observed an absence of protest, an uncanny silence, amongst ordinary Germans in the face of brutal and organised crimes committed against people in the Nazi empire. He wrote movingly about this silence:

'First they came for the Communists,
Well, I was not a Communist
So I said nothing.
Then they came for the Social Democrats,
Well, I was not a Social Democrat
So I did nothing,
Then they came for the trade unionists,
But I was not a trade unionist.
And then they came for the Jews,
But I was not a Jew – so I did little.
Then when they came for me,
There was no one left who could stand up for me.'

- Nazi ideology depended on majoritarian principles. Jews were merely 0.75 percent of the population in Germany. Apart from Jews others who opposed Nazis were also punished. How does the pastor capture this?



Fig 14.6 : Jewish slave labourers in the Buchenwald concentration camp near Jena Germany in 1945

On 3 March 1933, the famous Enabling Act was passed. This Act established dictatorship in Germany. It gave Hitler all powers to sideline Parliament and rule by decree. All political parties and trade unions were banned except for the Nazi Party and its affiliates. The state established complete control over the economy, media, army and judiciary.

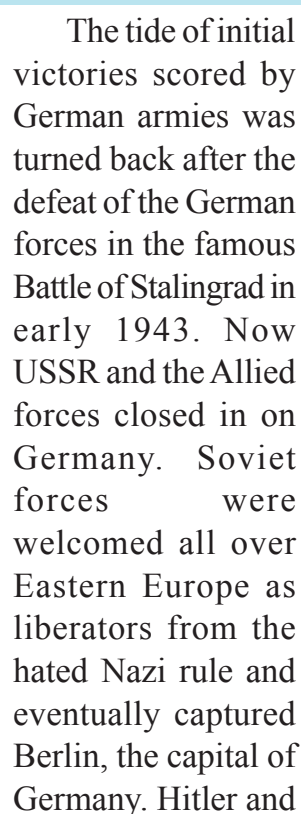
Special surveillance and security forces were created to control and order society in ways that the Nazis wanted. Apart from the already existing regular police in green uniform and the SA or the Storm Troopers, these included the Gestapo (secret state police), the SS (the protection squads), criminal police and the Security Service (SD). It was the extra-constitutional powers of these newly organised forces that gave the Nazi state its reputation as the most dreaded criminal state. People could now be detained in Gestapo torture chambers, rounded up and sent to concentration camps, deported at will or arrested without any legal procedures. The police forces acquired powers to rule with impunity.

These powers were used to arrest and torture millions of political activists, trade unionists and people of minority communities and build a state of unprecedented horror and fear.

Hitler assigned the responsibility of economic recovery to the economist Hjalmar Schacht who aimed at full production and full

As the War proceeded the Nazi regime unfolded its horrible programme of building the racial supremacy of Germans by mass extermination of minority communities.

The defeat and end



his close associates committed suicide to avoid being captured and tried. Eventually Germany was divided into two with the eastern part named German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the western portion named Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The GDR came under the area of influence of USSR while the FRG came under the influence of USA.

In the far east with bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Japan surrendered to

- In what ways was the Second World War a logical outcome of Hitler's ideology and economic policies?
- Why do you think Hitler wanted to target Jews as the enemy of German people?
- Find out more about "Holocaust" and Auschwitz camps and prepare a project report based on it.

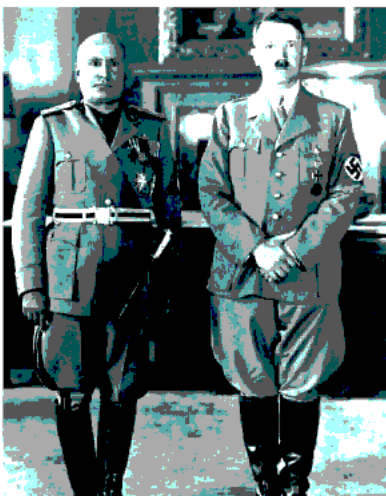
USA. US armies occupied Japan but keeping in the sentiments of Japanese allowed the Japanese Emperor to continue. But it built a Constitutional Monarchy like in England. Japan was to be ruled by the elected government responsible to the parliament (DIET).

Many of the Nazi generals and leaders were captured and put to trial in the famous Nuremberg trials. The Nuremberg Tribunal sentenced only eleven leading Nazis to death. Many others were imprisoned for life. The retribution did come, yet the punishment of the Nazis was far short of the brutality and extent of their crimes. The Allies did not want to be as harsh on defeated Germany as they had been after the First World War. In fact given the economic collapse of Germany and Japan after the war, the USA came up with Marshall Plan to fund their economic revival. Likewise the USSR came up with a package for the revival of East European countries.

The first half of the 20th century ended with the nightmare of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and with the hopes generated by the founding of the UNO. Just as the First World War saw the end of large monarchic empires the Second World War also ended with ending of large colonial empires of the Britain, France, Japan, Italy and Germany. By 1950 countries like India, China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Nigeria etc



*Fig 14.7:
(TOP) from
left Churchill,
Roosevelt and
Stalin at Yalta
Conference*



*(Left) Two
dictators:
Mussolini and
Hitler*

became independent. Britain which was the most powerful country before the war now became a secondary power. Two new super powers emerged on the world scene, the USSR and the USA. The USSR which bore the main brunt of Hitler's war and faced enormous destruction, gradually rebuilt its economy. Its victory however, greatly enhanced its prestige in the world and it was now joined by the entire Eastern Europe and China to form a large 'Socialist Camp'.

- Compare the experiences of USSR and Germany after the First World War. What similarities and differences do you find between them?
- The experience of war and depression gave rise to many new alternative models of national development – what were these and what were their limitations?

Key words

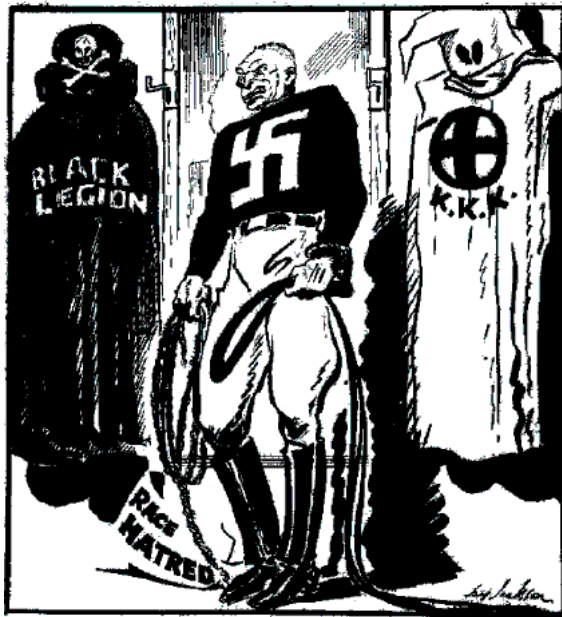
Socialism	Communism	Revolution	Centralisation of power
Bolshevik	Collectivisation	Relief – Reform – Recovery	
Welfare state	Indoctrination	Propaganda	Racial supremacy

Improve your learning

1. Russian revolution brought in many changes in their society. What were they? And what challenges did they face?
2. Compare different points of view about Great Depression, which one would you agree with? Why?
3. In what ways were Jews persecuted during the Nazi Germany? Do you think in every country some people are differentiated because of their identity?
4. List the measures taken under idea of welfare state under Great Depression and explain how similar or different they are from that of the reforms that emerged under the USSR?
5. What challenges were faced by Germany during Great Depression and how did Nazi rulers and Hitler make use of it?
6. What were the political changes brought under the Nazi rule? Often people argue that a single powerful leader can resolve the problems of a country. Based on the experiences narrated in the context of Nazi Germany how do you respond to this vision?

Project

Discuss the images given on next page. Try to collect more images regarding this period.



In cartoon 1, artist from USA points out the treatment of Jews in Germany is much like the treatment of Blacks in USA. In cartoon 2, British Prime Minister

advises to USA that Nazi Germany is not to be afraid of.



In the first cartoon on the left, Nazi Germany is shown as leading people to slavery. But as you would notice in the second cartoon many people continued to

believe the propaganda generated in Germany that were biased towards the Jews.



War is expensive and deeply affects the people lives. Two posters in USA were created with the aim of getting people to help their nation in fighting against the Nazi. What can you tell about the images here?