


Russia at the beginning of the 20th century





At the turn of two centuries, Russian capitalism began to develop into its highest stage - imperialism. Bourgeois relations, having become dominant, demanded the elimination of the survivals of serfdom and the creation of conditions for the further progressive development of society. The main classes of bourgeois society were already formed - the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the latter was more homogeneous, bound by the same hardships and difficulties, concentrated in the country's large industrial centers, more receptive and mobile in relation to progressive innovations. All that was needed was a political party that could unite his various units, equip him with a program and tactics of struggle.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a revolutionary situation developed in Russia. There was a demarcation of the country's political forces into three camps - government, liberal-bourgeois and democratic. The liberal-bourgeois camp was represented by supporters of the so-called. "Union of Liberation", which set as their task the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Russia, the introduction of general elections, the protection of the "interests of the working people", etc.

After the creation of the Cadet Party (Constitutional Democrats), the Liberation Union ceased its activities. The Social Democratic movement, which emerged in the 1890s, was represented by supporters of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), which in 1903 split into two movements - the Bolsheviks led by V.I. Lenin and the Mensheviks. In addition to the RSDLP, this included the Socialist Revolutionaries (the party of socialist revolutionaries).

After the death of Emperor Alexander III in 1894, his son Nikolai II ascended the throne. Easy to succumb to outside influences, not having a strong and firm character, Nikolai II turned out to be a weak politician, whose actions in the country's foreign and domestic policy plunged her into the abyss of disasters, which laid the defeat of Russia in the Russian-Japanese war of 1904-1905. The mediocrity of the Russian generals and the tsarist entourage, who sent thousands of Russians into the bloody massacre soldiers and sailors, further inflamed the situation in the country.

The first Russian revolution

The extremely deteriorating position of the people, the complete inability of the government to resolve the pressing problems of the country's development, defeat in the Russo-Japanese War became the main reasons for the first Russian revolution. The reason for this was the shooting of a demonstration of workers in St. Petersburg on January 9, 1905. This shooting caused an explosion of indignation in wide circles of Russian society. Riots and unrest broke out in all regions of the country. The discontent movement gradually took on an organized character. The Russian peasantry also joined him. In the conditions of the war with Japan and complete unpreparedness for such events, the government did not have enough strength or means to suppress numerous demonstrations. As one of the means of relieving tension, tsarism announced the creation of a representative body - the State Duma. The fact of disregard for the interests of the masses from the very beginning put the Duma in the position of a dead-born body, since it had practically no powers.

This attitude of the authorities aroused even greater discontent both on the part of the proletariat and peasantry and on the part of the liberal-minded representatives of the Russian bourgeoisie. Therefore, by the fall of 1905, all the conditions had been created in Russia for the brewing of a national crisis. Losing control over the situation, the tsarist government made new concessions. In October 1905, Nicholas II signed the Manifesto, granting the Russians freedom of the press, speech, assembly and union, which laid the foundations of Russian democracy. This Manifesto also split the revolutionary movement. The revolutionary wave has lost its breadth and mass character. This can explain the defeat of the December armed uprising in Moscow in 1905, which was the highest point in the development of the first Russian revolution. Under these conditions, liberal circles came to the fore. Numerous political parties arose - the Cadets (constitutional democrats), the Octobrists (Union on October 17). A notable phenomenon was the creation of patriotic organizations - "Black Hundreds". The revolution was on the decline. In 1906, the central event in the life of the country was no longer the revolutionary movement, but the elections to the Second State Duma. The new Duma could not resist the government and was dispersed in 1907. Since the manifesto on the dissolution of the Duma was promulgated on June 3, the state system in Russia, which lasted until February 1917, was named the June Third Monarchy.

Russia in World War I

Russia's participation in the First World War was due to the exacerbation of Russian-German contradictions caused by the formation of the Triple Alliance and the Entente. The assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne in the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, was the reason for the outbreak of hostilities. In 1914, simultaneously with the actions of the German troops on the western front, the Russian command launched an invasion of East Prussia. It was stopped by German troops. But in the region of Galicia, the troops of Austria-Hungary suffered a serious defeat. The result of the 1914 campaign was the establishment of equilibrium on the fronts and the transition to trench warfare. In 1915, the center of gravity of hostilities was shifted to the Eastern Front. From spring to August, the Russian front along its entire length was hacked by German troops. Russian troops were forced to leave Poland, Lithuania and Galicia, suffering heavy losses.

In 1916, the situation changed somewhat. In June, troops under the command of General Brusilov broke through the Austro-Hungarian front in Galicia on Bukovina. This offensive was stopped by the enemy with great difficulty. The military actions of 1917 took place in the context of a clearly imminent political crisis in the country. In Russia, the February bourgeois-democratic revolution took place, as a result of which the Provisional Government that replaced the autocracy turned out to be hostage to the previous obligations of tsarism. The course of continuing the war to a victorious end led to an aggravation of the situation in the country and to the coming to power of the Bolsheviks.

Revolutionary 1917

The First World War sharply exacerbated all the contradictions that had been brewing in Russia since the beginning of the 20th century. Human sacrifices, economic ruin, hunger, people's dissatisfaction with the measures of tsarism to overcome the imminent national crisis, the inability of the autocracy to compromise with the bourgeoisie became the main reasons for the February bourgeois revolution of 1917. On February 23, a workers' strike began in Petrograd, which soon grew into an all-Russian strike. The workers were supported by the intelligentsia, students, and the army. The peasantry also did not stay away from these events. Already on February 27, power in the capital passed into the hands of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, headed by the Mensheviks. The Petrosovet completely controlled the army, which soon completely went over to the side of the rebels. Attempts of a punitive campaign, undertaken by the forces of the troops withdrawn from the front, were unsuccessful. The soldiers supported the February coup.

On March 1, 1917, a Provisional Government was formed in Petrograd, consisting mainly of representatives of the bourgeois parties. Nicholas II abdicated the throne. Thus, the February Revolution overthrew the autocracy, which hindered the progressive development of the country. The relative ease with which the overthrow of tsarism in Russia took place showed how weak the regime of Nicholas II and its support - the landlord-bourgeois circles - were in their attempts to retain power. The February bourgeois-democratic revolution of 1917 had a political character. It could not solve the pressing economic, social and national problems of the country. The provisional government did not have real power.

An alternative to his power - the Soviets, created at the very beginning of the February events, controlled so far by the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, supported the Provisional Government, but could not yet take the leading role in the implementation of radical transformations in the country. But at this stage, the Soviets were supported by both the army and the revolutionary people. Therefore, in March - early July 1917, the so-called dual power developed in Russia - that is, the simultaneous existence of two powers in the country.

Finally, the petty-bourgeois parties, which then had a majority in the Soviets, ceded power to the Provisional Government as a result of the July crisis of 1917. The fact is that at the end of June - beginning of July on the Eastern Front, German troops launched a powerful counteroffensive. Not wanting to go to the front, the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison decided to organize an uprising led by the Bolsheviks and anarchists. The resignation of some ministers of the Provisional Government further inflamed the situation. There was no consensus among the Bolsheviks about what was happening. Lenin and some members of the party's central committee considered the uprising premature.

Mass demonstrations began in the capital on 3 July. Despite the fact that the Bolsheviks tried to direct the actions of the demonstrators in a peaceful direction, armed clashes began between the demonstrators and the troops controlled by the Petrograd Soviet. The Provisional Government, having seized the initiative, with the help of troops arriving from the front, took tough measures. The demonstrators were shot. From that moment on, the leadership of the Council gave full power to the Provisional Government. The dual power is over. The Bolsheviks were forced to go underground. The authorities began a decisive offensive against all those who were dissatisfied with the government's policy. By the fall of 1917, a nationwide crisis was ripening again in the country, creating the basis for a new revolution.

The collapse of the economy, the activation of the revolutionary movement, the increased authority of the Bolsheviks and support for their actions in various strata of society, the disintegration of the army, which suffered defeat after defeat on the battlefields of the First World War, the growing distrust of the masses in the Provisional Government, as well as an unsuccessful attempt at a military coup undertaken by General Kornilov, - these are the symptoms of a new revolutionary explosion imminent. The gradual Bolshevization of the Soviets, the army, the disappointment of the proletariat and peasantry in the ability of the Provisional Government to find a way out of the crisis made it possible for the Bolsheviks to put forward the slogan "All power to the Soviets", under which they managed to carry out a coup d'etat in Petrograd on October 24-25, 1917, called the Great October Revolution. At the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets on October 25, the transfer of power in the country to the Bolsheviks was announced. The provisional government was arrested. At the congress, the first decrees of the Soviet power - "On Peace", "On Land" were promulgated, the first government of the victorious Bolsheviks was formed - the Council of People's Commissars, headed by V.I. Lenin. On November 2, 1917, Soviet power was established in Moscow. Almost everywhere the army supported the Bolsheviks. By March 1918, a new revolutionary government was established throughout the country.

The creation of a new state apparatus, which at first ran into stubborn resistance from the previous bureaucratic apparatus, was completed by the beginning of 1918. At the III All-Russian Congress of Soviets in January 1918, Russia was proclaimed a republic of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies. The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was established as a federation of Soviet national republics. Its supreme body was the All-Russian Congress of Soviets; In the intervals between congresses, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK), which possessed legislative power, worked.

The government - the Council of People's Commissars - exercised executive power through the formed people's commissariats (people's commissariats), while the people's courts and revolutionary tribunals exercised judicial power. Special authorities were formed - the Supreme Council of the National Economy (VSNKh), which was responsible for regulating the economy and the processes of nationalization of industry, the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (VChK) - for the fight against counter-revolution. The main feature of the new state apparatus was the merger of the legislative and executive powers in the country.

Soviet Republic during the Civil War

For the successful construction of a new state, the Bolsheviks needed peaceful conditions. Therefore, already in December 1917, negotiations began with the command of the German army to conclude a separate peace treaty, which was concluded in March 1918. Its conditions for Soviet Russia were extremely difficult and even humiliating. Russia abandoned Poland, Estonia and Latvia, withdrew its troops from Finland and Ukraine, ceded the Transcaucasian region. However, this "obscene", in the words of Lenin himself, peace was urgently needed for the young Soviet republic. Thanks to a peaceful respite, the Bolsheviks managed to carry out the first economic measures in the city and in the countryside - to establish workers' control in industry, begin its nationalization, and begin social transformations in the countryside. However, the course of the reforms that had begun was interrupted for a long time by a bloody civil war, the beginning of which was laid by the forces of the internal counter-revolution in the spring of 1918. In Siberia, the Cossacks of Ataman Semyonov opposed the Soviet regime, in the south, in the Cossack regions, the Don Army of Krasnov and the Volunteer Army of Denikin in the Kuban were formed. Socialist-Revolutionary mutinies broke out in Murom, Rybinsk, Yaroslavl. Almost simultaneously, interventionist troops landed on the territory of Soviet Russia (in the north - the British, Americans, French, in the Far East - the Japanese, Germany occupied the territories of Belarus, Ukraine, the Baltic states, British troops occupied Baku). In May 1918, a revolt of the Czechoslovak Corps began. The situation on the fronts of the country was very difficult.

Only in December 1918 did the troops of the Red Army manage to stop the advance of General Krasnov's troops on the southern front. From the east, the Bolsheviks were threatened by Admiral Kolchak, who was striving for the Volga. He managed to capture Ufa, Izhevsk and other cities. However, by the summer of 1919, he was driven back to the Urals. As a result of the summer offensive of General Yudenich's troops in 1919, the threat now hung over Petrograd. Only after bloody battles in June 1919 was it possible to eliminate the threat of the seizure of the northern capital of Russia (by this time the Soviet government had moved to Moscow). However, already in July 1919, as a result of the offensive of General Denikin's troops from the south to the central regions of the country, now Moscow also turned into a military camp. By October 1919, the Bolsheviks had lost Odessa, Kiev, Kursk, Voronezh and Orel. The troops of the Red Army, only at the cost of huge losses, managed to repel the offensive of Denikin's troops. In November 1919, the troops of Yudenich were finally defeated, who in the course of the autumn offensive again threatened Petrograd. In the winter of 1919-1920. The Red Army liberated Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk. Kolchak was captured and shot. At the beginning of 1920, having liberated the Donbass and Ukraine, the troops of the Red Army drove the White Guards into the Crimea. Only in November 1920 was the Crimea cleared of the troops of General Wrangel. The Polish campaign of spring-summer 1920 ended in failure for the Bolsheviks.

From the policy of "war communism" to the new economic policy

The economic policy of the Soviet state during the civil war, aimed at mobilizing all resources for military needs, was called the policy of "war communism." It was a complex of emergency measures in the country's economy, which was characterized by such features as the nationalization of industry, the centralization of management, the introduction of surplus appropriation in the countryside, the prohibition of private trade and equalization in distribution and payment. In the conditions of the ensuing peaceful life, she no longer justified herself. The country was on the verge of economic collapse. Industry, energy, transport, agriculture, as well as the country's finances were experiencing a protracted crisis. Peasants who were dissatisfied with the surplus appropriation system became more frequent. The mutiny in Kronstadt in March 1921 against the Soviet regime showed that the dissatisfaction of the masses with the policy of "War Communism" could threaten its very existence. The consequence of all these reasons was the decision of the Bolshevik government in March 1921 to go over to the "New Economic Policy" (NEP). This policy provided for the replacement of the surplus appropriation system with a fixed tax in kind for the peasantry, the transfer of state enterprises to self-financing, and the permission of private trade. At the same time, a transition was made from wages in kind to cash wages, and leveling was abolished. Elements of state capitalism in industry in the form of concessions and the creation of state trusts associated with the market were partially allowed. It was allowed to open small handicraft private enterprises, served by the labor of hired workers. The main merit of the NEP was that the peasant masses finally went over to the side of Soviet power. Conditions were created for the restoration of industry and the beginning of the rise in production. Granting a certain amount of economic freedom to workers gave them the opportunity to show initiative and enterprise. The NEP, in fact, demonstrated the possibility and necessity of a variety of forms of ownership, the recognition of the market and commodity relations in the country's economy.

Soviet Russia in the first half of the 20s

In 1918-1922, small peoples living compactly on the territory of Russia received autonomy within the RSFSR. In parallel with this, the formation of larger national formations - sovereign Soviet republics allied with the RSFSR - took place. By the summer of 1922, the process of the unification of the Soviet republics entered its final phase. The Soviet party leadership prepared a project of unification, which provided for the entry of the Soviet republics into the RSFSR as autonomous entities. The author of this project was I.V. Stalin, then People's Commissar for Nationalities.

Lenin saw in this project an infringement of the national sovereignty of peoples and insisted on the creation of a federation of equal union republics. On December 30, 1922, the First Congress of Soviets of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics rejected Stalin's "project of autonomization" and adopted a declaration and treaty on the formation of the USSR, which was based on the plan of a federal structure, on which Lenin insisted.

In January 1924, the Second All-Union Congress of Soviets approved the Constitution of the new union. According to this Constitution, the USSR was a federation of equal sovereign republics that had the right to freely withdraw from the union. At the same time, the representative and executive union bodies were formed at the local level. However, as further events will show, the USSR gradually acquired the character of a unitary state ruled from a single center - Moscow.

With the introduction of the new economic policy, the measures taken by the Soviet government to implement it (denationalization of some enterprises, permission of free trade and hired labor, emphasis on the development of commodity-money and market relations, etc.) came into conflict with the concept of building a socialist society on a commodity-free basis. The priority of politics over the economy, preached by the Bolshevik party, the beginning of the formation of the administrative-command system led to the crisis phenomena of the New Economic Policy in 1923. In order to increase labor productivity, the state decided to artificially raise prices for manufactured goods. The villagers were unable to afford to purchase manufactured goods, which overcrowded all the warehouses and shops of the cities. The so-called. Overproduction crisis. In response, the village began to delay the delivery of grain to the state in kind. Peasant uprisings broke out in some places. New concessions to the peasantry from the state were needed.

Thanks to the successful monetary reform of 1924, the ruble exchange rate was stabilized, which helped to overcome the sales crisis and strengthen trade relations between the city and the countryside. Taxation of peasants in kind was replaced by monetary taxation, which gave them greater freedom in the development of their own economy. In general, thus, by the mid-1920s, the process of restoring the national economy was completed in the USSR. The socialist sector of the economy has significantly strengthened its position.

At the same time, the USSR's positions in the international arena are improving. In order to break through the diplomatic blockade, Soviet diplomacy took an active part in the work of international conferences in the early 1920s. The leadership of the Bolshevik Party hoped to establish economic and political cooperation with the leading capitalist countries. At an international conference in Genoa on economic and financial issues (1922), the Soviet delegation expressed its readiness to discuss the issue of compensation to former foreign owners in Russia, subject to the recognition of the new state and the provision of international loans to it. At the same time, the Soviet side put forward counter-proposals to compensate Soviet Russia for the losses caused by the intervention and blockade during the Civil War. However, during the conference, these issues were not resolved. But the young Soviet Diplomacy managed to break through the united front of non-recognition of the young Soviet republic from the capitalist encirclement. In Rapallo, a suburb of Genoa, it was possible to conclude an agreement with Germany, providing for the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries on the basis of mutual renunciation of all claims. Thanks to this success of Soviet diplomacy, the country entered a period of recognition from the leading capitalist powers. In a short time, diplomatic relations were established with Great Britain, Italy, Austria, Sweden, China, Mexico, France and other states.

Industrialization of the national economy

The need to modernize industry and the entire economy of the country in the conditions of capitalist encirclement has become the main task of the Soviet government since the early 1920s. In the same years, the process of strengthening control and regulation of the economy by the state was outlined. This led to the development of the first five-year plan for the development of the national economy of the USSR. The plan for the first five-year plan, adopted in April 1929, laid down indicators for a sharp, accelerated growth in industrial production. In this regard, the problem of lack of funds for the implementation of the industrial breakthrough was clearly identified. Investments in new industrial construction were sorely lacking. It was impossible to count on help from abroad. Therefore, one of the sources of the country's industrialization was the resources siphoned off by the state from the still not strong agriculture. Another source was government loans, which were levied on the entire population of the country. To pay for foreign supplies of industrial equipment, the state went to the compulsory confiscation of gold and other valuables from both the population and the church. Another source of industrialization was the export of the country's natural resources - oil, timber. Grain and furs were also exported.

Against the background of a shortage of funds, the country's technical and economic backwardness, and a shortage of qualified personnel, the state began to artificially spur the pace of industrial construction, which led to imbalances, disruption of planning, a discrepancy between wage growth and labor productivity, disruption of the monetary system and price increases. As a result, there was a shortage of goods, a rationing system for supplying the population was introduced. The command and administrative system of economic management, accompanied by the formation of the regime of Stalin's personal power, wrote off all the difficulties of implementing industrialization plans at the expense of some enemies that hindered the construction of socialism in the USSR.

In 1928-1931, a wave of political processes swept across the country, at which many qualified specialists and managers were condemned as "saboteurs", allegedly holding back the development of the country's economy. Nevertheless, thanks to the widest enthusiasm of the entire Soviet people, the first five-year plan was fulfilled ahead of schedule in terms of its main indicators. Only in the period from 1929 to the end of the 1930s did the USSR make a fantastic leap forward in its industrial development. During this time, about 6 thousand industrial enterprises were commissioned. The Soviet people created such an industrial potential, which in its technical equipment and sectoral structure was not inferior to the level of production of the advanced capitalist countries of that time. And in terms of production volume, our country took second place after the United States.

Collectivization of agriculture

The acceleration of industrialization, mainly at the expense of the countryside, with an emphasis on basic industries, very quickly exacerbated the contradictions of the new economic policy. The end of the 1920s was marked by her overthrow. This process was stimulated by the fear of the administrative-command structures of the prospect of losing the leadership of the country's economy in their own interests.

Difficulties were growing in the country's agriculture. In a number of cases, the authorities came out of this crisis by the method of violent measures, which was comparable to the practice of war communism and food appropriation. In the fall of 1929, such violent measures against agricultural producers were replaced by compulsory, or, as they said at the time, total collectivization. To this end, with the help of punitive measures, in a short time, all potentially dangerous, as the Soviet leadership believed, elements were removed from the village - kulaks, wealthy peasants, that is, those whom collectivization could interfere with the normal development of their personal economy and who could resist it. The destructive nature of the forcible unification of peasants into collective farms forced the authorities to abandon the extremes of this process. Voluntariness began to be observed when joining collective farms. The main form of collective farming was declared to be the agricultural artel, where the collective farmer had the right to a personal plot, small implements and livestock. However, land, cattle and basic agricultural implements were still socialized. In such forms, collectivization in the main grain regions of the country was completed by the end of 1931. The gain of the Soviet state from collectivization was very important.

The roots of capitalism in agriculture were eliminated, as were unwanted class elements. The country gained independence from the import of a number of agricultural products. The grain sold abroad has become a source for the acquisition of perfect technologies and advanced equipment necessary in the course of industrialization. However, the consequences of the breakdown of the traditional economic structure in the countryside turned out to be very grave. The productive forces of agriculture were undermined. The crop failures of 1932-1933, the unreasonably overstated plans for the supply of agricultural products to the state led to famine in a number of regions of the country, the consequences of which were not immediately eliminated.

Culture of the 20-30s

Transformations in the field of culture were one of the tasks of building a socialist state in the USSR. The peculiarities of the implementation of the cultural revolution were determined by the backwardness of the country, inherited from the old times, by the uneven economic and cultural development of the peoples that became part of the Soviet Union. The Bolshevik authorities paid the main attention to building the system of public education, restructuring higher education, increasing the role of science in the country's economy, and forming a new creative and artistic intelligentsia.

The struggle against illiteracy began during the civil war. Since 1931, universal primary education has been introduced. The greatest successes in the field of public education were achieved by the end of the 30s. In the system of higher education, together with old specialists, measures were taken to create the so-called. "People's intelligentsia" by increasing the number of students from among the workers and peasants. Significant advances have been made in the field of science. Research by N. Vavilov (genetics), V. Vernadsky (geochemistry, biosphere), N. Zhukovsky (aerodynamics) and other scientists became famous all over the world. Against the background of success, some areas of science have experienced pressure from the administrative-command system. Significant damage was done to social sciences - history, philosophy, etc., by various ideological cleansing and persecution of their individual representatives. As a result, practically all of the science of that time was subordinated to the ideological ideas of the communist regime.