

frequent pogroms – organised attacks on their homes and businesses by ultra-conservative nationalists.

During the nineteenth century there were a number of uprisings and protests from national groups seeking greater personal freedom and more autonomy (self-government) in their parts of the empire. These tended to occur in one region at a time and the tsarist government was able to suppress them. It seems strange that the government sought to antagonise and alienate such a large section of its population. It drove many into the ranks of the revolutionaries. For instance, many Jews were found in revolutionary groups and in 1897 they formed their own 'Bund' or union.

4 Political opposition

Substantial opposition had grown towards tsarism during the later part of the nineteenth century. Amongst the Russia intelligentsia (writers, artists, philosophers and political activists), many believed the regime was oppressive and that Russians lacked basic freedoms present in Western European countries. Some felt that change could be achieved through reform; others that the only way to bring change to Russia was to overthrow the tsarist regime by revolution.

THE LIBERALS

The liberal movement had grown significantly after the local government reforms of Alexander II in 1864, which had set up town and district councils called zemstva (singular zemstvo). These gave local areas a small degree of autonomy to run their own affairs, manage schools and hospitals, build and maintain roads, etc. These councils had proved to be very effective and created a class of people who became skilled in local politics. This included liberal leaning members of the Russian nobility as well as representatives of the middle classes, many of whom worked for the zemstva, including Chekhov (the playwright) who was employed as a doctor. They gained a taste for greater participation in government. The zemstva have been called 'the seedbeds of liberalism'.

The idea of 'liberalism' prevalent in Western Europe was not very Russian and it took a different form in Russia. What Russian liberals agreed on was that reform rather than violence was the way to change the tsarist system and limit the tsar's powers. Many others wanted an extension of freedoms and rights (see right). Before 1905, there was no liberal party to



speak of. Liberalism took on a more organised form at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1903, the Union of Liberation was formed demanding economic and political reform. The Liberals were the major opposition to tsarism before 1905 and indeed up to the 1917 revolution.

Main beliefs: civil rights and freedom of the individual, the rule of law, free elections, parliamentary democracy and limitation of the tsar's powers, and self-determination for the national minorities. Some believed that the concept of the zemstvo should be extended to regional and perhaps national level.

Methods: reform rather than violent action, political channels through zemstva, articles in newspapers, meetings and reform banquets.

Support: they did not have a large popular base and had few active supporters outside Moscow, Petrograd and a few other large cities. Their main support came from the middle class intelligentsia: lawyers, doctors, professors, teachers, engineers and other professional groups. They also had support amongst progressive landowners, industrialists and businessmen.

REVOLUTIONARIES

Populism and The People's Will

In the later part of the nineteenth century, the main revolutionary movement was Populism. Populists put their trust in and sought support from ordinary people. From the 1860s to the 1880s the populists or Narodniks, largely well-to-do intellectuals, believed that the peasants in Russia could develop their own form of socialism. Life would be based around co-operation and sharing in peasant communes on a fairly small scale. This would avoid capitalism and the evils of industrialisation. However, it was not really clear how this would be achieved and did not amount to a coherent programme. They believed in 'going to the people' and spreading their socialist ideals to the peasantry by peaceful propaganda. Many populists, particularly students and young people, did

'go to the people' in the 1870s, moving out to the countryside to live with peasants and convince them of their revolutionary potential. But the peasants had nothing in common with these middle class youngsters with their strange ideas and rejected them.

After the failure to get a response from the people, in 1879 some Populists formed The People's Will. Peaceful propaganda gave way to violent action – they turned to terrorism to bring down the tsarist regime. Their most spectacular success was the assassination of Alexander II (see page 4). This prompted a fierce reaction from the tsarist regime and led to a period of repression. The People's Will and Populism in general helped create a revolutionary tradition and more directly gave birth to the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES (SRs)

The Socialist Revolutionary Party, formed in 1901, was a loose organisation accommodating groups with a wide variety of views and did not hold its first congress until 1906. It was never well co-ordinated or centrally controlled. There was a split between moderates and radicals (who supported extreme terrorism) that persisted into the 1917 revolution.

Main beliefs: SRs placed their central hope for revolution with the peasants who would provide the main support for a popular rising in which the tsarist government would be overthrown and replaced by a democratic republic. Land would be taken from landlords and divided up amongst the peasants. Unlike the populists, the SRs accepted that the development of capitalism was a fact. The leading exponent of their views was Victor Chernov. He accepted that the growth of capitalism would promote the growth of a proletariat (working class) who would rise against their masters. But he saw no need for the peasants to pass through capitalism; he believed they could move



straight to a form of rural socialism based on the peasant commune that already existed. He saw SRs as representing 'all labouring people'.

Methods: Agitation and terrorism, including assassination of government officials.

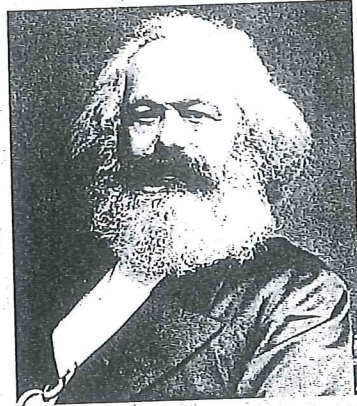
Support: Peasants provided a large popular base but by 1905 industrial workers formed perhaps 50 per cent of the membership. This is probably because many workers were recently arrived ex-peasants who recognised the SR Party and supported its aims of land and liberty. Most had regular contact with their villages. It also attracted intellectuals who wanted to make contact with the mass of the population. The SRs often bemoaned their lack of strength in villages because most SR committees were run by students and intellectuals in towns and communication was difficult. Most peasants could not read the leaflets the SRs produced. Nevertheless they were the party the peasants recognised as representing them, especially its pledge to return the land 'to those who worked it'.

The Marxists

In the 1880s, it seemed to some Russian intellectuals that there was no hope of a revolutionary movement developing amongst the peasantry. Instead they turned to the latest theories of a German philosopher, Karl Marx. The 'scientific' nature of Marxism appealed to them – it was an optimistic theory which saw progress through the development of industry and the growth of the working class to the ultimate triumph of socialism. Marxist reading circles developed and societies and groups were formed. They believed in action and soon became involved in organising strikes in factories. The working class, not the peasants, were the key to the revolution. See chart 1E on pages 22–23.

Karl Marx (1818–83)

Marx was a German philosopher who spent the last years of his life in London. He wrote the *Communist Manifesto* which encouraged workers to unite to seize power by revolution. He also wrote *Das Kapital* which explained his view of history. His views became known as 'Marxism' and influenced the thinking of socialists throughout Europe in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



Marxism

Marxism was attractive because it seemed to offer a 'scientific' view of history, similar to the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin. According to Marx, history was evolving in a series of stages towards a perfect state – Communism. Each stage was characterised by the struggle between different classes. This was a struggle over who owned the 'means of production' (resources used to produce food, goods, and so on) and so controlled society. In each stage, Marx identified a ruling class of 'haves' who owned the

means of production and exploited an oppressed class of 'have-nots' who sweated for them for little reward. He saw change as being brought about by a revolutionary class who would develop and contest power with the existing ruling class. Economic change and development (economic forces) would bring this new class to the fore and eventually allow it to overthrow the ruling class in a revolution (see Chart 1E on pages 22–23).

Marx was a determinist: he thought that there were certain forces (economic forces, e.g. changes in technology) driving history which would lead to the changes he predicted. However, he did give individuals a role in history. He believed that they could affect the course of events, though not the general pattern: 'Men make their own history but do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered, given or transmitted from the past.'

His theory gave middle-class revolutionaries an important role in that they saw what the true nature of history was and could help to bring it about.

Marx did not think his theories were the final word and he did not think all countries would go through the pattern described; he thought it applied particularly to countries in Western Europe. He expected that experience would lead to changes in his theories; he even had a name for this – *praxis*.

THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (SDs)

In 1898, Marxists formed the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. The leading light was George Plekhanov who had translated Karl Marx's work into Russian. However, some people found him a little too intellectual and not revolutionary enough. There were serious disputes about the direction of the party. Some wanted to encourage trade unions to improve the conditions of the workers. Others wanted the focus to be on revolutionary tactics and the preparation of the working class for revolution.

At the Second Party Congress in 1903, the SDs split into two factions – the Bolsheviks (Majoritarians)



and the Mensheviks (Minoritarians). This was largely caused by the abrasive personality of Vladimir Ulyanov or Lenin (see page 26) who was determined to see his idea of the revolutionary party triumph. During the congress the votes taken on various issues showed the two groups were roughly equal. But in a particular series of votes Lenin's faction came out on top (mainly because some delegates had walked out of the conference) and he jumped on the idea of calling his group the majority party (Bolsheviks) which gave them a stronger image. In fact, until 1917, they always had fewer members than the Mensheviks for reasons that will become apparent below.

Main beliefs: Both factions accepted the main tenets of Marxism but they were split over the role of the party.

Bolsheviks

Lenin believed that a revolutionary party should:

- be made up of a small number of highly disciplined professional revolutionaries
- operate under centralised leadership
- have a system of small cells (made up of three people) so that it would be more difficult for the police to infiltrate.

It was the job of the party to bring socialist consciousness to the workers and lead them through the revolution. Critics warned that a centralised party like this would lead to dictatorship.

Mensheviks

They believed that the party should:

- be broadly based and take in all those who wished to join
- be more democratic, allowing its members to have a say in policy making
- encourage trade unions to help the working class improve their conditions.

Mensheviks took the Marxist line that there would be a long period of bourgeois democratic government during which the workers would develop a class and revolutionary consciousness until they were ready to take over in a socialist revolution.



Support: Their support came mainly from the working class. The Bolsheviks tended to attract younger more militant peasant workers who liked the discipline, firm leadership and simple slogans. The Mensheviks tended to attract different types of workers and members of the intelligentsia, also a broader range of people – more non-Russians, especially Jews and Georgians.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Sources 1.17–1.20 contain views and ideas associated with the various parties.
 - a) Identify the party.
 - b) Explain what points about the party the writer of each source is making.
- 2 Source 1.21 has a very different message. What warning does it contain and for which party?

SOURCE 1.17

And thus I confirm that:

- 1 *no revolutionary movement can be firm without a solid and authoritative organisation of leaders;*
- 2 *that the wider the masses spontaneously drawn into the struggle, acting as a basis of the movement and participating in it, all the more urgent is the necessity of such an organisation . . . ;*
- 3 *that such an organisation should consist primarily of people who are professional revolutionaries;*
- 4 *that in an autocracy, the more we restrict the membership of such an organisation to those who are professional revolutionaries and who received professional training in the art of struggle against the political parties, the harder it will be to 'draw out' such an organisation.*

SOURCE 1.18

Fundamental Civil Rights

- 1 *All Russian citizens, irrespective of sex, religion or nationality, are equal before the law . . .*
- 2 *Each citizen shall have freedom of conscience and religious belief . . .*
- 3 *Each individual is free to express himself orally, in writing and in published works . . . censorship will be abolished . . .*

The state structure

- 1 *Popular representatives shall be elected by universal, direct, equal and secret ballot . . .*
- 2 *No resolution, regulation, edict or similar act can become law without the approval of the representatives . . .*
- 3 *Ministers are responsible to the assembly of popular representatives.*

SOURCE 1.19

A great peasant upheaval must come, such as would enable the peasantry to confiscate all land not already held by the communes. The land would be socialised and made available to the peasant toiler in accordance with his needs. The peasants might either become members of a co-operative or till the soil as small 'proprietors' . . .

The combat organisation ought first to disorganise the enemy; second, terrorism would serve as a means of propaganda and agitation, a form of open struggle taking place before the eyes of the whole people, undermining the prestige of government authority.

SOURCE 1.20

A man can be sincerely devoted to a cause but quite unsuited for a strongly centralised militant organisation consisting of professional revolutionaries. For this reason the party of the proletariat must not limit itself to the narrow framework of a conspiratorial organisation because then hundreds, and even thousands, of proletarians would be left outside the party. We can only be glad if every striker, every demonstrator . . . can describe himself as a party member.

SOURCE 1.21 Leon Trotsky, Our Political Tasks, 1904

In the internal politics of the party these methods lead, as we shall yet see, to this: the party organisation is substituted for the party, the central committee is substituted for the party organisation, and finally a 'dictator' is substituted for the central committee.

Lenin

Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, later known as Lenin, was born in Simbirsk in 1870 into a privileged professional family. His father was a Chief Inspector of Schools, his mother the daughter of a doctor and a landowner. They were a family of mixed ethnic origin (Jewish, Swedish, German and Tartar) and Lenin may not have had much Russian blood in his ancestry. According to Robert Service in *Lenin, A Biography* (2000), new archival evidence about Lenin's early life suggests he was a raucous, self-centred little boy who gave his brothers and sisters a hard time. He had tantrums and would beat his head on the floor. However, he was a gifted school pupil, doing exceptionally well in exams.

Service suggests that the Ulyanovs were a self-made, upwardly mobile family, anxious to succeed. However, the involvement of Lenin's elder brother in a plot to assassinate Tsar Alexander III saw the family ostracised: people refused to speak to them. Service thinks that Lenin may have learned to hate at this time. Certainly he was deeply affected by his brother's execution and seemed, by some accounts, to have become harder and more disciplined.

Lenin went on to university at Kazan where he studied law and soon became involved in student revolt. This led to his expulsion but he was eventually allowed to sit his exams and, for a short time, practised as a lawyer. He was becoming more interested in revolutionary ideas and, after flirting with populism, was drawn to the scientific logic of Marxism.

In 1895, he moved to St Petersburg and joined Marxist discussion groups where he met his future wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya. He became involved in propaganda for a strike movement in 1895 and was arrested. He spent the next four years first in prison and then in exile in Siberia, where he married Krupskaya, a kind of revolutionary working relationship, and enjoyed with her possibly the happiest years of his life, writing, walking and hunting.

After his release from exile in 1900, Lenin moved to London with Krupskaya. He founded a newspaper, *Iskra* ['The Spark'], with his friend Martov (Julius Tseederbaum). He wanted to establish it as the leading underground revolutionary paper which would drive forward the revolutionary movement. In 1902, he published his pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* which contained his radical ideas about the nature of a revolutionary party (see right). He wanted to put forward his ideas at the Second Congress of the Social Democratic Party which met in 1903 (first in Brussels and then in London). His abrasive personality helped to cause the split in the party into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. He lost control of *Iskra* to the Mensheviks.

The Bolsheviks played a relatively minor role in the 1905 revolution and Lenin returned to St Petersburg only in October. But when the revolution failed, he left for exile abroad once more. The years from 1906 to 1917 were frustrating. There were arguments and splits in the Bolshevik Party and membership collapsed. Lenin seemed destined to remain a bit player in history.

**Political theorist**

Lenin is regarded as an important political theorist. The body of his work, including adaptations of Marxist theory, has been called Marxism-Leninism. But he really saw his writings as plans for action. His principal writings include:

- *What Is To Be Done?* (1902) – here he argued for his idea of a revolutionary party:
 - it was to be highly centralised; a clear line of policy would be laid down by the central committee of the party
 - there would be a network of agents who would be 'regular permanent troops'
 - it would be a small, conspiratorial party made up of professional, dedicated revolutionaries
 - it would act as the vanguard of the working class who would not attain a revolutionary consciousness without clear guidance from the revolutionary élite.
- Lenin encouraged the individual revolutionary to be hard with himself and others to achieve his aims; there was no room for sentiment.
- *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) – here he claimed that capitalism was a bankrupt system and would collapse in a series of wars between capitalist countries over resources and territory. This would lead to civil war and class conflict within countries, which would facilitate the socialist revolution. This could start in a relatively undeveloped country – the weakest link in the capitalist chain – and then spread to other industrialised countries. Russia seemed to be this weakest link.
- *The State and Revolution* (1917) – this book discussed what the state would be like after revolution and dismissed the need for constitutional government. Existing state structures should be taken over and smashed by revolutionaries. The transformation of the economy and society would be relatively easy – the spontaneous will of the people would support revolution and they would play a large part in managing their own affairs in industry and agriculture.

REVOLUTIONARY NAMES

Many of the revolutionaries adopted pseudonyms or aliases to protect their families and confuse the tsar's secret police so that they would have trouble tracking down their associates. Vladimir Ulyanov's pseudonym 'Lenin' was probably derived from the River Lena in Siberia and was first used in 1901. The name Trotsky was taken from a prison guard during Trotsky's escape from Siberia in 1902. Other well-known pseudonyms are Stalin meaning 'Man of Steel' which Joseph Dzhugashvili was supposed to have acquired whilst in prison camps; Martov (Julius Tseederbaum) leader of the Mensheviks; and Parvus (Alexander Helphand).

Trotsky

Lev Bronstein was born in 1879 in the Ukraine, the son of a well-to-do Jewish farmer. He had a flair for writing and for foreign languages. He, too, was dissatisfied with the society he lived in, particularly its treatment of Jews. He was drawn to Marxism in his teens and had joined a Marxist discussion group by the age of sixteen. He fell in love with the leader of the group, Alexandra Sokolovska, and they were soon involved in inciting strikes. They were both arrested in 1900, got married in prison and were exiled together to Siberia. Aided by his wife, he escaped dramatically in 1902 by using a false passport signed with the name of a prison warder – Leon Trotsky.

Arriving in Paris he met a young Russian art student, Natalia Sedova. He was to live with her for the rest of his life and have two sons by her. He soon made the journey to London, where he got on well with Lenin and his wife Krupskaya, who were busy writing and editing the Social Democratic journal, *Iskra*. They admired his writing skills, giving Trotsky the nickname 'The Pen'. But at the 1905 Social Democratic Conference he would not side with Lenin. He prophesied that Lenin's concept of a revolutionary party would lead inevitably to dictatorship. He remained in the Social Democratic Party somewhere between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks but not in either camp.

He first made his mark in the 1905 revolution, where his oratorical talents led to his becoming deputy chairman of the St Petersburg Soviet. His subsequent arrest and escape established his credibility in revolutionary circles. His analysis of the situation in Russia moved closer to Lenin's when, with 'Parvus' (Alexander Helphand), he developed the theory of the weakest link (see page 23) concerning the weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie and how revolution might begin. He was in the USA when the revolution broke and arrived back to find the Mensheviks collaborating with the Provisional Government. This horrified him as much as it did Lenin and it was not long before he threw in his lot with the Bolshevik Party. Like Lenin, he was anxious for a workers' government to be put in place at the earliest possible opportunity.

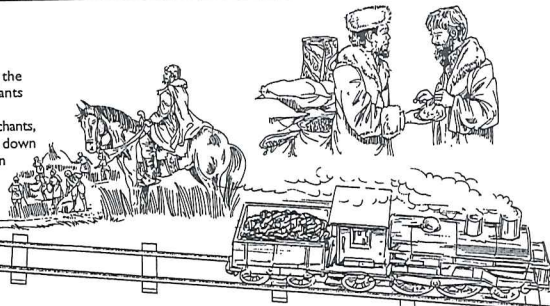
**KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 1**

What were the challenges facing the tsarist regime at the end of the nineteenth century?

- 1 Tsarist Russia was a vast country with a diverse population, making it a very difficult country to govern.
- 2 Russia was an autocracy, ruled by a tsar who was at the head of a large, unresponsive and inefficient bureaucracy.
- 3 The tsars used repressive measures and secret police to keep control.
- 4 Russia needed to modernise and industrialise if it was to compete with the developed countries of Western Europe and maintain its position as a major world power.
- 5 The task of modernising Russia was one that even the most able leader would have found difficult. Nicholas II was not a good leader for these circumstances – he was not able, competent or decisive. He had little idea of the needs of his subjects. He resisted change and tried to preserve as much of the autocracy as he could.
- 6 Sergei Witte set in motion a process of modernisation but he was forced from office by conservative court influences and the problems engendered by rapid industrialisation and then recession.
- 7 Tsarist Russia faced challenges from different groups in Russia: the peasants, urban workers, national minorities and the intelligentsia engaged in forming political opposition to the government. All these groups had different and specific demands which the tsars were not able or willing to accommodate.

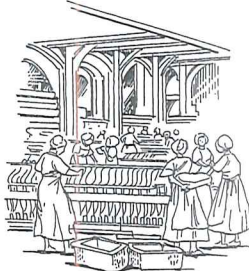
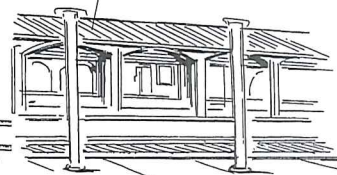
FEUDALISM

Government: Absolute monarchy
Means of production: Land; land ownership gives power.
Social organisation: Aristocracy is the dominant group controlling the mass of the population – peasants – who work on their estates. Peasants are virtually owned by their lords and masters.
Revolutionary change: The revolutionary class is the middle class (merchants, traders, manufacturers). As this group gets wealthier, it begins to break down the rules of feudal society which hinder its development, e.g. wants an economy based on money and labourers free to work in towns.



BOURGEOIS (MIDDLE-CLASS) REVOLUTION

The growth of trade and industry sees the middle classes becoming larger and more powerful. Eventually, they want to reshape society and government to suit their interests, e.g. they want to have a say in how the country is run and do not want landed aristocrats determining national policy. The middle classes take power from the monarch and aristocracy. The bourgeois revolution can be violent, as in France in 1789, or more peaceful and gradual, as in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



CAPITALISM

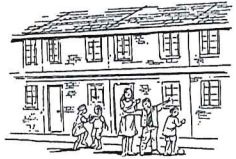
Government: Parliamentary democracy with civil rights, elections, freedom of the press, etc., but largely run by the middle classes.
Means of production: Industrial premises, factories, capital goods like machinery, banks owned by capitalists. Land becomes less important as industry and trade create greater share of national wealth.

Social organisation: Middle classes or bourgeoisie are the dominant or ruling class although the aristocracy may still hold on to some positions of power and prestige. The mass of the population move from being peasants to being industrial workers – the proletariat, who are forced to work long hours in poor conditions for little reward.

Revolutionary change: As capitalism grows so does the proletariat, since more workers are needed to work in factories and commercial premises. Great wealth and material goods are produced, but these are not shared out fairly. A small bourgeoisie gets increasingly wealthy while the proletariat remains poor. Gradually, the proletariat develops a class consciousness and realises that it is being oppressed as a class.

LENIN'S CHANGES TO MARXIST THEORY (MARXISM-LENINISM)

- 1 Revolution would be accomplished by a small group of highly professional, dedicated revolutionaries. They were needed to develop the revolutionary consciousness of workers and focus their actions.
- 2 Lenin believed that the revolution would occur during a period of conflict between capitalist powers. He accepted Trotsky's 'weakest link' theory – revolution would start in an underdeveloped country (just like Russia) where the struggle and conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie was very great, then spread to more advanced industrial countries.
- 3 He did not think that the middle classes in Russia were strong enough to carry through a bourgeois-democratic revolution. He believed that the working class could develop a revolutionary government of its own in alliance with poor peasants who had a history of mass action in Russia – the bourgeois and socialist revolution could be rolled into one.



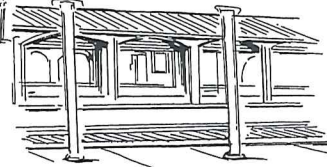
SOCIALISM

Government: Workers control the state. At first, government is exercised through the dictatorship of the proletariat, a period of strict control necessary to deal with counter-revolution (old capitalist enemies trying to recover power) and to root out non-socialist attitudes.

Means of production: Factories, machines, etc., as in the capitalist period but not owned by individuals. They are owned collectively by everybody.

Social organisation: Everybody is equal, the class system is brought to an end. Wealth and goods produced by industry are shared out fairly. Everybody has an equal entitlement to good housing and decent standards of living.

THE TRANSITION TO COMMUNISM
 The need for government declines because there are no competing classes.



SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

The proletariat moves from class consciousness to a revolutionary consciousness aided by revolutionary leaders (often from the middle classes). They now form the great bulk of the population whilst the bourgeoisie are a tiny minority. They rise up and seize power, ousting their class enemies – the bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution starts in a highly industrialised country.

