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Causes of the Russian Revolution

Like other revolutions some basic causes of the Revolution of 1917A.D lay dominant in the history of the past century and there were some immediate circumstances which led to the sudden outburst of the widespread of discontent. The distant and immediate causes of the Revolution were as follows:

- **Despotism of the Czars:**

The Russian emperors were despotic; they did not consider themselves responsible to anyone. Czar Alexander I to be a little liberal but the revolt of Poland and other external circumstances forced him to adopt the reactionary policy again. Czar Alexander II also adopted a liberal attitude and emancipated the serfs, but the opposition of the feudal chiefs pushed him back to adopt the reactionary policy. During this period terrorist assassinated Czar Alexander II. Czar Alexander III learnt from the death of his father that the emperor's authority could be secured only through a harsh policy of ruthless suppression. Nicholas II also followed this policy, but because of the revolution of 1905A.D, to placate the reformists he had to announce the election of Duma. However, he did not allow the Duma to become a real representative of the people and established the reactionary rule once again. During the last years of his reign Rasputin, the wicked, became all powerful and brought disaster to the empire. His opponents put him to death in 1916. By the middle of the nineteenth century responsible governments had been

established in the major states of Europe, but in Russia those who opposed the administration were severely punished. The increasing atrocities of the Czar intensified people's discontent and opposition against him.

- **The Revolution of 1905 A.D and Attempts to crush the influence of the Duma:**

In the Russo-Japanese war was fought in 1904-05. Russia was defeated at the hands of Japan. This defeat revealed at the hands of Japan. When there was a chaos in the government the workers took resort to strikes and the peasants expressed their discontent through riots. On Sunday January 22, 1905 A.D about 150 thousand workers under the leadership of Father Gapon staged a demonstration before the Czar for the acceptance of their political and industrial demands. After a peaceful demonstration when they were marching forward the soldiers of the Czar attacked these unarmed people and killed 130 of them. With a view to pacifying the situation, the Czar announced administrative reforms on October 30, 1905 A.D. people were granted freedom of speech and expression and forming associations. This announcement of October 30 is considered an important step in the direction of constitutional government in Russia. But as soon as the discontent subsided, the Czar made Duma the first house of the Parliament and constituted a second house under the name of 'Imperial Council' whose members were to be nominated by the emperor. Not only this, when in the elections held in March 1906 the conservatives failed to get a majority in the Duma the Czar dissolved it on its very first session. The second session of the Duma held in March 1907, was also dissolved likewise. Now people became restless to see their rights which they had won as a result of the revolution of 1905 being snatched in this way.

- **Deplorable Condition of the Peasants:**

Russia was an agricultural country, but the condition of peasants there was very deplorable. The emancipation of the serfs by Czar Alexander II in 1861 did not bring much change in their condition. By the end of the nineteenth century twenty thousand big landlords in Russia possessed 180 million acres of land whereas more than 10 million peasants possessed only 190 million acres. One third of the peasants were landless and worked on the land of the

landlords. They had to pay several types of taxes, which made their economic condition miserable. In 1902, the peasants of Harkov and Poltava revolted. The revolutionary socialist party took advantage of this situation and provoked them against the administration. Peasants revolted broke out in South west of Ukraine, Caucasus, Poland and the Volga river zone in 1905. A conference of all the representatives of peasants was held the same year in Moscow where it was decided to form a Russian Peasants Union. Consequently, in the law of 1906 every farmer was given the right to withdraw his land from 'commune'. The land enactment of 1910 gave the peasants the right to consolidate their land. These laws benefited only a few peasants and the problem of landless peasants remained unsolved. These conditions made the peasants revolt inevitable.

- **Discontent among the workers:**

Industrial revolution had taken place in major states of the Western Europe but Russia was still an agricultural country. Industrialization gained momentum during the times of Alexander III. Thousands of landless peasants thronged the industrial centers in search of jobs. The industrialists exploited their miserable and helpless condition. Their wages were so low they could not make even both ends meet. The Revolutionary Socialist Party exploited this discontent and preached the principles of socialism among the workers. The Principles of this Party greatly allured the peasants and they girded up for struggle. Workers strikes started from 1902-03; the revolution of 1905 also began with workers rally. The government tried to improve the condition of the workers after 1905; Health insurance and accident insurance laws were introduced in 1912 but these reforms did not alleviate the grievances of the workers.

- **Social and Economic Disparity:**

The social condition of Russia at this time was similar to that of France before 1789. The whole Russian society was divided into two classes the first class which enjoyed all rights comprised favorite aristocrats of the Czar. This class was very affluent and had grabbed most of the important offices as well as a very large portion of the land. The other class were bereft of all rights. It comprised peasants and workers whose economic condition was

very miserable. They were tortured by the aristocracy. Thus the Russian society suffered from glaring social and economic disparity.

- **Czar's policy of Russification:**

The Russian subjects belonged to several races, followed several religions and spoke several languages. There were Jews, Poles, Finns, Uzbeks, Tatars, Kossacks, Americans and Russians. They had their own culture and civilization. Being most powerful among the Russians held the reins of government and had no sympathy with these minorities. From the times of Czar Alexander I the policy of Russification was thrust on these races. Non-Russian subjects were repressed, their languages were banned and their property was confiscated. This filled them with discontent and they turned against the Czar. There were violent revolts in Georgia, Poland and the Baltic sea in 1905. To put these revolts down Czar Nicholas used inhuman atrocities which added fuel to fire and played an active role in provoking revolt against the Czar .

- **Intellectual Revolution:**

Liberal ideas from the western Europe had penetrating Russia for the past few years and the Czar and his reactionary officials left no stone unturned in strangling them, but even then they flourished here. Russian novelists such as Tolstoy, Turganov and Dostoevsky drew people's attention towards the shortcomings of Russian life. Their ideas brought about political awakening among the people and the educated classes began to demand political rights. Besides them, the socialist ideas of Karl Marx, Maxim Gorky and Bakunin influenced the peasants and workers. At this time Nihilism raised its head in society and tried to wipe the old order out.

- **Personality of Czar Nicholas and his corrupt Administration:**

Czar Nicholas II of Russia was superstitious and incompetent. He was weak, dull and obdurate and lacked the power of perceiving the significance of events and the character of individuals. He was under the thumb of Czarina Alexandra and liked despotic rule. The Czarina was a puppet in the hands of the monk called Rasputin who misused his influence and began to interfere

in the administration. Appointment and dismissal of high officers depended on his will. Consequently, to oppose his a group was constituted in the court which finally murdered him in December, 1916.

- **Energetic Leadership of the Revolutionaries:**

The Russian revolution succeeded for it was guided by able leadership. The contribution if the leaders of the Mensheviks and the Revolutionary Socialists were in no way less significant than that of the Bolsheviks. It was Lenin's competent leadership that escorted the Bolsheviks-a minority party-to the height of success. Credit also goes to his efficient associates Tortsy and Stalin

No doubts, in the beginning of the war Russian troops got some success but soon they began to lose against Germany. They were not being properly supplied with arms and ammunition as well as food stuff. The incompetence of military officers, and interference by Czarina and chief feudatory princes in the war affairs were responsible for the constant defeat of the Russian troops. During the first three years of the war 15 million soldiers were sent to the war fields; this reduced the number of farm workers and agricultural production fell. Besides food stuffs, other goods were also in short supply. Naturally, this situation aggravated public discontent. Humiliation caused by constant defeats of the army enraged the public. The people held the Czar responsible for all this confusion and mismanagement.