

2 (a) Write an account of life in Soviet Russia.

Life in Soviet Russia changed dramatically after the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917. The Communist regime, first under Lenin and then under Stalin, aimed to reshape society through state control, strict rules, and a focus on equality (in theory). While there were improvements in some areas, many people experienced hardship, fear, and repression, especially during Stalin's rule.

With regard to daily life and general living conditions, many people lived in cramped, shared apartments. Privacy was limited, and conditions were often poor. There were frequent shortages of food, clothes, and consumer goods. Queues for basic items were common. Especially during the 1920's and 1930's, food was rationed, and people relied on the state for supplies.

When it comes to work and wages, people also suffered. The government decided where people worked. Most jobs were in factories, farms, or construction. During the Five-Year Plans (under Stalin), workers were expected to meet high production targets. There were rewards for meeting them, but also punishments for failure. The Stakhanovite Movement, named after a miner, encouraged workers to go above and beyond quotas and be "heroes of labour." However, some resented this sort of encouragement as workers were pushed beyond reasonable limits.

In Soviet Russia women were officially equal to men and encouraged to work in factories, medicine, and education. The reality was different. Most women had a "double burden": working full-time and looking after children and the home. However, the state did provide crèches and nurseries to help working mothers, especially in cities.

People who lived in Soviet Russia benefitted from improved education. Schooling became free and widely available. Children were taught to read and write, as well as communist ideology. Children also joined groups like the Young Pioneers, where they learned loyalty to the Communist Party and Soviet values. There were also classes for illiterate adults - by the end of the 1930's all adults in the USSR could read and write.

Life in the USSR was totally controlled by the communist government. For example, the state controlled all newspapers, books, films, and radio. Only pro-communist messages (so called "Socialist Realism") were allowed. Posters and slogans promoted hard work, loyalty to Stalin, and pride in the Soviet Union. Stalin also made use of a Cult of Personality: He was portrayed as a wise and kind leader. His image was everywhere.

Religion beliefs were also oppressed. Churches were closed or destroyed, and religious leaders were arrested. The state promoted atheism. The state encouraged people to believe in communism, and questioning the system was dangerous.

Unfortunately, people living in Soviet Russia experienced a great deal of fear and repression. The Secret Police monitored people, arrested anyone suspected of disloyalty, and sent many to labour camps. Millions died in these Gulags. (These were harsh prison camps where people worked in extreme conditions.) Life in the Gulags was brutal and deadly. Purges and Show Trials were used to force people into obedience. Millions were accused of being enemies of the state, often with no real evidence. Many were executed or imprisoned.

Overall, life in Soviet Russia was a mix of industrial modernisation and brutal oppression. While education and job opportunities improved for some, people lived under strict control, constant surveillance, and fear of punishment. The state dominated nearly every aspect of life, and loyalty to the Communist regime was expected from everyone, often at great personal cost.