Question 1:
What were the social, economic and political conditions in Russia before 1905?
Answer:
The social, economic and political conditions in Russia before 1905 were variously beneficial and bad for the masses. 85% of Russia's population was agriculturist, far more than France or Germany with 40-50%. Industry was existent, but sporadically. Most of this was privately owned. Workers either came from villages, or migrated to cities for employment in factories. The industrial sector had its fair share of trouble with strikes in the textiles industry in 1896-97 and the metals industry in 1902.

At this time, the peasant community was deeply religious, but did not care much about the nobility. They believed that land must be divided amongst themselves. Since this was not possible due to feudal rights, the peasants had their own unique commune wherein wealth was shared out according to each family's needs.

Political parties were illegal before 1914. The Social Democratic Workers' Party (1898) was hence, illegal. Interestingly, the socialists believed that the peasants were "natural socialists" in their policy of equitable distribution of wealth. However, the Bolsheviks under Lenin wanted a disciplined group, and not farmers, in the party. While the Bolsheviks believed in controlling the number and quality of its members, the Mensheviks believed that the party should be open to all.

In the field of economic conditions, 1904 was a bad year for the workers. Due to rise in prices of essential goods, real wages decreased by 20%, leading to the famous St.Petersburg strike where 110,000 workers protested, demanding reduction in work hours and increase in wages. This strike started a series of events that are together known as the 1905 Revolution. During this revolution, there were strikes all over the country, universities closed down, and various professionals and workers established the Union of Unions, demanding the establishment of a constituent assembly.

These were the socio-economic and political conditions in pre-1905 Russia.

Question 2:
In what ways was the working population in Russia different from other countries in Europe, before 1917?
Answer:
The working population in Russia was different from other countries in Europe before 1917 because not all Russian workers migrated from the villages to work in the industrial sector. Some of them continued to live in villages and went to work daily, to the towns. They were a divided group, socially and professionally, and this
showed in their dress and manners too. Metal workers were the “aristocrats” of the working class because their occupation demanded more training and skill. Nevertheless, the working population was united on one front — strikes against work conditions and employer tyranny.

Question 3:
Why did the Tsarist autocracy collapse in 1917?

Answer:
The Tsarist autocracy collapsed in 1917 because of public mistrust and a growing dissatisfaction with the Tsar’s policies. The Tsar, Nicholas II imposed restrictions on political activity, changed voting laws and dismissed any questioning of or restrictions on his authority. At the beginning of the First World War, he did not consult the main parties in the Duma. Anti-German sentiments were gaining ground, and Tsarina Alexandra’s German origin, Rasputin and the German name of the city St.Petersburg did nothing to remedy the situation. The Russian army lost battles, but would destroy crops and dwellings on retreat. This led to the presence of 3 million refugees in Russia, which in turn worsened the conditions.

Industry was badly affected by the First World War. Imports were cut off due to German control of the Baltic sea. Industrial equipment started disintegrating and the railway lines were broken by 1916. Due to conscription, able-bodied men went to the army and this resulted in labour shortage. Riots in bread shops became a common sight. On 26 February, 1917, the government suspended the Duma. This was the last straw and put the Tsar’s regime in complete jeopardy. The Tsar was forced to abdicate on 2 March, 1917, thereby marking the end of his autocracy.

Question 4:
Make two lists: one with the main events and the effects of the February Revolution and the other with the main events and effects of the October Revolution. Write a paragraph on who was involved in each, who were the leaders and what was the impact of each on Soviet history.

Answer:
Main events and effects of the February Revolution, October Revolution (who was involved, leaders, impact on Soviet history)

(a) The February Revolution
In February 1917, acute food shortages were felt in the workers’ quarters; parliamentarians were opposed to the Tsar’s wish to dissolve the Duma. On 22nd February, a factory lockout occurred and many women led the way to the strikes. The strikes continued, with the workers surrounding fashionable quarters and official buildings at the centre of Petrograd — the Nevskii Prospekt. On 25th February, the Duma was dissolved. This resulted in a ransacking of the Police Headquarters on the 27th. The cavalry refused to fire at the protesting crowd, and
by evening, the revolting soldiers and the striking workers were united as a “soviet” or “council” called the Petrograd Soviet. The Tsar abdicated his power on 2nd March, and the Soviet and Duma leaders formed a Provisional Government for Russia. The February Revolution had no political party at its forefront. It was led by the people themselves. Petrograd had brought down the monarchy, and thus, gained a significant place in Soviet history.

(b) The October Revolution
This arose out of the conflict between the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks. In September, Vladimir Lenin began to bring together Bolshevik supporters for an uprising. On 16 October 1917, he convinced the Petrograd Soviet and the Bolshevik Party for a socialist seizure of power. A Military Revolutionary Committee was appointed under Leon Trotsky to organise this capture of power. When the uprising began on 24 October, Prime Minister Kerenskii left the city to bring in the troops to prevent the situation from going out of control. In a swift response, the Military Revolutionary Committee attacked government offices; the ship Aurora shelled the Winter Palace, and by nightfall on the 24th, the city was under Bolshevik control. After some serious fighting, the Bolsheviks gained full control of the Moscow-Petrograd area. The actions of the Bolsheviks were unanimously accepted at a meeting of the All Russian Congress of Soviets, in Petrograd.

The October Revolution was primarily led by Lenin and his subordinate Trotsky, and involved the masses who supported these leaders. It marked the beginning of Lenin’s rule over the Soviet, with the Bolsheviks under his guidance.

Question 5:
What were the main changes brought about by the Bolsheviks immediately after the October Revolution?
Answer:
Main changes brought about by the Bolsheviks immediately after the October Revolution:
In November 1917, industry and banks were nationalised; land was declared social property, thereby allowing peasants to seize it from the nobility. In urban areas, houses were partitioned according to family requirements; old aristocratic titles were banned, and new uniforms were designed for the army and the officials. In November, the Bolsheviks lost in the elections to the Constituent Assembly, and when in January 1918, the Assembly rejected their measures, Lenin dismissed the Assembly. In March 1918, despite political opposition, Russia signed a peace treaty with Germany at Brest Litovsk. Gradually, Russia became a one-party state where trade-unions were controlled, Bolsheviks’ critics were punished by the secret police, and any form of opposition to the Bolshevik Party was censored.

Question 6:
Write a few lines to show what you know about:
• kulaks
• the Duma
• women workers between 1900 and 1930
• the Liberals
• Stalin’s collectivisation programme

Answer:
(a) **Kulaks**: It is the Russian term for wealthy peasants who Stalin believed were hoarding grains to gain more profit. They were raided in 1928 and their supplies were confiscated. According to Marxism-Leninism, kulaks were a ‘class enemy’ of the poorer peasants. Their desire for profit led to food shortages and ultimately, Stalin had to put the collectivisation programme in place to eliminate the kulaks, and establish large, state-controlled farms.

(b) **The Duma**: Formed on 6 August 1905, under the pressure of the Russian Revolution of 1905, it was initially thought to be an advisory organ. In the October Manifesto, Tsar Nicholas II endowed it with legislative and oversight powers. However, he had the power to dismiss the Duma and announce new elections whenever he wished to do so. The Tsar dissolved the Duma on 25 February 1917, and for doing so, he had to ultimately abdicate his own post on the 2nd of March that same year.

(c) **Women workers between 1900 and 1930**: They made up 31% of the factory labour force by 1914, but were paid almost half and three-quarters of the wages given to men. However, interestingly, it were the women workers who led the way to strikes during the February Revolution.

(d) **The Liberals**: They espoused a nation that was tolerant towards all religions; one that would protect individual rights against the government. Although the liberals wanted an elected parliamentary form of governance, they believed that the right to vote must only belong to men, and that too the ones who were property holders.

(e) **Stalin’s collectivisation programme**: This was implemented in 1929 in order to increase grain produce and avoid hoarding by kulaks. The programme entailed collective farms (kolkhoz) where peasants were made to work together. All land and implements were to be owned by the state. Kolkhoz profit was meant to be shared by all the people working on these farms. However, this collectivisation policy was unpopular and cultivators destroyed their livestock in protest. In spite of collectivisation, production did not increase immediately. The bad harvests of 1930-33 led to horrible famines in which over 4 million people died.