THE NATIONAL QUESTION SOLVED

THREEPENCE
THE U.S.S.R. is a country of many nationalities. Its vast territory, stretching from the Arctic tundras to the sub-tropics, is inhabited by scores of different peoples: Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Uzbeks, Georgians, Kazakhs, Azerbaijanians, Turkmenians, Yakuts, Buryats, Tajiks, Jews, Poles, Nentsi, Ossetians, Lezghins, Greeks, Tartars, Kalmyks, Chukchi, Yukaghirs, Aleuts, and numerous other peoples.

Want and destitution was the lot of these nationalities in the past. Theirs was a life of endless misery left in the wake of frequent bloody tragedies which took the toll of thousands—and sometimes millions—of human lives. Lenin called tsarist Russia “a prison of nations.”

Prior to the Great October Socialist Revolution only the Russians were considered the indigenous population of the country. All other nationalities were termed “aliens.” But even of the Russians only a small minority enjoyed a privileged position. The overwhelming majority of the Russian people—the workers and peasants—were denied political rights, and bore the yoke of economic oppression.

The peoples of the Far North were the victims of the sharp practices of the traders, who would come to their habitations and exchange a sewing needle for a deer, or a bottle of vodka or a brick of pressed tea for the skin of a sable. The
Chukchi would be tricked into exchanging a beaver skin for a bottle of vodka treated with makhorka and blue vitriol to give it an extra kick. In the Northern Urals traders would wheedle out a couple of the exceedingly valuable blue fox skins in exchange for an axe.

The mountaineers of the Caucasus—after having for many decades waged an unequal war for their freedom—abandoned their auls (villages), orchards and pastures, and retreated high into the mountains, preferring to lead a life of semi-starvation in the recesses of the naked ridges rather than to submit to slavery. Many Kirghiz, Tajiks and other inhabitants of the mountainous districts of Central Asia likewise left their fertile land and pastures in the valleys and retreated into the mountains.

Many a time did the peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia suffer cruel and bloody defeat in their fight for their national independence; but defeat could not stifle their love for liberty, and tsarist Russia was always rife with insurrections and rebellions of the oppressed peoples.

The tsarist government tried to paralyze the resistance of the subjugated peoples and to maintain its own rule by sowing hatred and discord among the various nationalities and inciting one nation against another: Russians against Jews, Armenians against Azerbaijanians, the Turkmenian tribes against one another, etc.

Anti-Jewish pogroms and massacres of other nationalities were quite frequent in tsarist Russia. In the Caucasus a whole town, Shusha, was razed to the ground, and most of its inhabitants—about 20,000 people—slaughtered as the
result of a bloody massacre instigated by the tsarist government authorities.

**Divide and Rule**

The tsarist government resorted to pogroms and incitement of national hatred most often as a means of stemming the rising tide of the revolutionary movement in the country. By these means the tsarist officials tried to divert the anger of the people from the autocracy, to blame one nationality for the misery and destitution of another, to head off the struggle of the working people against the tsar's arbitrary rule.

Jews, Azerbaijanians, Uzbeks and people of many other nationalities were not allowed to hold government positions. The tsarist government was particularly ruthless in its policy of hate with regard to the Jews. In this respect the German fascists are worthy successors to the Black Hundreds of tsarist Russia.

Jews were confined to a so-called Pale of Settlement. They were not permitted to live in Central Russia, in St. Petersburg, then the Capital, and in a number of other large cities. It may be mentioned that the Russian landscape painter Levitan, one of the greatest artists of Russia, was deported from Moscow as a Jew. Jews were not allowed to engage in agriculture. A special quota was established for the admission of Jewish children to high schools and universities, according to which the number of Jews could not exceed 3 per cent. of the total number of students in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and 5 per cent. in other cities.
The numerous peoples inhabiting the territory of the former Russian Empire endured the double yoke of the tsarist government and of their own landlords, feudal princes, priests, and merchants.

The policy of the tsarist government was to keep the enslaved peoples of its colonies in a state of ignorance and darkness. In pre-revolutionary Kirghizia only one out of two hundred could read and write. There was not a single university or college in Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Armenia, and other colonies of the tsar’s government. The number of elementary schools could be counted on one’s fingers. Instruction in the native languages was forbidden. No literature was published in the languages of the oppressed colonial peoples. The creative genius of the non-Russian nationalities was suppressed. The treasures of folk art, the products of the age-old national cultures of the Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian, Kirghiz and other peoples, were buried in oblivion. In Georgia people were persecuted for singing popular folksongs. The Ukrainians were not permitted to have their own theatre. Scores of peoples of old Russia even had no alphabet of their own.

The October Revolution

The Great October Socialist Revolution, which transformed the former Russian Empire into a free democratic state, into the fatherland of all labouring people, put an end to national oppression. The October Revolution emancipated all
the peoples of Russia, and they have since become the masters of their own destinies.

A few days after the victorious October Revolution, on November 15, 1917, the "Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia," a document of the greatest historic significance, was signed by Lenin and Stalin, the leaders of the Revolution.

This document announced the principles of the national policy of the Soviet Government:

1. Equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.

2. The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, including the right to secede and form an independent state.

3. The abolition of all national and national-religious privileges and restrictions whatsoever.

4. Free development for the national minorities and ethnographic groups inhabiting the territory of Russia.

The Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia pointed out to the labouring masses of the various nationalities the only way to their emancipation—the brotherly union of peoples, their common struggle against the rule of the bourgeoisie—for their independence and freedom.

The Russian workers and peasants, fighting in close unity with the working people of all the nationalities of the Soviet Republics, defended their state independence and routed the internal counter-revolutionists. This historic victory of the Soviet power welded the working
people of the various nationalities into a mighty force.

In 1922, soon after the end of the Civil War and the defeat of the foreign interventionists, the first All-Union Congress of Soviets was convened in Moscow. This Congress decided unanimously to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The declaration adopted by the Congress stressed the voluntary nature of the union of all the Soviet Republics, each of which reserved the right freely to secede from the Union.

The amalgamation of the several Soviet Republics into a single Union was dictated, on the one hand, by the problems of economic restoration following the havoc wrought by the war, and, on the other hand, by the instability of the international situation and the danger of new attacks, which necessitated the formation of a common front of all the Soviet Republics in the face of the capitalist world surrounding them.

The Great Socialist October Revolution abolished all national privileges and restrictions. But there still remained the heritage of the past—the actual inequality of the various peoples as a result of the deliberate policy of the tsarist government to maintain a different level of economic and cultural development for the different nationalities. When the Soviet Republic was formed, the Party of Lenin and Stalin at once set out to do away with this inequality.

The working-class of the great Russian people and the splendid Russian culture with centuries of development behind it came to the assistance of the nationalities which had remained back-
ward in their economic and cultural development. Russian culture has exercised an enormous and beneficient influence upon the culture of all the peoples of the U.S.S.R.

With the abolition of political inequality and of the exploitation of man by man the causes for national enmity have also been removed.

Suleiman Stalsky, the famous people's poet of Daghestan, once said: "The Bolshevik upheaval, which shook the whole world, has shaken up our old mode of life as well. Our vast plains have been lighted up by the bright and eternal fire of the Great October Revolution." The light of this revolutionary fire has penetrated to the mountain fastnesses of the Caucasus as well as to the deserts of Central Asia, to the Far Eastern taiga as well as to the tundras of the Far North.

There are peoples in the Soviet Union that have in two decades made a leap for medieval backwardness to twentieth century conditions. Modern culture has penetrated to the most remote and inaccessible auls whither the "natives" once withdrew in order not to submit to the tsarist colonisers.

Economic Development

All the national republics have been progressing at a tempestuous rate. Their mineral wealth no longer lies idle in the bowels of the earth. Each year brings with it discoveries of new deposits of gold, zinc, coal, manganese, oil, tin, iron, lead, sulphur, etc. Over the landscape rise the derricks of newly-sunk mines and the
smokestacks of recently-built factories. Powerful industries have sprung up in the various national republics. Coal, copper and lead in Kazakhstan, manganese ore in Transcaucasia, coal in Kirghizia, zinc in North Ossetia in the Caucasus, oil in Checheno-Ingushetia, and along the southern slopes of the Urals in Bashkiria—all these mineral resources have become the basis for the industrial development of the respective republics.

In the past, the coal, copper and lead resources of Kazakhstan were left practically untouched. There was even no railway there before the Revolution. The first railroad to traverse Kazakhstan was the Turksib, built in 1928-32. It connects Turkestan with Siberia, and has brought to life vast stretches of semi-desert land.

A marvellous transformation has been wrought in the economic life of Uzbekistan. Here a number of huge textile mills have been built, and a powerful and complex irrigation system has brought about an unprecedented development of cotton growing.

Azerbaijan had only one industrial centre in the past—Baku, famous for its oil fields. But the Baku oil resources were exploited in a wasteful manner. The oil kings reaped enormous profits, while the whole country and the population of Azerbaijan lingered in poverty. At present many new industries are developing in Azerbaijan, while the output of oil has increased more than threefold.

Every one of the eleven republics comprising the U.S.S.R. has been undergoing a profound
economic change and development. The railway stations of the Ukraine alone now handle more freight in a year than all the railway stations of tsarist Russia in 1913. More freight and mail is carried by airplanes in Transcaucasia, Central Asia and Kazakhstan than in Germany, Great Britain, and France combined.

Industrial progress in the national republics has been accompanied by an intensive development of agriculture. Collective farming has transformed the old auls and kishlaks. Modern scientific methods of cultivation and stockraising have been introduced, where formerly primitive nomadic economy prevailed. Hundreds of thousands of tractors, harvester combines, and other machines are used on the fields of the collective farms and state farms. Mountainous regions and boundless steppes, where formerly only the wooden plough and mattock were known, have now been provided with modern implements and machines for efficient farming. Eighty-eight tractors and 27,000 harvester combines are in use on the fields of the Ukraine. The collective farms and state farms of Byelorussia dispose of 8,100 tractors, 4,000 threshing machines, 4,000 trucks, and 1,200 flax-pulling machines. The valleys and plateaus of Kirghizia are cultivated with the help of 3,964 tractors. There are 6,885 tractors and 2,871 harvester combines in Tataria, and 5,562 tractors in Azerbaijan, etc.

New crops have appeared in the national republics. Rice growing has been introduced in the Ukraine. In Transcaucasia, tea is grown on
an extensive scale, and large citrus fruit groves have been planted. The breeds of cattle have improved. Among sheep the fine wool varieties are becoming prevalent.

The growth of industry and agriculture has created a large demand for workers proficient in various trades and professions which were formerly unknown in some of the national republics. Among the native Kazakh population, for instance, there were formerly no smiths even, not to speak of engineers, agronomists or physicians. To-day Kazakhstan has its own native intelligentsia. There has been a steady increase in the number of professional people and the variety of professions among the people of the remote sections of the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Far North.

**Women’s Rights**

One of the manifestations of the former cultural backwardness of some of these peoples was the tenacity with which the survivals of tribal feudal customs persisted among them, particularly with respect to women. When a girl was ready to be married she was traded off to the highest bidder. Her consent was never asked. She went to the man who offered the highest “ransom.” Women were frequently abducted. Their homes were prisons to them. No strange man was allowed to see the face of a woman who did not belong to him. Women had to wear veils (“chadra” among the Azerbaijanians) or nets made of horse-hair (“chavchan” among the Tajiks and Uzbeks). The vendetta existed
among the mountaineers of the Caucasus, and blood feuds between families were kept up for generations.

Among most of the Eastern peoples women enjoyed no rights whatsoever. Woman was looked down upon. She was the docile slave of her husband, father or brother. The Lezghins of Daghestan used to express contempt with the words: "If you can't do that you are nothing but a woman." In Azerbaijan men would say to women: "Don't mix into men's affairs with your dough-covered hands."

Only Soviet power brought the women emancipation. The Soviet laws protect the rights of women, which are in every respect the same as those of men. Under the beneficient rays of the Soviet national policy thousands of women in the East have developed and become statesmen, doctors, engineers, fliers, teachers, agricultural experts, etc.

The Soviet Government has from the very outset devoted great attention to the development of national cultural and public education in the border regions of the former Russian Empire.

Universal free elementary education is enforced in the national republics just as it is throughout the Soviet Union. The number of children attending school has increased 35 times in Azerbaijan, 37 times in Turkmenia, 53 times in Uzbekistan, 48 times in Kazakhstan, 68 times in Armenia, 172 times in Kirghizia. In 1936 children in the U.S.S.R. were taught in school in 112 languages, many of which had no alphabet of their own before the Revolution.
Education

The few universities and scientific institutes that existed in tsarist times were all Russian. There were many nationalities that knew nothing about them. At present there are 22 institutions of higher learning in Byelorussia, 13 in Azerbaijan, and 19 in Kazakhstan. The number of universities and scientific institutes in the Ukraine has grown from 15 to 139. The Ukraine to-day has more institutions of higher learning than Germany, although the population of the latter is twice as large as that of the former. The universities and other institutions of higher learning of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic alone are attended by more than three times as many students as there are in Great Britain, Germany, and Italy combined.

The national policy of the Soviet Government has stimulated the development of creative talent, and has opened up the spring-wells of national art. It has revived the creative forces of the peoples. The works of the great writers of the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and other republics have become the property of the entire Soviet nation. The rich heritage of the culture of the various nationalities has been made accessible to the Russian people, and to all the other peoples of the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, the Georgian poet Shot'ha Rust'hveli, the Kirghizian epos are now read by millions in the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, Russian and world culture has become accessible to all the nationalities
inhabiting the U.S.S.R., exercising a tremendous influence on the development of their national culture. Pushkin and Darwin, Shakespeare and Cervantes, Tolstoy and Marx have been translated into dozens of languages of the Soviet peoples.

All the nations and races of the U.S.S.R., irrespective of their past or present condition, and irrespective of their numbers, enjoy fully equal rights in all spheres of economic, public, political and cultural activity.

Rights of Minorities

Article 123 of the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. states:

“Equality of rights of citizens of the U.S.S.R., irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life, is an indefeasible law.

“Any direct or indirect restriction of the rights of, or, conversely, any establishment of direct or indirect privileges for, citizens on account of their race or nationality, as well as any advocacy of racial or national exclusiveness or hatred and contempt, is punishable by law.”

All the eleven Union Republics enjoy equal rights in absolutely every respect. Each of these constituent republics has its own constitution, which takes into account the specific features of the republic, and is drawn up in full conformity with the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. To every Union Republic is reserved the right freely
to secede from the U.S.S.R. The territories of the Union Republics cannot be altered without their consent.

The highest organ of state authority in the U.S.S.R. is the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., which consists of two Chambers enjoying equal rights—the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities.

Each Union republic, irrespective of the size of its population, elects 25 deputies to the Soviet of Nationalities; each autonomous republic elects ten deputies, each autonomous region five deputies, and each national area one deputy. Thus the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, with a population of slightly over three million, and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, with a population of over thirty million, each send the same number of deputies to the Soviet of Nationalities. This places all the constituent republics, irrespective of the size of their population, on an equal footing, and enables each of them to fully defend its specific interests in the Soviet of Nationalities.

Such, in brief, are the main features of the policy which has led to the solution of the national problem in the Soviet Union. We may sum up in the words of J. V. Stalin, the author of the Constitution of the U.S.S.R.:

"... the absence of exploiting classes, which are the principal organisers of strife between nations; the absence of exploitation, which cultivates mutual distrust and kindles nationalist passions; the fact that power is in the hands of the working-class, which is an enemy
of all enslavement and the true vehicle of the ideas of internationalism; the actual practice of mutual aid among the peoples in all spheres of economic and social life; and, finally, the flourishing national culture of the peoples of the U.S.S.R., culture which is national in form and Socialist in content—all these and similar factors have brought about a radical change in the aspect of the peoples of the U.S.S.R.; their feeling of mutual distrust has disappeared, a feeling of mutual friendship has developed among them and thus, real fraternal cooperation between the peoples has been established within the system of a single federated state.

"As a result, we now have a fully formed multi-national Socialist state, which has stood all tests, and the stability of which might well be envied by any national state in any part of the world."

To Soviet people, the amity of nations is the most indispensable condition for the further success of Socialism. The most gifted artists and writers devote their works to the idea of internationalism and the brotherhood of peoples in the Soviet Union. These works reflect the thoughts and sentiments of the millions.

The Dungans, a people inhabiting the approaches to the central range of the Tian-Shan Mountains in Central Asia, have a fine saying expressing the idea of the fraternal friendship of the peoples:

"The bonfire will burn brighter if all the twigs are put together."