

CHAPTER TWO

HOW THE CZAR GOVERNED HIS COLONIAL EMPIRE

ETHNOGRAPHICALLY, the Russian Empire embraced the greatest variety of peoples ever included within a single political unit. White, brown, yellow, and even black,¹ they were all incorporated within this vast agglomeration. Almost 175 ethnic groups were analysed at one time by the Russian Academy of Sciences into ten major divisions.² These comprised Indo-Europeans (36 groups); Caucasian, now classified as Japhetic (40); Turks (48); Mongols (3); Tungus-Manchurian (6); Palaeo-Asiatics (9); Samoyeds (1); Finns (16); Semites (6). In addition there were groups of tribes from the Far East with an ancient culture. The Russian Empire was, therefore, racially as well as geographically, Eurasian rather than European, the Turkic tribes occupying the most important role after the Slavs.

The national elements included Great Russians, White Russians, Ukrainians (or Little Russians), Georgians, Turks, Armenians, Uzbekians, Turkmans, Tajiks, Tartars, Kazaks, Kirghizians, Chuvashians, Votyakians, Dunganians, Adegaians, Kalmuks, Bashkirs, Loparians, Buriats, Khakassians, Mesheyaks, Shoreans, Oiratians, Komis, and numerous others. In all, they comprised as great a medley of different peoples as there are in the British Empire.

Administration of the Czarist Empire was one of the most patchwork kind. There was no defined policy regarding the political status of the territories, such as one finds in the British Empire—Dominions, Colonies, Protectorates, Mandates. With scant heed for the special needs of the ethnical groups, either culturally, politically or economically, except to use them to play one section off against another in pursuance of the old imperialist policy

¹ African slaves were imported into the Black Sea region of Abkasia.

² These statistics are based upon the ethnological studies of Prof. N. Marr of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

of 'divide and rule,' Czarism, for administrative purposes, just lumped the imperial territories under five major divisions:

1. Russia Proper (and Baltic Provinces).
2. Finland Grand Duchy.
3. Caucasia (including Cis-Caucasia and Trans-Caucasia).
4. Siberia and The Far East.
5. Central Asia (Turkestan).

1. *Russia Proper and Baltic Provinces.*

Great Russia, White Russia, the Ukraine, the Baltic Provinces (now Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia) and Poland collectively constituted the metropolitan section, or European Russia. Ukraine came into the Russian Empire in 1654, when the Kossack Hetman Bogdan Khmel'nitsky voluntarily surrendered the Ukraine to the 'protection' of the Czar Alexius Romanov against the Polish invaders. This amalgamation was influenced by the Ukrainian clergy, from the ranks of which the Orthodox Church exclusively recruited its priests until the middle of the 18th century.¹ As a 'protectorate,' the Ukraine enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy until Catherine the Great rescinded it in 1764 during her process of 'levelling' conditions throughout the Russian Empire. Poland, partitioned for the third time in 1795, was completely Russified by Alexander II following the suppression of the second Polish rebellion in 1862-63, from which time it became an integral part of the metropolis.

The Baltic countries of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia (Courland and Livonia), while politically subject to the Muscovite autocracy, in the same way as Kenya and Rhodesia are subject to the British Crown, were actually administered by foreign settlers. Since the Middle Ages, German aristocrats, descendants of the Teutonic Knights, had settled in these countries. They lost much of their political power under the Swedes, but when Peter the Great annexed the territories, he restored the privileges of the 'Baltic barons' in order to win their support against the native populations. Special charters were given to them, which, like those granted to the chartered companies of the British Empire in the 18th

¹ Prince D. S. Mirsky : *Russia: A Social History*, p. 211.

and 19th centuries, gave them administrative powers as well as economic monopoly.

Having contact with western civilisation, the Baltic nobility were economically more efficient and progressive than the Russian aristocracy, as a result of which serfdom in these regions was abolished early in the 19th century. As with the abolition of slavery in the British Empire and the United States, it was not humanitarianism that was the real reason behind the abolition of Baltic serfdom, which was really dictated by economic reasons. Free labour was found to be cheaper than slave labour, because more productive. The results of the termination of serfdom in the Baltic countries of Latvia and Estonia in 1816-19 were similar to those in the West Indies after the emancipation of the Negroes in 1834. The freed men were transformed into landless masses, who were forced to work for their former masters for wages. We see the same process in South Africa, Kenya, etc., under the aegis of British Imperialism. Only by throwing the people off the land can a free labour market, necessary to the development of capitalism, be created. Thus the Baltic barons were able to lay the foundations of industry and large-scale agriculture, which was the most advanced and efficient in the whole of the Russian Empire, the agrarian hinterland of which served as a market for the products of these Baltic regions. Serf labour actually kept back the development of Russian industries, which did not go forward until after the abolition of serfdom in 1861.

2. *Grand Duchy of Finland.*

Finland, alone of all the subject nations, enjoyed any kind of autonomy. Having the status of a Grand Duchy, it had its own Diet or Parliament, its political position being near enough analogous to that of India. The Finns were accorded a limited control over internal affairs, subject to the veto of the Russian Governor-General, who was invested with reserve powers and direction of finance, foreign affairs, and defence. Any measure introduced by the Diet which was not to the liking of the autocracy was cancelled by the Governor-General, in much the same way as the Viceroy of India rejects bills unpleasing to British imperial interests. At all events, it would seem that, limited as the Finnish

autonomy was, it was more democratic than any other part of the Russian Empire.

3. *Caucasia (A) Trans-Caucasia.*

Georgia, on the Black Sea, was the most important section of the Trans-Caucasian colonies. It became part of the Russian domains in 1801, when the Emperor Paul sought to 'protect' it against the Persian Shah, Aga Muhammad. As a Russian colony, it was ruled through a Governor-General with the aid of the Georgian princes, who enjoyed rights similar to those of the native rulers in the British Empire, their relation to the Russian Crown being akin to that of the Indian princes towards the British Raj. And like these oriental despots, the Georgian princes enjoyed extensive rights which enabled them to exploit the masses of the people ruthlessly. The Georgian nobility was completely Russified and quite decadent. The Georgian people, however, resisted the Czarist policy of Russification and succeeded in maintaining their cultural and revolutionary traditions. Commenting on the vitality of Georgian nationalism, Prince Mirsky observes that "As early as the 'seventies the Georgian democracy began to play a considerable part in the Russian Socialist and Radical movement. In 1905 the peasantry of Guria (Western Georgia), organised by the Social-Democratic party, showed a remarkable spirit of revolutionary discipline and self-help. Georgians played a very prominent role in the Russian Social-Democratic movement, their leaders remaining definitely hostile to any form of autonomy for Georgia. In cultural matters, however, they supported the great national-democratic revival which led to the re-establishment of Georgian as a language of civilization. By the beginning of the century Georgian cultural life was substantially democratic, and the firm foundations were laid for a new Georgian culture which began to bear fruit in the Soviet Georgia of to-day".¹

The Russian agrarian policy in the Trans-Caucasian colonies was similar to that in the Punjab and other parts of British India. All of the land annexed from Persia was handed over to the Moslem beys (equivalent to the zemindars of India), who collected the rents from the peasants and

¹ D. S. Mirsky: *Russia: A Social History*, pp. 284/5.

handed over a part to the Russian governors. In this way, the Imperial Power created a buffer class between the autocracy and the masses, who were born in debt, lived in debt, and died in debt to the landlords and moneylenders. Among the medley of races and religious sects inhabiting Trans-Caucasia, such as Georgians, Circassians, Mingrelians, Imerians, etc., the influence of the beys was used to incite communal disaffection among the peasantry. Moslems were played off against the non-Moslem peoples like the Ossetians (who were Christians), and Jews. When they got out of hand, the Russians used the Cossacks against all of them, for Cossack communities had been settled on lands taken from the Kabardis and Chechens in the 18th century. Right up to the Revolution, the Caucasus was seething with warring races and tribes. Family and tribal feuds were carried on from generation to generation. No man dared to walk unarmed outside his own village. In the midst of these war-like Moslem tribes, lived the Armenians, one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. The Armenian bourgeoisie enjoyed the special patronage of the autocracy. They were wealthy, and pro-Russian in outlook, and dominated the trade and commerce of Trans-Caucasia. Politically, they were used by the Russian imperialists in promoting Czarist influence in Turkey and Persia. On the other hand, the Armenian intelligensia was very progressive and identified itself with the revolutionary movements against the autocracy. After the abortive 1905 Revolution, pogroms were often organised against the Armenians by the Moslem beys with the connivance of the Czarist police.

(B) Cis-Caucasia.

Daghestan, situated in Cis-Caucasia along the Caspian Sea, was the most important colonial territory in the North-Eastern Caucasian region, populated by about 80 different Turkic tribes "speaking a bewildering number of related but mutually unintelligible languages, and collectively known to the Russians as Lezgians." Like the tribes of the North-West Frontier of India, the Lezgians were fanatical Moslems and resisted Russian domination for over 25 years under Shamil, a holy man like the Fakir of Ipi. After their resistance had been crushed by the Cossacks in 1859, the rebels,

rather than accept the domination of the infidel Russian unbelievers, migrated to Turkey.

4. Siberia And The Far East.

The wide stretches of Siberia, the wildest section of the Empire, were governed with the aid of Cossacks. In the early days of the colonisation of Siberia (an area larger than the whole of Western Europe by more than 1,000,000 square miles), the Cossacks were sent as settlers, but since their interests were military and not agricultural, they failed as colonising material. Another means of colonisation was tried by the Imperial Government, which about 1648 began to send political exiles to the Siberian wastes. By the end of the 17th century a colonisation policy through exile was well enforced, and men were sent to Siberia for the most trifling offences, especially after convict labour was introduced into the mines there. In fact, capital punishment was abolished in 1753 for a short period and replaced by perpetual hard labour in the Siberian mines. Political prisoners were later banished there in droves, particularly to the Yakut region in the north-east. This was the largest administrative unit in Siberia, covering an area of 1,188,000 square miles. It was very sparsely populated by a Turk-Tartar people known as Yakuts, settled cattle and reindeer breeders on the way to becoming agricultural. They were the only indigenous people in Siberia who resisted Russian assimilation and retained right up to the Revolution their own social organisations and customs.

Between 1823 and 1898, something like 700,000 exiles were banished to Siberia, whence they were accompanied by their wives and relatives. Free settlers also played an important part in the colonisation of Siberia. Runaway serfs and fugitives from religious persecution and military conscription sought refuge in the remoter parts. Many of them inter-married with the Yakuts, whose language in many cases they also adopted. The half-caste descendants of these mixed marriages are known as Siberiaks. After the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the government supported organised emigration.

Among the many Siberian tribes collecting and bringing furs to the trading stations of the Russian chartered com-

panies were the Chukchees, who occupied the area in the north-east around Cape Chukotsk on the Arctic Ocean; the Ostiaks (now called Kants), living in the forest region of western Siberia; the Voguls (now called Mansi); the Samoyeds (now called Nentsi), who were in the process of dying out, and lived in the north and north-east; the Nubikh (now Guliaks) grouped along the Amur river and the northern part of Sakhalin island. All of these people are of Ugro-Finnish origin and professed Shamanism, a primitive religion connected with domestic ritual. The Samoyeds were in an extremely primitive stage of social evolution, with a tribal organisational form, and were the most backward of all the peoples of the Czarist Empire. They roamed the tundras and worshipped idols. "Their gods are carnivorous and fond of raw flesh, which is thrust between their teeth at stated times." The stage of social development among these tribes corresponded with that of the natives of the interior of New Guinea.

For administrative purposes this 'land of exile' was divided into eight *Guberniya* (governments), with headquarters at Tomsk, Irkutsk, Omsk, Tobolsk, Yakutsk, Petropaulovski on the Peninsula of Kamchatka, and Vladivostock. Czarism ruled the scattered populations of the extensive Siberian territory through military control. Nothing at all was done to mitigate either for the settlers from Central Russia or the indigenous peoples the hardships which harsh climatic conditions and primitive modes of living incurred.

Of the rather more advanced peoples living within the Siberian colonial empire, the Buriat Mongols occupied a very large territory of over 145,000 square miles around Lake Baikal. As their name implies, they are a Mongol people, professing Buddhism. They lived in a social organisation which did not seem to have progressed since the time of Jenghis Khan, and engaged in primitive farming and pastoral occupations.

The Bashkirs, an admixture of Turk, Mongol and Finn, and of Moslem faith, inhabited the southern Urals, where they had settled between the 9th and 10th century. They were most shamefully exploited, for it was in this region that Russian mining industry first established itself. The Urals, then as now, were the centre of the iron ore industry.

To make way for this enterprise, the natives were driven off their pastoral lands with the same ruthlessness as that displayed by European Imperialism in Africa and elsewhere. One difference there was, however, and that is, unlike millions of natives in Africa, for instance, who have become proletarianised, the Bashkirs continued to maintain their nomadic existence. The mines were worked by Russian convict and other imported labour. Similar conditions existed in the Altai region, an area as large as France. All the minerals—gold, silver, copper, lead, iron ore and zinc—exploited in this part of the Empire were the exclusive property of the Russian industrialists.

Once the Czarist imperialists had secured the land for the large agrarians and mining concerns, they left the social structure of these primitive peoples intact, governing them with the aid of the native chiefs. The semi-feudal gentry of the Bashkir territory were closely linked with the mullahs (Moslem priests) of Kazan. They occupied the same relationship towards the Czarist autocracy as do African tribal rulers towards the British Imperial Government under Indirect Rule. For these 'privileges' the native gentry paid tribute to St. Petersburg.

Czarist Imperialism also made use of the Bashkirs as soldiery. After Napoleon's retreat from Russia in 1812, Alexander decided to 'liberate' the nations of Europe, in alliance with Prussia; and it was at the battle of Leipzig in 1813 that he used Bashkir cavalry units, armed with bows and arrows.¹

Most assimilated of the Siberian communities bordering the Kazak steppes were the Kazan Tartars. They adopted many Russian ways while retaining their Mohammedan religion, and in return for the services they rendered Czarism in keeping other natives in subjection they were allowed to monopolise the trade of supplying goods in exchange for indigenous products such as hides, skins, cotton and other raw materials. The wealth they obtained from this trade enabled them to send their children to the few schools maintained solely for the sons of the semi-feudal gentry, and even sometimes to Kazan University.

¹ D. S. Mirsky: *Russia: A Social History*, 0. 247.

5. *Central Asia or Turkestan.*

Turkestan, which now includes a number of Soviet Central Asian republics, was the name given to the Czarist Empire in Central Asia and, with Trans-Caspia, represented its truly colonial section. Administration was through a kind of Indirect Rule, subordinated to the authority of Russian military governors and the Petersburg autocracy.

When Bokhara and Khiva succumbed to the Czar, Russian political agents were appointed to direct the emirs and other Moslem chiefs of these countries in ruling their populations. "The Emirs remained and became loyal vassals of the Czar, whose 'native states' policy permitted them to continue to enrich themselves at the expense of their subjects. For example, the Emir of Bokhara possessed, at the time of his flight in 1920, a personal fortune in bullion and gems of \$175,000,000, although the population of his fiefdom was smaller than that of New York City and its economy infinitely less productive."¹

The Emir of Bokhara stood in the same relation to the Mohammedans of Central Asia as the Emir of Sokoto (Northern Nigeria) stands to Mohammedans in Equatorial Africa. He was the Sarikin Muslimin, 'Defender of Islam,' and exercised autocratic power over the Uzbeks, Turkmans, Tajiks, Afghans, Arabs, Kara-Kalpaks inhabiting Turkestan, and even over a Jewish colony said to have migrated from Bagdad, and made great fortunes during the capitalistic boom of the first decade of the 20th century. Samarkand, the Bokharan capital, was one of the most important religious centres of the Moslem world, and was the city in which Tamerlaine was buried.

The Emirs of Bokhara and Khiva, the beys and the mullahs were fully aided and abetted in their misrule by the Russian governors and notorious political administrators and police chiefs. Czarist colonial administration, in fact, reflected the whole corrupt character of the Petersburg autocracy. Not even a pretence was made at 'trusteeship' or 'paramountcy of native interests,' principles enunciated by British colonial administrators. There were no apologists for Czarist Imperialism.

¹ *Soviet Far East and Central Asia* by William Mandel, p. 99.

All the non-Russian peoples of the Empire—the Inorodtzi or 'aliens by origin'—comprising largely the populations of Central Asia and along the Volga, on the right side of which lived the Kalmuks, were completely without national rights or individual liberties of any kind. Unbridled licence was the keynote of Czarist colonial rule, which might in general be said to approximate nearest to the atrocious extermination policy associated with the name of King Leopold in the Belgian Congo. Every Russian official was a little Czar armed with inquisitorial and arbitrary powers; the Czarist colonial administration was a scandal. "After the conquest, both the peoples of the native states of Khiva and Bokhara and those inhabiting the bulk of Central Asia (the resemblance to Hitler's device of the *gouvernement-generale* is more than verbal) underwent even more severe exploitation by government and economy. The Czar's taxes on the population of Russian Turkestan were between 50 and 150 per cent higher than those levelled upon the none-too-liberally treated people of European Russia. While the Czar's tax-collectors took the place of the Emir's, where these had been overthrown, down below the social system remained unchanged. The Russian officers who took the place of the Emir's beks sold supposedly elected offices to the highest bidder, and the native lordlings who won in these clandestine auctions made sure to get back their investment and a sizable profit from the dekkans—the peasantry."¹

By such simple means as expropriating the people of their lands, Russian Imperialism in Central Asia did exactly what European Imperialist Powers have done for the blacks in parts of Africa: dispossessed the natives and left them in many cases to die out. For instance, about a hundred million acres of the most fertile lands of the Kazak and Kirghizian peoples were alienated and given over to Russian settlers. "The sufferers were mainly nomadic peoples, and the whole process was not unlike, though incomparably more painful than, the treatment of the American Indians. Driven into the desert, the nomads' cattle died off, and their masters followed soon after. Between 1902 and 1907, the Kirghiz cattle herds decreased by 27 per cent, and the number of the

¹ *Soviet Far East and Central Asia*, p. 100.

Kirghiz people itself is estimated to have dropped by 7 to 10 per cent in the years 1903-1913."¹

The Kazaks and Kirghizians were subjected to extortionately high direct taxes and indirect exactions of all kinds by the Russian overlords and their native agents. Nomadism was extremely advantageous to the beys, who made the poor and middle families completely dependent upon them by forcing the people to deliver up to them their sheep and cattle. Patriarchal society flourished in Central Asia, and was sanctioned and buttressed by the Russian officials, inasmuch as it carried out the Czarist objective of keeping the people ignorant and tied to local despots whose interests were bound up with keeping them submissive. "The gentry were given support, their privileges confirmed, and even restored or increased. Where there was no gentry the commercial class was chosen as the object of encouragement and support. Old laws and institutions were as far as possible preserved, and the social order that prevailed at the moment of annexation continued and safeguarded."² Nevertheless, there were many revolts amongst the people, which were put down with extreme ruthlessness and bloodshed. The last and most serious uprising among the Kirghizians occurred in July 1916. Following the enormous losses incurred on the eastern front, the Czar sent a large force of Russian soldiers to the Kirghiz capital of Pishpek (now Frunze) to recruit men and horses. They were met with strong resistance from the Kirghiz herdsmen, who, however, being unorganised, were overpowered by the Czar's soldiery. The Kirghizians found their way into the mountains and carried on a kind of guerilla defence, but after several months of brutal decimation, 200,000 out of a population of 800,000 fled to Chinese Turkestan, "to return only after the establishment of Soviet Rule."³

The emirs, beys, and the rest of the semi-feudal gentry, were encouraged by the Russian imperialists to utilise forced labour for the cultivation of cotton, which, distributed from the centre of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, went to feed the ginning

¹ Quote from Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia, Vol. 32, p. 377, Ogiz, Moscow, 1936.

² D. S. Mirsky: *Russia: A Social History*, p. 288.

³ Prince D. S. Mirsky: *Russia: A Social History*, p. 237.

mills of Krenholm in Latvia and the textile factories of Lodz in Poland. Silk was also largely raised in Uzbekistan. The lands used for cotton and silk cultivation were confiscated from the natives and the people driven into the Gobi desert and the mountain regions. Hordes of Kazaks and Uzbeks fled into the wilds of Siberia and the Gobi regions in order to escape from the Cossacks who were sent from time to time to round them up for work on the cotton plantations of the Russian landlords.

Economic Imperialism.

Czarist Imperialism followed the by no means unique principle of keeping the colonial areas backward, using them only to provide raw materials for the industries of the European section of the Empire. Thus rich and fertile lands were neglected and allowed to fall into the extremities of poverty. Such raw materials as were easily accessible were transferred west. European Imperialism in Africa, while almost as circumscribed in outlook as Czarism, has, in the interests of finance-capital, supported the building of railroads, the construction of docks, and opening up of mines. Railways in Czarist Russia, outside of the metropolitan centres of European Russia and the great imperial arteries like the Trans-Siberian, the Trans-Caspian and the Orenburg-Tashkent lines, were practically non-existent. Where they were built they were designed purely for military purposes. Up to 1913, the Russian railway mileage covered 73,000 kilometres compared with 500,000 in the United States during the same period. *Corvée* (forced) labour was used for building military roads as part of the imperialist expansion in Central Asia. The primitive tribes of Siberia were rounded up for work on the Trans-Siberian railway and other military construction. Even up to the time of the Revolution, the Central Asian colonies were far more backward politically, culturally and economically than British Africa, with all the disadvantages of Western imperialist rule in that continent.

This is in part explained by the fact that the Russians themselves enjoyed no democratic liberties. Because of the democratic tradition in Britain, there have always been liberal and humanitarian elements among the British people expressing themselves through Parliament and public life in

support of the colonial peoples. It is not that these people are fundamentally opposed to Imperialism. They are not, but they would rather see colonisation of the Liberal 'trusteeship' kind in the place of die-hard Tory Imperialism. They consider that the same ends can thereby be achieved more effectively. Their influence has been used in an endeavour to curb the extravagances of imperialism and the more brutal manifestations of capitalism in the Colonial Empire. Since there was a complete absence of such restraining influence in Czarist Russia, because of the absence of democratic liberties and free parliamentary institutions, there existed no liberalising tendency to counter excessive abuses against the colonial peoples of the Russian Empire. Even the Left-wing parties, with the single exception of the Bolsheviks, paid scant attention to the problems of the Colonial peoples of the Empire; and even they, functioning as they did under conditions of illegality, were in no position to help secure reforms for the subject peoples, or to obtain for them even such limited concessions as are granted from time to time to Indians, Africans, and other colonial peoples of the British Empire. Pissemskiy, a Russian sociologist closely acquainted with the lives of the Kalmuks, wrote in his diary in 1885 that, compared with a Kalmuk, a Russian peasant lived like a prince! So evil, so extremely dire, were the conditions of the oppressed populations of Central Asia that, before the Revolution, many of them were dying out.

There was no direct contact between the Russian people and the more primitive colonial populations, except where Russians were banished or took refuge in Siberia. The only contact the oppressed peoples had with the 'superior' race was through the Czar's political agents and Cossack mercenaries, who levied and collected taxes and maintained 'law and order.' All higher government posts in the national and colonial regions were held by Russian officials. Even the most culturally advanced subject peoples were excluded entirely from such administration as there was, except in the western Baltic provinces and Georgia. Of course, there was no question of representation in the Duma for the 'inferior' Siberian and Central Asian races. They were not even permitted the right allowed to the natives of West Africa, who are provided with the opportunity of selecting a certain num-

ber of representatives to the various colonial legislatures. In every respect Russian colonial rule was inordinately more repressive and backward than British colonial administration.

Inter-Racial Discord: 'Divide and Rule' Policy.

The Czarist Government of set purpose engendered among the Slav population hatred and contempt of the subject peoples, who were officially referred to as 'aliens.' National discord between the peoples was deliberately fanned. One people was set against another: Armenians against Georgians; Uzbeks against Turkmans; Cherkesses against Chechens and Ingushes; the Great Russians against all the others; and all against the Jews. Ethnic groups were deliberately separated by arbitrary administrative boundaries, which forced them into association with other tribes and groups with whom they had ancient feuds. It was easy enough to incite divisions and internecine strife in such circumstances. All this provided a means whereby the many subject peoples tended to lose sight of the double oppression of the Czar and their own native exploiters, and blamed their unfriendly neighbours as the cause of their desperate economic and social plight.

Of the minorities under Czarism, the Jews were the most vilely treated. Unlike the colonial peoples of Central Asia and the nationalities of the western part of the Empire, living in territories of their own, the Jews were a minority living on the territories of other groups: in Great Russia, in Byelorussia, in the Ukraine, in Poland, the Baltic provinces, and the Caucasus. Like the Negroes of the Southern States of America and the natives of territories in South and East Africa colonised by Europeans, the Jews were segregated from the gentile populations. In towns where they were allowed to live, they were ostracised in ghettos, like the natives of Kenya and South Africa, who are segregated in reserves. The most elementary human rights were denied to them. Their children were not permitted to enter the schools, special taxes were imposed on synagogues, and no Jewish worker could be employed except by a Jew. Like the natives of Kenya and South Africa, Jews were prohibited from owning land, nor were they permitted to work as labourers in the fields. In keeping with the policy of 'divide

and rule,' the Russian capitalists and landlords organised pogroms whenever the peasantry became restive against the despotism of the autocracy. For while inter-racial feeling was fostered between the different national minorities, overpowering hatred for the Jews was stimulated among all. The Jews were represented universally to the workers and peasants of the Czarist Empire as the cause of their poverty and misery. They were told that improvement of their conditions was not to be secured by reforms from the Russian ruling class, but by reprisals against the Jews. The mass lynchings or pogroms which the Czarist ruling class instigated against the Jews in times of crisis can be likened to the lynchings which are fomented in certain parts of the United States by the landlords and capitalists against the Negroes, to divert the attention of the 'poor whites', especially the sharecroppers, from their own white exploiters.

This social exclusion fostered among the Jews, always a literate people, a sort of defence mechanism, expressed through religious cohesion and a sense of 'superiority' towards the rest of the world. They tended to hang closely together and to seek worldly success in so far as they could achieve it within the pale, as a sign of their 'superior' ability.

Role of the Orthodox Church.

Everywhere the Orthodox Church reigned supreme. Having a primary interest, as the largest single owner of land in the Empire, in keeping the people ignorant, it very ably assisted the State, of which it was a component part, in buttressing the whole system of Czarist Imperialism. There were as many religions and religious sects in Czarist Russia as there are in India today: Orthodox, Uniats (United Greek), Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Jews, Karaite Jews, Sunni-Moslems, Shiya-Moslems, Ismailiya-Moslems (spiritual subjects of the Aga Khan and descendants of the Assassins), the dualistic religion of Avesti of Manchian origin, Nestorians, Shamanists, Lamaists (Buddhists), and many others. Religion was applied in the Czarist Empire as an anæsthetic to lull the masses to sleep. To use the Communistic aphorism, it was indeed 'the opium of the people.'

"The special function of the Orthodox Church was to teach Christian obedience to the Russian lower classes, to

convert the peoples of the East from their dark heathenism, and, above all, to suppress the Old Belief and the dissenting sects that represented the national and plebeian opposition to the Europeanised and noble-owned State. The Church was given full facilities to fulfil its duty towards the State. . . . And the Church did what the State demanded of it. . . .

"The higher clergy was recruited from the class of 'Learned Monks,' exclusively Ukrainian till the middle of the 18th century. For the most part they were the sons of secular priests, as only these were as a rule admitted to the clerical schools. The clergy thus grew into a closed caste; parishes were handed over from father to son, or son-in-law, for priests' daughters were invariably married to prospective priests. The clerical class formed a sort of exotic growth in the midst of secular society."¹

The Church also played an important role in the early development of capitalism in Russia. For instance, "the monasteries were among the first capitalists and long retained a leading position as money lenders."²

In the regions of Central Asia, the Moslem religion played a similar role in bolstering the Czarist autocracy. And while the Orthodox Church was in conflict with Islam, the Czarist Government allowed the mullahs religious freedom, using them as instruments of Imperialist policy. In Samarkand, for instance, ten per cent of the population were mullahs.

Cultural Backwardness.

The absence of any native intelligentsia among the Asiatic peoples left them isolated from the progressive current of Western civilisation, and tended to leave the semi-feudal superstructure intact. While European rule in many parts of Africa also tries to maintain the tribal and semi-feudal forms of society, it has been obliged to create some kind of educated class which will provide native clerks and government functionaries able to cope with the commercial and administrative needs of the colonies. In Czarist Russia, colonial administration in Central Asia and Siberia was so corrupt, and the general economic and social level so backward, that this need never arose. While the system of

¹ Prince D. S. Mirsky: *Russia: A Social History*, pp. 210-211.

² D. S. Mirsky: *Russia: A Social History*, p. 144.

Imperialism is fundamentally a retarding factor in the industrial development of colonial areas, European capitalists, however, have, in their own interests, made some progress in developing mining, agricultural plantations, and small-scale industries in many African territories. Capitalist exploitation of colonial areas in Czarist Russia was so backward that there was practically no such thing as a native proletariat in Central Asia. Hence the Russian Government were not impelled by self-interest to sponsor education, and the great masses of the people in these parts of the Eastern Empire were almost entirely illiterate, and certainly from the standpoint of western civilisation more backward than the native population of any of the West African territories under British rule.

In the civil administration, in the courts of 'justice,' in the schools run chiefly for the children of the Russian settlers, Russian was the only language used. Due to this restriction, many nationalities did not even have a written language of their own. It was officially laid down that "the Russian state school must be Russian and nationalistically patriotic."

This was the policy known as Russification, and it knew no bounds. The cultural progress of the non-Russian populations throughout the Empire, particularly the 'inferior' races of Central Asia, was totally ignored. Scanty government budgets were allowed for education in the colonial territories of the East, and where official schooling was provided, it was confined almost exclusively to the children of Russian officials, traders and colonists. The natives paid the taxes and the children of the dominant race reaped the cultural benefits. In Turkestan, for instance, 98 per cent of the students were always Russian. In Buriat-Mongolia 95 per cent of the Russian children were admitted into the schools in 1915. Of the Buriat children, there were just 194. The Buriats were, of course, entirely illiterate in their own language. Only the Llamas (the local clergy and monks) were an exception. They used Tibetan characters, and kept exclusively to themselves their knowledge of the Buriat-Mongolian alphabet.

This story was repeated from one colony to another. The position was such that when the Czarist Department of

Education did get down to planning the introduction of universal primary education for the Slav population, it stated that the process would require 125 years, with an annual expenditure of 76 million rubles. It was left to the Soviet Government to wipe out illiteracy among the Slavic and Asiatic populations in less than twenty years.

Most of the oppressed nationalities were almost completely illiterate at the time of the Revolution. In Armenia, only 4.2 per cent were literate; in Tartaria, 8-10 per cent. The Kazaks numbered only 2 per cent of literates; the Uzbeks, 1 per cent; Chuvashians, 5 per cent; Mariys, 3 per cent; Tajiks, 0.5 per cent; Yakuts, 0.5 per cent. And so the last pre-Revolution census, from which these figures are taken, goes on. For the guidance of the reader, we must point out that the census defined literacy as the ability to sign one's name. The people of Byelorussia petitioned the Czar for a university in 1915. Three-quarters of their population could not read. They had 13,000 Greek Orthodox Churches, 704 synagogues, 113 Roman Catholic Churches, 5,000 licensed saloons, but not a single college, and permission to erect one was not granted.

As one of the main conditions for the promotion of cultural progress is a vernacular press, it is not astonishing that this was strictly forbidden in those limited sections where a certain autonomy was permitted, such as Finland, and among the extremely pro-Czarist bourgeoisie of Georgia. Not more than 20-25 newspapers were published in Czarist Russia in the languages of the national minorities.

The other cultural constituents: the theatre, music, drama, were practically non-existent outside the metropolitan centres of St. Petersburg and Moscow. There was the Ukrainian opera in Kiev, and a few Armenian, Georgian and Tartar theatres which led a miserable existence.

Throughout the great stretches of the Empire, culture was reduced to the lowest possible ebb. Only the dance allowed outlet for cultural expression, and the folk songs of the peasants, who, like the Negroes, sang of their misery as they toiled. No wonder the ignorant millions turned to the Church and vodka as their only means of recreation from the wretchedness of their daily existence and the heavy burden of their dreary lot. Not for nothing did the Czarist

bureaucracy use the Church in holding down the masses; not for nothing did Russian Imperialism utilise religion in its depredations.

This, then, was the state of the Russian Empire when Lenin and his party addressed themselves to the task of capturing power and liberating the Russian and Colonial peoples of the East from the Czarist 'prison of nations.'

CHAPTER THREE

HOW LENIN SOLVED THE COLONIAL QUESTION

"NO NATION can be free if it oppresses other nations."

This statement of Marx and Engels, the founders of Scientific Socialism, is a clear formulation of the fundamental principle of Self-Determination for colonial peoples, the implementation of which Lenin, their greatest disciple, achieved in 1917. This achievement still remains one of the most outstanding successes of the Russian Revolution, and provides a living example to the British, American, French, Dutch and other imperialist nations still faced with the task of finding a solution to their colonial and national minority problems.

Realising that "the socialists cannot reach their great aim without fighting against any form of national oppression," Lenin and his followers not only made themselves the champions of the Russian workers and peasants, but consistently advocated the liberation of all the non-Russian peoples of the Czarist Empire, regardless of their degree of social and cultural development. "The socialist of a great country or nation possessing colonies who does not defend this right is a chauvinist," taught Lenin. "To defend this right does in no way mean to encourage the formation of small States, but on the contrary it leads to a freer, more fearless and therefore wider and more universal form of government and unions of government—a phenomenon more advantageous for the masses and more in accord with economic development."¹

The correctness of this political principle is proved by the solidarity of the Soviet peoples in the present crisis. Furthermore, its rightness and the need for its extension is observable in the aspirations of the peoples of the smaller European States to political independence, now being expressed in the current plans for federated groups on the continent.

¹ Lenin and Zinoviev: *Socialism and War*, Little Lenin Library, Vol. 3, p. 25.