

That is why he described 1905 as the 'dress rehearsal' for October, which ushered in the Soviet régime and emancipated not only the workers and peasants of Russia proper, but also the millions of exploited people in the colonial territories of the Czarist Empire. And it was the teeming millions of Asiatic Russia who supported the Bolsheviks in the struggle against the counter-revolution and foreign intervention. For with the granting of the Right of Self-Determination and the concession of voluntary separation by the formerly imperialist country, the national bourgeoisie is deprived of the demagogic platform by which it binds the masses to itself. Once the subject country is freed from the foreign yoke with the voluntary consent of the formerly dominant nation, the native capitalists and landlords are exposed as the substitutes of the foreign overlord. As long as Czarism ruled, the native bourgeoisies of the subject and oppressed nations were able to pose as the defenders of the national aspirations. Once the Bolsheviks had declared the subject nations' Right to Self-Determination, this, their sole prop, was gone. "For communism knows that the amalgamation of the nations into a single world economic system is possible only on the basis of mutual confidence and voluntary agreement; that the formation of a voluntary amalgamation of nations must be preceded by the separation of the colonies from the 'integral' imperialist 'whole,' by the transformation of the colonies into independent States."¹

¹ Joseph Stalin : *Marxism and the National Question*, p. 197.

PART II

THE NEW RUSSIA

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW THE CZARIST COLONIAL EMPIRE WAS
LIBERATED

THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION was the opportunity and Lenin and his party were *the agents* who used the opportunity to implement the principle of Self-Determination for the subject peoples of the Russian Empire, even to the point of voluntary separation, if desired. Lenin had consistently stressed that without theory there can be no revolutionary practice, and here the Bolsheviks had theory ready for immediate application. The historic moment did not find them wanting. The liquidation of the Czarist Colonial Empire was not accidental, but a deliberate policy of socialist strategy and objective.

Indeed, the more one studies Lenin's interpretation of Marxism and the invaluable original contributions which he brought to revolutionary theory, the more one becomes convinced of the outstanding greatness of the man, of the uniqueness of his mind and personality. Nowhere among Socialist movements of Western Europe has there been thrown up such a theoretical and revolutionary giant. Certainly not in England, where the intellectual class has tended to regard theory with contempt and scorn. That is why the British Labour Movement has grown up in such shapeless form. It reflects the intellectual outlook of its ruling class, which shies away from theory as though it were a deathly contagious disease. Hence the ineffectuality of the British Labour Movement, for without theory practice has nothing to guide it.

The Bolshevik Party, having a clear conception of its goal, was able, four days after the capture of power, to issue on

October 30, 1917, its historical Declaration of Rights of Peoples, in which it established the Right of Self-Determination for the Russian colonial peoples and national minorities. Thus was inaugurated the transformation of the Czarist 'prison of nations' into the present Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Much, however, was to happen before the metamorphosis was finally achieved.

Before the leaders of the Revolution had time, metaphorically speaking, to catch their breath, the counter-revolution had been set in motion. Not only had the capitalists and landlords organised themselves for an attack on the centre of the Revolution, under Kolchak, Denikin, Wrangel, Krasnov, Mamontov, Kornilov, Alexayev, Yudenitch, etc., but they called in outside aid for the assault on the Soviet Power. British, German, French, Japanese, Polish, Finnish, American and Czech battalions were massed against the Russian workers and peasants in a wide scale attempt at intervention. In fact, it seemed that all the 'civilised' nations had converged on Soviet territory in an attempt to crush the new Soviet Power. Winston Churchill, at that time British Minister for War and Air, spent £100-million of the British taxpayers' money in trying to break down the new Soviet Power. It was only the action of the British working class movement, expressed through their Councils of Action, which achieved the withdrawal from Soviet soil of the British forces headed by General, now Baron, Ironside of Archangel, and stopped help for the counter-revolutionaries. Since that time the U.S.S.R. has been anxious to avoid the possibility of a British Expeditionary Force setting foot on its territory. The Soviet leaders have long memories.

It took three years to rid the Soviet soil of its own counter-revolution and the foreign intervention. Yet, almost immediately upon the capture of power, on November 16, 1917, Lenin issued the document, signed by himself and Stalin (who had been appointed Commissar of National Minorities), which released the subject peoples of the Czarist Empire from their bondage and raised them from colonial dependencies to the level of independent States. This document was issued in the name of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, and was ratified by the Third Congress on January 18, 1918. It enunciated the following principles:

1. *Equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.*
2. *The Right of the peoples of Russia to self-determination, including the right to secede and form an independent State.*
3. *The abolition of all national and religious privileges and restrictions whatsoever.*
4. *Free development for the national minorities and ethnographical groups inhabiting the territory of Russia.*

Lenin was not afraid to risk the possibility of certain sections of the dependent Empire seceding, as actually happened in the case of Finland and the Baltic Provinces. Even with all the Great Russian people fighting desperately for their lives against the combined capitalist forces of their own and several foreign Powers, Lenin did not say to the subject peoples that they must wait and see what the outcome of the war would be. Today, when Britain is fighting for its national existence, the people of India, Burma, Africa, and other colonial territories; are told that their claims for self-government cannot even be considered until the enemy is first defeated; that the present, when they must mobilise all their forces against the Axis, is not an opportune time to make constitutional changes of a fundamental character.

How differently Lenin behaved. He did not start haggling with the colonial peoples of the Russian Empire, offering them minor concessions in return for their support against the enemies of the Russian Revolution. Inspired by the fundamental principle that all peoples—irrespective of colour, race, creed or degree of social development—have an inalienable Right to Self-Determination, including the most backward Asiatic races, that they have the right to decide their own destinies for themselves, Lenin offered them unconditional independence. This spontaneous declaration had a tremendous political and psychological effect. It inspired confidence in the Bolsheviks, and was instrumental in rallying millions of subject peoples of the Czarist Empire to the side of the Soviet Government at the most critical period of the struggle against the counter-revolutionary and interventionist armies.

Moreover, Lenin recognised with incisive clarity that the

civil war could be won, and the young Soviet Power consolidated, *only* by the immediate liberation of the subject peoples and oppressed nationalities. By proclaiming their independence he gave them something worth fighting for—a 'vested interest' in the Revolution—and the Soviet Government was able to mobilise their support against the counter-revolutionaries and foreign armies. This decisive action, this unhesitating, unequivocal declaration of rights for the subject nationalities, made without quibble or stipulation, was the essential factor which guaranteed the victory of the Revolution.

As Stalin observes: "*It need hardly be shown that the Russian workers could not have gained the sympathies of their comrades of other nationalities in the West and the East if, having assumed power, they had not proclaimed the right of peoples to political secession, if they had not demonstrated in practice their readiness to give effect to this inalienable right of peoples, if they had not renounced their 'rights', let us say, to Finland (1917), if they had not withdrawn the troops from Northern Persia (1917), if they had not renounced all claims to certain parts of Mongolia and China, and so on, and so forth.*"¹

This renunciation of imperialist power politics was addressed to all the colonial and semi-colonial victims of Czarist foreign policy in the Soviet Government's Declaration of December 7, 1917. It declared that "*all your racial and cultural institutions are free and inviolable*

"Mohammedans of the Orient, Persians, Turks, Arabians, and Indians! People of all countries that have been partitioned among the greedy plunderers of Europe in the wars in which they have staked your lives and your goods, your freedom and your heritage! We declare that the secret treaty of rapine to seize Constantinople made by the Czar whom we have overthrown, and confirmed by the fallen Kerensky, is torn up and denounced! The Russian Republic and its committee of government are opposed to the seizure of the territories of others! . . . The imperialist European despoilers have seized your countries to make them their colonies and to enslave you! Drive them out!"

¹ Joseph Stalin: *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, p. 113.

Revolution In The Border Regions.

The only Great European Power to turn its back upon territorial aggrandisement, the young Soviet Republic was able to rally the moral support and goodwill of its Eastern neighbours. This was important for, after the fall of Czarism in February 1917, the Revolution spread from Leningrad, Moscow, and other metropolitan centres of Western Russia, to the border regions—East and West; from Finland to Central Asia and the Caucasus. While the Great Russian workers were fighting to achieve power for the Soviet State in the great industrial centres of the metropolis, the landlords and capitalists of the colonial territories were busy setting up bourgeois-nationalist governments. In Siberia, for example, Social-Revolutionaries and Monarchists vied with one another in setting up governments hostile to the Bolsheviks. In Murmansk and Archangel the Social Revolutionary governments were supported by British troops. These native capitalist exploiters of the Western Empire and feudal lords of the Central Asian Empire laboured under the impression that the Great Russian workers and peasants had made the Revolution just in order that they might instal a number of smaller autocracies in place of a single Czar. They had a friendly regard for the Russian workers then, but when the second—the *October Revolution*—occurred, replacing the bourgeois Kerensky Government with the Bolshevik Government, the landlords and other exploiting elements in the border territories became hostile to the Soviet Government and opened their countries to the armies of the counter-revolution as bases of operation. For instance: "In October, 1919, Yudenich, starting from a neighbouring base in Estonia, actually fought his way into the suburbs of Petrograd, but he was driven out and defeated through a vigorous concentration of troops, due to the energy of Trotsky."¹ But when Wrangel, Kolchak and Denikin tried to draw support from the border regions, the native masses turned against their own reactionaries. Lenin's Declaration of the Right of Self-Determination deprived the native ruling sections in the colonial and dependent territories of the old Empire of the only slogan with which they could rally the masses behind them. They now stood exposed as

¹ Bernard Pares: *A History of Russia*, p. 482.

being concerned with nationalism purely as an end in itself; as bourgeois nationalists desiring freedom from Czarist oppression merely to become petty oppressors themselves.

Commenting upon the attitude of these upper-class non-Russian elements to the revolutionary events in the metropolitan part of the empire, William Mandel, Research Associate of the American-Russian Institute, says that "the opportunity for unbridled development of capitalism for which the national bourgeoisie, the ginners of cotton and traders in wool, had hoped and even fought during the time of the Tsar disappeared with the coming of the Bolsheviks to power. These elements, literate, aware of the course of events in European Russia, and hearing from the local Bolsheviks their plans for development towards socialism, united with the beys and mullahs, who also saw the writing on the wall, to forestall the Soviets. Thus were formed the bands of Basmachi who terrorized Central Asia until as recently as 1931 and had held important territories until 1922."¹

As the reactionary attitude of the native bourgeoisie became evident, the workers and poorer section of the rural populations and landless peasants began to create their own Soviets in those colonial areas like Trans-Caucasia, which even at that time boasted certain industrial enterprises and therefore possessed an advanced proletariat. Civil war thereupon ensued, as it had done in Russia proper when the workers supporting the Bolsheviks had set up their local Soviets. But this time the newly formed Red Army, under the People's Commissar of War Trotsky, having consolidated power, was able to come to the assistance of the workers and peasants of the border regions and help them to secure power for their local Soviets. In this way Trans-Caucasia was brought under Soviet influence; Georgia was liberated from the Mensheviks, who were being backed by the British and French; Azerbaijan from the Mussavatists, or native bourgeoisie; and Armenia from the Dashnaks. By 1921 Soviet power had triumphed throughout Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia which federated to form the Trans-Caucasian Federated Republic.

This succession of events affords a concrete example of

¹ *The Soviet Far East and Central Asia* by W. Mandel, p. 108.

the interplay of the social revolution starting in a metropolitan country with a national liberation struggle in the colonial regions, which it influences to a very large extent. It demonstrates also the gravitation of the struggle from the metropolitan area to the colonial areas and back again to the 'mother' country. What is the force which promoted this oscillation? It is that the Russian imperialists of the 'mother' country not only oppressed the Russian workers and peasants 'at home,' but had their roots deep in the non-Russian colonial and backward territories of the Empire. Consequently events in St. Petersburg (Leningrad) and other parts of metropolitan Russia stimulated revolutionary uprising in the colonies; and the success of the colonial liberation movements against Czarist Imperialist rule and the counter-revolutionary forces which attempted to use the outlying territories as rallying points influenced again the contest in the 'mother' country between the Russian workers and peasants and their ruling classes.

What is not generally known even among well-informed Western European socialists is the contribution made to the 1917 Revolution by the colonial peoples of Central Asia.

As a result of the tremendous losses inflicted on the Russian Army by the Germans in East Prussia, "the Czar was compelled, in June 1916, to issue an edict decreeing the mobilisation of the colonial peoples for work in the rear of the army. Central Asia was to provide 250,000 men. The very attempt to mobilise the natives for service in the armed forces of the hated Czar added insult to injury. But with a fine disregard for the most elementary needs of these people, the Russian authorities proceeded to carry out the mobilization at the height of the farming season. Central Asia burst into flame. Having no unified organization or plan of action, but determined not to leave their native soil to work for the army of their conquerors, the native peoples, settled and nomad, in town and country, took up arms to prevent the conscription of their men. The rebellion, which began in July, was finally put down in November of 1916. The terror which accompanied the suppression was so great that fully a million nomad Kirghiz and Kazaks fled into Sinkiang. Yet the Czar was able to conscript only 120,000 of the 250,000 workers whom he had hoped to get. The Central Asian

rebellion has a significance in modern world history that is little appreciated. It was the first serious crack in the structure of the Russian monarchy and was, in effect, Central Asia's contribution to the overthrow of the Czar in the following year."¹

Significance Of The National Question.

The danger of ignoring the National and Colonial Question, of withholding the right of the colonial countries to full Self-Determination, was fully brought home to the Spanish people during the civil war of 1936-39. We must never forget that the Spanish Fascist leader Franco organised his counter-revolution from a colonial territory—Morocco—and then, because the Republican Government made no move to declare the Moors directors of their own national life, Franco was able to bring over the regular battalions of the Spanish colonial force. Then, since the Spanish anti-Fascist forces—Liberals, Socialists and Communists—made no claim to extend Self-Determination to the people of Spanish North Africa, Franco was able to exploit the nationalist aspirations of the Moors by promises of independence to recruit native levies to put down the Spanish workers and peasants at home.

The failure of the People's Front Government was largely a political reflection of its class composition.² While the most progressive and democratic régime in Spanish history, capitalist interests predominated. Apart from that, there was not a single political party in Spain—not even the Communists, professedly followers of Lenin, who always stressed the tremendous importance of the right of oppressed peoples to national independence—which so much as broached the issue.

Since the People's Front Government of Spain was essentially an Imperialist Government dedicated to the maintenance of the Spanish Colonial Empire while instituting reforms at home, its denial of liberty to its African subjects was a conscious policy. Progressive though it was as compared with the Monarchy in its desire for social reform in Spain, it still clung to the colonial *status quo*. Coincident

¹ *The Soviet Far East and Central Asia*, by W. Mandel, p.103

² For a detailed analysis of this question, read Fenner Brockway *Workers' Front*, Chapter VI.

with the inherently imperialistic outlook of the Republican leaders on the Colonial Question was their dependence upon the goodwill of Imperialist France and Britain rather than upon the support of their own colonial peoples. Senor Viçens, well-known educationalist and adviser on matters colonial to the Spanish Republican Government at the time, admitted in an interview with an American Negro journalist, Miss Thyra Edwards, that the Republic had not granted liberation to the Moors as it would have increased nationalist ambitions in the adjoining French territories of Morocco, Algeria and Tunis, which France was not yet prepared to satisfy.¹

All that Republican Spain gained from dependence upon the Blum Popular Front and Chamberlain Tory Governments was the farce of 'non-intervention' and the final success of Franco and his counter-revolutionary allies. Truly, "a people oppressing other peoples cannot be free." The Spanish workers and peasants failed to remember their doubly oppressed coloured brothers and thereby found themselves enslaved under a régime of Fascism, which, to achieve the victory of reaction at home, made use of the very colonial people which the anti-Fascist leaders sacrificed for power politics. The Russian workers and peasants—thanks to Lenin—on the other hand, extended the Right of Self-Determination to their colonial comrades in the struggle against the common oppressor—Czarist autocracy—and were thus able to consolidate their Soviet Power in the first place, and later, in unity with the erstwhile subject races, to bring into being the U.S.S.R., a more stable and unified State than the ramshackle Czarist Empire.

We have said that the Spanish Socialists and Communists neglected the Moors. This was so, although even Stalin himself had long warned Western European Socialists against the 'superior' attitude which they manifested towards the coloured races. "The tens and hundreds of millions of the Asiatic and African peoples suffering from racial oppression in its crudest and most brutal form did not as a rule enter the field of vision of the 'Socialists'." he declared. "The latter did not venture to place the white peoples and coloured peoples, the 'uncultured' Negroes and the 'civilised' Irish,

¹ See *Africa and World Peace* by George Padmore.

the 'backward' Indians and 'enlightened' Poles on one and the same footing. It was tacitly assumed that although it might be necessary to strive for the emancipation of the European non-sovereign nationalities, it was entirely unbecoming for 'decent socialists' to speak seriously of the emancipation of the colonies, which were 'necessary' for the 'preservation' of 'civilisation.' These apologists for socialists did not even suspect that the abolition of national oppression in Europe is inconceivable without the emancipation of the colonial peoples of Asia and Africa from the oppression of Imperialism, and that the former is organically bound up with the latter."¹ It is a vast pity that Stalin did not recall this admonition to his Spanish disciples when they most needed the support of genuine allies!

The Treaty Of Union Between Russians and Non-Russians.

By the end of the Russian civil war and the victory over the armies of foreign intervention, there were four full-fledged Soviet Socialist Republics and a number of smaller territories respectively designated Autonomous Republics, Autonomous Territories and Autonomous Regions, as well as several Peoples' Republics (later Sovietised), in Central Asia. Outer Mongolia, which was among the last-named, still remains a Peoples' Republic in alliance with the U.S.S.R. The territories formerly comprising the metropolitan regions of the Czarist Empire were transformed into the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. The other full-fledged Soviet Socialist Republics were the Ukrainian, the White Russian (or Byelorussia), and the Transcaucasian.

In 1922, the last-named Republic, where Bolshevik influence predominated, approached the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (R.S.F.S.R.) with the proposal that all the Republics should unite together. Due to the civil war and the famine period, all these countries were economically very much worse off than in 1914, and believed that their union would materially assist their recovery and also provide a greater measure of safety against the possibility of the return of their former rulers and foreign enemies. The

¹ Joseph Stalin: *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question* pp. 111-112.

proposal was approved by the Ukrainian and White Russian Republics, and in December 1922, at the first All-Union Congress of Soviets, it was unanimously decided to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, at that time comprising:

1. Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic
2. White Russian Soviet Socialist Republic
3. Transcaucasian Socialist Federated Republic, composed of:
 - (a) Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic
 - (b) Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic
 - (c) Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic
4. Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic

Other Republics, as they evolved into full-fledged Socialist Republics, joined the Federation.

The Second All-Union Congress of Soviets adopted the first Constitution of the U.S.S.R. in its final form in 1924. It incorporated special features designed to protect the rights of all the non-Russian national republics from any possible domination by the Great Russians who, with their population of 100 million, formed the preponderating majority of the population of the entire Union. Of set purpose the word 'Russia' was omitted from the name of the Union, in order not to offend the nationalist pride and susceptibilities of the non-Russian peoples.

Certain sovereign rights of the component Republics were merged into the U.S.S.R., which was envisaged as the federal pattern for the future World Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and allowed for the admission of further territorial units as the World Revolution extended beyond the boundaries of the old Czarist Empire. Defence and foreign affairs, for example, became a function of the central federal government, which also established a single form of Soviet citizenship to cover the population of the entire Union. The general economic plan for the whole Soviet territory was the task of the central government of the Union, which also became responsible for regulating foreign trade, currency, utilisation of the land, for controlling transport and communications, and measuring and weighing standards. The education and health of the Union population were also the concern of the federal government, but much of the actual

administrative work was delegated to the governments of the separate republics and smaller political divisions.

Each of the Union Republics retained complete self-government, except in matters over which power had been vested with the All-Union Government. If, however, a Republic introduced legislation which was contrary to the terms of the treaty of Union, this law could be annulled by the All-Union Government. Every Republic, if it wished to do so, had the right to secede from the Union.

The Soviet Government quite early in its career implemented its disavowal of an imperialist policy by concluding equal treaties and pacts of friendship with the Asiatic countries of Persia and Afghanistan in February 1921, and with Turkey and Outer Mongolia in March and November respectively of the same year. These semi-colonial countries were the objects of aggression by Russia during the Czarist period.

Self-Determination and Socialist Federation.

The right of secession was, of course, the crucial testing point of the Treaty of Union. Exercise of this right, however, is not obligatory. It does not follow from the acknowledgment of the rights of nations to form separate States that nations enjoying this right must necessarily divide. "The aim of Socialism is not only to abolish the present division of mankind into small States, and all national isolation, not only to bring nations closer to each other, but also to merge them," Lenin wrote. "*Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can only achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede.*"¹

Nations whose political life is based upon a socialist economy tend towards closer unity in the common interests of all. The most noteworthy fact about the formation of the Soviet Union as a federation of separate Socialist Republics with one centralised government is that the proposal for unity came from the Transcaucasian Soviet Republics—the erstwhile colonial sections of the Czarist Empire; that is, it

¹ Lenin: *Selected Works*, Vol. V, pp. 270-271.

was a voluntary union of the newly formed independent States after they had successfully ousted their Russian overlords and native princes and landlords. These former subject races of the Czarist Empire had, during their subjection, borne an intense hatred towards the Russians and everything Russian. Yet, having achieved Statehood at the hands, and with the assistance, of the workers and peasants of the formerly oppressing Russian nation, they forgot their century-old animosities and themselves made the first approaches for unity with the newly established Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. It was as if the Irish masses, after having successfully thrown off British Imperialism and the yoke of their own capitalists and landlords, should approach an English Socialist Government with a proposal for common union; or as if the Boers in South Africa, who are still at enmity with the British settlers in the Union, were voluntarily to come into a British Socialist Federated Commonwealth on an equal basis. In that case, the Europeans, as a national minority, would have autonomous rights within a black republic, since the Africans would constitute the overwhelming majority of such a Soviet State.

Stress must be laid upon two very important factors: (1) that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was a voluntary one; (2) that each non-Russian Republic occupied an equal status with the former Imperialist country—Great Russia.

The declaration of the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets on January 24, 1918, made it clear that "*The Soviet Republic is established on the basis of a free union composed of free nations. In order to avoid misunderstanding on the question, the declaration offers to the workers and peasants of every nationality the right to make their own decision in their own authorised Soviet Congress: do they wish, and on what grounds, to participate in the federal government and other federal Soviet institutions.*"

The best example of a federated State based upon private property relations is the United States of America, which, in its present form, was not established as a free and voluntary union. The right to secede was brought into question when the Southern States broke away from the Union in 1861, and in order to maintain the unity of the nation, the Federal Government, under Lincoln, began the Civil War against the

Secessionists. It has often been said that the American civil war was fought to decide the question of slavery, but this is a legend built around a myth. Writing to Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, in 1862, Abraham Lincoln declared: "My paramount object is to save the Union, and not either to save or destroy slavery."

"If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it—if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it—and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that."¹

Later, Lincoln confessed that his purpose had been solely to restore the Union, and that the question of slavery had been incidental. "I can now most solemnly assert that I did all in my judgment that could be done to restore the Union without interfering with the institution of slavery. We failed, and the blow at slavery was struck!"²

Emancipation, however, was at first applicable only to the Secessionist States. It was introduced as a military measure, with the object of inciting the slaves in the rebel States to support the Federal forces against the South. General emancipation came later.

The restoration of the Union, even against the wishes of the Southern States, as expressed in their secession, was the aim of the North. Not so in the Soviet Union, where the objective is *mutual* development, economically and socially, of the separate nations forming the unity. None is concerned to override the other, for here all occupy an equal status and function under a co-operative and not a competitive economic system; production is for use and not for profit, the means of production are under common ownership, not monopolised by individual capitalists. The elimination of private property relations and imperial-colonial antagonisms has contributed largely to the solidity of the Soviet State, whose stability has been so obviously demonstrated in the course of this war.

Had the Soviet revolutions in the western parts of the Czarist Empire—in Poland, the Baltic States and Finland—managed to sustain themselves against their own bourgeoisie and foreign interventionists, they would, as Socialists

¹ From: *Life, Public Service and State Papers of Abraham Lincoln*.

² *Ibid.*

Republics, have come into the present union.¹ But, as we have already shown, the Finnish counter-revolution was assisted by German troops; while the Polish landlords headed by Pilsudski were able to assure the workers and peasants that the Bolsheviks were coming to force communism upon them with the aid of the Red Army. They massed an army and invaded the Soviet Ukraine, and when the Russians counter-attacked and had almost reached the gates of Warsaw in 1920, French aid, under General Weygand, helped to push the Red Army back. While the Finnish workers and peasants had already set up their own Soviets, the Polish masses were hoodwinked by their rulers with the bogey of enforced communism, a relatively easy matter, since the Poles as a whole have always looked down upon the Russians as a non-Catholic and less civilised people.

Nevertheless, the Russian Soviet Government recognised the independence of the newly formed Polish and Finnish capitalist Governments. For, declared Lenin, "Every nation must have a Right to Self-Determination. This right promotes also the self-determination of the toilers. It is precisely by recognising the independence of the Polish, Lettish, Lithuanian, Estonian and Finnish Governments that we are slowly but surely gaining the confidence of the most backward among the toiling masses of the neighbouring small nationalities, and of those who are most hoodwinked and down-trodden by the capitalists there. It is precisely by pursuing such a path that we are making the more certain of winning them away from the influence of 'their' national capitalists. We are more certain to gain their complete confidence for the united International Soviet Republic of the future."²

This principle was incorporated in the manifesto which the Soviet Government issued throughout the world in 1920, when the Polish gentry were openly inciting the masses against the Soviets. "Your enemies," it told the Polish working masses, "who are ours, speak falsely when they tell you that the Russian Soviet Government intends to force Communism on the Polish people with the help of the bayonets of the Red Army. Communism is only possible in

¹ The Baltic States and Eastern Poland up to the Curzon Line were annexed to the Soviet Union in 1939.

² See Lenin's *Collected Works*.

countries where the vast majority of the working people have the will to secure it by their own initiative . . . The organisation of Poland in accordance with the interests of the Polish masses must be the work of these working masses themselves."¹

Soviet-Finnish Blunder—1940.

In direct contravention of this principle was the Soviet attack upon Finland by Stalin in 1940. While at the time we recognised the need for the Soviet Union to anticipate Finnish territory being used as a point of imperialist intervention against its own territory, we considered and still do consider that the method employed to secure against this danger was a great blow to the prestige of the Soviet Union, universally accepted by progressive people as the symbol of International Socialism.¹ The procedure of sending in the Red Army and setting up a puppet government under Dr. Otto Kuusinen—a Finnish communist exile—was diametrically contrary to the whole policy of Lenin's conception of National Self-Determination which Stalin himself had been largely instrumental in carrying through in the early days of the Soviet Power.

It is significant that the Russian workers displayed no such enthusiasm for the Finnish war as they have shown in their stand against Imperialist Germany. Educated since the Revolution in the spirit of internationalism, especially as it related to the National and Colonial Question, they could not but feel instinctively that Stalin, however justifiable his motives, had employed a wrong approach in solving the problem. This passivity among the Soviet peoples in turn created among the Western democracies the impression that "Communism rots the soul of a nation," as Winston Churchill declared at the time; "makes it abject and hungry in peace and proves it base and abominable in war."

Adhering to the principles inherent in Lenin's teachings and to the extract from the 1920 Manifesto, dictated by him and quoted immediately above, Stalin should have appealed to the Finnish workers and peasants over the heads of Mannerheim and other Fascist leaders to take direct action

¹ See *LEFT*, Feb. 1940. Article entitled "Hands off the Soviet Union," by G. Padmore.

against any move which these reactionaries, in alliance with Hitler, aimed at the Soviet territory. Stalin could have reminded them how the Soviet Government had, since its inception, recognised and respected the national integrity of Finland and that it relied upon the masses of the Finnish people to see that they did not allow themselves to be made the dupes of pro-Nazi 'patriots' in any encroachment upon the Soviet Union. There is absolutely no doubt that this approach would have secured the sympathy and active support of the overwhelming majority of Finnish workers and prevented the pro-Nazi elements from exploiting the national and racial antagonism felt throughout the whole population, which expressed itself in the stubborn resistance that all classes of Finns put up against the Red Army. It would have prevented the subsequent sequence of events into which Finland was drawn; and would most likely have achieved a stronger barrier to German intervention than was actually provided by the circumstances when Hitler made his attack upon the Soviet Union in June 1941.

Quite true it is that Communism cannot be forced upon a people from outside; but it seems to be equally true that when subject nations achieve independence and come into free and voluntary unity as equals with the former Imperialist country, they are quite unlikely to want to secede. It is important for European workers to take full cognisance of this fact. If it is possible for the former colonies of the Czarist Empire to come together in fraternal co-operation, there is no reason at all why a Socialist Britain, for example, should fear to extend the Right of Full Self-Determination to the subject peoples of the British Empire. Once these dependent territories are given the right to plan their future, in their own interests, they would link up with the more advanced sections of the new Socialist Commonwealth. It is only in this way that the subject peoples of Asia and Africa can ever hope to reorganise their national lives on a co-operative basis; and it is this basis alone which holds out any possibility of real economic, educational, cultural and social advancement to the common peoples of the world.