

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW SOVIET ADMINISTRATION OPERATES
AMONG BACKWARD PEOPLES

EQUAL rights for all peoples, regardless of race, colour, creed or degree of civilisation, epitomises the fundamental conception of political democracy in the Soviet Union. One may criticise and even disagree with many things under the Soviet system as it functions at present, such as the curtailment of civic liberties and the absence of the control which the workers wielded over industry in the years immediately following the October Revolution. But there is no other State in the world possessing such a heterogeneous population which extends the same degree of economic, and social opportunities to *all* of its citizens, including also its coloured races, as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. If in the Soviet Union the individual does not enjoy the same liberty to criticise the Government as do the British, for example, then this restriction applies equally to every section of the Union, and not merely to specified racial communities. No one is penalised for not having been born with a white skin, as in South Africa, where the official policy is "No equality between White and Black in State or Church." The coloured races, comprising the overwhelming majority of the country's population, have absolutely no voice in the government. Racial discrimination of the most rigorous kind—legal and practical—is paramount. The same disabilities based exclusively on colour and race exist in varying degree in other parts of the British Colonial Empire.¹

But "the British commonwealth of nations is not alone among the capitalist democracies in the refusal to institute racial equality within its own territories as a necessary characteristic of political democracy. In the United States, the Negroes, though assumed by the Federal Constitution to

¹ See *Colour Bar in East Africa*, by Norman Leys; and *How Britain Rules Africa*, by George Padmore.

be entitled to vote and represent voters, are by the electoral law and administrative practice of particular States excluded from being full-fledged citizens with the right to vote and become representatives. The Dutch and Belgian Empires have a like discrimination against the native inhabitants. Hence, if equal rights for all races within a sovereign State is the necessary characteristic of political democracy, the U.S.S.R. stands out as the champion of this form of liberty.

"Thus, one of the outstanding features of Soviet political democracy is racial equality; the resolute refusal to regard racial characteristics as a disqualification for the right to vote, to be deputies to the Legislative Assembly, to serve on the Executive, or to be appointed salaried officials."¹

The equality of rights between the peoples of the Soviet Union, regardless of race or colour, is not just a statutory principle, but is translated into practice through the apparatus of government from the highest to the lowest administrative units. To white-skinned citizens of the Anglo-Saxon countries, the question of race and colour might be unimportant, but to the coloured races ethnic democracy is all important. In the U.S.S.R. there are no signs reading "Niggers and dogs keep out." That is why the Soviet Union, despite its many shortcomings, enjoys widespread sympathy among the coloured races of the world.

Administrative Divisions.

There are within the Soviet Union today sixteen full-fledged Socialist Republics:

1. Russia Proper (R.S.F.S.R.)
2. White Russia or Byelorussia
3. Ukraine
4. Azerbaijan

Formerly Transcaucasian Republic

5. Armenia
6. Georgia
7. Uzbekistan
8. Tajikistan
9. Kirghizstan
10. Kazakstan

¹ S. & B. Webb: *Soviet Communism*, Vol. 1, p. 11 (Revised Edition.)

11. Turkmenistan
12. Finno-Karelia
13. Estonia
14. Latvia
15. Lithuania
16. Moldavia

Within each of the Soviet Socialist Republics there are sub-units called

(a) *Autonomous Republics*.¹ Within the R.S.F.S.R. alone there are 17 such republics:

Tartaria; Bashkiria; Dagestan; Buriat-Mongolia; Kabardino-Balkaria; Kalmuk; Karelia; Komi; Crimea; Mari; Mordavia; Volga-German; North Ossetia; Udmurt; Chechen-Ingush; Chuvashia; Yakutia.

Still smaller units are known as

(b) *Autonomous Provinces or Territories, Autonomous Regions, and National Regions*. The number of these within each of the different Union Republics vary. In the R.S.F.S.R., for instance, besides 17 Autonomous Republics enumerated above, there are:

(c) *Autonomous Provinces or Territories*:

Azov-Black Sea; Far-Eastern; Western Siberia; Krasnoyarsk; and North Caucasian.

(d) *Autonomous Regions*:

Adygei; Jewish; Karachai; Oiro; Khajass; Cherkess.

(e) Then there are 19 *National Regions*:

Voronezh; East Siberia; Gorki; Western; Ivanovo; Kalinin; Kirov; Kuibyshev; Kursk; Leningrad; Moscow; Omsk; Orenburg; Saratov; Sverdlovsk; Northern; Stalingrad; Chelyabinsk; and Yaroslavl.

¹ In 1944, after the Germans were expelled from the Volga region, the autonomous Kalmuk republic, which the Hitlerites invaded south of Stalingrad, has been abolished. The autonomous republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, in the Caucasus, has been renamed. It is now called the Autonomous Republic of Kabardins. The Kalmuks are Mongols descended from the Tartars of Mamai Khan, who was defeated on the Don by the Russian Saint Dmitri, not far from the site of what is now the town of Stalingrad. The Balkars are obscure relatives of the Turks, and are famous horse breeders.

Every single political unit throughout the Soviet State—Union Republic, Autonomous Republic, Autonomous Province, Autonomous Region, and National Region—has its own independent Soviet (Council), which is entrusted with the special needs of the inhabitants of the given area.

This structural form of administration enables each national and racial minority living within another ethnographic area to maintain its own identity, if it so wishes, and helps to nurture the many distinctive cultures of the several peoples, the interchange of which has greatly enriched Soviet art, especially the theatre.

In this way the All-Union Soviet Government, centred in Moscow, has solved the centuries-old national, tribal, social, and religious conflicts which existed under Czarism and which still exist in India and Africa today. Such a solution is only possible under a Socialist system in which there are no exploiters to incite one people or race against another in order to 'divide and rule.'

Commenting on the success of the Soviet policy on the National Question, a correspondent writing in the *New Statesman and Nation*,¹ provides us with a contrasting picture of the past and present. He affirms that "In Czarist days the aim of Moscow was to keep the outlying colonies in a perpetual state of internal strife. One race would be set against another so that they wasted all their energies fighting each other instead of uniting to combat Czarist exploitation and oppression. My chauffeur in Yerivan, on a fairly recent visit to the Caucasus, explained it in this way: 'You ask me, are things better than they were? There is no comparison. Previously there was always fighting between the Turks, the Georgians and ourselves, the Armenians. . . . Never in the history of Armenia have things been so good, and they will be better yet.'" It is the hope of a yet better future which inspired these Caucasian peoples to resist Nazi aggression.

Racial Equality in Red Army.

The fraternal solidarity which has developed between the peoples of this multi-national and multi-racial State is best seen in the composition of the Red Army, which includes

¹ September 6, 1941. Article entitled *The Caucasus will not revolt*.

within its ranks more than 100 different peoples and races. There are no segregated racial units such as exist in the fighting forces of the Western democracies. In the U.S.A., for example, Negroes are not admitted into the regular Navy except as mess-men.¹ In the Army, they are segregated into 'Jim Crow' units.² In the British colonial armies—the King's African Rifles and the West African Frontier Force—there is only one black commissioned officer (Captain Seth Anthony of the Gold Coast, gazetted in 1942), while in South Africa the Zulus and other Bantu peoples are not even permitted to bear arms.

In the Red Army members of the 'inferior' races are not only commanders and staff officers, but a considerable number of the higher command are Jews, the most despised of all the subject peoples under the Czarist régime. It was a Jew—General Lev Dovator—who was the first to rout the 'invincible Aryans' after having led into the Battle of Moscow a Cossack regiment, the very 'black hundreds' who used to be employed by the autocracy to terrorise the Jews and keep them 'in their place.' General Dovator's decisive attack broke the German offensive on December 5, 1941, and threw the Nazis back from the Soviet capital. The General, who was decorated by Stalin with the highest Soviet title (Hero of the Soviet Union), was killed in battle. These facts

¹ Since Pearl Harbour where a negro, Messman Dave Millar manned an anti aircraft gun and brought down a Japanese plane, negroes are being trained for service in the U.S. Naval Coast Guard. However, writer Dr. Charles H. Hanson, negro member of President Roosevelt's Committee on Fair Employment Practice: "Negroes are still insulted by the Navy's barring all Negro women, except those passing for white, from the Waves, the Marines and the Spars. We have officers in the Army and Navy; but there is still not a single lieutenant in the United States Marines. The army puts Negroes in uniform, transports them South and then leaves them to be kicked, cuffed and even murdered with impunity by white civilians. In places, Negro service men do not have as many civil rights as prisoners of war. In at least one Army camp down South for a time there was one drinking fountain for white guards and German prisoners and a segregated fountain for Negro soldiers. And Negroes know that just as soon as the shooting stops many Americans will give the same Germans, Austrians, Italians, Rumanians and others who were trying to kill them preference over Negroes who were defending them, simply because these Germans and others are white."

² The highest ranking Negro officer in the American Army is Brig. General Benjamin O. Davis, but he holds no command.

were revealed in a stirring tribute to Dovator and his men broadcast by the Moscow radio, and they illustrate the correctness of Lenin's teaching that only under a socialised régime can colour bars and racial arrogance be eliminated.¹

Racial Representation In Supreme Soviet.

The unity of the diverse peoples of the Soviet Union is exercised in matters of common political and economic interest through the Federal Government, with supreme power vested in the All-Union Congress of Soviets. Two chambers compose the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., namely:

(a) *The Soviet of the Union*

(b) *The Soviet of Nationalities*

Every citizen of the U.S.S.R. over the age of eighteen, without regard to race, colour or creed, is entitled to vote for the election of members to the Soviet of the Union, the basis of representation being one deputy for every 300,000 of the population. Election to the Soviet of the Union, it will thus be seen, is direct. This chamber meets every six months, or more often if necessary.

Election to the Soviet of Nationalities is on a regional basis. All persons over the age of eighteen vote for a nominee to represent the political unit of which they are accredited citizens. Each Union Republic has the right to return 25 deputies; an Autonomous Republic, 11; an Autonomous Province, 5; and an Autonomous Region, and other national areas, one each. In all, there are 1298 deputies—621 in the Soviet of the Union, and 677 in the Soviet of Nationalities. Under this system, the Republic with the largest population (100 millions), the R.S.F.S.R., can return no more deputies than the other very much less populated

¹ In 1944, there were over a hundred Jews holding the rank of General in the Red Army. Among them, Jacob Kreiser, hero of the Soviet Union, who took part in liberating the Donetz Basin, and General Chernyakhovsky, the victor of Minsk and Vilna, who commands one of the Red Army groups on the Polish front. Other leading non-Russian Red Army commanders are: Bagramyan, an Armenian, and Chanchibadse, a Georgian. Stalin, who holds the ranks of Supreme Commander of all the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union, is also a Georgian, one of the former subject peoples of the Czarist Empire. Such "inferior" people would never have been allowed to hold the positions they do in the Czar's Imperial Army.

Republics. This mode of representation, therefore, gives no excess of power to any one nationality, such as the more numerous Great Russians, over others.

"During the Congress of Soviets which assembles from time to time in Moscow, I have watched the delegates from these far-flung territories assemble in the 'Big Theatre' which serves as meeting-place for the Congress until such time as the Palace of Soviets is completed. Mongolians, Tajiks, Bashkirs, Uzbeks, Yakuts, and some scores of other nationalities, representing peoples of almost every creed, stand together in respectful silence as the 'International' is played. Later in the proceedings they pass a unanimous vote of confidence in their Central Executive Committee."¹

To draw an equivalent picture for the British Empire, one would have to imagine deputies from India, from Ceylon, from Burma, Malaya, Africa, West Indies, Cyprus, Fiji, Hong Kong, mixing with members from the English, Welsh, and Scottish constituencies in the House of Commons. But perhaps this would be stretching one's imagination too far, for it is impossible to think that any Imperialist Power would concede so revolutionary a right as the direct representation of all its colonial peoples in its Central Government.

The special function of the Soviet of Nationalities is to watch over the special interests of the different nationalities and minorities, and see that legislation is made to fit their particular needs, customs and culture.

Members of the Soviet Union population, even the most backward, have a dual citizenship: they are citizens of the U.S.S.R. itself, allowing them the right to vote for direct representation in the Supreme Soviet of the Union; and citizens also of the autonomous division (i.e., Republic, Province, National Region, or area, as the case may be) in which they live, giving them the right to vote for representation in the Soviet of Nationalities.

Persons are eligible for election to any Soviet from the age of eighteen, and nominees are put forward by any group of people working together, that is, a collective farm, factory office, educational institute, etc. Everyone included in the group, right down from the chief director to the cleaner, is entitled to take part in the meeting from which nominees are

¹ Allan Monkhouse: *Moscow—1911-1933*, p. 135.

put forward. A local conference of delegates from all the groups nominating candidates then votes on them, and their number is reduced to the allowed limit by the process of elimination. Candidates can only be returned if they receive over 50 per cent of the total votes in the constituency. Voting is by secret ballot, and representatives must be prepared to report on conditions in their individual constituencies, and when they return to their constituencies they are obliged to report on the proceedings in the Supreme Soviet.

The fact that within all groups Communist Party members act in unity secures that persons advocating policies in opposition to that of the Soviet Government will not be returned. However, the right to recall representatives and the provision for a more than 50 per cent vote does safeguard the wishes of the mass of the people.

The authority of the two chambers—the *Supreme Soviet of Nationalities* and the *Supreme Soviet of Union*—is equal. Together they regulate all affairs affecting the common interests of the entire population of the Soviet State. It is from this supreme authority that the members of the executive body, known as the Council of People's Commissars, are elected.

The Supreme Soviet meets at least twice a year for about ten days, but a small number of members is elected to carry on its work between sessions. This is called the Presidium. It does the major part of the work of the supreme authority, but its actions must be ratified by the whole of the Supreme Soviet. The People's Commissars, who are appointed by the Presidium, collectively form the Government; and they, too, are responsible to the Supreme Soviet.

So flexible is the structure of the Soviet system of government that the component parts of the U.S.S.R. have in most cases corresponding local People's Commissars, distinct from the All-Union People's Commissars, who head each of the State departments. The local People's Commissars head the analogous departments in the separate national republics and autonomous territorial governments. To illustrate, the People's Commissar of the U.S.S.R. co-ordinates the educational plan for the whole of the Union. To translate the general educational programme in accordance with the needs

of each of the different Soviet political and administrative groupings, there is an educational commissar for each Union Republic, each Autonomous Republic, each Autonomous Region, right down to the smallest possible grouping. Thus due regard is given to the cultural development of every ethnic section of the population, while the socialist objective directs all towards mutual amity between the different races and peoples, the only basis on which a Socialist society can be secured. The Socialist aim of the U.S.S.R. imposed the spirit of unity upon the multi-national structure of Soviet society.

The latest example of the flexibility of the Soviet political structure is illustrated by the decision of the All-Union Supreme Soviet on February 1, 1944, to extend to the National Republics a greater degree of autonomy in the field of foreign affairs. This amendment will give each of the Soviet Republics the right to set up People's Commissariats of Foreign Affairs and to appoint their own People's Commissars to head these departments. Thus, in future, the All-Union Supreme Soviet, in which all the Republics already have representation, will not merely approve treaties of war and peace, but will refer back to each Republic for its expression of views on matters of foreign policy concerning its respective obligations as a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

With each of the sixteen Republics having the status of an independent sovereign State, and with the additional right of appointing its own People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, it will automatically have the right to send its own diplomatic representatives to the capitals of foreign Powers. This may sound an absurdity, but such an arrangement will only follow the long-established precedent set by British Commonwealth constitutional practice. Under the Statute of Westminster, each of the British Dominions—Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Eire—is considered an independent sovereign State, and as such entitled to appoint its own Minister for Foreign Affairs at home and diplomatic representatives abroad.

In relation to the internal administrative structure of the State, the new constitutional reforms will make no fundamental difference. In the past all matters relating to foreign

affairs were discussed by the All-Union Supreme Soviet, in which, as we have seen, deputies from the National Republics participated and reported back to their respective National Soviets. In future, while this procedure will continue, the Soviets of the different National Republics will have the right to discuss and ratify foreign policy conjointly with the Supreme Soviet of the entire Union. The line to be adopted will, of course, be laid down by the Communist Party Political Bureau, headed by Stalin, and will be guided through the various Soviet State apparatus by the party leaders. Hence a unified policy between the All-Union Government and the different National administrations will be assured. The right of the National Republics to secede, guaranteed by the Constitution, is in no way invalidated by this new administrative change.

The other concession extended to the National Republics by the All-Union Supreme Soviet on February 1, 1944, is in the field of national defence. This is closely related to foreign affairs, for "war is the continuation of policy by other means." In accordance with the reforms, each of the National Republics will be permitted to set up its own Commissar of Defence, and the individual Commissariats will be represented in the All-Union Commissariat of Defence. They will each be responsible for carrying out the decisions of the Supreme War Council of the U.S.S.R. in their respective territories. There will not, of course, be sixteen uncoordinated armies. The armed forces of each of the National Republics will become constituent parts of the Red Army. This right to assemble their own armies could not be accorded to the National territories under Czarism, because of its imperialistic structure. The unity of the Soviet State resulting from its economic structure, and proved indubitably in the course of this war, makes this new departure a possible and feasible one.

The national economy of the Soviet Union has been increased and strengthened by the war. Even more, it has cemented as never before the fraternal solidarity between the various ethnic elements which make up the U.S.S.R. The peoples of the Soviet East have rallied enthusiastically behind the peoples of the Soviet West, whose territories have been devastated by the German armies.

None of these constitutional changes will in any way undermine the fundamental political unity of the Soviet State, but will rather draw closer the divers nationalities constituting the U.S.S.R. by imposing upon them greater responsibilities towards each other. Under a planned socialised system, the contradictions and nationalistic jealousies inherent in capitalism disappear, or are reduced to insignificant dimensions. The economic life of the entire Union is planned at the centre, and the National Republics merely implement the central plan in their respective territories. All this enables the All-Union Soviet to control trade and commercial relations with foreign Powers.

Pyramidal System of Government.

Soviet government starts at the very base of the great pyramidal system, and every citizen, apart from certain legally disqualified categories, from the age of eighteen has the right to vote under the new Constitution. Neither sex, race, colour, degree of literacy, nor property qualification excludes anyone from the right.

At the very bottom of the Soviet system is the Village Soviet. There are 70,000 of these in the U.S.S.R., and they represent about three-quarters of the whole population. Within its territorial limits the village soviet guards the carrying out of the laws of the Union and is empowered to establish village courts. It is also urged to consider the affairs of the Autonomous Region, Autonomous Province, and Autonomous Republic. It has the duty of watching the operations of the State manufacturing and trading departments in its locality, and those of the consumers' co-operative societies. As far as the village itself is concerned, "there is practically nothing that the soviet may not organise, regulate or provide at the public expense, from roads and water supplies, through club-houses and dance floors, up to schools, theatres, and hospitals. To the British reader, accustomed to the narrow range of work allowed to the parish or rural district council, the lengthy and varied catalogue of duties prescribed for the local authority of the village in the Russian steppe or Siberian forest will seem absurdly pretentious, all the more so when it is told by the soviet jurists that within the village the selosoviet is 'sovereign'; meaning that nothing

which it does requires the sanction of any higher authority before it is put in operation."¹ Today the village soviet makes out its own budget, in just the same way as the constituent republic. In this way, every Soviet citizen is compelled to take an active interest in the affairs of the State.

The system of elections and representation took several years to elaborate, and it arose out of long discussions and many congresses. For the Bolsheviks when they assumed power had no cut and dried plan upon which to base the Soviet system. They saw its design as giving to all peoples of the Union, no matter how small and culturally backward, active participation in the direction of government. The Soviets (or Workers' Councils) had been thrown up by the workers of St. Petersburg themselves in the abortive 1905 revolution, and Lenin recognised in them the basis of the future transition government which would direct economic planning towards the Socialist goal, when the centralised State will cease to exist in its present form. Quite true, much of the original power of the early councils has been curtailed; but this curtailment of Soviet democracy operates throughout the Union, and does not apply merely to certain racial sections, as it does in America and the British Empire, where democracy is the monopoly of the whites while the coloured races are denied all democratic rights and economic opportunity.

The system of representation in the Soviet of Nationalities formerly in vogue was that of indirect delegation, with the village and city soviets at the bottom. Under that system the primary soviets responsible for local government elected deputies to higher congresses of soviets governing the larger area; e.g., the village soviet sent its delegates to the congresses of the Autonomous Regions, which sent its deputies to the congresses of the Autonomous Province. This procedure continued right up to the Republic congresses. This system, however, has now been changed, and representation to the Soviet of Nationalities is today by direct election. In fact, all representation is now direct, thus giving all citizens more immediate connection with and control of their representatives.

There is, of course, only one political party in the Soviet

¹ S. & B. Webb: *Soviet Communism*, Vol. 1, pp. 29-30.

Union—the Communist Party. Non-party candidates are allowed, and even encouraged, to contest elections, but the absence of freedom to propagate political views differing from those of the ruling party gives the Soviet State its 'totalitarian' character. Nevertheless, it can unhesitatingly be said that the people of the Soviet Union have in actuality greater participation in their government than those of the Western democracies, chiefly through their representation in and direct contact with their local soviets and the interest they are induced to take in the affairs of the whole State collectively.

How does this system compare in operation with that obtaining within the British Empire in Africa, for instance? Neither under Crown Colony nor under Indirect Rule do the Africans enjoy anything even remotely related to political democracy. But quite apart from their lack of participation in the machinery of government in their own countries, the Colonial peoples of the Empire are denied direct representation in the supreme legislative assembly: the British House of Commons. But even the most backward of the Soviet peoples enjoys representation in the Soviet of Nationalities, as well as general representation as citizens in the Soviet of the Union. Deprived of the privilege of directly voicing their many grievances, the British colonial peoples—Indians, Africans, West Indians, etc.—are unable to draw the attention of those who are supposed to be their 'trustees.' Quite true, there are some Members of Parliament (their number can be counted on the fingers of the hands) who from time to time voice the grievances of the subject peoples, but they are under no compulsion to do so, since they do not represent Colonial constituencies. Capitalist democracy, even in its most liberal form, has positive racial limitations; it does not embrace the coloured sections of the population. Everywhere the coloured races are treated as political pariahs.

"Modern democracy," declared the South African Bantu paper, *Imiro za B Ntundu*, "is a democracy only of the white-skin peoples of the world, and its philosophy is that of brazen spoliation, and the violation of human right of all whose colour is black. The black peoples wherever they reside, under so-called civilised authority, are not respected in the matter of human rights. There is," the paper adds,

"great unrest in Africa amongst the intelligent black inhabitants through the oppressive laws under which they live. Truly the white man's religion (Christianity) has failed to interpret to us the meaning of life in the world."

The Soviets are the political embodiment of Lenin's interpretation of Self-Determination based upon the principle of a planned socialised economy for all the national units constituting the Federated Union. This State structure provides the machinery through which the former subject peoples and national minorities may give expression to their national and cultural aspirations and at the same time unite with each other on matters affecting the common interests of all, such as the defence of the U.S.S.R. against aggression. If the machinery is not functioning as democratically as Socialists in the West would like, then the remedy lies largely in their hands. The sooner the European and American workers achieve Social Revolution, the sooner will they be able to influence political democracy in the U.S.S.R. in the desired direction. Their achievement of Social Revolution will help the Soviet workers to solve their internal difficulties through the removal of the constant threat of imperialist intervention and war. As long as the Soviet Union remains an isolated Socialist enclave in an ocean of capitalist States she will be unable to achieve those conditions of security upon which full political democracy can alone be founded.

Critique of Wilsonian Self-Determination.

Let us compare the Leninist interpretation of Self-Determination with that of President Wilson's. The Wilsonian conception was based upon the capitalistic economic system and conflicting class relations. It is the same conception as that embodied in the Atlantic Charter. Thus it merely fed national exclusiveness. The sovereign States which came into existence at the end of the last World War became an end in themselves. The victorious Allied Powers, Britain and France, exploited Wilson's political conception of Self-Determination to create in Europe a number of small States carved out of the old Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. These States very soon became vassals of France and Britain and were employed as pawns in Imperialist power politics against the Soviet Union.

The tendency to exclusiveness inherent in bourgeois nationalism has become the greatest obstacle to any solution of the burning economic and social problems of Europe, and this in turn has enabled the Great Powers to intervene and so aggravate between themselves the nascent Imperialist rivalries over markets and colonies in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

Most of the post-war States degenerated long before the Second World War broke out into hotbeds of reaction, wherein national chauvinism flourished. National minorities were persecuted with the same vigour of which the dominant nationality had been the victim before it emerged as a sovereign State. This was particularly so in countries like Poland where the Jews, Ukrainians and other ethnic minorities were persecuted by the Poles. In contradistinction there has developed in the Soviet Union a harmonious co-operation and fraternal relationship which has given stability to the Soviet régime, a stability noticeably lacking in any of the multi-national Versailles States. Even the Ukraine, long considered by so-called experts to be the weakest link in the Soviet State, failed to revolt when the German imperialists invaded the Soviet Union in 1941.

This memorable fact reveals even greater significance when we remember how the Czechoslovak State, for instance, disintegrated under the impact of Hitler's political onslaught. Admittedly the most democratic of the Versailles States, Hitler nevertheless found himself able to stir up dissension among the Sudeten Germans, and later to lever the Slovaks off from the Czech body. The Czechs claim that they had achieved internal stability. Quite true, perhaps, they had secured the greatest possible stability permissible within the framework of a multi-national capitalist régime in the present epoch of Imperialist wars and Social Revolutionary upheavals. But it is not unreasonable to suggest that if they had reached that harmony and stability which it has become most obvious that the Soviet Union (with its far greater diversity of races and nationalities) has attained, the grounds of discontent upon which Hitler played would have been absent. Again, in Jugoslavia, it required very little to create division between the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Conscious of the inherent weakness in multi-national capitalistic States, Marshal Tito, the

leader of the Yugoslav National Liberation Movement, hopes to reorganise Jugoslavia on the basis of a federated State in which all the ethnic groups will enjoy the same rights. Despite the imperfections of the U.S.S.R., it seems obvious that a socialist State structure secures a greater cohesion of its multi-national elements than a capitalist form of society, where the very nature of the economy makes for racial conflict.

While nationalism is not something which is ineradicable from human nature, it is at present a psychological factor which must not be ignored. "To refuse to recognise the thing that is cannot be permitted; recognition enforces itself," wrote Lenin. Thus bourgeois nationalism must be recognised, even though it is a narrow chauvinistic and exclusive nationalism in an age when economic requirements of civilized society can no longer be satisfied within the framework of national States.

It is because Europe failed to reconstruct her political life in keeping with her economic needs, country after country degenerated into Fascism. Commenting upon the crisis of capitalist society Stalin observed that "the post-war period (after 1918) presents a gloomy picture of national enmity, inequality, oppression, conflict, war and imperialist brutality on the part of the nations of civilised countries both towards each other and towards the non-sovereign peoples: on the one hand we have a few 'Great' Powers, which oppress and exploit the mass of dependent and 'independent' (but in fact wholly dependent) national States, and the struggles of these powers among themselves for the monopoly of exploiting the national States, dependent and 'independent,' against the intolerable oppression of the 'Great' Powers; the struggle of the national States among themselves for the extension of their national territory; the struggle of the national States, each in particular, against its own oppressed national minorities; and, finally, the growth of the movement for emancipation on the part of the colonies against the 'Great' Powers and the intensification of national conflicts within these Powers and within the national States, which as a rule contain a number of national minorities. Such is the 'world picture' inherited from the Imperialist war. Bourgeois society has proved to

be utterly bankrupt in the matter of solving the National Question."¹

In this connection a special correspondent of *The Times*, commenting on the new attitude towards nationalism in the liberated Balkan countries, writes: "An important feature of the new movements, common to the conquered and the satellite countries, is their attitude to nationalism. Understanding that national problems cannot be passed over with empty phrases, the new leaders believe a treatment radically different from that of the past is required. They denounce the old chauvinist imperialism, but admit the right of each nationality to its own national territory and a Government of its own kin. Where nationalities are inextricably mixed all local languages should be used in the administration. In general regional cultural autonomy should be reconciled with the necessity of State formations larger than the territory of the smaller nations. This policy has already been applied with success in some regions. In Yugoslavia the thesis of Tito that Serbian and Croatian peoples had one common enemy—the Germans and their tools the Croatian and Serbian Fascists—was widely accepted. The people saw that in fact Ustashe and Chetniks collaborated with each other and with the Germans against their own and each other's peoples, and that only the National Liberation Movement protected both Serbs and Croats from the invaders. In the areas where the worst atrocities were committed by Ustashe against defenceless Serbian civilians, Serbs and Croats fought side by side against the Germans. Another example is Transylvania, where Rumanians and Hungarians, under the leadership of the left, are seeking a national reconciliation which will enable both to live side by side in peace. In this they are definitely supported by Soviet policy. Perhaps the most striking case of all is Macedonia, whose right to home rule has been recognized after 40 years of bloody disputes between 'Great Serbian' and 'Great Bulgarian' imperialists. Tito realizes that the people of Macedonia do not wish to be made into Serbs or Bulgars, and is willing to let them rule themselves, within the framework of a federal Yugoslav State. Peaceful democratic development in the Balkans is impossible

¹ Joseph Stalin: *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, p. 90.

without representative government, social reforms, and national tolerance. No Government is representative which does not derive considerable support from each of the three main social groups—peasants, *intelligentsia*, and industrial workers. Social reform is meaningless unless it improves the lot of the poor majority as well as the prosperous minority of the peasants, and unless the administration that executes the reforms is purged of men compromised either by collaboration with the Germans or by personal corruption and brutality to the population. National tolerance will remain an empty phrase until victimization by chauvinist lawyers and gendarmes is genuinely suppressed."¹

Modern European nationalism has its historic roots in a definite epoch—the epoch of rising capitalism—and manifests itself in the modern capitalist State. With the disappearance of capitalism and the bourgeois State, the importance of nationalism will diminish, and from its present significance as a political form will gradually become a cultural concept. Until that time a way has to be found to satisfy the nationalistic feelings and aspirations of those peoples whose national development has been retarded by their subjection to Imperialism. "In its battle with feudalism," Lenin said, "capitalism had been a liberating influence, but imperialistic capitalism (the capitalism of recent times) became the greatest oppressor of nations." This is quite true; the oppressors of small nations are all Imperialist Powers.

Utopianism of Zionism.

Perhaps the clearest example of the redirection of the political aspirations of a minority into cultural channels is that of the history of the Jews in the Soviet Union. Prior to the October Revolution, the Jews were the pariahs of the Czarist Empire. The persecution which these people suffered only strengthened their will to survive and bred in them separatist tendencies, the most popular expression of which was Zionism, a platform extremely difficult of attainment under Imperialism and unnecessary under a Soviet régime, as events proved.

The disabilities which the Jews experienced under Czarism were removed by the Soviet Power, and therefore the

¹ *The Times*, May 26, 1945.

grievances which nurtured separatist tendencies no longer existed. The Jews took their place alongside other Soviet citizens on an equal basis, and today they occupy responsible positions in all government and party institutions. For example, Trotsky, founder of the Red Army and the first Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, was a Jew. Today Lazarus Kaganovitch, Stalin's brother-in-law, is a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party and of the Supreme Council of Defence. Another Jew, Lieut.-General Jacob Smushkevitch, is leader of the Soviet Air Force. Alexander Losowsky, Assistant Foreign Affairs Commissar and one time official spokesman of the Soviet Government, is also a Jew; and so is Maxim Litvinov, the highly esteemed diplomatist, at present Assistant Commissar for Foreign Affairs.

However, recognising that certain sections of the Jewish population harboured national aspirations, the Soviet Government put the territory of Biro-Bidjan at their disposal as the foundation of a Jewish Soviet Republic. Since, however, the Jews enjoyed equal rights with all other citizens of the Soviet Union, the majority of them were not anxious to leave their homes and occupations for the purpose of setting up a new exclusively Jewish republic in the Far East. Moreover, realising that 'race' was no longer a barrier to the attainment of the highest positions or to contact with the soil, the post-Revolution generation of Jews, divorced from orthodox Judaism, look upon Zionism as a reactionary manifestation of bourgeois nationalism. So it was that Biro-Bidjan failed as a Jewish Republic, for only those ardent pioneers enthusiastic for a national Jewish territory faced the exactions of turning a barren region into a thriving country.

Since they are accepted into the body politic of the U.S.S.R., the younger generation of Jews evince no separatist tendencies. Rather, the process is the reverse, one of assimilation. Under capitalist reaction the separatist tendency inherent in Zionism is fostered by wealthy Jews. They have enthusiastically supported Jewish settlement in Palestine, while they were very heated in the early days in their derision of the Biro-Bidjan project, which, if it failed, did so because the fundamental basis of the Soviet system destroyed its *raison d'être*. Rich Zionists are desirous of a

national home founded upon capitalistic and not Socialist economy, a national home in which they will have power to exploit the poorer Jews and any other people who come their way. Palestine, therefore, is much more to their liking than Biro-Bidjan, or, for that matter, the Soviet Union.

Black 'Zionism'.

This distorted view of bourgeois nationalism is not confined to Jews. In America, where Negroes occupy a position analogous to that of the Jews under Czarism, and in Nazi Germany, Poland and other east European territories they have developed a similar separatist tendency, which at one time expressed itself in the Garvey Movement. Garveyism was a political reflection of Negro persecution. Afro-Americans, like the Jews, have no territory of their own. They constitute minority enclaves in the territory of white majority populations, and hence hanker after a country of their own.

Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.), was a West Indian Negro who built up a tremendous following. Starting with a membership of 17 Negroes in 1918, his organisation soon developed into the largest coloured mass movement in the Negro world. "There has never been a Negro movement anywhere like the Garvey Movement, and few movements in any country can be compared to it in growth and intensity. By 1920 it was proportionately the most powerful mass movement in America. Supporters of Garvey have claimed that the U.N.I.A. membership in 1920 reached three millions, and Garvey himself claimed in 1924 six millions. The latter figure is certainly exaggerated, for that would have meant at least half of the total Negro population of America at that time. That nine-tenths of the Negroes in America were listening to him is probable, and as far as can be gathered, from very insufficient data, he may well have had two million members already in 1920. Money and members poured in from every State in America, from all over the West Indies, from Panama. Negroes sold their dearest possessions to send money to Garvey. His name rolled through Africa. The King of Swaziland told a friend some years after that he

knew the names of only two black men in the Western world, Jack Johnson and Marcus Garvey.

"What was Garvey's programme? Back to Africa. The Negroes must have Africa back for themselves. They would go and settle there and live in Africa as free and happy as Europeans lived in Europe and white Americans in America. How were they to get Africa back? They would ask the imperialists for it, and if the imperialists did not give it, they would take it back. That was in essence all that Garvey had to say."¹

Unable to challenge the Imperialist Powers that control Africa, Garvey attempted to force a foothold in Liberia, the West African Negro Republic, where he planned to oust the black ruling class. The result would have been to create antagonism between the Negro immigrants from America and the indigenous people, in the same way as a clash has resulted between the two Semitic peoples—Jews and Arabs—in Palestine. The cause of such conflict is chiefly politico-economic, and has little to do with racial differences. It mattered little to Garvey that the people he was trying to displace were African Negroes, any more than it does to the bourgeois Zionists that in their effort to build a 'national home' on capitalistic lines in Palestine they are edging off their lands another Semitic (Arab) people. The economic conflicts thus generated inevitably express themselves in a struggle for political hegemony, causing constant strife between the peoples so contending in a given territory.

The only satisfactory solution of the Palestine problem is to be found within the Soviet form of multi-national state, where every community—Arab, Jew and Christian—can find accommodation on the basis of absolute political and cultural equality on the one hand, and the country developed under a planned economy in the interest of all on the other. Such a policy cannot be carried out under the ægis of imperialism—British, French or American. Neither can it be achieved by Arab nationalism nor capitalist Zionism. The same applies to plural societies like South Africa inhabited by English, Dutch and Bantu.

Garvey ran foul of the American Government, was sent to prison in 1926, and after his release, deported back to his

¹ C. L. R. James: *History of Negro Revolt*, pp. 68-69.

native Jamaica. He later came to London, from where he hoped to stage a 'come-back,' but his health broke down and he died in the British capital in 1939, a leader deprived of his mass following. Despite his political limitations, he was undoubtedly the greatest Negro leader since Toussaint L' Ouverture.

Garveyism, as utopian as Zionism, is merely an ideological expression today. As the Garvey Movement began to disintegrate, the American Communists, hoping to salvage its remnants, evolved an equally fantastic scheme to give the Negroes 'self-determination' in the form of a 'black belt' State. The genius behind this scheme was the same Dr. Otto Kuusinen who cut such a sorry figure in the Soviet-Finnish crisis of 1939-40. Kuusinen, who had never seen a dozen Negroes in his life, worked out a detailed plan on the basis of data supplied by American Communists to set up a sort of Biro-Bidjan below the Mason-Dixie Line. Here the American Negroes, under Communist leadership, were to find that 'national home' which Garvey was unable to achieve for them in Africa. But the project was quickly killed by the ridicule of the American Negro press. The black capitalists, unlike their Zionist brothers, had no illusions. They argued, and quite correctly, that such a 'national home' could not be realised within the existing framework of American capitalist-Imperialism. And if and when Socialism came to America, they maintained, there would be no necessity to create a glorified Harlem in the backwoods of Dixieland, for then the Negroes, like the Jews in the Soviet Union today, would enjoy full political, economic and social equality with other ethnic communities and become completely assimilated into the body politic.

Inter-racial Basis of Soviet Power.

Czarist Imperialism had frustrated the economic and cultural development of the subject peoples. Therefore, declared Lenin, it was the duty of the Russian workers and peasants once they had achieved power to help the more backward peoples along the path of progress, giving their nationalistic aspirations a socialist content. Following out

¹ George Padmore: *Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, pp. 125-126

this injunction, the Soviet Government has harmonised the national energies of the diverse peoples and directed them towards the objective of Soviet civilisation.

In the U.S.S.R., the national tributaries are flowing into one mighty river, enriching the social soil of the entire Soviet Union. This result of Lenin's statesmanship has been testified by Stalin. Since "the Soviet State is a multi-national State," Stalin emphasised, "clearly the question of the relations among the peoples of the U.S.S.R. cannot but be one of prime importance for us. . . . It was necessary to establish fraternal co-operation among the peoples on the basis of economic, political and military mutual aid by uniting them in a single, federated, multi-national State. The Soviet Government could not but see the difficulties of this task. It had before it the unsuccessful experiments of the multi-national States in bourgeois countries"

"Since then fourteen years have elapsed. A period long enough to test the experiment. And what do we find? This period has shown beyond a doubt that the experiment of forming a multi-national State based on Socialism has been completely successful. This is the undoubted victory of the Leninist national policy.

"How is the victory to be explained? 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 the force 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.; the feeling of mutual distrust has disappeared, a feeling of mutual friendship has developed among them, and thus real fraternal co-operation among 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 whose stability

might well be envied by any national State in any part of the world."¹

The reason for this stability is that all have an interest in the well-being of the country, since all participate as equal citizens, politically, economically, and socially, in its upbuilding and running. "No widespread Empire," observe the Webbs, "has yet found it possible to establish a parliament effectively representing its whole realm; just as none has yet attempted to carry on its whole production and distribution of commodities and services by a cabinet responsible to a single popularly elected parliamentary assembly. But the U.S.S.R. finds it quite practicable and useful to let each village in Kamchatka or Sakhalin, or beyond the Arctic circle, elect its own selosoviet, and send its own deputies to the rayon congress of the oblast (province) or autonomous republic, and ultimately to the All-Union Congress of Soviets at Moscow, in exactly the same way, and with exactly the same rights, as a village in the oblast (province) of Moscow or Leningrad. Such a remote and backward village, it must be remembered, which uses its own vernacular in its own schools and its own court of justice, enjoys likewise the privilege of filling the local offices, even the highest of them, with its own people."²

Colour Bar Illegal In The Soviet Union.

Aristocracy of colour obtains nowhere in the Soviet Union. Racial discrimination is a criminal offence. "The equality of the 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," states Article 123 of the Soviet Constitution. It continues: "Any direct or indirect restriction of the rights of, or conversely, the establishment of direct or indirect privileges for citizens on account of their race or nationality, as well as the advocacy of racial or national exclusiveness or hatred and contempt, is punishable by law."

It is not generally known that among the different peoples living in the Caucasus and taking their part in the fight of the Soviet Union against Nazism is a community of several

¹ J. Stalin: *The National Question*, p. 31.

² S. & B. Webb: *Soviet Communism*, Vol. I, pp. 158-159.

hundred Negroes. These people have been living for several centuries on the shore of the Black Sea and constitute an autonomous political area in the Abkasia region near the well-known holiday centre of Sukhumi. They are the descendants of Negro slaves brought from Africa by Arab slave traders to cultivate the fertile tobacco fields on the shores of the Black Sea. Coming successively under the tyranny of Turkish, Persian and Czarist masters, they now live in harmony with their Moslem neighbours, distinguishable from them only by certain traces of negroid ancestry. They represent the most favoured Negro community in the world, living on terms of equality with all other peoples of the Soviet Union, free from all the disabilities of racial discrimination imposed on Negroes in America, and British democracies like South Africa, and with their own village soviet.

The Soviet Government's attitude on Colour and Race is in complete contrast to that which obtains in most so-called Christian lands, where people of colour may be insulted, segregated, and discriminated against with impunity, since the Governments of these countries provide them with no legal and constitutional protection.

It is asserted by certain people who try to discredit the Soviet contribution to the solution of this centuries-old problem of inter-racial strife that Russian people were never as colour-conscious as, for example, the Anglo-Saxon races. The fact remains, however, that during the Czarist Empire, racial persecution existed widely and was sanctioned by official policy. The Soviet Government is the only Government which makes it an offence against the fundamental laws of the State to preach or practise race hatred. Not even in the most advanced democratic countries, Britain and America, does such a constitutional law exist.

With all its shortcomings and limitations of personal freedom and civic liberties, the Soviet Union has much to teach the Western democracies in solving the problem of race relations, which is one of the biggest problems of the twentieth century. And for this reason, if no other, the U.S.S.R. makes a strong appeal to the sympathies of hundreds of millions of coloured peoples in Asia, Africa, America, and other parts of the world.

CHAPTER SIX

HOW ILLITERACY IS BEING LIQUIDATED.

THERE are in the Soviet administration many undemocratic features, but there is no doubt that it has made a conscious and forceful drive towards the liquidation of illiteracy and the development of a national culture among the many different peoples of the U.S.S.R. The question of language has been the key factor in the Union's policy of forwarding the cultural development of the former colonial peoples.

To most English people, who are not directly confronted with the problem of national minorities within their own country, the language question does not have the significance which it has in the European countries or within the Colonial Empire.¹ In most European countries, in Yugoslavia, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Rumania, etc., it has been the policy of the Governments to impose the language of the dominant racial element within the State upon the other ethnic groups, denying them, in most cases, the right to use their vernaculars in the schools and as official media of communication. Czarist Russia had been the chief sinner in this respect. The Russification of the Empire had been aimed at extirpating the national languages and cultures so that succeeding generations would grow up familiar only with the imposed language and culture of the ruling Russian nation. This policy, however, had precisely the opposite result from that envisaged.

Language and Nationalism.

With the growth of nineteenth century nationalism, language assumed a most disproportionate importance. The use of one's own national tongue became a mark of prestige. arising out of this circumstance, national consciousness among

¹ The British Parliament in 1943 recognised the right of the Welsh people to use their own language in the law courts of Wales.