

PREFACE

While there exists an extensive literature on the Soviet Union—good and bad, friendly and hostile—very little has been written on how the U.S.S.R. solved the National and Colonial problems which it inherited from Czarist Russia. The transformation of this vast ramshackle Empire into a socialised commonwealth was one of Lenin's greatest achievements.

This book is an attempt not only to survey the results of this achievement, but also to interpret the *modus operandi* adopted by the Bolsheviks in bringing about the transformation. It is not enough to describe and admire the achievements of the Soviet Union. It is equally important to understand *how* these achievements were made possible. This is the emphasis of the present book. For the solution of the Colonial Question in Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and the Caribbean is one of the most urgent problems facing the Western Powers — Britain, France, Holland, Belgium, America—at the end of this war.

We think it fair to say that, in spite of many shortcomings inherent in any project of such stupendous proportions, embarked upon without benefit of a political and economic precedent by which it might be guided, the Soviet Government has, within 25 years, achieved more than any other Great Power has accomplished in centuries. While it has committed grave errors, due largely to the empirical methods forced upon it by historical circumstances, the Soviet Government has every reason to be proud of the results of its National Policy, especially when comparisons are made with the deplorable economic, social and political conditions existing in the Asiatic colonies at the time of Czarism's collapse. In passing judgment, we must remember not only the heights to which the Soviet Union has risen but also the depths from which it emerged. The industrial basis upon which the Bolsheviks founded their economy, after the stress of war, revolution, and foreign intervention, had fallen far behind that even of 1914. The whole vast territory of the former

Russian Empire had been laid waste, and all vestige of industry had almost completely disappeared. However much we may criticise the Soviet Union's sins of commission and omission, its policy towards the former colonial peoples of the far-flung Czarist Empire indicates conclusively that only under a planned economy based on Socialist principles is it possible to abolish, root and branch, national and racial oppression and exploitation.

The Soviet Union is no utopia; it is a new civilisation in the making. The establishment of a socialised economy and the abolition of capitalist property relations have created the psychological conditions engendering mutual confidence between different races, colours and creeds. The October Revolution laid the foundation on which has been built the fraternal collaboration of the world's most heterogeneous population. People who were traditional enemies have during the war been united in defending their common heritage. This was the Soviet Union's secret weapon.

The U.S.S.R. is a political federation of multi-national Republics in which all peoples, *irrespective of their degree of civilisation and social development*, enjoy equal political, economic and social status. It is the one country in the world where the Colour Bar—legal or accustomed—is officially proscribed. Constitutionally, it is a criminal offence to insult anyone on account of race or colour. Never during three years' residence in the Soviet Union did I encounter the slightest manifestation of racial chauvinism or colour bar. To coloured people, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the British Empire, this is of tremendous significance.

Not only was there an absence of colour bar in social and inter-racial relations, but coloured people from foreign countries working in the Soviet Union were encouraged to enter into Soviet public life and take an active part in political affairs. I had the honour of being the first Negro to be elected a Deputy to the Moscow Soviet, and during my term of office I had every opportunity of getting practical experience in the working of Soviet municipal administration. Incidentally, in my own country (Trinidad) I would not be eligible for election to the local Legislative Council, as I do not possess the necessary property qualifications. This again

illustrates the difference in ethnic democracy as it obtains in the U.S.S.R. and the British Empire. In South Africa, Kenya and the Rhodesias, the blacks, who form the preponderating majority of the populations of those countries, are completely disfranchised, while in most other colonies where the coloured peoples are theoretically entitled to vote they are practically disqualified by the property regulations.

The denial of democracy to the coloured races of Asia, Africa, and America on ethnic grounds contains the seeds of a potential conflict fraught with extreme danger. Left unsolved, this problem may, after the present war, contribute to the greatest crisis in human relations—world inter-racial war. This danger cannot be dismissed merely as the 'hallucination' of extreme nationalists. It is sufficiently important to have received the attention of the Netherlands Minister of Colonies, Dr. H. J. van Mook, in a recent address to the Royal African Society.¹ "The germs of nationalism and liberty," he observed, "have been so firmly planted in the minds of great colonial populations that their growth is inevitable, and their suppression would only lead to that most horrible of wars—a racial world conflict."

It is understandable why the coloured Asiatic peoples of the Soviet Union, former victims of the most ruthless forms of Imperial exploitation and social discrimination, were united behind the Soviet Government in the struggle against the Nazi *Herrenvolk* with a fanaticism and self-sacrificing spirit which has aroused the admiration of the whole world. Not only the valour of the Red Army, but the solidarity of this unique multi-national State, has demonstrated beyond a doubt the loyalty of subject peoples once they have achieved national freedom and entered freely into political unity with the formerly dominant nation. It is the finest testimony to the judgment of the Soviet Union's National Policy, as laid down by Lenin.

As Chairman of the Negro Bureau of the Profintern, I had the privilege to lecture on the Colonial Question as it exists in various parts of the British, French, and other Colonial Empires to students of KUTVU, in Moscow, the University which trains Asiatic students for administrative leadership in their own territories. I had good opportunity to observe the

¹ July 5, 1943.

fraternal solidarity existing between the diverse peoples of the Soviet East, many of whom were traditional enemies under Czarism. KUTVU students represent a cross section of the Union, comprising more than one hundred different races and nationalities. These young men and women, whom many European colonial officials would no doubt describe as 'backward Asiatic savages,' not only devote themselves to the problems of the Soviet Union in relation to the national reconstruction of the former colonial territories of the Czarist Empire, but take a keen interest in the colonial administrative methods applied by the Western Powers in dealing with Africans and other 'backward' races. This kind of comparative education was fostered by the Soviet authorities; for these Asiatic students have had no personal experience of life under Czarist Imperialism, and can only really appreciate the achievements of the Soviet Government by comparing them with the economic backwardness and cultural stagnation of the colonial peoples in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere.

In all the Union Republics, Autonomous Republics and Autonomous Territories that I visited during my residence in the Soviet Union, I found the natives of those regions taking a leading part in the political administration. Today, throughout the Asiatic Republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakstan, KUTVU graduates are to be found conducting the local soviets, trade unions, co-operatives, kolkhozes, cultural institutions, etc.

Whatever criticisms or charges one might level against Stalin's policy in relation to Socialism and World Revolution and his programme of 'Socialism in a single country,' he has in the main adhered to the fundamental principles laid down by Lenin as far as concerns the Right of Self-Determination for the Soviet national minorities.

Acknowledgment is made to Stalin's book, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*. This is the most comprehensive Leninist treatise on the subject, an indispensable Marxist classic. Other useful books are Prince D. S. Mirsky's *Russia*, providing a *Short Cultural History*, Fannina Halle's *Women in the Soviet East*, the *Soviet Far East and Central Asia* by William Mandel, issued under the auspices of the Institute of Pacific Relations; Dr. Hans Kohn's *Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, the best simplified expose

of the subject, and *Soviet Communism* by Sidney and Beatrice Webb. The last-named undoubtedly offers the most detailed survey of the Soviet system available in English, and contains much valuable information on the concrete application of the National and Colonial Policy. There is also a Penguin Special, Leonard Barnes's comprehensive study of *Soviet Light on the Colonies*. This presents in popular form an enlightened and detailed description not only of the achievements of the Soviet Union but also of the means by which it has solved the Colonial and National Question. I can highly recommend this as an essential book on this subject.

Due to the limited material available, this book required much teamwork to produce. I, therefore, wish to express my especial thanks to my principal collaborator, Miss Dorothy Pizer, for her valuable co-operation in gathering and sifting historical data, and to our mutual friends, T. R. Makonnen, P. P. V. de Silva, S. Raja Ratman and T. B. Subasingha for their helpful criticisms and suggestions; also to Dr. C. Belfield Clarke, who first suggested the idea of writing the book, and whose encouragement throughout its preparation sustained its course. Finally, I am indebted to Dr. S. D. Cudjoe for reading the proofs and making useful corrections. Whatever merit the book may have is due largely to the unselfish co-operation and helpful criticisms of my Colonial colleagues with whom I have discussed the manuscript at every stage of its preparation. Any deficiencies in this co-operative effort are entirely mine.

GEORGE PADMORE.

London, June, 1945.

INTRODUCTION

HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

A BRIEF SURVEY—FEBRUARY TO OCTOBER

The great significance of the October Revolution is that it placed power in the hands of the common people for the first time in history. That is to say, the proletariat replaced the bourgeoisie as the dictators of power. This in turn opened up the way for the transformation of society from capitalism to socialism.

Never since the Glorious French Revolution, which replaced the power of the bankrupt feudal régime by that of the middle class, had history seen such a social upheaval. It was the first successful socialist revolution of all time!

Unlike the so-called Fascist and Nazi revolutions (in reality, counter-révolutions), the October Revolution encompassed a fundamental change in the political, economic and social life of the Russian peoples.

This complete transference of power from the capitalists to the working class was the essential prerequisite for the solution of the National and Colonial Question. Only the proletariat can cut the Gordian knot which binds the subject peoples to the yoke of imperialism. The following brief survey of the main events which occurred in Russia between the fall of the Czarist autocracy and the rise of the Soviet power will illustrate the incapacity of the Provisional and Kerensky Governments to find a solution to the problem.

What makes a revolutionary situation? There is no specific formula which will reply to this question. An incident in a factory, a strike for economic demands, etc., may, provided the objective conditions are there and a disciplined party exists to take advantage of the situation, lead to a revolution which can change the whole social structure. Thus it was on February 23, 1917, that 130,000 men workers

in Petrograd were out on strike. A considerable number of women workers were demonstrating also. Strikes had been sporadic for some time, but the resentment among the workers seems to have reached its height on that day, and continued until February 25, when the Czar ordered regiments of guards out against them. Some men were shot down, but instead of crushing the workers, the show of authority heightened their revolutionary mood. Next day other regiments of the Petrograd garrison sent against the workers were won over by them. The soldiers joined the workers and began to arrest Czarist officials and generals and to free political prisoners from the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. On February 27 the Czar ceased to control for ever the destinies of the peoples of the Russian Empire.

The Revolution was made by the workers and peasant soldiers, but the power of the state passed into the hands of the capitalists and landlords, who set up a Provisional Government under the monarchist Prince Lvov. "The Provisional Government included Milyukov, the head of the Constitutional - Democrats, Guchkov, the head of the Octobrists¹, and other prominent representatives of the capitalist class; and, as the representative of the 'democracy' the Socialist-Revolutionary, Kerensky²."

Side by side with the Provisional Government, the workers, peasants and soldiers set up their Soviets or Councils. These Soviets first appeared on the Russian political scene during the abortive 1905 revolution, which came about as the result of the Russian defeat in the war with Japan. The abortive revolution was described by Lenin as "the dress rehearsal for 1917." Thus from the very beginning of the 1917 revolution there existed a dual power: the official government composed of the capitalists and landlords, and the power of the common people expressed through the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

The first stage of the revolution, the overthrow of the Czarist autocracy and the establishment of a Republican régime, constituted what is known as the *Bourgeois Democratic Revolution*; that is to say, the revolution made by the

¹ The Octobrist Party included Monarchists of various shades.

² See History of the "Communist Party of the Soviet Union," p. 178.

workers but control of which fell into the hands of representatives of the bourgeoisie.

The Provisional Government, however, was fundamentally unable to satisfy the aspirations of the common people, whose revolutionary mood in consequence failed to abate. From the end of February events moved rapidly. About the beginning of May, the Provisional Government gave way to a coalition government composed of ten capitalists, five Mensheviks (moderate socialists) and Alexander Kerensky, a Social Revolutionary representing the right-wing of his party (peasants' party). Kerensky, a middle-class radical lawyer, became Minister of War in the new government. The coalition lasted only two months, inasmuch as it was incapable of solving the questions of 'peace, bread and freedom,' which were becoming most insistent, or of coping with the growing unrest which was spreading all over the Russian Empire, including the colonial border territories where local national governments had been set up. At the end of June the coalition cabinet was reshuffled and Kerensky added the Premiership to his Ministry of War portfolio.

Kerensky, who entertained imperialist ambitions, wanted to continue the war against Germany, and his government accordingly had the full backing of Britain and France. The Russian workers, peasants and soldiers, however, were more than weary of the war, and the offensive which Kerensky started on June 18 did not encourage their support.

During all this while the Bolsheviki Party (the revolutionary section of the Russian socialists) had been gathering its forces. Its leader, Vladimir Ilyitch Ulianov, better known as Lenin, who had been in exile at the time of the overthrow of the Czarist Government, returned to Petrograd on April 3. He was given a tremendous welcome by the workers and soldiers of the capital. His first task was to draw together his party, which without his lead had been unable to grasp the historic perspective which the situation was opening up, and to mobilise it for action. For this purpose he drew up a document which has come to be known as the April Thesis, in which he outlined his plan of campaign. He pointed out that Russia needed a second revolution that would wrest power from the coalition of Kerensky, who had not broken with the imperialists, and pass it over to the Soviets, the

organs of the workers, peasants and soldiers. In other words, Lenin sketched the transition from the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution to the *Socialist Revolution*: the passage from the first stage of the Revolution to its second stage.

The success of the transition would decide for the people the end of the Imperialist war on the one hand, and usher in a new social order for the Russian and Colonial peoples on the other. Even before his return to Petrograd, Lenin had advised the Russian workers to prepare themselves for the task of carrying through the revolution from its first to its second stage. He was convinced that they would be cheated out of their rights by the bourgeoisie. In his letters to his party comrades, despatched from exile in Switzerland as soon as news reached him of the Czar's abdication, Lenin wrote: "Workers, you have displayed marvels of proletarian heroism, the heroism of the people, in the civil war against Czardom. You must now display marvels of organisation, organisation of the proletariat and of the whole people, in order to prepare the way for your victory in the second stage of the revolution."¹

After the collapse of Kerensky's June offensive, the soldiers, in Lenin's phrase, began "to sign the peace with their feet." Wholesale desertions from the front took place. The peasants forming the bulk of the army started for their homes in hordes. The situation provided the opportunity for which Lenin had long been preparing, for the workers were beginning to realise that his warning of Kerensky's treachery was correct. Furthermore, he and his party were alone in favouring a programme of "peace, bread and freedom," and thus the deputies of the Workers' and Peasants' Soviets, which, until then, had been largely under the influence of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, turned to the Bolsheviki, to whom they gave their support in increasing numbers. Assured of the mass backing of the workers and soldiers, Lenin called upon the Petrograd Soviet to get rid of Kerensky and his capitalist colleagues and give "All power to the Soviets."

To carry out this task, he set up a Military Revolutionary Committee, under the chairmanship of Lev Davidovitch

¹ Lenin: *Selected Works*—English Edition, Vol. VI, p. 11.

Bronstein, better known to the world as Trotsky. Other members were Sverdlov, Dzershinsky, Bubnov, Uritsky, and Stalin. Commenting on the role played by Trotsky in the capture of power, Stalin paid tribute to him in the following passage: "The inspirer of the Revolution from beginning to end was the Central Committee of the party headed by Comrade Lenin. Vladimir Ilyitch was then living in Petrograd in a conspirative apartment in the Vyborg district. On the evening of October 24th, he was summoned to Smolny for the general leadership of the movement. All the work of practical organisation of the insurrection was conducted under the immediate leadership of the president of the Petrograd Soviet, Comrade Trotsky. It is possible to declare with certainty that the swift passing of the garrison to the side of the Soviet, and the skilful direction of the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee, the party owes principally and first of all to Comrade Trotsky. Comrades Antonov and Podvoisky were Comrade Trotsky's chief assistants."¹ Within ten days of Lenin's call for action the Kerensky Government was overthrown, and on October 25 Lenin was able to announce the victory of the *Social Revolution*, the transfer of power from the capitalists and landlords to the workers and peasants. The dictatorship of the proletariat was established in alliance with the peasantry. The first Soviet Government consisted not only of Bolsheviks but also of Left Social Revolutionaries, and others.

The Bolshevik Revolution, astounding as it may seem, was achieved practically without bloodshed. All the important buildings such as the telegraph, telephone, and other Government offices, were taken over without a shot. In fact, it was only in the taking of the Winter Palace and the offices of the General Staff that there was any fighting. The number of dead was certainly less than the number of pedestrians killed on British roads in a month! The transfer of power from the bourgeoisie to the workers was accomplished almost bloodlessly. The actual mass killing only occurred during the civil war which followed, when the capitalists and the landlords, with the assistance of foreign armies, attempted to recover their lost power. The responsibility for the killing, therefore, rests with the former ruling class. The same thing

¹ *Pravda*, official Russian Communist newspaper, November 6, 1918.

occurred in Spain, where the capitalists and the landlords, led by Franco, were responsible for the civil war. This only confirms that the ruling class will never voluntarily surrender power.

Lenin's supreme role in directing the second stage of the revolution cannot be gainsaid. He was the greatest revolutionary of all time. Not only a unique and profound thinker, he was an organiser and inspirer, tactician and strategist of incomparable stature. Here was a man who, against tremendous odds, created his own party, which at the time of the October Revolution numbered no more than 250,000,¹ trained it in the teeth of innumerable difficulties and, when the moment arose for which he had given a lifetime of preparation, confidently placed himself at the head of the masses and led them to victory, to the first successful Social Revolution in history.

Lenin's part in the Revolution is the outstanding example of the role of the individual in history. For if Lenin had not broken with the Mensheviks in 1903 and organised his own Bolshevik Party, when the political crisis arose the opportunity would have passed, and instead of a Soviet Union issuing, Russia would still have continued to be another imperialist state, possibly in the form of a democratic capitalist republic. It is quite certain that it would have continued to be a financial colony of Western European capitalism.² No Lenin, no Bolshevik Party, no Social Revolution!

No less remarkable than his role in the Social Revolution were Lenin's contributions to the international Labour and socialist movement. For Lenin was not concerned only with the emancipation of the Russian workers, but with the social freedom of all the toilers and oppressed peoples throughout the world, irrespective of race, colour, creed or nationality. He took as great an interest in the problems of the black workers in the mines of Johannesburg, of the coolies and dock workers of Shanghai and Bombay, as in those of the British proletariat. He was a true disciple of Marx, who

¹ Trotsky himself gives the figure on the eve of the Revolution as 240,000. See "History of the Russian Revolution" by Leon Trotsky (Gollancz 1933), Vol. 2, p. 287.

² Prince D. S. Mirsky, in an article, *Histoire d'une Emancipation*, in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, September 1, 1931, and quoted by Hans Kohn in *Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, p. 115, develops this argument.

taught that "labour in the white skin cannot free itself while labour in the black is branded." Lenin never tired of emphasising to the workers of the civilised countries of Europe and America that their freedom is inextricably bound up with the freedom of the colonial masses of China, India, Africa and elsewhere, to whom they must render every support in their fight to liberate themselves from the yoke of Imperialism. He insisted that only this unity between the working classes of the economically advanced countries with the toiling masses of the colonies and semi-colonial lands can guarantee the final and irrevocable victory over the common enemy—capitalist-imperialism, 'democratic' or fascist—the victory of all of the oppressed and exploited over the oppressors and exploiters of all races and colours and creeds.

In Russia, Lenin denounced anti-Semitism and racial chauvinism wherever it expressed itself among the Russian workers, peasants and intellectuals. He uncompromisingly proclaimed the right of Self-Determination for all the backward races of Asiatic Russia and the oppressed nationalities under Czarist Imperialism.

This is the aspect of Lenin's teachings and their application to the Russian Revolution with which we are chiefly concerned. Hence in the following pages we shall examine Lenin's method of solving the National and Colonial Question, which today, like yesterday, remains one of the most important issues in world politics. This question is of particular concern to the British people at this moment.

In order to give value to our examination of the Leninist solution of the Colonial Question, we shall first give a brief account of the rise of the Czarist Empire and the conditions which obtained among the subject peoples, particularly among those of Central Asia, before the Revolution. This will enable the reader to appreciate all the more the achievements of the Soviet Government in applying Lenin's principles in practice.

PART I

THE OLD RUSSIA — THE CZARIST EMPIRE

CHAPTER ONE

THE RISE OF THE CZARIST EMPIRE

CZARIST Russia, 'the Gendarme of Europe' and 'the hangman of Asia,' was the most paradoxical of the great empires of modern times. Culturally the most backward of the European nations, it produced some of the world's greatest writers and social reformers, among them such literary giants as Pushkin (like Dumas, of African descent), Lermontov, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorki; such important social figures as Kropotkin, Bakunin, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and many others. Industrially, Czarist Russia was the least developed of the Imperialist Powers, yet it produced the most revolutionary proletariat, the first to make a successful Social Revolution. Itself a semi-colony of foreign finance capital (chiefly French), Russia was one of the most aggressive imperialist nations, constantly expanding its frontiers right up to the very collapse of the Empire. Foreign participation in Russian industry and finance was very great. Eleven of the leading banks were represented by foreign capital: 5 French, 4 German, and 2 British.

"The most important of Russia's metal works were in the hands of French capitalists. In all, about three-quarters (72 per cent) of the metal industry depended on foreign capital. The same was true of the coal industry of the Donetz Basin. Oilfields owned by British and French capital accounted for about half the oil output of the country. A considerable part of the profits of Russian industry flowed into foreign banks, chiefly British and French. All these circumstances, in addition to the thousands of millions borrowed by the Czar from France and Britain in loans, chained Czardom to