

RUSSIA



COLONIAL



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HOW RUSSIA TRANSFORMED HER COLONIAL EMPIRE

by

GEORGE PADMORE

THE sub-title, "A Challenge to the Imperialist Powers" indicates the author's attitude towards the idea of Empire. George Padmore is a West Indian of African òrigin, and has a practical knowledge and interest in the British Empire. He lived in the U.S.S.R. for some years and was a member of the Moscow Soviet for a time.

In a letter to the publisher in which he discussed this book, he says of it : "Revolutions upset the social, economic and political arrangement between social classes and in the case of the Russian Revolution between the racial and national elements making up the old Czarist Empire. That is the main thesis of my book. I show (a) the relationship between the Russians (Slavs) and non-Russians (Asiatic) under Czarism. (b) How the U.S.S.R. transformed the oppressoroppressed relationship to one of political equality, i.e., the Federal State structure. (c) How this has given greater strength and stability to the U.S.S.R. compared to imperial relations, i.e., the British Colonial and Indian Empires. (d) How the former subject peoples have been helped to catch up with the Western part of the Union."

Stalin's

advice to friends of the

Soviet Peoples

ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR VISIT TO THE U.S.S.R. IN 1945, STALIN TOLD THE BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION THAT ON THEIR RETURN TO BRITAIN THEY SHOULD:

⁶⁶TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT RUSSIA. WE HAVE MANY THINGS THAT ARE GOOD AND MANY THAT ARE NOT. TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT BOTH. WE ARE QUITE AWARE THAT EVERY-THING IS NOT PERFECT IN THE U.S.S.R.⁹⁹

IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES WE HAVE TRIED TO CARRY OUT STALIN'S INJUNCTION. Publications by George Padmore

LIFE AND STRUGGLES OF NEGRO TOILERS HOW BRITAIN RULES AFRICA AFRICAN AND WORLD PEACE (Foreword by Sir Stafford Cripps) HANDS OFF THE PROTECTORATES WHITE MAN'S DUTY (with Nancy Cunard)

HOW RUSSIA TRANSFORMED HER COLONIAL EMPIRE

A Challenge to the Imperialist Powers

by

GEORGE PADMORE

in collaboration with DOROTHY PIZER

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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 This danger cannot be dismissed merely as the war. '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. Raia 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.

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