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"THE BOLSHEVIKS AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION, 1917-1923"

PhD. Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the formulation and execution of policies towards the various nationalities of the Soviet Republics from the October revolution of 1917 until the formation of the Soviet Union in 1923.

Most of the Russian and Western literature on this question focuses on the process of the reincorporation of the non-Russian regions of the former empire into the new Bolshevik-led state. Accordingly, there is a general assumption that the purpose of Bolshevik national policy was to gain the short-term support of the national minorities in the struggle to win the civil war. By examining the material newly released from the Soviet archives in addition to the material previously available, I have concluded that the goal of Bolshevik nationality policies was to "raise the cultural level" of the non-Russians and to eliminate the inequalities arising from economic and historical conditions. The central policies pursued were: the creation of formally independent or autonomous republics and regions; the maintenance, as far as was practicable, of the ethnic homogeneity of these territorial national units by means of rearranged borders and movements of population; the development of a cadre of national communist leaders including the incorporation of sympathetic nationalists into the republican communist parties; encouraging a flourishing national culture through the education system, the use of native languages in the press and administration, and the selective promotion of both historical and new "socialist" cultural traditions; and the development of industry and agriculture in non-Russian areas. The final objective of all these measures was to create and encourage a strong sense of national identity based mostly, but not exclusively, on national territorial units, and through that national identity a loyalty to the Soviet state.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

RTsKhIDNI	Rossiiskii Tsentr dlia Khraneniia i Izucheniia Dokumentov Noveishei Istorii
GARF	Gosudarstvennii Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii
ZN	<u>Zhizn natsional'nostei</u>
Stalin	I.V. Stalin, <u>Sochineniia</u> (Moscow, 1946 ff.)
Lenin	V.I. Lenin, <u>Polnoe sobranie sochinenii</u> 5th Edition (Moscow, 1958 ff.)

Where other editions of Lenin's works have been referred to, this is clearly indicated in the notes.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At the end of 1991, shortly after I embarked on research on the Bolsheviks and the national question, communism collapsed and the Soviet Union split into 15 parts. It seemed natural enough that, if the Soviet state was to fall apart, it should do so along national lines. At the turn of this century, however, it would have been hard to point to the existence of many of the nationalities which in 1991 asserted their sovereignty against Moscow. The Ukrainians and Bielorussians were not recognised as separate nationalities by the administrators of the Russian empire. The Bielorussian population was distinguished by its language, but showed little sign of national consciousness. In Central Asia the numerous tribes that roamed the steppes or dwelt in villages were often divided for convenience according to language, religion or agricultural methods, but could in no way be described as nations in the modern sense. The emergence of national consciousness and territorial states for many of the nationalities of the former Russian Empire is a product of this century, and especially of the first decade of Soviet rule. The borders of the 15 states were mostly drawn up in this period and their titles and standard languages decided on. Had the Bolsheviks never come to power, or had they chosen to pursue a different set of policies, there is every possibility that the geopolitical map of Europe and Asia would be very different today.

Wider access to the archives of the former Soviet Union has opened up a wealth of material on the whole period. It is now possible to present a much more accurate picture of Bolshevik thought and practise on the national question. Even without this material, the paucity of recent literature on overall aspects of national policy makes a new study long overdue.

Much of the western literature on this question deals with the experience of one nationality or a group of nationalities. Of the works dealing with the nationalities question as a whole in this period the most comprehensive and influential remains Richard Pipes' The Formation of the Soviet Union, first published in 1954.¹ Since this book appeared, its broad analysis has been accepted in most subsequent works on the national question and general works on the Bolsheviks in this period.

As his title suggests, Pipes' prime concern is to describe the process by which the Bolsheviks gained control of the territories not immediately engulfed by the October revolution and inhabited principally by non-Russians (collectively referred to by Pipes as the borderlands); his secondary aim is to analyse the reasons the Soviet Union came to take the form it did.

For Pipes the national question is seen by the Bolsheviks purely as a question of power; "Lenin looked upon national problems as something to exploit, and not as something to solve."² Although Pipes treats Lenin's theory of self-determination as a serious development in

¹ Richard Pipes, The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism 1917-1923 (Revised edition, Cambridge, Mass. 1964).

² Idem, p.49.

the Marxist tradition, he then dismisses it as "entirely inadequate" as a solution of the national question in Russia, as it offered the national minorities "no choice between assimilation and complete independence", neither of which they desired.¹ Pipes argues that Lenin had completely failed to foresee the strength of the centrifugal forces which would tear the Russian empire apart along national lines, and that faced with this reality he had no hesitation in resorting to the immediate use of force to violate the principle for which he had struggled so hard in the European Marxist movement and within his own party;

utilizing Bolshevik organizations established in the borderlands in the days of the Provisional Government, and the Russian troops which to a large extent followed Bolshevik leadership, he overthrew wherever possible the newly formed national republics. The dissolution of the Bielorussian Rada; the attempted coup in Transcaucasia; the invasion of the Ukraine; as well as the suppression of the Moslem governments of Kokand, Crimea, the Alash Orda, and the Bashkir republic....were all a complete violation of the principle of national self-determination.²

As Pipes views the principle of self-determination as the beginning and end of Bolshevik nationality policy, once the principle has been dismissed in this way there is little more to be said on Bolshevik aims in this field until the debate on autonomisation and federation in 1922.

¹ Pipes, p.49.

² Idem, p.108.

Thus, while admitting that the principle of self-determination may have had some success in winning the support of a certain section of nationalists towards the Bolsheviks, Pipes rejects the possibility that their eventual victory in the borderlands can be ascribed to a positive national programme. Instead, he points to other reasons for the Bolshevik success. Foremost among these is the use of military force, as the book's chapter headings immediately indicate (Soviet Conquest of the Ukraine and Bielorussia etc.) This was true even of Bielorussia where, in Pipes' account, the national movement "was still in its embryonic stage", where "there is no evidence that in 1917 the peasantry, which composed the mass of the Belorussian people, possessed any consciousness of ethnic separateness"¹ and where the returns for the elections to the constituent assembly indicated considerable support for the Bolsheviks.² Soviet governments were established in Bielorussia on three separate occasions, each time by the naked use of force; in November - December 1917, through their control of large parts of the Russian army;³ a year later, when the Red Army occupied the areas vacated by the Germans;⁴ and in August 1920 as the outcome of the Polish-Soviet war.⁵

Much more attention is paid to the Ukraine, where the political situation was far more complex than in Bielorussia. As in Bielorussia the outcome was intimately tied up with the wars with Germany, Poland and the White Russian Armies,⁶ but here the Bolsheviks also

¹ Pipes, p.73.

² V.B.Stankevich, Sud'by narodov Rossii (Berlin, 1921), p.39.

³ Pipes pp.74, 150.

⁴ Idem, p.152.

⁵ Idem, p.154.

⁶ Idem, pp.138, 148.

engaged in armed conflicts with nationalist forces; in January and February 1918 against the Ukrainian Central Rada,¹ and again in February 1919 against the Directory.²

Similarly, in Central Asia the Civil War was fought against both the White Armies and nationalist forces: against the Kokand Muslim government at the start of 1918;³ the Bukharan emirate in February 1918;⁴ the Alash-Orda in 1919⁵; Khiva in February 1920;⁶ Bashkir nationalist forces after the failure of the Bashkir Revolutionary Committee (Bashrevkom) in the summer of 1920;⁷ and the Basmachestvo rising across much of Central Asia, a struggle lasting as far as 1926,⁸ while the absence of a popular national struggle in the Kirghiz republic is ascribed by Pipes to the debilitating effect of the famine of 1921-22.⁹ The use of armed force is similarly stressed in the Crimea,^a while in Transcaucasia the Bolsheviki came to power in all three republics through invasions directed against independent nationalist governments in 1920 and 1921.^b In Pipes' account, throughout the borderlands it was only in the North Caucasus that initial Bolshevik successes could be attributed to the support of a section of the native population, in this case of the Chechens and Ingushi.^c

¹ Pipes, pp.123-125.

² Idem, p.143.

³ Idem, pp.174-176.

⁴ Idem, p.177.

⁵ Idem, p.162.

⁶ Idem, 183.

⁷ Idem, pp.167-168.

⁸ Idem, p.178

⁹ Idem, p.174.

^a Idem, pp.188,189.

^b Idem, pp.227, 232, 238-240.

^c Idem, p.197.

While stressing the purely military aspects of the Bolshevik seizure of power in the borderlands, Pipes describes several other factors which contributed to the success of military operations and the subsequent consolidation of power. In each case a highly organised Communist Party apparatus either existed already in the conquered areas or followed closely in the wake of the advancing Red forces, immediately ready to take over administrative functions and to carry out the political tasks necessary to win a degree of legitimacy and support among at least sections of the population. In the Ukraine a Soviet government under Piatakov was already secretly prepared in Kursk prior to the January 1919 invasion.¹ Following the failure of that regime the Communist Party of Ukraine was entirely subordinated to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, so that the second government under Rakovskii that followed the Red Army into Kiev in December 1919 was directly controlled by Moscow.² In Bielorussia the Northwestern Regional Committee of the Russian Communist Party was transformed into a Communist Party of Bielorussia which effectively formed the new administration.³ In Transcaucasia the existing Communist organisations united under the the regional committee of the Russian Communist Party in Tiflis were supplanted by Sergo Ordzhonikidze's Transcaucasian Bureau (Kavbiuro), formed by the Central Committee of the Russian party and entrusted with both preparing for the invasion and organising Soviet power, often in conflict with the local organisations.⁴

¹ Pipes, p.139.

² Idem, pp.144, 148.

³ Idem, pp.152-153.

⁴ Idem, pp.224-225

The second factor in the Bolsheviks' favour was the support they enjoyed among ethnic Russians, whether workers or colonists, in many of the borderlands; the support of Russian or russified urban workers gave the Bolsheviks an important edge in the major cities of the Ukraine and Crimea, and in certain other key cities such as Baku and Tashkent.¹ In Central Asia the Bolsheviks were able to utilise the support of Russian colonists fearful of nationalist intentions to expropriate them from the land.² Pipes stresses this factor to the extent that in many areas the Bolshevik struggle for power appears as a national struggle between natives and Russians, the latter in the form of the Russian Communist Party.³

The Bolsheviks were further aided by the immaturity and lack of organisation of the various nationalist parties, and their predominantly peasant base. In the Ukraine,

the weakest feature of the Ukrainian national movement was its dependence on the politically disorganized, ineffective, and unreliable village...The Ukrainian cause was further weakened by the inexperience of its leaders and the shortage of adequate administrative personnel.⁴

In Central Asia the Moslem movement was disorganised and hopelessly split along various lines, with the result that the principal centre for nationalist aspirations, the Kokand government, was unable to muster any significant force in the face of the Red Army offensive.⁵

¹ Pipes, pp.89, 149, 179, 190, 199.

² Idem, pp.82-86, 92, 163.

³ Idem, pp.93, 190.

⁴ Idem, p.149.

⁵ Idem, pp.174-176.

As well as exploiting the weaknesses of the nationalist organisation, the Bolsheviks were able to win the tactical support of significant sections of the national movement as a result of the blatantly anti-native policies of the occupying armies and the Russian Whites in the borderlands. In Ukraine peasant resistance to the oppressive policies of the German military led to the left wings of both the main nationalist parties passing over to the Bolsheviks in June 1918, and the relationship was further cemented by the activities of the Whites in the fall of 1919.¹ The defection of the Bashkir forces under Validov and of many members of the Alash Orda in 1919 was a direct result of Kolchak's hostile attitude to the demands of the national movements;² Denikin produced a similar effect on the national minorities in the Caucasus³ and in the Crimea where his attitude meant "the Milli Firka had no choice but to cooperate with the only powerful, well-organized anti-Denikin force - the Communists."⁴

So in Pipes' account Bolshevik policy in the borderlands was to regain as much of the territory of the former Russian empire as possible, primarily by the use of military force aided by the support of the local Russian populations, the weakness of the nationalist organisations and the reactionary attitudes of the White Russian commanders. What remained of Bolshevik national policy after the abandonment of genuine self-determination had little relevance to the actual course of the revolution in the borderlands; according to Pipes, the Bolsheviks had completely failed to comprehend the

¹ Pipes, pp.134, 143.

² Idem, pp.161-162, 173.

³ Idem, p.215.

⁴ Idem, p.188.

impact of nationalism as the revolution unfolded. In part this was due to the ideological conviction of "the inevitable triumph of class loyalties over national loyalties"¹ held by Lenin, let alone the large number of influential Bolsheviks who held more extreme anti-nationalist views than Lenin. Even without this ideological handicap, the Bolsheviks could not have foreseen that "the same factors which in Russia proper made possible the triumph of Bolshevism" would also lead to "the unexpectedly rapid development of political aspirations on the part of the minorities."² In the eastern borderlands the demand for land led to peasant hostility, not against the large landowners, as was the case in Russia proper, but against the Russian colonists. In the Ukraine, the superior soil conditions led the peasantry to see their interests as best served by taking a course independent of Russia.³ The political dependence of the Bolsheviks on Russian workers and colonists and the economic dependence of Russia on the agriculture and mineral resources of its former empire thus made it impossible for the Bolsheviks to win the support of the non-Russian peasants simply on the basis of the distribution of the large estates, as they had been able to do in Russia. Forced to adopt a constructive approach to the national question, which had something to offer to nationalist aspirations without threatening the integrity of the Soviet state, Lenin and the Bolsheviks abandoned their long-standing opposition to the principal of federalism and in 1918 adopted a constitution based on the idea of national-territorial autonomy.⁴

¹ Pipes, p.49.

² Idem, p.51.

³ Idem, p.51.

⁴ Idem, pp.111-113.

In addition, in the course of the civil war the Bolsheviks made overtures to certain nationalist leaders and organisations. In Pipes' account, the key episode here occurred in Bashkiria in 1919-1920. Territorial autonomy was granted to an elected Bashrevkom as a bargaining counter designed to win the defection of Validov's troops from the Whites.¹ This experiment soon broke down, however, as the native Bashkir government came into repeated conflict with the local Russian communist authorities, and while the Bashrevkom initially enjoyed the backing of Moscow this support ceased abruptly with the end of the civil war and the Soviet government removed most of the powers of the Bashrevkom by a decree of May 1920.² Thus national-territorial autonomy joined self-determination in the dustbin of discarded slogans.

For Pipes, the overriding aim of the Bolsheviks was to create a highly centralized state in order to be able to impose the socioeconomic and political legislation which they believed best served the interests of the proletariat. The adoption of federalism did not contradict this aim because, in the first place, federalism was seen as a step towards centralisation as it was a means of bringing the borderlands into the sphere of the Soviet state. Secondly,

the existence of the Communist Party, with its unique internal organization and extraordinary rights with regard to the institutions of the state, made it possible for the rulers of the Soviet republic to

¹ Pipes, p.162.

² Idem, pp.166-167.

retain all the important features of a unitary state in a state which was formally decentralized.¹

The autonomous regions "had no distinguishing juridical features even in terms of Soviet law" while the legal status of the republics was at best vague; moreover all of these units, with the exception of Bashkiria, came into being simply by decree of VTsIK or the Sovnarkom.² The formation of the Soviet Union was thus the formal outcome of the constant aim to create a unitary state. None of the disputing parties in the controversy that racked the Party leadership in 1922-23 really challenged these principles: Lenin's proposed remedies consisted "only of reversion to party control of the political apparatus, linguistic measures, and the introduction of 'codes of behaviour' for Communist officials working in the borderlands."³

As an account of the processes by which the territories of the former Russian Empire were reincorporated into the new state, Richard Pipes' work is a detailed and invaluable history. His analysis of the Bolsheviks' victories in the borderlands as the product of a combination of military and political factors can be challenged only on the basis of the emphasis given to the former over the latter. As an account of the Bolsheviks' nationalities policies, however, his approach is fundamentally flawed; on the whole, Pipes views Bolshevik activity as directed unerringly towards the creation of a unified, centralised state under the firm control of the Communist Party, and any variations in policy were an ad hoc response to unforeseen circumstances, specifically

¹ Pipes, p.242.

² Idem, pp.247-248.

³ Idem, p.287.

the unexpected strength of nationalist and separatist tendencies during and after the revolution. The fact that the principle of self-determination was never literally applied in practise is interpreted by Pipes as showing that the Bolsheviks had no real commitments to make with regard to national aspirations; and yet the principle continued to be the topic of frenetic debate at Communist Party conferences and congresses right up to 1923. The point missed by Pipes is that these debates reflected genuine divisions over the approach to be taken to the national minorities which resulted in tangible policy differences; to take one example, the splits in the Ukrainian sections of the Party in 1918, described at some length by Pipes, involved many of the leading participants in the dispute over self-determination, including one of Lenin's principal protagonists, Piatakov.¹

In general, Pipes' tendency to view the struggle for Soviet power in the borderlands as primarily a national struggle leads him to view all conflicts as between Russians and natives, with the latter occasionally receiving the support of Moscow for tactical reasons; this ignores the genuine ideological differences that existed among the communists themselves, with Russians and non-Russians on both sides. Pipes is able to disregard these ideological differences as purely cosmetic since for him all Bolsheviks shared a common overriding aim, to create a centralised state.

This same reasoning leads Pipes to view the evolution of Soviet forms of autonomy and federalism as a means by which the centre could exercise control over the regions.

¹ Pipes, pp.68, 131-133.

His assertion that in all except the Bashkir case autonomous regions were created by decree of the central government glosses over the complex processes and haphazard variety of causes which led to the establishment of these units. No analysis is provided of the actual relationships of power between the republics and regions and the centre, the assumption being that autonomy, like independence and self-determination, existed in name only.

The failure of the Bashrevkom government led, according to Pipes, to the abandonment of any serious attempt to encourage genuine local native leadership. Again, the overwhelming aim of subordination to Moscow and the appearance of Soviet power as an instrument of Russian domination led eventually to reliance on the Russian dominated Communist party. However what was unique about the Bashrevkom was not that it was non-Russian, but that it was non-Communist. This led not to the abandonment of native political leaders, but to a more concerted effort to win sympathetic nationalists to support for Communism and integration into the Communist Party. The presence of left nationalist individuals and organisations had an important impact on Soviet policies through their participation in the state and party apparatus not just in the regions but in Moscow itself.

While Pipes admits that the Bolsheviks implemented policies beneficial to the national minorities in the area of culture, especially with regard to language, these are passed over as minor concessions. Having described self-determination as the central plank of national policy, which was rapidly discarded, Pipes ignores the significance of the other main planks, which

admittedly evoked far less debate as they were less controversial; to the end of honouring a commitment to the equal rights of national minorities, the Soviet state embarked on a massive programme of educational reform and introduced policies to ensure not just the survival but the development of native languages and cultures. What this programme entailed was an acknowledgement of the relative permanence of nations. This contradicted most Marxist thought on the subject, but here, as in other cases, Pipes refers to Lenin's theories without considering other influences on, and later development of, Bolshevik thought.¹ Another result of this national permanence was the formation of autonomous national units which formally exercised independent authority over a broad range of functions. However illusory this independence was in reality, Pipes' contention that the autonomous regions "had no distinguishing juridical features" is simply untenable.

Finally, the formation of the Soviet Union itself is viewed by Pipes as the logical conclusion of a policy directed at creating a centralised state while making concessions to the unexpected vehemence of national sentiments, but he takes little account of either ideological factors or the way in which the character of Soviet power and of the Communist Party itself had developed as a result of Civil War and the early years of power.

Other writers have largely accepted Pipes' analysis, while approaching the subject from a different viewpoint. Writing before Pipes, E.H. Carr provides a

¹ Pipes, p.42.

less detailed account of the process of the formation of the Soviet Union in volume one of his The Bolshevik Revolution.¹ By divorcing the national question from the rest of his exhaustive account of the first years of the Russian Revolution, Carr isolates the constitutional issues from the real relationships involved and misses the non-constitutional developments in Bolshevik policy.

Moshe Lewin's Lenin's Last Struggle² makes use of important additional material in its discussion of the disputes over the national question in 1922-1923. Lewin writes from the perspective of the power struggle surrounding the dying Lenin so that, in contrast to Carr, he views constitutional questions as vitally linked to the deepest divisions in general political approach. This perspective of the national question as one of the key issues in a power struggle, however, leads Lewin to overstate the depth of these divisions and he does not deal with the national question as an area of policy development separate from that struggle. Lewin's work will be discussed further in chapter seven.

A rather different attitude has been taken by historians concerned with questions of culture, education and language in the early Soviet period. Writers such as Simon Crisp, whose work on Soviet language planning will be referred to in chapter six, adopt a more positive stance towards Bolshevik national policy than political historians owing to the achievements of the Bolsheviks in the field of language and culture. Few attempts have been made, however, to provide an overall picture of the

¹ E.H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923, (Pelican Edition, 1986).

² Moshe Lewin, Lenin's Last Struggle, (Paperback edition, London, 1975).

Bolshevik approach to the language and culture of the national minorities. One historian who has devoted more attention to these matters in general is Hélène Carrère d'Encausse. Her latest book The Great Challenge¹ describes the development of the languages and cultures of the non-Russians in the Soviet Union. She does not, however, explore the policies underlying these processes, and therefore fails to challenge Pipes' analysis of the Bolsheviks' national policy.

Another recently published work is Stephen Blank's The Sorcerer as Apprentice - Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917 - 1924.² This book contains a great amount of detail on the activities of the People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs, but includes little recent research and follows an analysis essentially the same as Pipes.

I have made extensive use of the large numbers of histories of individual nationalities available. Mostly written by emigres of the relevant nationality, these histories are written exclusively from the nationalist point of view and generally accept Pipes' version of the policies of the centre. Given the huge range of material on each of the nationalities, these national histories are invaluable sources of information but add little to our understanding of the Bolsheviks' attitudes and policies.

Pipes' account of the actual course of events in the borderlands is in little need of revision. What does not

¹ Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917-1930, (New York, 1992).

² Stephen Blank, The Sorcerer as Apprentice - Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917 - 1924 (Westport, 1994).

exist in the western literature is a satisfactory overall account of the general character of national policy in the crucial early years of Soviet power, the various factors which influenced it and an evaluation of the successes and failures of the first experiment of communism in the context of a multinational state. This thesis aims to fill this gap in subsequent chapters, by looking at the theoretical debates which influenced the ideological approach taken by the Bolsheviks, the factors which led to the evolution of a system of autonomous national units, the way in which those units functioned in practise, the role of nationalists in the evolution of policies, the reforms in the area of culture of the national minorities and a revaluation of the disputes surrounding the creation of the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER 2: MARXISTS, BOLSHEVIKS AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

Richard Pipes is not alone in supposing that the Bolsheviks' national policy after 1917 had little to do with Marxist theory and everything to do with practical expediency. It is natural to reach this conclusion if it is supposed that the programmatic policy of the right to national self-determination is the last word in Bolshevik thought on the national question. The complexities of the national question made it one of the most hotly debated political questions around the turn of the century. After Marx, four principle positions on the national question emerged among the European socialist movement. The right of nations to self-determination, a position most clearly identified with Lenin; the 'national nihilism' of Rosa Luxemburg which was also supported by a number of leading Bolsheviks; extra-territorial national autonomy, a programme developed by the Austrian Marxists and the Jewish Bund; and state federalism, which was the policy of a number of socialist and nationalist parties within the Russian empire. The polemical nature of debate among European and Russian Marxists has tended to polarise these four positions, but in fact none of them apart from the first two was mutually exclusive from a theoretical point of view, and all could find a measure of support in the writings of Marx and Engels. Although the Bolshevik Party has been most closely identified with the policy of national self-determination, each of these positions had its adherents within the Party and elements from each were to play a more or less important role in the development of the

Party's national policy after 1917. Although Marxism and the national question has frequently been discussed by historians and political scientists, it is therefore necessary to present a brief overview of Marxist thought on the national question.

From Marx to Lenin

By the turn of the century the focus of the revolutionary movement in Europe had largely shifted from Western towards Central and Eastern Europe where the nationalities question was far more complicated than in, for instance, France, where state boundaries followed a growing tendency to conform with national ones, either through the re-drawing of boundaries or the assimilation of ethnic groups. This provoked an often passionate debate on the Marxist left as socialists tried to grapple with problems which had never been posed to Marx and Engels in quite the same form. In 1859 Engels had predicted a trend

to bring the great and vital European nations ever closer to their true natural borders as determined by speech and sympathies; while at the same time the ruins of peoples....must be incorporated into the larger nations, and either dissolve in them or else remain as ethnographic monuments of no political significance.¹

As a statement of a general trend in European history this analysis was never seriously challenged on a

¹ Quoted in Pipes, p.21

theoretical level by later Marxists and indeed formed the basis for both the opposing positions of Lenin and the Bolshevik Left Opposition, although it is hard to reconcile with the position of the Austro-Marxists Karl Renner and Otto Bauer, as we shall see. This is not to say, however, that Marx and Engels or, for the most part, their successors simply ignored the question of ethnic rivalry or national oppression.

Marx and Engels viewed nationalism as a product of the growth of capitalism and of competition between the bourgeoisies of the various national states. Nationalism was an ideological weapon which would tie workers to an illusory common interest with their own ruling classes. The workers "had no country" and the eventual supremacy of the proletariat would bring to an end all national differences; "In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end."¹ Nevertheless, the fact of the existence of national states and of national oppression had two important consequences. Firstly, "since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is so far itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word."² This means simply that the class struggle is conducted within state boundaries (and in Western Europe this also meant national boundaries) and that the workers in each country faced the task of overthrowing their own bourgeoisie.

¹ Quoted in Carr, Vol.I, p.415.

² Idem, p.415

Second and more importantly, Marx and Engels acknowledged the fact that national rivalries and subjugation constituted a barrier to the international unity of the working class. One possible reaction to this was to view all nationalisms as a diversion and a threat to unity and it was in this vein that Engels dismissed all the Slav nations apart from the Poles in 1848.¹ Imperialist nations could even play a progressive role in accelerating the economic development of colonies such as India, in spite of all the horrors of the British occupation.² In the early writings of Marx and Engels, support for national liberation struggles were conditional on their role in the overall scheme of historical development. On this basis bourgeois Poland's right to independence was supported against the reactionary Russian Empire, while the claims of the Schleswig Danes and the Irish against the Prussian and British states respectively were rejected.³ In the case of Poland, however, Marx made the crucial observation that the nationalist movement, even if led by the Polish aristocracy and serving their interests above all, needed the support of the peasant masses in order to have any chance of success and was therefore necessarily democratic and implied the abolition of feudal rights.⁴ This set the tone for later Marxist debates. On the one hand it was argued that certain national movements were divisive and threatened the progress of the more advanced nations in favour of the less developed, while on the other hand it was pointed out that all national liberation movements were by nature revolutionary and

¹ Nigel Harris, National Liberation (London, 1990), p.47.

² Idem, p.42.

³ Carr, Vol.I, p.419.

⁴ Harris, p.43.

democratic and should therefore receive support in all cases.

If both arguments are apparent in Marx and Engels it is clear in their later works that they came down on the side of the second argument in support of national movements. This is shown by Marx' reversal of attitude to the Irish question. In 1848 Marx had blamed the Irish people themselves for the chauvinism of British workers and saw the British Chartist movement as the only force capable of liberating the Irish. But the rise of the Fenian movement in the 1860's forced Marx to admit a mistake and to argue for support among English workers for the Irish and to recognise that revolution in Ireland might even precede and encourage revolution in mainland Britain. It was around this time, in 1865, that a general right to national self-determination was first incorporated in the Programme of the first International.¹ Marx drew one more important conclusion from the Irish case. Britain's oppression of Ireland did not just affect the Irish people. It also bred chauvinism among the English working class which was an important factor in holding back the development of the revolutionary movement in Britain. It was therefore particularly important to argue support for the Irish cause in England. This argument was to be echoed later in Lenin's denunciations of Great Russian chauvinism.

While Marx and Engels tended to base their attitude to national movements on tactical considerations dependant on the levels of economic development of each nation involved, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a sharpening of the debate as different

¹ Harris, p.45; Carr, Vol.I, p.421.

sections of the socialist movement attempted to develop a general theory on the national question which could be applied across the board. Three developments contributed to the need to clarify this debate. First, the focus of the revolutionary movement had shifted from France and Britain to Central and Eastern Europe and the three great empires of Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungary. Here the national question was far more complex than, for instance, in Britain where there existed only one significant national minority, the Irish, whose national boundaries were clearly defined. Second, the spread of capitalism across Europe and the relative levelling of economic development meant it was no longer possible to argue in terms of relatively progressive vs. backward nations, thus eliminating Marx and Engels' preoccupation with Russia as the single most important threat to progress in Eastern Europe. Thirdly, the development of significant national movements in Europe's colonies of the East came to influence the Bolsheviks and others increasingly from the start of the First World War onwards.

Most Marxists shared the basic premise that nationalism was a product of capitalism and that national differences and antagonisms would disappear or at least be easily resolved following a socialist revolution. The debate for them, then, was whether the national movements could help or hinder the revolutionary movement in the short term. In the late 1890's a different approach emerged within the Austrian Social Democratic Party. This approach acknowledged that there were national groups which were not confined to any one distinct territory and who therefore could not be discussed in terms of the right to separate from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and

form their own state. The Austro-Marxists further implied that national differences and separate cultural identities were permanent and would persist under socialism. The 1897 Party Congress in Vienna resolved to reorganise into a federation of six national-territorial parties, but it was at the Bruenn Congress of 1899 that the South Slav delegation first proposed Personal, or Extra-territorial National Autonomy. This notion, that a politically centralised state could guarantee the rights of national minorities by allowing them their own autonomous institutions to control the cultural and linguistic affairs of the nation became the cornerstone of the theory of extra-territorial National-Cultural Autonomy.

In April 1901, the Fourth Congress of the Jewish Bund adopted a similar position:

The congress recognises that a state such as Russia, which is composed of many different nationalities, must in the future develop into a federation of nationalities in which every nationality enjoys full national autonomy, regardless of the territory which it occupies.¹

Indeed, it could be argued that the principle of National-Cultural Autonomy originated not with the Austro-Marxists, but with the emigre Bundist John Mill.²

It was the Austrians Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, however, who provided the most comprehensive exposition

¹ Jonathan Frankel, Prophecy and Politics; Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917 (Cambridge, 1984), p.220.

² Idem, pp.215-219.

of this approach. Bauer argued, against Marxist orthodoxy, that the spread of education and communication under capitalism was already binding peasants and workers to their national cultures and that socialism would bring this process to its conclusion and "will distinguish whole peoples from each other by the diversity of national education and civilization."¹ Far from bringing an end to national differences, socialism would fully realise the national principle, where all members of society, not just its rulers, could feel part of a nation. The rational organisation of the world economy would lead to the full accomplishment of the international division of labour so that even the smallest territory could survive on its own by specialising in a particular area of economic activity. Thus Bauer was prepared to recognise and even encourage the aspirations of all nations, however small, which he believed would flourish under socialism.² Karl Renner was equally favourable to the aspirations of small nations, particularly those which had suffered national oppression and who therefore identified the oppressor nation, not capitalism, as the cause of their suffering.³ Lenin had a similar view of the oppressed nation, but Bauer and Renner drew conclusions much broader than Lenin's as, unlike him, they believed the nation was something permanent and positive. Bauer maintained that while different nations could become federated under one supra-national state, they would still administer to their own cultural and linguistic affairs. This national autonomy would extend beyond the territory occupied

¹ Otto Bauer, "The Concept of the Nation" in Tim Bottomore and Patrick Goode (eds.), Austro-Marxism (Oxford 1978), p.107

² Otto Bauer, "Socialism and the Principle of Nationality" in Bottomore and Goode, p.114.

³ Karl Renner, "The Development of the National Idea" in Bottomore and Goode, p.120.

exclusively by the given nationality to cover all members of that nation wherever they lived. Thus there might be isolated communities which owed a dual allegiance "to the territorial bodies of their nation, and in other respects, to the community of the foreign nation". The result would be a "variegated picture of national associations of people and territorial bodies".¹

From these premises the Austrian Marxists constructed an elaborate blueprint for Austria, which was to be divided into eight multinational economic regions but also into eight separate national councils administering cultural affairs, all united under the Crown. This scheme rested on the total divorce of economics, power and cultural affairs which surfaced later in Bolshevik policies, and also introduced into socialist debate some important notions; firstly, that national differences would persist beyond capitalism and that individual nations, even the smallest, would aspire to maintain their own separate cultures and languages. Secondly, the scheme of Personal Cultural Autonomy was the first serious effort by socialists to deal with the question of national groups living outside their own national territory or who had no national territory.

While Bauer argued that economic progress had eliminated local particularism and allowed the masses to identify with the nation at large, for the Polish socialist Rosa Luxemburg imperialist domination and the internationalisation of the economic system led to the strengthening of class loyalties that cut across nationality and therefore made the national question in

¹ Bauer, "Socialism and the Principle of Nationality", in Bottomore and Goode, p.117.

Europe at best an irrelevance and at worst a dangerous diversion: "[The assertion of] national interests can serve only as a means of deception, of betraying the working masses of the people to their deadly enemy, imperialism."¹ In the case of Poland she argued that conditions had changed since Marx' time, that the nationalist Polish aristocracy was a thing of the past and Polish society was now dominated by a largely foreign bourgeoisie, so that apart from a tiny intelligentsia no social class now had any interest in fighting for Polish independence. Moreover the Russian empire was no longer the bulwark of reaction it had been in Marx's day, and the Polish economy could not prosper without preserving its links with Russia. This analysis could be extended to the rest of Europe (though not to the Far Eastern colonies) as the development of capitalism and class differentiation meant that "in a class society, 'the nation' as a homogeneous sociopolitical entity does not exist. Rather, there exist within each nation, classes with antagonistic interests and 'rights.'"² National self-determination was, at any rate, a utopian demand as long as capitalism existed, and it failed to stand up for the class interests of the proletariat; "Thus, Social Democracy is called upon to realize not the right of nations to self-determination but only the right of the working class, which is exploited and oppressed, of the proletariat, to self-determination."³

Rosa Luxemburg did concede certain rights to national particularism, allowing for limited national autonomy in certain specific circumstances. Unlike the German

¹ Quoted in Harris, p.57.

² Rosa Luxemburg, "The National Question and Autonomy" in Horace B. Davis (ed.), The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg (New York, 1976), p.135.

³ Idem, p.140.

Marxist Karl Kautsky, who advocated a centralised legislature separate from a largely decentralised administration, she argued both as a basic democratic principle and as an inevitable product of capitalist development that "certain spheres of local life" should be earmarked for both legislation and administration at a local level.¹ Culture and education were to be included in these spheres, and as history dictated that culture should take a national form it followed that national territories would enjoy autonomy within the multi-national state;

Where inside a modern state there exist distinct nationality districts constituting at the same time territories with certain economic and social distinctions, the same requirements of the bourgeois economy make self-government on the highest, country-wide level, indispensable. On this level, local self-government is also transformed, as a result of a new factor, national-cultural distinctness, into a special type of democratic institution applicable only in quite specific conditions.²

This national autonomy, which was an inevitable extension of the need for local self-government in certain spheres, was also to Luxemburg sufficient guarantee against the possibility of national oppression, which Lenin insisted could only be secured by granting the right of the nation to secession. For Luxemburg, National autonomy was an adequate solution for the Poles, who formed a large majority of the population in a distinct area, but could not be applied to the Jews, who had no distinct territory and were at any rate being

¹ Luxemburg, p.249.

² Idem, p.256.

culturally assimilated into the Polish and Russian cultures, or for the regions of Lithuania and the Caucasus, where the ethnic make-up was so complex as not to allow any one national group to dominate. Rejecting non-territorial national autonomy as a barrier to the cooperation of different nationalities, Luxemburg's only proposal for the safe-guarding of the cultural rights of minorities in such circumstances was the cooperation of all ethnic groups in broad local self-government plus "a separate, empire-wide, linguistic law guarding the interests of the minority [which] can establish a norm in virtue of which national minorities, beginning with a certain numerical minimum, can constitute a basis for the compulsory founding of schools in their national languages", as well as provisions for the use of minority languages in administrative institutions etc.¹ These positive provisions of Rosa Luxemburg's amounted to a system of limited national-territorial autonomy, together with educational and linguistic guarantees for non-territorial national groups. This system, which has received less attention than Luxemburg's views on national self-determination, were closer to Lenin's and Stalin's ideas than to those of the 'national nihilists' in the Bolshevik Party who were often described as 'Luxemburgists' on the national question but who frequently ignored this aspect of Luxemburg's approach.

In common with Lenin and most other Marxists, Rosa Luxemburg identified a tendency for national differences to disappear. This led her to underestimate the problems posed by territories of mixed national composition, for which she foresaw only purely administrative difficulties in terms of education and language. This way of

¹ Luxemburg, p.279.

thinking, especially when taken up by the arguably less sensitive administrators of the new Soviet regime at both local and national levels, led inevitably to tensions and serious errors in underestimating the strength of national sentiments among the non-Russian peoples.

The Bolsheviks before 1917

The Programme adopted by the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party at its Second Congress in 1903 included the following provisions on the national question:

3) Broad local self-rule; regional self-rule for those localities which distinguish themselves by separate living conditions and the composition of the population.

7) Destruction of social estates and full equality for all citizens, regardless of sex, religion, race, and nationality.

8) The right of the population to receive education in its native tongue, secured by the establishment of schools necessary for that purpose at the expense of the government and of organs of self-rule; the right of every citizen to use his native tongue at gatherings; the introduction of native languages on a basis of equality with the state language in all local social and government institutions.

9) The right of all nations in the state to self-determination.¹

These provisions did not include any reference either to national-cultural autonomy or federalism and were accepted by both Menshevik and Bolshevik wings of the Party, but were opposed from one angle or the other by all other sections of the revolutionary movement, including the national parties. The Jewish Bund had adopted the proposal for national-cultural autonomy developed by the Austrian marxists while several nationalist parties, the Armenian Dashnaktsutiun, the Georgian Socialist Federalists, the Bielorussian Hromada, the Jewish group 'Sierp' and a section of the Polish PPS, together with the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries demanded the Russian empire be reorganised into a federation of independent states. By 1912 the Menshevik faction had moved considerably towards the position of national-cultural autonomy, partly in order to accommodate the Bund. Not long after the left wing of the Bolshevik Party led by Bukharin, Piatakov and Evgenia Bosh was to use the arguments of Rosa Luxemburg against article nine of the Party Programme. From 1912 onwards Lenin was forced to conduct a series of polemics against all these opposing opinions both within and outside his own party.

Lenin concurred with Rosa Luxemburg and the orthodox Marxist opinion that nationalism was a product of capitalism and the competition between states, which served to tie the working class to their own ruling classes and divide the international proletariat along national lines. To this extent all nationalism was

¹ R.H. McNeal (ed.), Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Toronto, 1974) Vol.I, p.42.

reactionary and divisive. But unlike Luxemburg or the Austro-Marxists Lenin insisted on a critical distinction between the nationalism of an oppressor nation such as Great Russian Chauvinism and the nationalism of the oppressed non-Russian minorities in the Russian Empire. The former encouraged the workers and peasants of the oppressor nation to believe in their own natural superiority and to look to their own masters rather than to unity with the oppressed of other nations, while the latter encouraged revolutionary opposition to the tsarist empire but also created an understandable mistrust of all members of the oppressor nation. This was not a question of what were the real, underlying forces at work - all workers were oppressed by capitalism, not by one or other national group, while Russian workers had nothing real to gain from the Tsars' oppression of the non-Russians; but it was a question of understanding the psychology of the situation, as Lenin insisted in a letter to Stepan Shaumian:

Why will you not understand the psychology that is so important in the national question and which, if the slightest coercion is applied, besmirches, soils and nullifies the undoubtedly progressive importance of centralised large states and a uniform language.¹

Recognition of the right of national self-determination was essential for two reasons: to eliminate the mistrust of the workers of the oppressed nation towards those of the oppressor nation, and to combat the oppression of the latter. The existence of the right to separate should encourage nations not to desire separation as this right was a guarantee against national oppression and ensured

¹ Lenin, Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii (5th Edition; Moscow, 1964), Vol. XLVIII, p.234.

"the greatest chances of national peace in Russia should she remain a multi-national state."¹ Lenin hoped that the economic advantages of a large state combined with the right to secession would mean that nations would not in fact take this course. Unlike the Austro-Marxist solution, which saw nations as permanent entities and encouraged national particularism through the existence of national assemblies, the Right to National Self-Determination was designed to overcome and hasten the end of national divisions.

The slogan of National Self-Determination was, then, a means of overcoming national mistrust and not a programme for the future organisation of a multi-national state. Lenin clearly believed that large states were preferable to small ones and saw international unity as being in the interests of the working classes:

While recognising equality and equal rights to a national state, [the proletariat] values above all and places foremost the alliance of the proletarians of all nations, and assesses any national demand, any national separation, from the angle of the workers' class struggle."²

He hoped for a unitary state while vehemently rejecting both the system of national-cultural autonomy advocated by the Austro-Marxists and the Bund, and the federal system proposed by the Socialist Revolutionaries, the Dashnaks etc.

For our purposes, the important difference between Lenin and Luxemburg was not so much the principle of

¹ Lenin, Vol.XXV, p.277.

² Lenin, Vol.XXV, pp.274-275.

self-determination itself. But whereas Luxemburg argued that "'the nation' as a homogenous sociopolitical entity does not exist", Lenin viewed the nation as a definable group which could be granted rights distinct from the various classes which made up the nation. This distinction influenced the attitude of the two wings of Bolshevism to the practical tasks of national policy after 1917.

As well as advocating the right of nations to self-determination, Lenin, like Luxemburg, supported the right of national minorities to use their own language and cultures. The important thing here was that coercion should never be employed in linguistic matters, i.e. there should not be a compulsory state language. This was the point he was making in his letter to Shaumian quoted above, and which he elaborated in an article of 1914 "Is a Compulsory Official Language Needed?" He was in favour of a universal language:

We desire more than you do that the closest possible intercourse and fraternal unity should be established between the oppressed classes of all the nations that inhabit Russia, without any discrimination. And we, of course, are in favour of every inhabitant of Russia having the opportunity to learn the great Russian language."¹

An example of this was provided by Armenian schools, where Russian was taught on a voluntary basis.² But the impulse to learn a common language on a voluntary basis was a natural product of capitalism and should never involve coercion.

¹ Lenin, Vol.XXIV, pp.294-295.

² Lenin, Vol.XXIII, p.423.

This distinction was the key to much of Lenin's thought on the national question. The disappearance of national differences was both desirable and an inevitable consequence of capitalist economic relations and the development of an international working class. But for the present nations were a fact, and any attempt to short-cut the natural withering away of the nation would only serve to reinforce nationalist attitudes. This led Lenin to pay great attention to purely formal questions concerning the relationship between nationalities and, almost with his dying breath, to wage a struggle against the Great Russian abuses of the national minorities he saw emerging in the Communist Party and the Soviet state.

In 1913 Lenin asked Stalin to write a work refuting the arguments of the Austro-Marxists, but on the eve of the First World War he himself embarked on "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" as a critique of Rosa Luxemburg's arguments. In terms of his own party, Luxemburg's position was the more serious threat. Luxemburg had received consistent support in the Bolshevik faction from the Pole Karl Radek and Iurii Piatakov, and in 1915-16 they were joined in their opposition to any support for national movements by Nikolai Bukharin. The latter's analysis of imperialism and the war led him to believe that small independent states were no longer viable and that nationalism as a political force was therefore a thing of the past. The slogan of self-determination was "first of all utopian (it cannot be realised within the limits of capitalism) and harmful as a slogan which disseminates illusions."¹ This was essentially a repetition of Luxemburg's argument that the assertion of national interests was a deception.

¹ Stephen F. Cohen, Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938 (Oxford, 1980), pp.35-37.

The argument between Lenin and this group of left Bolsheviks first came to a head in early 1915 over an article by Radek in the journal *Kommunist* and continued into 1916 as Bukharin and Piatakov demanded the removal of article 9 of the Party Programme. The Programme remained unchanged, but the widespread support shown for the arguments of Piatakov and Bukharin indicates an attitude among many Bolsheviks that the demands of nationalities could easily be dismissed as an irrelevance. This attitude should not be dismissed as straightforward contempt for small nations, based as it was on Rosa Luxemburg's serious attempt to develop a general Marxist theory of the national question applicable to Europe in the early twentieth century. But Lenin may have been correct in his fear that such a position would dovetail with the prejudices of Great Russian Chauvinism and would certainly be perceived as such by the smaller nationalities. The emergence of a contemptuous attitude to minority nationalities by many officials of the post-1917 Soviet State may have had many causes, among which serious theoretical beliefs cannot be dismissed.

The Bolsheviks' leading spokesman on nationality affairs both before and after 1917 was I.V. Stalin, whose 1913 article on "Marxism and the National Question" is more important as giving clues to Stalin's own views than for its impact at the time. Stalin was a supporter of Lenin's general position on the national question and was certainly encouraged by Lenin to write his article attacking the Austro-Marxist arguments. But there is some evidence that Lenin disapproved strongly of elements

of Stalin's work,¹ and at least two elements of Stalin's argument appear to be entirely his own and in conflict with Lenin's views. Firstly, Stalin laid down a definition of the nation as a "historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."² This formulation, drawn largely from Bauer, frequently reappears in one variant or another in Stalin's post-1917 works³ and finds its way into party and state resolutions. By furnishing a relatively restricted definition of the nation this formulation could be used to deny any status to certain minority groups (most notably the Jews) on the basis that they did not meet the criteria for nationhood. By insisting on a common territory as necessary to the definition of nations, Stalin at this stage implied that no special steps were needed for national minorities who were not a majority in a given area - their aspirations would automatically be satisfied by the introduction of complete democracy which would guarantee their linguistic, educational and religious rights.⁴ For those that occupied a distinct territory there was Stalin's second innovation - a system of 'regional autonomy' as a means for "breaking down the barriers between nations".⁵ The advantage of territorial autonomy over federalism was that "it does not divide people according to nations, it does not strengthen national barriers; on the contrary, it breaks down these barriers and unites the population in such a manner as to open the way for division of a different kind, division

¹ Harris, pp.71-72; Pipes, pp.40-41.

² I.V. Stalin, Sochineniia (Moscow, 1946ff), Vol.II, p.296.

³ e.g. Stalin, Vol.IV, p.355.

⁴ Stalin, Vol.II, pp.362-363.

⁵ Idem, p.362.

according to classes".¹ Federalism, on the other hand, led to "the disintegration of a united workers' party, the splitting of trade unions according to nationalities, aggravation of national friction, national strike-breaking, complete demoralization within the ranks of Social-Democracy."² It should be noted that here Stalin is talking about organisational federalism within the Socialist movement rather than state federalism. But this is his only attempt to clarify the difference between regional autonomy and federalism. What did this difference consist of? Autonomy broke down national barriers and united workers, while federalism divided them! While Lenin similarly condemned state federalism as divisive, he was prepared to accept its existence in certain circumstances out of tactical considerations, not out of principle, while his objections to federalism could equally have applied to any system of autonomy.³ The point here is, firstly, that the precise distinction between federalism and regional autonomy was not clear, and this was to become important later on; secondly, that Stalin's project for territorial autonomy as a principle was an original contribution to Bolshevik thought.

The Bolsheviks after 1917

Lenin's polemical style of politics meant that most of his writings on the national question were directed against the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg. As a consequence of this the debate centred specifically around the fate of

¹ Stalin, Vol.II, p.362.

² Idem, p.364.

³ Lenin, Vol.XXVII, pp.255-256.

Poland. More generally for the Bolsheviks, discussions of the national question were focused on Poland, Ukraine, the Baltic states and Finland, and to a lesser extent Transcaucasia. Once in power, however, the Bolsheviks were confronted with the reality not only of the major non-Russian areas of Central Asia and the Caucasus, but also with the smaller national groups of the Volga region, Siberia and elsewhere. The slogan of national self-determination was a useful weapon in gaining the support of non-Russians for the Reds against the Whites, who stood openly for Russification, while on the other hand 'Luxemburgist' Bolsheviks like Piatakov argued that Lenin's slogan was largely responsible for the disintegration of the Russian Empire.¹ Whatever its impact, during the Civil War the right to self-determination remained little more than a slogan. Once Soviet power became consolidated in the non-Russian areas, the slogan had nothing to say about the tasks faced by the Bolsheviks in the construction of a multi-national state.

It is therefore paradoxical that the major debates in the Bolshevik Party at least up until 1921 continued to focus exclusively on the right of nations to self-determination. At the Seventh Party Conference in April 1917 Piatakov and others tried unsuccessfully to overturn this point in the Party's Programme,² while the resolution passed by the conference had little to add to the old Programme.³ The same argument provided the focus of debate on the new Programme of the Russian Communist Party at the Eighth Party Congress in March 1919.

¹ Vos'moy s'ezd RKP(b), (Moscow, 1959), p.78.

² Sed'maia (aprel'skaia) vserossiiskaia konferentsiia RSDRP (Moscow, 1958), pp.208-227.

³ McNeal, Resolutions..., pp.225-226.

Piatakov now argued from the experience of the previous two years that

the slogan 'the right of nations to self-determination' which our party has held to from time immemorial, has shown itself in practise, when it comes to the question of the socialist revolution, to be a slogan which is the rallying point for all counter-revolutionary forces.¹

Bukharin presented a new argument to the effect that the slogan of national self-determination was anachronistic in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism, and should now be replaced by the self-determination of the "toiling masses".²

In the Programme adopted by the Eighth Congress, a new qualification was added to the right to self-determination. Paragraph 4 of section 9 dealing with the national question reads:

The All-Russian Communist Party regards the question as to who expresses the desire of a nation for separation, from a historical-class point of view, taking into consideration the level of historical development of any given nation: whether the nation is passing from medievalism toward bourgeois democracy or from bourgeois democracy toward Soviet or proletarian democracy, etc.³

In his report-back on the Party Programme Lenin had vehemently opposed the positions of both Piatakov and

¹ Vos'moi s"ezd RKP(b), p.78.

² Idem, pp.107-110.

³ KPSS v rezolutsiakh (Moscow, 1963), p.45.

Bukharin, employing as one of his arguments against the latter the fact that class development and differentiation had not proceeded far enough among the non-Russian nationalities to be able to talk about the self-determination of the labouring masses. In this respect, he spoke not just about the Bashkirs, Kirghiz, Uzbeks, Tadzhiks and Turkmens, but also about Finland.¹ And yet the new paragraph of the Programme, as is clear from the debate, implied that the old policy of national self-determination still obtained for certain less developed nationalities, while for the more advanced nationalities the principle of self-determination of the toiling masses would apply. What this meant in practise was that in some cases an unrestricted referendum would be necessary, while in others the decision on a nation's future could be taken at a Congress of Soviets. This paragraph had had no place in Lenin's original draft, but was accepted by him during the course of the congress.² It clearly represented a compromise between the positions of Lenin and Bukharin. The point here is that Lenin thought it necessary to accept such a compromise. This was better than a victory for Bukharin, and even a victory for Bukharin was better than a victory for Piatakov. But for Lenin the great tactician to accept a compromise means that he feared defeat. The course of this and other debates indicate that Lenin was never secure in his position on the national question among the Party leadership, while the events of the first few years of Soviet power suggest that he had even less support on this among the Russian rank and file of the Party. The majority of the local communist administrators displayed a nihilistic attitude to the national question which was if anything more extreme than those of Bukharin, Piatakov

¹ Lenin, Vol.XXXVIII, pp.157-158.

² Idem, pp.111-112.

and certainly Rosa Luxemburg. These attitudes were to lead to serious conflicts in Bashkiria, Turkestan and elsewhere.

The arguments over self-determination illustrate that deeply differing attitudes to the national question were widespread in the Russian Communist Party. The policy had little direct relevance in practise, however. Already in 1918 Stalin had proclaimed publicly that the slogan of self-determination was outmoded and "should be subordinated to the principles of socialism."¹ By October 1920

the demand for the secession of the border regions from Russia...must be rejected not only because it runs counter to the very formulation of the question of establishing a union between the centre and the border regions, but primarily because it runs fundamentally counter to the interests of the mass of the people in both the centre and border regions.²

As the revolution and the Red Army spread from the Russian heartland to the periphery, the question was not whether the non-Russian regions should be Soviet, but how they should be administered.

Although the principle of self-determination was not directly applied in the form Lenin had envisaged following the independence of Finland, its adherents still brought it up in numerous important disputes. In subsequent discussions surrounding the formation of autonomous national units and the borders of national territories, the 'spirit of self-determination' was

¹ Stalin, Vol.IV, p.158.

² Idem, p.352.

frequently invoked, and we shall see that it was often the will of the local population, as displayed through congresses of soviets, which played an important part in decision making. The reason the Right of Nations to Self-Determination took up so much time at Party Congresses was that disagreements on this question reflected a broader difference in approach which was to affect the day to day implementation of national policy.

While Lenin continued to take a vigorous role in the debates on the national question at Party conferences and congresses, his concern was primarily for the international impact of the Party's national policy¹ and by his own admission at the end of 1922 had neglected the practicalities of the national question.² While the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party and the Sovnarkom paid a great deal of attention to the western borderlands, the execution of national policy in Russia was left largely in the hands of the Collegium of the Peoples' Commissariat for Nationality Affairs (Narkomnats) and its Commissar, Stalin.

The personnel of Narkomnats was selected in order to reflect the national composition of Russia. Consequently, Party and non-Party workers were drawn in from widely different backgrounds. Thus the head of the Jewish Section, S. Dimanshtein, who for a while was the effective head of Narkomnats, was an Old Bolshevik who had little time for Jewish nationalism either in its Zionist form or as expressed in attempts to establish

¹ See, for example, his report on the national and colonial questions to the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin, Vol.XLI, pp.161-168.

² Lenin, Vol.XLV, p.356.

traditional Jewish culture and the Hebrew language. This was a reflection of his general attitude to the national question, as we shall see. On the other hand there were the members of the Muslim Commissariat, led by Mulla Nur Vakhitov and Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, who espoused outright nationalist, pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic ideas. We shall see in the next chapter that it may have been the Muslim Commissariat as much as Stalin which was initially responsible for the creation of autonomous republics. In between were former supporters of other socialist or nationalist parties who brought with them ideas of cultural autonomy and federalism.¹

From this mixture of personnel a new approach to the national question was to emerge. A series of articles in early issues of the Commissariat's official journal, Zhizn natsional'nostei, gave brief histories of the national minorities and described their present condition. Part of the purpose of these articles was simply to spread knowledge of the lesser nationalities whose existence would have been virtually unknown to many Russians. But they also set out to present the immediate tasks of the Party and State with regard to these nationalities. Common to all these articles are references to the low level of cultural, political and economic development of these peoples. Thus the Turkmens and Kirghiz were "homeless, landless, horseless poor" with few prospects and strongly influenced by the mosques;² the Kalmyks were "ignorant, down-trodden masses";³ the Chuvash were illiterate and lived in miserable economic conditions, and were dominated by

¹ The impact of these 'national communists' is discussed below in chapter 5.

² Zhizn natsional'nostei no.3, 24th November 1918, p.2.

³ ZN, no.3, 24th November 1918, p.3.

Russians and Tatars who controlled all industry and commerce in the region.¹ As a consequence of this "backwardness", these peoples showed little enthusiasm for the revolution, were mistrustful of the Russians, and were deeply influenced by religion. The immediate task of Soviet power, then, was to improve their economic condition, to provide educational facilities, to attract as far as possible the local intelligentsia and to conduct socialist propaganda.

Whether influenced by his officials at Narkomnats or pursuing his independent train of thought, a similar attitude emerged in the writings and speeches of Stalin. In his article "One Immediate Task" published in Pravda on 9th April 1918, Stalin stressed the problems posed by the low cultural level of the non-Russians:

Soviet power has not yet succeeded in becoming a people's power to quite the same extent in the border regions inhabited by culturally backward elements. The revolution begun in the centre spread to the border regions, especially the eastern, with a certain amount of delay. Conditions as regards language and manner of life in these regions, which are moreover economically backward, have somewhat complicated the consolidation of Soviet power there. In order that the power there might become a people's power, and the labouring masses become socialist, it is necessary, among other things, to devise special methods of drawing the labouring and exploited masses of these regions into the process of revolutionary development. It is necessary to raise the masses to the level of

¹ ZN, no.4, 1st December 1918, p.7.

Soviet power, and to identify their finest representatives with it.

The most important 'special method' was national-territorial autonomy:

this is impossible unless these regions are autonomous, that is, have their own schools, courts, administrations, organs of power and social, political and cultural institutions, and unless the labouring masses of these regions are fully guaranteed the right to use their own language in all spheres of social and political activity.¹

Stalin elaborated what he meant by autonomy in his speech declaring autonomy for Dagestan at the Congress of the Peoples of Dagestan in November 1920:

the Government of Russia considers it necessary to tell you that Dagestan must be autonomous, that it will enjoy the right to internal self-administration, while retaining its fraternal ties with the peoples of Russia. Dagestan must be governed in accordance with its specific features, its manner of life and customs.²

So autonomy did not just aim at protecting the national minorities against the violation of their rights, but sought to preserve the national characteristics of the people. This went so far as maintaining traditions of a religious character, in the case of Dagestan the Muslim Shariat (Islamic legal system):

¹ Stalin, Vol.IV, p.75.

² Idem, p.395.

The Soviet Government considers that the Sharia, as common law, is as fully authorised as that of any other of the peoples inhabiting Russia. If the Dagestan people desire to preserve their laws and customs, they should be preserved...it is the definite purpose of the Soviet Government in granting Dagestan autonomy to single out from the local forces men who are honest and loyal and who love their people, and to entrust to them all the organs of administration in Dagestan, both economic and administrative. Only thus, only in this way, can close contact be established between Soviet power in Dagestan and the people. The Soviet government has no other object than to raise Dagestan to a higher cultural level by enlisting the co-operation of local forces. The Soviet government knows that the worst enemy of the people is ignorance. It is therefore necessary to create the greatest possible number of schools and organs of administration functioning in the local languages".¹

In conclusion "the autonomy of Dagestan will become the secure and indestructible foundation of the life of the Dagestan Republic"².

The answer to cultural and economic backwardness was, then, to promote national characteristics through regional autonomy. This was the case even in Dagestan, which was unique among the Soviet autonomous republics and regions in including a complex mix of ethnic, religious and linguistic elements. In spite of this, it was hoped that by the promotion of the various national languages, schools, traditional institutions and entrusting administration to individuals who 'love their

¹ Stalin, Vol.IV, pp.395-396.

² Idem, p.398.

people' the population of Dagestan would come to see the Dagestan Republic as the 'secure and indestructible foundation' of their life and through it to be raised 'to a higher cultural level'.

Stalin returned to the theme of backwardness at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in March 1921, the first Congress where discussion of the national question went beyond the slogan of self-determination and dwelt on the the detailed implementation of policy. In the resolution adopted by the Congress, it was accepted that "the Party's task is to help the labouring masses of the non-Great-Russian peoples to catch up with central Russia, which has forged ahead, to help them: a) to develop and strengthen their Soviet statehood in forms corresponding to the national conditions of these peoples; b) to develop and strengthen their courts, administration, economic organs and organs of power, functioning in the native languages and staffed with local people familiar with the manner of life and the psychology of the local population; c) to develop their press, schools, theatres, recreation clubs and educational institutions generally, functioning in the native languages; d) to set up and develop a broad network of courses and" schools both of a general-educational and of a vocational-technical character in the native language..."¹ In his introductory speech, Stalin stated that

the essence of the national question in the RSFSR lies in abolishing the actual backwardness (economic, political and cultural) that some of the nations have inherited from the past, to make it possible for the

¹ Desiatyi s"ezd RKP(b), mart 1921 goda - stenograficheskiy otchet (Moscow, 1963), p.252.

backward peoples to catch up with central Russia in political, cultural and economic terms.¹

In his conclusion, he repeated this point:

owing to the actual inequality (cultural, economic and political) inherited from the old bourgeois order, inequality between the more cultured and less cultured nations, the national question assumes a form which calls for the working out of measures that will help the labouring masses of the backward nations and nationalities to make economic, political and cultural progress, that will enable them to catch up with central - proletarian - Russia, which has forged ahead. From this follow the practical proposals which constitute the third section of the theses on the national question which I have submitted²

(i.e. autonomy).

So the main task in the national question was to eliminate backwardness, which could be achieved through national-territorial autonomy. The Bolsheviks were acutely aware of the fact that they had led a socialist revolution in a predominantly peasant country. In the absence of aid in the form of successful revolutions in the industrial countries of Western Europe, it was essential to take short-term measures to promote economic and political development in Russia, including wide-ranging concessions to the peasantry. One consequence of this was the New Economic Policy introduced by the same Party Congress. For the non-Russians, who were even more overwhelmingly peasant than the Russians, development had

¹ Stalin, Vol.V, p.39.

² Stalin, Vol.V, p.44.

to be national in form. If the non-Russian peasantry were not yet ready to identify with socialism and with Soviet power, they might identify with the state through national identity, on which the Soviet and autonomous republics and the autonomous regions were based. In an article written at the end of 1921, Stalin listed the Party's national policy as one of the three principal factors which had served to "rally the peasants of more than twenty nationalities in the vast expanse of Russia around the Red Flag of the Russian proletariat."¹ It was clearly his hope that by promoting national statehood, culture and language, the peasantry would move closer to socialism.

A small incident at the Tenth Party Congress provides a further insight into Bolshevik thinking at this time. During his closing speech, Stalin was handed a note accusing the Communists of artificially cultivating a Bielorussian nationality. According to Stalin "that is not true, for there exists a Bielorussian nation, which has its own language, different from Russian. Consequently, the culture of the Bielorussian people can be raised only in its native language"². Language was sufficient to define a nation, and in spite of the weakness of Bielorussian national identity at the time, on that basis the Bolsheviks were going to promote Bielorussian nationhood.

While Stalin's views were not shared by all Bolsheviks by any means, in this period they were common to many leading figures in Narkomnats and in the Party and administrative bodies of the national republics and regions. They were therefore essential in influencing

¹ Stalin, Vol.V, p.113.

² Stalin, Vol.V, p.48.

the direction of policy with regard to the national minorities.

For all of the Bolsheviks, the first years of Soviet power provided their first experience of dealing on a practical level with the national question, and for this they were poorly prepared. The principle of the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, while it ceased to apply in the sense of the right to secede and form a separate state, was a general guide; for its supporters, it meant that the wishes of the national minorities with regard to their own constitutional status, language and culture had to be respected within certain parameters. But otherwise it was a question of developing policy as events unfolded, with a great deal of improvisation and contradiction.

Before 1917, debates among the Marxist movement on the national question had centred around the need to combat oppression and to promote international unity. Now the discussion started not from imperialism, but from general backwardness. In this context it was being proposed that nationality could be something much more positive, as a means to promote the cultural, economic and political development of the non-Russians. National identity became not a problem, but part of a solution. In making autonomy the central plank of their national policy, the Bolsheviks were drawing on not only elements which could be found in the programmes of Rosa Luxemburg and Stalin, but also the approach of the Austro-Marxists. This was more or less acknowledged in the admission of the Bund and the Ukrainian Borotbists into the Communist movement in 1921. One theoretical precondition of this view was

that the Marxist assumption that nations were transitory phenomena which would rapidly disappear was shelved at least for the time being. Around this time Lenin acknowledged as much in a written reply to the Tatar Communist S. Said-Galiev,¹ and this was confirmed by the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1923.² The nation was not something that would disappear over the next few years. On the contrary, the policy of the Bolsheviks was now, by means of territorial autonomy, ethnic consolidation, education, linguistic and cultural development, and the recruitment of national communists, to promote the nation as a focus for the overall development of the non-Russians to the 'higher stage' of socialism.

¹ B.F. Sultanbekov (ed.), Tainy natsional'noi politiki TsK RKP - stenograficheskyi otchet sekret'nogo IV soveshchaniia TsK RKP, 1923 g., (Moscow, 1992), p.31.

² Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), 17-25 apreliia 1923 goda - stenograficheskii otchet, (Moscow, 1968), p.654.

CHAPTER 3 - THE CASE FOR NATIONAL AUTONOMY - CAUSES AND PROCESSES

In March 1917 the Provisional Government had guaranteed the equal rights of Russian citizens of all nationalities and religions in regard to residence, property, employment, commerce, military and state service, education and language.¹ Beyond affirming these general rights the Provisional Government did not, however, propose any concrete territorial rights beyond those committees generally set up to execute limited local government, or create any institutions directed specifically at taking care of the needs of the national minorities, although such matters were, of course, likely to come up for discussion at a future meeting of the Constituent Assembly. After the October revolution the new Soviet government in its "Declaration of Rights" confirmed these general rights and also invited "each nation to decide independently at its own plenipotentiary Soviet congress, whether and on what basis to participate in the federal government and in the other federal Soviet institutions."² The Constitution adopted at the fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets on 10th July 1918 went some way towards clarifying the basis of this relationship in its article 11:

The soviets of districts distinguished by a particular way of life and national composition can be united into autonomous district unions, at the head of

¹ Sbornik ukazov i postanovlenii Vremennogo Pravitel'stva, Vipusk 1 (Petrograd, 1917), p.46.

² Velikii Oktiabr (Moscow, 1987), p.123.

which...stand district congresses of soviets and their executive organs. These autonomous district unions enter on the basis of federation into the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic."¹

Several historians have stressed that the 1918 constitution failed to clarify the exact relationship between the federal state and these national 'unions'.² But it would be misleading to view this constitution in the same way as, for instance, the constitution of the United States of America which aims to define the precise roles and privileges of the various branches of government. By contrast the first Soviet Constitution, in passages where it talks about specific organs of power such as the Central Executive Committee and the Soviet of People's Commissars employs such vague terms as "general direction", "guidance" and "all measures necessary for the correct and speedy flow of state life."³ The constitution reads more like a general bill of rights than a blueprint for a system of government, and its vagueness on the national structure of the RSFSR can not be singled out as an especial area of neglect. Treating the constitution as a serious founding document becomes even less appropriate when it is realised that by the time of its adoption it already failed to reflect the actual developments in the relationship between the Russian federal government and the borderlands. Possibly this was simply an inefficient by-product of the time lag between the drafting of the document and its official ratification, with little opportunity for updating or amendment in between. At any rate, by the time the

¹ Velikii Oktiabr, p.138.

² Both Carr and Pipes state, incorrectly, that the word 'federation' does not appear in the constitution. Pipes, p.247.

³ Velikii Oktiabr, p.139.

constitution was officially adopted it was clear from the actual development of the autonomous regions and republics, as well as from the public statements of leading Bolsheviks, most notably Stalin, on the topic, that the national principle lay at the heart of the emerging system of autonomy and it was the requirement for specifically national rights and powers which dictated the need for such a system.

It was impossible for the constitution at that time to define precisely the status of the national territories, even more impossible than with the rest of the state structure; that structure was evolving in an improvised manner influenced by several impulses which included not just Marxist ideology and the beliefs of the Communist Party leadership but also factors on the ground. This was especially the case in those borderland areas where, cut off from the centre, Bolshevik influence was weak and national factors, in the form of deep cultural-religious differences and historic ethnic rivalries, played a major role in shaping Bolshevik policies. The system of autonomous territories which was to survive, at least in theory, in the same form for the next seventy years was largely the product of on-the-hoof decisions and haphazard developments.

The People's Commissariat of Nationality Affairs

Although the principle of regional autonomy formally remained a part of the Bolsheviks' party programme¹ the

¹ McNeal, Resolutions..., Vol. I, p.226.

question merited little discussion in leading party and state bodies in the early months of the revolution, when the national question focused mainly on relations with the Ukraine. Rather than forming self-governing districts, the Bolsheviks preferred approach to dealing with the rights and grievances of the national minorities was to give them representation and some decision-making power through a special department of the central government, the People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs (Narkomnats), under Stalin.¹ Unlike the other People's Commissariats, Narkomnats oversaw the activities of several individual commissariats, one for each of the major non-Russian nationalities, while smaller nationalities were accorded not a commissariat, but a department (otdel) or were dealt with by a section of the department for national minorities (in practice there was little effective difference between a commissariat and a department, and I shall refer collectively to both as "departments"). According to Stephen Blank the role of the commissariat was as "an instrument for the recruitment, mobilization, and socialization of nationality elites and, through them, their masses",² and was to function as no more than an intermediary for the implementation of the decisions of the Soviet government through those elites, with a secondary function of information gathering.³ But it is clear that at least in the eyes of the members of the Narkomnats' collegium themselves their role was more than this, acting as the direct representatives of the national minorities to the central government and in that capacity having some

¹ For a more detailed account of the history and activities of Narkomnats, see Blank, The Sorcerer as Apprentice...

² Stephen Blank, "The Unknown Commissariat: the Soviet Commissariat of Nationalities 1917-1924" (unpublished PhD. thesis, Chicago, 1979), p.32.

³ Idem, p.108.

involvement in the legislative process itself. At the first full meeting of the collegium, which included Stalin, Narkomnats gave itself and its constituent commissariats the right to examine all decrees, and the individual national commissars the right to be present at meetings of Sovnarkom when questions affecting their nationality were to be discussed.¹

Narkomnats' request for additional representation on the Sovnarkom was never agreed to by the latter, whose desire for Narkomnats to operate on the same footing as other commissariats led to conflicts between the two bodies and within the Narkomnats' collegium. While the other collegia were directly appointed by the Sovnarkom, Narkomnats' collegium was made up of the managers of the individual nationalities' departments, in addition to the commissar and his deputy. As the managers were generally chosen on the criterion that they were themselves members of the relevant nationality, it was objected that the membership of a collegium whose role was the general political direction and implementation of government policy was being determined on purely national lines rather than political suitability. This anomaly led Sovnarkom to order a reorganisation of the Narkomnats collegium on 23rd July 1918, which would reduce its size from sixteen to nine, to bring it into line with the other commissariats. The subsequent debate within Narkomnats on the reorganisation revealed the confusion over Narkomnats' dual role - as an executive organ of the central government on the one hand, and as representative of the national minorities on the other. While the meeting unanimously accepted the proposal that the collegium's composition should be based on political, not

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, 1.1.

national principles, a majority of members continued to argue for the inclusion of representatives of certain nationalities, to the evident frustration of the meeting's chair, Pestkovskii. The debate descended into absurdity with a suggestion that both principles would in effect be satisfied in the event, as the list of members proposed on purely political grounds included members of all the major national groups, including Stalin as a Georgian!¹

What becomes clear from this debate is that a majority of Narkomnats' activists saw themselves as the representatives of their own nationalities to the government, with unique competence to oversee matters affecting the non-Russians. At the same time as attempting to increase its representation on Sovnarkom, the commissariat was bidding to take over responsibility for two major issues facing the Soviet state in the course of 1918 - the refugee problem, and the education of national minorities. As the considerable numbers of refugees entering Russia were primarily fugitives from war in Bielorussia and Armenia, Narkomnats in April 1918 proposed to the Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) that it should take on sole responsibility for this problem.² This proposal was rejected by the NKVD, leading Narkomnats to appeal to the Sovnarkom, which eventually resolved the dispute by creating a special Central Collegium for prisoners of war and refugee affairs attached to the NKVD.³ Likewise, Narkomnats' proposal to set up its own cultural-educational commission was overruled in favour of a commission

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, 11.52-56.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, 1.8.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, 11.10, 15, 25.

attached to the People's Commissariat for Education, with some Narkomnats representation.¹

Narkomnats' frustration at being unable to assert itself with a clearly defined role in the government led the collegium to propose its own abolition in July 1919, passing the following motion:

Taking into account the fact that the People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs has not had clearly defined functions, but has touched on the functions of other departments, and the fact that staff turnover has meant that in recent times several urgent matters have been impossible to resolve, the Collegium has decided that the People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs will transfer with its apparatus to a department of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. The department considers that, for the fruitful fulfilment of its work, at the head of the Department for Nationality Affairs there should stand a member of the All-Russian CEC who is responsible for its work..."²

In addition to the commissariat's failure to mark out a clear role for itself at the highest level of government and the constant absence of Stalin and other key members who had been commandeered to work for the war effort, Narkomnats had suffered setbacks at a local level in a series of disputes with Soviet organs, most notably in Kursk where, in February 1919, the Gubispolkom had unilaterally closed down the local department for nationality affairs.³ The outcome of this dispute was a

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.29. See below, chapter 6.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.2, l.104.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.102.

further erosion of Narkomnats' authority as the formal existence of independent Soviet republics in the western borderlands logically ended Narkomnats' competence over those nationalities and led in March to the closure of its commissariats and departments with responsibilities for Latvian, Estonian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Bielorussian affairs.¹ Between that time and its decision to liquidate itself, the Narkomnats collegium met only once, and its subsequent decision, whether it represented a cry of desperation, or was based on a genuine belief that the interests of the national minorities' interests would best be served by a department of VTsIK, clearly reflects a deep-felt frustration at its inability to act as a major organ of government. At any rate, the Soviet of People's Commissars (SNK) rejected this decision and ordered a reorganised collegium to continue its work under the leadership of N. Narimanov and S. Dimanshtein.²

The failure of Narkomnats to win the responsibilities it sought over education and refugees at the highest level, and the frequent subordination of its local organs, has led commentators to view the commissariat as something of a lame duck which had little effective role until Stalin began to build it up as his personal power base after 1920.³ However, the preoccupation of the regime with economic reform and waging the civil war, combined with the uneven course of development of the revolution in the different areas of the empire and the relative weakness of the Bolsheviks among the national minorities, allowed considerable scope for the various departments of the commissariat to organise among the

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.2, l.94

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.2, l.113.

³ Pipes, p.113; Blank, "The Unknown Commissariat...", pp.137-145.

non-Russians at a local level, and even to initiate major projects affecting individual nationalities which were eventually to affect the whole constitutional structure and national policy of the Soviet state. In 1918 and 1919 the national commissariats and departments were active in organising military, political and cultural work on the ground and in winning Moscow's support for the principle of regional autonomy. The commissariat then played a leading role in establishing the seventeen autonomous regions and republics of the RSFSR that came into being by 1923.

National Units in the Red Army

During 1918 much of the energy of the national departments was devoted to military matters. Almost immediately on the outbreak of the Czechoslovak revolt the Commissariat for War invited Narkomnats to initiate the recruitment and organisation of special National Brigades.¹ Narkomnats set about this task with a will, starting with refugees and prisoners of war, but spreading its activities into the non-Russian areas through its local departments, printing literature on a large scale, in one case scattering leaflets from an aeroplane, and sending leading cadres to agitate for the formation of military units, (it was on such a mission that one of the most important Muslim communists, Vakhitov, was captured and shot in Kazan). By the end of the year Narkomnats boasted its success in creating national brigades or detachments among Poles, Muslims,

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.15.

Estonians, Lithuanians, Mari, Chuvashi, Votiaks and Kirghiz and national Red Army units in the North Caucasus.¹

Prior to the revolution, in addition to the Cossack formations, there had existed small voluntary units of Crimean Tatars, Dagestanis, Ossetians and Turkmens in the imperial service, while a small Finnish army charged with defending the Grand Duchy was abolished in 1899. But on the whole the Russian army was entirely hostile to the idea of national military units. On the contrary, it imposed a rule that at least three quarters of all units must consist of Russians (including Ukrainians and Bielorussians), that the remaining quarter should not be taken exclusively from one nationality, and that non-Russian conscripts should perform their service far away from their native regions. An attempt by the Finnish Senate to reform its national battalions after 1905 was quickly blocked by the Russian government.² The rationale behind such regulations was obvious; the existence of separate national units would provide a breeding ground for nationalist sentiment and solidarity as well as serving as a ready made force to support any national risings such as those which had occurred in Poland in the nineteenth century. In addition, the policy of incorporating native conscripts into Russian-dominated formations, with Russian as the sole language of command, furthered the regime's policy of russification.

By contrast the Bolsheviks, as champions of the oppressed nationalities, welcomed the existence of

¹ ZN no.1, 9th November 1918, pp.1-2.

² Pertti Luntinen, French Information on the Russian War Plans 1880-1914, (Helsinki, 1984), pp.22-23, 64, 105, 178.

separate national units. The war commissar, Trotsky, initially saw these units as a means of uniting the class struggle with the national struggle.¹ On April 30th 1918 a joint meeting of Narkomnats and the Commissariat for War resolved to start creating national military brigades.² The organisation of national units was an expedient way of recruiting forces in non-Russian areas. But the naming of these units by their national composition, their initial allocation to operations in their own national regions, special command structures, the existence of separate propaganda departments and, in the case of the Muslim population, of a separate War Collegium, indicate that the Bolsheviks were ready to place the national principle at the base of the most important instrument of the revolution at that time. The danger of such units, welded together more by common nationality than by a common desire to defend the revolution, falling under the influence of anti-Soviet nationalists was clearly recognised by Narkomnats, which insisted on their close political supervision by agents of the commissariat and by the "national Soviet socialist parties."³ With this proviso the commissariat continued to oversee the formation of national units throughout 1918 and 1919, mobilising Finns, North Caucasians, and especially Central Asian Muslims, while the War Commissariat was ultimately responsible for the national units of the western borderlands. Typically mobilisation in Central Asia was initiated by a local soviet or more general meeting of workers which, having condemned the White generals and foreign military intervention, called for volunteers to enlist. Special

¹ Stephen Blank, "The Bolshevik Party and the Nationalities in 1917", Sbornik no.9, January 1983, p.13.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.15.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.17.

agitators would carry out the recruitment and organise regular meetings among the recruits, backed up by a series of publications in different languages aimed at Red Armymen of specific nationalities.¹ The long-term survival of the national principle in the Red Army appeared to be assured by the opening of a school specifically to train Muslim officers for the Red Army in Kazan in August 1919.² In several cases this policy won the support of non-Bolshevik national parties, with regional Bund organisations setting up Jewish units apparently on their own initiative at the time of the greatest threat from Kolchak,³ and entered a new dimension when an entire national Bashkir army passed over to the Bolsheviks and formed the basis of the new Bashkir Autonomous Republic at the beginning of 1919.

The encouragement of national identity in the Red Army inevitably led to problems with the chain of command, and clashes over the extent of autonomy in the military sphere first came to a head in the Ukraine. The fractious situation among the Ukrainian communists at this time was further complicated by the presence of an invading Red Army, which in turn was subject to tactical disagreements between the local commander, Antonov-Ovseenko, and the overall Commander-in-Chief Vatsetis; meanwhile the Ukrainian operation also became embroiled in the conflict between Trotsky and the 'Tsaritsyn Group'. The differing political strategies of the left and right Ukrainians led the former in 1918 to support a strategy of immediate, peasant-based guerilla warfare against Skoropadski while the latter preferred a waiting strategy; while the lefts welcomed the Red Army

¹ ZN no.21, 13th April 1919, p.3; no.26, 18th May 1919, p.4.

² ZN no.41, 3rd August 1919, p.4.

³ ZN no.25, 11th May 1919, p.4. See below, chapter 5.

invasion, both sides subsequently bombarded Moscow with complaints over the treatment of the local population by the invading force and the military leadership's refusal to take any notice of the Ukrainian communists.¹ On 16th January 1919 the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party upheld the Ukrainian complaints, resolving to sort out the question of the military command in their favour, demanding the dismissal of Voroshilov and Rukhimovich from military work and allowing the replacement of Antonov-Ovseenko himself if the Ukrainians desired it.² Antonov-Ovseenko remained, and eventually sided with the Ukrainians in conflicts with Moscow over military affairs.

As the Red Army established Soviet power in Ukraine, it fell into the intolerable situation of being under the dual command of both the Commander-in-Chief of the RSFSR and the Commissar for War of the Ukraine. The two issued completely contradictory orders at various times, reflecting different priorities; the Russian command was primarily concerned with using Ukraine as a bridgehead to Central Europe and, in the immediate term, establishing a line of military support for Bela Kun's revolution in Hungary, while Antonov-Ovseenko and the Ukrainian communists were more concerned with local tasks. According to Juriy Borys, the main problem with the Ukrainian attitude was that "they looked at the revolutionary situation in Ukraine with somewhat patriotic eyes" which meant they wanted to restrict the operations of Ukrainian forces to purely Ukrainian tasks.³ This attitude had a very real basis in the fact

¹ Arthur E. Adams, Bolsheviks in the Ukraine, the Second Campaign 1918-1919 (New Haven and London, 1963), pp.25-61.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.8, l.1.

³ Juriy Borys, The Sovietization of Ukraine 1917-1923, (Edmonton, 1980), pp.235-236.

that the bulk of the Ukrainian forces were composed of undisciplined peasant units whose political allegiance was to the left Ukrainian social democrats and SRs rather than the Bolsheviks, and who had little interest in Soviet power in Ukraine, let alone in Central Europe.¹

It was these bands which provoked a sharpening of the dispute with Moscow and led Trotsky to rethink his evaluation of the effectiveness of national units: "the revolution took everything it could from the improvised insurgent units; any further and these units become not only dangerous, but simply ruinous to the cause of the revolution..." He proposed harsh disciplinary measures, concluding that "since this work has...a decisive significance for the fate of the Ukrainian Soviet republic, I think that the Ukrainian party should concentrate its main efforts in the field of the reorganisation and training of the Ukrainian army."² At about the same time Trotsky was involved in a dispute over the control of sailors sent to defend the Gulf of Riga with the Latvian Commissar of War Peterson, who had subordinated these forces to his own appointee, Zenin. On 13th April 1919 Trotsky telegraphed the Russian Central Committee, insisting that it was necessary

decisively to put an end to these regionalist tendencies...All appointed orders ought to go out via the Western Front. We can not have speeches about the assumption of dual subordination...I ask the Central Committee of the Party immediately to send the necessary admonishment, making it clear to the Latvian

¹ Borys, p.238.

² "Iz arkhiva t.Sklianskogo" (Trotsky Archive), quoted in Borys, p.239.

comrades that similar hasty steps should be avoided in the future.¹

The Central Committee had recently issued instructions to the Ukrainian party on the need to subordinate all questions to do with food supplies to the appropriate organs of the RSFSR,² and its response to the current disputes with Latvia and Ukraine was simply to extend this instruction to cover military matters in all the republics.³

On 4th May the Central Committee clarified the subordination of all military matters to the RSFSR in a directive to friendly Soviet Socialist Republics which treated the territory of each of the republics as a military okrug (region) of the Russian Military Revolutionary Council (MRC), apart from Ukraine which would be divided into an unspecified number of okrugs. The directive subordinated the mobilisation and allocation of supplementary forces (medical etc.) to the MRC, allowed the formation of new units only with the MRC's permission and gave the MRC control over all questions of supply as well as establishing the direct subordination of all military units to the commands of the Russian body.⁴ In this decision the CC specifically criticised the tendency of the national republics to treat national military units as primarily useful for operations within their own borders, rather than devoting them to the tasks of the revolution as a whole. At the end of the month the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party initiated the process of formalising the military

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.16, l.14.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.15, l.2.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.16, l.14.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.17, l.9-10.

relations of the republics by instructing the Russian VTsIK and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine to set about completely unifying the War Commissariats and military commands of the two republics, reducing the Ukrainian War Commissariat to the status of a district plenipotentiary of the Russian body.¹ On 1st June a commission was formed to work on the text of such an agreement covering all the Soviet republics.² The matter was not entirely resolved, however, and Trotsky again had to complain to the Central Committee about the interference of the Ukrainian government in military affairs,³ and a formal agreement on the military and economic union of the two republics was not signed until the very end of 1920.⁴ But already by the spring of 1919 the power of the leaderships in the national Soviet republics to act independently had been effectively removed in the military sphere, and the subsequent relationship of the military organs was to become a model for relationships in general in the future federal state.⁵

Trotsky's objections had been to the indisciplined, partisan nature of national units and the interference of the national governments in the command structure, rather than being directed against the existence of national military units as such. In spite of the Ukrainian experience, the Bolsheviks continued to back the organisation of national formations, particularly through the Muslim War Collegium and the departments of

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.9, l.1.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.10, l.1.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.23, l.1.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.48, l.1.

⁵ Bertram D. Wolfe, "The Influence of Early Military Decisions upon the National Structure of the Soviet Union", American Slavic and East European Review, Vol. 9, 1950, pp.169-170.

Narkomnats, but adopted a much more cautious approach. In January 1920, three days after approving a project of Smilga to form a Caucasian-Kuban Labourers' Army,¹ the Politburo vetoed the creation in Kazan guberniya of independent Muslim units on a religious basis (known as God's Warriors).² In April 1921 the Politburo allowed the formation of a Ukrainian regiment, but strictly as an experiment and under the direct political responsibility of M. Frunze, who was to provide monthly reports to the Central Committee.³

It clearly made sense from the military point of view to have a unified army with a single command structure right from the start of the civil war. But the nature of the revolution in the borderlands, which combined a national struggle with class struggle, and the Bolshevik approach to the national question led them initially to rely on irregular national forces, especially in Ukraine. Having incorporated these units into a centralised Red Army by mid-1919, the question arises of why the Bolsheviks continued to encourage the formation and deployment of units constructed along national lines. By allowing the national minorities to form their own military units, albeit with little control over their activities, the Bolsheviks were encouraging the retention or development of a national identity and were conforming with their overall approach of allowing national sentiment to feel at home in the Soviet state. The importance of national military units as a symbol of national sovereignty was clearly recognised at the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1923, when both Stalin and Trotsky expressed the hope that

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.57, l.1.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.58, l.3.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.155, l.6.

within a couple of years the national republics of the USSR would be able to rely on their own forces for defence.¹

The National Commissariats and Departments of Narkomnats

Aside from military matters, the departments of Narkomnats were engaged in a wide area of cultural and political activities among the national minorities; the business of a single week at the end of 1918, as described in one of the first issues of the commissariat's journal, Zhizn natsional'nostei, gives an impression of the range of their work: the Armenian Commissariat was preparing a widespread circulation of a declaration on the current situation and printing a translation of Radek's "The Communist Party in Germany"; the Bielorussian Commissariat had organised a concert-meeting on the anniversary of the October revolution and was organising schools for refugee children; the Votiak section was producing two newspapers, "Vil'-Sin" and "Udmort" and an agricultural journal "Udmort Kalikli Kule Kenieshes"; the Jewish Commissariat had closed down the 'Union of Jewish Warriors', was sending a mission to the Chernigov guberniia, opened a Jewish seminary in Moscow, was publishing children's books in Yiddish, involved itself in organising aid for refugees in Tambov, and blocked a move by Poale-Zion to take over the affairs of the Jewish community in Moscow; the Latvian Commissariat had organised a workers' theatre in Moscow; the Department for Caucasian Highlanders was carrying out a

¹ See below, chapter 7.

census of Highlanders and planning the construction of a cotton mill; the Kirghiz Department was sending agitators with literature to the Kirghiz regions occupied by the Czechoslovaks; the Mari Department was recruiting well; the Polish Commissariat had liquidated all its provincial sections except those in Petrograd and Smolensk; the Chuvash Department was starting a daily socialist paper; and the Estonian Department had increased the number of regiments in Estonia, was organising an Estonian choir and had opened an Estonian teachers' congress in Petrograd.¹

The tasks of the national departments, as laid down for the Department for Caucasian Highlanders, were: a) informing the Soviet regime of the needs of the Caucasus; b) informing the Highlanders of the policies of the Soviet regime; c) the satisfaction of the needs of the Highlanders through the organs of Soviet power; d) propaganda and agitation for the ideas of the Soviet regime; e) the implementation according to the principles of the Soviet Constitution of the principles and provisions of administrative territorial national autonomy for the North Caucasus and Dagestan. The department was to have its own collegium with decision-making powers subject to Narkomnats' approval consisting of representatives of the different mountain tribes. In addition to the above tasks the department was responsible for educational reform to ensure the availability of teaching in the native languages, translation and distribution of socialist literature, and the implementation of communist economic reorganisation with the aid of resources brought in from outside the local economy.²

¹ ZN no.2, 17th November 1918, p.7.

² ZN no.3, 24th November 1918, p.8.

As well as the departments with overall responsibility for particular nationalities, Narkomnats organised in the provinces local departments for nationality affairs attached to the city and regional soviets, which would oversee separate sections for each of the nationalities represented in the region. The regional departments' tasks were the provision in native languages of material on the measures of Soviet power, the execution of Narkomnats' resolutions, raising the cultural level and class-consciousness of the national minorities and the "struggle with counter-revolution in its national manifestations". These departments had a dual subordination to the local Ispolkom and to Narkomnats.¹

So although the national and regional departments of Narkomnats were largely involved in spreading propaganda and overseeing cultural and educational matters, they also had responsibility for economic reforms specific to national groups - no small task in a state that considered a majority of the national minorities "backward" and in need of hauling up to the economic level necessary for socialism. They also acted as the political representatives of the nationalities until the establishment of autonomous units. As such, they frequently came into conflict with Russian-dominated Soviet organs which showed little interest in the national demands of the local population, and thus the departments came increasingly to be the defenders of national, and even nationalist, demands.² Organised in a fairly ad hoc manner, left largely to their own devices by the higher organs of Soviet power, while only under the loose supervision of the Narkomnats collegium, and frequently staffed by nationalists who had come over late

¹ ZN no.6, 15th December 1918, p.7.

² Blank, "The Unknown Commissariat...", pp.177-185.

to the Bolsheviks there was considerable scope for these departments to play a major role in the evolution of national policy and to emerge as the political leaderships of a major portion of the Soviet population which were to lead the drive to national autonomy.

The Muslim Commissariat

The most independently-minded and strident of the departments was the Muslim Commissariat (Muskom). Formed at the beginning of 1918, the Commissariat under the energetic leadership of Vakhitov opened a network of Muslim Bureaus and Guberniya Muslim Commissariats across the regions of Russia which agitated for the political leadership of the Muslim movement and for enlistment to the Red Army.¹ The Muskom was able to act independently of Narkomnats to the extent that it was granted funds directly by the SNK in July 1918.² In spite of the death of Vakhitov and the occupation by the Czechoslovaks of much of the area covered by the Muskom network the Muskom continued to assert itself under the leadership of the Tatar Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev. The independent line pursued irritated the other officials of Narkomnats. When the Muskom went directly to the Soviet of People's Commissars (SNK) in an attempt to amend the decree on the separation of Church and State in August 1918 it was severely reprimanded by the collegium.³ The SNK regularly backed the Muskom, however, and on 30th August 1918 the frustrated collegium was forced to concede the

¹ Blank, "The Unknown Commissariat...", pp.57-70.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.48.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.58.

independence of the Muskom¹ and to open negotiations with the Muskom's leaders the following month.² The Muskom further pitted itself against Narkomnats in October, demanding amendments to the latter's instruction to local departments to include a commitment to the cultural self-determination of the Muslim population.³ This dispute provoked an ugly scene at a subsequent meeting of the Narkomnats Collegium, where the chairman Karklin had to intervene in a personal slanging match between Sultan-Galiev and the collegium member Sova-Stepniak.⁴ Relations between Narkomnats and the Muskom had deteriorated to such an extent that the collegium attempted in November to liquidate the Muskom and replace it with a Commissariat for Tatar-Bashkir Affairs,⁵ a move that was overturned by the SNK in January 1919.⁶ The struggle then moved to the Muslim War Collegium, which Narkomnats tried to abolish on the basis that it duplicated the functions of other government departments.⁷ Sultan-Galiev again appealed successfully to the SNK, provoking the threat of his expulsion from the Narkomnats collegium.⁸

The importance of the Muskom faded from the spring of 1919 with the creation of the Bashkir autonomous republic and a number of Muslim Communist Party and Narkomnats bodies, but during the period of its existence it had established itself as an important centre with considerable influence among a major portion of the population. The weakness of the Bolsheviks among the

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.68.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.71.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.79.

⁴ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.78.

⁵ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.86.

⁶ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.93; ZN no.10, 19th January 1919, p.7.

⁷ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.95.

⁸ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.2, ll.94-95.

Muslims led them to allow a more or less free rein to the Muskom in an attempt to undermine the influence of the Medzhilis and Shuras and pan-Islamic organisations and incorporate Muslim intellectuals into the Communist Party, but at the expense of granting considerable authority to individuals such as Sultan-Galiev whose ideas on "proletarian nations" and pan-Islamic unity were directly at odds with Marxist approaches to the national question. Even after the abolition of the Muskom, these individuals were to create difficulties for the regime, as will be discussed below.¹

For all their enthusiasm, there was never any possibility of the Muskom and the other departments of Narkomnats providing an adequate solution of the national problem in Russia. Narkomnats has been described as a 'Parliament for Nationalities',² a description which fits the Austro-Marxist rather than the Bolshevik solution to the national question. Based in Moscow and far from the people whose interests they were to represent and defend, deprived of adequate resources and with poorly defined powers, the leaders of Narkomnats were able to do little more than complain to the leading Party and State authorities about abuses against the rights of national minorities. In the national regions themselves the Russian-dominated authorities showed little inclination to heed the demands of the non-Russians. A more thoroughgoing solution to the national question was going to be needed.

¹ Chapters 5 and 8.

² Carrère d'Encausse, p.101.

National Territorial Autonomy

The solution favoured by Stalin, the Muskom and a number of moderate nationalist movements was National Autonomy. The first step to implementing this solution was the publication of the "Proposal on a Tatar-Bashkir Soviet Republic" on 22nd March 1918. The text of this proposal reads:

Starting from the principle of national self-determination of the labouring masses, confirmed by the Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets, The People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs, in agreement with the Commissariat of the affairs of Muslims of Central Russia, has worked out the following position on the Tatar-Bashkir republic:

1) The territory of the Southern Urals and Middle Volga is made a Tatar-Bashkir Soviet Republic of the Russian Soviet Federation.

2) In regard to delineating borders, the project worked out by the Bashkir and Tatar revolutionary organisations is accepted as a basis (all of Ufa guberniia, the Bashkir portion of Orenburg guberniia, Kazan guberniia excluding the Chuvash-Cheremiss portion, and adding the Muslim portions of Perm, Vyatsk, Simbirsk and Samara guberniias). The final establishment of the borders of the Republic is to be left to a Founding Congress of Soviets of this Republic.

3) The political and economic relations of the western part of the Republic and Bashkirdistan are to be worked out by the Founding Congress of Soviets of the Tatar-Bashkir Republic.

4) The organisation of a commission for convening the Founding Congress of Soviets is left to the Commissariat for the Affairs of Muslims of Central Russia.

Signed: Stalin, Vakhitov, Manatov, Ibragimov.¹

Although the principle of territorial autonomy had figured prominently in Stalin's views on the national question since 1913, and was accepted in both the party programme of the Bolsheviks and the Declaration of Rights, nothing concrete on the subject was decided after the revolution. The resolution of the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets in January 1918 left the relations of National Soviet Republics to the federal government "to be determined by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Central Executive Committees of the Republics",² and at any rate referred only to the independent republics already proclaimed in the western borderlands. When the status of the Crimea came up for discussion at the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party on 15th March 1918, the option of autonomy did not even arise, the CC resolving instead to leave it completely independent for the time being.³

The proposal for a Tatar-Bashkir Republic was therefore the first attempt to apply the principles of national

¹ ZN no.62, 8th February 1920, p.2.

² Stalin, Vol.IV, pp.32-33.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.1, l.2.

autonomy in a concrete form. The exact authorship of the proposal is unclear. Although the Muskom claimed responsibility and Narkomnats issued the declaration, it is reasonable to suppose that Stalin himself, who had been most closely associated with the concept of national-territorial autonomy and who had overall responsibility for national affairs, was involved at some point. From Stalin's early writings and his later decisions, however, it is clear that his preference was for autonomy to be granted to clearly defined national groups rather than the broad mixed territories covered by this proposal. It is rather the hand of the Muskom, many of whose leading figures openly advocated the formation of a vast Volga-Urals Islamic Republic on the basis of their pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic convictions, that is apparent in this proposal.

Whatever its provenance, once the proposal for a Tatar-Bashkir republic had been formulated, it was eagerly seized upon by Narkomnats and by Stalin, who heralded the breakthrough in the national structure of the RSFSR in a Pravda article of March 23rd.¹ The original Narkomnats decree establishing the republic left its final form to be determined by a Constituent Congress of Soviets of the republic,² but in April Narkomnats instead determined to call a meeting of "representatives of all those bodies with an interest in the autonomy of Tatar-Bashkiria, guberniya and city Soviets and appropriate Muslim organs from the regions situated within the borders of the Tatar-Bashkir Republic and contiguous to it, together with representatives of Narkomnats."³ The commissariat

¹ Stalin, Vol.IV, pp.49-50.

² W.R. Batsell, Soviet Rule in Russia (New York, 1929), p.139. The relevant Narkomnats minutes were lost in the move from Petrograd to Moscow; GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.2.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.11.

gathered together reports from representatives of the Kazan and Urals Soviets and of the smaller nationalities, and asked the SNK to take steps to secure the support of the local soviets prior to the triumphant meeting which proclaimed the Tatar-Bashkir Autonomous Republic in May 1918.¹ Thus the first steps in Soviet autonomy were taken largely on the initiative of the Muskom and were prepared for by the close involvement of the local representative organs.

The Turkestan Soviet Autonomous Republic

The situation of the Civil War prevented the execution of the decisions on the Tatar-Bashkir republic for the time being. But its principles were soon to be applied to Turkestan. According to Alexander Park:

to the Muslim population, Turkestan's future status was the crucial question of the Russian Revolution. From the fall of the monarchy, native leaders had been active in seeking to establish some form of Muslim self-government and local independence.²

In November 1917 the second Congress of Soviets of the Turkestan region had formed a Soviet government with its own Council of People's Commissars, which had informed Lenin of its intention to carry out all decrees of the

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.17.

² Alexander G. Park, Bolshevism in Turkestan 1917-1927 (New York, 1957), p.64.

Russian Soviet state.¹ Russian domination of the Communist Party and Soviets meant the exclusion of Muslims from the organs of power, leading to the vigorous intervention of the Bolshevik leadership to redress this problem.² In mid-March 1918 the Tashkent Soviet received a telegram from Narkomnats stating that "analogous proposals [to the Tatar-Bashkir proposal] are being worked out by the People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs for...the other peoples of Russia."³ On 25th March the reformed Tashkent Soviet gave its approval to the "Proposal on the Tatar-Bashkir Republic", at the same time requesting Narkomnats to send "one of the commissars" for Muslim affairs. In reply Kobozev was sent to Tashkent as an Extraordinary Commissar of the Soviet government and representative of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party; Narkomnats provided a directive "with concrete instructions on state construction of the national borderlands on the basis of Soviet autonomy and the involvement of the local nationalities in building the Soviet state" as well as sending two more plenipotentiaries, Ibragimov and Klevleev.⁴ On 20th April 1918 the 5th Congress of Soviets of Turkestan opened with a remit to establish an autonomous republic. On the 22nd, the Congress received a telegram from the Russian SNK, over the names of Lenin and Stalin, which made clear what was expected of the Congress: "Comrades, you can be assured that the SNK will support the autonomy of your region on a Soviet basis...we ask you to send the commission for convening a

¹ A. Aminov & A. Babakhodzhaev, Ekonomicheskiye i politicheskiye posledstviya prisoedineniya Srednei Azii k Rossii (Tashkent, 1966), p.128.

² Sh. B. Batirov et al., Pobeda sovetskoi vlasti v Srednei Azii i Kazakhstane (Tashkent, 1967), pp.612-613.

³ Idem, p.614.

⁴ Idem, pp.614-615.

constituent congress of Soviets, which you have undertaken to organise, to us in Moscow for the joint working out of the question of defining the relations of the plenipotentiary organ of your region to the SNK..."¹ On 27th April the Bolshevik fraction at the congress pushed through a resolution implicitly criticising the Turkestan soviets for failing to live up to the principles of the October revolution in their treatment of the Muslim population and outlining the duties of the future republic. On 30th April the Congress approved the formation of the Turkestan Soviet Autonomous Republic, a decision which was officially celebrated on May Day and was soon confirmed by the Soviets of Samarkand, Dzhizak, Khogzhent, Chardzhue, Andizhan and Aulie-Ata. In July, a commission arrived in Moscow as requested for meetings with Lenin and Sverdlov, and in October the 6th Congress of Soviets of Turkestan passed the first constitution of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.²

Unlike the proposed Tatar-Bashkir Republic, autonomy was fairly forced down the throat of Turkestan by Moscow. The complex ethnic situation and weakness of the Bolsheviks necessitated vigorous intervention from the centre on the side of the Muslim population to ensure their participation in the administration and to guarantee their cultural and economic development. On this basis the creation of an autonomous republic on the national-territorial principle was designed to ensure the political ascendancy of the native populations over the Russian settlers and administrators.

Following the creation of the Turkestan ASSR, autonomy for the other peoples of Russia, as promised by

¹ Batirov, p.617.

² Idem, pp.617-622.

Narkomnats, failed to materialise in the course of 1918. Only the colonies of Germans on the Volga were granted limited autonomy by a decree of the SNK on October 19th.¹ The most significant aspect of this decree was that it gave the Germans the right to appeal directly to the Russian SNK in the event of conflicts with the provincial Soviets. The move was therefore designed to protect the violation of the Germans' national rights by the Russian authorities.

Bashkir and Tatar autonomy

At the beginning of 1919 the issue of Bashkir autonomy arose in an entirely different form from a year earlier. The Bashkir forces led by Zeki Validov had been so mistreated by Kolchak that Validov began to consider defecting to the Bolshevik side in the Civil War. In February 1919 he opened negotiations with the Reds with the demand for extensive self-rule for Bashkiria and on 22nd February the Bashkir forces formed the Bashkir Military Revolutionary Committee (Bashrevkom) with Validov at its head.² On 16th March the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party instructed Stalin to negotiate with the Bashkirs for their operation as a regional unit of the RSFSR with representation on the VTsIK in return for the RSFSR's representation on their Central Executive Committee.³ What the Bashkirs got a week later was rather more than this - an Autonomous Soviet Republic with full power over the

¹ Batsell, pp.165-166.

² GARF, f.1318, op.3, d.1, l.1.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.10, l.3.

region on the basis of the Soviet constitution, excluding major economic installations (railways, factories, mines), with its own armed forces and an unconditional amnesty for all members of the Bashrevkom.¹

Bashkir autonomy was a unique case, in that it was granted as a matter of military expediency in a critical theatre of war, and for the same reason the autonomous republic was to be run by a government composed entirely of nationals with no real sympathy for the communist cause and with more independent powers than the Soviets may otherwise have granted. The disastrous experience of the relationship of the Bashrevkom with Soviet organs, to be described in the next chapter, meant that more caution was to be exercised in the future but did not wipe out the idea of autonomy; in April 1920, after the dust had settled on the conflict with the Bashrevkom, the Politburo felt obliged to clarify to party members that the Bashkir Autonomous Republic was "not a chance, temporary, phenomenon...but an organic, autonomous part of the RSFSR".² Whatever the origins of autonomous Bashkiria, it was there to stay and the principle of autonomy was firmly established.

In spite of the existence of a Bashkir Republic, the March 1918 Narkomnats decree on a Tatar-Bashkir Autonomous Republic remained on the books and was still promoted as the long-term aim until the end of 1919. In December 1919 opposition at the second All-Russian Congress of Peoples of the East, especially among the Bashkir communist delegates, led the Politburo to drop the idea.³ The Congress voted for a separate Tatar

¹ ZN no.18, 23rd March 1919, p.1.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.68, l.4.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.48, l.4.

Republic, and when this resolution was overwhelmingly endorsed by the Muslim sections of the Communist Party, and Validov provided an assurance that the Bashkirs had no objection to such a republic, Stalin was instructed to set the wheels in motion in January 1920.¹ The name of the new republic caused some friction within Narkomnats. On 1st February 1920, Zhizn natsional'nostei published an article entitled "The Proposal on the Tatar-Bashkir Republic" in which the Tatar S. Said-Galiev argued that the 1918 position still held, with the difference that the territory of the Bashkir Republic would now be excluded. Both the Tatars and the Bashkirs outside the Bashkir Republic were demanding the creation of a Tatar-Bashkir Republic, which would provide a base "where all the best Muslim revolutionary forces will cooperate."² Said-Galiev also hinted that this republic would be linked to Turkestan and Kirghizia under the leadership of Tatars.

In the next issue of Zhizn natsional'nostei, Said-Galiev was forced to retract this position.³ Now he spoke only of a Tatar Soviet Socialist Republic on the basis of Tatar self-determination. Alongside Said-Galiev's article was printed a statement on the Tatar republic by the Bashrevkom and an explanatory article by Karl Grasis. According to the Bashrevkom statement, the title 'Tatar-Bashkir Republic' had been chosen solely "out of caution lest the Bashkirs left out of the territory of Soviet Bashkiria and coming into the composition of the Tatar Republic would protest against the formation of that republic in the name only of the Tatar nationality". Now the Bashrevkom, as

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.58, l.5.

² ZN no.61, 1st February 1920, p.2.

³ ZN no.62, 8th February 1920, p.2.

representatives of the Bashkir people, affirmed that such fears were groundless. On the contrary, that title aroused the mistaken suspicion that the Tatars would seek to incorporate the existing Bashkir Republic and assimilate the Bashkirs. The Bashrevkom was fully in favour of a Tatar Republic, but objected to the use of terms such as 'Tatar-Bashkir language', 'Tatar-Bashkir literature' and 'Tatar-Bashkir Army'.¹ Grasis' article explained that the idea of a Tatar-Bashkir Republic was appropriate to the international situation in 1918. Now the priority was to prove the principle of self-determination in practise by "the formation of a number of republics on the territory of the former Russian Empire".²

While it appears that it was the objections of the Bashrevkom that led to the idea of a Tatar-Bashkir Republic being dropped, the Bashkirs had the support of the Politburo and there may have been a deeper principle at stake. Both the Muskom and the Russian leadership were in favour of national autonomy. But whereas Said-Galiev, who was by no means the most radical Muslim nationalist on the Muskom, saw autonomy as a step on the path to the political unification of the Muslims of Russia, Stalin and the rest of the Politburo sought to reinforce national identity as a means of drawing the non-Russians towards Soviet power. This implied the creation of autonomous territories along narrow national criteria rather than the broader lines proposed by the Muskom. This happened to coincide with the wishes of the Bashrevkom, who were keen to assert a national identity distinct from the Tatars.

¹ ZN no.62, 8th February 1920, p.2.

² ZN no.62, 8th February 1920, p.2.

It took a further three months of preparation, until after the reorganisation of the Bashkir Republic, before VTsIK and SNK proclaimed a Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.¹ The creation of the Tatar Republic was closely supervised by Moscow and its relationship to the RSFSR overseen by a state commission.²

The Spread of Autonomous Republics and Regions

The principle of dividing the RSFSR along national lines was by now firmly established and between June 1920 and January 1921 autonomous units were organised for the Karelian, Chuvash, Kirghiz, Votiak, Kalmyk, Mari and North Caucasian nationalities. Unlike the Bashkirs, whose military forces were important to the Soviets, and the Tatars whose political activism and cultural traditions made them a political force to be reckoned with, most of these nationalities were small, powerless and, in Bolshevik terminology, "culturally and economically backward".³ In these cases there is no evidence of any initiative towards autonomy on the part of the native populations themselves, but the case for autonomy for the smaller nationalities was forcefully made by the Narkomnats official El'mets writing on the Chuvash in Zhizn natsional'nostei in January 1920; forced to cultivate the poorest lands of the Volga valley the Chuvashi were stricken by poverty and disease and lacked cultural traditions and political leadership. What headway had been made by the Chuvash department of

¹ Batsell, p.143.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.43.

³ ZN no.3, 24th November 1918, p.3.

Narkomnats and the Chuvash sections of the Russian Communist Party was being hampered by their lack of any authority in the local organs of Soviet power and a hostile attitude on the part of Soviet officials who "work on the principle that the use of Russian in schools and other institutions combats nationalism". The Chuvash have no prospect of escape from their backwardness and non-participation in the gains of the revolution unless they are united and assigned to a special administrative unit directly subordinate to the central organs of the RSFSR. Such a solution should be approved because, firstly, it would be an act of fairness, and secondly, it would centralise all work on the education, sovietisation and economic improvement of the Chuvash.¹ Five months after writing this article, El'mets saw his request granted.

Disregard for the needs of the native population by local Russians - including Soviet officials and communists - especially in the field of language, was also the main argument used for the formation of a Crimean Autonomous Republic for the much more advanced and powerful Muslim population there in 1921. The status of Crimea was controversial, and was the subject of broad discussion in Zhizn natsional'nostei.² Geographically, the Crimea bordered only Ukraine, but its population was a mixture of Tatars and Russians. During the revolution and civil war it had been the scene of some of the most serious ethnic conflict on Russian territory. After hearing a pessimistic report from Sultan-Galiev on the national situation in Crimea, the Narkomnats Collegium decided on 25th April to grant Crimea autonomy within the

¹ ZN no.59, 11th January 1920, p.1.

² ZN no.113, 30th July 1921, p.1.

RSFSR.¹ On 30th April the Politburo confirmed that Crimea would become an autonomous region.² But on 18th May the Central Committee amended this decision, upgrading the Crimea to the status of an autonomous republic.³ The Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was duly formed on 18th October 1921. The distinction between an autonomous region and an autonomous republic was never clear - the latter title implied a higher degree of autonomy, but in practise this status made little difference until the formation of the USSR and the Chamber of Nationalities in 1923-1924. But the acuteness of the national situation in Crimea clearly led the Bolsheviks toward it the higher status as a move against the attitudes of the Great Russian authorities there.

The creation of autonomous national units cannot, then, be seen purely as a way of incorporating otherwise unenthusiastic sections of the population into the Soviet system. Autonomy for even the less significant nationalities was aimed at creating distinct national-territorial groups which would develop their national identities and cultures and not be subject to Russian domination, even if it appeared in a Soviet form.

Who qualified for autonomisation and at what time seems to have been determined in a haphazard way. After the rush of centrally initiated autonomisations of 1920, three nationalities, the Buriats, the Karachai, and the Komi (Zyrians) received autonomy on their own application. The Buriats may have been overlooked in

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.5, ll.61-62.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.157, l.1.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.65, l.1.

1920 because of their dispersal over a large area which was divided down the middle by Lake Baikal, but on representations to Narkomnats this problem was eventually solved by creating two Buriat-Mongol Autonomous Regions - a Siberian and a Far Eastern.¹ The Zyrian communists employed the somewhat spurious argument that an autonomous region would act as a useful buffer against enemies from the north (the Arctic?) but appear to have been successful in their application for autonomous status as a result of an ethnological argument establishing the existence of a Komi narod.²

Ethnically, the North Caucasus was the most complex of the regions of the RSFSR, and had a history of violence not just between the local nationalities and the Russians and Cossacks, but also between the small Highlander nationalities. The initial solution of the national question in the North Caucasus was to include all the Highlander nationalities in a single Mountain (Gori) Republic, created on 20th January 1921. Within this republic it was proposed that each of the nationalities should have its own National Soviet "to administer the affairs of the given people in accordance with its manner of life and specific conditions."³ The appeal of this distinctly Austro-Marxist solution may have been primarily practical. The small size of the numerous nationalities and the difficulty of fixing borders was the main reason for not splitting the peoples further, as had been the case with the Bashkirs. But it was also argued that uniting the various nationalities in a single

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.5, l.112; *ibid.* d.7, l.75.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.5, l.63.

³ Stalin, Vol.IV, p.401.

autonomous administrative unit would help to overcome the ethnic tensions between them.

It did not take long for this policy to be reversed. A congress of the Kabardi people led the way, voting in favour of a separate region in July 1921.¹ Stalin approved this request and the situation of the Kabardi was investigated and passed to the Kavbiuro for consideration. The Kavbiuro report concluded that owing to soil conditions and historical development the Kabardi had a more advanced economy than the rest of the Caucasian Highlanders and were being held back by their inclusion in the Gori Republic.² Accordingly, the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Region was formed on 1st September 1921.³

Next were the Karachai-Cherkess people who demanded autonomy at two congresses in El'burg in September and December 1921⁴ and were granted autonomy on 12th January 1922. Finally, the Chechen Autonomous Region was formed on 30th November 1922.

In all three cases, autonomy was granted on the initiative of local congresses, and economic arguments were employed to support their autonomy. But in April 1923 the Georgian Mdivani claimed that Stalin and the Kavbiuro had supported splitting up the Highland peoples specifically as a way of solving national tensions.⁵

While it appeared at times that the qualification for autonomy was simply to be a national group, a line had to

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.72, l.10.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.72, ll.6-9.

³ ZN no.115, 3rd September 1921, p.1.

⁴ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.7, l.101; idem, d.8, l.104.

⁵ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.500.

be drawn somewhere, and in the second half of 1921 the Politburo blocked moves for autonomy by the Kashgar and Dzhungar peoples,¹ and Narkomnats denied requests from the Altais² and the Karaim,³ while explicitly accepting that they were national groups.

The creation of autonomous territories was usually accompanied by extensive research and discussion of the status of the nationalities involved. This was especially the case with the lesser known groups whose definition as a distinct national group was dubious, such as the Yakuts.⁴ But this does not mean that the formation of autonomous units was scientific or consistent. The creation of the Karelian Labouring Commune was undertaken almost casually. The Comintern agent Yu. Sirol later recalled the key meeting between Lenin and the Finn E.A. Giulling:

In the spring of that year [1920] comrade Giulling arrived from Stockholm seeking to form a Karelian Autonomous Republic. We were at Lenin's where he questioned us in detail, as to what we knew about Karelia and what we proposed to do in relation to it. 'Do you believe that this will work?' I confessed that I had doubts: there were few workers, indeed in general there was no national proletariat. There were few party workers. But comrade Gyulling was full of conviction and was ready to take the matter in hand. He was sure that autonomy would serve as a push for the workers and peasants of Karelia, to prompt them to strengthen the struggle for culture and reinforcing

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.174, l.4.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.8, l.27.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.8, l.119.

⁴ ZN no.116, 16th September 1921, p.1.

Soviet power. Comrade Lenin listened attentively. He was looking at a person who had a positive idea and who was ready to work hard to achieve it. It is essential to give such comrades the opportunity to prove themselves. And after a few days, in the course of which the matter was investigated from every angle, comrade Gyulling held in his hands a decision of the VTsIK on forming a Karelian Labouring Commune.¹

Thus the Karelian Labouring Commune came about as a result of Lenin's faith in one man's convictions and his belief that such individuals should be given the opportunity to prove themselves.

Transcaucasia

We have seen that one argument for the creation of autonomous territories was the need to combat inter-ethnic violence. Apart from a period of frequent pogroms against the Jews, however, this problem was not nearly as serious in Russia and the western borderlands as it was in Transcaucasia. Here the three major national groups, the Georgians, the Armenians, and the Muslim people which came to be known as the Azeri, were scattered among each other in many areas and violence between these groups was common under the Russian Empire and particularly intense during the period of Transcaucasian independence. In addition there were several smaller nationalities, most notably the Abkhaz, the Adzharians and the Ossetians in Georgia. But these latter groups inhabited relatively

¹ A.I. Afanas'eva, Istoriia Karelii v dokumentakh i materialakh - Sovetskii period (Petrozavodsk, 1992), p.55.

well defined regions, and were treated in much the same way as the national minorities of Russia. In March 1921, soon after the sovietisation of Georgia, Abkhazia was granted the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic, but was included in the Georgian SSSR by a special agreement between the two republics.¹ This status, peculiar to Abkhazia, was a fourth type of national territory, somewhere in between an independent Soviet republic and an autonomous republic. In July 1921 the Adzharian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was formed, and in April 1922 the Georgian part of the area inhabited by Ossetians was formed into the South Ossetian Autonomous Region, both as part of Georgia.

A solution to the territories of mixed Azeri, Armenian and Georgian population proved more elusive. In March 1920, the Bolshevik agent in Transcaucasia B.Shakhtakhtinskii wrote to Lenin providing details of nine territories disputed at the time between the three Transcaucasian governments.² Of these Georgia now occupied the Signakhsksk uezd, the Karayazsk Steppe, Borchala, and Akhaltsikhsk uezd, while it also laid claim to the Zakatal'sk district currently administered by Azerbaidzhan. According to Shakhtakhtinskii, whose pro-Azeri bias is undisguised, Georgia claimed these territories on purely historical grounds while their population was predominantly Azeri or Armenian. After the sovietisation of Transcaucasia, the borders of these disputed territories was carefully worked out by a series of commissions basing their decisions primarily on ethnographic principles, as was the Kazakhsk uezd, disputed between Azerbaidzhan and Armenia.³

¹ Velikii Oktibr, p.205.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.1, d.2796, p.4.

³ See below, chapter 4.

The three other territories disputed between Azerbaidzhan and Armenia: Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Zangezur, proved more problematic. Zangezur, lying between the two republics, was of mixed Azeri and Armenian population, as was Nakhichevan, lying to the south of Armenia. Shakhtakhtinskii claimed, inaccurately, that Nakhichevan had been entirely emptied of its Armenian population during the war. Karabakh formed a single administrative unit under the Russian Empire, but could be divided between Lower Karabakh and Nagorniy (Mountainous) Karabakh. Lower Karabakh was inhabited by 415,000 Muslims and 170,000 Armenians. The settled population of Nagorniy Karabakh was overwhelmingly Armenian, and the area's main town Shushi became one of the principle centres of Armenian culture during the nineteenth century.¹ However, the region straddled one of the major routes used by Azeri nomads for driving their flocks. On this basis, Shakhtakhtinskii argued against the splitting of Karabakh as this would directly interfere with the livelihood of the nomads.

After the collapse of the Russian Empire, Nagorniy Karabakh had become the scene of prolonged and often bloody conflicts between Azeris and Armenians.² On 22nd August 1919 the 7th Congress of Armenians of Karabakh reached an agreement with the Mussavat government of Azerbaidzhan whereby Nagorniy Karabakh would remain part of Azerbaidzhan under a complicated set of provisions designed to secure the position of the Armenian

¹ Christopher J. Walker (ed.), Armenia and Karabakh - the Struggle for Unity (London, 1991), p.83.

² Idem, pp.88-99.

population.¹ This agreement, which ran to 26 paragraphs, combined an intricate system of power-sharing with 'cultural self-determination' as exercised by an Armenian National Soviet. The peace resulting from this agreement was short-lived, however. In February 1920 the Azerbaidzhani governor-general of Karabakh, Khosrov bek Sultanov surrounded the region with troops and demanded the Armenians accept full integration into Azerbaidzhan. The events that followed culminated in a full-scale massacre in Shushi.

At this time the Bolsheviks were divided on their attitude to Nagorniy Karabakh. While Shakhtakhtinskii and many Bolsheviks in Azerbaidzhan were against the dismemberment of Karabakh, the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (Kavbiuro) and the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (Narkomindel) seemed to favour the Armenian claim on the basis of national self-determination. On 3rd June 1919 S.M. Kirov, then attached to the Military Soviet of the Eleventh Red Army, wrote to Lenin and Stalin: "Karabakh and Zangezur do not recognise the Azerbaidzhani Government. The Dashnaks [the Armenian government] are hoping to unite Karabakh to Armenia."²

But the situation changed on 27th April 1921. The Red Army marched into Baku, and the next day the Azerbaidzhan Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed. The Soviet state was entrusted to the Azerbaidzhan Communist Party, recently formed from the left wing of the socialist Muslim party 'Hummet' under N. Narimanov. The new government rejected all the Armenian claims, inspired

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.1, d.2797; Gérard J. Libaridian (ed.), Le Dossier Karabagh - Faits et Documents sur la Question du Haut-Karabagh, 1918-1988 (Paris, 1988), pp.20-22.

² S.M. Kirov, Stat'i, rechi, dokumenti - Tom 1 (Moscow, 1936), p.144.

both by the national interests of Azerbaidzhan and the fact that Armenia was not yet Soviet. Narimanov was confident that "no-one in the world is in a position to prevent us from using our influence over the population of the given regions to declare in favour of unity with Azerbaidzhan."¹ Stalin appears to have sided with Narimanov at this time, prompted in part by the diplomatic situation with regard to Turkey, which wanted to preserve a link between itself and Muslim Azerbaidzhan through Nakhichevan, Zangezur and Karabakh. Writing to the head of the Kavbiuro Ordzhonikidze, Stalin said: "My opinion is that we need to give decisive backing to one of the sides - in this case Azerbaidzhan and Turkey."² According to a later Soviet source backing the Armenian claims a number of Armenian Bolsheviks also supported Azeri control of the disputed regions as a temporary measure until the sovietisation of Armenia.³

Soon after coming to power, the Azerbaidzhan Soviet Government issued an ultimatum to Armenia demanding the withdrawal of its troops from Karabakh and Zangezur. This led workers' May day demonstrators in Armenia to call on Soviet Russia to work out a just solution to the dispute.⁴ The Russian Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Chicherin, favoured an even-handed solution. For the time being at least, Zangezur, Nakhichevan and Karabakh should belong to neither Armenia nor Azerbaidzhan, but the local soviets ought to be strengthened and the territories should be occupied by Russian troops until a permanent solution could be worked out.⁵ In June,

¹ Akademiya Nauk Armyanskoy SSR, Nagorniy Karabakh - Istoricheskaya spravka (Erevan, 1988), p.24

² Idem, p.23.

³ Idem, p.24.

⁴ Le Dossier Karabagh, p.28.

⁵ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.17, l.18.

Chicherin proposed that Zangezur and Nakhichevan should belong to Armenia, and the status of Nagorniy Karabakh should be determined by a referendum.¹ During May and June, Chicherin's proposals for the Russian occupation of the disputed regions was carried out by the Eleventh Red Army.

This solution did not, however, meet with unanimous approval among the Bolsheviks in Transcaucasia. On 18th June Narimanov, supported by the leading Georgian Bolshevik Mdivani and the Armenian Mikoyan, wrote to Chicherin protesting at Armenian incursions into what they considered to be Azerbaidzhan:

The Armenian population of Nagorniy Karabakh and Zangezur, following the withdrawal of [the Armenian general] Dro, proclaimed Soviet power under the leadership of the Communist doctor Ambarpum'ian...We categorically declare that it is indisputable that these two areas should henceforward lie within the borders of Azerbaidzhan...The districts of Dzhul'fin and Nakhichevan should be occupied by our forces and joined to Azerbaidzhan, both for military purposes and towards the end of direct union with Turkey.²

On 13th August Shakhtakhtinskii wrote to Lenin recommending that Nakhichevan be separated from Armenia as control over the crucial rail links would strengthen the Dashnak government and break the Soviets' communications with revolutionary Turkey.³

¹ Armenia and Karabakh, p.100.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.17, l.106.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.1, d.2796, ll.1-2.

A much stronger attitude was displayed by the head of the Karabakh Guberniya Revkom Asad Karaev. This character's solution to the Karabakh and Zangezur problems was violent and overtly racist. He wrote to the Gerusin Revkom:

Anyone who understands the psychology of Armenians...[knows that] there is not a single Armenian who will not betray everything for money...Your old policy of occupying Karabakh and Zangezur with troops was deeply mistaken. We know that our forces are broken and have retreated, but today instead of armed forces our money is working miracles. Again and again I repeat my advise - do not spare any sum, increase salaries, give them bonuses and anything they want. The government has decided that to unite Karabakh and Zangezur to Azerbaidzhan it will issue 200 million roubles.¹

And to the Goris Revkom:

90% of the villages of Zangezur have not yet been disarmed. This is regrettable, but what is even more regrettable is that the Armenian population of Zangezur has not yet been decapitated. Its intelligentsia and its military chiefs are still present in the villages...no time must be lost. You must work night and day. See to it that all the important Armenian personalities are arrested. Deportations and pillaging are of little importance. Time will pass, the situation will change, and they will return to their country. Leave aside all humane considerations. It is not with such sentiments that

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.19, l.9.

one builds a state, conquers countries or lives in peace...If you have not sufficient forces, use money instead. Why do you delay the attachment of this rebel region by talking of the existence of a certain Azhda Pasha? Use the consecrated methods! What Armenian, in return for three million roubles, would not bring us the head of this man?...P.S. In order to weaken the Armenians in places where the guerilla force is active, you have only to kill a Russian soldier and accuse the Armenians of the crime. You know very well what the Russians will do. Let not a single honest man exist in Zangezur, and leave no money either, so that this accursed people will never rise again."¹

Faced with such opposition, the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party lent its support to Chicherin in an instruction of 7th July 1920:

Clarify to the population of the disputed territories, occupied by Russian forces, that these territories are occupied by our forces temporarily with the aim of halting inter-ethnic slaughter, and that the question of the status of these territories will be decided by a joint commission under a Russian representative, and that the joint commission will be guided by the ethnic composition of the population and its will.²

The Bolshevik leadership wanted to apply in Transcaucasia the basic principles - ethnic homogeneity and self-determination - which guided national policy in Russia. But in Azerbaïdzhan the Politburo did not have the same control over the newly formed Communist Party

¹ Nagorniy Karabakh, pp.24-25; Armenia and Karabakh, pp.101-102.

² Nagorniy Karabakh, p.27.

that it had, by insisting on Party discipline, in Russia, let alone control over the likes of Karaev.

In August 1920 Kirov wrote to Chicherin

I have done all I could to fulfil your directive. Regrettably, the results are disappointing, and the matter has not gone one step forward. Recently, in connection with the events in Zangezur and Nakhichevan, many opinions have been forthcoming on the Armenian question. For a long time the Commissar for Foreign Affairs for Azerbaidzhan Guseinov was here with several Party workers. I held a string of meetings with him and with Armenian representatives here. I also set up joint meetings. As a result of all this only one point was secured from the Azerbaidzhanis - they were ready to concede Sharuro-Daralageskii uezd to Armenia; for the rest, i.e. Nakhichevan, Ordubat, Dzhul'fa, Zangezur and Karabakh, the Azerbaidzhanis consider them unconditionally theirs. In their turn the representatives of Armenia categorically claimed these regions. The chief argument of the Azerbaidzhanis is that these regions belonged to Azerbaidzhan under the Mussavat government and to concede these regions now would, in their opinion, discredit Soviet power not only in Azerbaidzhan but also in Persia and Turkey...I have already advised you, that the only way out of the situation which has arisen is to be firm and resolve this question in Moscow, only Moscow's authority can resolve the affair.

Delay in resolving the disputes was, according to Kirov, discrediting Russia's policy as racial massacres

continued to take place.¹ Chicherin, the Kavbiuro and the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party were seeking a solution to the disputed territories along the lines of the national policy being employed in Russia but were hampered primarily, in Kirov's view, by the Azerbaidzhani communists. Therefore the problem remained unsolved until the sovietisation of Armenia.

On 29th November 1920 the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia was proclaimed. Immediately it became clear that those like Stalin who had opposed granting territory to Dashnak Armenia were only too happy to oblige the new Soviet state. The Azerbaidzhani leadership were also prevailed upon at this point. On 1st December, following a session of the Baku Soviet, the Azerbaidzhani Revkom proclaimed

The problems of the frontiers between Armenia and Azerbaidzhan are declared resolved. Nagorniy Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhichevan are considered parts of the Republic of Armenia.²

Three days later, Stalin hailed this act in an article in Pravda and concluded that "the age-old enmity between Armenia and the surrounding peoples has been dispelled at one stroke by the establishment of fraternal solidarity between the working people of Armenia, Turkey and Azerbaidzhan."³ The transfer of the disputed territories to Armenia was enthusiastically welcomed by Ordzhonikidze, the Armenian Revkom, and an Armenian

¹ Kirov, pp.231-232.

² Le Dossier Karabakh, p.31.

³ Stalin, Vol.IV, p.414.

delegation which met with Lenin in the Moscow Kremlin on 12th December.¹

Azerbaidzhan's acceptance of the transfer did not last long, however. Shortly after the declaration of 1st December, Shakhtakhtinskii arrived in Nakhichevan and began to agitate against the declaration, claiming that "the Azerbaidzhani Revkom has betrayed the interests of Nakhichevan by declaring its transfer to Armenia."² According to a Soviet source, a referendum held in Nakhichevan held at the start of 1921 declared nine to one in favour of autonomy within the Azerbaidzhan SSR³. Turkey also took an interest in Nakhichevan and, in deference to the Muslim population and in the interests of good relations with Turkey, the Bolsheviks agreed to Nakhichevan becoming an autonomous region under the protection of Azerbaidzhan in the Treaty of Moscow signed on 16th March 1921.⁴

Almost immediately, Narimanov started to agitate for the return of Nagorniy Karabakh to Azerbaidzhan, threatening that otherwise he could not prevent the re-emergence of anti-Soviet groups in Azerbaidzhan⁵. The status of Karabakh was nonetheless confirmed by the Kavbiuro on 3rd June 1921,⁶ and in declarations of the Armenian government on 12th and 19th June.⁷ The Kavbiuro was having to fight constantly with the Azerbaidzhani government. On 26th June Ordzhonikidze and Kirov stated the most radical interpretation yet of the ethnic

¹ Nagorniy Karabakh, p.207.

² Nagorniy Karabakh, p.35.

³ A.Sh. Mil'man, Azerbaidzhanskaya SSR - suverennoe gosudarstvo v sostave SSSR (Baku, 1971), p.234.

⁴ Armenia and Karabakh, p.106.

⁵ Nagorniy Karabakh, p.31.

⁶ Armenia and Karabakh, p.107.

⁷ Le Dossier Karabakh, p.23.

principle in a telegram to Narimanov: "Not one Armenian village ought to be united to Azerbaidzhan, equally not one Muslim village can be united to Armenia."¹ The very next day, however, the Politburo of the Communist Party of Azerbaidzhan flouted this principle and declared that Nagorniy Karabakh would not be restored to Armenia on the grounds that it was economically linked with Azerbaidzhan.²

On 3rd July 1921 the Kavbiuro met to resolve the question of the status of Nagorniy Karabakh. At its first meeting the Kavbiuro confirmed the decision to transfer Nagorniy Karabakh to Armenia, against Narimanov's protests. Two days later, however, the same body resolved

considering the necessity of national peace between Muslims and Armenians and the economic ties between upper and lower Karabakh and its permanent ties with Azerbaidzhan, to leave Nagorniy Karabakh in the borders of the Azerbaidzhan SSR, granting it broad regional autonomy with an administrative centre in Shushi, coming into the composition of an autonomous oblast.³

Although it took two years to implement this decision, in July 1923 the Autonomous Region of Karabakh was formed in Azerbaidzhan.⁴

This sudden turnabout has never been fully explained. According to two pro-Armenian secondary sources the

¹ Nagorniy Karabakh, p.32.

² Armenia and Karabakh, p.107.

³ Nagorniy Karabakh, p.33

⁴ Le Dossier Karabagh, p.34.

change was made on the insistence of Stalin, but a third source indicates that Stalin was himself present at the first meeting.¹ It is possible that a third party intervened (such as Chicherin, or the Politburo of the Russian Communist Party), but equally it could be that the members of the Kavbiuro and Stalin were persuaded by Narimanov's threats of disorder or other factors to change their minds.

Given the predominantly Armenian population, the reversal of the decision over Nagorniy Karabakh ran against the general policy of the Bolsheviks to integrate territories according to their overall ethnic composition rather than economic considerations. The creation of an autonomous region corresponded rather to the situation of a weaker nationality within the territory of another nationality. Whatever the immediate causes of this about turn, several factors may have played a part. The Bolsheviks at this time placed great importance on their relationship with Kemalist Turkey, which they regarded as revolutionary, and the inclusion of Nagorniy Karabakh in Muslim Azerbaidzhan may have been intended as a positive gesture. A more general factor is the strength of Azeri claims to the region. The decision of the Seventh Congress of Armenians of Karabakh gave some legitimacy to the Azeri position. There was the question of the Muslim territory lying between Nagorniy Karabakh and Armenia, through which some kind of corridor would have to be carved out if Nagorniy Karabakh was to be united to Armenia. More importantly, the fact that the majority of the settled population was Armenian would not necessarily have been conclusive for the Bolsheviks. In the

¹ Hrant Avédissian, quoted in Le Dossier Karabagh, p.34. The other two sources are Nagorniy Karabakh, p.33; Armenia and Karabakh, p.108.

discussions over the boundaries of Kirghizia the Bolsheviks clearly considered that land used seasonally by Muslim peasant nomads was theirs, and the recently arrived Russian settlers had no claims on it.¹ The nomads who drove their flocks through Nagorniy Karabakh could, therefore, be considered to have as good a claim to the region as the Armenians, and their way of life would certainly be affected if they were forced to cross state borders in the course of their travels.

Economic arguments such as those put forward by the Azerbaidzhanis held little weight against ethnological considerations with Narkomnats or the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. But in Transcaucasia the Communist Organisations were not controlled directly by the Russian Central Committee, but through the Kavbiuro. Although initially sympathetic to the Armenian position, in 1921 Ordzhonikidze and the Kavbiuro had already shown in the course of a series of disputes with the Georgian Soviet government that they were more responsive to the demands of economic centralisation than to national sensibilities.² In August 1923 Ordzhonikidze went so far as to try and integrate Nakhichevan fully into Azerbaidzhan with no autonomous status, but was pulled into line by the Russian Politburo after Chicherin objected that this move would violate the 1921 treaty with Turkey.³ The Kavbiuro may also have been swayed by Narimanov's arguments that the cession of Nagorniy Karabakh to Armenia would only prolong ethnic conflict. In August 1921 Ordzhonikidze claimed that the correct solution by the Soviets of the Karabakh, Zangezur and

¹ See below, chapter 4.

² Discussed below, chapter 7.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.375, 11.2, 12.

other questions had secured national peace in Transcaucasia.¹

Perhaps the most important underlying factor in this affair was the Bolshevik attitude towards Azerbaidzhan and Armenia respectively. Azerbaidzhan occupied a special place in the Bolshevik heart. It was hoped that the granting of autonomy to the Muslim peoples of Central Asia and the Volga region would act as a beacon to draw the Muslim world towards Communism. But, unlike these areas, Azerbaidzhan was an independent Soviet Socialist Republic led by Azeris and closely linked to the potentially crucial regions of Turkey and Persia. Azerbaidzhan could therefore expect a certain degree of favouritism. The communists of Azerbaidzhan, moreover, were not controlled by strict discipline, and Moscow would not have wanted to be seen to violate their sovereignty and aspirations over Nagorniy Karabakh.

Armenia, by contrast, was insignificant on the international stage, and was held in low regard by many Bolsheviks. At the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1923, the chairman of the Armenian Sovnarkom, S.L. Lukashin, argued that the national problem in Transcaucasia was not a question of Great Russian domination, as was the case elsewhere, but rather was rooted in the emergence of "the Armenian mercantile bourgeoisie."² At the same meeting, Karl Radek claimed that there were still tendencies for Armenians to oppress Muslims in Azerbaidzhan.³ Although Stalin rebuked Radek's claim, these statements are clear indications that at least some Bolsheviks regarded Armenians as the

¹ G.K. Ordzhonikidze, Stat'i i rechi, (Moscow, 1956), Vol.I, p.201.

² Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.599.

³ Idem, pp.618-619.

Great Power nationality in Transcaucasia. This anti-Armenian sentiment was reflected in the attitude to the Armenian nationalist Dashnak party. In July 1921, at a time when the Bolsheviks were forming alliances with other nationalist parties the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party refused to reach an agreement with the Dashnaks after receiving assurances from the Kavbiuro that their name was reviled in Transcaucasia¹.

If in Transcaucasia the Armenians occupied the role of the Great Russians in Russia, it followed in the Bolsheviks' eyes that they could not claim any national rights over the oppressed nationalities. The very fact that Armenians were a majority in Nagorniy Karabakh meant that the Muslim minority faced national oppression unless their position was secured by Azerbaidzhan. In general, the Bolsheviks tended to display a more favourable attitude to Azerbaidzhan than to Armenia or Georgia throughout this period. This is the most likely general explanation of why they departed from their usual principles by refusing to draw the borders of Armenia so as to include Nagorniy Karabakh. Given the resulting status of the Karabakh Armenians as a compact minority within the Azerbaidzhan SSR, the principles of territorial autonomy could now be applied to them.

With the worst of the Civil War over, a revitalised Narkomnats involved itself from the beginning of 1920 with the organisation of autonomous territories on a national basis, but in a haphazard and inconsistent manner and for a variety of reasons. It had quickly become clear that the October Revolution had not solved

¹ See below, chapter 5.

at a stroke the problem of localised conflicts between national minorities and Russians which had been blamed on the imperialist policies of the tsarist regime. The solution of setting up national departments and sections in parallel with the organs of Soviet power only created further intractable disputes which came to a head in clashes between the Astrakhan authorities and Kalmyk organisations in January 1920.¹ The failure of Narkomnats to provide adequate protection for the national minorities prompted the adoption of a territorial policy which had anyway been previously advocated by Stalin and a number of nationalist organisations, especially in Central Asia. There were general practical considerations, most obviously linguistic, as well. Once embarked upon, however, the policy developed in such a way that the existence of nationally cohesive and self-conscious units came to be seen as being valuable in their own right. In a Pravda article on October 10th 1920, Stalin wrote that "Soviet autonomy is nothing but the sum total of all these institutions [schools, courts, administration, organs of authority] in national forms"² - the same institutions which existed in the rest of the Soviet state were to become national institutions, and we shall see in the next chapter that the Soviets were keen for these autonomous units to be as far as possible ethnically homogenous. By providing the national minorities with the basis for national development and identification, the Bolsheviks gave them the means for the cultural and economic development necessary for socialism, and a medium through which they could assert their loyalty to the Soviet state.

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.1.

² Stalin, Vol.IV, p.359.

CHAPTER 4: BUILDING NATIONHOOD - BORDERS AND STATE STRUCTURES

The Bolsheviks started to create the autonomous republics and regions with no clear idea of what forms exactly autonomy should take. It was only through often bitter experience that the parameters of power for the autonomous territories were fixed. An even more immediate and essential task was to fix the borders of the areas covered by the Soviet republics and autonomous regions. In ethnically mixed regions, this was no easy task.

The case of the Azeri-Georgian border in the Karaiaz region illustrates the difficulties faced by the Bolsheviks once they had embraced the principle of dividing the former empire along national-territorial lines. On 5th July 1921 a special Conference on Regulating the Internal Borders of Transcaucasia decided that the exact border of the Azerbaidjan and Georgian Republics in the Karaiaz Steppe should be fixed by a special commission, which was bound to "take full account of the wishes of the peasants of Kazakh uezd."¹ Accordingly, at 9 p.m. on 26th July a commission of two Azeris, two Georgians and a third Azeri, Ibrahimov, as chair met at the remote railway station of Akstafa to begin its work. Immediately a dispute arose between

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.61, l.7.

Ibrahimov and the Georgian representative, Ingorovka, as to the commission's remit; the Georgians insisted that the resolution of the special conference implied that the commission had to carry out a detailed study of the question of land ownership in the whole steppe region while the Azeris felt the border could be decided without such exhaustive work.¹ With the question unresolved, the commission retired and reconvened at 10 a.m. the following morning. Akhundov (Azerbaidzhan) immediately proposed that the commission proceed straight to the steppe and get on with its task. Ingorovka replied that the commission could not proceed as, firstly, the two delegations could not agree on the interpretation of the special conference decision and would need to get guidance from the centre (i.e. the Kavbiuro); secondly, the Azeri population whose interests were to be consulted were currently in summer pastures and would not be returning to the Karaiaz Steppe before the end of August; thirdly, the commission did not have at its disposal any of the technical instruments or expertise needed for marking out the proposed borders on the landscape or on a map; fourthly, the cattle-breeding nomads were also away in their camps; finally, the delegates had not had time to gather sufficient preparatory material on which to base any decision. The Georgian delegation accordingly proposed to disband and reconvene on the 1st September when the natives would be back on the steppe, and to use the intervening time to collect material. The Azeris agreed to this proposal and both delegations went their separate ways.²

In accordance with this decision a Georgian delegation arrived in Elisavetpol on 1st September 1921. There the

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.61, l.2.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.61, l.1.

Georgians spent five days looking for the Azeri delegation and, having failed to locate their counterparts, abandoned the mission and returned to Georgia.¹ At the same time there were complaints about incursions from the Azeri side of the border by peasants of the Shikhli region under the leadership of the local Soviet authorities, and counter-accusations of cattle raids by Georgian peasants.² After a period of frantic correspondence between the Commissariats for Foreign Affairs of the two republics and the Kavbiuro, an agreement was signed in Tiflis between Azerbaidjan and Georgia on 15th November. The border was to run as follows:

from the Red Bridge, north to Torpakh-Tape, in a straight line crossing the river Kura, through the forest of Kozlukh to the southern end of the seventeenth ditch of the Karaiaz irrigation system, north along the western side of the same ditch, taking in all the lands ploughed by the inhabitants of Shikhli, north, including Bayuk-Kyasksoe property, across the Dzhadar lake, leaving the eastern half in the Azerbaidzhan SSR, the western in the Georgian SSR...

and so on and so on.³ This was not the end of the matter, as incursions from either side continued and the situation was further complicated by a dispute between the peasants of the Karavanserai uezd (Armenian) and the Kazakh uezd (Azerbaidzhani) over land usage which embroiled the Armenian Republic in the border disputes. A degree of urgency was lent by the uncontrolled abuse of

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.52, l.249.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.75, l.100.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.61, l.5

the Karaiaz forest by military, engineering and rail-construction units, which was threatening the livelihood of local Muslim peasants, requiring further high level meetings in Azerbaidjan to lay the basis for the determination by the local authorities of the exact rights of each side¹. Out of this process, the first basis was laid for the boundaries between the modern day sovereign states of Azerbaidzhan and Georgia.

Although the attempt to fix the border in the Karaiaz region was chaotic and even farcical, this was a result of the attention to detail and the competing claims of the parties involved. The 7th Party Conference of April 1917 had resolved that

the determination of boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions [was to be decided] by the local population itself on the bases of its economic conditions, living conditions, national make-up of the population etc.²

In an interview in April 1918 Stalin apparently did not anticipate any major problems with such self-determination, arguing that Ukraine, the Crimea, Poland, Transcaucasia, Turkestan, the Middle Volga and The Kirghiz territory were all "integral economic territories having a population with a specific manner of life and national composition."³ This was hardly the case. The various national groups rarely inhabited clearly defined territories, but rather lived alongside each other in the cities and in separate villages situated in one area. Concentrations of the same national group could be found

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.61, l.13.

² McNeal, Resolutions..., Vol.I, p.226.

³ Stalin, Vol.IV, p.67.

in non-contiguous areas. Nomadic peoples frequently travelled with the changing seasons through territories populated by different sedentary groups; this was especially the case in Central Asia where different nationalities came to be defined as much by their methods of agriculture as by any linguistic or historical-ethnic principle. The absence of 'economic integrity' provided further arguments for altering national boundaries; as long as the republics and autonomous units had any genuine control over the economies of their territories, there were going to arise cases where it made economic sense to include certain enterprises, industrial zones or tracts of land of a specific agricultural usage in the region which could most successfully exploit their production. Indeed, there were proposals to base the administrative organisation of the Soviet state on purely economic, rather than national grounds.¹ Thus, in addition to disputes between the various nationalities over borders, there was competition between the 'economic principle' and the 'national-territorial principle', both supported to varying degrees at all levels of the Communist Party.

Transcaucasia's Internal Borders

The Karaiaz commission described above was typical of the approach to the solution of disputed borders between the three Transcaucasian republics. The 5th July Conference on Regulating the Internal Borders of Transcaucasia followed the establishment of a special

¹ See below, chapter 7.

commission under Kirov in May 1921.¹ This commission was instructed to complete its work by 1st June, but the complexity of the competing claims made it impossible to do so, resulting in the July conference and the establishment of several commissions.

Of the nine main disputed territories,² Karabakh and Nakhichevan have already been discussed. The Zangezur region was the scene of prolonged anti-Bolshevik resistance at the start of 1921 and, perhaps in deference to the strength of Armenian nationalism there, became an integral part of Armenia subsequently,³ while much of the Akhaltsikh region was lost to Turkey.

The other regions were discussed at length by special commissions and diplomats. The Georgian-Azeri border in Zakatal came up at peace talks between Soviet Russia and Menshevik Georgia on 7th May 1920, where the Georgians agreed to submit the final decision to a joint Georgian-Azeri under the neutral chairmanship of a Russian⁴, but it is unknown whether this commission ever met. At the July 1921 conference Georgia renounced all claims on the region⁵, but violent cross-border clashes between Azeris and Georgians continued into 1921, which also affected the Signakh region which had been awarded to Georgia⁶. The Kazakh uezd was included in Azerbaidzhan by the July conference, but was still under investigation in December 1921.⁷ In Borchalo uezd a line was drawn which weaved its way between the Georgian and Armenia villages and an

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.52, l.135.

² See above, chapter 3.

³ Armenia and Karabakh, p.106.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.17, l.13.

⁵ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.61, l.7.

⁶ RTsKhIDNI, f.69, op.1, d.75, l.100

⁷ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.6, l.13.

agreement on this basis was signed by the heads of the respective governments Myasnikov and Mdivani in Tiflis on 6th November 1921.¹

Numerous other commissions dwelt on the details of the borders of the three republics, guided primarily by the principle that communities of each nationality should not be separated from their national republic, with some preferential treatment shown to Azeri nomads, as had been the case with Nagorniy Karabakh. But these decisions, while agreed by the three governments, were frequently contested by the local authorities. Apart from the nomads who had to traverse state boundaries, peasants from one republic often relied for wood on forests which now lay across the border. Small-scale cross-border raids on livestock continued into 1922.² These conflicts endured to the considerable annoyance of the Kavbiuro and the authorities in Tiflis, Erevan and Baku, and continuing cross-border disputes were one of the main arguments put forward for the creation of a Transcaucasian Federation in 1922.

Bielorussia's Borders

The principles upon which new state boundaries were to be based were most widely discussed with regard to the new republic of Bielorussia. The difficulties involved in establishing criteria for Bielorussian nationhood meant that the establishment of the republic's borders was largely an open question. While the western border

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.61, l.4.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.52, l.249.

with Poland established by the treaty of Riga in 1921 can be regarded as the outcome of purely military operations, the southern and eastern borders, with the Ukrainian SSR and Russian SFSR respectively, were not finally fixed by the Soviets until 1926. Throughout the period 1917-1926 the issue of Bielorussia's borders was hotly disputed both in international negotiations and within the Soviet and Communist Party organs.

The most useful summary of the various competing linguistic, ethnographic and political claims in the region is provided by Nicholas Vakar.¹ Unfortunately, Vakar concludes that

discussion of East European statistics is useless. The truth is that the regions in question have always been Polish to the Poles, Lithuanian to the Lithuanians, and Belorussian to the Belorussians, irrespective of the actual distribution of their populations.²

In the absence of a historical Bielorussian nation, the broadest Bielorussian claims were based on the distribution of Bielorussian speaking natives. On this criteria, some consensus can be said to have existed among ethnographers around the turn of the century. The prototype ethnographic map was drawn by A.Rittikh in 1875, and was generally supported by the returns to the Russian census of 1897. Although other linguists found some characteristics of Bielorussian speech much further afield, the maps of Karskii and Durnovo in 1903 and of the Moscow Dialectological Committee in 1915, both based on a different set of linguistic requirements, do not

¹ Nicholas P. Vakar, Belorussia, the Making of a Nation (Cambridge, Mass. 1956), pp.5-16.

² Idem, p.11.

differ greatly from Rittikh's. In 1943 the German occupiers found Rittikh's ethnographic map to be still the most reliable, and Vakar himself, writing in 1956, concludes that this map "strikes a generally fair balance between Polish, Russian and contemporary Bielorussian claims."¹ To Rittikh's borders need to be added the region of Polesie along the banks of the Pripyet, whose inhabitants spoke a dialect closer to Ukrainian, but whose culture is recognised to be tied to Bielorussian, and the region of Brest. On this basis the furthest possible borders of linguistic/ethnographic Bielorussia embrace Brest, Bialystok and Grodno in the west, Vilno in the north-west, Dvinsk, Polotsk and Vitebsk in the north, Smolensk in the east, Gomel in the south-east, and Pinsk and Turov in the south. This map also roughly corresponds to the tsarist gubernias of Mogilev, Vitebsk, Minsk, Vilna and Grodno, all of which were found to have a majority Bielorussian population by the 1897 census, plus the western portion of Smolensk gubernia. In all these regions, however, there were considerable populations of Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, Russians and Ukrainians, especially in the cities.

It is unlikely, however, that Rittikh's work was the most influential in the establishment of Bielorussia's borders under the Soviets. The academic E.F. Karskii, whose linguistic work had contributed to the definitive map of Bielorussian territory adopted by the Moscow Dialectological Society in 1903 and who had been appointed Rector of Warsaw University in 1905 and was the recipient of many academic awards before the revolution, rose to even greater prominence under the Soviets. He was a member of the presidium of the Academy of Sciences

¹ Vakar, pp.5-8.

of the USSR and the director of its Museum of Ethnology and Anthropology, and received numerous other appointments and honours before his death in 1931.¹ During the early Soviet period much of his work was devoted to the study of Bielorussian ethnography and language. In 1924, Karskii published a book 'Russian Dialectology' in Moscow, which included a detailed outline of the borders of Bielorussian speech and an account of the nature of Bielorussian nationhood.² It was Karskii and other academics like him who played a decisive role in the creation of Bielorussia's borders.

The first declaration of an 'Independent Socialist Republic of Bielorussia' was made on 20th December 1918 by the Sixth Northwestern Regional Conference of the Russian Communist Party in Smolensk,³ and a Bielorussian Workers' and Peasants' government was formed in Minsk on 1st January 1919. According to the declaration, the borders were to be decided on the basis of self-determination by the regional and city Soviets and confirmed by a Bielorussian Congress of Soviets, to meet at the beginning of February. The Bolsheviks clearly preferred drawing the borders around an area which included all of ethnographic Bielorussia. The December conference in Smolensk, which renamed itself the First Congress of the Communist Party of Bielorussia, wanted a republic based on the guberniias of Minsk, Smolensk, Mogilev, Vitebsk and Grodno; also to be included were two uezds each of Kovno and Vilna guberniias to the north, and four uezds of Chernigov guberniia to the south-east. Excluded were four eastern uezds of Smolensk and three

¹ E.F. Karskii, Biolorusi - iazik Bielorusskogo naroda (Moscow, 1955), Vol.I, pp.447-448.

² E.F. Karskii, Russkaia dialektologiia (Moscow, 1924), pp.79-82.

³ ZN no.10, 19th January 1919, p.1.

uezds of Vitebsk guberniia. Areas of mixed population in Vitebsk and Vilna guberniias were to be decided on by special joint commissions of the relevant republics.¹

The full realisation of this project was delayed by other political and military considerations, and anyway there was no automatic guarantee that the approval of the local Soviets would be forthcoming. On 16th January, the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party entrusted Ioffe with a special mission to Bielorussia, instructing him

to secure through the local soviets, and then through the Congress of Soviets of Bielorussia, the demarcation of the Bielorussian Republic from the Vitebsk, Smolensk, Minsk and finally, if possible, Mogilev guberniias.²

These four guberniias, with the addition of Vilna and Grodno guberniias, correspond (as closely as is possible within the framework of the tsarist administrative division into guberniias) to the ethnographical/linguistic map of Bielorussia including Polesie. Grodno was at that point the seat of Varonka's rump government of the Bielorussian National Republic, and most of the guberniia was still occupied by Austro-German troops, while Vilna was the centre of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic proclaimed on 29th December 1918. Thus the Central Committee's plan was to unite all the Bielorussian-speaking people into one republic as far as was possible given certain political

¹ Kommunisticheskaia Partiiia Bielorussii v Rezoliutsiiakh i Resheniiakh s"ezdov i plenumov TsK, tom pervyi 1918-1927 (Minsk, 1973), pp.19-20.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.8, l.1.

and military constraints, that is, to create a Bielorussian Republic on the ethnographic principle.

A month later, the Central Bureau of Communists of Bielorussia declared that

concerning membership of the Bielorussian Soviet Republic, the following gubernias should be included: Grodno, Minsk, Mogilev, Smolensk, Vitebsk and several uyezds of Vilna. However, it is noted, these decisions are not final. Details of the questions of demarcation, the construction of power and the interrelations of neighbouring republics lies solely in the competence of the First All-Bielorussian Congress of Soviets.¹

This plan was the same as the Central Committee's with the addition of Grodno and parts of Vilna.

The Central Committee instruction to Ioffe, asking him to secure the adherence of Mogilev gubernia to the new republic only "if possible", together with the Bielorussian Bureau's caveat that these borders were not final, clearly recognise firstly that the Communist Party could not exercise complete control over the Soviets of the region, and secondly that Bielorussian national sentiment was not so strong as to guarantee support for the republic. In Bielorussia the Bolsheviki faced a problem they were also to encounter elsewhere; their support in the revolution was based overwhelmingly on the industrial working class, and by 1919 the right of self-determination had effectively been modified to the right of proletarian self-determination, that is self-

¹ ZN no.12, 2nd February 1919, p.4.

determination through the Soviets. In Bielorussia however, as in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, the native population was predominantly peasant. Thus, in securing such decisions, the Bolsheviks had to depend on the peasant Soviets and party discipline.

As it turned out, in Bielorussia it was even harder than the Central Committee had anticipated to win support for the Bielorussian Republic. When the All-Bielorussian Congress of Soviets convened in Minsk on 2nd February 1919, the delegates from Smolensk and Vitebsk gubernias joined those from Mogilev in declaring that they preferred to remain in the RSFSR and left the congress. In fact the first Bielorussian Soviet Socialist Republic found itself restricted to six uezds of Minsk gubernia.¹ The Bielorussian national idea was not strong enough, nor did the Bolsheviks have sufficient control over the Soviets to ensure the unity of ethnographic Bielorussia.

The February Congress did succeed in extending the new state's borders, however, by voting for fusion with the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, and on March 12th the "Litbel" Republic came into being. The origin of the idea for this merged republic is obscure and the secondary sources are silent on this point,² although all speculate on the reasons the Bolsheviks may have found it advantageous. Part of Ioffe's mandate was to get the congress to initiate negotiations "on uniting with recently formed Soviet republics (Latvia, Lithuania, Estland etc.)",³ but there is no direct evidence of any initiative for a specifically Lithuanian-Bielorussian

¹ Vakar, p.109.

² Pipes, pp.152-3; Carrère d'Encausse, p.86; Vakar, p.109; Jan Zaprudnik, Belarus - At a Crossroads in History (Boulder and Oxford, 1993), p.70.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.8, l.1.

Republic emerging from Moscow. The Manifesto of the Provisional Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Soviet Government of Bielorussia published at the beginning of January stated that the Soviet Republic was being set up "jointly with the labouring peoples of Russia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Latvia",¹ but the wording here suggests a joint effort rather than a unified state. But the same issue of Zhizn natsional'nostei (5th January 1919) which carried the Manifesto also reported a number of resolutions had been passed similar to that of a conference of peasants of Minsk guberniia which called for

the organisation of regional Soviet power on the basis of unification with our brother workers and peasants of Lithuania...and for the swift convening of a Congress of Soviets of Bielorussia and Lithuania, which will decide all questions of the state order of Soviet Bielorussia and Lithuania.²

These resolutions won editorial endorsement from the journal. It would have been difficult for the Bolsheviks to have engineered a series of such resolutions less than a fortnight after the departure of German troops from Minsk. Equally, it is unlikely that both the Lithuanian and Bielorussian congresses should simultaneously take such a step without Bolshevik endorsement, and Zhizn natsional'nostei would not have signalled its approval if the Party was opposed. Clearly the idea had been widely discussed, at least in Bielorussia, while both the instruction to Ioffe and the declaration of the Central Bureau of Communists of Bielorussia left the question of relations with the neighbouring republics open enough to

¹ ZN no.9, 5th January 1919, p.1.

² ZN no.9, 5th January 1919, p.3.

suggest that the Bolsheviks were happy to let the Congress decide this question for itself.

Why, then, should the Congress have chosen to merge with Lithuania and not with Russia, Ukraine and Latvia, with whom at most a federal union had been proposed?¹ Several explanations of the advantages of such a union have been advanced. According to Pipes, the Litbel was "a mere device for Soviet expansion"² into the territories being vacated by the Germans. Vakar points out that "in that manner everybody, as it were, was given satisfaction: the separatists, the promoters of the Lithuanian Belorussian state, and the federalists."³ Carrère d'Encausse notes that the move served Russian interests as it "included independently minded Lithuania in a state in which the majority of the population was favourable to Russia", at the same time undermining pro-Polish tendencies and removing Lithuania from the British sphere of influence in the Baltic.⁴ According to Jan Zaprudnik "this maneuver was carried out in view of the war with Poland over the Belarusan and Lithuanian territories."⁵ A typical later Soviet source ascribes the decision to the need for "defence of Soviet power from internal and external counter-revolution, while also taking into account the historically developed economic and political community of the Lithuanian and Bielorussian peoples."⁶

¹ ZN no.9, 5th January 1919, p.3.

² Pipes, p.153.

³ Vakar, p.109.

⁴ Carrère d'Encausse, p.87.

⁵ Zaprudnik, p.70.

⁶ T.S.Gorbunov et al, Istoriia Bielorusskoi SSR, (Minsk, 1961), vol.II, 126.

None of these explanations convincingly explain the Litbel. These motives could easily have been satisfied by leaving the Bielorussian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics as separate states, enjoying federal or other links with Russia and Ukraine. The declaration of the Bielorussian Congress of Soviets, in contrast to these explanations, gave as the sole basis for merger with Lithuania the "historical identity of economic interests" of the two republics.¹ What Lithuanians and Bielorussians had in common with each other, and not with the other Soviet peoples, was a shared territory in the Vilna region and a common historical and cultural heritage based on the 500 year existence of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. While later Soviet historians have depicted the Grand Duchy as a period of domination and oppression by Lithuanians over the Bielorussians, who were cut off from their brothers in Russia, according to Zaprudnik it is more likely that this was a period of peaceful coexistence in which the two peoples mingled and the Bielorussian language and culture was allowed to flourish and indeed predominate in the Grand Duchy.² At any rate the Grand Duchy held fond enough memories for the idea of a Lithuanian-Bielorussian Confederation to be resurrected by Bielorussian nationalists under the German occupation in 1915.³ The historical unity of Bielorussia and Lithuania may have appealed both to the nationalists and to the Bolshevik efforts to awaken national identity in a reluctant nation, especially once the bulk of ethnographic Bielorussia had been denied to the new republic. It is even possible to speculate that those communists who supported the creation of the Litbel had half an eye on Poland, hoping to entice the Poles with a

¹ ZN no.13, 16th February 1919, p.2.

² Zaprudnik, p.19.

³ Vakar, pp.93-94.

Soviet version of the confederation between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland. At the same time the merger solved a problem for the proponents of the ethnographic territorial principle in that the ethnically complex Vilna district did not have to be divided between the two peoples. The Litbel remains something of an enigma, however.

The refusal of the Vitebsk, Smolensk and Mogilev Soviets to enter the republic sparked a controversy over the scope of self-determination and of the 'ethnographic principle'. On 16th February Zhizn natsional'nostei tetchily reported that:

side by side with self-determination by oblast proceeds the active self-determination by guberniia. So the Fourth Congress of Soviets of Vitebsk guberniia passed a resolution on isolating the guberniia from the composition of Bielorussia. And that was done at a time when the government of Bielorussia needed as many as possible of the revolutionary elements of the Bielorussian region to repel the aggressive policies of the Polish bourgeoisie,

as the Poles were demanding the annexation of Grodno, Vilna and Minsk guberniias.¹ In a similar vein, at the unification meeting held in Vilna on 27th February, the Central Executive Committees of Bielorussia and Lithuania grudgingly accepted the decisions of the Vitebsk, Mogilev and Smolensk Soviets while complaining that less than half of the ethnographically Bielorussian territory now came into the Bielorussian Republic; the separation of the three northern uezds of Vitebsk guberniia (Dvinsk,

¹ ZN no.13, 16th February 1919, p.3.

Rezhitsk, Liutsinsk) with their mainly Lettish population, was "to be welcomed, on the basis of the ethnographical principle", but other separations contradicted the ethnographical principle. The Gomel district Soviet had passed a resolution expressing its desire to be linked to Chernigov guberniia in Ukraine, as this would best serve its local interests. Economically, the four northern uezds of Chernigov, the two southwestern uezds of Minsk, and the southern portion of Mogilev guberniia were united around the economic centre of Gomel. Under the Rada, this region was united into a special Gomel guberniia. According to Zhizn natsional'nostei, the creation of a Gomel guberniia was correct, "taking into account its economic integrity...but its purely Bielorussian ethnographic character means that it should be joined to Bielorussia.." or, curiously, to Russia.¹ As the Polish armies advanced into Bielorussia, the economic principle prevailed over the ethnographic for the time being, and the Gomel guberniia was reformed and attached to the RSFSR².

Following the Polish-Soviet War and the recognition of Lithuanian independence, the Litbel union was dropped and Bielorussia was further diminished by the treaty of Riga (18th March 1921), which ceded the western portion of Minsk guberniia, Grodno guberniia and the Bielorussian parts of Vilna guberniia to Poland. Following the formation of the USSR, with the Communist Party now in complete control of affairs and the international situation stabilized, the ethnographic principle was again invoked. In March 1923 the 7th Congress of the Communist Party of Bielorussia resolved to extend the

¹ ZN no.16, 9th March 1919, p.3.

² ZN no.24, 4th May 1919, p.3.

eastern border of the BSSR to include all districts with a Bielorussian majority¹, and in November 1923 a commission of the Orgburo of the CPSU proposed "to unite to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Bielorussia the uezds of the adjacent gubernias related to it in manner of life, ethnographic and economic respects..." These were, two uezds of Smolensk guberniia, all uezds of Vitebsk guberniia apart from the three Lettish uezds already ceded, and eight uezds of Gomel guberniia, the remaining five uezds to be reassigned to Bryansk guberniia in Russia.² This would have included all of ethnographic Bielorussia east of Poland apart from the Smolensk and Chernigov regions, but a second, state commission including representatives from Bielorussia, Ukraine and Gomel, "guided by the ethnographic principle", reduced the portion of Gomel entering into Bielorussia, including Gomel city, but overruled the objections of the Vitebsk Gubispolkom to include most of Vitebsk.³ The enlargement was carried out on 3rd March 1924, and the disputed Gomel territories were subsequently added in 1926. Although Smolensk city remained in Russia, the territory of the Bielorussian republic grew from 20,000 square miles in 1921 to 48,500 square miles in 1926, and its population from 1.5 million to almost 5 million, over 80% of whom were Bielorussian.⁴ Aside from the western territories ceded to Poland, these borders corresponded almost exactly to the maps drawn up by ethnographers and linguists such as Karskii and Rittikh around the turn of the century.

¹ Kommunisticheskaia Partiia Bielorussii..., p. 95.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.397, l.10.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.406, l.2.

⁴ Zaprudnik, p.78.

The evolution of the Bielorussian borders shows that the Bolsheviks were attempting to create a clearly defined national territory, while the creation of the short-lived Litbel republic may have represented an attempt to set that territory to a historical background, in line with their policy of encouraging Bielorussian national identity referred to in chapter 2. The ethnographic principle was at the heart of the demarcation, but could be modified by the economic principle and was obstructed by the resistance of the local Soviets and the military successes of the Poles. The former were overcome by 1926, the latter in 1939, delaying until then the creation of a Greater ethnological Bielorussia.

The Internal Borders of Central Asia

In Central Asia national consciousness was, if anything, weaker than in Bielorussia. The natives for the most part spoke one of a number of mutually-intelligible dialects of the Turkic language, were Muslim by religion, and ethnically were descended from the Iranian or Turko-Mongol strain, or a mixture of the two.¹ Territorial autonomy was, in the first place, based on the tsarist Governor-Generalship of Turkestan, but the Bolsheviks recognised early on a clear national differentiation between the nomadic, Turko-Mongol Kirghiz and Kazakhs (in pre-revolutionary literature known collectively as Kirghiz, or differentiated as Kara-

¹ Edward Dennis Sokol, The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia (Baltimore, 1954), pp.15-17.

Kirghiz and Kirghiz-Kazakhs) on the one hand, and the sedentary, Iranian Tadzhiks, Sarts and Uzbeks on the other.¹ The Kirghiz were granted separate recognition by Narkomnats when a Kirghiz department, one of the first departments of Narkomnats, was formed in April 1918.² Territorial autonomy for the Kirghiz had been proposed before then, at the second all-Kirghiz Congress in Orenberg in December 1917. Here the nationalist Alash Orda leadership proposed autonomy for all the regions inhabited by the Kirghiz, namely: the Ural'sk, Turgai, Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk oblasts in their entirety; the northern parts of the Syr-Darya and Zacaspiian oblasts; and the territory of the former Bukeev khanate in Astrakhan guberniia.³ The idea of Kirghiz autonomy was subsequently brought up in December 1917 at a West Siberian Congress of Soviets, which resolved "to consider the resolution of questions of national autonomy at the next congress with the participation of deputies of the organised poorest sections of the Kirghiz population."⁴

In April 1918 the leadership of the Alash-Orda began to make overtures to the Soviets, but these approaches were refused. Kirghiz autonomy was soon taken up by the Bolsheviks, however, and on 20th May 1918 the Extraordinary Commissar for the Kirghiz Steppe, A. Dzhangil'din, asked the Central Executive Committees of the Fergana, Syr Darya, and Semirechensk oblasts (where the Kara-Kirghiz were concentrated):

whether the Kirghiz uezds should finally enter into autonomous Turkestan, or if the Executive Committee

¹ Stalin, Vol.IV, pp.75-76.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.13.

³ Granitsi Rossiskoy Federatsii (available to me only in a preliminary photostat form, Moscow, 1995), p.59.

⁴ Batirov, p.623

finds desirable the union of the population of the whole Kirghiz region. In the latter case - in what form, and what preliminary measures are needed to demarcate the Kirghiz lands from the whole lands of other peoples, who do not gravitate towards the Kirghiz region? Do you consider it desirable to convene a congress of representatives of executive committees of the Kirghiz region, if so, where and when?

What Dzhangil'din had in mind here was a region embracing both the Kirghiz and Kazakh peoples, but apparently the response from these three oblasts was negative, as a fortnight later Dzhangil'din sent an instruction on the convening of a Kirghiz congress to the Soviets of only Semipalatinsk, Turgai, Akmolinsk oblasts and Bukeev guberniia (i.e. the Kirghiz-Kazakh regions).¹

Preparations for the Kirghiz congress were cut off by the Civil War, but as the Red Army reconquered the region in 1919 the question of Kirghiz autonomy was again firmly on the agenda, with the creation in July 1919 of a Kirghiz Revolutionary Committee (Kirrevkom) to temporarily administer the Uralsk, Turgai, Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk oblasts and part of Astrakhan guberniia², while the southern border of Kirghizia was subject to negotiations with the Turkestan ASSR. Unlike the Bashrevkom, the Kirrevkom was composed of communists appointed by Moscow and headed by Stalin's former deputy at Narkomnats, the Pole Pestkovskii, but the underrepresentation of Kirghiz nationals clearly concerned the Politburo, who in October ordered the Kirrevkom to replace the Russian Tungachin with a

¹ Batirov, p.624.

² Izvestiia VTsIK, 17th July 1919.

Kirghiz.¹ The Kirrevkom has generally been seen as a subservient tool of Moscow², but in spite of its origin and the absence of Kirghiz nationals from its composition, in the later disputes concerning the constitutional and geographical jurisdiction of the autonomous Kirghiz republic the members of the Kirrevkom identified themselves closely with the Kirghiz national position.

The Bolsheviks faced a particular set of problems in trying to devise an application of the national-territorial principal to an essentially nomadic people. The loyalties of the Kazakhs and Kirghiz were, if anything, tribal rather than national or religious. Islam, recently imposed on the population by the Russian conquerors, was a much weaker force than among the sedentary population of Central Asia, and strivings to unite the Kazakh and Kirghiz on a national basis before 1917 had been confined to a few intellectuals. Thus, while the most violent revolts against the Russians had occurred in the Kirghiz regions of Semirechie in 1916, these incidents were localised and were directed primarily against the results of the Russian colonisation policies rather than based on any specifically national demands.³ Unlike central Turkestan which had a thriving cotton-export economy and several important urban industrial and trading centres, the steppe nomads had possessed little in the way of a native economy which could justify the existence of an integral autonomous territory. The presence of Russian and Ukrainian colonists on large areas of the best agricultural land presented a further barrier to the process of

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.34, l.1.

² Pipes, p.173.

³ Sokol, pp.117-125.

establishing an ethnographically and economically viable autonomous national unit.

These circumstances explain the length of time involved in setting up the autonomous republic once the region had been liberated from the Whites. The desire to strengthen the political and economic viability of the territory led to a brief flirtation with the idea of uniting Kirghizia and Bashkiria in December 1919,¹ but this possibility was discarded along with that of the Tatar-Bashkir republic on the objection of the Bashkirs. At the beginning of January 1920 a Kirghiz conference in Aktiubinsk voted for the establishment of an autonomous Kirghiz state, and on 27th January the Politburo sought the opinions of Frunze, the Turkkomissia and the Kirrevkom on uniting the Kirghiz portions of Turkestan with the Kirghiz steppe into a single republic.² It took until 25th June for a provisional decision on the composition of the Kirghiz republic to be reached,³ and a further two months and a number of interdepartmental meetings before any effective decision could be taken; even then the precise form of the republic and its exact borders were still unresolved.⁴ In part this delay can be put down to continuing military operations in the region, but undoubtedly owes a lot to the intractable disputes over the borders of the republic which presented more conflicts of interest than with any other national territory outside Transcaucasia. The problem was in part a question of applying the 'ethnological principal' to a nomadic and ethnically ill-defined group; but more contentious in this case was the 'economic principle',

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.48, l.3.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.59, l.2.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.88.

⁴ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.104.

particularly in regard to the region immediately to the north of the Kirghiz steppe which the Russian Soviets saw as an integral part of the economy of western Siberia while the Kirghiz insisted that their republic could not survive as a meaningful entity without an independent grain supply and some industry. At all of these meetings, even the most internationalist Bolsheviks defended the interests of their particular group rather than looking objectively at the needs of socialist political and economic construction.

At one of the final inter-departmental meetings on the question, on 9th August, the difficulty of demarcating a territory "distinguished by a particular way of life and national composition" in such a mixed region was manifest. Of the twenty-one people present at this meeting, eighteen were representatives of regional Soviet organs, Kamenskii and Sultan-Galiev represented Narkomnats and Tsiurupa represented Narkomzem. Of these, Sultan-Galiev was clearly on the side of the Kirghiz interest, so only Kamenskii, who chaired, and Tsiurupa can be considered to have been in any position to take an overall, objective point of view. Yermakov, from the Semipalatinsk oblast, opened the discussion by proposing a Kirghiz republic made up of the oblasts and gubernias of Astrakhan, Ural'sk, Turgai, Akmolinsk, Semipalatinsk, Syr Darya, Zacaspiia, Samarkand and Fergana, i.e. the whole of Central Asia including what was then Turkestan. This extreme proposal was based on the fact that over three quarters at least of the territory of each region was considered under cultivation by the Kirghiz, even though the Kirghiz made up barely half of the overall population. While conceding that there was a problem with the other Turko-Tatars in Turkestan, Yermakov argued

that the predominance of Russians in the northern regions was a result of tsarist colonial policy and that these regions should be included to preserve the unity of the Kirghiz ethnically, culturally and economically. Moreover, these border areas contained the economic and cultural centres (including Orenberg) of the region and especially the black earth grain producing regions and the granaries which were essential if Kirghizia was to be an economically viable republic.

The subsequent discussion focused on these northern regions and on the question of what bodies should govern Kirghizia. There was a general consensus that Turkestan should remain separate to preserve the identity of the Uzbeks and Sarts, but far more controversial was the question of areas of Russian predominance. Sokolov, from the Sibrevkom, argued that the northern regions were economically more developed than the rest and to cut them off from Russia would incite the Russian population and cause national conflicts. Predictably, Sokolov was supported by Poliakov (Cheliabinsk) and the other Russian representatives, while the Kirrevkom members Kulakov, Murza-Galiev, and Dzhangil'din backed Yermakov, and Safarov from the Turkomissiya fought the corner for the Sarts and Uzbeks. Kamenskii, basing himself firmly on the principle of self-determination, backed the Kirghiz' northern claims, but managed to incense Sultan-Galiev and the Kirrevkom by suggesting that the Kirghiz themselves were not yet ready to exercise their own autonomy and the region should temporarily come under the joint administration of the Kirrevkom, the Sibrevkom and the Turkomissiya.¹

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, ll.65-73.

This dispute showed it was impossible to settle borders purely on the ethnographic basis where both sides could lay claims to certain mixed areas and especially where the predominant population could shift with the seasons (one of the most hotly disputed regions was Kustanais, near Orenberg, where for most of the year the population was 57% Russian but in the summer months the Kirghiz were a majority.) But in this case the controversy centred more on the economic unity of Kirghizia on the one side and Siberia on the other, and on the competence of the Kirghiz organs to govern. In spite of further meetings, the last of which was chaired by Lenin himself, a final decision on the borders and on the extent of autonomy had not been reached even by the time the Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed on 26th August 1920.¹ The basis of the territory was to be the oblasts Semipalatinsk, Turgai, Ural'sk, and Akmolinsk excluding Omsk, with four volosts of Astrakhan guberniia and a part of the Zacaspiian oblast; the Omsk and Astrakhan questions awaited a final decision, while Orenberg was omitted from the original decree and it was not until 20th September that VTsIK decided to include Orenberg, which was to be the capital of the Kirghiz ASSR until 1925.

In each of these decisions, the claims of the Kirghiz to be granted a territory not just covering as much of the territory inhabited and farmed by the Kirghiz-Kazakhs, but also including the industrial and natural resources needed to make Kirghizia economically self-sufficient, were preferred to the interests of the Russian population of Central Asia and Siberia. The delineation of the Kirghiz ASSR to include Orenberg and

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.104.

the Russian dominated northern districts was a victory not just for the national-territorial principle but also for the theory that national liberation and the preparation of the 'backward' peoples for socialism could only be achieved by economic development alongside national autonomy. The granting of Kirghiz authority over economically important installations continued to be challenged by the Sibrevkom, who questioned the competence of the Kirghiz in a series of disputes over factories, a major stud farm near Petropavlovsk and the important Pavlodar salt lakes. In each case following vigorous lobbying by Narkomnats the Sibrevkom interventions were overruled and the installations entrusted to the Kirghiz ASSR.¹ In the case of the Pavlodar salt lakes, the Soviets tried to maintain a balance between preserving the integrity of the Kirghiz republic and meeting the economic needs of both Kirghizia and Siberia by leaving the lakes in the Kirghiz ASSR while granting the Sibrevkom extensive rights of exploitation of the lakes. An indication of the importance accorded to such economic/national questions is the fact that the Pavlodar salt lakes alone were discussed on more than one occasion by each of the VTsIK of the RSFSR and the Orgburo and Politburo of the RKP(b).²

The separation of the Kirghiz ASSR from Turkestan was the first move in the process of dividing the population of Central Asia into distinct national groups.³ Among

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.7, ll.88, 107.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.271, l.1; d.291, ll.2, 7-8.

³ Although the delimitation of Central Asia in 1925 falls outside the period covered by this thesis, it is directly relevant to the topic discussed here and deserves a brief mention. For a fuller account, see Alexander G. Park, Bolshevism in Turkestan (New York, 1957), pp.88-98.

the Muslims of the region, immediate loyalties were usually tribal, while the radical intelligentsia for the most part dreamed of a pan-Islamic or pan-Turkic state. The Alash Orda were the principle exception to this, which may explain why the Kirghiz were the first to be recognised as a distinct group. Already it was clear that the Bolsheviks were keen to foster national identities and loyalty among all the peoples of the Soviet republics, and the logical conclusion of this approach was the division of Central Asia into separate groups, each of which would have its own language, territory and culture.

The numerous dialects in use in Central Asia made it difficult to define nationalities by language, and other criteria had to be used. This involved combining the returns to the 1897 census with "socioeconomic studies of each individual district in order to discover its language and cultural patterns, its economic profile, and its economic relationship with other districts."¹ As a result of all this work, in October 1924 Rudzutak presented a report on the peoples of Central Asia to the Central Committee. He first divided them into two broad ethnic groups: the Turko-Mongols, which included Turkmens, Uzbeks, Kirghiz and Kazakhs, and the Indo-European Tadjiks. Within the Turko-Mongol tribe, there was a clear difference between the sedentary Uzbeks, now largely engaged in cotton-growing, and the nomadic, cattle-breeding Kirghiz and Turkmens.² The complexities of the area meant that economic considerations should occasionally over-ride purely national ones, Rudzutak argued. This affected the Samarkand region in

¹ Park, p.93.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17,op.2, d.153, ll.123-124.

particular.¹ But some of the problems caused by the administrative division could be overcome by the creation of a Central Asian Economic Soviet.²

On this basis, the Central Executive Committee of the USSR voted on 24th October 1924 to dissolve the Bukhara, Khorezm, and Turkestan republics and reconstitute them as the Uzbek and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics, the Tadzhik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the Kirghiz Autonomous Region, while incorporating more territory into Kirghizia and renaming it the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.³

Hélène Carrère d'Encausse views the delimitation of Central Asia as an attempt to artificially separate related peoples as part of a deliberate policy of divide and rule in Central Asia.⁴ She argues that the Bolsheviks' objective was to undermine pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic aspirations, motivated partly by fear of the unity shown by the Kazakhs and Kirghiz in the revolt of 1915. But there is no evidence that the 1915 revolt ever achieved any unity above the tribal level, or that the ideas of pan-Islam and pan-Turkism had any major influence outside intellectual circles.⁵ Such an interpretation moreover, while it may appear as a valid explanation of the 1925 Delimitation when taken in isolation, ignores the work on language and culture which began immediately after the revolution and applied equally to small nationalities which posed no threat. While it was a somewhat artificial process to construct national groups in Central Asia, the task was approached

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.153, l.127.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.153, l.130.

³ Park, p.98.

⁴ Carrère d'Encausse, pp.177-179.

⁵ Sokol, op. cit, passim.

in a thoroughly scientific manner. The promotion of separate national identities in Central Asia is consistent with Bolshevik policies elsewhere and had the eventual goal of improving the situation of the Central Asian Muslims. This was made explicit at the time by a Soviet writer: "National development on Soviet principles demands the unification of the toiling strata of nations into unified Soviet countries in order to strengthen economic and political uplift and to deepen national-cultural construction."¹

Migration and Resettlement

Having drawn the administrative borders to create, as far as possible, ethnographically homogenous units, the Bolsheviks were still left with ethnically very mixed regions and in the autonomous regions and republics the "native" population barely constituted a majority. Even with the Bashkirs and Tatars, who formed a minority or a bare majority of the population in their regions, the principle that only territorial autonomy could guarantee the development of the national minorities meant that they were granted the status of autonomous republics. But the general policy was to secure ethnically integral regions for the non-Russians. The only method of increasing the predominance of a particular national group within its own borders was by moving sections of the population around. While the Bolsheviks did not resort to the wholesale deportations of national groups that occurred in the 1930's, there occurred significant

¹ F. Ksenofontov, quoted in Park, p.90.

population movements in this period which the Bolsheviks took advantage of to improve the ethnic balance of the regions. There were four principle causes of resettlement during and after the Civil War; firstly, the historical legacy of a colonisation policy which had displaced natives from much of the best land to be replaced by Russian or Ukrainian peasants and Cossacks. The results of this policy were most keenly felt in the North Caucasus and Central Asia, where large scale dispossession and colonisation had occurred as late as 1916 as a reprisal for the Muslim revolts. Secondly, large scale migration had occurred as a result of people fleeing the effects of the World War and Civil War, especially in Armenia and Ukraine and on a smaller scale among the Central Asian rebels who had fled to China. Thirdly, the famines of 1921-22 provoked a migration away from the affected areas towards those less affected. Fourthly, there was the voluntary migration of ethnic minorities towards their newly created national "homelands". While none of these causes excepting perhaps the last were the deliberate results of Bolshevik policy, Narkomnats in particular was quick to seize on the national character of population movements and took the opportunity to strengthen the ethnic base of the new national units. This policy, while it did not succeed in significantly altering the demographic map in the short term, is further evidence of the desire to maintain adherence to a purely national identity.

From the beginning Narkomnats considered the refugee question to be primarily a national one. Initially refugees were handled by voluntary organisations, including the Red Cross, with political authority exercised by the War Commissariat. In April 1918 the

collegium of Narkomnats complained about the assignation of 30 million rubles to refugee organisations with no control by the national commissariats and proposed that the matter be dealt with by a joint commission of Narkomnats and the Commissariat for Internal Affairs.¹ A fortnight later the collegium went further, demanding unique competence over refugee affairs be transferred from the War Commissariat to a Narkomnats commission.² When this request was declined in favour of setting up a special Central Collegium for Prisoner of War and Refugee Affairs attached to the War Commissariat, Narkomnats still attempted to maintain a measure of control by granting the national departments exclusive rights to issue documents in the occupied regions and later, in August, issuing an instruction to the national departments to organise local control over refugees, to issue certificates to individuals travelling in private convoys and to register the visas of new arrivals.³ While the national departments engaged in organising relief work, education and and so on for the refugees of their nationalities,⁴ Narkomnats also clearly hoped to influence the movements of refugees according to their nationality. This is already indicated by a request from the Commissariat to the Central Collegium for POW and Refugee Affairs in May 1918 to commence returning refugees to the Ukraine, in spite of the fact that most of the Ukraine was under German occupation at this time,⁵ and later in the year Latvian refugees were being returned to Riga.⁶ For the most part, refugees from war could be returned to their original homesteads as

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.5.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.8.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, ll.25, 59, 65-68.

⁴ ZN no.5, 8th December 1918, p.7; no.19, 25th May 1919, p.4.

⁵ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.21.

⁶ ZN no. 6, 15th December 1918, p.7.

hostilities died out, but dealing with the thousands of Armenian refugees, many of whom were from the Turkish side of the border, proved more intractable. Many ended up in Ukraine, where they were dealt with by special committees of the Armenian Commissariat,¹ but as late as 1923 the Soviets were searching for vacant land where an Armenian "National Centre" could be established.²

It was not until the Civil War was over, however, that any measure of long term planning could be applied to migration policy. But here it was a matter of short term contingency, a response to the famines of 1921, that provided the main impulse for population movements. The priority was simply to move people from the worst affected areas to the more productive regions, such as Ukraine, or regions where it was possible for migrants to bring more land under cultivation, especially in Siberia, and this task was overseen by the People's Commissariat for Land affairs (Narkomzem). But in August 1921 it was the Narkomnats representative Karklin who secured through VTsIK a plan for migration from the famine areas to parts of Siberia, Turkestan, Ukraine and Kirghizia. Discussing this proposal at the Soviet of Nationalities, Karklin noted that the resettlement of 200,000 Muslims in Turkestan would create a Muslim majority in the autonomous republic.³ Thus it was possible to take advantage of the famine to redress the imbalance of population in favour of 'natives' against Russians and strengthen the national identity of the autonomous republics, and Narkomnats was most enthusiastic about the migration of national minorities: in April 1921 Narkomnats was asked to consider the migration of 150

¹ ZN no.21, 13th April 1919, p.4.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.331, l.1.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.5, l.112.

Kalmyk families from Orenberg guberniia, where they had been forcibly settled under tsarism, to the recently formed Kalmyk Autonomous Region, and resolved not only to give permission for the move, but also to provide the necessary material and financial support;¹ three months later the migration of a further 1,330 Kalmyks from Kizliar and Mozdok in the North Caucasus to the Kalmyk Autonomous Region was approved.²

Such voluntary migrations were to the advantage of all concerned, but were not in themselves sufficient to create homogenous national regions or to right the wrongs of Russia's colonial history. Here the Bolsheviks were in a dilemma: in Central Asia many natives had lost their land as a collective punishment for the 1916 revolt. It was possible to go further and argue that all the land cultivated by Russian colonists was historically wrongfully expropriated and should be returned to the national population; on the other hand, to forcibly remove Russian peasants from Central Asia would undermine a large segment of communist support in the region, increase ethnic tensions and risk creating serious disturbances.

In the North Caucasus, where there had been 65,000 peasant and Cossack settlers, the local nationalities had taken things into their own hands; most of the land belonging to the Cossacks who had gone to fight for the whites had already been seized and even after the Civil War , according to a representative of the Sunzhen district Ispolkom, Chechens, Ingush and Ossetians had been waging a systematic campaign of murder, seizure of livestock and crop destruction which made life impossible

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.5, l.64.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.6, l.128.

for the Russian inhabitants.¹ Narkomnats forbade outright the return of any evicted Cossacks and flatly denied a proposal to organise a special Sunzhen district with special status to include all the major Russian villages of the North Caucasus.²

The North Caucasians had, from an early stage, been strong enough and well organised enough to exercise political and military control over the region, but in the Crimean peninsula and Central Asia the opposite was true and only state intervention would be able to secure the eviction of the Russian colonists. In the Crimea the Politburo had tried to ensure the redistribution of expropriated large estates to the Muslim population in January 1920,³ but this policy was blocked by the local authorities until the establishment of autonomy and the reorganisation of power in the Crimea at the end of 1921⁴.

In the light of the Crimean experience and the strength of the Central Asian Russians Narkomnats moved cautiously. It took a political and agricultural crisis in Turkestan to provoke a decision to proceed with the eviction of Russian settlers. On 21st March 1921 the Politburo resolved to proceed with "the eviction of the most hated settlements in three uezds of Semirechie (Kesnensk, Pozheval'sk, Pishchneksk), and also the consolidation of other settlements, liberating the canals and springs for the needs of the Kirghiz in time for the autumn of 1921, with the proviso that preparatory work on the allocation of land for those evicted has been

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.7, ll.23-25

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.7, l.20.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.55, l.3.

⁴ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.5, ll.61-62.

completed by that time."¹ So the eviction, directed only against a few troublesome settlements, aimed at the same time to placate specific national resentments and to improve the agricultural position of the natives. But in June 1921, in reply to a proposal of the Turkomissiya to reverse the 1916 colonisations, Narkomnats generalised this policy by approving in principle the need to remove Russian rich peasants (Kulaks) from all the border regions of Turkestan.² At the same time a Federal Commission on Migration and Colonisation was being set up by VTsIK. Narkomnats initially objected to this project, but quickly agreed to it when certain rights of the autonomous units had been guaranteed and an assurance received that 'colonisation' was not meant in the tsarist sense. This collegium was to coordinate all matters connected with land policy, and through it Narkomnats lobbied both for a positive migratory policy and for the development of settled native agriculture in Central Asia.³ But the most complete decision on the general removal of Russian colonists came directly from the Sovnarkom of the RSFSR, which resolved in November 1921 to

request the Sovnarkom of the Turkestan Republic to organise the migration of the recently arrived European population from those districts where old or newly established settlements radically interfere with the possibility of uniting a regular cattle-breeding economy and lead to the destruction of the nomadic population, and also in those districts in which, owing to the lack of water and land there is a worsening of national relations in the environment of

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.140, l.3.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.6, ll.103, 138.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.6, ll.95, 102, 108

a settled agricultural population....Narkomzem [of RSFSR] is to provide a land fund for settlers from Turkestan in Altais guberniia and Siberia.¹

So Narkomnats, the Politburo, the Sovnarkom and the Turkomissiya had all approved in general terms the principle that Russian settlers should be removed from the land previously cultivated by the Muslims in Central Asia. The concrete realisation of this policy was confined to Semirechie, where Russian colonists had their land and equipment confiscated.² But at around the same time a move to resettle 50,000 colonists in Kirghizia was blocked on the grounds of the current famine.³ Although the Sovnarkom decision on migrations came after the Semirechie land reform, such measures were no longer pursued so vigorously. The crisis in Turkestan that year brought home the political risks in such an overtly anti-Russian policy. From 1922 onwards talk tended to be more about the eviction of Kulaks rather than Russians, and progress was slow. In 1923, T. Ryskulov claimed that in 1921-22 7,000 families were resettled onto former Kulak land in Turkestan.⁴ Whether this land was confiscated from genuine Kulaks or from whatever Russians happened to be there is unclear, and the numbers involved were relatively small. But this claim illustrates that the Bolsheviks were prepared to at least begin to redistribute land and influence the demographics of the region on national principles.

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.8, l.80.

² Park, p.168.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.6, l.154.

⁴ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.514.

The forced expropriation of Russian colonists from Turkestan was the most radical solution to the national question so far, but it had a certain logic to it. The thrust of Lenin's nationality was to eliminate the injustices and divisions caused by former Great Russian policies, and this meant promoting the interests of the national minorities above those of Russians; Narkomnats had consistently favoured native institutions over Russian ones wherever there had been disputes and it was an extension of this attitude from the institutional to the personal level which favoured the Muslim peasant at the expense of the Russian settler. The policy may also have made some economic sense; under NEP, conditions for agricultural initiatives were far more favourable than under War Communism, and clearing the colonists from the better soil would have encouraged the development of more productive (and more socialist) forms of settled agriculture among the Muslims, while the resettled Russians could bring under cultivation virgin land in Siberia, and with favourable market conditions may not have been altogether unhappy at the move. But above all, in the final analysis migration was the only feasible method of finally creating stable national-territorial units which the regime had embarked upon.

Problems of Autonomy

The Bolsheviks had never defined exactly what 'autonomy' consisted of. In spite of the long-held objections to the idea of extra-territorial cultural autonomy espoused by the Austro-Marxists, the party leaders accepted that the national territories would exercise general authority over cultural matters, and where the central organs directed policy, as in education and religion, they generally adopted a positive attitude to the national minorities. Even extra-territorial cultural autonomy gained some acceptance, under pressure of the Muslim Commissariat and the Bund in particular. More contentious was the extent of independence in purely political and economic matters. Particularly vexed was the question of land reform which, owing to the historical conflict of nationals with Russian colonists, often took on a national character. But the most general problem, whatever the formal authority of the autonomous governments, was over the actual exercise of power. Here, two basic principles of Bolshevism contradicted the newer principle of national autonomy; firstly, both revolutions of 1917 had placed increasing power in the hands of the Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' soviets, whose sovereign right to wield local and central authority was further enshrined in the Soviet constitution; secondly, the Bolsheviks held an unshaking faith in the political ability of their own Party membership, from top to bottom, to carry out, consolidate and further the revolution.

These contradictions could have been resolved if the local soviets had been truly representative of the nationalities inhabiting the borderlands and had been headed by reliable and conscientious Communists. But this was rarely, if ever, the case outside the Russian heartland. The soviets were for the most part overwhelmingly Russian in composition and often exhibited a hostility to the local population which can only be described as straightforward racism, while the national leaders were on the whole inexperienced and usually came from one of two extremes, conservative-religious or radical nationalist, neither of which fitted comfortably with Bolshevik aspirations. Two immediate courses of action presented themselves as possible ways of resolving these contradictions; allow the Russian soviets to govern in the name of the national minorities, supervised by the centre to ensure a correct approach to the national question, or grant the national leaderships authority above that of the soviets, whatever the political leanings of the nationalists themselves. The first approach was characterised by Turkestan, the second by Bashkiria; both experiments generated hopeless conflicts and ended in failure, leading the Bolsheviks to adopt a more long term, two-pronged approach of closer supervision by the centre combined with the development of national communist cadres.

The Bashkir Republic

The agreement between the government of the RSFSR and the Bashkir Revolutionary Committee formed in February

1919 under Validov granted the Bashrevkom "full power until the Congress of Soviets". The only qualifications to this were that the railways, factories and mines would come under the direct jurisdiction of the central Soviet authorities and that the Bashkir armed forces, consisting of a single cavalry division made up of four regiments, and a three regiment strong rifle brigade, while composed on a national basis, would be financed from the general Russian war fund and was subordinate to the central Red Army command.¹ While the subordination of industry and military affairs represented a severe restriction on Bashkir sovereignty, the Bashrevkom made clear its intentions to exercise authority by immediately organising commissariats of Labour, Justice and Education,² and tackling the vexed land question by organising committees of poor peasants in the villages.³ Right from the start, however, the Bashrevkom encountered resistance. By the beginning of March, it had to deal with the seizure of Bashkir citizens' property by troops of the First Red Army, and the arrest of 40 Bashkir militiamen at the Preobrazhenskii factory. The initial response of the Bashkirs to these events was restrained, ascribing the incidents to "misunderstandings between the Bashkir and Russian populations". They set up a committee composed of two Bashkirs, two Russians and one outsider to look into these misunderstandings, and asked the Bashkir Commissariat of Internal Affairs to exercise great care in selecting personnel to send to the Russian villages and factories, at first sending only Russians in both administrative and agitational capacities.⁴

¹ ZN no.18, 23rd March 1919, p.1.

² ZN no.18, 23rd March 1919, p.4.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.3, d.1, l.8.

⁴ GARF, f.1318, op.3, d.1, ll.6, 9.

In spite of the placatory attitude of the Bashrevkom, tensions continued to mount and over the next three months spread from purely localised conflicts to confrontations with the Soviet and Red Army authorities in Sterlitamak, Ufa and Orenberg. Throughout this period the Bashrevkom was unable to establish its authority, being almost exclusively preoccupied with Bashkir-Russian conflicts which culminated in May in the arrest of the Bashrevkom members Kuvatov and Gabidullin.¹ After the failure of a series of local protests to produce any effect, on 24th June the Bashrevkom finally appealed directly to the War Commissar Trotsky and Narkomnats, asking for the removal of the divisional commander Vorob'ev and the brigade commander Zelenkov "in view of their continuing attitude to the Bashkir population".²

This was apparently the first full knowledge Moscow had of the seriousness of the situation, but from now on the central party and state organs took a close interest in Bashkir affairs, resulting in a more detailed agreement between the Bashrevkom and VTsIK in the summer of 1919, and in general intervention to strengthen the hand of the Bashkirs. Encouraged by this support but still frustrated at the intransigence of the local Soviet authorities, especially in Ufa, the Bashrevkom went on the offensive in August. Its own order no.1 of 26th August, made public to the population at large, gave the Bashrevkom full authority over the territory of the republic, and was accompanied simultaneously by an ultimatum to the Ufa Gubrevkom, threatening to prevent the work of any body which did not subordinate itself directly to the Bashrevkom, and by a telegram to the centre effectively announcing it had taken over all power in the region:

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.3, d.1, l.29.

² GARF, f.1318, op.3, d.1, l.35.

On the basis of the agreement with the Russian government on Soviet Autonomy, the Bashrevkom has initiated direct rule of the Bashkir Soviet Republic...all organs and their staff, inclusive of any central, guberniia and uezd soviets on the territory of Bashkiria are to be handed over to the appropriate organs of the the Bashrevkom except those indicated in point 4 of the VSNKh decision of 12th June 1919...the Orenberg Gubispolkom has agreed to hand over all except the food department, which we understand is now the subject of talks in Moscow. However, the Ufa Gubrevkom is being obstructive - can you issue a categoric order stating whether our agreement is binding on all organs or not...If the Bashrevkom is only an agitational apparatus, then the Bashkir population will retreat from Soviet power...We are ready to govern, while the Bashkir population is deaf to the commands of the uezd and gubernia powers.¹

The Bashrevkom interpretation of autonomy, however hostile in tone, was no more than the practical affirmation of clause 13 of the March agreement which had granted the Bashrevkom full authority. The Bashrevkom continued to assert itself throughout September, reminding the authorities in Ufa and Sterlitamak in no uncertain terms that the orders of Bashrevkom took precedence over those of all other bodies, and that its decisions could only be overruled by the VTsIK of the RSFSR, and then only by agreement with the Bashrevkom. Further than this, the Bashkir War Commissariat decided to put a stop to the export of horses from Bashkiria while the numbers of the Bashkir armed forces were made up, thus arguably exceeding their authority and violating

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.3, d.1, l.73

the points of their agreement with the RSFSR on military matters.¹ Moscow continued to support the Bashkirs, and on 21st September the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party issued a sharp rebuke against the Ufa leaders Yel'tsin and Pravdin, who were accused of not wishing to recognise the existence of the Bashkir Republic, together with reassurances to the Bashkirs as to the Bolsheviks' favourable intentions.²

However vigorously the centre intervened, the Bolsheviks were unable to prevent the local Russian Communists from causing strife. Mounting concern over the possible military implications of the dispute in the autumn led to a Politburo investigation headed by Dzerzhinskii himself. The initial response of the Politburo was to further placate the Bashkirs, ordering the speedy transfer of all native Bashkir forces to Bashkiria on 23rd October.³ But exactly a week later the seizure by Bashrevkom forces of the prison and post office in Sterlitamak forced the Politburo's patience to run thin; the Politburo expressly vetoed a proposal of the Bashrevkom to transfer the capital of Bashkiria to Sterlitamak, as well as ordering the Bashrevkom to return to the Sterlitamak Revkom the captured buildings.⁴

Following this setback, the Bashrevkom continued to be squeezed, especially as the Russian and Tatar dominated communist party strengthened its organisation in the area and posed a sufficient threat for the Bashrevkom to order the arrest of several Tatar communists.⁵ This act on its own was enough to persuade Moscow of the serious

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.3, d.1, ll.81, 86.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.23, l.1.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.32, l.2.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.34, l.1.

⁵ Pipes, pp.164-165.

possibility of a Bashrevkom led counter-revolution and on 27th January 1920 Trotsky, with the Politburo's approval, ordered the Turkestan Red Army commander Frunze to take vigorous measures against the would-be insurgents. In his telegram Trotsky admitted that the "hasty steps and declarations of various local representatives of the central Soviet power and practical disputes with local Soviet institutions" were probably to blame for the crisis, but concluded that now the matter had gone as far as actual military preparations the Bashkirs were to be disarmed and their leaders arrested, while reaffirming the RSFSR government's continued commitment to Bashkir autonomy.¹

Although the revolt failed to materialise, this action proved a decisive turning point and the local communists began increasingly to take authority away from the Bashrevkom. At the beginning of April, further rumours of counter-revolution led to another investigation by Dzerzhinskii, and on 20th April the Politburo resolved to reorganise power in Bashkiria.² The basis for this position was a proposal by Stalin, which represents the first real attempt to define autonomy in a concrete manner. In general, the relations of the Bashkir republic with the RSFSR was to be based on the current practise with the Ukraine. More specifically, all measures of the Bashrevkom aimed at equalising land usage were to be binding on Bashkirs and Russians alike; land committees were to be set up including both Bashkir and Russian peasants, while all disputes were to be settled in the first place by the Bashkir Narkomzem, and in the second place by a special commission of VTsIK; the

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.59, l.2.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.71, l.2

Bashkir Cheka and War Commissariat were to be subordinate to the appropriate Russian bodies.

While these measures implied more central control over Bashkir affairs, the Bashrevkom still wielded considerable authority in all except military matters, and on the other hand it was made clear to the Communist Party members in the region that they were not to interfere; they were reminded that the Bashkir Republic was "not a chance, temporary phenomenon, but an organic, autonomous part of the RSFSR" and under no circumstances were party organisations to interfere with the practical tasks of Soviet institutions. The chief task in Bashkiria was to turn it into a communist country as part of a "Great Communist Federation" and so the priority was the recruitment of the Bashkir poor to the Communist Party through Communist schools, the immediate involvement of Bashkir Communists in canton committees "even if politically untrained", and in the near future in oblast committees where they could act as a "link between the leadership of the oblast organisations and the broad masses". In addition, some of the leading protagonists on both the Bashkir and Russian sides of the dispute, Validov, Yumagulov, Preobrazhenskii, Artem and Samoglev were to be recalled to Moscow and replaced.¹

While this decision confirmed the continuing authority of the Bashrevkom in many areas, the emphasis was on recruitment to the Communist Party and on central supervision. On May 19th 1920 a sudden decree of VTsIK more formally curtailed autonomy, restricting the government of the Bashkir Republic to ten commissariats, those for the Interior, Justice, Education, Health,

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.68, ll.1-6.

Social Welfare and Agriculture being responsible directly to the VTsIK of the RSFSR, while the commissariats for Food, Finance, Economics and Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, together with the Post and Telegraphs division of the Commissariat for the Interior were subordinate to the corresponding Commissariats of the RSFSR.¹ All the commissars were subject to the approval of the RSFSR government. At its inception in March 1919 the Bashrevkom had been granted the power to form whatever administrative organs it chose, without interference from the centre, but by this decree the exact form of government and its subordination to the centre were to be decided by the Russian VTsIK. Although the decision, regarded by the Bashrevkom leaders as a betrayal of the principle of autonomy, led to a fierce revolt in the summer of 1920, it was to be the model for the relationships of all the subsequently formed autonomous regions and republics with the RSFSR.

The autonomous republics formed later in 1920 and 1921 enjoyed almost identical rights to Bashkiria, with minor refinements and with the clear subordination of policies and appointments to the Commissariats of the RSFSR, while the autonomous regions enjoyed no greater rights than those accorded to a Russian regional government under article 61 of the constitution of the RSFSR, apart from a general guarantee of their cultural and linguistic rights.² Thus the entire economic and political life of the autonomous territories was regulated through a hierarchical structure whereby the local government was restricted by the general directives of the commissariats

¹ Batsell, p.142.

² For constitutions and decrees on the autonomous regions and republics, see Batsell, pp.139-178.

of the RSFSR and could be vetoed by them. The right to a certain degree of decision making within this structure, combined with a higher degree of independence in educational and cultural matters, is what, in effect, national autonomy came to mean.

Turkestan

A similar, though less serious crisis to that in Bashkiria occurred in Turkestan in 1921, although here the government itself was largely Russian. Despite the vigorous intervention of the Bolshevik leadership in 1918, during the Civil War little progress was made in involving Muslims in the government and the Tashkent authorities continued to implement anti-Muslim policies. In October 1919, as soon as communications between Russia and Turkestan were restored, the Russian government set up a special Commission for Turkestan Affairs (Turkomissiya). On arriving in Tashkent, the Turkomissiya undertook an overhaul of the Soviet apparatus, to the annoyance of both the Russians, whose privileges were undermined, and the national communists who had been waiting to assume power themselves with the support of Moscow.¹ The Turkomissiya's intervention had little lasting impact anyway. In September 1920, delegates to the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East complained bitterly about the treatment of Muslims in Turkestan and begged Zinoviev, Lenin and Trotsky to intervene.²

¹ Park, p.121.

² Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East (London, 1977), p.62.

While the Muslims complained about the restrictions suffered by them, others complained that too much caution was being employed with regard to the Muslims. At the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in March 1921, the Russian member of the Turkomissiya, Safarov argued against the Bolshevik policy of minimizing the principle of class struggle among the Muslims of Turkestan and called for the promotion of class differentiation.¹ Safarov had already been rebuked by the Central Committee for his "extremism" in Bukhara,² but now proceeded to adopt a similar approach in Turkestan. On the one hand the Russian communists opposed in principle Moscow's policy of concessions to the local population, on the other hand they felt that their own position was increasingly threatened, especially after Russian settlers began to be evicted from their land. The policies pursued by the Russians evoked a sharp response from national leaders, and the demand for Turkestan's separation from Russia grew. Moscow became increasingly concerned about the situation in Turkestan,³ and in August 1921 sent Ioffe on a special mission to sort out the conflicts in the region.

The Politburo's brief to Ioffe reflects its concern at the exclusion of Muslims from real power, but also recognised the dangers of alienating the Russian population: "we ought to strike a balance, fighting against colonialism but not destroying our buttress in the republic, namely, the Russian labouring population, from whom the core of Turkestan's red forces are taken...". But while it was necessary for economic and military reasons to keep the republic within the RSFSR,

¹ Park, p.168.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.56, l.3.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.81, l.2.

the priority was for "Turkestan to be a model Muslim Soviet Republic". The communists should "preserve a decisive influence, without turning the local Soviet power into a silent instrument" and should concentrate on "developing the initiative of the [Muslim] labouring masses on a Soviet basis". Ioffe's principle task was to work out a compromise between the opposing factions in Turkestan, led by Safarov and Tomskii, and present it to the Politburo.¹ He clearly failed in this last task, as a month later the Politburo decided to send Safarov on leave.²

On 14th October 1921, the Politburo again discussed the problems in Turkestan, and resolved to reorganise the Turkomissiya and the Party's Turkestan Bureau (Turkbiuro) under Sokol'nikov, and to include only reliable Russians and Muslims. The Turkomissiya was to exercise direct control over the republic's military, diplomatic and external trade policies, but otherwise the republic should be governed by its own Central Executive Committee. The situation was becoming exacerbated by unauthorised seizures of land by non-Russians. Urgent measures had to be taken against this, but at the same time concessions had to be made to the local population: confiscated waqf land (land owned by the mosques) should be returned to the mosques, local (i.e. Islamic) courts were to be authorised, and more moderate elements of the Basmachi movement should be amnestied³. In December, Stalin warned the Politburo that Turkestan could become another Ulster.⁴ The reference was not just to sectarian violence, but to the political partition of the province

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.192, 11.5-6.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.201, 1.2.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.215, 11.2-4.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.247, 1.1.

along national and religious lines which was being accomplished at that time. The Turkbiuro was reorganised again, so that its membership would be half Russian, half Muslim, and Sokol'nikov was despatched to Turkestan with extensive powers.¹

Thanks to the frequent and energetic intervention of the Politburo, peace gradually returned to Turkestan. If the Bashrevkom had illustrated the dangers involved in entrusting power to one group of nationalists in an ethnically mixed area, the Turkestan crisis showed that Russian communists could not be trusted to govern with sufficient respect for the aspirations of the national minorities. In Turkestan, the national divisions in the population at large were reflected within the communist movement. In Ukraine, the situation was different in that the two factions were not based on national groups,² but the effect was much the same - irreconcilable attitudes meant that in the short term the Communist Party leadership in Moscow had to exercise close vigilance and strong authority, in the long term a reliable cadre of national communists had to be developed and entrusted with the national administration.

The People's Soviet Republics

In addition to the autonomous republics and regions, three areas of Russia remained nominally independent: the Far Eastern Republic, and the former khanates of Bukhara

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.247, l.1.

² For a full account of the conflicts within the Communist Party of Ukraine, see Jurij Borys, op. cit, passim.

and Khiva. The assumption that the Far Eastern Republic, formed in May 1920, was no more than a diplomatic pretence designed to counter Japanese manoeuvres in the region is confirmed by a top secret decision of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party on 12th January 1921: "...this proposal ensures the control of the Russian Communist Party over the Far Eastern Republic with the appearance of bourgeois democracy and a non-party nature..."¹ The situation with Khiva and Bukhara was more complex. Both emirates withstood the advances of Red forces until 1920, and the hostile attitude of the populace combined with the absence of any base of support for Bolshevism and a level of industrialisation low even by Central Asian standards led the Bolsheviks to encourage the development of radical elements in the national movement by maintaining formal independence.

When Khiva finally fell to the Red Army on 1st February 1920 a People's Soviet Republic under the ancient name of Khorezm was established on the same day. On 13th September 1920 a Union Treaty and an economic agreement between the KhPSR and the RSFSR were both signed as agreements between equal states and did not imply the subordination of KhPSR state institutions to their equivalent in the RSFSR. All former property of the Russian state and private enterprises on the territory of the republic were unconditionally handed over to the government. Borders were to be established by a commission composed of an equal number of representatives of each of the two republic, with referendums being held in the former Khivan territories annexed by Russia, and a similar joint commission dealt with matters of irrigation. Working class and peasant citizens of each

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.55, l.27.

republic were to enjoy full political rights on the territory of the other.¹

Clauses dealing with military and economic matters were more complex. Both republics were committed to "prevent the formation or presence on their territories of governments, organisations, groups or individuals, whose objective is to struggle against the other contracting party or another Soviet Republic" and to prevent other states using one republic's territory for military preparations against the other.² In addition to material aid for education aimed at eliminating illiteracy, by the terms of the treaty the RSFSR was to grant considerable aid towards industrial development in the form of equipment and personnel. In return, the KhPSR was to grant industrial, mining, agricultural, transport and other rights only to Soviet republics, and an exchange of merchandise and raw materials was to be conducted on a non-profit basis between the two states rather than between private traders.³ The economic agreement elaborated these provisions, providing the KhPSR with favourable terms for the import of Russian goods and dealing with transportation costs on a favourable basis. What the RSFSR gained from this arrangement was contained in a clause directing the KhPSR to "place at the disposal of the RSFSR all raw materials over and above those intended for internal consumption."⁴

The Bukhara Soviet Republic established on 2nd September 1920 enjoyed a similar position to Khorezm, but the agreements signed with the RSFSR on 4th March 1921

¹ USSR: Sixty Years of the Union, 1922-1982. A Collection of Legislative Acts and other Documents (Moscow, 1982), pp.115-118.

² *Idem*, p.119.

³ *Idem*, p.119-120.

⁴ *Idem*, pp.120-123.

aimed at coordinating the general economic and trade policies of the two republics while promising even more aid towards the economic development of Bukhara.¹ The constitution of the Bukharan republic guaranteed the right to private property and asserted the primacy of Islam, two principles which would have been hard to maintain within the Russian Soviet framework.²

The existence of the independent People's Republics was in part a short term solution to a problematic, if economically insignificant, region, and much faith was put in the development of the leadership of the Young Bukharans and Young Khivans. But, perhaps wary of the Bashkir experience, Moscow kept a close eye on developments, which were also intended as an example to the Muslim world at large. A Politburo instruction to Frunze on 3rd August 1921 shows the importance attached to the region:

Bukhara and Khiva are considered independent and all the Muslim world is looking at them. Our policy in them ought to be taken regularly from the centre. Everything ought to go through our Plenipotentiary. Party decisions ought in the first place to be referred to his judgement...the independence of Khiva and Bukhara ought to be observed demonstratively. Our decisive influence in them ought to aim at national reconciliation and the implementation of reforms without removing the merchant Soviet governments, none of which ought to be replaced. We need to show our

¹ USSR, pp.136-139.

² Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, "The National Republics Lose their Independence", in Richard Allworth (ed.) Central Asia - 120 Years of Russian Rule (Durham and London, 1989), pp.254-265..

backing for comrades Yurenev and Bik in their carrying out of this line and preserve their full authority.¹

Thus independence was to be preserved while the Bolsheviks exerted their "decisive influence" through a single plenipotentiary whose authority over the local communists aimed at preventing a repetition of the Bashkir disaster.

The Independent Soviet Socialist Republics

While Stalin's statement in April 1921 that the relations of the Bashkir Autonomous Republic were to be based on the current practice with the Ukraine greatly oversimplified the situation, such a representation of the question was understandable in 1921. The Bashkir and Turkestan autonomous republics at that time wielded authority with little interference on the part of Moscow, but were obstructed rather by local Soviet organs. The five independent republics did not have this problem of local conflicts in quite the same form, but were closely supervised from the centre.

Formally, each of the five republics had their own independent governmental structures and were linked to the RSFSR only by a series of treaties. In practice, the Commissariats of the RSFSR exceeded their powers in issuing instructions to the independent republics. The Communist Party leadership exercised close control over its members in the national governments. The head of the

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.192, l.5.

Ukrainian government, Khristian Rakovskii, was a member of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party and frequently attended its plenary meetings and some sessions of the Politburo in Moscow, where the central policies of the Ukrainian government were worked out. In Transcaucasia, the activities of the three governments were supervised by Sergo Ordzhonikidze's Kavbiuro. The Kavbiuro kept a firm hold on the reins of power in Transcaucasia, but was less closely supervised by Moscow than was the Ukrainian Central Committee.

Apart from their formal status, the most obvious difference between the independent republics and the autonomous republics was that the former had their own Commissariats for Foreign Affairs and diplomatic apparatuses. This important symbol of sovereignty was curtailed at the beginning of 1922, when it was decided that Russia could represent all six republics at the Geneva Conference. This violation of independent status was the object of furious complaints by the Ukrainians.

The relations of the independent republics to the RSFSR have received a great deal of attention in western literature. Controversy over the relationship reached its height in 1922 in a series of disputes in Georgia and the project to unite the six republics into one body. Further discussion of this question will therefore be left to chapter 7.

Economic Development

True to the principle that the main obstacle to the socialist development of the national minorities was their economic backwardness, the Soviets embarked on a massive programme of industrial development in the non-Russian areas, including the movement of whole enterprises from the central Russian region. Thus, according to Soviet sources, in Central Asia between 1918-1923 the following measures were taken: in 1918 50 million roubles were earmarked for construction work in the Golodniy steppe, and 502 million for the restoration of the cotton industry in Turkestan; in 1922 a stationery and a textile factory and a leather and a soap works were moved to Bukhara, and a stationery factory and a cellulose plant to Turkestan; two large factories from the Moscow region, "Zarya Vostoka" and "Krasnyi Vostok" were also moved to Turkestan; in 1918 a new soda plant was erected in Tashkent, and in 1919 a metalworking plant, a mechanical-transport plant and a foundry were also built; old plants in Bukhara, Chardzhay and elsewhere were renovated; in 1921-22 work started on a cement plant in Khilkov, a textile factory in Fergana, a silk-winding factory in Leninabad and a textile factory in Ashkhabad among others. In 1923 an electricity station came into service in Fergana and construction of a hydro-electric plant commenced near Tashkent as a part of the GOELRO plan.¹ These projects were disproportionate to the general level of investment in the RSFSR for this period.

¹ Aminov and Babakhodzhaev, pp.138-139.

Table 4.1: Nationality of Workers in Each Republic and Autonomous Region of the USSR in 1926.

<u>Republic or Region</u>	<u>Total no. of workers</u>	<u>% Belonging to Nationalities:</u>		
		<u>Titular</u>	<u>Russian</u>	<u>Other</u>
Ukraine	1,071,856	54.64	29.17	16.19
Bielorussia	121,913	58.86	13.33	27.81
Azerbaidzhan	149,211	42.58	22.50	34.02
Armenia	28,295	80.88	1.42	17.70
Uzbekistan	136,921	50.37	17.50	32.13
Tadzhikistan	20,350	63.47	1.28	35.28
Turkmenistan	25,933	26.61	35.06	38.33
Bashkiria	69,196	17.77	58.83	23.40
Buriat-Mongol	10,857	16.28	73.11	10.61
Daghestan	42,180	72.84	17.21	9.93
Kazakhstan	151,987	39.43	34.25	26.32
Karelia	23,222	34.81	61.53	3.66
Kirghizia	16,453	26.49	24.88	48.63
Crimea (Tatars)	49,154	13.26	55.93	31.01
Volga Germans	24,091	58.24	27.89	13.87
Tatar	34,909	22.65	74.64	2.71
Chuvash	4,748	17.84	75.36	6.80
Yakuts	6,409	70.92	21.30	7.78

Source: Natsional'naia politika VKP(b) (Moscow, 1930), pp.126-128.

The rate of industrial development was still slow, however, in the first years of Soviet power. In 1923, at a crucial stage in the development of the Bolsheviks' national policy, industrial development became one of the

main themes of party policy and work began on the removal of factories to sites nearer to the natural resources which lay in huge quantities outside of central Russia.¹

The effects of this policy are shown in table 4.1. These figures include workers (wage earners) in 'the agricultural economy', which always exaggerate the proportion of the local nationality, but not unduly in most cases. Although the overall number of workers remains low except in Ukraine, the proportional shift in favour of the local nationality and away from the Russians, who predominated almost everywhere before the revolution, is impressive.

Economic investment in the borderlands went hand in hand with increasing central control of all aspects of the economy. The Karelian Labourers' Commune, however, enjoyed a special status in regard to its economic relations with the RSFSR, established by two decrees of Sovnarkom on 26th April 1921. An economic soviet was to be set up in the Karelian Commune, which was to produce accounts showing the total values of products received from and provided to the RSFSR, with the aim of balancing the two. This aside, the budget of Karelia was to be independent of the RSFSR until 1924, with any surplus from production to be directed solely to the satisfaction of local needs. Karelia was encouraged to export wood abroad, and was entitled to keep 25% of export receipts to conduct its own foreign trade. The RSFSR was to aid the industrialisation of Karelia by financing the construction of a paper factory, two celluloid factories, a wood-working plant and an electricity station, and by

¹ See below, chapter 8.

funding exploratory work on the mineral resources of the region.¹ In 1922 the Sovnarkom confirmed this arrangement and authorised a further grant of 90 milliard roubles to be paid in instalments.² Thus Karelia, one of the less significant autonomous units given only 'commune' status, enjoyed greater economic independence than any of the other autonomous units. The absence of any references in the protocols of the leading organs of the Communist Party or of the Collegium of Narkomnats suggest it also enjoyed less political interference than elsewhere.

Karelia enjoyed this unique status because it was headed by a number of reliable Bolsheviks who had fled the repression in Finland, under the able leadership of the Finnish Old Bolshevik Gyulling, who was to remain in situ far longer than any other of the national leaders until he, too, fell victim to Stalin's purges in 1935. But in the rest of the borderlands the Bolsheviks lacked such cadres, and now turned to an intensive policy of attracting, recruiting and training native intellectuals, peasants and workers as a means of solving the national question.

What exactly national autonomy consisted of had to be worked out in practise. The Bolshevik approach to national borders showed that they were serious about encouraging nation-building but efforts to promote national self-government foundered on the conflicts between the autonomous institutions and the other, predominantly Russian organs of power. Faced with the crises in Bashkiria and Turkestan, the Bolsheviks had to

¹ Afanas'eva, pp. 63-65.

² Idem, p.75.

step back from broad national political autonomy and look for other ways to promote national development. Foremost among their solutions were the recruitment and development of non-Russian cadres to the Communist Party and Soviets, coupled with the promotion of national culture and awareness through the education system and linguistic rights.

CHAPTER 5: 'KORENIZATSIIA' - NATIONAL COMMUNIST LEADERSHIPS

The existence of national-territorial units designed to encourage national self-awareness and promote cultural development could not persist without unbearable frictions as long as political and administrative leadership remained in the hands of Russians. Outside of central Russia, the Bolsheviks were generally weak, and what support they did have came mostly from Russian or russified workers and intellectuals. The soviets were also based on the Russian proletariat, and the military forces of the revolution in the borderlands consisted at first of the retreating troops of the Russian army. Events in Turkestan had shown the problems to be encountered by leaving power in the hand of Russians insensitive to native demands, while the disaster of the Bashrevkom made it impossible to entrust power to nationalists. As noted in chapter 2, the need to recruit 'natives' to the Communist Party and Soviet apparatus became a recurrent theme in Bolshevik statements on the national question, especially after 1919. Faced with the urgent need to find a body of native cadres, the Bolsheviks turned their attention to parties and individuals who combined support for the principles of Soviet power and agrarian reform with a nationalist programme. As time progressed, much of the nationalist content, far from being viewed as an obstacle, coincided with the direction being pursued by the Bolshevik and Narkomnats leaderships themselves, as Great Russian

attitudes continued to persist in much of the Communist Party. The Evkom and Muskom of Narkomnats took much of the initiative in involving non-Bolshevik nationalists in the administration of the borderlands, but the Central Committee of the RCP(b) gave them considerable backing in this direction. The Jewish socialist parties were the first to indicate their willingness to work in full cooperation with the Bolsheviks and moved voluntarily in the direction of full unity. Later, the Central Committee saw in the Borotbist party of Ukraine a possible solution to many of the problems they were encountering in the region, and actively sought to bring them into the Soviet government and then into the Communist Party. In Central Asia, where the shortage of native Communists was most dire, there existed no such party which could readily be transformed into the nationalist wing of Bolshevism, but the need for cadres led to the involvement of a particular brand of Jadidist, pan-Islamic nationalist in positions of great responsibility in the Muskom and in the party and Soviet apparatus in Central Asia and the Volga region. These three types of national communist will be discussed in this chapter.

The Jewish Socialist Parties

The Jews of Russia, Ukraine and Bielorussia posed problems different from those arising with other national

minorities.¹ Unlike any other minority group with substantial numbers in the Soviet territories, the proportion of Jews in the Russian Communist Party was higher than the proportion of the population as a whole, and they included many of the leading figures of the Communist Party. Jews could not be categorised as belonging to one social class, but included a layer of wealthy merchants and professionals, an educated intelligentsia, and a larger number of skilled artisans, workers, and illiterate peasants. Jewish political parties were more developed and diverse than for any other national minority; while a number of Zionist parties claimed a far larger membership (300,000 before 1917) between them than the Social-Democratic Jewish parties, these were marginalised and suppressed after the 1917 revolutions.

Most important were the three major parties on the left: the Bund, with 33,700 members in December 1917, which had played a major part in the Social Democratic movement in Russia and which, along with its sister parties in Poland and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, espoused the principle of national-cultural autonomy; the United Jewish Socialist Workers Party, popularly known as the 'Farainigte' (United), was formed in May 1917 from a merger of the Socialist-Zionist territorialists and the Jewish Socialist Labour Party. It combined national-cultural autonomy with an ambivalent attitude to the

¹ Although Stalin, for one, denied that the Jews were a nation, the creation of a Jewish Commissariat in Narkomnats and the subsequent treatment of the Jewish question by the Bolsheviks, including attempts to create a Jewish national territory, equated the Jews with other non-territorial national minorities. Without committing myself on the question of whether the Jews constitute a nation, I shall therefore use the term 'national minority' when comparing the Jews with other groups. cf. Stalin, Vol.II, p.297.

Jewish homeland, claimed 13,000 members; and Poale Zion, with 18,000 members in 1907, a proletarian party which attempted to combine Marxism and Zionism - the tension between the two traditions was reflected in sharply differentiated factions within the party and rapidly shifting attitudes towards Bolshevism.¹ While the Jews were concentrated in the Pale of Settlement, and formed a majority of the population in certain areas of Ukraine and Bielorussia, they did not constitute a territorial unit like most of the national minorities in Russia.

The Jews, moreover, suffered a sharper form of national oppression than other nationalities. In addition to the general handicaps imposed by the tsarist russification policies, Jews faced especial restrictions on residence, education and employment, and were periodically subjected to the semi-authorized occurrence of pogroms. While the legal handicaps on Jews were removed after the February Revolution, pogroms grew in intensity under successive regimes in the Ukraine. On one estimate, between the February Revolution and the end of the Civil War, "over 200,000 Jews were massacred in the Ukraine alone, over 300,000 children left orphans and over 700,000 rendered homeless."²

Thus the Jews were more politically and culturally developed than any other national minority, but were more oppressed and there was no Jewish territory in which the considerable pool of Jewish talent could be put to work. The attitude of the Bolsheviks to the Jews was therefore ambivalent. The strength of Jewish political

¹ Nora Levin, The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917 - Paradox of Survival (London, 1990), pp.1-7.

² C. Abramsky, "The Biro-Bidzhan Project", in L. Kochan (ed.), The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917 (Oxford, 1978), p.66.

organisations presented a threat to Bolshevik hegemony at a time when they were desperate to foster political traditions among other national minorities. The pre-1917 Jewish Bolsheviks were 'assimilated' or 'russified' Jews who had little interest in specifically Jewish affairs, but who could be used to promote the image of the Bolsheviks as the natural party for Jewish socialists. Nevertheless, the single most important factor in Bolshevik attitudes towards the Jews was overwhelming sympathy for the suffering of the Ukrainian Jews between 1917 and 1920, which prompted Narkomnats to open the Jewish Commissariat (Evkom) as one of its first and most important departments and to devote a great deal of attention and resources to Jewish affairs and to combating anti-semitism.¹ The same factor - the pogroms - combined with the strength of Socialist traditions among Jews prompted a widespread and spontaneous movement of Jews away from their own parties and towards the Bolsheviks. This influx of Jews who combined a social with a national agenda presented the Bolsheviks, whether they liked it or not, with their first experiment in National Communism. Given the absence of a Jewish territory, these Jews were largely employed in the only area for which politicised Jews were exclusively suited - the promotion of Jewish culture and education. Most of the new Jewish Communists came from the Bund, which had been foremost among the Russian political parties in espousing the Austro-Marxist principle of national-cultural extra-territorial autonomy. The employment of these individuals in responsible positions in the field of culture inevitably helped the development of Bolshevik national policy towards the encouragement of national cultural identity in general. At the same time, the ease

¹ cf. Dimanshtein's article in ZN no.4, 1st December 1918, p.3.

of their incorporation into the Russian Communist Party provided the Bolsheviks with a successful model for the policy of creating nationalist communist cadres in the less developed regions of the former Russian empire.

The process of the disintegration of the Jewish socialist parties and their eventual incorporation into the Russian Communist Party has been dealt with at length by Zvi Gitelman.¹ This work is, however, written exclusively from the point of view of the Jewish parties, and little work has been done on the policy of the Bolsheviks towards the Bund. This approach leads Gitelman, like many other writers, to view the history of the Bund in the early years of Soviet power as one of conflict with the Jewish section of the Communist Party (Evsektiia) in which the Bund was battered into submission. While it is undoubtedly the case that the Evsektiia sought to establish itself as the leading political body for Russian Jews, it focused its attacks primarily on the more conservative, orthodox and Zionist Jewish institutions while displaying a conciliatory attitude to the socialist parties. At the same time the reorientation of Jews towards Communism was in the first place a defensive reaction as the Bolsheviks and the Red Army proved the only effective defence against pogroms, and later became a more positive movement as Jews rushed to take up arms in defence of the revolution against the Whites and the Poles. Long before the Bund officially disbanded, thousands of individual members and, at times, whole branches of the organisation had thrown in their lot with the Bolsheviks and had been enthusiastically received into the Communist Party. Those who remained

¹ Zvi Y. Gitelman, Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics; (Princeton, 1972).

may have been reluctant to go over to the Bolsheviks, but the ground had been cut from under their feet more by the Bolsheviks' actions in defence of Jews than by their assaults on alternative Jewish organisations.

From the beginning, the Bolsheviks displayed their readiness to work with non-Party Jews. When the Jewish Commissariat was formed by Narkomnats at the beginning of 1918, out of its six-member collegium only Dimanshtein was an established Bolshevik, while the others were still members or had recently been members of the Bund or Poale Zion¹. Shortly after the formation of the first Jewish sections, 'Evsektiias', Dimanshtein convened a conference of Jews under the auspices of the Evsektiias and Evkoms, nearly half the delegates to which were non-Bolsheviks, most of them Yiddish educationalists. While thus signalling their readiness to work with certain non-communist Jews, the Bolshevik delegates at the same conference voted "to take the necessary steps to systematically liquidate all bourgeois institutions" of the Jews.² This the Evkom proceeded to do, starting with the right-wing Union of Jewish Warriors in November 1918.³ The communist faction of the Evkom signalled a more general assault on undesirable Jewish organisations on 11th March 1919 with a resolution to liquidate the Jewish Commune and all Zionist organisations in Moscow and to put all Jewish societies under the control of a political commissar.⁴

This attitude did not extend, however, to the socialist Jewish parties. The Bund and Poale Zion continued to

¹ Abramsky, in Kochan (ed.), op. cit., p.66.

² Levin, p.55.

³ ZN, no.2, 17th November 1918, p.7.

⁴ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.8.

function openly, although the Evkom jealously strove to restrain their influence where they threatened its own¹. Nor did this tolerance imply any let up in the ideological struggle. In one of the earliest issues of Zhizn Natsional'nostei Dimanshtein relentlessly attacked the Bund in separate articles over their policy of cultural-educational autonomy and for their attitude towards the Ukrainian Directory.² This dual policy of toleration combined with criticism of the Bund is most clearly illustrated in two decisions of the Politburo of the RKP from October and November 1919 when the Bund's request for state funding was met by a demand that the Central Committee of the Bund publicly disassociate itself from certain leading Bundists who were considered counter-revolutionaries and provide proof of their commitment in the form of a list of expelled members.³ Similar caution was shown in May 1920 when the Politburo authorised the issue of supplies of paper "in very modest measures" to the Bund, Farainigte and Poale-Zion for their newspapers.⁴ On the whole, the attitude of the Bolsheviks towards the left-wing Jewish parties was extremely favourable compared with that towards both the Russian socialist parties and more right-wing Jewish parties. Thus at exactly the same time as the Bund was entering into negotiations with the Russian Communist Party for a joint organisation, the Bolsheviks were preparing a propaganda onslaught on Zionism following the mass arrest of delegates to a Congress of Zionists in May 1920.⁵

¹ ZN, no.2, 17th November 1918, p.7.

² ZN, no.8, 29th December 1918, pp.2-3.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.34, l.1; d.37, l.2.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.78, l.1.

⁵ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.75, ll.2-3.

Bolshevik tolerance towards the Bund compared with other parties has been largely passed over by western Jewish historians who concentrate on the Pogroms in the Ukraine as the defining factor in Jewish attitudes towards Bolshevism.¹ Certainly there is sufficient anecdotal evidence concerning Jewish communities finding security only under the wing of the Red Army, and there are plenty of instances of Jewish organisations mobilising their membership into the ranks of the Red Army.² But this is not enough to explain the collapse of the Bund and the large numbers of Jews going over to the Bolsheviks. From the time of the Bolshevik reoccupation of Bielorussia in December 1918, small groups of Bundist-Communists began to organise in the region, and in January 1919 the leaders of these groups applied to the Bielorussian Communist Party to be allowed to organise a Jewish Communist organisation. In spite of some opposition from the Bielorussian Evsektiia, who considered a Jewish section in the Bielorussian Communist Party to be sufficient, the Central Committee of the BCP granted this request, and at the end of the month a Jewish Communist Party was proclaimed and given control over the Jewish Communist newspaper "Der Shtern".³ Although this party was short-lived, it was the first Communist Party formed on a non-territorial national basis and had come about primarily on the initiative of the Bundists themselves. A similar pro-Bolshevik orientation was manifest in the Ukrainian Bund. On 20th

¹ S.W. Baron, The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets (New York, 1987), pp.181-186; Jonathan Frankel, "The Dilemmas of Jewish Autonomism: the case of Ukraine 1917-1920" in Potichnyj and Aster (eds.), Ukrainian-Jewish Relations (Edmonton, 1980), p.274; Levin, p.43; Gitelman, p.161-165.

² ZN, no.24, 4th May 1919, p.4; no.25, 11th May 1919, p.4; no.26, 18th May 1919, p.4.

³ ZN, no.12, 2nd February 1919, p.6; Gitelman, pp.177-179.

February 1919 a conference of the Kiev Bund split the city organisation, with the leftist and centrist factions forming a Communist Bund or 'Kombund'.¹ This was followed shortly by a similar split in the Ekaterinoslav Bund, where a Kombund was formed in March,² and other local organisations followed suit.

The Ukrainian Kombund, was, however, refused entry into the Ukrainian Communist Party, as was its successor, the Komfarband, formed in May 1919 from a merger of the Kombund with the left of the Farainigte. A year later the Russian Politburo also made it clear that it was not ready to accept Poale Zion's entry into the Communist Parties en bloc.³ The Bolsheviks preferred instead to encourage individuals' entry into the Party while promoting leading leftist members of the other Jewish parties. This policy carried with it considerable risks, as senior appointments in the Evkom and other organisations were being given to individuals who at best held non-Bolshevik views on the Jewish question and at worst could not be relied upon at all. Ilya Dobkovskii, a Left-SR, was appointed Vice-Commissar for Jewish Affairs at the inception of the Evkom, only to be dismissed in March 1918 for views expressed in a book on Moses Hess and amid allegations that he had worked as an agent provocateur for the tsarist secret police.⁴ His successor, Bukhbinder, lasted five months before his dismissal in September 1919 for a 'nationalist deviation' in his political beliefs.⁵ In August 1918 the Evkom recruited the well-known Jewish literary critic S. Niger

¹ Gitelman, pp.172-174.

² ZN, no.17, 16th March 1919, p.4.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.78, l.1.

⁴ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.10.

⁵ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.74.

to edit a weekly journal "Culture and Education" but he was dismissed after the appearance of just one issue. Agurskii later reflected on this: "With such 'loyal' cultural workers as Niger we could never create a revolutionary proletarian culture. The first number was impossible. It reflected the cultural ideas of the Vilna 'Yidishe velt' and smacked of religious obscurantism".¹ New Jewish members were especially hard hit during the party re-registration of 1921, presumably for displaying these same tendencies. But these experiences did not prevent the promotion of non-Communist Jews in the Evkom, and this policy was extended to the Ukrainian Communist Party when members of the Komfarband were admitted later in 1919 and dominated the new Jewish sections.

There is some doubt as to the precise extent to which Jews left the Bund and other parties to join the Bolsheviks. Of 31,200 Jewish members of the Communist Party in 1925, 2,799 admitted to being former members of the Bund. These figures are small compared to the total Bund membership of 33,000 in 1917. But Communist Jews were reluctant to admit to former membership of the Bund and it is probable that a disproportionately large number of former Bundists were expelled in 1921. Even so, admitted ex-Bundists made up 9% of the Jewish membership of the Communist Party, and we know that a significant number of Poale Zion and Farainigte members joined up as well.² Thus Jews from other parties came to play a major role in the Communist Party, and their numbers were even more dominant at the highest levels. Of the fifteen members of the Bund Central Committee elected in April

¹ Zvi Halevy, Jewish Schools under Czarism and Communism (New York, 1976), p.161.

² Gitelman, pp.218-223.

1917, at least seven later joined the Communist Party, two of whom, Rafes and Chemeriskii, were on the Central Bureau of the Evsektiia by July 1920.¹

Many of the leading Bundists were to enjoy successful if not always long careers after joining the Communist Party, but were confined to specifically Jewish areas. Ester Frumkin, who had been the most reluctant of the Bundist leaders to liquidate her party was a member of the Central Bureau of the Evsektiia until 1930 and chief of the Jewish Section of the Main Political Education Administration of the CC of the CPSU. She edited a Yiddish collection of Lenin's works, and in 1925 became Rector of the Communist University for Western National Minorities.² Chemeriskii was a leading member of the Evsektiia and was a major advocate of agricultural colonisation for the Jews until he became an early victim of the purges.³ Rafes was influential in the Evkom and Evsektiia until he died in the purges. Zvi Gitelman concludes that without the former Bundists and Farainigte the Evsektiia would have completely failed to fulfil the tasks it set itself.⁴

At the beginning of their association with the Bund, the Farainigte and Poale-Zion, the Bolsheviki were following a general policy of cooperation with the socialist parties, especially the Left-SR's. But the conciliatory attitude to the Jewish socialist parties lasted much longer, in part because of the need for unity in the face of pogroms, in part due to the absence of

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.32, l.2; Gitelman, p.225.

² Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History (AIP, 1979), vol.XII, p.37.

³ Gitelman, pp.513-515.

⁴ Idem, p.230.

Bolshevik Jews willing to work for the Evkom and Evsektiia, but mostly because of the willingness of Jewish socialists to lend their support to the Soviets and the Bolsheviks. The relationship of the Bolsheviks to the Jewish socialist parties does not appear to have been the consequence of a deliberately thought out policy, but its success may have encouraged the Bolsheviks to deal with other left-wing nationalists. With no territory to govern, the Jewish communists did not build up any power base which may have posed a threat. Instead they engaged in cultural work and the numerous Jewish organisations. Through this they were able to promote Jewish culture in its more secular and Yiddish forms, and were therefore able to exercise a form of cultural autonomy for the Jews. Of the early national communists, the Jews remained in positions of importance the longest. The background of most of the new Jewish communists was in parties which espoused the principle of cultural autonomy, and the most lasting contribution of the Jewish national communists was to was to bring different approaches to national culture into the Communist Party.

The Ukrainian Borotbists

During the first period of Soviet power in the Ukraine the Bolsheviks had not been strong enough either to win widespread support in the countryside or to keep in check the undisciplined forces of the Red Army on whose strength power rested and who displayed anti-Ukrainian

tendencies in their behaviour.¹ This weakness was not simply a question of size, but also of the concentration of Bolshevik organisations amongst predominantly Russian or russified workers, the shortage of leading cadres based in Ukraine and familiar with the mood of the country, and the deep splits among the Ukrainian Communists themselves. As Red Army forces reoccupied the Ukraine at the beginning of 1919, the weakness of the Ukrainian Communists was exacerbated by the influx of new and unreliable members:

there were simply not enough Soviet workers to organise authority in the territory won by the army. Partisan leaders, former members of the Tsaritsyn gang, self-styled 'communists', Petlyurists-turned-Bolsheviks - all were pressed into service as local officials in the new government.²

In addition, the established Bolsheviks continued to indulge in factional in-fighting. The immediate response of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party was to take measures to further subordinate the Ukrainian Party and ensure its adherence to Moscow's line. Rakovskii was brought in to replace Piatakov as head of the Soviet government, the military command was reorganised, and a high-level delegation of Rakovskii, Chicherin, Kamenskii and Manuil'skii was entrusted with sorting out the Ukrainian Party.³

The priorities for Rakovskii's new administration were to bring about unity in the Party, to stabilise the

¹ Pipes, pp.126-127.

² Adams, p.115.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.8, l.1.

military situation, and to pursue a popular and effective agrarian reform, tasks which Rakovskii, closely supervised by Moscow, gained considerable success in pursuing. But the Bolsheviks were still faced by a serious shortage of reliable cadres capable of effectively administering the Ukraine. In particular, the cadres they had could still not be relied upon to display the necessary understanding of and sensitivity to the national feelings of the Ukrainians, which Rakovskii's team continued to underestimate. The readiness of Jewish organisations to work for the socialist cause removed the problem with regard to one part of the population, but the Bolsheviks continued to suffer from their lack of roots in the Ukrainian countryside. This was not purely a question of winning popular support; as the national policy of the Bolsheviks moved increasingly towards encouraging and strengthening national self-identity, the question of native cadres became ever more urgent.

By far the most important organisation of the left in the Ukraine was the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Party which, in a bloc with the Ukrainian Peasants' Union, had won over 60% of votes in Ukraine in the election to the Russian Constituent Assembly.¹ Although organisationally weak, their call for the full expropriation of large landowners and the free distribution of land to the peasantry, combined with support for Ukrainian autonomy won them widespread popular support. The increasingly radical mood of the peasantry and disillusionment with successive regimes pushed the party further to the left, and eventually the left wing took control in May 1918 and formed a new party

¹ Borys, p.80.

known as the Borotbists after their newspaper "Borotba" (Struggle). Civil war meant that for the rest of the year the Borotbists devoted most of their attention to the armed struggle, in which they were closely associated with the Cossack leader Grigorev. From the time of the Red Army's capture of Kiev in February 1919, however, relations between the Borotbists and the official Communist Parties of Ukraine and Russia were to play a major role in Bolshevik policy in the Ukraine. Bolshevik attitudes to the Borotbists varied according to circumstances and the balance of political forces, but at the beginning of 1920 the leadership in Moscow became firmly committed to an alliance with the Borotbists as a way of strengthening their own political cadres among the Ukrainians.

Like many of the Jewish organisations in the Ukraine, a large section of the Borotbists was more than ready to lend its support to the Bolsheviks, recognising that there was more to unite the two parties than to divide them. Thus in March 1919 the Kiev organisation of the Borotbists resolved:

While recognising the considerable differences that exist between the Ukrainian Party of SR's [the Borotbists] on the question of programme and tactics, given the desire of many circles of the Party to add the title 'Communist' to the name 'Ukrainian Party of SR's'...warns the Party that the separate existence [of this tendency] in opposition to the leaders of the Central Committee, the current course of events, and support for this tendency on behalf of reliable elements, all inevitably play into the hands of the counter-revolution. Given that there exists the core

of a genuine Communist Party, organisationally linked to Communist Parties of other lands and pursuing correct policies, given the duty of all sections of comrades or groups of the Kiev organisation to give its support to these policies to the best of their ability, on this basis and in the interests of successfully spreading the revolution in the Ukraine, we resolve: to demand of the Central Committee of our Party, that they apply to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (bolshevik), with the aim of uniting the UPSR with the CP(b)U, and that they energetically prepare for the successful fulfilment of that union at the Fifth all-Party Congress of the UPSR.¹

As this resolution indicates, the Borotbists considered the Communist Party of Ukraine only as the 'core' of a genuine Communist Party, while they themselves were a genuine Ukrainian party. Although they had major differences, principally on the relationship of Ukraine to Russia and the role of Ukrainian culture, they were in full agreement on the key issues of Soviet power and the distribution of land to the peasants. They therefore felt able to work within the Communist Party, but unlike many of the Jewish socialists were not prepared to keep their disagreements hidden, so confident were they of their own legitimacy. It was these differences that were to antagonise many Bolsheviks and delay the entry of the Borotbists into the Communist Party of Ukraine.

The Fifth Party Congress of the Borotbists, held later in March 1919, voted to change the party's name to Ukrainian Party of Socialists Revolutionaries Communists

¹ ZN, no.17, 16th March 1919, p.4.

Borotbists and to merge with the Communist Party. Their approaches were refused, however, by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, who also opposed any participation by the Borotbists in the Soviet Ukrainian government.¹ On 16th April 1919, however, the Russian Politburo instructed Rakovskii to open talks with the Borotbists, and insisted that Borotbists be admitted to the government.² The most significant result of this instruction was that Olexander Shumskii became Commissar of Education. This appointment may have followed the same pattern as the Bolsheviks' treatment of former Bundists, who were mostly assigned to cultural and educational work, but it may also have represented an attempt by the Ukrainian Communists to satisfy the new line on the Borotbists while minimising their influence over the key political, military and economic structures.

This did not, however, prevent Shumskii from using his position to try to influence Bolshevik policy in the Ukraine and increase the role of the Borotbists. On August 7th he presented a resolution on the national question to the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee, in which he criticised the Communist Party of Ukraine for persisting in policies of Russification, and stressed the need to raise culture "in national forms" and to secure real autonomy for Ukraine.³ Inevitably, this motion was rejected. By now, however, with the advance of Denikin's forces, the Ukrainian Soviet government had become largely irrelevant for the time being, and the Borotbists shifted their struggle to the

¹ Pipes, p.147.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.1, 1.1.

³ James E. Mace, Communism and the Dilemmas of National Liberation: National Communism in Soviet Ukraine (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp.57-58.

Third International, where they applied for membership alongside the Communist Party of Ukraine. In his submission to the Executive Committee of the Third International, Shumskii reasserted the Borotbists claim to be the "organised kernel of Ukrainian Communism", and went even further in his attacks on the CP(b)U. He claimed the latter were totally alien to the Ukraine, where conditions were different from Russia. The Ukrainian Revolution had to be based principally on the Ukrainian peasantry, which meant a struggle against russification and guaranteed cultural equality. The conclusion of these arguments was that the revolution in Ukraine had to be led "by those who recognised the national form of Ukrainian culture" - i.e. the Borotbists.¹

Only a few months after applying to join the CP(b)U, the Borotbists were now claiming the right to replace it as the leader of the revolution in Ukraine. It is unlikely that the Borotbists had any serious expectations of having this position recognised either by the Comintern or the Russian Communist Party, but they may have been hoping to profit from Moscow's frustrations at the continuing factionalism within the CP(b)U, and would have felt encouraged by the Politburo's intervention on their behalf in April. However, they continued to oppose unrelentingly both the Ukrainian and Russian Communist parties on the key practical issue of the day, the question of a separate Ukrainian Army.

In October the Politburo blocked the Borotbists' entry into the Comintern on the basis that it was "formally inadmissible [because there was already one Ukrainian

¹ Mace, pp.55-57.

party in the Comintern] and politically premature."¹ This rejection did not, however, imply a hostile attitude to the Borotbists. At the same time the Politburo allowed the Borotbists to start another newspaper, for issue in Russia. Three weeks later, they were granted a political fund of 750,000 rubles and were promised weapons from the supplies of the southern front.² Both Lenin and Stalin had followed the development of relations with the Borotbists with keen interest since March 1919.³ While their motives are not clear, it can be assumed that they were worried by the limited extent of popular support in the Ukraine and by the divisions and mistakes of the CP(b)U. Lenin in particular must have been concerned at the Great Russian attitudes of many communists in Ukraine. But there may have been more to their sympathy with the Borotbists. As we have seen,⁴ both Lenin and Stalin were beginning to attach more importance to the national culture of the non-Russians, and national policy in the RSFSR was tending towards the strengthening of national self-identity. These ideas were increasingly similar in tone to those being put forwards by the Borotbists. The potential of the Borotbists to undermine Bolshevik authority in the Ukraine did not prevent negotiations reopening on 6th November. In spite of the Borotbists's insolent and hostile attitude to the CP(b)U and their refusal to cease agitating for an independent Ukrainian army, a demand which the Bolsheviks could not possibly entertain, the leaders of the Russian Communist Party continued to look favourably on the Borotbists.

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.29, l.1.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.34, l.1.

³ Adams, p.122.

⁴ See above, chapter 2.

Thus the formulation that the admission of the Borotbists into the Comintern was "politically premature" left the way open for a change of mind. When the issue came up again on 21st November 1919, the Politburo split, with Lenin, Stalin and Kamenev supporting admission, Trotsky and Krestinskii against. Uncertainty over how to treat the Borotbists is reflected in the Politburo's unusual deferral of a final decision until Zinoviev had been consulted.¹ Zinoviev was in favour of admitting the Borotbists, but nevertheless a week later the full Central Committee voted not to admit them to the Comintern, but this time they cited only the 'formal' objection that the Comintern already had one Ukrainian member, and they also formed a commission to discuss the possibility of fully uniting the Borotbists with the CP(b)U.²

A full role for the Borotbists in the government of Ukraine was confirmed in the appointment of a Borotbist to the four-man Revolutionary Committee which was to assume temporary authority in Ukraine as the Red Army pushed Denikin back, and a Borotbist was also sent to join the Revvoensoviet of the XII Army.³ Curiously, however, at almost exactly the same time (3rd December) Lenin, at the Eighth Conference of the Russian Communist Party, was vigorously denying that he favoured a bloc with the Borotbists:

when some of the comrades said that I recommend a bloc with the Borotba Party they mistook my meaning. Here I compared the policy that must be pursued in respect

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.42, l.2

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.25, l.1.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.1318, op.3, d.44, l.1; d.48, l.3.

of the Borotba Party with the policy we had pursued in respect of the Right Socialist-Revolutionaries...[in October 1917] I said that we had taken over their [the Right SR's] programme in its entirety so as to use the forces of the peasantry - we want to do that, but we don't want an alliance with Socialist-Revolutionaries...My opinion is that we must demonstrate that we need a bloc with the Ukrainian peasantry, and in order to achieve that bloc we must polemise with the Borotba people in a way that differs from the present polemics.

He went on to 'polemise' against their military policy and against the Borotbist-led teachers' union.¹ This statement, coming in the middle of prolonged negotiations between the Bolsheviks and the Borotbists, may have been intended to put pressure on the latter, who continued to stick firmly to their most incompatible policies. But it was certainly misleading. In 1917 the Bolsheviks had appropriated the agrarian programme of the Right SR's without seeking a bloc, but the comparison, if any, should have been to the Left-SR's, who were brought into the Soviet government at that time just as the Borotbists had been brought into the Ukrainian government and were now being invited into the Revkom. But four days earlier, the Politburo had gone even further than this by suggesting a possible merger with the Borotbists.

By his remarks Lenin had indicated that unity with the Borotbists was not yet a foregone conclusion, but at the end of the month he went public in a "Letter to the Workers and Peasants of the Ukraine apropos of the

¹ Lenin, Vol.XXXIX, pp.370-371.

victories over Denikin" affirming what in effect amounted to a 'bloc' with the Borotbists:

One of the things distinguishing the Borotbists from the Bolsheviks is that they insist upon the unconditional independence of the Ukraine. The Bolsheviks will not make this a subject of difference and disunity, they do not regard this as an obstacle to concerted proletarian effort. There must be unity in the struggle against the yoke of capital and for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and there should be no parting of the ways among Communists on the question of national frontiers, or whether there should be a federal or some other tie between the states.¹

Just as events seemed to be moving in favour of the Borotbists, however, the Bolshevik leadership abruptly turned against them. Negotiations were broken off on 26th December, before Lenin's article was published, and on 18th January 1920, the Politburo asked the bureau of the Comintern to issue a sharp statement refusing the Borotbists membership, and this time the Comintern was to list their counter-revolutionary statements.² This the Comintern prepared to do,³ and on 6th February, the Politburo passed a resolution for circulation to party organisations based on Lenin's draft:

The Borotbists shall be qualified as a party, which, by its propaganda aimed at splitting the military forces and supporting banditism, is violating the

¹ Lenin, Vol.XL, pp.44-45.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.55, l.3.

³ A.V. Likholat, Razgrom natsionalisticheskoy kontrrevoliutsii na Ukraine 1917-1922 (Moscow, 1954), p.609.

basic principles of communism, thereby playing directly into the hands of the Whites and of international imperialism. Also opposed to the interests of the proletariat is their struggle against the slogan calling for a close alliance with the RSFSR. The whole policy must be systematically and steadily aimed at the dissolution of the Borotbists in the near future. To this end, not a single misdeed on the part of the Borotbists should be allowed to pass without being immediately punished. In particular, information should be collected concerning the non-proletarian and most disloyal nature of the majority of their party members. The moment for their dissolution shall be determined within a short time by the Politburo and communicated to the Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee.¹

From being allies and participants in government, the Borotbists had overnight become counter-revolutionaries and were soon to be liquidated.

No adequate explanation for this abrupt reversal has come to light. The only specific incident to have surfaced is the publication by the Borotbists in "Proletarskaya Borba" of a leaked report in December 1919.² Lenin's resolution mentioned the Borotbists' policies on the separate Ukrainian Army and on relations with the RSFSR, but these had never changed. One explanation is a shift in the balance of forces within the CP(b)U. In late November 1919, a number of Communists who had formerly been working in Ukraine met unofficially in Gomel, and here a faction emerged which

¹ Lenin, Vol.XL, p.122; RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.61, l.2.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.50, l.3.

not only supported a union with the Borotbists, but also adopted the central points of their programme, namely military and political independence of the Ukraine, including independence of the party from Moscow.¹ This group formed a small minority, however, and the attitude of the majority remained deeply hostile. Of the leading Bolsheviks in the Ukraine, Rakovskii considered the Borotbists a petit-bourgeois nationalist party, while Manuil'skii expressed the opinion that they should all be executed.² It is possible that the Bolsheviks saw the old splits in the Ukrainian party re-emerging in the guise of a nationalistic, pro-Borotbist tendency and decided once and for all to throw their weight behind the senior Party members of the Ukraine, especially now that the threat from Denikin had receded and the need for compromise had decreased in urgency. It may be that talks had simply become deadlocked over the Borotbists' persistent separatism. Equally, it is possible that some serious accusations of counter-revolutionary activity, real or imagined, had emerged.

Within a matter of weeks, however, the position had again been reversed, just as abruptly. On 28th February, the Politburo resolved to admit the Borotbists into the CP(b)U.³ In mid-March an all-Ukraine conference of the Borotbists was held, to which Lenin sent this message: "I thank you for the greetings from the bottom of my heart. Warmest wishes for the success of the conference, particularly for the success of the work that has been begun for merging with the Party of Bolsheviks."⁴ The

¹ Adams, pp.393-394; Orest Subtelny, Ukraine - a History (Toronto, 1989), p.391.

² Mace, p.61.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.63, l.1.

⁴ Lenin, Vol.LI, p.162.

conference voted for a merger, and this was approved at a stormy conference of the CP(b)U on March 20th 1920. If there was any doubt as to the position of the former Borotbists in the Ukrainian Party, Lenin personally ordered the inclusion of Shumskii on a provisional five-man Central Committee appointed to replace the CC elected at the conference.¹ 4,000 out of 5,000 Borotbists joined the CP(b)U, and both Shumskii and Blakytniy were subsequently made members of the permanent Central Committee.²

At the Ninth Congress of the Russian Communist Party on March 30th 1920, Lenin went some way to explaining the extraordinary twists and turns in relation to the Borotbists:

When we said in the Central Committee that the maximum concessions should be made to the Borotbists, we were laughed at and told that we were not following a straight line. But you can fight in a straight line when the enemy's line is straight. But when the enemy moves in zigzags, and not in a straight line, we have to follow him and catch him at every turn. We promised the maximum concessions to the Borotbists, but on condition that they pursued a communist policy....thanks to the correct policy of the Central Committee, which was carried out so splendidly by Comrade Rakovskii, all the best elements among the Borotbists have joined our Party under our control and with our recognition, while all the rest have

¹ Idem, p.167.

² Mace, p.62; RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.29, l.3.

disappeared from the political scene. This victory was worth a couple of good tussles.¹

In truth, the zigzags followed by the Bolsheviks were not dictated so much by the line of the Borotbists, which remained fairly straight, as by contradictory pressures working on the Bolsheviks themselves. On the one hand, the Communist Party of Ukraine was weak and internally split, and any growth in the influence of the Borotbists with their separatist demands would further weaken the hand of Moscow in the crucial region of Ukraine.

Ukraine was exceptional in terms of the non-Russian regions. Not only did it contain important raw materials, the Bolsheviks regarded it as a rural capitalist economy which, alone of the 'borderlands' might form a viable independent state. This created a particular sensitivity to the national question there and also underlay the splits within the Communist Party. The leadership's 'zig-zagging' with regard to the Borotbists reflects their fear of a possible breakaway by Ukraine, either through nationalist feeling growing beyond control in the state and party organs, or through the implementation of policies which would arouse terminal hostility among the peasantry.

On the other hand the Borotbists accepted all the major elements of the Bolshevik programme apart from the national question, they could supply a valuable cadre of native administrators if only they could be fully relied on politically, they enjoyed considerable popular support in the countryside, and they were also able to influence

¹ Lenin, Vol. XL, p.266.

the alignment of key military forces, although this factor became less important with the defection of Grigorev in May 1919.

Alternately wooing and then condemning the Borotbists the Bolsheviks may have hoped to grind them into submission on their nationalist demands before they would entrust them with a responsible role. At the same time, the struggle between the various factions of the CP(b)U was bound to have an effect on the attitude towards the Borotbists. But the emergence of the Federalists at Gomel marked a new departure in the internal party politics of Ukraine. The nationalist demands of the Borotbists were beginning to gain a following among established Bolsheviks distressed at the domination of Ukrainian policy by Moscow and the alienation resulting from the lack of recognition accorded to Ukrainian national character. It is significant that Lenin indicated his support for this faction, and it can be seen that the Bolshevik leaders were moving towards a greater toleration of autonomist demands. Although the military and political separatism of the Borotbists was constantly opposed to Bolshevik policy, many of their ideas on national culture and nativisation dovetailed completely with the direction of Bolshevik national policy.

The matter of strengthening a native communist base became most urgent, however, following the collapse of the communist-nationalist alliance in Bashkiria. The disaster of the Bashrevkom showed up the twin dangers of entrusting political authority to nationalists who had little in common with Bolshevism beyond hostility towards the Whites on the one hand, and of Russian domination of

the Communist Party on the other. In the Ukraine, the Bolsheviks were presented with a middle way between these two dangers - national communism. The alliance with the Borotbists was the result of a centrally directed policy, concluded as it was in the face of fierce opposition from the Communist Party of Ukraine. Although most of the Borotbists had left the Party, and in many cases the country, by 1923,¹ for a while many of them played a leading role in the Ukrainian party, and although the Borotbists were subsequently discredited, their policies had a lasting impact on the Party and on key individuals, most notably on Shumskii's successor as Commissar of Education, Mykola Skrypnyk. They also provide an important model for the alliances made with left-wing nationalists elsewhere in the former Russian empire.

Muslim National Communists

In 1919 and 1920 the Ukrainian Borotbists and Jewish socialists on the one hand and the Bolsheviks on the other were moving towards each other, both as a result of the need to unite the pro-Soviet, anti-White forces, and on the level of ideas; the Bundist notion of cultural autonomy and the Borotbists' insistence on the role of national culture and of political autonomy were not seen as insurmountable obstacles to cooperation by either side. The two organisations were able to present themselves as the nationalist wing of the Bolshevik movement and, as experience of Soviet government in the borderlands forced a rethink of national policy, their

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.572.

ideas came to be regarded as a positive asset by the Bolshevik leaders in their struggle against the Great Russian tendencies which were becoming apparent in the Communist Party, whether these tendencies were manifested as old-fashioned chauvinism or as Marxist internationalism. In Central Asia the situation was very different. The logistical and military situation on the one hand made the support of the non-Russian native population ever more urgent, but on the other hand restricted the ability of Moscow to exercise effective influence over Russian dominated Party and Soviet organs. Bennigsen and Wimbush have presented a detailed account of the numerous Muslim political organisations existed or sprang up in the course of 1917 and 1918. None of these could compare, however, with the Bund or the Borotbists; the ideas of Islam or pan-Turkism permeated all of them and went far beyond notions of autonomy, most were hostile to the Russians as a whole, and showed little enthusiasm for the principles of Soviet power.

Between 1918 and 1920 the priority for the Bolsheviks in Central Asia was the military struggle, however, and following the defeat of the Kokand nationalist government they were able to make common cause with a number of nationalist military units thanks mainly to the Great Russian ambitions of the White armies. Most important among these were the Bashkir forces of Validov, but the Red Army was also able to conclude a number of alliances with nationalist led troops in spite of the political gulf between them; the 'Ush-Zhuz' (The Three Hordes), a Kazakh group espousing pan-Islam but increasingly accepting Bolshevik ideas from 1917 onwards, whose members were admitted to the Communist Party in 1920; the Crimean radical Tatar party 'Milli Firqa'; the

'Jengelis', a Persian, pan-Islamist guerilla movement who in 1921 were involved in joint operations with the Communist Party of Iran and Russian Red Army forces in an attempt to overthrow the Teheran government; and most incongruously, the 'Vaisites', a mystic Sufi brotherhood founded in Kazan in 1862, whose doctrine "was a curious blending of puritan reformism of the Wahhabi type, of Tolstoyism, and, later, of Socialism (of Socialist Revolutionary trend)". In 1917 and 1918, this group fought alongside the Red Army, even against their Kazan Tatar compatriots.¹

Bizarre though this alliance was, the numbers of the Vaisites were small, and they disintegrated following the death in battle of their leader, Iran Vaisov. Far more significant and risky was the cooperation of the Bolsheviks with the leader of the former Young Turk government Enver Pasha. Enver was something of a hero in the Muslim world for his military exploits against the Italians in Africa in 1911-1912 as well as for his activities in Turkey. His association with Germany in the World War and his well-known dream of creating a pan-Islamic state to include most of Russian Central Asia led Muslim communists to treat him with deep suspicion on his appearance in Russia in 1920. But he had established personal contacts with Radek and presented a stirring statement to the Congress of the Peoples of the East held in Baku in September 1920, in which he asserted his solidarity with Soviet Russia on the basis of anti-imperialism, but gave no indication of any deeper political common cause with the Bolsheviks.² So keen

¹ Alexandre A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union - a Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World (Chicago, 1979), pp.218-223.

² Baku: Congress of the Peoples of the East, pp.76-79, 195.

were the Bolsheviks to establish some sort of political legitimacy in Central Asia that this appears to have been sufficient to persuade the Politburo to grant Enver funds and permission to publish two Turkish language newspapers in Russia in April 1921.¹ In the autumn he was sent to Central Asia to lend his personal kudos to the struggle against the Basmachestvo. But his personal ambitions and Islamic nationalist instincts proved far stronger than any passing attachment he had formed to Bolshevism, and almost immediately on his arrival in Bukhara he defected to the side of the Basmachis, taking with him a small armed force and many of the leaders of the Bukharan government.²

The defection of Enver was the most serious setback to the Bolsheviks' pursuit of nationalist allies, and was to lead to a change in direction of policy, but it was not an entirely isolated incident. As early as June 1917 the Second Regional Congress of the RSDLP in Turkestan recognised that "the task of party work in the milieu of of the Muslim population of Turkestan is to support the oppositional-democratic tendency within the Muslim milieu, directed against the influence and domination of clerical-bourgeois elements..."³ This resolution demonstrates an awareness of the divisions within the Muslim political movement between the conservative, clerical forces on the one hand and the radical, more secular but still largely pan-Islamist groups on the other. It was these divisions that the Bolsheviks sought to exploit after the October Revolution, as well as the anti-white feelings that emerged in the course of

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.154, ll.2-3.

² Pipes, pp.256-258.

³ Aminov and Babakhodzhaev, p.121.

the Civil War, in their efforts to attract a cadre of Muslim nationalists.

In spite of the wide range of Muslim political organisations, however, there did not exist a Muslim equivalent of the Bund or Borotbist party which accepted the basic Bolshevik policies of Soviet Power and class war combined with a nationalist tinge. Beyond the short term military alliances mentioned above, the only Muslim organisation which the Bolsheviks were to recognise as a genuine socialist party on Soviet territory was the Azerbaidzhani Hummet, which became the nucleus of the Communist Party of Azerbaidjan in 1920.¹ But when the powerful liberal nationalist Kazakh party 'Alash Orda' contacted the Russian Sovnarkom and Narkomnats in April 1918 with a view to reaching a settlement they were refused outright.² Around the same time other, smaller Muslim organisations were disbanded by order of Narkomnats: the Kazan-based 'Harbi Shura', the Muslim National Board 'Milli Idare' in Ufa, and the 'Milli Shura', a coordinating body set up by the First All-Russian Muslim Congress on 1st May 1917.³ During late 1919 and 1920, however, in line with the more tolerant attitude being displayed towards nationalists elsewhere, many members of Muslim parties were admitted into the Russian Communist Party, including important leaders of the Alash Orda and the Milli Firqa who were to play a leading role in their republics into the 1930's.⁴

Still there did not exist in Central Asia any large Muslim party which the Bolsheviks could trust as allies.

¹ Bennigsen and Wimbush, p.25.

² Batirov, p.623.

³ Bennigsen and Wimbush, pp.216, 220.

⁴ Idem, p.25.

Apart from the Hummet, the only Muslim parties to be granted a role in government by the Bolsheviks were the Young Bukharans and Young Khivans who allied themselves with the Bolsheviks in the struggle to overthrow the emirs of the former khanates and who enjoyed the leading role in governing the formally independent People's Republics from 1920 until 1923. The Young Bukharans had been formed in 1909 by a group of radical Islamic Jadidists. In December 1917 they made common cause with the Bolsheviks and in March 1918 joined forces with Kolesov, the Chairman of the Soviet Government in Turkestan, in an attempt to overthrow the Emir. Following the failure of this attempt, many Young Bukharans fled to Russia and Turkestan, leaving underground work in Bukhara to the newly formed Bukharan Communist Party. Following a number of abortive risings in 1918-1919, however, the Young Bukharans rather than the weak Bukharan Communist Party were promoted by Moscow as the leading revolutionary force in the Khanate, and when the Red Army succeeded in taking Bukhara in the summer of 1920 they were given the leading government posts. Early in 1922, however, the relationship between the Young Bukharans and the Communists was coming under severe strain, leading to an investigation by the Turkomissiya and, a year later, to the arrest of a number of Young Bukharans and the merger of their organisation into the Communist Party. The Young Khivans allied themselves with the Russian-dominated Soviets early in 1917, but had little military force once Russian troops were withdrawn and faced severe repression from Djunaid-Khan in 1918, losing many of their leaders to the firing squads. The oppression of Djunaid's regime led, however, to growing support for the Young Khivans, who launched a revolt in November 1919 which succeeded with Red Army

support. The Revkom set up to temporarily administer Khiva in February 1920 consisted of three Young Khivans, two Turkmen chiefs and a leading cleric, but this was replaced by a largely Russian government in April. Soon the Khorezm Communist Party displaced the Young Khivans from power, and the Young Khivan leadership fled the region.¹

The Bukharan and Khivan governments represented the extreme cases of Bolshevik cooperation with nationalist forces. In part, this was a result of the late conquest of the regions, which remained beyond the reach of the Red Army until 1920, when nationalists were most in favour. But the two former khanates were always regarded as exceptions by the Bolsheviks owing to the extreme weakness of the working class, the destruction of all Soviet organisations by the emirs, and the extremely low cultural level of the local population who were considered to be fully under the influence of conservative Muslim clerics. In consequence they were not even accorded the status of Soviet republics, and the Young Khivans and Young Bukharans, coming from a radical Islamic tradition, were considered the most favourable forces to govern a people not yet ready for socialism.

Nevertheless it is significant that the Bolsheviks allowed such responsibility to the Young Bukharans and Young Khivans given that they came from a tradition which had an important influence throughout the Muslim world, especially the Muslim parts of Russia - Jadidism. With its origins in the late nineteenth century attempts by Tatar intellectuals to reform the teaching of the Arabic

¹ Seymour Becker, Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva 1865-1924 (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp.301-305.

alphabet, Jadidism sought to rid Islam of much of its religious content but to promote it as a cultural form which was common to all Muslims. Though originally focused on education, Jadidism developed a broader political thrust which sought to promote pan-Turkism within a framework of cultural autonomy in Russia. Although an elitist movement which never gained a mass base, Jadidism attracted many of the leading Muslim intellectuals of the period who wished to promote a secular Islamic culture within a just society.¹ While the secular western orientation, anti-imperialism, and social demands of the Jadidists coincided with many Bolshevik beliefs, and the demand for cultural autonomy was not, as we have seen, necessarily a handicap to cooperation, their pan-Turkism and the rejection of the class struggle in favour of the national one put a lot of space between the two ideologies. In the course of 1917, moreover, the more radical Jadidists adopted a more strident anti-Russian position. On the other hand, at the same time there was a significant movement among many Jadidists towards the acceptance of the socialist ideas which were seen as the driving force of the revolution, and during 1917 a number of Muslim Socialist Committees were set up². Given the presence of the word 'socialist' in their title and the absence of alternatives, it was only natural that the Bolsheviks should turn to these committees in their search for Muslim radicals with whom they could cooperate.

Most important among them was the Kazan Socialist Committee formed on 7th April 1917. The committee was

¹ Azade-Ayşe Rorlich, The Volga Tatars - a Profile in National Resilience (Stanford, 1986), pp.178-179.

² Bennigsen and Wimbush, pp.20-22.

headed by Mullanur Vakhitov, its vice-president was, unusually, a woman, E. Mukhitdinova, and it was joined in June by Sultan-Galiev. It was linked to the broader Tatar nationalist and Jadid movement, promoting a reformed, secular Islam, but gave its support to Bolshevik policies on the War, land, and Soviet power, although it also supported the expulsion of Russians from colonised land. It "embraced an ideology that, despite its socialist label, was a melange of Marxism and pan-Islamism."¹ The Kazan Socialist Committee was one of the moving forces behind the first and second All-Russian Congresses of Muslims, held on May 1st and August 2nd 1917. Although the first congress was unable to reach agreement on the issues of the role of women and territorial autonomy, it still managed to present a united Muslim front and established the Milli Shura as a permanent coordinating body. The second congress was dominated by the Volga Tatars as the opponents of extraterritorial autonomy stayed away. While this prevented the Congress from being able to claim representation of all the Muslims of Russia, it enabled it to unite around a positive programme for the implementation of cultural autonomy based on jadidist principles.²

The Bolsheviks had established links with the Kazan Socialist Committee at an early date, and the Appeal to the Muslim Workers of Russia and the East issued on 20th November 1917 acknowledged the demands of the Second All-Russian Congress of Muslims. Already in 1917 the Kazan Bolshevik organisation had succeeded in attracting a number of leading Muslims, including the vice-president

¹ Rorlich, pp.126-127; Bennigsen and Wimbush, p.22.

² Rorlich, pp.127-130.

of the Kazan Socialist Committee Mukhitdinova. Immediately after the Revolution, Stalin tried to involve other Muslim leaders in the work of Narkomnats, approaching first the Milli Shura, but unsuccessfully, and then co-opting Vakhitov, G. Ibrahimov, Sh. Manatov and later Sultan-Galiev to run the newly formed Muskom and giving them places on the collegium of Narkomnats.¹

Bennigsen and Wimbush have examined in detail the success of the Bolsheviks in attracting Muslim nationalists, and conclude that "by 1920, the Bolsheviks had secured the support or neutrality of most radical nationalist elites in the Muslim East, and these elites soon became important figures in the Turkestan Communist Party."² Bennigsen and Wimbush list four factors that may have attracted Muslim nationalists to the Bolsheviks: 1) The ineptitude and Russian chauvinism of the White leaders; 2) Stalin's determination to enlist native leaders; 3) the conviction on the part of the Muslim nationalists that all of the opponents of Soviet Power were Russian chauvinists, while the Bolsheviks stood for internationalism and national equality; 4) the Russian Revolution was viewed as "the first step to the liberation of Islam from European and Russian encroachment"³.

In this analysis insufficient weight is given to the extent to which the aims of the Muslim national communists did in fact coincide with those of the Bolsheviks in certain areas, while in others the Bolsheviks until 1920 went to extraordinary lengths to

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.1.

² Bennigsen and Wimbush, p.26.

³ Bennigsen and Wimbush, pp. 26-29.

accommodate the Muslim leaders in spite of their differences. It was not simply a case of putting a few token Muslims in prominent positions; the Muskom was staffed almost entirely by committed former Jadidists and given real authority, which, as we have seen in chapter 3, was backed more often than not by the Bolshevik leadership whenever the Muskom came into conflict with the Narkomnats collegium. As well as the Muskom, Muslims with few communist credentials were granted leading position in the departments and sections of Narkomnats for the Kirghiz, Caucasian Highlanders, Turkestan, Kalmyks, and so on.¹

In addition to their positions in Moscow, strenuous efforts were made to involve native Muslims in Soviet and party work in the regions. In March 1918 Narkomnats sent out instructions to the regions on involving natives in the soviets,² and in the April elections to the Tashkent soviet, which had previously excluded Muslims, 40% of the delegates elected were natives.³ In the summer of 1917 the Ispolkoms of many Central Asian soviets were reconstituted, giving natives representation for the first time - according to Soviet sources, one-third of the places on the Samarkand Ispolkom, two out of seven in Bayram-Ali, four out of seventeen in Auliatainsk uezd, three out of eleven in Skobelev uezd, a majority in Ura-Tiube, and half in Temir.⁴ In some areas, the proportion of Muslim party members also rose dramatically; by the end of 1918, from almost zero, native Muslims made up 900 out of 2,000 members in Tashkent, 400 out of 600 in

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, ll.13, 41, 69, 80.

² Batirov, p.615.

³ Idem, p.624.

⁴ Idem, pp.626-627.

Namangan, and 250 out of 750 in Kokand,¹ and in Kerki a new section for Muslim Communists recruited 160 natives in 1919.² This trend continued so that in 1922 the national composition of the Communist Party of Turkestan was 49.7% Russian, 23.3% Kazakh and Kirghiz, 10.7% Uzbek, 4.6% Turkmen, 2.2% Tadzhik, and 9.5% other Muslims.³ By 1922, according to the party census of that year, 6,534 members of the Russian Communist Parties gave their nationality as Tatar, 4,964 as Kirghiz, and 2,034 as Uzbeks.⁴ In 1922, natives were hardly represented at all, however, in the leading bodies of the Communist Party of Turkestan. This, too, had changed by 1924, when 8 out of 21 members of the Central Committee and its principal departments were natives, and at the uezd committee level, an impressive 64 out of 91 committee members were natives. In total, at the end of 1924 out of 192 members of the Executive Political Bureaus of the party at the central, oblast and uezd levels, 128 were natives.⁵

A number of leading communists emerged from the region in this period who were to remain influential into the 1930's - T.R. Ryskulov, N. Khodzhaev, A. Ikramov, F. Khodzhaev, A. Tiuryakulov, D. Ustabaev, N. Aytakov, K. Atabaev, A. Rakhimbaev etc.⁶

¹ Batirov, p.631.

² A. Babekov, "Bol'shevistskie organizatsii vostochnogo Turkmenistana v godi grazhdanskoi voini i inostrannoi voennoi interventsii", in Sh. Tashliev (ed.), Grazhdanskaya voina i inostrannaia voennaia interventsia v Srednei Azii (Ashkhabad, 1986), p.212.

³ Carrère D'Encausse, p.143.

⁴ Pipes, p.278.

⁵ S.A. Nazarov, Rukovodstvo TsK RKP(b) Partynim stroitel'stvom v Sredney Azii (Tashkent, 1972), pp.288-289.

⁶ Idem, p.275.

Bennigsen and Wimbush explain the indulgence shown by the Bolsheviks towards the Muslim National Communists by several reasons:

a desire to avoid alienating the minorities before Bolshevik power was completely solidified; an underestimation of the strength of this mutated Marxism or the dynamism of the national communists; an uncertainty over the proper relationship between the Russian centre and the borderlands; and the absence of a personality strong enough to control centrifugal nationalism by controlling or eliminating its spokesmen, as Stalin eventually would do.¹

But both the public statements and internal directives of the leading Bolshevik and Soviet individuals and organs throughout this period pointed to a deliberate long-term strategy of placing political and especially cultural leadership in the hands of local non-Russians, and this was supported by the actual nativisation and ethnicisation policies being pursued not just in Central Asia but in the Western borderlands where the Bolsheviks were stronger. In the Muslim regions, where there was no strong native socialist tradition, this meant coming to an arrangement with nationalists whose ideas may have been further from the principles of Bolshevism than was ideal.

For a while, however, it was possible to paper over the gulf that existed between the two traditions of Marxism and radical Islam. Limited political autonomy was acceptable to the Bolsheviks, while the central demand of the Kazan nationalists for full cultural autonomy became

¹ Bennigsen and Wimbush, p.39.

increasingly desirable. Other consequences of the Jadidist and pan-Turkic traditions were, however, more unacceptable and were bound to cause strains between the Bolsheviks and the Muslim nationalists. The concept of 'proletarian nations' was to some extent common to the nationalist movements among all the minorities of the Russian empire, but found its sharpest expression in the doctrines expounded by Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, doctrines which were widely accepted by Muslim national communists. Essentially, Sultan-Galiev proposed that while sharp class divisions existed in the advanced nations, the most significant division in the world was between the oppressor and oppressed nations. Thus on the world stage the oppressed nations occupied the position analogous to that of the proletariat in the advanced nations. "All Muslim colonised peoples are proletarian peoples and as almost all classes in Muslim society have been oppressed by the colonialists, all classes have the right to be called 'proletarians.'" ¹ Therefore the national revolution should precede the social one, and there could be no class struggle within the oppressed nations. Most seriously from the point of view of the Bolsheviks, Sultan-Galiev concluded from this analysis that it was essential for the oppressed nationalities, specifically the Muslims, to have their own independent political organisations:

If a revolution succeeds in England, the proletariat will continue oppressing the colonies and pursuing the policy of the existing bourgeois government; for it is interested in the exploitation of these colonies. In order to prevent the oppression of the toiler of the

¹ Bennigsen and Wimbush, p.42.

East we must unite the Muslim masses in a communist movement that will be our own and autonomous.¹

In spite of these differences, Sultan-Galiev and his supporters were allowed to articulate their ideas freely, and Sultan-Galiev was even given the editorship of Zhizn natsional'nostei. But the demand for an independent Muslim Communist organisation in particular was a constant source of friction throughout 1918.² The Baku Congress of the People of the East in September 1920, which Sultan-Galiev did not attend, marked a shift in attitude towards Sultangalievism. In the discussion on the national and colonial questions, all of the speeches pointedly dwelt on the need for unity between the workers of the West and the East.³ From that point on, warnings against the dangers of nationalist deviation became more frequent in official speeches and the Communist press, but somehow the uneasy relationship between the Bolsheviks and the Muslim national communists survived until 1923.

By the end of 1920, the Bolsheviks had largely succeeded in strengthening their presence in the borderlands by co-opting nationalist parties and individuals into the Communist Parties themselves. This policy was at its most successful in Azerbaidzhan, where Bolshevik organisations had largely been destroyed following the fall of the Baku Commune. When the Red Army entered Azerbaidzhan in 1920, the Muslim Hummet

¹ Bennigsen and Wimbush, pp.43-46.

² Idem, pp.60-61.

³ Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East, pp.89-119.

party provided an immediate basis for a new Communist Party which combined socialist traditions with an organic connection to the Muslim population and furnished most of the leaders of the Azerbaidzhan SSR.¹ In 1922, while the Georgian crisis brewed as a result of the activities of Old Bolsheviks, the former Hummet leadership in Azerbaidzhan proved itself fully capable of dealing with the pressures which threatened disaster in Georgia.

There were limits placed on the role of nationalists in the borderlands, however. A year after the Bund, the Borotbists and the Hummet had entered the Communist Parties, the Politburo began to consider a similar arrangement with the Armenian nationalist Dashnak party, and in June 1921 Ioffe and the Armenian communist Ter-Gabrielyan were sent to negotiate with Dashnak leaders in Riga.² Ioffe got so far as signing a draft agreement with the Dashnaks when he was abruptly recalled and negotiations broken off at the end of July.³ The reason for this was straightforward; the Central Committee had received a telegram from the presidium of the Kavbiuro, signed by Ordzhonikidze, demanding that negotiations be terminated on the basis that the Dashnaks had been consistently vilified as counter-revolutionaries by the communists in Transcaucasia.⁴ With the Kavbiuro already coming into conflict with nationalist tendencies in Georgia, they clearly felt they were better off condemning the Dashnaks than cooperating with them.

The most effective checks placed on the influence of the national communists was the system of party

¹ Bennigsen and Wimbush, pp.216 - 217.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.175, l.4.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.192, l.3.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.13, d.384, l.1.

committees and plenipotentiaries who had overall responsibility for events in the borderlands. The Kavbiuro, the Turkbiuro, and the Central Committees of the Ukrainian and Bielorussian Communist Parties were staffed by reliable Old Bolsheviks, often Russians, and were able to override the decisions of lower party bodies and, indirectly, the soviets. At the head of these Committees stood individuals such as Ordzhonikidze, Sokol'nikov and Rakovskii who wielded enormous personal power, and they were joined by a number of plenipotentiaries of the Central Committee who were either in place permanently or sent on special missions to deal with specific problems: Ioffe in Bielorussia and Turkestan, Frunze in Central Asia and Ukraine, Kirov and Shakhtakhtinskii in Azerbaidzhan. In extreme cases, leading members of the Politburo - Stalin, Dzerzhinskii, Kamenev - visited the borderlands in person to settle disputes. In this way the Central Committee had a ready transmission mechanism for asserting its own authority and a reliable source of information on the activities of the nationalists. For the most part these individuals did not abuse their positions and were sensitive to nationalist sentiments. The principle exception to this, Ordzhonikidze and the Kavbiuro, will be discussed in a later chapter.

Communist Schools and Universities

The Bolsheviks had not, however, put all their eggs in one basket by relying exclusively on alliances with nationalist parties. Keen to develop a cadre of native leaders, but anticipating the problems to be encountered with the former Jadidists they set out to prepare a new generation of Muslim Communists, primarily through the network of party schools and universities. The importance of party schools in raising a new generation of native communists is underlined by a decision of the Politburo in October 1921 in response to a political crisis in Azerbaidjan:

Impose on the leaders of the Azerbaidjan and especially the Baku party organisations the obligation to focus their attention on the preparation and education of Muslim communists for the role of cell secretaries and other responsible party posts, and to this end to form special schools and to report every three months to the Kavbiuro and the CC of the RCP(b) on the successes achieved in this respect.¹

The first party schools in Turkestan were opened in 1918. In July 1919 a Central School of Party and Soviet Work was set up by the Regional Committee of the RCP(b), and in October a new school had a special Muslim department which turned out 530 Party workers in its first two sessions. In 1920 the Regional Committee organised a whole network of party schools and by the end of the year 2,000 people were enrolled in the schools,

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.1318, op.3, d.217, l.1.

600 of them natives.¹ In general, a large proportion of entrants to party schools were not yet party members but were identified as potential recruits,² especially in Central Asia. The schools were expected to provide workers and peasants with a level of all-round education as well as political training. In 1922 it was recommended that the six-month courses at uezd party schools be split into 235 hours of general education in languages, arithmetic, the sciences, philosophy and geography; 125 hours to a general theoretical course on the history of the communist movement and principles of Marxism-Leninism; and 60 hours were devoted to the study of Soviet construction.³ A similar division of study time was employed on the longer courses at the oblast and republican schools. More than half the course was devoted to general, as opposed to political education. The aim was to prepare Party Workers who were not just politically reliable but also capable of fulfilling the administrative tasks entrusted to communists.

As well as the Party schools in the national republics, the national minorities were well catered for in Russia. In Petrograd in 1922, Soviet Party schools were training 300 Estonian students, 260 Latvians and 200 Finns.⁴

European non-Russians received much more training at Party schools than Russians. According to the 1927 Party Census, only 8.6% of the total number of Communists had

¹ Nazarov, pp.276-277.

² Leonard Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (London, 1970), p.347.

³ Nazarov, p.282.

⁴ Zev Katz, "Party-Political Education in Soviet Russia" (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of London, 1957), p.58.

received some form of Party education, but between a third and a half of Party members from the European national minorities had completed courses. The figure for other nationalities were: Armenians - 14.5%, Georgians 14.4%, Kazakhs 11.6%, Uzbeks - 6.4%, Kirghiz - 5.4%, Turkmens - 4.4%.¹ The relatively larger numbers of Russian old Bolsheviks who required no training can not explain the differences in these figures. Clearly, an intensive effort was made to train communists in Ukraine and Bielorussia, while the programme was a relative failure in most of Central Asia.

Although a large proportion of non-Russian Communist Party members received some Party education, for the less developed nationalities this training tended to be more basic. In 1927, only 13% of all those who had studied at Party Schools had taken the shortest and most elementary courses at Schools for Political Grammar. The corresponding figures for Oirat communists was 50%, Bashkirs - 49%, and Armenians, 46%.² High levels of illiteracy and the urgent need to recruit national communists from largely uneducated peasants meant that the first task was to provide these peasants with basic literacy and then set them to work. The proportion of peasants attending Communist Universities was also much higher among the non-Russians, especially the Muslims. In 1924, 71% of the intake to the Communist University in Tashkent were peasants, as were 64% of those in Kazan and 54% of the intake to the University of the Peoples of the East.³

¹ Katz, pp.117-118.

² Idem, p.118.

³ Idem, p.364.

The Communist Universities turned out significant numbers of Muslim cadres. In August 1920, the Worker-Peasant Communist University (from June 1923 - The Central Asian Communist University in the Name of Lenin) opened in Tashkent. Over two months in 1922 it turned out 150 Muslim and 76 European graduates. On 21st April 1921 the Communist University of Labourers of the East organised by Narkomnats opened in Moscow. Although this was an international university, a majority of places were reserved for entrants from Central Asia. Out of one intake of students in 1921, 100 were Kazakh or Kirghiz, 40 were Uzbek, 20 Tadzhik, 15 Dungans, 25 Turkmens, with a further 50 places for entrants from Bukhara and Khorezm. In addition the university in Moscow had a network of 17 departments in the regions running preparatory courses for potential entrants to the main university.¹ In the same year a Communist University of the Labourers of the National Minorities of the West was opened in Moscow, and shortly afterwards a Tatar Communist University in Kazan and a "Transcaucasian Lenin Communist University in the Name of the 26 Commissars" in Tiflis were opened.

By 1924, the Communist Universities were turning out large numbers of trained non-Russian communists (table 5.1). Of 6,073 students attending Communist Universities, just over a half (3,097) attended the five 'National' Communist Universities. This roughly corresponds to the proportion of non-Russians in the overall population, but in 1926 Russians still made up 65% of the Party membership, and Muslims, who made up the

¹ Nazarov, pp.278-280.

bulk of the students at three of the schools, were even more under represented than the other nationalities.¹

Table 5.1: Students at the Ten Main Communist Universities on 1st January 1924

<u>Communist University</u>	<u>Students</u>
Peoples of the East	1,015
Western Minorities (Moscow)	1,196
Central Asia (Tashkent)	434
Transcaucasia (Tiflis)	289
Tatar (Kazan)	163
Sverdlov (Moscow)	1,289
Zinoviev (Petrograd)	835
Academy of Social Education	487
Uralo-Siberian (Ekaterinburg)	165
Lenin University (Saratov)	200
<u>Total</u>	<u>6,073</u>

Source: Zev Katz, Party-Political Education in Soviet Russia (Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of London, 1957), p.363.

In addition to the main national universities, the University of the East opened branches across Russia in 1921.² By 1933 Communist Universities had been set up in the Russian Federation for the Bashkirs, Crimean Tatars, Germans, Kazakhs, North Caucasian Highlanders, Karelians, Kirghiz, Buriat-Mongols and Udmurts. The general

¹ Schapiro, p.354.

² Katz, p.383

Communist Universities between them had 14 special national departments covering Ukrainians, Tatars, Mordvinians, Chinese, Koreans, and the Northern nationalities. Only the Chuvash, Karakalpaks, Dagestanis and Yakuts had no special provision made for them at the Communist Universities.¹

Courses at the national universities differed from those at the Sverdlovsk University in Moscow in that they concentrated more on the recent history of the revolutionary movements in Russia because of the relative lack of knowledge in these areas among the non-Russians.² As with the Party schools, training was largely general or technical rather than political, and in fact relatively few of the teaching staff were themselves communists. This was most pronounced at the Kazan Communist University where, in 1924, only 19.4% of teachers were communist.³

So a great deal of attention was devoted to providing a general and political education to non-Russian communists and potential communists, especially among Muslims. The emphasis was on the Communist Universities which produced many of the leading administrators and communist cadres in the national republics and regions. Although the numbers involved were small relative to the overall population, the report on the 1927 Party Census was able to claim:

Notwithstanding the small number of political educational institutions in the national republics,

¹ Katz, p.380

² Idem, p.384

³ Idem, p.365

political education of the nationals occupies an outstanding position. The majority of the Party activists and the leading officials of the national regions received their main education in Party schools and communist universities. Since there were no old Party cadres of nationals it would have been impossible, without these institutions, to receive the indispensable trained officials for the nativisation of the Party, Soviet and other administrative institutions in those areas.¹

With some places at the Party schools and universities open to non-Party members, they were in part instruments of recruitment. But mostly they were intended to provide the Party with national communists who had both the technical and literacy skills needed to head the national Soviet administrations, the necessary understanding of their own national cultures, and a sufficiently internationalist communist outlook to ensure a smooth implementation of socialist principles in the national republics. The Bolsheviks made no real attempts to 'Bolshevise' their recruits from the nationalist movements, relying instead on the long-term development of a new generation of national communists.

Although Russians were still over-represented in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1926, their dominance was far less than it had been in 1917. Table 5.2 shows the membership of ten nationalities in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, compared to the size of the nationalities as a proportion of the population of

¹ Katz, pp.145-147.

the USSR as a whole. (None of the other nationalities made up more than 0.5% of the total Party membership). In each of the national republics and regions, the local nationality made up a significant proportion of the Communist Party membership in the region, as table 5.3 shows.

Table 5.2: Members and Candidate Members of the Communist Party, Compared to the Size of Each Nationality as a Proportion of the Entire Population of the USSR in 1926/1927

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Members of CPSU</u>	<u>% of Total Membership</u>	<u>% in Total Population</u>
Total	1,061,860	100.00	100.00
Russian	688,855	64.91	53.05
Ukrainian	122,928	11.58	21.27
Jews	45,342	4.27	1.77
Bielorussian	32,649	3.08	3.23
Armenian	18,088	1.71	1.07
Georgian	16,136	1.52	1.24
Tatar	14,711	1.39	1.99
Uzbek	13,295	1.25	2.66
Latvian	12,198	1.15	-
Kazakh	11,950	1.13	2.71
Polish	11,158	1.05	0.53
Turkic	10,841	1.02	1.16
Others	63,709	5.94	9.32

Source: Natsional'naia politika VKP(b) pp.36-37, 137.

Table 5.3: Proportion of CPSU Members and Candidate
Members of the Titular Nationality in the National
Regions and Republics in 1927.

<u>Republic or Region</u>	<u>% of CPSU Members from Titular Nationality</u>
Ukraine	51.9
Bielorussia	52.3
Azerbaidzhan	35.7
Armenia	90.5
Georgia	55.4
Uzbekistan	42.9
Tadzhikistan	41.4
Turkmenistan	34.7
Bashkiria	17.0
Daghestan	67.3
Karelia	13.5
Crimea (Tatars)	9.5
Tataria	33.9
Kazakhstan	35.3
Kirghizia	50.6
Yakutia	36.2
Chuvashia	61.9
Volga German	31.8
Votiak	18.6
Mari	43.3
Kalmyk	69.9
Komi	87.1

Table 5.3 (cont.)

<u>Republic or Region</u>	<u>% of CPSU Members from Titular Nationality</u>
Buriat-Mongol	25.1
Oirat	16.4
Ingush	80.9
Kabardino-Balkar	63.2
Karachai	52.8
North Ossetia	85.8
Chechenia	51.1
Cherkess	25.3

Source: Natsional'naia politika VKP(b), pp.138-143.

Even more significant is the proportion of nationals in the highest Party and Soviet institutions in the Soviet republics. Although data are provide for up to twelve categories, table 5.4 provides only the figures for two types of Ispolkom: local Ispolkoms (raion and volost) and district (okrug and uezd) Ispolkoms. The former reflect closely the figures for the other categories.

Table 5.4: Percentage of Nationals on Raion, Volost, Okrug and Uezd Ispolkoms in 1927.

<u>Republic</u>	<u>% Nationals on Raion and Volost Ispolkoms</u>	<u>% Nationals on Okrug and Uezd Ispolkoms</u>
Ukraine	80.1	59.2
Bielorussia	79.2	60.5
Azerbaidzhan	77.4	77.1
Armenia	80.5	87.1
Georgia	-	70.0
Turkmenistan	68.3	52.7
Uzbekistan	76.0	54.6

Source: Natsional'naia politika VKP(b), pp.209-212.

Thus, by 1927 the number of national (that is, non-Russian) communists had increased massively. In the national republics and regions, local nationals made up a substantial proportion of the Communist Party membership and a majority on the Soviet administrative bodies at all levels. The success of the Bolsheviks in co-opting and recruiting national communists was one of the most important factors in creating stable national-territorial units. Although some former members of nationalist parties remained in important positions in the Communist Party, most of these individuals were newly recruited as a result of the Bolsheviks' efforts to create national cadres.

Overall, the Bolsheviks' policy of recruitment of national communists succeeded in creating an atmosphere where the culture of national minorities and national self-identity could flourish within a territorial and political system that satisfied much of the aspirations of the non-Russians. This meant conceding more influence than would have been ideal to elements whose ideas were ultimately at odds with the basic principles of Marxism, but it should be remembered that, while Sultan-Galiev was charged with the most serious displays of the nationalist deviation in 1923, the other manifestations of this deviation, in Ukraine and Georgia, were embodied in established and trusted Old Bolsheviks. Indeed the strongest testament to the influence of the national communists on the direction of national policy in the 1920's is the extent to which their ideas were adopted by many Bolsheviks of long standing, often bringing them into conflict with Moscow. The fruitfulness of the Bolshevik recruitment of nationalists no less than the adaptive skills of the nationalists themselves is indicated by the survival in many areas of the newly converted national communists in positions of authority longer than the original Bolsheviks who had led the revolution in the borderlands until they, too, were purged almost to a man by Stalin in the 1930's.

CHAPTER 6: "CULTURAL AUTONOMY" - EDUCATION, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

National territories with a solid ethnic population and their own national communist leaderships effectively endowed the minorities with a sense of national identity. But the long-term aim of these policies was to "raise the cultural level" of the non-Russians. Although 'culture' is used here in the broadest sense, including economic development, central to this policy was the improvement of culture in the narrower sense, through education and the arts. Given the development of national policy, it followed that culture should be promoted in a national form, and came to embrace traditional forms of culture including religion. The national approach to education and culture served to further cement national identity. In every region of the Russian Empire, illiteracy had been even more widespread among the national minorities than it had among the Russians, apart from a few of the smaller European minorities.¹ This fact made the promotion of national education even more urgent. It has already been noted that the widespread involvement of the early national communists in educational and cultural activities had a deep impact on this process. The primacy of native language education, now recognised by the Bolsheviks, had always been central to the ideas of the Austro-Marxists, the Bund, the Ukrainian nationalist movement and the Tatar Jadidists.

¹ Natsional'naia Politika VKP(b), p.273.

There were two schools of Marxist thought on the question of education in general: according to the first, which finds some support in Marx's writings, education's primary role was in the economic promotion of socialism and accordingly should be predominantly vocational; in the second view, which combined elements of classical Marxism (especially Engels) with the ideas of progressive west European educationalists, education should aim at promoting the all-round development of the child and liberate him or her, in the words of Engels, from "the one-sidedness which the contemporary division of labour forces on each individual."¹ While the first had its supporters among the Bolsheviks and among non-Communist parents who saw the acquisition of technical skills as a fast-track to their children's advancement, the second view prevailed among the Bolshevik leadership and especially in the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment (Narkompros). An expanded and reformed education system was going to lay the foundations for the future of socialism not only by promoting the literacy and skills necessary to advanced industrialisation, but by raising the general cultural level of Soviet children.²

Education was a major priority for the Bolsheviks and was allocated 8.5% of the total state budget of the RSFSR for 1918, when the immediate priorities were military. If the high priority accorded to education for Soviet children in general reflected the Bolsheviks' belief that the low cultural level and illiteracy of the predominantly peasant population was a barrier to the

¹ Frederick Engels, "Principles of Communism", Appendix to Marx and Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (Moscow, 1977), p.92.

² Sheila Fitzpatrick, Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934 (Cambridge, 1979), pp.3-18.

building of socialism, this was doubly the case among the national minorities. As Stalin put it in April 1918,

Soviet power has not yet succeeded in becoming a people's power to quite the same extent in the border regions inhabited by culturally backward elements....conditions as regards language and manner of life in these regions, which are moreover economically backward, have somewhat complicated the consolidation of Soviet power there....It is necessary to raise the masses to the level of Soviet power...¹

The educational tasks were more urgent in the borderlands, but even greater problems had to be overcome. There were fewer schools than in central Russia, and the buildings themselves faced destruction in the course of the Civil War. More serious was the shortage of teachers and textbooks in the native languages. Given the scale of the task, the success of the Communists in nativising schools by 1927 was truly remarkable. It is therefore even more surprising that the western literature on Soviet education has virtually ignored the question of education of national minorities.²

Although a joint commission for cultural and educational matters was established by Narkomnats and Narkompros in May 1918,³ until the end of 1918 the initiative on education of national minorities rested primarily with the individual national commissariats and departments of Narkomnats, each of which had a special

¹ Stalin, Vol.IV, p.75.

² e.g. Fitzpatrick, op. cit. does not refer to the education of national minorities.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, ll.25, 27, 29.

cultural-educational section. By the end of the year some progress had been made - a number of new schools had been opened in the Volga region and the borderlands,¹ schools had been set up in Moscow and elsewhere for Bielorussian refugees,² a Jewish seminary was opened in Moscow,³ the Mari section had started a teacher training course⁴ and so on. Most of these efforts were centred in Moscow, however, and Narkomnats failed to establish any national apparatus to deal with education. In general progress was very slow in spite of the urgency of this task implied in Stalin's pronouncements.

Two essential reasons for this tardiness are apparent from a series of articles on the education of national minorities by S.M. Dimanshtein, published in Zhizn Natsional'nostei in December 1918. The first problem was one of finances; the cultural-educational commission had submitted enormous estimates for the second half of 1918, requesting 25,023,573 roubles for the publication of literature and textbooks in twelve different languages; 8,668,325 roubles for out of school education for 13 nationalities; 23,135,315 roubles for schools for 4 nationalities; and 3,693,075 roubles for cultural work to come out of the budget of Proletkult. Only a fraction of these requests were met by the government, while Proletkult provided only 483,130 roubles.⁵

The second problem was the attitude of Dimanshtein himself, who as well as being the head of the Jewish Commissariat was Narkomnats' principle spokesman on education. In the first of his articles he refers only

¹ ZN no.6, 15th December 1918, p.1.

² ZN no.2, 22nd December 1918, p.7; ZN no.5, 8th December 1918, p.7.

³ ZN no.2, 22nd December 1918, p.7.

⁴ ZN no.6, 15th December 1918, p.7.

⁵ ZN no.6, 15th December 1918, p.1.

to the need to eradicate illiteracy as the motive for improving education among the national minorities¹, In his second article, spread over two issues of Zhizn Natsional'nostei, he went much further. He opened by inveighing against the theories of the Austro-Marxists and the Bund for promoting national schools, which would encourage nationalism and, by treating the rich and the poor equally, would help the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia dominate. He himself, by contrast, was a proletarian internationalist, and while this did not contradict "the striving for a national language" it meant he was opposed to any moves which might promote national unity above class struggle. The revolution, by overthrowing the domination of one nationality and dissipating the fear of the Russians, had removed the need for national guarantees altogether. As a result "many questions of education have nothing to do with nationality, but only involve a language problem". Accordingly, the education of national minorities was mostly reduced to a question of translation. The purpose of education was to encourage the coming together of nations, and one of the priorities in the national school was the teaching of the dominant language in each region (not necessarily Russian) to every child. It was economically essential that "each worker must know the language of his comrades with whom he works in the same factory". Dimanshtein therefore supported the transfer of responsibility for the education of national minorities to Narkompros, as this would centralise resources and ensure a non-chauvinistic, internationalist approach to education.² According to this approach, language was the only special factor in the education of

¹ ZN no.6, 15th December 1918, p.1.

² ZN no.7, 22nd December 1918, p.3; ZN no.8, 29th December 1918, p.3.

national minorities, who would anyway be required to learn a second language for practical reasons, and would otherwise receive the same education as Russian children as the disappearance of national oppression had removed the need for anything further.

These views of Dimanshtein were, however, at odds with the attitude of the Muskom and many other national commissariats and the local branches of Narkomnats, as well as with Stalin's views on the importance of raising national culture. Dimanshtein's supposition that the fear of Great Russian domination had been removed was certainly not shared by Lenin and many other leading Bolsheviks. Both the internationalists and the supporters of national schools, however, came to support the transfer of responsibilities to Narkompros; the former because the centralisation of education should have promoted internationalism, the latter because Narkompros had more resources at its disposal. In agreeing to transfer responsibility in July 1918 the collegium of Narkomnats, however, indicated its concern that national factors should be properly addressed by insisting on representation from each commissariat and department of Narkomnats on the Narkompros committee and reserving to Narkomnats the right to open national schools itself and in general to exercise initiative and control.¹ Narkomnats continued to exert considerable influence over national education after its transfer, and its own nominee, P. Makintsian, was appointed manager of the Narkompros Department for the Education of National Minorities.²

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, ll.46-47.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.86.

What may have come as a surprise to Dimanshtein and the rest of the Narkomnats collegium was that Narkompros, which he had expected to promote internationalist education, proved itself extremely receptive to the demands of national education. The Commissar of Enlightenment Lunacharskii showed his colours in a later dispute over Hebrew education, where he stood virtually alone in support of the Tarbut against the combined opposition of the Evsektiia and the majority of the Narkompros collegium.¹ At this time Narkompros was keenly promoting the all-round cultural development of Soviet children, and it was natural to assume that this could be achieved most effectively if carried out in the national form.

Thus the transfer of responsibility for the education of national minorities from Narkomnats to Narkompros boosted native language education by harnessing the considerable enthusiasm of Narkompros' leadership to the commissariat's financial and material resources which dwarfed those available to the national commissariats. At the end of October 1918 Narkompros published its proposals on Schools for National Minorities in Izvestiia:

- 1) All nationalities inhabiting the RSFSR enjoy the right to organise teaching in their native language at the level of both the Unified Workers' School [Elementary School] and the United Labour School [High School].
- 2) Schools for National Minorities are to be opened wherever there exists a sufficient number of pupils of the nationality for the organisation of a school. The

¹ Halevy, p.132.

numerical requirement is set at the level of no fewer than 25 pupils for each and every age group.

3) With the aim of cultural drawing together and the development of class solidarity between the labourers of the various nationalities, the study of the language of the largest population of the given region [oblast] is to be introduced in the Schools of National Minorities.

4) Schools for National Minorities are state schools, and are subject in all respects to the position on United Labour Schools published in no. 225 of *Izvestiia VTsIK*.

5) All administration of Schools for National Minorities is concentrated in Narkompros, and in oblast or guberniya Departments of Peoples' Education
Note 1: For the management of Schools for National Minorities a special department is to be set up attached to Narkompros, the collegium of which ought to include an equal number [to the Narkompros members] of representatives of Narkomnats who are subject to final approval by Narkompros.

Note 2: For the management of Schools for National Minorities in the regions, oblast and guberniya departments are to organise sections [one for each minority in the region] on the same basis as the centre.¹

Although this decree did not quite guarantee native language education for every single child, the requirement of 25 pupils per age group meant that relatively small minority communities could in theory demand their own school. The only concession to internationalism is the requirement to teach a second

¹ Izvestiia VTsIK, 31st October 1918, p.4.

language, but minority education was to be conducted in separate schools; at no time was consideration given to the possibility of catering for the needs of different national groups within the same schools.

The separate character of education for national minorities is even clearer in the instruction on the organisation of Sub-departments for the Education of National Minorities in the regions issued by Narkompros in February 1919. One such sub-department was to be organised at the oblast, guberniya, or uezd level to cover all the minorities of the region, rather than being organised for each minority; but their collegiums were to consist primarily of representatives of the local national minorities, subject to approval by the regional Department of Education. The sub-departments had authority over all cultural-educational establishments and teaching institutions of the national minorities and their responsibilities were:

- 1) To open and organise [educational] establishments, integrating them into the state network.
- 2) To compose lists of candidates for appointment to responsible posts in the establishments.
- 3) To stock lending libraries in the local tongue.
- 4) To oversee and approve the establishments' accounts.
- 5) To compile statistical data on the state of education among national minorities.
- 6) To issue information and instructions on cultural-educational matters - in the correct languages.

7) To remove harmful phenomena (e.g. nationalistic) from cultural-educational work, to lead and oversee all educational work.¹

The sub-departments therefore had broad responsibility over the personnel, financing and content of education for national minorities, and also the political responsibility for preventing the flourishing of nationalism in the education system. This last provision may have aimed at pre-empting the objections of those hostile elements who viewed the national schools as hotbeds of nationalism. Aware of possible conflicts with local Russian-dominated Soviet organs, Narkompros added two further paragraphs to the instruction to strengthen the hand of the minorities; firstly, any disagreements between a Sub-department for the Education of National Minorities and the regional Department of Education to which it was nominally subordinate were to be referred directly to Narkompros in Moscow. Secondly, in the initial organisation of the sub-departments the regional Department for Education was to share responsibility equally with the local departments of the national commissariats.

Narkompros' authority extended only over the RSFSR, but the other Soviet republics adopted similar principles. In one of its earliest declarations the provisional Soviet Ukrainian government of 1919 decreed that "the language of instruction in unified workers' schools will depend on the will of the local worker and peasant population."² Although Bolshevik hostility to Ukrainian national forms initially reduced the number of Ukrainian schools, Ukrainisation in education received a boost in

¹ Izvestiia VTsIK, 14th February 1919.

² ZN no.12, 2nd February 1919, p.3.

1921 with the appointment of Shumskii as Commissar of Education and a series of laws passed in 1923 and 1924 meant that

instruction of all children was to be conducted in Ukrainian where that nationality predominated; where national minorities formed a compact group, they were to be guaranteed education in their native language. Both Ukrainian and Russian were made compulsory subjects in all schools, irrespective of the language of instruction.¹

In addition to their own resources, the Soviet republics received special credits for education from the government of the RSFSR, to the sum of 10 million roubles each for Bielorussia and Ukraine between 1918 and 1922.² In Georgia it was claimed that nativisation of schools for Georgians and Armenians was completed by 1921, while those for Azeris, Abkhazians and Ossetians took until the end of the decade. In Armenia and Azerbaidzhan the principle of native language education was adopted soon after sovietisation.³

In the autonomous regions and republics of the RSFSR education was one of the areas of complete local autonomy. The Orthodox Church had carried out some educational work among Christian peoples such as the Chuvash and Mari,⁴ while the mosques had run schools for

¹ Bohdan Krawchenko, Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine (London, 1985), p.88.

² A.E. Izmaylov and M.N. Kolmakova, "Stanovlenie i razvitie sovetskoy natsional'noy shkoli", in N.P. Kuzin et al. (eds.), Ocherki istorii shkoli i pedagogicheskoy misli narodov SSSR (Moscow, 1980), p.145.

³ Idem, pp.159-161.

⁴ Isabelle Kreindler, "A Neglected source of Lenin's Nationality Policy", Slavic Review, no.1, March 1977, pp.86-100.

Muslim children with a strong religious content. But in general native language education had been sadly neglected under tsarism. In their efforts to reinforce their status as autonomous national groups and to strengthen the cohesiveness of their inhabitants, the autonomous republics and regions strove particularly hard to improve levels of native language education. In the Tatar Autonomous Republic, Tatarisation of education became a key aim of Tatar Communists such as G. Ibrahimov.¹

The opening of national schools and teacher training started soon after the revolution. In the Mari region, courses for Mari teachers commenced at the end of 1918² and measures included building six 'school townlets' which catered for all age groups and provided accommodation for pupils. By 1923 there were 67 Mari schools. In Bashkiria three year teaching courses were in operation in two cities by the summer of 1921.³ There were 23 national schools for the Kabardi in 1920/21, the year preceding the creation of the Kabardino-Balkar AO, but 57 in the year following it, one indication of the effect autonomous status had; the Komi AO had 159 schools in 1922/23.⁴ By the middle of 1919 there were already 51 Kalmyk schools and over 100 Kirghiz schools, where previously there had only been ten.⁵ By October 1921, Zhizn Natsional'nostei reported that the number of schools in the Kalmyk region had risen to 84 first grade and 2 2nd grade, together with 7 boarding schools and 9 'colonial and foreign' schools, catering for 5,565 Kalmyk

¹ Rorlich, pp.151-153.

² ZN no.6, 15th December 1918, p.7.

³ ZN no.113, 30th July 1921, p.1.

⁴ Izmaylov and Kolmakova, pp.148-149.

⁵ ZN no.23, 27th April 1919, p.3; ZN no.24, 4th May 1919, p.2.

and 449 Russian children.¹ In Central Asia as a whole, according to a Soviet source, the number of native schools grew from 345 in 1914-1915 to 2022 at the end of 1920, catering for 165,122 pupils.²

Nativisation of Higher Education proved more difficult than in the schools, thanks to the near monopoly of higher academic posts by conservative Russians. Thus as late as 1927-28 only 350 local Muslims attended the university of Tashkent out of a total of 5,000 students,³ while in the Ukraine in 1922 only 19% of students at institutes and 16% at technical colleges were Ukrainian.⁴ Narkomnats did its best to rectify this situation, lending its support to the creation of a Bielorussian university in 1918⁵ and engaging in a protracted struggle to save the polytechnic in Vladikavkaz from closure by Narkompros late in 1921.⁶ Narkomnats also intervened on several occasions to preserve the Lazarus Institute in Petrograd as a centre for Armenian studies.⁷ The most significant attempt to involve non-Russians in Higher Education was through the Institute of Oriental Studies set up in Moscow in 1920 largely on Narkomnats' initiative.⁸ Narkomnats retained its control over the institute, appointing to its collegium in April 1922 Sultan-Galiev, Ibragimov, Manatov, Tanachev and Avsaragov, which suggests the institute had a predominantly Muslim nationalist character.⁹

¹ ZN no.118, 3rd October 1921, p.3.

² Aminov and Babakhodzhaev, pp.162-163.

³ Carrère d'Encausse, p.189.

⁴ Krawchenko, p.91.

⁵ ZN no.20, 6th April 1918, p.3.

⁶ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.8, ll.22, 27, 92, 97.

⁷ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.51; d.8, ll.27, 98, 101-102.

⁸ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.54.

⁹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.9, l.4.

Native language education was set as a target not just in schools and universities, but in pre-school and adult education. In Bashkiria, the provision of pre-school education was higher than in later stages of education - in 1921, 94 kindergartens and 305 instructors catered for 4,840 children.¹ The first All-Russian Congress on Pre-school Education held in the summer of 1919 discussed a special report on 'National Kindergartens' prepared by the Bundist Ester Frumkin. The congress concluded that general educational principles rather than nationality policy determined that kindergarten education should be conducted in the language best understood by the child:

we must strive to provide each child with the conditions for joyous, free and creative development, which means that preschool education must be provided in the mother tongue [rodnom yazike] which they actually speak, regardless of the nationality they belong to.

The congress demanded that the educational authorities provide workers familiar with native languages and cultures as well as native language textbooks. In a statement directed against the hard-line internationalists, the congress resolved:

An international spirit is not achieved by lumping together children who can not understand each other, but rather by introducing in the native tongue the spirit of world-wide revolution.²

Although this was an all-Russian congress, the overall attitude of the delegates indicates the effect

¹ ZN no.118, 3rd October 1921, p.3.

² ZN no. 28, 1st June 1919, p.2.

educationalists had on national policy. The stipulation that it should be the child's mother tongue (i.e. the language spoken by his or her parents) rather than its national group which determined the language of instruction was clearly based on educational grounds rather than any deliberate attempt to reinforce national identity. But in practise the general principle prevalent in Narkompros of promoting the all-round development of the child implied the use of the national language in most cases. Educational principles also led the congress to ridicule the notion that internationalism could be promoted by standardising education in a single language. This approach to the education of non-Russians prevailed at all levels of the educational establishment and was later reinforced by the widespread employment of former nationalists in education.

Narkomnats and its departments also paid especial attention to out of school education for adult workers and peasants. In a decision of 26th April 1918 the Narkomnats collegium insisted that out of school education for non-Russians should be controlled by Narkomnats. It proposed the creation of literacy schools, Labourers' Clubs "where workers and peasants would become literates", People's Universities, courses for educational instructors, and touring theatres, museums and exhibitions.¹ In March 1919 the commissariat equipped the literary-instructional train 'October Revolution' with Jewish, Ukrainian, Polish and Muslim instructors and a large supply of literature to tour the regions.² The national commissariats and departments also put native language educational and propaganda work at the centre of their activities, setting up literacy

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.1, l.12.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.2, l.97.

clubs, running cultural events and employing academics to translate literary and historical works.¹ In April 1919, the Mari section boasted that "libraries, reading rooms, cultural-educational circles, proletarian clubs, people's homes are being opened. National shows, meetings and gatherings are being conducted." The government was "giving them [the Mari] the possibility of building life in accordance with the past of their nationality."² These activities were later taken up and expanded by the autonomous regions and republics.

The growth in native language schools, starting from virtually zero, was impressive in many areas in the early years following the Russian Revolution. But educational provision for non-Russian children still fell far short of the targets set by Narkompros in 1918. The problems besetting the nativisation of education were clearly revealed at a special All-Russia Conference of Workers in the Education of Peoples of non-Russian language held in August 1919. Although there were no Ukrainians, Bielorrussians, Lithuanians or Transcaucasian nationals present, 17 language groups were represented by 155 delegates. Almost half (74) were communists, 41 communist sympathisers, 16 non-party, 12 Bundists, 6 Farainigte, 5 Poale Zion and 1 anarchist. 111 were active in education, so the congress as a whole was broadly representative of those educational workers sympathetic to Narkompros' aims in national minority education. Dissatisfaction with the progress towards those aims was shown by a poll conducted among the delegates. When asked "do you find the current organisation of education of non-Russian speakers satisfactory?" only 19 replied yes, while 88 said no. In

¹ ZN no.3, 27th November 1918, p.8.

² ZN no.22, 20th April 1919, p.4.

the key speeches from the platform, Lunacharskii, Dimanshtein and Makintsian praised the progress made since Narkompros took over education of national minorities, while warning against the dangers of permitting petit-bourgeois nationalism to gain a foothold in the schools. The speeches from the floor could hardly have provided a sharper contrast. Far from worrying about the encroachment of nationalist influences, the delegates bemoaned the obstacles to the progress of their work. The principle complaints were against shortages in personnel and resources, and the obstructive attitude of the Russian authorities in the regions. Speaker after speaker told anecdotes about the refusal of local soviets and Narkompros departments to comply with the needs of the native population.¹

The resolution of the congress proposed a range of measures which were later hailed by Soviet historians as a turning point in the education of national minorities.² But it was clearly an uphill struggle to implement the Narkompros position. The conference resolved to introduce various new organisational measures, and to "pay serious attention to the obstacles put in the path of educational work for minorities by the organs of provincial departments of people's education and other Soviet organs, arising from a poor understanding of the cultural needs of national minorities". Makintsian acknowledged the shortcomings in his department's work and promised improvements.

In the short term, however, it proved impossible to do much about the shortage of trained personnel and the obstructive attitude of the local authorities. In

¹ ZN no.40, 24th August 1919, p.2; ZN no.41, 31st August 1919, p.2.

² Izmaylov and Kolmakova, p.145.

January 1920 a report of the Chuvash Department of Narkomnats complained that it did not have the necessary authority to carry out its basic tasks of raising the economic and educational level of the Chuvash. Specifically, "functionaries in the region are ignoring the peculiar social conditions and language of the Chuvash. They work on the principle that the use of Russian in schools and other institutions combats nationalism", while the more active Chuvash elements had long departed for the Red Army leaving behind an older generation who spoke no Russian and could not participate in the work of the soviets.¹

The shortage of cadres had a disastrous affect on the work of the national departments in general, but particularly in education, and was greatly exacerbated by the demands of the civil war. The formation of national units meant that reliable native cadres were at a premium for political work in the Red Army. The Votiak section for Viatsk guberniya started the year 1919 with only one manager, by March it had four officials, but one of these was soon removed to work at the front. At the end of April the section temporarily closed altogether as its staff were put at the disposal of the political department of the 3rd Army. At the start of May preparations for opening Votiak schools came to naught as educational staff were called to the front and the schools failed to open at all. In the summer the section could only muster 13 students for its 'flying campaign' of education and agitation among the Votiaks.² The department for education in the Kalmyk steppe registered similar complaints - in one region, out of 11 school

¹ ZN, no.59, 11th January 1920, p.1.

² ZN no.58, 4th January 1920, p.2.

heads, two were dead and two more departed for the front, with no replacements available.

The same report illustrates another problem directly associated with the civil war. The department complained that at least four schools had been totally destroyed by troops billeted in school buildings, and threatened that education in the steppe might have to cease altogether in 1920 unless the military authorities acted to prevent the billeting of troops in schools.¹ Given the suitability of school buildings for temporarily housing troops, this must have been a common problem in and near front-line areas, and severely affected educational work among the national minorities. Cultural problems also hampered educational work. In February 1919 Zhizn Natsional'nostei reported that "popular education among the Muslims frequently clashes with religious fanaticism and traditional customs",² and following the official separation of church and state Muslim peasants in Khvalinsk uezd were refusing to send their children to school.³

Similar problems affected education in the Ukraine, although here it was the attitude of the central Soviet government rather than local authorities which proved a barrier. In spite of the February 1919 decree, according to Bohdan Krawchenko, who generally takes a negative view of the Bolsheviks' early achievements in this field, "when the first and second Bolshevik governments were installed in Ukraine, the country already had a modest network of Ukrainian language schools. The Bolsheviks, however, did not trust these establishments, charging

¹ ZN no.60, 18th January 1920, p.3.

² ZN no.12, 2nd February 1919, p.6.

³ ZN no.20, 6th April 1919, p.3.

them with Ukrainian nationalism and chauvinism, and converting many Ukrainised schools back into Russian ones. Irrespective of the fact that in 1921 the equality of Ukrainian and Russian in the republic was proclaimed, the local plenipotentiary 'when he saw a teacher or a pupil with a certificate written in Ukrainian would froth with anger, often rip it up and stamp on it'. This chauvinism received its theoretical justification in the formulation 'the struggle between two cultures'.¹ But this formulation was soon dropped and a more positive attitude to Ukrainian education adopted. From hardly any Ukrainian language teachers in 1917, by 1923 there were 45,000 out of the 100,000 deemed necessary, and the printing of Ukrainian language textbooks took off in 1924.²

The situation improved steadily after the civil war, and personnel were transferred from the Red Army to the disposal of the newly formed autonomous regions and republics, particularly for employment in education,³ their numbers and attitude swelled by the national communists. At the beginning of 1920 Narkomnats set up a special publishing department to oversee publications in non-Russian languages,⁴ and in May together with Narkompros negotiated for a special supply of paper to meet the educational needs of the national minorities.⁵ By 1924, 25 different languages were being published in the Soviet Union, rising to 34 the following year and 44 by 1927.⁶ The resolution of the 10th Party Congress in March 1921 dealt specifically with the need to develop

¹ Krawchenko, p.87

² Idem, pp.87-88.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.6, l.82.

⁴ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.3.

⁵ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.40.

⁶ Izmaylov and Kolmakova, p.147.

education in native languages.¹ In June 1922 the Politburo enhanced the status of national minority education by creating a federal committee on education with representatives from each autonomous region and republic which was subordinate to Narkomnats but had the right of appeal directly to the VTsIK or Sovnarkom.² The strict separation of church and state was also relaxed with regard to Muslims in the 1920's, and in October 1923 the Politburo even authorised the organisation of Muslim Spiritual Schools, thus helping to overcome the resistance of Muslim parents to the education system.³

By this time the autonomous regions and republics wielded more authority than had the departments of Narkomnats and Narkompros, the national communists had brought a positive and experienced approach to national education into the Communist Party and the administration, and the attitude of the centre against the dangers of nationalism in culture had softened. The Twelfth Party Congress in 1923 reinforced the principle of national education,⁴ which was vigorously promoted throughout the 1920's, especially in the federated republics, where use of the national language became the norm both in education and administration. A comprehensive survey undertaken in December 1927 shows how far the soviets had progressed in education for non-Russians. Table 6.1 shows that native language education for children in their own republics was near total.

¹ KPSS v rezoliutsiiakh, p.252.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.299, l.9.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.385, l.4; Carrère d'Encausse, pp.166-167.

⁴ See below, chapter 8.

Table 6.1: Native Language Education for non-Russian Children in the Republic of their own Titular Nationality in December 1927

<u>Soviet Republic</u>	<u>% Taught only in Native Language</u>
Ukraine	93.9
Bielorussia	90.2
Georgia ^a	98.1
Azerbaidzhan ^a	95.5
Armenia ^a	88.3
Uzbekistan	96.9
Turkmenistan	93.5
 <u>Autonomous Republic</u>	
Kazakhstan	89.1
Kirghizistan	94,9
Bashkir	50.0
Buriat-Mongol	45.2
Dagestan (Gortsi)	15.4
Dagestan (Kumiks)	8.9
Karelia (Finnish)	42.2
Crimea (Tatars)	90.6
Volga German	98.2
Tatar	95.7
Chuvash	92.3

Note^a: Figures are only given for each nationality in the whole of the Transcaucasian federation.

Source: Natsional'naia politika VKP(b) (Moscow, 1930), pp.278-279..

In the autonomous regions, the principle that children should study in their national language and also in the principle language of the surrounding area made it more likely that children would study in two languages, apart from the Kalmyks, who mostly learnt in Russian (table 6.2). This was also true in the smaller Buriat-Mongol autonomous republic and Dagestan.

Table 6.2: National Language and Mixed Language Education for Children of the Titular Nationality in the Autonomous Regions in December 1927.

<u>Autonomous Region</u>	<u>% Taught only in Native Language</u>	<u>% Taught in 2 Languages</u>
Votiak	2.7	86.0
Kalmyk	8.6	-
Komi	48.6	49.9
Mari	49.8	46.4

Source: Natsional'naia politika VKP(b), pp.278-279.

Native language education for national minorities outside of their republic or region was also widespread. The figures for four-year and seven-year schools in Bielorussia indicate a wide range of national schools in 1927 (tables 6.3 and 6.4). The proportion of each minority nationality in Bielorussia being taught in their own language, or their own language and one other, was: Russians - 81.2%, Poles, 48.2%, Jews - 57.1%.¹

¹ Natsional'naia politika VKP(b), p.278.

Table 6.3: Four Year Schools in the Bielorussian SSR in December 1927

<u>Language</u>	<u>Schools</u>	<u>Teachers</u>	<u>Pupils</u>
Bielorussian	4,363	6,153	296,182
Yiddish	146	445	11,212
Polish	129	162	6,159
Russian	118	289	11,299
Mixed Russian/Biel.	362	646	29,746
Other	45	76	2,060
<u>Total</u>	<u>5,163</u>	<u>7,771</u>	<u>356,658</u>

Source: Jan Zaprudnik, Belarus - at a Crossroads in History (Boulder, 1993), p.81.

Table 6.4: Seven Year Schools in the Bielorussian SSR in December 1927

<u>Language</u>	<u>Schools</u>	<u>Teachers</u>	<u>Pupils</u>
Bielorussian	176	2,193	66,563
Yiddish	53	733	13,778
Polish	12	145	2,627
Russian	18	305	7,910
Mixed Russian/Biel.	40	600	15,988
Other	9	180	4,078
<u>Total</u>	<u>308</u>	<u>4,156</u>	<u>110,944</u>

Source: Jan Zaprudnik, Belarus - at a Crossroads in History (Boulder, 1993), p.81.

Table 6.5: Children of National Minorities Receiving Education in their own National Languages in December 1927 (%).

<u>Republic</u> <u>Nationality</u>	<u>In National</u> <u>Language</u>	<u>In Own and</u> <u>2nd Lang.</u>	<u>In Russian</u> <u>Only</u>	<u>Other</u>
RSFSR				
Bielorussians	0.9	7.1	90.5	1.5
Ukrainians	5.5	12.8	81.4	0.3
Latvians	19.6	15.5	61.8	3.1
Poles	4.5	1.4	92.5	1.6
Germans	84.2	5.0	10.5	0.3
Jews (Yiddish)	8.0	3.1	86.6	2.3
Tatars	82.3	8.6	7.5	1.6
Kazakhs	88.6	5.9	4.4	1.1
Kirghiz	90.5	0.2	4.6	4.7
Chuvash	77.6	16.7	5.2	0.5
UKRAINE SSR				
Russians	67.1	14.1	-	18.8
Poles	45.7	6.6	3.9	43.8
Germans	84.6	4.7	3.6	7.1
Jews (Yiddish)	49.6	3.4	19.6	27.4
Moldavians	49.0	14.2	6.2	30.6
BIELORUSSIA SSR				
Russians	44.2	22.8	-	33.0
Poles	47.4	0.8	2.4	49.4
Jews (Yiddish)	55.5	1.6	11.5	31.4

Table 6.5 (continued)

<u>Republic</u>	<u>In National</u>	<u>In Own and</u>	<u>In Russian</u>	<u>Other</u>
<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Language</u>	<u>2nd Lang.</u>		
UZBEK SSR				
Russians	94.6	4.8	-	0.6
Jews (Yiddish)	62.3	0.0	31.9	5.8
Tatars	30.4	9.1	25.2	35.3
Armenians	33.0	6.8	59.1	1.1
Turkmens	33.0	-	-	67.0
Kazakhs	63.7	1.4	1.1	33.8
Tadzhiks	74.1	4.7	0.2	21.0
TURKMEN SSR				
Russians	85.7	14.2	-	0.1
Armenians	25.6	20.5	49.1	4.8
Turks	72.9	9.6	1.7	15.8
Uzbeks	70.2	7.6	1.6	20.6
KIRGHIZ ASSR				
Russians	97.7	1.7	-	0.6
Uzbeks	85.5	-	1.7	12.8
Ukrainians	-	-	98.3	1.7
CRIMEAN ASSR				
Tatars	90.6	7.4	1.9	0.1
Russians	93.6	4.3	-	2.1
Jews (Yiddish)	10.0	9.7	78.4	1.9
Ukrainians	1.9	-	96.6	1.5
TATAR ASSR				
Russians	96.6	2.8	-	0.6
Chuvash	71.7	20.6	6.4	1.3

Source: Natsional'naia politika VKP(b), pp.278-279.

The picture was not the same for all nationalities throughout the Soviet Union however. Table 6.5 shows that native language education for Germans and Muslims was well catered for in Russia and Ukraine. About half of Polish and Jewish children received native language education in Ukraine and Bielorussia, but only a small proportion did so in the RSFSR. Likewise, there were relatively few Ukrainian and Bielorussian schools in the RSFSR. In part this reflects the higher priority given to native language education by the Education Commissariats of Ukraine and Bielorussia with their Bundist and SR influences as compared with the RSFSR. On the other hand, whereas the Germans, Tatars, Kazakhs and Kirghiz of the RSFSR mostly lived in compact communities and were clearly differentiated in terms of their national or religious identities, there was a higher degree of assimilation among the Jews, Poles, Ukrainians and Bielorussians living in the RSFSR, and parents from these national groups may have seen a Russian language education as essential to their children's advancement. The same may have applied in Kirghizia, Kazakhstan and Crimea, where there was little or no provision for Ukrainian language education.

The relative strength of national differentiation of the Central Asian peoples, as well as the attention paid by the various republics to minority education, is reflected in the figures for the Uzbek, Turkmen and Kirghiz republic. While most Turkmen children were taught in Uzbek in the Uzbek SSR, the figures are reversed for Uzbek children in the Turkmen SSR, and are even more pronounced for Uzbeks in the Kirghiz ASSR. Tadzhiks and Kazakhs were more likely than Turkmen in the Uzbek SSR to be educated in their own language.

In all the republics the figures for children of national minorities being educated in both their own language and that of the predominant nationality are relatively low. (Bilingual schools were common only in the autonomous regions of the Russian Federation - table 6.2). The principles of bilingualism outlined by Narkompros had therefore been dropped. While there may have been practical considerations for this, it is clear that the priorities had change. Narkompros had supported bilingualism as promoting "cultural drawing together and the development of class solidarity."¹ Similar sentiments were expressed in a 1923 statement concerning national peace in Transcaucasia:

[we must] strengthen work on uniting the peasants and workers of all nationalities, acquainting them with the histories, cultures and struggles of the workers and peasants of other nations, and nourishing in the broad masses and especially the youth a truly international spirit.²

This approach, which anticipates modern 'multicultural' theories of education, was not systematically pursued. Instead, priority was given to ensuring each child was educated in a way which would encourage him or her to identify with their own nationality.

In general, by the end of the 1920's provision had been made for the education of non-Russians in their native tongues where there were significant minority communities and sufficient demand. This was true also for those nationalities that had no specific territory within the

¹ Izvestiia VTsIK, 31st October 1918, p.4.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.31, l.6.

Soviet Union. Thus in 1928 there were over 150 Latvian schools in operation.¹

Table 6.6: The growth of Yiddish Schools in Bielorussia, Ukraine and the RSFSR in the 1920's.

<u>Year</u>	<u>BIELORUSSIA</u>		<u>UKRAINE</u>		<u>RSFSR</u>	
	<u>Schools</u>	<u>Pupils</u>	<u>Schools</u>	<u>Pupils</u>	<u>Schools</u>	<u>Pupils</u>
1922	106	10,475	na	na	na	na
1923	98	12,241	na	na	83	10,000
1924	na	na	268	42,000	83	12,884
1925	140	19,085	na	na	na	na
1926	175	22,535	na	58,384	118	12,193
1927	184	24,073	na	69,000	na	^6,315

Note^a: Excludes Gomel district, transferred to Bielorussian SSR in 1926.

Source: Zvi Halevy, Jewish Schools under Czarism and Communism (New York, 1976), pp.176-178.

For Jewish children the situation was complicated by the existence of two types of school, Yiddish and Hebrew. The Bolsheviks, with the notable exception of Lunacharskii, were implacably hostile to the Hebrew language which was closely associated in their minds with Zionism and a backward-looking conservatism. After a protracted struggle, Narkompros decreed the complete cessation of Hebrew language education on 30th August

¹ Izmaylov and Kolmakova, p.158.

1919.¹ On the other hand Yiddish schools spread steadily across the Soviet Union throughout the 1920's, as table 6.6 illustrates. This growth was gradual, but steady. The Jews were unique as a non-territorial nationality, however. Overall, native language education was more readily available to national groups within their own republics or autonomous units than elsewhere, and played a major role in creating or reinforcing ethnic and cultural self-identity.

As noted in the previous chapter, the employment of nationalists in education may have been regarded by many Bolsheviks as a way of moving such people away from the more important political and economic structures. But their presence in the educational network could not but help reinforce the policy of nativisation in general, especially in the Ukraine and Bielorussia. The involvement of Narkompros in the national question, perhaps unexpectedly, also reinforced national self-identity. Although the local departments of Narkompros often proved obstructive to the needs of national minorities, the generally liberal-minded leadership of the Commissariat gave its full support to native language education. While Lenin's wife Krupskaya was not directly involved in work on national minorities, her presence in the Narkompros leadership may have provided a more direct link with Lenin's ideas than was the case with Narkomnats. The nativisation of schools could be seen as the most significant and lasting element of the Bolsheviks' national policy. The measures carried out in the 1920's ensured that national consciousness survived the russification of the 1930's.

¹ Halevy, p.132.

Language Planning

A question intimately connected with education was that of language. Although the immediate task of language planning was directed at administration, in the long term the standardisation of languages for each nationality would contribute to national unity and self-awareness and would need to be transmitted through the education system. In the Russian Empire many language groups were split into numerous dialects, some close to each other, others more differentiated, and many languages had no written forms. The russification policies of the former regime meant that little official attention was paid to other languages, but all the same a great deal of academic study of the different languages of the empire was still carried out and formed much of the scientific basis for early Soviet policies. The study of minority languages was necessary for both practical and political reasons; if children were to be educated in their native languages, then agreement on a standard version of a language which may have had many dialects was needed for the production of textbooks and other teaching materials, as well as for the training of teachers. The administrative needs of the Soviet republics, autonomous republics and autonomous regions also required a standardised language of administration.

At the same time, a national policy aimed at promoting national cohesiveness demanded that members of the same national group, however defined, shared the same language. To this end, Narkomnats and Narkompros agreed in May 1920 to form a joint commission for the study and

development of languages and scripts, especially for the more 'backward' nationalities.¹ In June 1921 Narkomnats formed another commission, charged with standardising languages for the autonomous republics and regions.² In the same year, Narkomnats sponsored research into ethnography and language in Turkestan, among the Zyrians, and in the North Caucasus.³ According to Simon Crisp, whose study of early Soviet language planning is the basis for much of this section,

after the revolution...attempts were made to put scientific study of these languages on a more systematic footing, above all by the formation of research institutes with distinguished scholars at their head, which engaged in numerous linguistic expeditions to study phonetic systems and dialect distribution.⁴

Experts from tsarist times, like E.F. Karskii, received important positions and continued to study and develop languages.⁵ The result of all this work was to produce a number of codified languages which were to be used as a standard in administration and education, where previously there may have been many dialects.

The choice of which dialect should form the basis was often problematic. Such was the case with Uzbek, where first of all the rural dialect was favoured, but was later dropped in favour of the dialect predominant in the

¹ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.40

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.6, l.110

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.6, ll.9, 51, 220, 225.

⁴ Simon Crisp, "Soviet Language Planning 1917-1953", in Michael Kirkwood (ed.), Language Planning in the Soviet Union (London, 1989), p.25.

⁵ E.F. Karskii, Ocherk nauchnoy razrabotki Russkogo Yazika v predelakh SSSR (Leningrad, 1926), p.95.

central urban areas, especially Tashkent. Crisp argues that the reason for this choice of dialect was that "the change of dialect basis had the effect of differentiating Uzbek from the other Turkic languages of Central Asia and emphasising its separate status",¹ while in the same volume Shirin Akiner sees the debate over dialects as "a political battle between the 'nationalist' faction and the pro-Russian faction" which the latter won by choosing a dialect which had more to do with the demands of industrialisation and was more familiar to Russian scholars.² While general political considerations may have influenced the choice of dialect, it is clear that the standardisation of Uzbek suited the purposes of the nationalists as well as the Bolsheviks.

In general, the priority for choosing a dialect was not so much the extent of its spoken use, but its role in the literary traditions of written languages, or its suitability for adapting to a written form in the cases of previously unwritten languages. Such was the case with Bashkir, Kirghiz, Karakalpak, Kabardin, Balkar, Chechen, Ingush, Circassian, Karachai, and the two Ossetian languages, Digor and Iron.³

Consolidating languages into standard written forms made perfect practical sense from the point of view of mass education for the non-Russians and for administrative needs. But it is clear from the forms chosen that cultural considerations often overrode practical expediency. In Karelia, Finnish was chosen as the official language ahead of the three major dialects

¹ Crisp, p.32.

² Shirin Akiner, "Uzbekistan: Republic of Many Tongues", in Michael Kirkwood (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.104.

³ Carrère d'Encausse, pp.178-180.

of Karelian for its cultural and literary associations and the prejudices of Finnish communists who saw Russian Karelia as inalienably linked to Finland. This was in spite of the fact that just over one thousand Finns lived in Soviet Karelia in 1923 compared to 101,000 Karelians. As Paul Austin has pointed out, "if the aim had been to give the indigenous Karelian population...a practical written language of their own, the creation of a literary Karelian would have been the most sensible solution on strictly linguistic grounds."¹

Crisp concludes that

behind the measures discussed...lies a pattern of attitudes towards language relations...In the early years of Soviet power the emphasis was on the linguistic traditions of peoples more or less oppressed under the tsarist regime. The need to win the cooperation of the various nationalities, coupled with Lenin's own views on the equality of languages (whatever the motivation of these), meant that the larger peoples were able to develop their existing linguistic traditions even if these had unsatisfactory religious or cultural associations, while smaller and demographically weaker peoples were encouraged to unite around the more developed languages of culturally prestigious neighbours.

¹ Paul M. Austin, 'Soviet Karelian: The Language that Failed', Slavic Review vol.51, no.1 (1992), pp.16-20.

Behind these policies lay "the atmosphere of commitment to the national languages as the primary vehicle of culture and progress for their speakers."¹

While language consolidation strengthened national differentiation, the pressures of internationalism and of political and economic centralisation suggested that a common language for all the Soviet peoples would have made practical and political sense. Serious consideration was given to this question in Narkomnats and Narkompros. The introduction of Esperanto as an international language even had its supporters, although this solution was rejected as utopian.² The most practical solution would have been the universal use of Russian, but this was regarded as politically unacceptable and received little official support in the 1920's even after the death of Lenin. In the 1920's one of the most influential Soviet linguists was Nikolai Iakovelich Marr, whose theories, according to Crisp,

in their original form suggested that the linguistic road to the socialist future lay not through stable bilingualism or even language shift, but through a process of language crossing to which all languages would contribute and which would result in a hybrid directly reflecting a higher stage of human political development.³

Marr's theories held that such a process would be spontaneous. Lenin had argued in 1914 that the will to

¹ Crisp, pp.36-37; Carrère d'Encausse sees language standardisation was a part of the Bolsheviks' 'divide and rule' tactic; Carrère d'Encausse, pp.177-178. Her views on this are discussed above, chapter 4.

² ZN no.44, 21st September 1919, p.4.

³ Crisp, p.37.

learn Russian would arise spontaneously.¹ Inasmuch as such theories were accepted, this may explain why no action was taken to promote a common tongue at this stage, although the success claimed by the Indian Army in developing the hybrid Hindustani language as the language of command (Hindustani is now widely used in the Indian cinema) suggests that a more active policy could have produced a workable lingua franca.²

Efforts to promote a common alphabet went much further, however. Initially, it was necessary to devise scripts for the many unwritten languages, while the existence of numerous separate scripts for relatively small language groups caused logistical problems. In 1918 the Narkomnats Section for Caucasian Mountain peoples complained that it did not have a single appropriate printing press,³ and although one printing press was specially commissioned for it at the end of the year,⁴ in April 1919 the Section realised it needed separate presses for Ingush, Ossetian and Lezgin.⁵ In April 1921 Narkomnats created a special commission to deal with the manufacture and distribution of type-faces in different scripts.⁶ At an early stage, however, the question of rationalising scripts was taken on board. The Jadidist movement had focused on the reform of the Arabic script from the mid-1850's, and towards the end of 1918 the Muskom followed this tradition by preparing a congress on the reform of Muslim orthography.⁷ In an article published in Zhizn Natsional'nostei in September 1919, M.

¹ Lenin, Vol.XXIV, pp.293-295.

² Letter from Brigadier B.S. Malik, military adviser at the High Commission of India in London, to Brian Pearce, 24th June 1992.

³ ZN no.3, 24th November 1918, p.8

⁴ ZN no.7, 22nd December 1918, p.7.

⁵ ZN no.23, 27th April 1919, p.4.

⁶ GARF, f.1318, op.5, l.65.

⁷ ZN no.5, 8th December 1918, p.7.

Shul'man described the discussions taking place in the Narkompros Department for Education of National Minorities on introducing a uniform Latin script for all languages. Although it provoked fierce opposition from nationalists, such a move was "natural at a time of common struggle against world imperialism". The proponents of this move argued that it would help bring together different nationalities as it would make it easier to understand writings in another language. The scheme's opponents pointed out that learning another language was a far more difficult task than learning another script, so the reform would hardly help in this regard, and argued that it could not work as different languages had different sounds and accents and could not be equated phonetically. The reform would make the printing of books easier, but on the other hand it would be difficult to teach adults the new script, while children should not learn the Latin script exclusively as this would limit their access to their own culture. Shul'man concluded that the use of a single uniform script could not be entirely implemented until a new generation had replaced the current one, by which time the cultural level would be so high that everyone would know several languages and a uniform script would become truly relevant.¹ Marr's theories stated that Cyrillic "was tied to Russia's capitalist past and the only road to a socialist future lay in the universal adoption of the Latin alphabet". Latinisation of all languages was essential to the expected development of a hybrid universal language, specifically in the form he had devised for the Abkhaz and which was introduced in 1920 (unsuccessfully).² In Azerbaidzhan, where attempts to use the Latin script had been made from the middle of the

¹ ZN no.44, 21st September 1919, p.4.

² Crisp, p.31.

19th century, Latinisation was seen as a major step on the path to exporting the revolution to the east.¹

Idealistic, utopian and even bizarre though many of these arguments were, they formed the basis on which Soviet alphabet reform was built. Lenin was convinced by the Azerbaidzhanis and Lunacharskii declared in favour of Latinisation of the Russian language.² In March 1920, Narkomnats set in motion the process of Latinisation across the RSFSR by asking all of its departments and commissariats to submit their opinions on the proposal.³

Table 6.7: Proportion of Turko-Tatar Literates understanding the New Turkic Alphabet in 1928/29

<u>Region</u>	<u>% Literate in New Alphabet</u>
Azerbaidzhan	14.5
Uzbekistan	13
Turkmenistan	6 ^a
Bashkiria	19
Kazakhstan	8
Kirgizstan	13
Dagestan	10
Crimea	18
North Caucasus	23
Minorities in RSFSR	13

Note^a: Whole population, including illiterates.

Source: Natsional'naia politika VKP(b), p.273.

¹ Crisp, p.26.

² Idem, p.28

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.10.

Other proposals were current, including an offer by Izmail Karimov to provide a general eastern script, but it was only the Latinisation of Turkic languages which became a reality. In 1922, a new Latin alphabet was adopted by decree in Azerbaidzhan and four years later the First All-Union Turcological Congress held in Baku voted by 101 votes to 7, with 9 abstentions, to adopt the Latin alphabet for Turkic and related languages.¹ Interestingly, opposition to Latinisation at the congress was led by someone not known at that time as a nationalist, the Tatar orthodox communist Ibrahimov, who argued the historical claims of the Arabic alphabet which was "a prerequisite for the cultural continuity and linguistic vitality of the Tatars."² His objections were not heeded, however, and table 6.7 shows the progress made in learning the new alphabet according to a survey at the end of 1928, just two years after the alphabet's official introduction.

Latinisation of the Turkic languages was an exception to the general trend of Bolshevik national policy, which in general set out to foster and preserve cultural traditions. Ibrahimov's speech to the Turcological congress smacked of nationalism but such sentiments were not out of place among the non-Russian communists. The practical arguments for Latinisation were strong - provision of school books and literature in native languages was never as high as would have been ideal, and Latinisation would have helped from a purely logistical point of view. But ideological considerations were paramount, and this is one area where internationalism seems to have prevailed over national-cultural sensitivity. Lenin's support for the process suggests he

¹ Crisp, pp.26-27.

² Rorlich, p.151.

viewed the Latin alphabet as neutral in terms of national oppression (it can be assumed that he would have bridled at any proposal for cyrillisation), and the arguments put forward by the reform's supporters may have ignited on the spark of optimism over revolution in the East which prevailed at the start of the 1920's.

National Culture

As well as being a purely practical measure, language reform played an important part in the task of fostering national cultures. Apart from their involvement in education, the cultural-educational sections of the national commissariats and departments set about promoting both a "new, socialist culture" in the native tongue, but also making available on a broad scale works of history and literature.¹ As well as publications, the sections organised, promoted and financed theatres, choirs, concerts, art exhibitions, clubs and libraries.² In the case of established nations with a rich history and culture like Georgia there was no need to invent culture. In other areas like the Ukraine it was sufficient to give free rein to a national intelligentsia which had for long been engaged in promoting national traditions and culture. Where national identity was weak, it was sometimes possible to build a cultural identity by vigorous promotion of a past heritage. Even before the proclamation of Soviet Bielorussia, the

¹ ZN, no.3, 27th November 1918, p.8.

² e.g. see ZN no.27, 25th May 1919, for cultural activities in Saratov guberniya and for Armenians in Kharkov. Other examples of cultural activities have been given above, chapter 3.

Bielorussian commissariat was making especial efforts to promote Bielorussian writers.¹ This policy was most successful among the Kirghiz who "began to build a cultural tradition in 1925 founded on a rich epic folklore".²

While Proletkult and other artistic and historical movements were trying to establish a clear break with the past in Moscow, in the non-Russian regions the trend was towards promoting the nations' past. Frequently attempts were made to root the ideas of socialism in national history. Many Tatar Communists argued that dialectical materialism had first been formulated by the Genghisid Mongols, while in Ukraine similar attempts were made to root communism in the tradition of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.³ Such efforts were aimed at much as promoting interest in the national past as at popularising Communism.

On the whole, Stalin's wish that culture should be "national in form, socialist in content" was of less import than the impulse to exploit the heritage of the past in promoting a modern national identity. The unrestricted promotion of non-socialist culture inevitably caused frictions, however. The most strident opponents of cultural autonomy turned out to be the Evkom and Evsektia, whose antipathy to Hebrew language and culture, and of all things associated with Zionism, led to several conflicts. In 1919, the Evkom and Evsektia were successful in their attempts to ban education in Hebrew. Early in 1920, Stalin himself authorised a subsidy to the Classical Jewish Theatre in Moscow. Twice

¹ ZN no.8, 29th December 1918, p.7.

² Carrère d'Encausse, p.178.

³ Bennigsen and Wimbush, p.49.

the Evsektia protested this decision to the Central Committee and were overruled on both occasions.¹ The theatre's subsidy was removed in July 1920 by the Tsentreteatr, however,² and its place was taken by the State Jewish Chamber Theatre. This theatre represented one of the more successful attempts to combine 'socialist content' with 'national form', especially with the arrival at the theatre of the artist Marc Chagall, who later summed up his aims: "this is a good chance, I thought, to overturn the old Jewish theatre with its realism, its naturalism, its psychology and false beards"³ while preserving an essentially Jewish form. Chagall and others inspired an exciting and bold new form of Jewish theatre,⁴ but overall such efforts were confined to Moscow and had little resonance in the regions, where the emphasis was on promoting traditional cultures.

In October 1918 the Muskom declared in favour of "a formal declaration of Muslims' right to self-determination on questions of culture and education". Such questions could not be dealt with on a mechanical geographical basis but required "granting those nations which have lost political independence along the path of historical development the broadest cultural-educational autonomy". On this basis the Muskom sought to overturn several Sovnarkom decrees.⁵ It was this resolution that led to the confrontation between Sultan-Galiev and Sova-Stepniak at the Narkomnats collegium mentioned in chapter

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.44, l.1; d.46, l.3.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.61

³ Aleksandr Kamensky, Chagall: the Russian Years 1907-1922 (London, 1989), p.331.

⁴ Andre van Gyseghem, Theatre in Soviet Russia (London, 1943), pp.172-177.

⁵ GARF, f.1318, op., d.1, l.79

3. The demand for 'cultural-educational autonomy' on a non-territorial basis directly contradicted the pre-revolutionary writings of Lenin and Stalin and post-1917 official policy. But extraterritorial cultural autonomy had been a central demand of the Volga Tatars from whom the Muskom drew its leadership and had been proclaimed at the Second All-Russian Muslim Congress in July 1917. In practise this policy went unchallenged and, as we have seen, the Bolshevik leadership backed the Muskom in its disputes with the Narkomnats Collegium.

Religion

Although the Muslim national communists favoured the secular vision of Islam developed by the Jadidists, the widespread influence of traditional Islam caused problems for the Bolsheviks. On the one hand, cultural autonomy meant leaving to the Muslims themselves the question of the role of Islam, on the other hand, the Bolsheviks were committed to campaigning against religious and clerical influences and saw the grip of the mosques as in part responsible for holding back the cultural and political development of Muslims. Although the Sovnarkom's 1918 decree on the separation of Church and State guaranteed religious freedom, during the civil war there were numerous instances of mosques being closed or profaned and of Mullahs being shot. Sultan-Galiev argued for a cautious approach to Islam, however, and as the influence of the Muskom and the governments of the autonomous regions and republics grew, so did tolerance of Islamic institutions and practises. In 1921, on Chicherin's initiative, the Central Committee officially toned down

the antireligious campaign among Muslims, and in October of that year even ordered the return of confiscated wagf land to the mosques and authorised the reopening of Islamic local courts.¹ In 1922 a Shariat Commission was created by Muslim communists in conjunction with the Commissariat of Justice charged with the task of making compatible Koranic and Soviet law. This tolerant attitude towards Islam survived at least until 1928.²

Similar tolerance was shown towards Buddhism in the Far East, especially among the Buriat Mongols, where in 1922 4,000 pupils were being educated in Buddhist schools (datsans).³ Even Christianity among National Minorities received more respect than it did for the Orthodox Russians. In 1920 Narkomnats went as far as sanctioning the continuation of ritual animal sacrifices among the Mari and other peoples, at a time of general food and livestock shortages.⁴

When, in 1922, Stalin sought to centralise the political and economic structures of the Soviet Republics, one of his arguments was that this would help to guarantee the "real internal autonomy of the republics in the areas of language, culture, justice, internal affairs, agriculture etc."⁵ Although this autonomy was based on territorial units, the distinction with the extra-territorial cultural autonomy which had been so vilified by the Bolsheviks was extremely fine. The

¹ RTsKhIDNI f.17, op.3, d.215, ll.3-4.

² Rorlich, pp.148-150.

³ James Forsyth, A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony 1581-1990 (Cambridge, 1994), pp.275-276.

⁴ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, ll.4, 12.

⁵ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.28, l.19.

Soviet republics, autonomous republics and regions were responsible for the cultural affairs of their nationals in other regions, while those nationalities which did not have a specific territory were catered for on a Russia-wide basis by the departments and commissariats of Narkomnats. The real objection to the Austro-Marxists had been to their plan for extra-territorial elective representation on a national basis rather than to cultural autonomy itself. Cultural autonomy became an increasing reality as it fitted the Bolsheviks' aims of encouraging national self-awareness. In many cases this led to the deliberate creation of national forms in language and culture. These policies had a lasting impact on the national consciousness of the peoples of the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER 7: THE GEORGIAN CRISIS AND THE FORMATION OF THE SOVIET UNION

By the end of the Civil War, the administrative organisation of the Soviet republics was in a mess. According to the Bolshevik M.F.Vladimirskii, since the Pugachev revolt of the 1770's the tsarist division of Russia had been based primarily on the need to respond quickly with force to peasant risings wherever they might break out. This division naturally accorded with the surface area to be covered rather than with the size of the population, the economic structure of the region and modern communications.¹ These were the factors which, together with the national principle, were the basic organisational criteria of the Soviet state. Clearly the division of Russia needed overhauling, but in 1920 alone three different projects were under way; autonomous republics and regions were being set up on a purely national basis, principally under the guidance of Narkomnats; a plan for the 'economic raionisation' of Russia was being drawn up by the State Commission for Electrifying Russia (GOELRO); and a special 'administrative commission' was set up by VTsIK in February 1920 and charged with formulating the principles of a new administrative division. Relations with the other Soviet republics, including borders, were supposedly governed by treaties and came under the jurisdiction of the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. The Communist Parties, meanwhile, had their own

¹ M.F. Vladimirskii, "Osnovnie polozheniia ustanovleniia granits administrativno-khoziaistvennikh raionov", in G.M. Krzhizhanovskii (ed.), Voprosi ekonomicheskogo raionirovaniia SSSR (Moscow, 1957), p.58.

structures. While the Russian Communist Party could ensure the political unity of the state two separate principles, the national and the economic, pulled in opposite directions. Bolshevik national policy had evolved in such a direction as to encourage local autonomy in certain spheres, while Marxist principles of economics generally pulled towards centralisation.

Between 1920 and 1922, however, the tension between the economic and national principles did not engender serious conflicts in the restructuring of the RSFSR, a spirit of compromise and of respect for the rights of national minorities prevailing as long as the system of national autonomy worked successfully. The relations between the independent republics proved more problematic, however, and a series of disputes between Moscow and, in particular, Ukraine and Georgia, led to the establishment in May 1922 of a commission under Frunze to review the system of relations. Even then, the disputes had not yet reached the level of serious conflict and the decision to undertake a formal overhaul of the whole system in the autumn of 1922 could have been expected to pass off relatively smoothly; the rational argument for such an overhaul was undeniable; and while the decision to limit or end the independence of the republics was bound to provoke disagreements, the Bolshevik party was no stranger to such disputes and could have dealt with them internally had it not been for the recalcitrance of the Georgian communists, whose stubbornness played an equal role with the insensitivity of Ordzhonikidze's Kavbiuro in turning a practical disagreement into a major crisis. Material now available to us suggests that the differences between the various sides of the dispute may not initially have been as violent as has previously been

supposed, and in particular that what was involved was not a power struggle between Lenin and Stalin; while there were clearly important differences, there has never been any firm evidence that in September 1922, either Lenin was "dismayed and angered" by Stalin's proposals (Pipes),¹ or that Stalin viewed Lenin's intervention as "a useless piece of interference on the part of the 'old man'" (Lewin).²

Competing Plans for the Organisation of Relations between the Soviet republics

The GOELRO plan presented to the Eighth Congress of Soviets in December 1920 was concerned primarily with the planned electrification of the RSFSR, but also included a proposal to divide the country into eight economic "raions". One of these raions covered Turkestan alone, but otherwise the scheme paid no attention to the national division of the RSFSR, which is hardly surprising as the plan was being drafted before the creation of autonomous territories other than the small Volga German Commune and the Bashkir Republic. At any rate the plan was superseded before it could be put into practice, and is of primary interest for the economic autonomy it proposed to devolve to the regions (raions):

...in connection with working out a rational plan of the economy for the country it is convenient to subdivide it into economically-independent units - raions...In essence the compilation of the economic

¹ Pipes, p.272.

² Lewin, p.51.

plan for the raion ought to be a matter for the raion itself, in as much as it demands a broad understanding of local conditions and the active participation of the population, without which the compilation and fulfilment of the plan would be hard to achieve. On the basis of these raion plans it would be relatively easy to put together a general scheme for the rational collaboration of the raions and to draw up a state plan for electrification...¹

The insistence of a major central economic institution on the devolution of economic planning indicates a trend away from War Communism towards regional autonomy, even in the economic sphere, which contrasts with the tendency of other state organs and communists towards increasing centralisation of decision-making.

More lasting than the GOELRO plan was the work of the Commission for the Administrative division of Russia, which worked from February 1920 until the middle of 1922. Within a month of it being set up Narkomnats, fearful lest the national principle be ignored in favour of the economic, set up its own commission under Dimanshtein to draft an administrative division of the RSFSR on the national principle,² at the same time as it was stepping up the creation of autonomous national territories. This rivalry was smoothed over, however, and by mid-1921 Narkomnats was cooperating with the commission and Gosplan on working out a new division.³ When the commission finally presented its theses to the presidium of VTsIK on 13th April 1922, they included a

¹ Plan elektrifikatsii RSFSR - доклад VIII s"ezdu sovetov gosudarstvennoy komissii po elektrifikatsii Rossii (2nd edition, Moscow 1955), p.185.

² GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.4, l.12.

³ GARF, f.1318, op.1, d.6, l.82; d.7, l.75;

commitment to preserving the territorial integrity and autonomy of the national territories, the smaller of which would become 'sub-raions'; larger ones (Turkestan) would make up a single raion on their own, while the larger still (Ukraine and Kirghizia) would make up more than one economic raion.¹ The Narkomnats Collegium did not object in principle to this plan, but proposed several amendments, including uniting Bashkiria, creating one special economic oblast for the Tatars, Chuvash, Mari and Votiaks centred in Kazan, adding the Kalmyk oblast to Kirghizia, uniting Ukraine into one raion, and splitting the Caucasus into a northern, a central and a Transcaucasian raion.² Professor I.G.Alexandrov, the main author of the original proposals, responded favourably to these amendments and shortly after made it clear that the raionisation project would in no circumstances violate the national principle, even admitting that "in some cases, raionisation needs to sacrifice the pure economic principle" in favour of the national, citing the case of Bashkiria, which in purely economic respects ought to have been split between the Volga and Urals raions, but which he now proposed to unite in the Urals raion.³

In sum, by 1922, the internal national structure of the RSFSR was working pretty well, most of the disputes over borders and competence had been resolved, the national cadres of the Communist Party, closely supervised by plenipotentiaries from Moscow, were carrying out the party's national policy, and the national principle had

¹ "Tezisi, virabotannie kommissiey pri VTsIK po voprosu ob ekonomicheskom rayonirovanii Rossii", in Krzhizhanovskii (ed.), op. cit. pp.103-105.

² GARF, f.1318, o.1, d.9, l.43

³ I.G.Aleksandrov, "Osnovi khozyaystvennogo rayonirovaniya SSSR", in Krzhizhanovskii (ed.), op. cit. p.222.

been comfortably accommodated in the system of management of the state's economy. One enormous question remained to be resolved - the formal and actual relationship of the other Soviet republics to the RSFSR. The existence of formally independent republics had always been regarded as no more than a transitional stage to a single Soviet republic, but little attention had been devoted to the form that would be taken by a reunited Russia. In the absence of concrete theories, and given the success of the autonomisation policy in the RSFSR, it seemed reasonable to suppose that the simplest and most effective way to create a united state was to extend the autonomy principle to the five independent republics.

'Federalism' or 'Autonomy'?

Before discussing the disputes over federalism and autonomisation in 1922, it is necessary to return to June 1920 and a disagreement between Lenin and Stalin about the role of federalism. This dispute occurred in the context of a discussion of Lenin's theses on the National and Colonial questions for the second congress of the Communist International held in July 1920. The most widely accepted version of this dispute is that given in a footnote to the fifth edition of Lenin's works. This account, published in 1963, mentions the exchange as resulting from Stalin's mistaken understanding of the national question which was to be repeated in 1922; it was published at a time when the trend in Soviet historiography was to disassociate Stalin from Lenin, and refers to Stalin's objection to Lenin's distinction

between Soviet republics based on autonomy on the one hand, and those independent republics linked by federative ties on the other. The only direct quote is "there is no difference [between the two forms], or it is so small as to be negligible."¹

Two other sources provide a fuller and somewhat different version of the dispute; the first is the full text of Stalin's letter to Lenin, which is published in an end note to the third (1931) edition of Lenin's works, and the second is Stalin's reply to Rakovskii at the section on the national question of the 12th Congress of the RKP in April 1923, published in Izvestiia TsK KPSS in 1991. Although, according to the editors of Izvestiia TsK KPSS, Lenin's reply has not been found,² from the text of Stalin's letter and Stalin's later account of Lenin's reply we can gather an accurate picture of their disagreement. The relevant portion of Stalin's letter, dated 12th June 1920, which has not been published in English, reads as follows:

I am referring to the absence in your theses of any mention of confederation as one of the transitional forms of drawing together the workers of different nations. For the nations which came into the composition of old Russia, we can and ought to consider our (Soviet) type of federation as an appropriate path to international unity. The reasons are clear: these nationalities either have not enjoyed statehood previously, or lost it a long time ago, in view of which the Soviet (centralised) type of federation applies to them without particular friction.

¹ Lenin, Sochineniia 5th edition, Vol.XLI, p.513.

² Izvestiia TsK KPSS, 1991, no.4, p.175.

It is impossible to say the same about those nationalities which did not come into the composition of old Russia, which have existed as independent formations, which developed their own statehood and which, if they become Soviet, will need by the force of things to stand in some sort or another of state relationship (bond) to Soviet Russia. For example, a future Soviet Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland. These peoples, when they have their own statehood, their own armed forces, their own finances, on becoming Soviet, would hardly agree to enter straight into a federative bond with Soviet Russia on the Bashkir or Ukrainian model (in your theses you make a distinction between the Bashkir and Ukrainian model of federative bond, but in actual fact there is no difference, or it is so small as to be negligible): for they would look at a federation on the Soviet model as a form of diminishing their state independence, as an assault on their independence.

I have no doubt, that for those nationalities the most appropriate form of drawing together would be a confederation (a union of independent states). Here I am not even talking about other nationalities, like Persia and Turkey, in relation to whom the Soviet type of federation and federation in general would be even more inappropriate.

Starting from these considerations, I think that the given point of your theses on the transitional forms of bringing together the workers of different nations needs to include (along with federation) confederation. Such an amendment would provide your

theses with more elasticity, and would enrich them with one more transitional form of drawing together the workers of different nations and would ease the state drawing together of those nationalities which were not previously part of Russia with Soviet Russia.¹

Here Stalin is making a distinction between federation, of the type that already existed in the RSFSR, and confederation, which he summarises as a union of independent states, and which he considered appropriate to countries like Germany. Pipes, who cites this text from the third edition of Lenin's works, quotes only the sentence in brackets on the absence of any difference between Bashkir and Ukrainian federalism, indicating that this foreshadowed their 1922 dispute.² It is clear from the text, however, that this was a minor point made in passing. The real point of difference was not on the distinction between Ukraine on the one hand and Bashkiria on the other, but on that between Ukraine and Bashkiria on the one hand, and Germany, Poland, Hungary and Finland on the other.

This is further supported by Stalin's 1923 account, which came in the context of his rebuttal of Rakovskii's attempt to lay claim to Lenin's national policy³:

I want to tell a story about confederation. I was at the southern front when Lenin sent his draft on the national question for the second congress of the Comintern and asked me to respond, as he did with others. Then it was being said that we, the

¹ Lenin, Sochineniia, 3rd edition (Moscow, 1931), vol. XXV, p.624.

² Pipes, p.270.

³ See below, chapter 8.

Comintern, would achieve a federalisation of nationalities and states. At that time I said - and this is all preserved in the archives of the Central Committee - that that wouldn't work. If you think the nationalities of former Russia will stay in a framework of federalisation - that is understandable enough, but if you think that Germany will at some point come to you to join a federation with the same rights as Ukraine - you are mistaken. If you think that even Poland, which has taken the form of a bourgeois state with all its attributes, will enter into the composition of a union with the same rights as Ukraine - you are mistaken. That is what I said then. And comrade Lenin sent out a long letter - that is chauvinism, nationalism, we need a centralised world economy, run from a single organ.¹

Stalin's account of his own letter is accurate, so it is reasonable to suppose that his summary of Lenin's reply, which may also have been known to members of his audience, is equally correct. Certainly a disagreement over the position of a future Soviet Germany would have had far more relevance to the content of Lenin's theses themselves; the relevant portion of Lenin's draft reads:

Federation is a transitional form to the complete unity of the working people of different nations. The feasibility of federation has already been demonstrated in practice both by the relations between the RSFSR and other Soviet Republics (the Hungarian, Finnish and Latvian in the past, and the Azerbaidjan and Ukrainian at present), and by the relations within the RSFSR in respect of nationalities which formerly

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS, 1991, no.4, p.171.

enjoyed neither statehood nor autonomy (e.g., the Bashkir and Tatar autonomous republics in the RSFSR)...In this respect, it is the task of the Communist International to further develop and also to study and test by experience these new federations, which are arising on the basis of the Soviet system and the Soviet movement. In recognising that federation is a transitional form to complete unity, it is necessary to strive for ever closer federal unity, bearing in mind...that there is a tendency towards the creation of a single world economy, regulated by the proletariat of all nations as an integral whole and according to a common plan...¹

Thus while Lenin mentions in passing the two types of republic, he does not in any way dwell on the distinction between the two, and the implication that the whole world could be united in a single Soviet federation was a far more controversial point and was surely the principle theme of Lenin's "huge letter" defending his theses. This must have been the main point at issue, with the distinction between the two types of republic mentioned incidentally.

If Stalin's 1923 speech is accurate, then, Lenin had accused him of chauvinism and nationalism for denying that Germany and Poland could be treated on the same basis as the Ukraine. Thus in 1920 Lenin wanted a union of all Soviet republics, including those yet to be built, while Stalin did not believe this was possible - Lenin was the centraliser, Stalin the separatist - the very opposite of what has been concluded by the editors of

¹ Lenin, Vol.XLI, p.164.

Lenin's works, Pipes, Lewin, Carrère d'Encausse, Blank, and all those following them.¹

According to the editors of the third edition of Lenin's works, in the corrective proofs of Lenin's 1920 theses Lenin had written "7. + Confederation? (Stalin)",² indicating that he had given some consideration to Stalin's comments. The word 'confederation' did not, however, make its way into the final theses,³ nor were any amendments to this paragraph put before the congress,⁴ nor is there any evidence from the available material that the question of federation or confederation got even a mention in the commission which discussed the final version of the theses.⁵

Trotsky, moreover, writing in 1927, makes much of the dispute between Lenin and Stalin in 1922, but says nothing of any disagreements in 1920⁶. Whatever the differences consisted of, then, there is no evidence that the affair went any further than the exchange of two letters. We shall see presently that Stalin had not in

¹ Pipes, p.270; Blank, p.169; Carrère d'Encausse, p.128. For the lasting impact of this interpretation of the Lenin-Stalin dispute, see e.g. Robert H McNeal, Stalin, Man and Ruler (London, 1988), p.70; Geoffrey Hosking, The First Socialist Society (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), p.117. Tucker is aware that this dispute was over the future position of Germany, Poland etc., but nevertheless concludes that "Stalin's coming conflict with Lenin over nationality policy was foreshadowed in this exchange." Robert C Tucker, Stalin as Revolutionary (New York, 1973), 251. Prior to Pipes' work of 1954, the western historiography on Lenin and Stalin does not mention this dispute.

² Lenin, Sochineniia, 3rd edition, vol.XXV, p.287

³ 2-oy kongress kommunisticheskogo internatsionala - stenograficheskii otchet (Petrograd, 1921), p.598

⁴ Idem, p.121.

⁵ The Communist International in Lenin's Time - Workers of the World Unite! - Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920 (London, 1977), vol.2, pp.846-885.

⁶ L.D. Trotsky, Stalinskaia shkola fal'sifikatsii (Berlin, 1932), pp.77ff.

any way anticipated the form that would be taken by Lenin's criticisms of Stalin's 'autonomisation' programme in 1922. If anything, he expected Lenin to defend the continued independence of the other republics. It must therefore have been with some relief that Stalin conceded this point to Lenin, hoping thereby to keep him quiet. When Lenin subsequently turned on Stalin in his defence of the Georgians, Stalin accused Lenin of trying to defend independence. The question of autonomisation vs. federalism was not as serious a point between them as has generally been supposed. Both accepted the general need for economic and political centralisation, while both increasingly saw cultural and linguistic guarantees as sufficient to satisfy the national demands of the non-Russians. Serious differences arose between the two over Georgia, as a result of Lenin's sensitivity towards the propaganda effect both at home and abroad of ignoring the Georgians wishes and his growing concern over the increasing bureaucratisation of the party and state apparatuses and in particular the dictatorial methods of Ordzhonikidze and the Kavbiuro. Stalin, by contrast, with some justification saw the creation of a Union in whatever form as necessary and easily practicable, had it not been for the resistance of the Georgians.

The importance of establishing exactly what was in dispute in 1920 is that without such a dispute, there is no evidence that Lenin's intervention in the proceedings of the Orgburo commission in September 1922 was anything other than a bolt from the blue. There is precious little to show that before this time any Bolsheviks other than Lenin recognised a meaningful distinction between 'federalism' and 'autonomisation', and the two terms were often used interchangeably. Prior to 1917 federalism was

viewed as a bourgeois state form, while the term autonomy was most usually equated with the Austro-Marxist position. But after the revolution the two terms were used interchangeably in informal contexts to describe the position of a national region which enjoyed certain rights but was ultimately subject to central control. The insistence on omitting the word "federal" from the formal description of the relationship of the RSFSR and Ukraine in 1921 shows that even this term was considered too strong a violation of national sovereignty. And even as it gave instructions to its representative on Stalin's commission in September 1922, the Central Committee of the Azerbaidjani Communist Party called, in the space of a single resolution, for "the formation of a single Soviet Federation" and for "unity of Azerbaidjan with Russia on the principles of broad autonomy."¹

Stalin's 'Autonomisation' Project

The disputes with the Ukraine and, increasingly, Georgia, had not been satisfactorily solved by the Frunze commission. While the decision of the Central Committee to convene a new commission to look at the relationship of the Soviet republics on August 10th 1922 may have been prompted by a specific event, such as the dispute with Ukraine over foreign policy² or the events in Georgia,³ such a move was entirely in line with the Bolsheviks' long-term policy of unifying the proletarians of the world, and may have been encouraged by the relative success of the national policy within the RSFSR and the near normalisation of affairs within the independent

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.28, l.11; Izvestiia TsK KPSS, 1989, no.9, p.195.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.290, l.2 ; I.K. Gamburg et al., M.V.Frunze - Zhizn' i deyatel'nost' (Moscow, 1962), pp.292-294.

³ Pipes, p.270.

republics. While it does not appear that anything had been determined in advance, the wording of the Politburo resolution, calling on the commission to "prepare the question of the relationships of the RSFSR and the independent republics with the aim of legalising them in the Soviet system"¹ left little doubt that what was intended was some form of unification. According to both Lewin and Service, the appointment of the commission by the Orgburo was designed to strengthen the hand of Stalin and his allies.² But of the five members representing the centre - Stalin, Kuibyshev, Rakovskii, Ordzhonikidze and Sokol'nikov - only the Central Committee secretary Kuibyshev had no obvious reason to be there, and his inclusion may have been justified by his expertise on the military needs of the republics as well as his knowledge of Central Asia. Of the others, Stalin was still Commissar of Nationalities, while Rakovskii, Ordzhonikidze and Sokol'nikov had held the highest positions of responsibility in Ukraine, Transcaucasia and Central Asia respectively. While Kuibyshev and Ordzhonikidze were supporters of Stalin, Rakovskii was an opponent of unification in any form while Sokol'nikov can be regarded as independent, and had demonstrated his impartiality in Turkestan. And if Stalin had meant to manipulate the choice of representatives from the republics, he would surely have vetoed Mdivani, a bitter opponent of Ordzhonikidze.

The progress of the work of Stalin's commission, including the precise content of Stalin's theses, has been well documented, most notably by Moshe Lewin. A number of points need re-examining, however, in the light

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.306, l.1.

² Lewin, p.47; R. Service, Lenin - a Political Life (London, 1995), Vol.III, p.276.

of Lewin's tendency to exaggerate Stalin's differences with Lenin, especially in relating earlier events to Lenin's notes of December 1922, and given a number of important documents which have only become available since Lewin was writing.

The provisional theses of the commission, Stalin's so-called 'autonomisation project', were sent out in due order to the various republics, and received a mixed response. The strongest objections came from the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party; they did not, however, object in principle to the proposals, only stating that they were "premature". The resolution also explicitly accepted the need for "the unification of economic forces and general policy" but with the preservation of all of the attributes of autonomy.¹ The Bielorussian CC also rejected the proposal, opting for a relationship with the RSFSR analogous to that enjoyed by Ukraine, i.e. maintaining the status quo, while taking the opportunity to raise again the question of extending Bielorussia's borders.² Armenia accepted the theses without qualification³, while the Azerbaidzhan CC gave its approval, but indicated a degree of uneasiness by asking for time to prepare the population.⁴ The Ukrainian CC apparently did not discuss the draft before the commission met,⁵ but Stalin received an enthusiastic response from Manuil'skii, then Secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee, on 4th September.⁶

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.28, l.5.

² Izvestiia TsK KPSS, 1989, no.9, p.197.

³ Ibid.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.28, l.11.

⁵ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.28, l.4.

⁶ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.28, l.22; Frantisek Sil'nitskii, Natsional'naia politika KPSS v period s 1917-1922 (Munich, 1981), pp.268-272.

The tone of these objections was maintained at the two sessions of the commission on 23rd and 24th September, at which Molotov had now replaced Rakovskii, who was on leave, and Kuibyshev did not appear. Only the Georgians Mdivani and Tsintsadze (who deputed for Mdivani at the first session) opposed Stalin's proposal outright, but a number of clauses raised some opposition; Mdivani received support from the Azeri representative, Aga-Maly-Ogly on a move to keep special national armies; Petrovskii (Ukraine) proposed to keep independent commissariats for food and people's economy, and got support from Mdivani, Aga-Maly-Ogly and Chervyakov (Bielorussia), and won an amendment to reserve the right of amnesty against the votes of Stalin, Molotov and Myasnikov (Armenia), although this right was then restricted to civil affairs on an amendment of Ordzhonikidze's. Petrovskii also came close to a victory in a move to have the proposals referred to the bureaus of all the Gubkoms of the republic; he won the support of Chervyakov, Aga-Maly-Ogly and Mdivani, with Khodzhaev Faizulla (Bukhara) abstaining.¹ So while only the Georgians opposed the scheme outright, all of the other republican representatives expressed concern over the pace of the reform or details of the plan which would have further restricted the powers of the republic. Nobody proposed amending the section of clause one which proposed that the independent republics enter into the composition of the RSFSR.

All this time Lenin had been too ill to take an active part in proceedings, but at some point, according to Fotieva, he asked Stalin to inform him as to the work of

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.28, 11.4-10.

his commission¹. On 22nd September, Stalin wrote to him explaining the reasoning behind his proposals. This letter, which was not available to either Pipes or Lewin, is interesting both for its comradely tone, which contrasts markedly with later exchanges, and for the reasonableness of Stalin's arguments, which do much to dispel the image of him as an excessive centraliser and a brutal manipulator, and is therefore worth quoting at length:

We arrived at such a position, when the existing order of relations between the centre and the borderlands, that is, the absence of any order and complete chaos, was becoming intolerable; when it creates conflicts, insults and irritation, it turns into a fiction the so-called united federative people's economy, and hampers and paralyses all economic affairs on a Russia-wide scale. There are two options: either real independence, and, in that case, non-interference of the centre, their own People's Commissariats for Foreign Affairs, their own external trade, their own concessions committees, their own railways; hand in hand with which, general questions are decided in the course of negotiations between equals, by agreement, but the decisions of the VTsIK, SNK and STO of the RSFSR are not obligatory for the independent republics; or else, the real unification of the Soviet republics into one economic whole with the formal extension of the powers of the SNK, STO and VTsIK of the RSFSR over the SNK, VTsIK and economic soviets of the independent republics, i.e. a change from fictitious independence to real internal autonomy of

¹ L.A. Fotieva, Iz zhizni V.I. Lenina (Moscow, 1967), p.270.

the republics in the areas of language, culture, justice, internal affairs, agriculture etc.

Actual practise was that the central institutions of the RSFSR were having to change the decisions of the republics' institutions, leading to protests against the "illegal activities" of Moscow.

Stalin goes on:

The interference of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party in such cases usually takes place after the central institutions of the borderlands have already issued their decrees, which are then changed by the central institutions in Moscow, which causes red tape and delays in economic affairs and elicits in the borderlands perplexity among non-party members and irritation among communists.

The liberal policy on the national question, necessary in the Civil War, has cultivated a number of 'social-separatists' among communists, who now condemn the interference of the Central Committee.

We are now living through a period of development when the form, the law, the legal constitution can not be ignored, when a young generation of communists in the borderlands is refusing to understand the game of independence as a game, obstinately taking at face value words about independence and obstinately demanding from us the execution in practise of the letter of the constitutions of the independent republics...if we do not now strive to reconcile the

form of relationships between the centre and the borderlands to the actual relationships, on the strength of which the borderlands ought in every respect to be subordinate to the centre, that is, if we do not now change formal (fictitious) independence for formal (and real) autonomy, then after a year it will be incomparably harder to achieve the factual unity of the Soviet republics.

Stalin goes on to talk about the dangers posed by allowing too much respect for the separatist tendencies at work, and warns of a possible split in the party, giving as an example the decision of the Georgian government to allow the Ottoman bank to open a branch in Tiflis, a decision which threatened the financial stability of the whole region and had to be reversed through the Central Committee, leading to a storm of protests from Georgia.¹

Stalin is being quite candid; independence was always a necessary fiction, a game, but the longer it went on the more literally it was being interpreted, leading to a series of conflicts in the party and interfering with economic policy. If a republican organ took a decision which ran against the policy of the RSFSR, the procedure was to refer first to the Party's disciplinary system, which would then lead to the communists on the government reversing the earlier decision, causing cumbersome delays, divisive squabbles and leaving a bad public impression. In this context he gives the example of the Georgian financial policy, which he may have figured was close to Lenin's heart, but he could equally have cited the case of the dispute with Ukraine over foreign policy

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.28, 11.19-21.

earlier that year, which was referred twice to the Politburo as well as to the Central Control Commission of the party.¹ He hints, moreover, that the continuation of a fictitious independence was leading to encroachments on the genuine autonomous rights of the republics; formalising the actual relations would also safeguard the areas of autonomy which ought to be preserved. Stalin's case is well argued and, given that Bolshevik policy was always for the long-term unity of the Soviet republics, hard to find fault with in terms of the need for some kind of change in the formal relations. But Stalin had only presented one possible solution: the full integration of the Soviet republics into the RSFSR.

According to Lenin's secretary, Fotieva, Lenin did not receive this letter until 25th September, after the commission had met, and the day before he was to have a meeting with Stalin at which he brought up his objections to the commission's proposals.² While the delay in informing Lenin of the commission's work may have been accidental it would be more reasonable to suppose that Stalin, who was well aware of Lenin's movements and could have communicated with him at any time, was keen to present Lenin with a fait accompli. He was not, however, to get things his way so easily. On 26th September, according to Fotieva, the two met for two hours and forty minutes to discuss this question.³ Whatever the precise nature of this discussion, its outcome was indicated by Lenin in a letter to Kamenev written on the same day:

Stalin has already agreed to make one concession - in paragraph one, instead of 'adhesion' to the RSFSR, to

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.290, l.2; d.291, l.1.

² Fotieva, p.220.

³ Fotieva, p.220.

say 'formal union with the RSFSR into a union of Soviet republics of Europe and Asia'. I hope the spirit of this concession is clear: we recognize that we are equals in law with the Ukrainian SSR etc. and together and on an equal footing with them we are joining a new union, a new federation 'The Union of Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia.'¹

Such a federation would entail creating a new federal VTsIK alongside the RSFSR VTsIK. Kamenev, who by now seems to have enjoyed Lenin's confidence in this matter, replied immediately to Lenin with a diagrammatic illustration of his more detailed proposal as to how the Union would function, and based on the principle of "preserving to the maximum the formal independence" of the different republics. Kamenev's scheme included one detail which he did not consider deserved a special mention, but which acquired enormous significance later on: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaidzhan, while preserving their own Sovnarkoms and Central Executive Committees, were subordinate to a Transcaucasian Federation within the Union.²

While Lenin saw Stalin's acceptance of an equal union of states as the key concession, Stalin, in a subsequent memorandum to the members of the Central Committee, accepted this change as if it was of little consequence: "In paragraph one of the commission's resolution we can, in my opinion, agree with Lenin's proposal..." Instead, Stalin picked on two subordinate points in Lenin's proposals. Firstly, he objected to the idea of a second, All-Union Central Executive Committee alongside the CEC of the RSFSR, "one of which will obviously represent a

¹ Lenin, Vol.XLV, p.211.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.28, 11.13-14.

'lower house' and the other an 'upper house' [the existence of which] will lead to nothing but conflict and debate". Secondly, he objected to the fusion of the commissariats of Finance, Food, Labour and National Economy. On this point he sarcastically charged that "comrade Lenin himself has 'hurried'" and that "this 'hurriedness' will 'supply fuel to the advocates of independence,' to the detriment of comrade Lenin's national liberalism."¹

What could have induced Stalin to give in, apparently without putting up much opposition, to Lenin's principle objection, but then to go on to accuse Lenin of 'national liberalism' before the rest of the Central Committee, in a marked contrast in tone from his earlier letter to Lenin? According to Lewin

the whole of Stalin is contained in this letter. One can see from his way of arguing that for him tactics outweigh any other consideration. So much so that he did not consider it necessary to defend for more than one day opinions that he had presented nonetheless so trenchantly.²

But as we have seen, Stalin did not see the distinction between federalism and autonomisation as particularly important. There was therefore no need for him to defend it seriously. In his reply to Lenin's proposals, he does not dwell on the grander aspects. Instead, he sets out his objections to those changes which would affect the smooth operation of a centralised political and economic system which was, after all, what everybody wanted, as long as it did not violate the national rights of any

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.28, 11.23-24.

² Lewin, p.53.

minority. His manifest irritation with Lenin stems from the latter's late intrusion into a process to which Stalin and others had devoted considerable work, and which was properly Stalin's area of expertise; Stalin could justifiably be proud of the fact that he had succeeded in obtaining widespread assent to his proposals from all the republics, with whatever misgivings, to such a radical project; there was already in place a successful structure for organising a multinational state which satisfied both the demands of centralism and the national aspirations of the non-Russian minorities, namely, the system of autonomous regions and republics within the RSFSR; and here was Lenin threatening to upset the whole process. While the image of Lenin as the idealist and Stalin as the practical man of action is too simplified, in this exchange we can see that Lenin is far more concerned with the impact of the formal wording of the proposal, which is consistent not just with his sensitivity towards the feelings of the non-Russians, but also with his preoccupation with the international impact of the achievements of Soviet power; Stalin, on the other hand, was ready to submit to Lenin's authority on such matters of principle, but was not so ready to amend the practical measures which he had so carefully worked out.

This last point needs stressing, as Lewin states that Stalin "gave in all along the line",¹ Pipes that "Stalin had to yield all along the line",² and Ronald Suny that Stalin "quickly decided not to confront Lenin on this issue and altered his plan to conform with Lenin's suggestions."³ In fact, in the new version of the

¹ Lewin, p.53.

² Pipes, p.273.

³ Ronald Grigor Suny, The Making of the Georgian Nation (London, 1989) p.215.

proposal signed by Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, Myasnikov and Molotov and accepted by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party on October 6th, Lenin did not get everything he had asked for. Firstly, the title of the new federation was to be the 'Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' rather than Lenin's 'Union of the Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia'. (This difference is significant given Lenin's plans for the advanced countries of Europe). Secondly, the republics' commissariats of Finance, Food, Economics and Labour were to be "subject to the directives of the corresponding commissariats" of the Union, as had been envisaged in Stalin's original draft, rather than merged as Lenin had suggested. Thirdly, the commissariats of Justice, Education, the Interior, Agriculture, Health and Social Insurance, were still to be "regarded as independent", without the purely consultative Union congresses and conferences proposed by Lenin. The Federal Central Executive Committee, together with its Federal Sovnarkom now appeared in Stalin's plan.

Overall, this second draft corresponded precisely to the scheme sketched out by Kamenev for Lenin on 27th September. Whether this was the source for the updated proposals, or whether it was the product of a negotiated compromise, the draft accepted by the Central Committee presented a much smoother structure for the new state than that proposed by Lenin, but also gave more formal recognition to the equality of the various republics than Stalin's earlier draft. The other significant change in the second draft was also consistent with Kamenev's proposal, namely, the entry of Azerbaidjan, Armenia and Georgia into the USSR via a Transcaucasian Federation.

In his letter to Kamenev, on the subject of the name of the new union, Lenin wrote "I hope the spirit of this concession is clear". His hopes were probably disappointed. Prior to Lenin's intervention, nobody had raised any objections to the title 'Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic'. While the Ukrainians' apprehensions about the disappearance of their sovereignty were similar to Lenin's, neither they, nor anyone else, had suggested an alternative form for the Union. The full significance of Lenin's insistence on this point could only be appreciated sixty-nine years later.

At the time, however, the different approaches of Lenin and Stalin were seen to be over matters of detail rather than deep matters of principle. Both recognised that the Communist Party would continue to provide the required political unity whatever forms the state relations took. Stalin was keen to cut the red tape that made the functioning of parallel Party and State institutions cumbersome. Lenin raised no objections to this point at the time, and three months later blamed the tsarist remnants in the Soviet apparatus for the problems which had occurred in Georgia. His insistence that Ordzhonikidze should be disciplined show that he saw no alternative to the Party as the solution to these problems. Lenin's objections to Stalin's proposal were based on his assessment of the impact on the international revolution that the constitutional reform might have. Stalin was less sensitive to such nuances, but had no reason to resist as long as Lenin's amendments did not interfere with the efficient functioning of the state machinery. Lenin's proposals did, in Stalin's

eyes, do exactly that, which was the reason for Stalin's irritation. But major principles were not at stake and, as often happened with the Bolsheviks at this period, the outcome was a compromise between the two positions.

The Georgian Affair

However contentious the controversy over autonomisation vs. federalism might have been at the highest levels of the party, there is every probability that the issue would have been resolved privately and the Soviet Union restructured with minimal reverberations on society as a whole had it not been for the recalcitrance of one particular group of Bolsheviks, namely, the leadership of the communist Party in Georgia. Their disagreements with Ordzhonikidze's Kavbiuro had caused constant strains on the party ever since the sovietisation of Georgia in 1921, and their public protests at the unification process, culminating in the collective resignation of the Georgian Central Committee brought the national question into open debate and eventually revealed wider divisions at the heart of the party leadership.

According to Pipes, "the main issue was one of authority: What was the power of the Kavbiuro, as an agency of the Russian Central Committee, over the Central Committees of the republican Communist parties?"¹ While the political struggle in Transcaucasia manifested itself largely as a struggle between the Kavbiuro and the Georgian CC, the issues between them were based on genuine theoretical and practical differences, while both bodies recognised the ultimate authority of the Russian Central Committee. And we shall see that it is not the case that the Russian CC always supported the Kavbiuro, as Pipes suggests. To view the conflict purely as a power struggle is to overlook the very real problems posed by a national policy which was open to very

¹ Pipes, p.266.

different interpretations in an ethnically complex region such as the Caucasus.

On 2nd March 1921, shortly after the conquest of Georgia, Lenin wrote to Ordzhonikidze demanding of him "a special policy of concessions in relation to the Georgian intelligentsia and small traders...It is hugely important to seek an acceptable compromise for a bloc with Zhordania or Georgian Mensheviks like him, who even before the rising were not absolutely hostile to the idea of Soviet construction in Georgia on certain conditions. I ask you to understand that both the internal and international aspects of Georgia demand that the Georgian communists do not apply the Russian pattern, but that they skilfully and flexibly create a particular tactic based on greater concessions to all kind of petit-bourgeois elements."¹ A month later Lenin wrote to the communists of Transcaucasia and the North Caucasus elaborating these differences from the Russian model and concluding that what was needed in the Caucasian republics was "a slower, more cautious, more systematic transition to socialism" than in Russia, including all kind of concessions to the peasantry, intelligentsia and petit bourgeoisie.²

The call for concessions to the intelligentsia and petit bourgeoisie, and especially the move towards a bloc with Zhordania and the Mensheviks who had followed an increasingly nationalistic line during their years in power in Georgia,³ implied giving especial headway to Georgian nationalism at a time when national self-

¹ Lenin, vol.XLII, p.367.

² Lenin, vol.XLIII, pp.198-200.

³ Stephen Jones, "Georgian Social Democracy" (Unpublished PhD., London, 1984), pp.387-554.

awareness was already being actively encouraged elsewhere in the former Russian Empire. The reasoning behind this special policy was clear: whereas in the rest of Russia the Bolsheviks had a significant base of support among at least sections of the workers and soldiers and their power was legitimised by the local soviets, Georgia had blatantly been invaded after three years as an independent national state, had virtually no working class and had always proved infertile territory for Bolshevik activists. The proposal to form a bloc with the Mensheviks did not last long, indeed by the end of the year Trotsky was instructed by the Politburo to write a pamphlet detailing the evils of the Menshevik regime in Georgia.¹ But the general policy of concessions to the Georgians remained in force and was repeatedly stressed by both Lenin and Stalin.

The later charge of the Kavbiuro against the Georgian Bolsheviks was that they had taken this policy of special concessions, which was intended as a temporary tactic, and made of it a fetish, to the extent that they themselves became infected with nationalism and were acting in the tradition of Menshevism. The Georgians, in turn, accused Ordzhonikidze and the Kavbiuro of Great Russian Chauvinism and of attempting to impose unification from above with no preparatory work or consultation, and thus with no regard for the effects of such reforms on the ground. Both sides could make a good case for their actions, both in practical and theoretical terms, and to some extent both could claim to be following Lenin's policies. The Kavbiuro employed all

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.247, l.3; L.D. Trotsky, Between Red and White: a Study of some Fundamental Questions of Revolution, with Particular Reference to Georgia (London, 1922).

the classic Marxist arguments for the economic, political and military benefits of closer union and centralisation, and could point to Lenin's arguments that national peace in an ethnically complex region could best be achieved by closer unity. The Georgians on the other hand saw the Kavbiuro's activities as a violation of the right to self-determination and of Lenin's instruction to follow a policy of special concessions in Georgia. It is immediately clear that at the root of these disagreements lies the conflict between the two divergent Bolshevik strains of thought on the national question, between the Leninists and the Luxemburgists, although it should be pointed out that one of the leading protagonists on the Georgian side, Makharadze, was on record as an opponent of Lenin's theory of the right of national self-determination.¹

A further problem was the character, temperament, and political outlook of the man given enormous power over the whole of Transcaucasia, Sergo Ordzhonikidze. Here was another case of the faith of the Bolsheviks in the ability of their political ideas, as embodied in the party as a whole or in individual leaders, to allow them to represent the interests of the workers and peasants to the exclusion of personal considerations. But whereas the likes of Rakovskii and Frunze were sensitive to local feelings, constantly taking advice both from the regional Soviet and communist organs and Moscow, and can be said to have justified that faith, Ordzhonikidze was the exception who, whether through temperament or political conviction, rarely consulted beyond the inner circles of the Kavbiuro and had little time for the feelings or opinions of those people he regarded as his direct

¹ Lewin, p.45.

subordinates in the Transcaucasian republics. As well as arousing the mistrust of leading Bolsheviks, especially Trotsky, Ordzhonikidze was the subject of a highly critical report for his handling of the Caucasus by Vadim Lukashev in December 1920.¹ According to the memoirs of A.I. Mikoyan, Ordzhonikidze came close to losing his seat on the Communist Party's Central Committee at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921:

Several military delegates from the North Caucasus unexpectedly shouted their objections to Ordzhonikidze's candidacy from their seats. These delegates sat in the last row and made noise which was heard throughout the hall. One of them rose to the podium and began to say that Ordzhonikidze yells at everyone, orders everyone around him, ignores the opinions of local party members, and therefore should not be on the Central Committee. This demagogic outburst influenced the mood of the delegates, many of whom did not even know Ordzhonikidze.²

On this occasion, Ordzhonikidze was saved by the vigorous intervention of Lenin and Stalin, but he was clearly unpopular among sections of the Party long before the Georgian affair arose.

Ordzhonikidze did not have a problem with the policy of special concessions in Georgia as such. On 3rd March 1921 he assured Lenin that "everything possible is being done to promote contact and mutual understanding with the Georgian intelligentsia", that approaches were being made

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.42, l.1.

² Quoted in Oleg V. Khlevniuk, In Stalin's Shadow - the Career of 'Sergo' Ordzhonikidze (Armonk, NY, 1995), p.14.

to members of the former Menshevik government, and that wide concessions were being made to small traders.¹ He was, however, obsessed with the economic and military arguments for the unification of Transcaucasia, to be followed by forging closer ties with Soviet Russia. This preference for larger states was, as we have seen, unanimously held by Marxists of the time but, like many Bolsheviks, Ordzhonikidze found this difficult to reconcile with Lenin's principle of the Right to National Self-Determination. He argued that it was "the class principle, not the national one which led to the separation of the borderlands from Russia" - in other words, separation was achieved in the interests of the capitalists and petit bourgeoisie, and ran counter to the interests of the workers and poorer peasants. Recognising the need, nevertheless, to accept that separation as a reaction to tsarist oppression, he promised that "we have no intentions whatsoever of encroaching on the national independence of the republics", and went on to immediately contradict this promise: "we will decisively fight with all nationalistic survivals which interfere with the close union of the Transcaucasian republics with Russia."² Right from the beginning of Soviet power in Georgia, there was a basic conflict in approach among the Bolsheviks of Transcaucasia. In Suny's words,

for moderates like Makharadze their task as laid out by Lenin was to secure for Soviet power a broad base of support, beginning with the intelligentsia. This precluded an assault on Georgian national institutions, the extirpation by force of Menshevik

¹ Ordzhonikidze, Vol.I, p.172.

² Ordzhonikidze, Vol.1, 183-184.

influence, or any hint that Georgian sovereignty was to be compromised by Soviet Russia and its agents...For Communists like Ordzhonikidze and Stalin the task of Soviet power was quite different. They were most concerned about the twin dangers of economic collapse and ethnic particularism...¹

By the end of the year, Ordzhonikidze's toleration of nationalism had completely worn away. In front of a meeting of Tiflis communists on 22nd November 1921 he stated:

In Transcaucasia we consider the first, immediate task of our party, of Soviet power, to wage a merciless struggle with the remains of the shameful past, with red-hot irons, in Stalin's words, to burn down the remains of nationalism.²

In spite of the reference to Stalin, this attitude was sharply at odds with the policy of the centre, which saw Great Russian Chauvinism as the principle enemy. To Ordzhonikidze, however, Georgian nationalism was as bad as Russian chauvinism, as the treatment of Abkhazians and Ossetians by the Menshevik government had testified: "Georgians in Georgia - that is the same as Russians in Russia."³ So uncomfortable was he with Georgia's right to self-determination that at the same November meeting he came up with an entirely novel interpretation of national independence:

¹ Suny, p.212.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, l.6; Ordzhonikidze, vol.1, 216.

³ Ordzhonikidze, Vol.1, 226.

We understand the independence of these republics as absolute independence from counter-revolution, but we also consider absolutely impossible the independence of Soviet republics from each other and from the world revolution.¹

Driven primarily by his political conviction that the unity of Transcaucasia overrode other considerations and a strong aversion to all manifestations of nationalism, Ordzhonikidze also suffered from an arrogant disposition and a short temper which were to contribute to the crisis in Georgia.

Ever since the sovietisation of Georgia in February 1921 there had been a series of disputes between the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist party and the Kavbiuro. Most of these disputes were referred to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. The disputes were later listed by a commission privately set up by Lenin to investigate the affair: 1) In 1921 the Kavbiuro unified the Transcaucasian railways by means of a central directive, and the Georgians objected, in vain, that no preparatory work had been done and that the unifications should be carried out in the names of the separate republics. 2) The Georgians objected to a Kavbiuro move to unite the republican Chekas and appoint a plenipotentiary in Georgia. In this case Stalin ruled in the Georgians' favour and the separate departments were retained. 3) The Georgians objected to the creation of a single economic organ for Transcaucasia, a move designed to further the economic union of the region. Here the Russian Central Committee refused to intervene and the dispute ended in a compromise by which a unified

¹ Ordzhonikidze, Vol.1, 214.

economic organ was created but the separate economic commissariats were preserved. 4) At the end of 1921 and beginning of 1922 the Kavbiuro decided on and published a project for the federal union of Transcaucasia without consulting the Georgian CC. At this point the Georgians did not object in principle, but demanded more time for a preparatory campaign and in this were supported by the Russian Central Committee. 5) In the summer and autumn of 1922 the Georgians presented similar arguments against the immediate monetary union of Transcaucasia, again arguing that the move was premature rather than objecting in principle. The Russian CC approved the transitional moves towards monetary union while preserving separate commissariats of finance. 6) Throughout 1921 and 1922 the status of the Georgian Red Army was a matter of dispute. In the end, with the support of the Russian CC, the Kavbiuro formed a Georgian brigade entirely subordinate to the central command structure, rather than a Georgian Red Army which would only be subordinate to OKA in purely operational respects, which the Georgians had wanted. 7) In 1922 the Georgians wanted all the Georgian Trade Unions to be united under the Georgian Council of Unions, which would link directly to the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, while the Kavbiuro backed the Transcaucasian Council of Trade Unions which wanted all Georgian unions directly subordinate to itself. The Russian CC supported the Kavbiuro. 8) In September Ordzhonikidze carried out a purge of the Georgian Trade Unions in accordance with an instruction of the Orgburo, a task which the Georgian CC saw as rightfully theirs, and the result of which was to remove the union movement completely from the control of

the Georgian CC. 9) Finally, there was the question of the entry of Georgia into the USSR at the end of 1922.¹

In all of these disputes the Kavbiuro was pushing towards maximum unity while the Georgians held on for formal independence, although it must be noted that they rarely opposed such measures in principle, objecting instead to their timing and their method of introduction. This suggests in part annoyance at the failure of Ordzhonikidze and the Kavbiuro to involve the Georgians in the decision making process to the extent to which they were entitled, but also a genuine fear of how the Georgian people might react to further moves against Georgia's sovereignty by what was already widely regarded as an occupying power. This explains why the apparently secondary question of Georgia's entry into the USSR via the Transcaucasian federation took on such enormous symbolic importance. There is some evidence, however, that the Georgians were also motivated by the desire to promote the interests of Georgia above the overall needs of the Soviet republics, a motive which lends some justification to the charges of nationalism against them.

This is most clear in the case of the dispute over monetary unification, where the Georgians argued against abolishing a stable Georgian currency and replacing it with a Transcaucasian currency pegged to the Russian ruble on the basis that this would disadvantage Georgia vis-à-vis the other republics. At the same time they boasted that real wages in the army in Georgia were twice the level in Russia, while in industry real wages were 50% higher. The successful battle of the Georgian government against price inflation would be immediately

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2 d.32, ll.55-57.

undermined by monetary union¹. The underlying sense of these arguments was that the Georgian economy was currently more stable than the economy in the other Transcaucasian republics, and far more so than in the RSFSR, thanks largely to the efforts of the Georgian Central Committee, and it would be unfair to undermine all this good work. However reasonable this argument appears in general, for a communist to take such a line which did not put the needs of the revolution as a whole in first place left him wide open to the charge of nationalism. However much the Georgians protested that their objections were over the timing of monetary reform or particular technical matters, the Kavbiuro was justified in concluding in its reply to the Georgians that "in reality the Georgian argument ought to have been directed against the general proposal for financial union with the RSFSR."²

The Georgian government displayed further disregard for the spirit of internationalism by setting up cordons on the border and charging for permits issued to non-citizens for the right to enter and stay in Georgia³. Further, the Georgian Sovnarkom issued strict instructions, based principally on ethnic criteria, on qualifications for Georgian citizenship.⁴ These measures went way beyond the policy of concessions to national sentiment.

In their turn, the members of the Kavbiuro laid themselves open to several charges of "abuses of a true-Russian character", listed by the same committee: 1)

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.83, ll.9-10.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.83, l.11.

³ Fotieva, p.291; RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.61, l.28.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.75, l.251.

Where the Georgian armed forces had worn the traditional Georgian headgear, 'tushinki' for the infantry and 'svaiki' for the cavalry, they were suddenly ordered to don the Red Army's 'budyenovki'. According to Aginashvili "that provided strong material for the development of chauvinism...indeed, under tsarism the national brigades were allowed to wear national costumes". 2) After the unification of the Transcaucasian railways in October 1921, large numbers of Georgian railway workers were sacked, supposedly to reduce unnecessary staff costs. But, according to the Georgians, in November the head of the Transcaucasian railways Mironov telegraphed to the authorities in Rostov asking, "in view of extreme necessity" for them to send twelve to fourteen thousand (Russian) railway workers. 3) Tsintadze testified to the systematic maltreatment of local Georgian elements in the Transcaucasian Cheka, leading to large scale desertions, and charged Ivanovskii with recruiting 1,345 Russians from Samara with the intention of replacing all Georgians in the Cheka. 4) Tsintadze also claimed that all the clerical work in the unified Transcaucasian commissariats was being conducted in Russian, and Russian had been introduced as the official language on the railways and in many other institutions in Tiflis. Meanwhile the old tsarist bureaucracy was being allowed to run events in Georgia on the basis that Georgia would soon be reintegrated into the one and indivisible Russia. 5) There was a string of complaints from the Georgians that the Transcaucasian institutions were constantly overriding the decisions of sovereign republican bodies, that the highest organs of the Transcaucasian Union were being convened and run without reference to the republican organs and were demanding that all major decisions were to be promulgated

in Georgia under its own name, not that of the Georgian authorities, that instructions were being sent to the Georgian government without the legally required signatures and so on.¹ Some of the complaints of the Georgians were certainly petty but others, such as the deliberate discrimination against Georgians in government employment, were serious enough to warrant severe disciplinary measures if substantiated.

Most of the charges on both sides did not come to light until Dzerzhinskii's commission visited Georgia in November 1922, but they indicate the bad feeling that had existed between the Georgian and Transcaucasian authorities. This went back as far as the February 1921 invasion which the local Georgian Communists felt had been carried out behind their backs and therefore without the necessary political preparation. The charges of 'nationalist deviation' on the one hand and 'Great Russian Chauvinism' and the 'methods of War Communism' on the other may often have taken the form of petty squabbles, but underlined the major political differences which were at the heart of the more serious disputes over sovereignty in Transcaucasia.

The most significant of these disputes was over the formation of a Transcaucasian Federation from the three republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaidjan. Such a move, to be followed by the entry of Transcaucasia into the Russian Federation, had been mooted as early as 1st March 1921 by the Azerbaidjani official B. Shakhtakhtinskii, who wrote to Lenin recommending this as the most practical resolution of the territorial disputes

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, l.61.

between the three republics.¹ Shakhtakhtinskii's proposals were discussed by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party in the same month², and in July Stalin visited Tiflis to prepare the ground for the creation of a federation.³

On 2nd or 3rd November 1921 the Kavbiuro formally resolved on the necessity of forming a Transcaucasian Federation. According to both Pipes and Lewin, this move was taken on the urging of Moscow.⁴ But on 8th November Ordzhonikidze telegraphed Stalin announcing the Kavbiuro's decision and asking for the Russian Central Committee's reaction. Just in case the CC should raise any objections, he added that "a campaign along these lines has started successfully."⁵ The Central Committee seems to have been taken aback by this decision. On 17th November the Politburo telegraphed the Kavbiuro, demanding that you

immediately advise us as to exactly what you have decided on the question of forming a Transcaucasian Federation and how you envisage the relationship of the Union Soviet of the Transcaucasian Federation to the RSFSR. The conclusion of the Central Committee will be made on receipt of this material.

At the same meeting, the Politburo discussed concluding a military convention with the three separate republics, indicating that it was not yet ready to deal with the new

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.1, d.2796, l.3.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.62 l.2.

³ Stalin, Vol.V, p.88 ff.

⁴ Pipes, p.267; Lewin, p.44.

⁵ Ordzhonikidze, Vol.1, 208

federation.¹ On 28th November, Lenin wrote to Stalin signalling his agreement in principle with a federation, but cautioning that its "immediate practical realisation must be regarded as premature", and calling for a preparatory period of propaganda orchestrated by the Central Committees of the three republican parties.² The next day the Politburo passed a resolution in much the same tone.³ On the 26th, however, a plenipotentiary conference of representatives of all three republics had already concluded a preliminary union agreement which guaranteed the independence of all three republics but passed supreme authority in Transcaucasia to a plenipotentiary conference elected in equal number by each of the republics.⁴ Thus it seems to be the case that the Kavbiuro was pushing ahead with the formation of the federation largely on its own initiative, and without preliminary consultations either with Moscow or the republics. On the other hand, the Georgians' claims that the Kavbiuro had acted entirely without preparation and in breach of party discipline⁵ were disingenuous; the idea had been in the pipeline at least since March 1921, and Stalin himself had visited Tiflis to discuss the proposal with the Georgian communists in July. Lewin suggests that in the dispute over the Transcaucasian Federation "Stalin and Ordzhonikidze were pursuing a personal vendetta" against the Georgian Communists,⁶ but the whole premise for closer ties between the three republics lay deeply embedded in Marxist theory and

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.231, l.2.

² Lenin, Vol.XLIV, p.255.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.237, l.2.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.61, l.16.

⁵ Fotieva, p.289.

⁶ Lewin, p.54

should have been the object of dispute only over the timing and form of such a union.

The objections of the Georgians and the hesitancy of the centre delayed the formation of the Transcaucasian Federation for the time being. But the Georgian Central Committee was overruled by the First Congress of the Communist Party of Georgia which met at the end of January 1922.¹ On 12th March 1922 a formal treaty creating the Federal Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of Transcaucasia was signed by representatives of the three republics. This treaty formally maintained the independence of the three republics, but granted sweeping powers to the Union Soviet and in particular to a Supreme Economic Council, which left the three republics with less independence in economic matters than was formally accorded to the autonomous republics and regions of the RSFSR.² In spite of the decision of the Georgian Party Congress, the Georgian leadership, and also some Azerbaidjani communists, continued to be obstructive towards the federation, prompting the Russian Central Committee to intervene. On 5th April, the CC came down firmly against the Georgian opposition, stating its belief that the struggle in Georgia was "based entirely on motives of a personal character on the part of various comrades", threatening expulsions on the basis of the Party's decisions against factional struggle, and reducing the Georgian Central Committee from twenty-five members to fifteen.³ (At this time, the Kavbiuro was renamed the Transcaucasian Regional Committee of the Russian Communist Party - Zakkraikom).

¹ Suny, pp.214-215; Ordzhonikidze, vol.1, p.226 ff.

² Batsell, pp.401-406; Suny, p.215.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.64, op.1, d.61, l.9.

Even though the Russian Central Committee at this stage had plenty of evidence that Ordzhonikidze was a maverick in his handling of Transcaucasian affairs and that Lenin's strict instructions on the sensitive handling of Georgia were being ignored, they continued to support the Zakkraikom right down the line just as they had, with the exception of Trotsky, over the invasion of Georgia in 1921. The conclusion that the disputes in Transcaucasia were the product of "motives of a personal character" may have had some validity, but this was a two-way process, and by siding with the Zakkraikom the Central Committee implicitly threw this accusation at highly respected Bolsheviks such as Makharadze and Mdivani. But the Bolsheviks could not allow any dissent on Georgia to come out into the open. Ever since the Bolshevik invasion, Georgia had become a cause celebre for anti-Bolshevik Social Democratic parties throughout Europe, and the Bolsheviks were initiating a massive continent-wide propaganda effort which was to culminate in making Georgia the focus of May Day celebrations and included the widespread translation and distribution of books by Chaykin and Trotsky.¹ Any suggestion by the leadership of Communist Georgia that all was not rosy in the Georgian garden or that the nation's fate was being decided against the wishes of its population would undermine the international appeal of the Bolshevik revolution at a time when the Bolsheviks were still depending on further revolutions in the West. A united front was now the priority, and for the time being it was the Zakkraikom which set the agenda.

Although the Georgians continued to raise objections to specific centralising measures, such as the currency

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.288, l.13.

reform, the Central Committee directive effectively silenced open opposition to the Transcaucasian Federation until the matter was again brought to the forefront when it appeared, almost as an afterthought, in the revised second draft for the formal unification of the Soviet Republics in October 1922. Although Mdivani was present as a guest at the session of the Central Committee which approved this draft,¹ and apparently raised no specific objections to the entry of Georgia into the USSR via the Transcaucasian Federation,² this caused a storm in the Georgian Central Committee who had already voiced their opposition to the formation of a Union and who now saw this move as a further diminution of Georgian statehood. Their protests to Moscow were met by successive rejections by Stalin, Kamenev, Bukharin, and finally Lenin, who sent a stern telegram to Georgia on 21st October, accusing the protesters of unseemly conduct and breach of Party procedures.³

Shortly afterwards, the Zakkraikom went on the offensive by trying to remove a number of Georgian oppositionists from Tiflis. This prompted the mass resignation of nine out of the eleven members of the Georgian Central Committee on 22nd October 1922, citing the "factual mistrust of the Zakkraikom towards the Central Committee of Georgia and its systematic persecution of almost all the members of the Central Committee."⁴ Although the Zakkraikom swiftly accepted the resignation and appointed a new Central Committee, the course of events could not be ignored in Moscow. The matter took a further turn when one of the members of the

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.84, l.1.

² Fotieva, p.290.

³ Lenin, Vol.XLIV, pp.299-300; Pipes, 274.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, l.57; Fotieva, p.290.

former Georgian Central Committee, M. Okudzhava wrote to Lenin detailing threatening and abusive behaviour by Ordzhonikidze against Georgian communists.¹ According to Okudzhava's later account, Ordzhonikidze had wielded a marble paperweight and a knife at him, and threatened to have him shot.² This charge, although it was denied by Ordzhonikidze, prompted the Secretariat of the Russian Central Committee on November 24th to send a three-man commission headed by Felix Dzerzhinskii to Tiflis to investigate the matter. Dzerzhinskii and the other members of the commission, Mitskevich-Kapsukas and Manuil'skii, were never going to be sympathetic to complaints against centralism, and Zinoviev is reported as having stated that the commission had reached its main conclusions even before it had left Moscow.³ By now, the Central Committee was used to supporting the Zakkraikom and viewing the Georgians as troublemakers, and in the main probably viewed the commission as a formality. Significantly, however, Enukidze later reported that Lenin himself made anxious enquiries about the composition of the commission,⁴ and he abstained from the vote of the Politburo confirming its make-up.⁵ Shortly afterwards Lenin also sent Rykov to Tiflis to keep an eye on affairs.

At this time a further incident gave more fuel to the charges against Ordzhonikidze. According to Rykov's own account, he arranged to meet his former comrade-in-arms in Siberian exile Akakii Kabakhidze, a supporter of the Georgian oppositionists, in Ordzhonikidze's apartment in

¹ Pipes, p.281.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, ll.49-50.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, l.54.

⁴ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.590.

⁵ Fotieva, p.290.

Tiflis where Rykov was staying. At this purely social gathering the discussion inevitably moved on to Georgian politics. Kabakhidze complained about the fact that leading communists were enjoying great material privileges, and in particular that Ordzhonikidze had been flaunting a fine horse which was being cared for at public expense. A fierce quarrel then erupted, in the course of which Ordzhonikidze struck Kabakhidze, and Rykov and his wife had to intervene to keep the two apart.¹

While what became known in Party circles as 'The Incident' was no more than an argument which got out of hand, possibly under the influence of alcohol, it confirmed much of the accusations against Ordzhonikidze's high-handed methods and was to leave a particular impression on Lenin. Nor was this an entirely isolated incident. In addition to Okudzhava's accusations, on another occasion A.A. Gegechkori, a supporter of Ordzhonikidze on the Georgian Sovnarkom, struck two party workers associated with the Georgian opposition.² In November, one Kakabadze further charged that Ordzhonikidze had approached him and asked him to organise a malicious campaign of slander "to discredit Mdivani in the eyes of the masses."³ While Ordzhonikidze flatly denied the accusations of Okudzhava and Kakabadze,⁴ dismissed the Kabakhidze incident as a personal quarrel and was not implicated in the Gegechkori assault, there was enough smoke to suggest a distinctly un-Bolshevik fire had been burning. While the methods of the Bolsheviks were often brutal in dealing with

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, ll.42-43.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, l.60.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, l.50.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, ll.59-60.

political opponents, the resort to slander and physical abuse against fellow Party members was a serious misdemeanour.

The written conclusions of Dzerzhinskii's commission submitted later to the Politburo completely exonerated Ordzhonikidze and the Zakkraikom; the Zakkraikom had consistently followed the line of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, including making concessions to the nationalist mood of the the masses and the intelligentsia. The Georgian communists, however, in pursuing this policy themselves succumbed to the pressure of petit-bourgeois nationalism and made a fetish of concessions; the Georgian Central Committee was entirely to blame for the conflicts with the Zakkraikom, which had always followed correct party procedures and campaigned properly for all its decisions; charges against the Zakkraikom of Great Russian tendencies were dismissed, while the Georgian opposition was charged with a range of offences including deliberate obstructiveness against policies it had formally approved, irregularities in carrying out important tasks, including land reform, nepotism in Party and Soviet institutions and lack of security with regard to the Mensheviks.¹ While many of these conclusions clearly flew in the face of the facts, the commission also chose not to deal with many important charges, including those against Ordzhonikidze's personal behaviour. The commission gave its full backing to the continuing work of the Zakkraikom and the new Georgian Central Committee, and recommended that the leading oppositionists Makharadze, Kavtaradze, Mdivani and Tsintadze be sent to work in Russia.

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.30, 11.1-2.

At some point between 21st October, when he had sent his rebuke to the Georgians, and the end of December, Lenin underwent a dramatic change in attitude to the Georgian affair, and more generally towards the whole progress of the system he had played the leading role in building and the individuals who led it. The precise reasons for this U-turn are not clear. According to Isaac Deutscher "in all probability, the change was not caused by any single incident but by a coincidence of many", in particular those connected with the Georgian affair, but also by an increasing awareness of the growing bureaucracy by which he was surrounded.¹ Pipes ascribes his change of heart to the information he received from Rykov and Dzerzhinskii on their return to Moscow,² on the 9th and 12th December respectively, and this is supported by Fotieva.³ As Lenin was poised to act, however, his health deteriorated severely on the night of 15-16th December and he was henceforward confined to his quarters. Nevertheless, he managed to dictate his "Testament" and, on the 30th and 31st of December, his "Notes on the Question of Nationalities or 'Autonomisation'".

These notes indicate that Lenin had been deeply disturbed by the Kabakhidze incident, and that this incident in itself was enough to lead him to question the whole process of what he continued to refer to as 'autonomisation'. While accepting the need for a closer union of the Soviet Republics, Lenin returns to his old theme of the position of Russia as the oppressor nation and dwells particularly on "that same Russian apparatus

¹ Isaac Deutscher, Stalin - a Political Biography (Pelican, 1986), pp.249-250.

² Pipes, pp.281-282.

³ Fotieva, p.291-292.

which...we took over from tsarism and slightly anointed with Soviet oil." It was impossible to deal with the national question in the abstract, and it was particularly this "bourgeois and tsarist hotchpotch" of an apparatus which demanded caution in creating an otherwise desirable Union. Therefore the strict rules needed to be enforced over the use of the national language in the non-Russian republics, and the Bolsheviks should even be prepared if necessary to "take a step backward at the next Congress of Soviets, i.e., retain the union of Soviet socialist republics only for military and diplomatic affairs, and in all other respects restore full independence to the individual People's Commissariats". Ordzhonikidze comes in for particular blame for the conflict in Georgia. Dzerzhinskii also "distinguished himself by his truly Russian frame of mind" in whitewashing Ordzhonikidze. He and Stalin shared the political responsibility for events in Georgia, and "Stalin's haste and his infatuation with pure administration, together with his spite against the notorious 'nationalist-socialism', played a fatal role here."¹

Pipes views Lenin's change of heart as evidence of the complete failure of his national programme: "In the end, Lenin's national program reduced itself to a matter of personal behaviour: it depended for the solution of the complex problems of a multinational empire upon the tact and good will of Communist officials." This much is certainly true, but Pipes goes on to argue that "Lenin's expectations were quite unfounded" given the rejection of Lenin's national policy by the majority of Bolshevik leaders and the overwhelmingly Russian composition of the

¹ Lenin, Vol.XLV, pp.356-362.

supreme authority in the land, the Russian Communist Party. While Lenin condemned the Great Russian attitudes of Ordzhonikidze and Dzerzhinskii in the affair, he saw the root of the problem not in the behaviour of individual communists but in the surviving influence of the tsarist, bourgeois, Great Russian bureaucracy. For Pipes on the other hand,

it was psychologically as well as administratively contradictory to strive for the supremacy of the proletariat, and at the same time to demand that this proletariat, which was largely Russian, place itself in a morally defensive position regarding the minorities.¹

This had certainly been a constant problem, which had led to crises in Bashkiria, Turkestan and elsewhere. But in those other cases three factors had weighed against Russian abuses; firstly, the energetic intervention of Narkomnats, the Sovnarkom and the Central Committee on the side of the national minorities; secondly, the "personal behaviour", the "tact and good will" of the Bolshevik plenipotentiaries entrusted with sorting out national disputes; and thirdly, the largely successful co-optation of nationalist leaders and their satisfaction with the autonomous rights granted to the non-Russians. These were the factors which had ensured the relative success of the Bolshevik national policy in the RSFSR. In Georgia, however, the nationalists were not co-opted, as had been originally intended, but their position was taken up by Georgian Old Bolsheviks who turned out to be more obstructive in their nationalism than many of those leaders who were nationalists first, communists second.

¹ Pipes, pp.276-281.

On the other side, the behaviour of Ordzhonikidze and the Zakkraikom contrasted sharply with that of, say, Frunze or Ioffe and the Turkbiuro.

Less explicable is the behaviour of the majority of the Russian Central Committee and Politburo. Narkomnats could have been expected to take the side of the Georgians, but had no role in matters outside of the RSFSR. But the Central Committee also had a good record of backing the national minorities, including the Georgians, up until the end of 1922. Now, however, all the members of the Politburo apart from Lenin followed Dzerzhinskii's line. Thus on 25th January 1923 the Politburo fully endorsed the findings of Dzerzhinskii's commission, including the removal of the four leading Georgian communists from Georgia. While there is no record of dissent to this decision, the presence of Rakovskii at the session suggests there must have been at least some debate. Trotsky too was present, but there is no evidence that at any point he took up the Georgian cause, concerning himself more with military matters in Transcaucasia, which were also discussed at the same session.¹

A national policy which had previously operated on a largely ad hoc basis in favour of the national minorities was now turning in the opposite direction. Lenin's solution was to provide more concrete guarantees than had hitherto been in place, particularly in the sphere of language, and to take exemplary measures against those he regarded as politically responsible for the new turn of events: Ordzhonikidze, Dzerzhinskii and Stalin. Pipes dismisses these remedies as entirely inadequate and

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f,17, op.3, d.331, l.1.

illustrative of Lenin's "fundamental misinterpretation of the entire national problem".¹ This is to underestimate Lenin's evaluation of the deeper problems at work: pervading his writings at this time, not just in the theses on the national question, but in his "Testament" and his statements on the Workers' and Peasants' inspectorate, is a mistrust of the growing influence of the State bureaucracy. Lenin sees this danger mostly in the remnants of tsarism and the absence of proletarians in the apparatus. But he was also increasingly aware of a further, more immediate dimension to the Georgian conflict. It was not simply the tsarist and opportunist elements in the apparatus asserting themselves, but a change in attitude at the very highest levels of the Communist Party that was manifesting itself.

The pivotal figure in this process must have been Stalin. Throughout 1922 he had been publicly addressing more and more invective against nationalism in general, where before he had stressed the dangers of Great Russian Chauvinism. His current obsession with the formal centralisation of the Soviet Republics may have been based on sound principles, but was now overriding his previously supportive attitude to the non-Russians. His pet project, which he had undoubtedly hoped to present as fulfilling the wishes of the independent republics, was now being threatened by the Georgians. He had already expressed his irritation at Lenin's intervention in September 1922, and now, in an exchange of notes with Kamenev, he went so far as to accuse Lenin of coming

¹ Pipes, p.287.

under the influence of Georgian Mensheviks.¹ He also did his best to obstruct the work of Lenin's commission of enquiry (discussed below). Stalin was at this time trying not only to effect a reorganisation of the Soviet State, but also to consolidate his own position in the Party given Lenin's increasing retirement from active political life. The increasing hostility between Lenin and Stalin, as evidenced in the Testament and the row over Stalin's treatment of Krupskaya, reflect a change in attitude on Stalin's part, which was clearly expressed in his approach to the national question.

Moshe Lewin views the conflict in the party over the creation of the USSR as one between the two types of Bolshevik leader:

The first of these were the intellectuals and idealists, sensitive to doctrinal requirements and deeply attached to their vision of socialism...The second group were primarily executives, men of action, practitioners of the revolution, more concerned with day-to-day realities.²

In the former category, he lists Rakovskii, Krestinskii, Serebryakov, Preobrazhenskii, Makharadze and Trotsky; in the latter belong Ordzhonikidze, Kaganovich, Molotov, Kuibyshev and Stalin. Such a distinction, also followed by Isaac Deutscher,³ is too simplistic. The "men of

¹ Fotieva, p.302; Izvestiia TsK KPSS 1989, no.9, pp.208-209; Lewin, pp.51-52. Fotieva dates these notes 1st February 1923, but Izvestiia TsK KPSS and Lewin place it at the end of September 1922. I have been unable to locate the document, but the contents of the notes as a whole would seem to support Fotieva's date.

² Lewin, 59.

³ Isaac Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky: 1921-1929 (Oxford, 1970), p.73.

action" had a theoretical programme driving their actions and were, moreover, backed by some of the Party's leading theoreticians, such as Bukharin and Piatakov; of the "intellectuals", Trotsky had distinguished himself in the Civil War by the ruthlessness of his practical application to the military tasks entrusted to him; Mikhail Frunze is another who springs to mind as a successful and pragmatic leader with a strong idealist streak. The course of events, and the ideological confusion thrust upon the Bolsheviks by their continued global isolation, had forced them to admit quite openly from the beginning of 1921 onwards that their primary task for now was to hold onto power at all costs, and this pressure was having an effect on the likes of Ordzhonikidze and Stalin in both their beliefs and their personal ambitions. But the pressures could work either way, and at the same time Makharadze was moving towards an equally unmarxist position, that of outright nationalism. Lewin's work, "Lenin's Last Struggle" is, as the title suggests, primarily concerned to show that Lenin was acutely concerned about the direction the Soviet state was taking and devoted his last days to a struggle against these tendencies, as manifested particularly in the person of Stalin. Such a project leads Lewin to view the leading personalities of the day in black or white terms, as good guys or bad guys, and thus to miss some of the complexities involved and the sometimes accidental nature of the course of events.

On 24th January 1923, Lenin asked Fotieva, together with his other secretaries Glasser and Gorbunov, to gather all the material of the Dzerzhinskii Commission and to prepare their own report. Exactly what aspects of

the affair most concerned him are shown by the list of questions he also gave his secretaries:

- 1) On what grounds were the old Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia accused of deviation?
- 2) For what were they charged with a breach of discipline?
- 3) What else did the Zakkraikom accuse the CC of the Communist Party of Georgia of?
- 4) Physical methods of repression.
- 5) The line of the CC of the Russian Communist Party in Lenin's absence and in his presence.
- 6) The attitude of the commission. Did it look only at the charges against the CC CP of Georgia or also at those against the Zakkraikom?
- 7) The current position."¹

From this list it is clear that Lenin was now coming to suspect not only that there had been political mistakes made in relation to Georgia, but that there had been a deliberate cover-up on the part of Dzerzhinskii's commission, and even that there had been a conspiracy by the Central Committee to mislead him over its attitude to the national question. Lenin constantly harried his secretaries over the progress of this work, indicating his acute concern to discover the truth behind the affair.²

On 3rd March 1923, Fotieva presented Lenin with the completed report. In its conclusions, the report unequivocally takes the side of the Georgians and refutes blow by blow the conclusions of Dzerzhinskii's commission.³ While the secretaries pull no punches in

¹ Fotieva, p.303.

² Idem, p.304-307.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, ll.69-73.

their criticisms of both Ordzhonikidze and Dzerzhinskii, most notable is the absence of a single mention of Stalin. Lenin had not asked for any information on Stalin's role in his questions to the secretaries, and his criticisms against Stalin in the 'Testament' had been directed against his unsuitability as General Secretary, not his handling of nationality affairs. He talks of Stalin's political responsibility in his December notes on the national question, but that is not enough to suggest that Lenin considered Stalin to be heavily involved on Ordzhonikidze's side. But Lenin's suspicions that the Central Committee had been deceptive in its treatment of the Georgian affair necessarily implicated Stalin. On 14th February, Lenin signalled his readiness to take on the Central Committee by instructing Fotieva to inform Sol'ts, the CC's secretary, that he considered the CC's approach to the national question in general incorrect.¹ By the time he received his secretaries' report, Lenin had had his famous split with Stalin over the latter's rudeness to Krupskaya, and had clearly made his mind up that Stalin was one of his primary opponents over the Georgian affair. On 6th of March, therefore, he wrote to Mdivani and Makharadze: "I am with you in this matter with all my heart. I am outraged at the rudeness of Ordzhonikidze and the connivance of Stalin and Dzerzhinskii. I am preparing for you notes and a speech.." ². But Lenin was too ill to undertake the defence of the Georgians, and he turned to Trotsky, who alone of the Politburo he felt he could trust and who could be expected to support Lenin's position. Lenin wrote to Trotsky on 5th March:

¹ Fotieva, p.313.

² Trotsky, Stalinskaia shkola..., p.81

I earnestly ask you to undertake the defence of the Georgian affair at the Central Committee of the Party. That affair is now under 'prosecution' at the hands of Stalin and Dzerzhinskii and I cannot rely on their impartiality. Indeed, quite the contrary!¹

In a telephone call to Lenin's secretary Volodicheva the same day however, Trotsky indicated that he was too ill to take on such a responsibility at a time when he could not even be sure of presenting the economic report to the Twelfth Party Congress. Anyway, having spoken to Makharadze, Mdivani and Ordzhonikidze, he was confident that any aberrations on Ordzhonikidze's part were isolated errors². For Trotsky, the Georgian affair was not such a major issue, certainly not important enough for him to pit himself against the rest of the Politburo.

Anyway, the Politburo and Zakkraikom had, in the meantime, been making conciliatory gestures in an attempt to smooth things over and avoid a damaging row at the Twelfth Party Congress. The Politburo decision of 25th January concerning the removal of Mdivani et al. from Georgia represented a conclusive victory for Ordzhonikidze and his backers. But on the very same day another incident caused Stalin's secretariat to demonstrate a measure of evenhandedness. Apparently a number of high security documents, including telegrams from Lenin and Stalin and a secret report by Makharadze had fallen into the hands of the Mensheviks in Tiflis. Lack of security and leaks to the Mensheviks had been one

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.34, l.15.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.34, l.3; Volodicheva's summary of Trotsky's reply has not been previously available, and consequently both Lewin and Deutscher speculate that Trotsky must have agreed to Lenin's request. Lewin, pp.155-156.

of the principal charges of the Zakkraikom against the former Georgian Central Committee, and now Stalin moved swiftly, pinning the blame on the new secretary of the Georgian CC Sabashvili, who was immediately dismissed from his post.¹ Possibly this embarrassment spurred on the moves to conciliation in Georgia, but the Politburo must also have been keen to put an end to a matter which was not only tearing apart the Party in Georgia but was also the subject of unhealthy interest in the Party as a whole. So much so that on 5th January the Central Committee felt obliged to send out a special circular to all Gubkoms and Obkoms of the Communist Party explaining the events in Georgia. While exonerating the Zakkraikom entirely, the letter was not as harsh on the Georgians as may have been expected.²

The immediate cause of the conciliation, however, was the supportive note Lenin had written to the Georgians. On 7th March, Stalin wrote to Ordzhonikidze warning him of the contents of this note and advising him to reach a compromise with the opposition³. In March 1923 Kamenev and Kuibyshev travelled to Georgia to attend the Party Congress and on 14th March a secret Party agreement was duly signed by Mdivani, Makharadze, Okudzhava, Kamenev, Kuibyshev, Eliava (head of the Georgian Sovnarkom), Ordzhonikidze and Myasnikov. In this the Georgians agreed to the need for a Transcaucasian Federation, while in return the Communist Party was committed to a "decisive and systematic struggle" against any Great Russian tendencies in the apparatus, to sensitivity towards national feelings, especially in Georgia, and to

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.31, l.1.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.32, ll.5-17.

³ Izvestiia TsK KPSS, no.9, 1990, pp.151-152.

cultural and educational measures to overcome national animosities.¹ In return for signing this agreement and submitting to Party discipline, the oppositionists were to be allowed a number of places to form a minority in the Georgian Central Committee.² Makharadze, Mdivani and Okudzhava signed a separate statement, however, making it clear that they believed that only they, who would now be a minority on the CC, would in fact be capable of putting these policies into practise, and that they were only signing the agreement out of regard for the unity of the Russian Communist Party and, in particular, so as to avoid causing further distress to Lenin in his current state of ill health.³ Ordzhonikidze also informed Stalin that Mdivani had demanded the reorganisation of the Zakkraikom and the removal of Ordzhonikidze from the Caucasus,⁴ but then agreed to leave the matter of the Zakkraikom to a later date. On 19th March Ordzhonikidze accordingly proposed a list for the new Georgian Central Committee drawn up by Kamenev and Kuibyshev to the Georgian Party Congress. So far had the tide flown against the Georgian opposition, however, that this list was defeated in favour of a list which excluded Mdivani and Tsintadze but did include eight 'deviationists' out of 25 places, headed by Makharadze.⁵

In spite of his negative reply to Lenin, Trotsky did take some measures to aid the Georgians. On 6th March he wrote to the Politburo suggesting some amendments to the theses on the national question Stalin had prepared for the Twelfth Party Congress, stressing the dangers of

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.31, ll.6-7.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.31, l.5.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.31, l.8.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.31, l.11.

⁵ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.31, l.9.

Great Power Chauvinism and, almost in the exact words of Lenin's articles, arguing that it might be necessary in the future to dismantle some of the unified commissariats.¹ Stalin, who does not seem to have been aware at this stage of Lenin's articles, nevertheless accepted Trotsky's suggestions. On 23rd of March, Trotsky tried to persuade the Politburo to remove Ordzhonikidze from his post and have the label 'deviationist' removed from the Georgian oppositionists, but was only able to muster one vote in his support (probably Bukharin). He then took the same proposal to the full Central Committee on the 31st, but still got only one vote in support.² Having been comprehensively defeated, he appears to have given up the struggle. Mdivani and company were now powerless, and Ordzhonikidze also appears to have moderated his behaviour. The Politburo had what it wanted, which was a trouble-free progress towards a united Soviet state.

Of more concern to the main figures in the Politburo at that time was what would happen after Lenin's death. In this context, a public continuation of the row over Georgia would not have helped anyone. Stalin had orchestrated the Transcaucasian compromise, and he had most to gain by it. By presenting the creation of the USSR at the Party Congress unopposed, his own pet project, he would enormously enhance his reputation in the Party. Now only the incapacitated Lenin could stand in his way.

The fate of Lenin's December notes on the national question is of some interest. On 5th March 1923, Trotsky

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, p.154.

² Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.9, 1990, pp.152-154.

had received a copy of the notes along with the report of Lenin's secretaries. Outside of Lenin's closest circle nobody else apart from Kamenev even knew of the existence of the notes until 16th April, when Fotieva wrote to Kamenev asking what she should do with these notes, as Lenin had indicated that he had wanted them published but had not left final instructions.¹ Kamenev in turn passed the matter to the Central Committee, indicating that he was for publication.² Stalin now took charge of the matter, and a flurry of notes passed back and forth on the same day. Fotieva informed Stalin that Lenin had been very clear that he had wanted to publish the notes at some point in the future, and that in her personal opinion their content was so important that they ought to be known to the Party.³ Later, however, she reported to Stalin that Lenin's sister Maria Il'ichna, was against publication on the basis that Lenin had left no clear instructions, and Fotieva added that Lenin had not considered the article complete.⁴ Trotsky again did his best to withdraw from the fray. He wrote to Stalin explaining that although he had seen the notes, he felt that previously it had been up to Lenin how to use them. Now that Lenin was unable to become involved, Trotsky felt it his duty to report the notes as a valuable contribution on the national question. But if nobody else on the Central Committee was to bring them up, he would take that as a silent decision "which relieves me of personal responsibility for the given article in relation to the party congress."⁵

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.34, l.16.

² Ibid.

³ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.34, ll.20-21.

⁴ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.34, l.18.

⁵ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.34, l.6.

Stalin had the last word, however. On the same day he wrote to the Central Committee members:

I am absolutely astounded that Lenin's articles, whose import is unquestionably of great significance in principle, were received by Trotsky as early as 5th March, and yet Trotsky has managed to hide them under a bushel for more than a month...rumours and myths about them are circulating amongst delegates [to the Twelfth Party Congress], people who have nothing to do with the Central Committee know about them; members of the Central Committee themselves must have nourished these rumours and myths, and the Central Committee ought above all to be informed about their content. I think that Lenin's articles ought to be published publicly. I can only regret, then, that as it turns out from Fotieva's letter, it is clearly impossible to publish them as they have not yet been revised by Lenin.¹

Stalin should have felt threatened by Lenin's articles, but the cheek and arrogance of this letter suggest he considered that he was in control and would get an easy ride at the Twelfth Party Congress.

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.5, op.2, d.34, l.19.

CHAPTER 8: THE TWELFTH PARTY CONGRESS AND THE SULTAN-GALIEV AFFAIR

The year 1923 was crucial for the development of the Bolsheviks' national policy. The Georgian affair and the question of Lenin's articles had to be tidied up. In the case of Sultan-Galiev, a national deviation had developed into organised anti-Party activity. Finally, the constitution of the USSR defined the relations of the national republics to the centre. The outcome of these debates was to strengthen political control over the republican leaderships, while reinforcing the policies of national recruitment and the cultural, language and educational rights of the national minorities. In addition a new emphasis was placed on the industrial development of the non-Russian regions.

The Twelfth Party Congress

The discovery of Lenin's articles on the national question on the eve of the Twelfth Party Congress inevitably influenced the course of the debate. Although it was decided not to publish the articles, the presidium of the Congress decided on 18th April to reveal its contents to the delegates.¹ Emboldened by Lenin's stance, Mdivani chose to break the agreement worked out at the Georgian Party Congress and complain bitterly about Ordzhonikidze's and the Central Committee's

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.9, 1990, p.162.

handling of Georgia at an early session of the Congress.¹ So the battle lines were drawn even before the Congress heard Stalin's report on the national question. Although the Georgian affair dominated the discussions of the full Congress, this should not obscure the important issues that were also raised concerning the Party's national policy in general and the exact form of the new Union of Soviet Republics in particular. The discussions of the section which met separately from the main Congress to discuss specific amendments to Stalin's theses completely ignored the Georgian question. Instead, Stalin was subjected to a barrage of criticisms for the vagueness of the theses and the proposed constitutional provisions for the Union, and to complaints about the shortcomings in implementing the Party's national policy. As a result, several significant amendments were incorporated into the theses which gave the federating republics more rights at the expense of the centre. This was a long way from Richard Pipes' claim that "the Twelfth Congress....ended in the complete triumph of Stalin. The issue of self-rule versus centralism on the administrative level was decided in favour of the latter."²

Stalin opened the session on the national question on the morning of 23rd April. He started his report by talking about the international significance of the national question, which was now particularly crucial in spreading the revolution to the colonial peoples of the East. Domestically, the chief obstacles to progress were the twin dangers of Great Russian Chauvinism and local nationalism, with the emphasis on the former.³ These were absolutely standard themes of any Bolshevik

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.164-166.

² Pipes, p.293.

³ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp. 479-481.

statement on the national question since 1918 and came as no surprise. His expressions of concern over Great Russian attitudes in the Party stretched as far as members of the Central Committee, whom he accused of delivering speeches "which were inconsistent with communism - speeches which had nothing in common with internationalism."¹ No doubt he wished to make clear he understood thoroughly Lenin's misgivings before justifying the policy in Georgia.

Referring to the Union, Stalin stressed the voluntary nature of this agreement and the right of the Republics to secede in accordance with the long-standing policy of self-determination. He now introduced a newer concept, the distinction between 'juridical equality', which was guaranteed under the terms of the Union, and 'actual equality', which would take much longer to achieve. The latter could be achieved not just by pursuing national policies with regard to schools and language, which were taken for granted, but by guaranteeing the development of the non-Russian regions by building industries there, including the removal of factories from the Russian heartland. Stalin reiterated the point that these new industrial centres were to be created by the efforts of the Russian proletariat.² This emphasis on industrial development was new, but was a logical conclusion of Stalin's ideas on the national question. If Stalin's aim was to raise the cultural level of the backward nationalities,³ then in the long run this could only be achieved by raising their economic level. A consequence of Stalin's formulation on this question, however, was that the Russian proletariat was now in the position of

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.484.

² Idem, p.486.

³ See chapter 2.

the enlightened benefactor of the non-Russians. This differed significantly from Lenin's interpretation which had burdened the Russian people, and specifically the Russian Soviet government, with collective guilt for the tsarist policies of national oppression and had therefore veered towards restricting the rights of the Russians in favour of the national minorities. In Stalin's vision of the new Union, by contrast, the non-Russians were to sacrifice some of their sovereignty in order to benefit from Russian largesse. This point was not picked up at the Congress, but is significant in view of later developments.

Having thus first stressed his disapproval of Great Russian Chauvinism and his commitment to the well being of the minorities, Stalin went on to launch his attack on local nationalism. Although he was at pains to include communists from Azerbaidzhan, Bukhara and Khorezm under this heading, his target was clearly the Georgians. After defending the Transcaucasian Federation as essential for national peace, he came to the question of why the Georgians were so against the Transcaucasian Federation, while they claimed to be completely in favour of federal relations with Russia. The answer, he claimed, was that they had nothing to fear from Great Russian Chauvinism but Georgia enjoyed a privileged position in Transcaucasia, thanks largely to her control of the railway junctions in Tiflis and the main port in the region, Batum. This put Georgia in a position to dictate to Armenia and Azerbaidzhan, and it was this advantageous position which would be lost if the Transcaucasian Federation was formed. To the list of nationalistic crimes uncovered by Dzerzhinskii's commission was added a new charge - that the Georgian

government had adopted a decree to regulate the population in Tiflis with the aim of reducing the proportion of Armenians and increasing the number of Georgians in the capital. This policy of promoting one nation at the expense of another was, according to Stalin, equivalent to the policies of the imperialist government of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and of the British in India.¹

In summary, Stalin concluded that firstly, it was necessary to make the Soviet regime loved in the republics by adopting measures to guarantee the national life of the non-Russians; secondly, "at least the principal nationalities" should be represented on the Union Commissariats; thirdly, "it is necessary to have among our supreme central organs one that will serve to reflect the needs and requirements of all the republics and nationalities without exception."² Stalin, it should be remembered, had opposed the creation of a second chamber in his dispute with Lenin in September 1922. Now he proposed that there should be two chambers with equal rights, one of which would reflect the class interests of all the working people, and the other purely national questions. The latter was to be composed of representatives of each national republic and region equally and would act as a 'barometer' for national needs³. Although Stalin accorded the second chamber equal rights, his description of it as a barometer made it sound more like an advisory body. In addition, the equal representation for each of the autonomous republics and regions proposed by Stalin meant that the influence of the federating Republics on this body would be

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.487-492.

² Idem, p.492.

³ Idem, pp.492-493.

negligible. We shall see that Stalin came in for special criticism on this point.

Mdivani, who was next to speak, did little to defend himself against the charges Stalin had aimed at him. His only response to the accusation of Georgian chauvinism was to refer to the Georgian government's policies towards Georgia's Abkhazian, Adzharian and Ossetian minorities. On national policy in general, he declared that "national policy certainly does not consist of questions of language and culture and national policy as, regrettably, to a large extent many authoritative comrades frequently understand it. For Soviet power, for communists, for Marxists, before anything else economic activity is everything and determines everything." So the issues of autonomy, language and culture which had been at the heart of most contentious issues in the Georgian dispute were of no great importance. The economy was everything and in economics Mdivani was as much of a centraliser as anyone else. He was more than willing to accept the unification of the Union commissariats dealing with defence, diplomacy and the economy.¹

As for the Transcaucasian Federation, after the formation of the Union and in line with the decisions of the Zakkraikom and the Transcaucasian Party Congress, the Transcaucasian Federation would be left with only two commissariats - "that is a somewhat awkward form of unification". As for the argument that the federation was necessary to prevent ethnic frictions, the policy of Soviet power so far, in the North Caucasus in particular, had been to subdivide territory along ethnic lines in

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.495-500.

order to reduce tensions, the opposite of what was now proposed.¹

Mdivani's strategy, therefore, was to focus on the practical issues surrounding the Transcaucasian Federation and to minimise the significance of the other issues at stake in the Georgian dispute, while proving his own credentials as a centraliser. He was not successful in this. A number of speakers reminded the Congress that the first point of conflict between the Zakkraikom and the Georgian Central Committee had been over the unification of the Transcaucasian railways which seemed to disprove Mdivani's claim that he was in favour of economic centralisation.

The Georgian Sturua was most damning of the Georgian opposition. He had initially been a supporter of Mdivani and Makharadze and had participated in secret meetings which had attempted to discredit Ordzhonikidze and Stalin and had even discussed moves to withdraw the Georgian Communist Party from the Russian Communist Party and apply to the Comintern for separate membership. The national question would not have been a problem in Transcaucasia had it not been for the outright nationalism of the Georgian leaders who were entirely to blame for the whole affair.² The Azerbaidzhani Akhundev was equally scathing in his attacks on the Georgian opposition.³

In general, however, the debate did not take on such hostile, personal tones. Zinoviev, while attacking the Georgians, deliberately distanced himself from Sturua's

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.500-501.

² Idem, pp.505-508.

³ Idem, pp.608-611.

remarks.¹ Eliava, the new head of the Georgian Sovnarkom, stressed the points of agreement with the oppositionists. Their disagreements were over the exact form of federal relations and the pace of change.² Enukidze defended the record of the Zakkraikom and taunted Mdivani and Makharadze for complaining about the treatment of individuals while not being able to find anything fundamental wrong with the national policy being executed in Transcaucasia.³ Ordzhonikidze was particularly restrained in his speech. Mindful of Lenin's articles, he cited a series of examples to prove that the Zakkraikom had not displayed any Great Russian attitudes in their treatment of Georgia.⁴

For the Georgian opposition, Tsintsadze opened by confirming that "it is clear from the discussion that there are no disagreements in our understanding of the national question". The disagreements were over timing and presentation. The problem with the way the unification of the Transcaucasian railways was carried through was that it gave the appearance of a colonial, Great Russian attitude to Georgia. The Georgians were not against political and economic unification - they were for political unity on an all-Union scale, and economic unity at the level of Transcaucasia. It was the method of achieving this unity which had the appearance of a Great Power approach and was alienating the Georgian masses.⁵ Makharadze spoke about straightforward misunderstandings and complained mostly about the

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.602

² Idem, pp.574-576.

³ Idem, pp.585-590.

⁴ Idem, pp.591-594.

⁵ Idem, pp.582-585.

Zakkraikom's lack of consultation with the Georgian Communist Party.¹

Almost all of these speakers stressed that there were no significant disagreements of principle between the two sides in the Georgian dispute. It was left to the two leading orators, Zinoviev and Bukharin, to put the conflict in a theoretical context. Zinoviev based his argument on Lenin's distinction between the position of communists belonging to an imperialist nation on the one hand and those belonging to oppressed nations on the other. Yes, Great Russian Chauvinism was the principle danger in the national question, and it was the job of the Russian Communist Party to struggle with all of its manifestations and to promote the rights of the national minorities. But it was the duty of Georgian communists first and foremost to fight against Georgian nationalism.² While this argument was formally correct, it failed to address the question of how the Georgians should react if confronted with Great Russian attitudes. In the context of this debate, however, Zinoviev won a victory over the Georgians as they had shied away from substantiating the charges of Great Russian attitudes against Ordzhonikidze and the Zakkraikom.

Bukharin delivered what Isaac Deutscher has described as "a great and stirring speech [which] was to be the swan-song of Bukharin the leader of Left Communism."³ Zinoviev, he argued, was underestimating the importance of the nationalism which was evidenced by continuing revolts in Ukraine, Central Asia and Yakutia. The national question could not be ignored as all measures of

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.515-518.

² Idem, pp.601-608

³ Deutscher, Trotsky..., p.98.

the Soviet state, agrarian reform, taxation and so on became national issues when applied in the non-Russian regions. The shortage of national cadres in the communist party meant that Lenin's policy of special concessions needed to be reinforced. Finally, as the standard bearer of international revolution, the Soviet state had to be especially sensitive to the national minorities. Whereas Uzbek Chauvinism meant nothing on a world scale, Great Russian Chauvinism was of enormous significance and it was therefore right that the Party should direct most of its attention against Great Russian Chauvinism.¹

Bukharin succeeded in turning the lip-service paid by every delegate to the priority of the international situation and the struggle with Great Russian Chauvinism into a defence of the Georgians. He refused, however, to criticise Stalin's theses, which he described as "superb", and instead tried to shelve the Georgian question into a separate resolution in line with the previous decisions of the Central Committee. Radek, who closed the session, tried to strike a balance between the two sides. He expressed most concern at the lack of understanding of the national programme in the Party as a whole, but criticised Bukharin and Mdivani for giving a 'carte blanche' to local nationalism. For the rest, on issues such as the Transcaucasian Federation it was necessary to remain open-minded and carefully weigh up the pros and cons.²

Nothing concrete came out of the discussions on Georgia. Only Bukharin was prepared seriously to argue that there were any general theoretical considerations at

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.611-615.

² Idem, pp.615-619.

stake. Otherwise it never became clear exactly what issues were involved. Dzerzhinskii's commission had at least concluded that what underlay the conflict was a differing interpretation of the policy of concessions, but this hardly got a mention at the Congress. Crucially, the Georgians did not have the confidence to try and substantiate the charges of Great Russian abuses by Ordzhonikidze and others, resting their case instead on Lenin's authority and their own credentials as internationalists and centralists. This inevitably led to their defeat. It was easy for their opponents to portray them as petty troublemakers who were concerned with nothing more than preserving their own authority.

Although most speakers addressed it, there was a sense of weariness with the Georgian question which seemed to have been finally resolved a month earlier. It is quite possible that the matter would have received little attention had it not been for the sudden discovery of Lenin's articles. While the debates on Georgia failed to clarify anything, they did succeed in obscuring the more pressing issues facing the Congress. This was, after all, the main opportunity the Party had to discuss the creation of a federal Union, surrounding which there were numerous concerns. There was also the question of the implementation to date of the Bolsheviks' national policy within the RSFSR. Areas such as Bashkiria and Turkestan had arguably far more cause for complaint than did Georgia.

Other issues were raised from the Congress floor. Khristian Rakovskii gave dire warnings about the possibility of civil war if the national question was not correctly handled. He attempted to elaborate Lenin's

misgivings about the nature of the Soviet apparatus which was breeding bureaucratic attitudes among communists themselves. This underlay "the root divergence which is forming day by day and becoming bigger and bigger between our Party, our programme, on the one hand, and our state apparatus on the other." While he was in favour of the Union, he was distressed at the attitude of the central organs which supposed they now had full power over all the separate republics. There was sufficient evidence of this already, even though the Central Committee had decided that the state structure should remain unchanged for now. No provision had been made to ensure the presence of nationals on the central organs, which were acquiring more and more power at a time when they were clearly suffering from a 'departmental psychology'. In conclusion, "we need to remove from the Union commissariats nine tenths of their rights and transfer them to the national republics."¹

Rakovskii was backed up by the Ukrainians Grin'ko and Skrypnik and by Yakovlev who had worked in Ukraine. Grin'ko stressed the need for the republics to enjoy broader budgetary powers and pleaded with the Party to take national culture more seriously.² Skrypnik was particularly concerned with the poor state of Ukrainian education and of lack of respect for Ukrainians as a national minority outside of Ukraine, both products of an underestimation of the importance of national factors among communists. He also described the Red Army as an instrument of russification, and bemoaned the party's failure to develop national cadres, especially in respect of the Borotbists, most of whom had now left.³ Yakovlev

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.576-582.

² Idem, pp.502-505.

³ Idem, pp.570-573.

also focused on the weaknesses of cultural and cadre policies, and further criticised Stalin's Second Chamber as a cosmetic and ineffective exercise.¹

The most damning criticisms of the Party came from two nationals, Said-Galiev from the Crimean Autonomous Republic, and Urazbaeva, representing the Party's section for Kirghiz women. Both complained that the national programme was being ignored by many communists, whose actions were threatening to ignite nationalist revolts. Urazbaeva was one of the few delegates to directly criticise Stalin's theses, which she said ignored the neglected area of work among the national poor.²

These criticisms went to the core of the real problems facing the Party among the national minorities. While a series of policies on the linguistic, cultural and political rights, on national cadre and state-building were in place, they were constantly being hampered by the obstructive attitudes of Soviet and Party officials and by lack of material resources and personnel. Partly as a result, there was a sufficient reserve of anti-Russian sentiment in the borderlands to threaten revolt if the creation of the Union was handled incorrectly. Time and again, however, the discussion returned to the Georgian affair, bypassing discussion of these crucial issues. The distraction of the Georgian affair not only misled the delegates, it has influenced historians who have mistaken a debating victory over the Georgians for a complete victory for Stalin and for centralism.

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.595-598.

² Idem, pp.508-510; 567-569.

It was at a later meeting that these other concerns received proper attention. While it was usual for a commission to discuss detailed amendments to resolutions and present them for a final vote to the full Congress, in this case the Central Committee had decided in February to hold a special sectional meeting on the national question to include around 20 'nationals' specially invited to the Congress for this purpose.¹ This section met on 25th April, the day after the full Congress concluded its debate on the national question. The stenographic report of this meeting was not published until 1991, and it reveals that Stalin was not able to have his way and several significant amendments were accepted.

Rakovskii opened the meeting with a repeat of his fears of giving too much power to a Great Russian apparatus. A united policy in defence, in internal economic policy and in trade was necessary, but this did not entail such a huge step as was now being proposed. He now accused the central organs of wanting to exploit the riches of the republics to the benefit of Russia. Here he revealed the real fear of the Ukrainians that they were about to lose all control over the natural riches of their own republic. He reiterated his plea for a curtailment of the rights of the Union commissariats.²

Mdivani was given the floor next and chose to ignore the specifics of the Georgian question. Instead he proposed his own programme for the Union. This differed from Stalin's project in three significant ways: first, there should be no distinction between autonomous and independent republics, all of which should enter the

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.88, l.1.

² Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.3, 1991, pp.170-172.

Union on an equal basis; second, the number of commissariats existing at the Union level would be restricted to six, of which the finance commissariat would have a purely 'directive' role. The other commissariats were to remain independent for each republic; third, there was no need for a special Second Chamber, which anyway would have no real power. Straightforward proportional representation did not bother him, as

Great Russians will be in a majority in that central institution, and I welcome that as I believe it is right, that the Great Russians as the most cultured nation should provide leadership; all the more so, because in all the central institutions communists will be in a huge majority and there will not be especially big frictions.

This arrangement would also obviate any need for a Transcaucasian Federation.¹ In his efforts to avoid controversy and present himself as a loyal communist and internationalist, Mdivani failed to strike a chord with the delegates. Only Sultan-Galiev gave him any support on the question of the autonomous republics, nobody was interested in doing away with the Second Chamber, while the status of the commissariats was dealt with in more detail by the Ukrainians.

By failing to really take on his opponents, Mdivani had missed an opportunity in a way which can only be put down to his misreading of the attitude of the delegates. Now, speaker after speaker criticised Stalin's theses and the failure of the Communist Party and soviets to implement

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.3, 1991, pp.172-173.

correct policies in the national regions. Khodzhanov, from Turkestan, noted that the theses contained no reference to the relationship between town and country, which was the essence of the national question in practise. NEP and sovietisation had been carried through mechanically, with no regard for local conditions, in a way which was reminiscent of the old tsarist system.¹ Musaev, also from Turkestan, complained bitterly about the several plenipotentiaries, representatives and extraordinary commissions which had been sent to Turkestan from Moscow;

they present themselves as eastern people, they even put on a khalat [oriental robe], making themselves out as local mullahs. A month passes, they take off the khalat, and after three months they appear not as a mullah, not as a bai, not as a Party worker responsible for carrying out a national policy in the localities, but they appear as dictators, not of the republic where they are, but of that which sent them."²

Avdeev spoke of the shortage of 'appropriate Party workers' in Kirghizia, the effects of Great Russian chauvinism, the total lack of Kirghiz language agitational literature and the ineffectiveness of recruitment of Kirghiz.³ Sh.N. Ibragimov, who was active in both the Crimea and Bashkiria, renewed the attack on the Georgian opposition, but also berated the Party for failing to implement the decisions of the Tenth Party Congress with regard to cultural development, land reform

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.3, 1991, pp.176.

² Idem, p.177.

³ Idem, p.164.

and cadre recruitment. It was these failures which contributed to the rise of local nationalism.¹

Sultan-Galiev argued that the rights of the autonomous republics were constantly being violated, that they ought to be upgraded to full republic status with a clearer constitutional position than was currently proposed. Important posts in areas such as Bashkiria were held exclusively by Russians, whom he accused of being former collaborators with Kolchak. The slogan of 'struggle with local nationalisms', when entrusted to such people, in effect gave them free rein to exercise their Great Russian prejudices: "They will beat the Bashkir communist under the guise of Bashkir nationalism". Party organisations in the regions were in chaos and could not be charged with the task of struggling with local nationalism². Sultan-Galiev himself was shortly to fall victim of the charge of a 'nationalist deviation' and his defence of local nationalism is a reflection of how far he had strayed from the Party line. But his comments here were not at all out of place and were echoed by the majority of the non-Russian speakers.

Frunze, by now a senior figure in the Ukrainian government, delivered the most serious critique of Stalin's theses. They needed to include specific provisions for the development of industry in the regions. The emphasis on industrial development among the non-Russians was a major theme for many speakers at the meeting. Stalin had dwelt on it in his opening report, but had not included it in the theses. Frunze also demanded a more emphatic statement on the "decisive struggle for the development of national culture" to be

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.4, 1991, pp.164-165.

² Idem, p.163.

included. But mostly he criticised Stalin's theses for their lack of clarity on the most fundamental issue of the day - the question of state relations within the Union. While not going as far as Rakovskii in wanting to curtail the powers of the centre, he argued that centralistic methods of administration had proved a disaster. For Frunze "unity is the right way to strengthen the rights of the economic and administrative departments of members of the Union". Therefore, the powers of the republics ought to be enhanced, particularly in respect of finance, and the formal equality of the republics needed to be guaranteed in practise. This the current constitutional proposals completely failed to do, as they stipulated that the organs of the Union should be formed from the organs of the RSFSR. It was at least necessary to give the Second Chamber powers equal to the First (i.e. it would have to approve all new laws, not just those specific to the nationalities as Stalin had implied) to ensure this equality.¹

As well as airing specific grievances, many speakers referred to the omissions, lack of clarity, or abstract nature of Stalin's theses. There was clearly a general fear that, with regard to both the new constitutional arrangements and the more general national programme, whatever arrangements existed on paper, in practise the non-Russian regions would be the subject of Great Russian administrative methods and the needs of the nationalities would be ignored. This fear was born of the experience of the last few years, when a satisfactory national policy had evolved but had not been taken seriously

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.3, 1991, pp.178-180.

enough to overcome obstructiveness and to provide the resources needed.

Amidst this storm of discontent, only the Armenian Mikoyan gave Stalin unqualified support.¹ But Stalin's main source of comfort was Trotsky, who played a major part in this debate. Trotsky's role in the Georgian dispute and Lenin's articles has been discussed in the previous chapter, and his presence at this meeting may possibly have something to do with a deal he had struck with Stalin, whereby he would now lend his moral authority in the national question. But his appearance also served two other purposes, to elaborate the proposals on industrial development in the non-Russian regions, and to be seen to discharge his obligation to the Georgians which had been laid on him by Lenin's letter of 5th March, which had by now become widely known to the delegates. He devoted most of his first speech to two proposed amendments, one on moving industrial enterprises near to the sources of raw materials, the other on tackling Great Russian attitudes in the Red Army.² He stressed that Stalin had agreed to these amendments but also indicated his agreement with Frunze and did not attempt to answer seriously the criticisms that had been raised so far. Next he moved on to the Georgian affair.

Lenin sent me a letter on the 5th of March with the intention that, based on this letter, I should wage a determined struggle at the Party Congress against this deviation. And I will now fulfil this task in my speech as an obligation I undertook to Lenin.

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.4, 1991, pp.158-161.

² Idem, pp.166-168.

Trotsky's defence of the Georgians, a task laid on him by Lenin, consisted primarily of pointing out that cordons had been frequently employed in the Civil War and he could not accuse the Georgians of nationalism simply because they had erected cordons¹.

This 'defence' was clearly no more than a token one which Trotsky hoped would save his face. Until we know more of Trotsky's dealings with Stalin at this time it is impossible to know exactly what Trotsky's motivation was in being so weak, but this half-heartedness is reminiscent of Trotsky's response to Lenin's letter on March 5th, indicating that he did not view the Georgian affair too seriously. In this and later speeches at the same session he did, however, come out strongly against Great Russian Chauvinism while proposing concrete measures to rectify the weaknesses in execution of the Party's national policy. This approach was significantly different from Stalin's, and while the two did not oppose each other openly, if any united front was at work it had clearly not been fine-tuned.

Faced with this barrage of criticism and virtually isolated, Stalin crumbled. Speakers were unfair to criticise him for omitting points which were already covered by the resolutions of the Eighth and Tenth Congresses. Anyway he had not wanted to present the report on the national question - twice he had tried to resign this responsibility, both times he had been refused, and now he was just being obedient to the instructions of the Central Committee. The Second Chamber had been devised on the instruction of the Central Committee,² and Stalin had only the examples of

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.4, 1991, pp.168-169.

² RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.2, d.88, l.1.

the American and the Swiss systems on which to base himself. Unable or unwilling to defend his own theses directly, Stalin fell back on Lenin; what Rakovskii was proposing was in effect a confederation, and Lenin had opposed confederation in 1920. Answering Mdivani's proposals, he accused him of haste and promised to review the powers of the Union commissariats in two years time - echoes of Lenin's last articles. In defence of his assault on local nationalism, Stalin referred to Lenin's speech at the Tenth Party Congress and repeated the arguments put forward by Zinoviev the previous day.¹

This was not an inspired performance. The level of discontent seems to have taken Stalin by surprise. In the summer of 1922 he had embarked on his proposals for reforming the relations of the Soviet republics confident that the RSFSR had proceeded far down the path of solving the national question. Then Lenin had raised annoying objections, next the Georgians had created a storm, and now he found himself confronted with dissatisfaction from all the national communists. Stalin's long-term plans both for himself and for the Soviet state are not the subject of this thesis, but if his aim was to consolidate his personal hold over the party apparatus and to further centralise the political and economic structures, he was not going to run the risk of a revolt in the Party on the national question, especially with Lenin taking up the cause of the non-Russians. He had personally been responsible for developing the Party's policies with regard to national culture and national communists, but now found that these policies had not been executed to a degree which would satisfy the delegates. He therefore immediately conceded a whole range of points.

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.4, 1991, pp.169-173.

After Stalin's reply, the meeting went on to debate at length specific amendments. The details of this discussion are of less importance than the amendments which were finally accepted. On Frunze's proposal, a new paragraph condemned talk about the inherent superiority of Russian culture over the culture of the less developed peoples, which represented "nothing other than an attempt to reinforce the supremacy of the Great Russian nationality."¹ Another amendment moved by Frunze and elaborated by Trotsky provided for the creation of new industrial centres and to improve the social position of non-Russians by allotting them more land. Initially, both Trotsky and Stalin had opposed specific promises on industry. Trotsky had wanted these measures to be included in his general report on industry rather than making specific commitments with regard to the national question. Subjected to the pressures of this meeting, however, he gave in and eventually accepted this amendment.²

The fears of the Ukrainians and others about the centralising instincts of the Union commissariats were reflected in the next amendment to be accepted:

We must consider as a similar heritage of the past the striving of some government departments of the RSFSR to subordinate to themselves the independent Commissariats of the autonomous republics and to prepare the ground for the liquidation of the latter.³

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, p.159; Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.653-654.

² Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, pp.161-162; Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.654.

³ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, pp.163; Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.654

After some debate between Trotsky and Said-Galiev, another sentence aimed against the attitude that the national republics were transitory phenomena affirmed their permanence.¹ An amendment proposed by the Ukrainian Poloz depicted the Union as the first step towards the creation of a World Soviet Republic of Labour.² Although Stalin had just admitted his opposition to such a concept in 1920, he did not object now.

At this point Zinoviev appeared at the meeting and proposed an amendment on the need for the Central Committee to exercise especial caution in the selection of Party workers for work in the border regions. After some discussion this was accepted.³ Two more proposals of Frunze were accepted, the first ensuring the equality of the various federating republics in the structure of the central organs, the second granting the republics broad budgetary and financial powers.⁴ Bobinskii proposed ensuring that special laws would be passed to guarantee the use of the national language in all institutions - "laws that will prosecute and punish with all revolutionary severity all violators of national rights, particularly the rights of national minorities."⁵ A further amendment was subsequently included in line with Trotsky's earlier proposal, to the effect that educational work in the Red Army should aim at

¹ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, pp.165-166; Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.654.

² Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, pp.163-164; Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.654.

³ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, p.166; Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.660.

⁴ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, pp.168, 171; Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.654, 655.

⁵ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, p.171; Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.655.

eliminating national rivalry and steps should be taken to organise national military units.¹

Stalin could claim one major victory. There was a lengthy discussion on the matter of the Second Chamber, which the Ukrainians wanted to represent the federating republics rather than nationalities. A number of proposals to limit the representation of the RSFSR on this body were defeated. Rakovskii was allowed the opportunity to propose this amendment to the full Congress, but was again defeated.² In the final version of the resolution, and in the constitution of the USSR, however, the emphasis was on the right of the Second Chamber to veto all new laws, rather than becoming involved only in legislation of a specific national character, as Stalin had originally indicated. Mdivani's alternative proposals were rejected in their entirety,³ as were a number of less significant amendments.⁴

In his report back to the full Congress, Stalin made out that he fully approved of all these amendments.⁵ It should be clear, however, that the resolution on the national question now contained a significantly different slant from Stalin's original theses.⁶ The constitutional status and powers of the national republics were greatly enhanced. Several specific measures against Great Russian Chauvinism were now included, while reference to local nationalism remained vague and general. The

¹ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.655.

² Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, pp.166-171; Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.657-660.

³ Izvestiia TsK KPSS no.5, 1991, pp.156-158.

⁴ Idem, pp.173-176.

⁵ Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), p.653.

⁶ The final version of the resolution is given in Dvenadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), pp.691-697. Stalin's original theses are in Stalin, Vol.V, pp.181-194.

language and education rights of the nationalities were to be strictly guaranteed by law. And the republics were, in time, to have their own national defence forces. Moreover, past errors and shortcomings were implicitly acknowledged.

For all the stormy debate at the Congress a broad area of consensus was shared by all the participants: some form of Union needed to be established, within which the major territorial national groups would enjoy certain political privileges; education and administration should be carried out, as far as was possible, in the national language; a cadre of national communists needed to be recruited and developed; and the fight against Great Russian Chauvinism had to continued. These were, in essence, the national policies which had evolved over the last five years and were now rarely challenged at the highest levels of the Communist Party.

If anything, then, the nationalities came out of the Congress stronger than they had gone into it. While it is possible to argue that the real moral battle had been fought and lost over the Georgian affair, subsequent developments suggest that the stance taken by the non-Russians at the sectional meeting had a more lasting influence on policy. The short-term impact of the Twelfth Party Congress can be gauged from a resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkestan on "Measures for enacting the decisions of the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party on the national question", passed at the end of July 1923. The main points of this resolution on cultural work were 1) to open non-Party cultural clubs; 2) to broaden the network of national language schools; to approve the Sovnarkom's

proposal to open schools for workers; to organise boarding-schools in each area for each nationality to ensure isolated children would be able to receive native-language education; 3) "to employ in the schools more or less loyal people's teachers of local origin"; 4) to form societies for eliminating illiteracy; 5) to step up publication of newspapers and books in the local languages; and 6) to organise 'Red Caravans' for political-educational work.¹

It is clear from this resolution that the old national policy had been strengthened, not weakened. Furthermore, the 'internationalist' delegates to the special meeting on the national question held in June clearly saw the Twelfth Congress as a defeat for themselves, as we shall see. Between the Congress and the final ratification of the USSR constitution further concessions were made. In particular, the Second Chamber was structured so as to give more representation to the full republics. It was also around this time that resources were found to fulfil the programme of constructing national schools. And in 1925 Mdivani and Sultan-Galiev's demand was partially satisfied when two of the nationalities of Central Asia were upgraded to full republic status. While the centralisation of political and economic structures was being reinforced, the rights and status of the national minorities remained strong for most of the 1920's.

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.62, op.3, d.9, l.134.

The "Sultan-Galiev Affair"

While the Twelfth Party Congress showed that the Bolsheviks still thought it essential to carry out special policies with regard to the non-Russians, there were limits to which nationalist attitudes would be tolerated. The Georgian affair had already shown that national demands were conditional on an accepted framework which would not challenge the authority of the Communist Party or interfere in the running of the Soviet state. The case of Sultan-Galiev showed what would happen to national communists who stepped outside the accepted parameters of theoretical debate by opposing the policies of the Party in an organised manner.

Sultan-Galiev appeared at the Twelfth Party Congress on the invitation of the Central Committee, albeit with only a consultative vote, and played a full part in proceedings. Although his 'deviationist' views were well known and had been the object of dispute since 1920, he was not subject to any of the attacks directed against the Georgians. Within a fortnight of the close of the Congress, however, on 4th May 1923, Sultan-Galiev was arrested, expelled from the Party, and held in a cell in the Lubyanka.

As already noted, in the past Sultan-Galiev's views had been tolerated and the Central Committee had frequently intervened on his behalf. His central project, for a separate Muslim communist organisation, had, however, been continually thwarted, his complaints against Great Russian Chauvinism and the Party's national policy had become increasingly strident, and his opposition had

taken on an organised, conspiratorial form. According to later accounts, he had formed a secret organisation, 'Ittihad ve Tarakki' (Union and Progress), together with other prominent Muslim communists as early as 1920.¹ In 1922 to 1923, concern over his activities led to two attempts, both unsuccessful, to have Sultan-Galiev removed from Moscow. One of these attempts was led by the effective head of Narkomnats at the time, Broido.² Concern first surfaced at the Tenth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, where Sultan-Galiev had tried, unsuccessfully, to form a united front of the Muslim delegates. Early in 1923, evidence emerged in the form of letters passed on or intercepted by the GPU which showed the existence of an organised group including communists and non-communists from Russia and communists in Turkey and elsewhere. They also suggested that Sultan-Galiev had made contact with Validov and the Basmachis.

These letters were passed to the Party's Central Control Commission, which summoned Sultan-Galiev on 4th May and resolved

to exclude Sultan-Galiev from the Party as an anti-Party, anti-Soviet element. To remove him from all his party and Soviet posts. In view of the fact that part of the material has not been explained, to investigate the affair and in relation to Sultan-Galiev himself, to hand him over to the GPU.³

This decision was quickly confirmed by the Party's Orgburo and Politburo, which also decided at the end of

¹ Bennigsen and Wimbush, p.87.

² Tayni Natsional'noy politiki ..., p.17.

³ Tayni Natsional'noy politiki ..., p.18.

May to call a special meeting of responsible party workers from the national republics and regions for 6th June. Although the Sultan-Galiev affair was the main topic for the conference, it would also discuss a report on general national policy prepared by Stalin and could scrutinise the question of the constitution of the USSR.¹ Fifty-eight delegates from the national republics attended, of whom only ten were Russians, along with the members of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission and Broido from Narkomnats. Among the Muslim delegates, both opponents and supporters of Sultan-Galiev were represented, including individuals such as Adigamov, Enbayev and Firdevs who were to a greater or lesser extent implicated in the Sultan-Galiev conspiracy.

The head of the Central Control Commission, Kuibyshev opened the proceedings with details of the evidence against Sultan-Galiev. The first letter which had fallen into the hands of the GPU by chance was addressed to a Persian communist and, according to Kuibyshev, testified to the existence of an organisation of Russian, Turkish and Persian Muslims, both Party and non-Party "for the purpose of carrying out an independent political line in the sphere of the national question in opposition to the Comintern and Soviet power."² The second letter addressed to the Bashkir Adigamov was not actually found, but was reported to the GPU by a Bashkir communist, and contained further evidence of a conspiratorial organisation. Stalin was told about this letter, and passed Sultan-Galiev a note at some meeting warning him that his letter had contained almost counter-revolutionary tones.³

¹ RTsKhIDNI, f.17, op.3, d.358, l.2.

² Tainy natsional'noi politiki..., p.15.

³ Idem, pp.15-16.

Concerning the discovery of the third letter in Ufa, Kuibyshev provided an account worthy of a spy novel, involving a chance meeting in a public bath, mysterious envelopes, long train journeys and decipherment of secret codes. Kuibyshev read out the full text of this letter, which had been intended for Adigamov:

Read this only yourself and burn it. Stalin informed me, that apparently he had been given one of my 'conspiratorial' letters to the Bashkir party workers, from which it is clear that an illegal organisation of the Zaki Validov type exists in Moscow and is waging a struggle against the party. Stalin decided not to propose my arrest. Now they are following me intently. Advise me immediately, whether my letters to you and Khalikov have been destroyed. Find out how this letter (or perhaps just a copy) could be found. I ought to know if it was an original or a copy. If the original letter to you was destroyed, then immediately telegraph as arranged to the Tatar representation 'I do not object to the transfer of Yumazhin to the Tatar representation'. I pointed out to Stalin, that I wrote one letter to Khalikov, but that there was nothing special in it. Find out, who is betraying us there. Be careful, vigilant and firm, they will be watching you as well. Stalin promised to send a copy of the letter to Narkomnats. While saying goodbye, he said that I should be careful in the future. You can tell Murzabulatov and Bikbavov about everything.

Might this be a matter for Khalikov?

Mirsaid.

P.S. After the Congress of Soviets I met Salimyanov, Tlyauberdin, Tual'baev, Sultanov and Murtazin. Tukhbatullin recommended the first three. Can we trust these people? In Turkestan and Bukhara the Basmachestvo is growing stronger. There are rumours that in the spring they want to appear in a more organised form. Because of that the centre is making huge concessions on the national question. Establish contact with Zaki Validov, only we need to be especially careful - personal contact or in code. Do not be afraid for me - I will be firm to the end.¹

After his arrest, Sultan-Galiev had eventually confessed to authorship of these letters and to the existence of a conspiratorial organisation including non-Party members. Although he at first maintained that the reference to making contact with the Basmachi leader Validov was part of an attempt to win him back to the side of the Soviets, according to Kuibyshev it was clear from the context of the letter that Sultan-Galiev was seeking to make common cause with the Basmachis, and this interpretation was not challenged at the meeting.

The case against Sultan-Galiev was therefore cut and dry. This was much more than a national deviation or a violation of the 1921 ban on party factions; he was leading a secret, non-Party organisation whose aim was to struggle with the policies of the Russian Communist Party and the Soviet state, and was involved with the enemy in the Civil War still being waged in Central Asia. This was a straightforward instance of state treason. Kuibyshev's account raises two important points; firstly, the discovery of a conspiracy was purely

¹ Tainy natsional'noi politiki..., p.17.

accidental rather than the product of a strategy aimed against the national communists; this being the case, there was a question mark over whether it was an appropriate discussion for a political meeting rather than a revolutionary tribunal. Secondly, Stalin had been aware of a conspiracy early on, but had merely cautioned Sultan-Galiev.

Both of these points were brought up repeatedly from the conference floor in the context of a sharp debate between the two tendencies among the national communists, characterised at this meeting as 'Lefts' and 'Rights'. The distinction between the two tendencies had first arisen at the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East and had reached an almost violent intensity in 1921 in a struggle for leadership in the Tatar Republic which had seen the 'Left' Said-Galiev replaced by the 'Right' Mukhtarov. In broad terms, the Rights were associated with a more lenient attitude to the nationalist intelligentsia and were closer to the traditions of Jadidism while the Lefts were internationalists closer to Moscow. This is not to say that the Lefts were against autonomy and special national rights, as many Russian internationalists were; at the Twelfth Congress, Said-Galiev, known as a leading Leftist, had complained about Great Russian attitudes and lack of interest in the national question among Russian communists, to give one example. At this meeting, however, the lines were more clearly drawn. One reason for this was that Sultan-Galiev had been seen as a leader of the Right and there was a fear among many of the delegates that their own position was threatened by direct or indirect implication in the Sultan-Galiev affair. The Lefts, on the other hand, considered the Twelfth Congress as a defeat for

themselves, and saw in the present case a chance to chastise the Right and win back some ground. This was most clearly expressed by Manuil'skii who directly blamed the decisions of the Twelfth Congress for "unleashing the national element."¹

Much of the discussion was therefore taken up with attacks on the opposing wing or personal defences. Of more significance were the differences on the two basic questions: what was the nature and scale of Sultan-Galiev's conspiracy, and what were its root political causes? It was in the context of these questions that the issues of the juridical nature of the Sultan-Galiev affair and Stalin's relations with Sultan-Galiev became important. The Rights argued that Sultan-Galiev was an isolated case, whose illegal and counter-revolutionary activities could in no way be put down to his association with the Rightist tendency, and it would be wrong to impute that the Sultan-Galiev affair was symptomatic of a broader problem among the Right national communists. This argument was put in various forms. Ryskulov blamed Sultan-Galiev's mistakes on his Tatar background and his misunderstanding of the situation in Central Asia, which meant that he could not be associated with the Right as a whole.² The Crimean Tatar Firdevs similarly dwelt on Sultan-Galiev's background, in which he had always been close to Validov, but this association between Sultan-Galiev and Validov could not in any way be compared with his association with other Muslim communists, nor could his actions be attributed to the Party's national policy.³ The Bashkir Khalikov also disassociated the Right from the more extreme case of Sultan-Galiev; "it is

¹ Tainy natsional'noi politiki..., p.57.

² Idem, p.24.

³ Idem, pp.48-49.

impermissible to count among the ranks of the nationalists any eastern communist who defends the national interests of the masses of one republic or another". While distancing himself from Sultan-Galiev, Khalikov also laid some of the blame for the affair on the Great Russian Chauvinism of Party representatives from the centre and on the Central Committee who had forbidden the Bashkir Rights from sending them any further complaints, thus forcing the opposition underground.¹

Others went further in this direction. The Mari, Petrov, argued that while it was possible to repress Sultan-Galiev, unless the Party got rid of incorrect implementations of the national question, the 'Sultangalievshchina' would simply rise again.² Skrypnik blamed the "Great Power Deviation" for the Sultan-Galiev affair; if the nationalist deviation was a response to Great Russian Chauvinism, as had been accepted at the Twelfth Congress, then the elimination of the latter would also destroy the nationalist deviation and its distorted manifestation, Sultangalievism.³ The head of the Tatar government, Mukhtarov who, along with the Bashkir Adigamov was most closely implicated with Sultan-Galiev, came closest to a defence of his former colleague. Sultan-Galiev was not an irredeemable nationalist, and there could be found no evidence of counter-revolutionary inclinations in his writings. But he had been unable to cope with the pressure of events, and in particular a nihilistic attitude towards the national question, and had therefore gone so far astray.⁴

¹ Tainy natsional'noi politiki..., pp.46-47.

² Idem, p.67.

³ Idem, pp.63-64.

⁴ Idem, p.59.

The Lefts tried to portray Sultan-Galiev as symptomatic of a much broader problem within the Party and called for wide-scale purges among the Right, nationalist communists. Said-Galiev argued that those like Sultan-Galiev were 'innate' nationalists who were beyond redemption.¹ Sh.N. Ibragimov was more sophisticated, pointing to the lack of historical socialist traditions among the Muslims which had led the party to lean on "petit-bourgeois nationalists" like Sultan-Galiev.² Ikramov also blamed the Sultangalievshchina on the absence of genuine communists in the Muslim regions, but blamed this specifically on the policies of the Central Committee and the government who had overlooked the possibility of drawing in genuine proletarians and had neglected party educational work.³

Frunze, while generally sympathetic to the Right, tried to steer a course between the two sides in the dispute. This type of deviation was not limited to the Muslims, but was apparent in both Ukraine and Georgia. The roots of the problem were, firstly, a defensive reaction to Great Russian Chauvinism. Secondly, uneven development between the Russian and non-Russian peoples. And thirdly, the existence of nationalist traditions and a nationalist temperament among certain communists. The main fight still had to be with Great Russian Chauvinism, but the adherents of the Sultangalievshchina, which was "nothing other than an expression of a petit-bourgeois ideology draped in a communist flag" should be thrown out en masse. The long-term solution, however, was the development of a new layer of communists from the youth.⁴

¹ Tainy natsional'noi politiki..., pp.26-27.

² Idem, pp.32-33.

³ Idem, pp.40-41.

⁴ Idem, pp.52-54.

Trotsky attempted to frame the question facing the conference clearly; was Sultan-Galiev just a traitor, or was he an instance of a perversion of the nationalist tendency within the Party? If it was the former, there would be no cause for this meeting. But it was clearly not the case that he was simply an agent of Turkey or some other power. "Sultan-Galiev represents the danger of the national deviation". While Trotsky did not charge the Rights with such extreme nationalism, he blamed their lack of vigilance for allowing such a state of affairs to arise. The exclusive focus on Great Russian Chauvinism made them blind to the dangers of nationalism.¹

Trotsky's criticisms were not reserved exclusively for the Right. The Left had been responsible for driving people away from Soviet power, as had been the case in Bashkiria in 1919. The attitude of the Lefts was making it difficult to attract new communists. They needed to show more patience and flexibility and be prepared to make concessions. As for the Party leadership, they had to accept the situation as it was in reality and try to steer a course between the Left and the Right, using now one, and now the other tendency in order to avoid straying too far in either direction.²

Stalin was again thrown on the defensive. But this time he was under attack primarily from the left. First, he had to defend his former attitude to Sultan-Galiev. Given the shortage of educated and able Muslims available to the Bolsheviks, it had been right to support individuals such as Sultan-Galiev in spite of their weaknesses. He had even defended Validov, with the result that the latter's defection was delayed by a year

¹ Tainy natsional'noi politiki..., pp.73-75.

² Idem, pp.76-80.

and was less harmful. As to the first letter mentioned by Kuibyshev, Sultan-Galiev had assured Stalin that its contents were completely innocent, so at that point, with the information available to him, it was still right for Stalin to support him. But once Sultan-Galiev had crossed the line of what was acceptable by seeking contacts with the Basmachis, then Stalin had turned his back on him completely.¹

Stalin was not prepared to abandon the Bolsheviks' policy of indulgence towards national communists. In part, this may have been a question of saving face. Stalin had been closely associated personally with this tolerance. Sultan-Galiev's unorthodox thoughts on the national question, while wrong, were quite harmless. His present treachery was a different matter altogether. But Stalin's excuse that the shortage of human material made such tolerance necessary should also be taken seriously. Without such an attitude it would have been impossible to develop any national leaderships, and consequently would have made it very hard to govern the national minorities other than by outright repression.

Having defended his own actions, Stalin went on to criticise particular speeches and then delivered a general critique of the two tendencies. The Rights, by not struggling seriously with local nationalism, were inhibiting the development of Marxist cadres. Nationalism was an obstacle to Marxism, not a way into it. He compared this to the period in the Party's history when the struggle with Menshevism sharpened the Party's political line and attracted a better class of Marxist into its ranks. In the same way, only a sharp

¹ Tainy natsional'noi politiki..., p.81

ideological struggle with nationalism would attract a genuine youthful communist cadre. If the Rights were making it harder to attract communists, the Lefts by their actions were alienating the broader masses of the population. They needed to show more flexibility, and to draw into Soviet work all those "national elements who are at all loyal", referring primarily to the intelligentsia. In his final judgement on the two tendencies, Stalin stated categorically that the Left presented the greater danger.¹ Finally, Stalin came on to the fate of Sultan-Galiev himself. To howls of protest from the floor, he expressed the opinion that Sultan-Galiev should be released and put to Soviet work in another region.²

In spite of the circumstances, Stalin was not prepared to give in to the Left. He was not even prepared to let them have the blood of Sultan-Galiev. At the present meeting the Left had appeared far more confident than they had been at the Twelfth Party Congress. But the proposals put forward by Kuibyshev and accepted by the conference, as well as the key speeches of Frunze, Trotsky and Stalin, stressed the need to "form truly internationalist and communist cadres among local Party workers in the national republics and regions."³ While the stress was on internationalism, in practise this meant a continuation in a slightly modified form of the policies of korenizatsiia which, in the view of the Left, had led to the Sultan-Galiev affair in the first place.

The second part of the conference, dealing with the national question in general, went over much the same

¹ Tainy natsional'noi politiki..., pp.83-85.

² Idem, pp.85-86.

³ Idem, p.281.

themes that had been discussed at the Twelfth Party Congress, including complaints from all the regions and objections led by the Ukrainians to the principles of the constitution of the USSR.¹ The resolution of the conference proposed specific measures to facilitate the recruitment of national communists and to impart a more national character to the Party and state institutions. In addition there was to be a purge of nationalists, primarily Great Russian, but also others. Otherwise the resolution merely reinforced in more concrete forms the decisions of the Twelfth Party Congress.²

Although the internationalist element was more confident at this conference than it had been at the Twelfth Party Congress, they did not win an outright victory. The dangers of a national deviation were recognised, and in future the activities of the national communists were to be more closely scrutinised. But the rights of the minorities and the danger from Great Russian Chauvinism was also emphasised.

The significance of the special conference is that it illustrates in a concrete form the priorities of the Party centre for work in the national republics and regions. The absolute priority was to develop a national element in the Party and state organs. This meant toleration of unorthodox positions within certain limits. Apparently, the ideological content of these positions was less important; the limit was only reached when opposition took on an organised form. The absence of any large-scale purges after the Sultan-Galiev affair has mystified Bennigsen and Wimbush.³ But such a purge would

¹ Tainy natsional'noi politiki..., pp.99-274.

² Idem, pp.282-286.

³ Bennigsen and Wimbush, p.86.

have undone much of the policy pursued by the Bolsheviks in the preceding years.

Before the Twelfth Party Congress, there were signs that many elements of the Bolsheviks' national policy were being reversed. The Georgian opposition had already been defeated and the Ukrainians had also failed to get satisfaction for their fears that the Soviet Union would mean an end to national privileges. The initial mauling inflicted on the Georgians early on at the Congress seemed to signal a defeat for the nationals in general, but it did not materialise. Even the discovery of Sultan-Galiev's treachery did not result in anything more than a closer supervision of the activities of the national communists.

Those who saw the year 1923 as a defeat for the rights of the national minorities, and those historians who still see it as such today, are confusing two things: the constitutional structure, and the Bolsheviks' national policy. The former is what Stalin described as 'the game of independence' which the Georgians and the Ukrainians had not understood as being a game; political unity would in any event be ensured by Party discipline, and the Georgians' and Sultan-Galiev's crimes were against Party discipline, with a charge of counter-revolutionary activities also laid against the latter. The Georgians mistakenly supposed that these formal questions related to themselves - in fact, they were intended primarily for international consumption. The national policies outlined in previous chapters were not affected, although they may have been violated by the Zakkraikom if some of

the accusations of the Committee's Russifying policies were indeed true. At any rate Ordzhonikidze was on the defensive at the Congress over the Zakkraikom's record on language rights, and may have been let off the hook by the Georgians' indiscipline. It was Ordzhonikidze's behaviour that Lenin had seized upon, but Lenin's primary domestic concern was with the growing influence of bureaucracy, and it was in his struggle against this that he turned to Trotsky with a request to defend the Georgians.

The constitution of the USSR that came into force at the beginning of 1924 preserved the spirit that had prevailed at the Twelfth Party Congress. The new arrangements formally gave the centre more political control over the activities of the national republics, while giving the non-Russians extensive representation at the centre. In addition the national rights of the minorities were reinforced and a long-term strategy of industrial and cultural development was enacted with the objective of raising the non-Russians to the level where they were ready for socialism.

CONCLUSION

Speaking on the proposal to form a special territory for the Jews in November 1926, the President of the USSR, Mikhail Kalinin, said:

to me this trend appears as one of the forms of national self-preservation. As a reaction to assimilation and national erosion which threaten all small peoples deprived of the opportunities for national evolution, the Jewish people has developed the instinct of self-preservation, of the struggle to maintain its national identity...The Jewish people now faces the great task of preserving its nationality. For this purpose a large segment of the Jewish population must transform itself into a compact farming population, numbering at least several hundred thousand souls.¹

In May 1934, on the occasion of proclaiming the Biro-Bidzhan area a Jewish Autonomous Region, Kalinin was even more explicit:

You ask why the Jewish Autonomous Region was formed. The reason is that we have three million Jews, and they do not have a state system of their own, being the only nationality in the Soviet Union in this situation. The creation of such a region is the only means of a normal development for this nationality...In ten years time, Biro-Bidzhan will

¹ Quoted in Abramsky,, p.69.

become the most important guardian of the Jewish-national culture and those who cherish a national Jewish culture must link up with Biro-Bidzhan.¹

The Biro-Bidzhan project, although a failure in practise, illustrates even more clearly than the national 'delimitation' of Central Asia how far Bolshevik attitudes to the national question had travelled since 1917. Before the revolution, the Bolsheviks, in common with most Marxists, had considered nations to be transitory phenomena linked to capitalist development. Lenin, the strongest advocate of the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, regarded this right as an essential tool to overcome mistrust between nations and hasten their merging. The idea of autonomy, as it appeared in the writings of Lenin, Stalin and Rosa Luxemburg, was in part a guarantee against survivals of national oppression, in part a solution to certain technical problems. This latter argument was common among Bolsheviks after 1917, as was clearly expressed by Dimanshtein, who viewed the national question primarily as one of language. It soon became clear that territorial autonomy would last more than a few years, and involved far more than the preservation of certain rights and overcoming linguistic barriers. Nine years after the revolution, Kalinin saw the national identity of the Jews as something worth preserving for its own sake. A further eight years down the line, and territorial autonomy was "the only means of a normal development for this nationality".

Kalinin's statement does not even refer to 'Soviet development'. Originally, Stalin had seized on national

¹ Abramsky, pp.74-75.

autonomy as the best way to "raise the cultural level" of the national minorities to the extent that they could become truly socialist and Soviet. As 'culture', even in the broadest sense, took on a national form, this policy evolved in such a way as to positively encourage national identity and personal loyalty to the national-territorial sub-state. Measures were taken to deliberately promote national feeling among a reluctant Bielorussian nation. Central Asia was divided so as to replace tribal loyalties with national categories specially created for the purpose. Finally, the Jews were to be provided with the last, missing attribute of nationhood, a national territory.

Having embarked on the course of promoting the national identity of the minorities on a territorial basis, the first task was to develop a national leadership to replace the predominantly Russian Soviet and Party personnel. In the short term, this could be achieved by co-opting the local nationalist intelligentsia and socialist-nationalist parties; in the long term, national communist leaderships were to emerge as a result of a special cadres policy. The second task was to 'nativise' the national institutions, the administration, publications and the arts. This was to be achieved by educational and language reform and the promotion of both traditional and socialist national culture. The creation of national schools was a massive task which involved the commitment of substantial resources and personnel. While ultimately the creation of national leaderships and a national school system was linked to the autonomous republics and regions, the process was already under way during the Civil War. With the introduction of NEP these

policies were applied more thoroughly in the newly formed autonomous territories.

The long-term effectiveness of these policies is clear from the surveys carried out in 1927. All but the smallest nationalities and the Jews had their own national territories. Native language education was almost total for the nationalities of the Soviet and autonomous republics, and substantial for most minorities outside of their own territories. The administration was largely in the hands of nationals, and national languages and cultures flourished.

These policies evolved separately, and were not initially directed towards any clear goals. But each of the policies was mutually reinforcing; the co-optation of left-wing nationalists strengthened the demands for autonomy and independence, and for national schools and culture; this increased the need for nationals in the administration and education system, reinforcing the national character of cadre policies; the more national education and culture became, the stronger was national identity in the republics, and so on. As the policies developed, their objective was defined - to form ethnically cohesive, culturally distinct and locally led national entities.

The formation of national proletariats, much hyped during 1923, was inevitably a slower process. It took the forced industrialisation of the 1930's to develop true national proletariats. By this time, Stalin had turned against many of the national policies of the 1920's, but national identity was already strong enough and institutionalised enough for most of the

nationalities to resist russification. In spite of the violent and hostile treatment of several nationalities in later years, the policies pursued in the first six years of Soviet power laid the basis for the strength of national feeling and the national borders which underlie developments in the former Soviet Union today.

This is not to say that national identity was, or ever could be, a purely artificial construct dependent on the whims of a central government. The long-term historical basis of national identity effects the form national consciousness takes. Thus, it is no coincidence that the nations which were the last and most reluctant to develop their national identities, Bielorussia and the Central Asian nations are, at the time of writing, the first to seek to re-establish stronger ties with Russia.

Could the Bolsheviks have pursued a different approach to the national question? Evan Mawdsley argues that the Bolsheviks' national policy, combined with a centralised Party and army, "was just the right - possibly the only - formula for holding multi-national 'Russia' together".¹ Had Piatakov and Bukharin won the internal Party debate at an early stage, it is possible not just that the Revolution would have been confined to Central Russia, but even that the Bolsheviks would have lost the Civil War and the Russian Revolution been strangled at birth. On the other hand, if their indulgent attitude to the national minorities had been purely a military and expansionist tactic, as Pipes suggests, then the Bolsheviks could have turned against the nationalities once the military situation was secure. Such a move may have led to a renewal of the Civil War, as Khristian

¹ Evan Mawdsley, The Russian Civil War (London, 1987), p.282 (emphasis in the original).

Rakovskii was warning as late as 1923. But the Bolsheviks may have felt strong enough to embark straightaway on an aggressive 'internationalist' policy aimed at integrating the whole population of the Soviet areas into either the Russian nationality, or a new 'Soviet' nationality. If such a policy had not provoked widespread revolt and had been even partially successful, it is unlikely that the Soviet Union would have broken up in 1991 in quite the form it did.

Another option would have been to pursue one variant of the Austro-Marxist model which would have preserved Narkomnats, or something like it, as a Parliament of Nationalities designed to protect national rights, combined with a degree of cultural autonomy, but without the designation of specific territories to the nationalities. Such a solution would have appealed to the former Bundists, some of the followers of Rosa Luxemburg, and those in between like Dimanshtein who put language at the centre of the national question. Given the difficulties inherent in delineating national territories in ethnically complex areas (not just the Caucasus, which was the extreme case, but everywhere), this would seem to have been the most obvious approach to adopt from a practical point of view, and would have accorded well with many elements of Marxist theory. It is impossible to judge precisely how national consciousness would have developed under such a system. But experiences of assimilation in Europe suggest that national identity would have weakened, and it is at least possible to say with some confidence that the Soviet Union would not have broken up on such clearly defined national-territorial lines.

The absence of opinion polls at the time makes it difficult to say what would have resulted from a pure application of the principle of the Right to National Self-Determination. While the positions of the various political parties and the returns of the elections to the Constituent Assembly in 1917 suggest that national secession may not have been as popular as might be assumed, the use of national referenda would presumably have left, at the very least, Georgia outside of the Soviet Union. While Lenin backed away from the application of this principle and Stalin explicitly repudiated it at an early stage, it remained important for a minority of Bolsheviks. The principle of national self-determination persisted, for instance, as a major factor in the attitude of the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Chicherin. Even without granting secession, it would have been possible for the Bolsheviks to go further than they did in preserving the formal independence of the Soviet Republics along the lines proposed by Rakovskii in 1923, or by applying a stronger version of federalism similar to that adopted in Yugoslavia, especially after the death of Tito. A Yugoslav-type dénouement would have been one possible outcome of such a policy, but on the other hand, the Soviet Union might have broken up earlier than it did and without serious conflict; a third possibility is that an established federal system might have allowed the CIS project or something similar to succeed.

What might have happened is a matter of speculation. But the particular solution to the national question adopted by the Bolsheviks had a lasting impact on the structure of the Soviet Union and the national feeling of the nationalities. This solution was, moreover,

initially a minority position within both the Party and society more generally. Although it can be most closely identified with Stalin, the national officials of Narkomnats, and many of the newly converted national communists in the regions, the fact that they were given such free rein in applying their policies was a product of a particular, and almost accidental, combination of circumstances. Incidents regarded as relatively trivial at the time had a lasting impact. Most significantly, if Lenin personally had not intervened at a late stage in 1922, there is every possibility that the state which came to be known as the 'Soviet Union' or the 'Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' would have contained the word 'Russian' in its title. Lenin's preoccupation with this point resulted primarily from international, rather than domestic, considerations, but in the long run the significance of this title was immense. Whatever effect it had on the national minorities, it certainly made an impact on the future attitude of the Russians themselves, and may have contributed to the absence in 1991 of a reaction similar to that of the Serb military to the break-up of Yugoslavia. Again, if Lenin had had one of his more serious strokes a few months, or even weeks earlier, the course of the Twelfth Party Congress and the future direction of Soviet national policy might have been different.

Most of these policies were modified or reversed in the 1930's and 1940's although some, notably the ethnic integration of national territories, remained prominent in Stalin's approach to the nationalities. In spite of the reversals of the 1930's, the particular set of policies pursued by the Bolsheviks from 1917 to 1923 determined not just the constitutional structure of the

Soviet Union but also helped to reinforce, preserve or create a strong sense of national consciousness among the major national minorities of the old Russian Empire. With the collapse of Communism in the last decade, it was this aspect of their policies which has arguably left the most lasting impression on the modern world.

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