

CULTURAL PROGRESS
AMONG THE NON-RUSSIAN NATIONALITIES
OF THE U.S.S.R.

By Yanka Kupala

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ORDER OF LENIN
POET LAUREATE OF THE BYELORUSSIAN SOVIET
SOCIALIST REPUBLIC



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW 1939



From great Moscow to the farthest border,
From our Arctic seas to Samarkand,
Everywhere man proudly walks as master
Of his own immeasurable fatherland.

This is what the Soviet people sing in one of their popular songs. In the Soviet Union man, irrespective of race or nationality, really feels himself to be master "of his own immeasurable fatherland."

The old Russia of the tsars was a prison of peoples, the enslaved, cruelly oppressed peoples of the former Russian empire.

All national culture was severely repressed. In conformity with its policy of Russifying the various non-Russian nation-

alities, the tsarist government prohibited the publication of newspapers and periodicals in the various vernacular languages. Thus, for example, it did everything in its power to extirpate the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian culture. The very word "Ukraine" was banished from official usage. To get a book in Byelorussian published in those days, its author had to resort to all kinds of subterfuges, as, for example, to palm it off as a publication in a foreign tongue. The same obstacles to cultural progress were encountered by all other non-Russian, or, as they were called, "alien" nationalities.

In many cases tsarism, while forcing the Russification of its "alien" nationalities, connived at the development of bourgeois nationalism in the cultural field, thus sowing discord among the various nations. Bourgeois national culture in the main reflected the interests and aspirations of the local feudal gentry and clergy, who by their servility and toadying tried to ingratiate themselves with the tsarist authorities.

Only the Great October Socialist Revolution and the establishment of Soviet power

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Jambul, people's bard and member of the Supreme Soviet of the Kazakh S.S.R., in conversation with some members of the Jambul Collective Farm in his constituency

put an end to the inequality of the non-Russian peoples. Tens of millions of people ceased to be "aliens" and became equal citizens of the Soviet Union, enjoying equal rights and all equally its masters. In the struggle against their country's enemies, in the fight for the peaceful pursuit of their vocations and for the economic and cultural development of their fatherland, the Soviet people sealed the indissoluble friendship and voluntary union of all the nations of the Soviet state.

The Soviet state has insured each constituent nationality ample development for its native culture. The Soviet state solicitously assists the formerly most backward peoples in the relatively more rapid development of their economy and culture so that they may be on a par with the more advanced peoples and republics of the Soviet Union.

Many nationalities had to begin their cultural development from the A B C, that is, they had to create an alphabet, a written language of their own; they had to publish their first primers and grammars. In Kir-

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ghizia, in tsarist times, only one out of every two hundred persons could read and write. Many of its villages did not have a single literate person among their inhabitants. The illiterate Kirghizian used the print of his right thumb in lieu of signature.

Today the Kirghizian Soviet Socialist Republic has 1,672 schools, 15 vocational high schools and 3 higher educational establishments. Before the Great October Socialist Revolution school attendance was only 4,000, while now there are 288,000 attending Kirghizia's elementary, secondary and higher schools and institutes. Books in the Kirghizian language are published in large editions which find a ready market.

In Kazakhstan only one out of every hundred persons could read and write. Only mullahs and beys were literate in Uzbekistan. In 1914 only 93 Uzbek boys attended the secondary schools of Turkestan.

Matters fared still worse as regards the education of women in tsarist Russia. Out of a female population of 82,000 in the Garm area in the Pamirs, only 7 women could read or write.

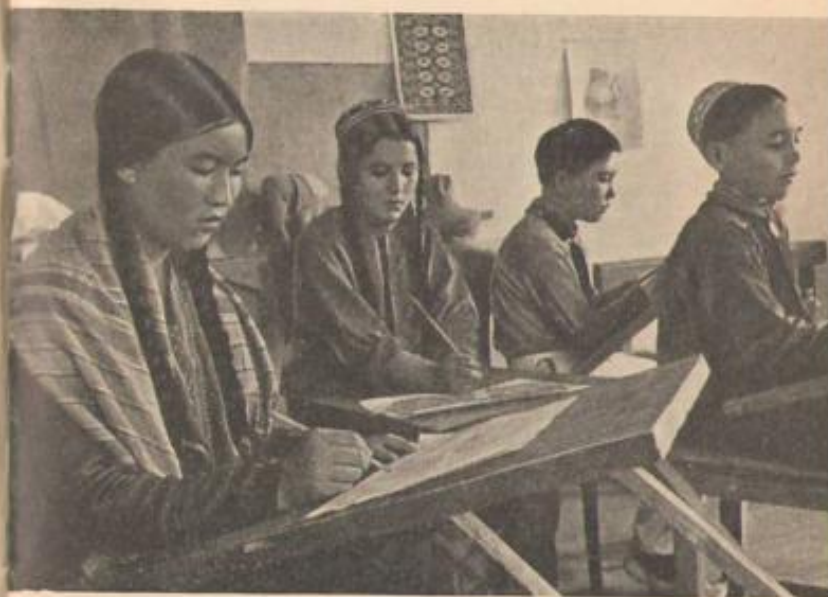
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Before the Revolution, Byelorussia had 3,000 Greek Orthodox churches, 704 synagogues, 113 Roman Catholic churches and 5,000 licensed saloons, but not a single university or college. This disparagement of public education explains why three-quarters of its population could neither read nor write.

The people of Soviet Byelorussia now have their own institutions of higher education, their own scientific-research institutes, splendid new theaters, and an extensive system of schools, clubs, libraries, moving picture houses, health and educational institutions for children of pre-school age, publishing houses, and hundreds of newspapers printed in their own tongue. The cultural growth of the people, synchronizing with the great improvement in their standard of living and the rapid development of industry and agriculture, is truly marvelous.

I should like to cite here one instance of the numerous colossal changes that have taken place in the life of the working people of Byelorussia. There is in this republic a village called Mokhoyedi, meaning moss

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Turkmen children attending a school of painting at Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan

caters. The very name speaks eloquently of the past life of its inhabitants. Until the Revolution almost all the land in and about the village—the meadows, fields and gardens—belonged to one big estate owner. All that was left to the villagers was bogs and woods—and these were about ten miles away from the village. The villagers would grind and bake a mixture of dried moss, acorns and chaff. This was their usual bread.

Now Mokhoyedi, after having become a collective-farm village, is not to be recognized. Two sawmills, a hospital, an out-patient clinic, five schools and two clubs have sprung up in this village and its environs. There is a radio in almost every house. Gone is the former want, and virtually every peasant house now rings to the merry voices of healthy children, whose numbers markedly increase each year.

Life in the Byelorussian village of Mokhoyedi resembles life in any other Soviet village, for they have all shaken off the chains of darkness and oppression, and have awakened to a new life of prosperity, happiness and culture.

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In the Ukraine about 80 per cent of the population was illiterate before the Revolution. Today both the Ukraine and Byelorussia are literate throughout.

The schools of the Soviet Ukraine employ a whole army of teachers—171,000. In the last five years alone the number of secondary schools in the Ukraine increased tenfold. In Uzbekistan the number of elementary and secondary schools has increased fourteen times during the last five years.

What is the distinguishing feature of the rights won by the working people of the Soviet Union through the Great Socialist Revolution? It consists in the fact that these rights have not only been proclaimed and enacted into law, but have also been effectively insured. For example, every citizen in the U.S.S.R. has the right to education. The government has taken appropriate measures to insure that this right does not remain an empty pledge, but is actually carried out in practice. One of these measures, adopted soon after the establishment of Soviet rule, provided that instruction in the schools should everywhere be conducted

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