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

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ORDER OF LENIN
POET LAUREATE OF THE BYELORUSSIAN SOVIET
SOCIALIST REPUBLIC

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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 re-
pressed. 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,
convinced at the development of bourgeois
nationalism in the cultural field, thus sowing
disease 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 Revo-
lution and the establishment of Soviet power
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 father-
land, the Soviet people sealed the indissol-
bale friendship and voluntary union of all
the nations of the Soviet state.

The Soviet state has insured each con-
stituent nationality ample development for
its native culture. The Soviet state solici-
tiously assists the formerly most backward
peoples in the relatively more rapid devel-
opment 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-
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 inhabi-
tants. The illiterate Kirghiz used the
print of his right thumb in lieu of signature.

Today the Kirghiz 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 boys were literate in Uzbek-
istan. 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
Carim area in the Pamirs, only 7 women
could read or write.
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 eaters. 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. Gene 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.

Turkmen children attending a school of painting at Ashkhabad, Turkmenistan

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