

The "Friendship of Peoples"...

Pages from a Notebook

I

TIGRAN PETROSIAN, the world chess champion, is an Armenian who was born and brought up in Tbilisi, Georgia. He won his first match in that city, and a few years ago he won the USSR championship in the Tbilisi tournament. In the Soviet Union, this is a big event, with pictures in *Pravda* and interviews on Soviet television.

I was in Tbilisi at that time for Petrosian's "coronation." After the ceremony I went to lunch with Georgian friends. About fifteen of us were gathered around a television set. When the interview with Petrosian began, one of my Georgian friends switched it off. I could not help asking why. Smiling, my host answered:

"What's the use of looking at him? Petrosian is the king of the nobodies. He didn't win; he sat out his championship. All he knows is how to avoid a fight. The likes of him we don't like."

I asked why they were not proud of Petrosian, since he was a native of Tbilisi. "My dear man," said my host, "there are many types of Tbilisians. Shaumian Avenue is full of people like him." (Shaumian Avenue is the Armenian district of Tbilisi.) I changed the subject.

The same evening, 300 miles away, a national celebration took place in Yerevan, the capital of Soviet Armenia. People kissed one another on the streets and shouted for joy, even though Petrosian had never lived in Yerevan.

Dislike of Armenians among Georgians is widespread, and *vice versa*. Georgians also dislike Russians, but the reasons for this are somewhat more obvious.

Recently a popular Georgian writer, Konstantin Gamsakhurdia, staged an odd demonstration in Tbilisi. Dressed in national costume, he rode his white horse up the steps of the large and tasteless building of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party and knocked on one of the windows with his whip.

Gamsakhurdia demanded to speak with the Second Secretary of the Central Committee, whose name—he

thought—was Ivanov. Ivanov, a Russian, was summoned; and Gamsakhurdia greeted him politely in Georgian, before a growing crowd of interested spectators. Ivanov smiled, waved his hands, and said that unfortunately he did not understand Georgian.

At this, Gamsakhurdia shouted (in Georgian): "How can you rule Georgia if you cannot even say 'good morning' in Georgian? What do we need with people like you? Get out of our country at once!" And he galloped away.

II

INCIDENTS SUCH AS THESE are typical not only of Georgia and Armenia but of all the other outlying areas of the Soviet Union as well. Anti-Russian and, with the exception of the Baltic States, a general "anti-neighbor" sentiment is the rule. The attitude of the Soviet officials, of course, is another matter again. In Georgia, for example, if you publicly express your dislike for Armenians, you may be mildly criticized; but if you make anti-Russian statements, far more serious consequences will ensue.

The expression of national sentiments within the Soviet Union is categorized as "bourgeois nationalism." At the same time, the Communist Party recognizes the existence of "progressive nationalistic movements" abroad—in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Thus we have the paradox that in the Soviet Union, where for forty years there has officially been no bourgeoisie, nationalism is a "bourgeois" current, while nationalism abroad, which is usually under bourgeois leadership, is a "progressive" movement.

Recently, however, nationalism has become fashionable among the intelligentsia in Russia proper as well as in the non-Russian republics. My discussion about Petrosian with the group of intellectuals in Tbilisi is a case in point. This may in part be influenced by the overall upsurge of nationalism throughout the world, but I believe that the principal cause is what might be described as a *new populism* (*narodnichestvo*) which has appeared, and is growing, in the Soviet Union.

III

OLD RUSSIAN CUSTOMS are very much in vogue. One is invited for the evening and offered nothing but vodka, boiled potatoes and salt. Intellectuals profess an enthusiasm for ancient temples and icons and talk of their moral responsibility for the difficult life of the "little man," the peasant or worker. Works like Solzhenitsyn's "Matriona's House," Siomin's "Seven in a House," Koniushev's "Twelve Sticks on the Green Grass," and Aimatov's "Goodbye, Tiulsary!" are popular examples of this trend.¹ They express sympathy for the hard life of the little people, and the intellectuals feel called upon to come to their assistance, rather than pass the time in talk and high living.

This is what I would term the new populism. It takes the form not of organized philanthropy, which is not feasible in the USSR, but of an attraction for the simple life. Instead of visiting resorts in the Caucasus, the new populists spend their holidays somewhere in Suzdal, Uglich, or ancient Novgorod, admiring the churches and living in peasant huts.

In the outlying areas, a similar process is taking place. Central Asian professors appear at meetings in colorful oriental robes. Scholarly research is exploiting the documentary collections of the smaller nationalities.

This new populism is in a sense a form of protest against the dead hand of central bureaucratic control. However, provided nationalistic expressions are not specifically anti-Russian, the authorities do not appear to be alarmed. In fact, they even exploit them for their own purposes. For example, during the recent Arab-Israeli war, *Pravda* openly appealed to latent antisemitic sentiments among the population. Nor are the authorities alarmed by what could be called a Great Russian backlash, or a hostile reaction toward the nationalities in the outlying areas. These feelings are shown in a number of ways and are worthy of some attention.

IV

IF YOU LISTEN to a conversation between two ordinary Russians about other nationalities of the Soviet Union, you will notice that they will usually refer to these people by pejorative nicknames, such as "*Khokhol*" for a Ukrainian, "*Katso*" for a Georgian, "*Armiashka*" for an Armenian, "*Yoldash*" for a Kazakh, "*Chernozadyi*" for an Azerbaijani, or "*Chuchmek*" for an Uzbek, Turkman or Tadjik.

These terms, to an outsider, may denote contempt and superciliousness, but while this is true to some extent, the basic explanation lies elsewhere. The Russians approach the outlying nationalities more with a feeling of suspicion than one of natural superiority. They have a vague realization that their country's annexationist policies—both

¹ Solzhenitsyn's tale appeared in *Novyi mir* (Moscow), No. 1, 1963, and in an English translation by Harry Willetts in Max Hayward and Patricia Blake (Ed.), *Half-way to the Moon*, Garden City, N. Y., Anchor Books, 1965. Koniushev's story also appeared in *Novyi mir* (May and June, 1966), as did Siomin's "Seven in a House" and Aimatov's "Good-bye, Tiulsary!" (June 1965 and March 1966, respectively).

Tsarist and Soviet—have brought very little good to the people of the Caucasus or Central Asia, and least of all to the Baltic nationalities. Anticipating anti-Russian sentiment, they are on their guard. To be sure, they may tend to look down upon certain nationalities—e.g., in Central Asia—as "primitive" and "uncultured." But often—paradoxically enough—their antagonism also disguises envy of and admiration for nationalities they consider even more advanced than their own. This is certainly true for the Baltic states, which had enjoyed an incomparably higher standard of living than the Soviet Union at the time of their forcible annexation in 1941. Many Russians flock to the Baltic sea resorts in the summer and openly admire the amenities of life in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

The reverse is often true, too. The anti-Russian hostility of many nationalities in the USSR is rooted more in the natural resentment of conquered peoples than in irrational hatred for everything Russian. In Lithuania, for instance, I met many people who bitterly resented the influx of Russian settlers and their preponderant positions in the party and local government bodies, but I hardly ever encountered anyone who thought that the Russians *as a people* were bad or unpleasant. The Ukraine is another case in point. Despite the growth of nationalism in this largest of all Soviet republics (after the RSFSR), the local population does not reject Russian culture or the Russian language. Except in the formerly Polish territories (annexed in 1939), Russian is recognized as the *lingua franca* and is spoken almost exclusively in all public enterprises and institutions—even though all official correspondence must be in Ukrainian. Even the fiercest Ukrainian nationalist would no doubt be horrified at the suggestion that he abandon the use or study of Russian.

V

DESPITE 50 YEARS of appeals for friendship among the peoples of the Soviet Union, national origin is still one of the fundamental facts of life in the USSR. All official documents, including personal identity papers, state the bearer's nationality, based on that of his parents. Since there is no possibility or procedure for changing one's nationality, this presents problems for children of mixed parentage.

At the age of 16, these children must choose the nationality of one of their parents. This is a very serious choice, which is exercised with solemnity and after consultation with the child's parents and the authorities. Nationality, as given in the identity papers, also appears on the Soviet citizen's military service card; and *raion* military commissariats, which are responsible for Soviet draft calls, keep their lists according to nationality. In applying for any job, school, university, or training program, the citizen's nationality must be specified.

Regardless of whether there is any discrimination in fact on the basis of nationality—and in some cases there is²—the Soviet citizen is continuously made conscious of

² For some examples of how different nationalities are subjected to official or quasi-official discrimination, see articles by Yaroslav Bilinsky and Zvi Gitelman in this issue. See also "The Deported Nationalities," p. 102.

the fact of nationality; and he is aware that there are "principal" and "secondary" nationalities.

A Jewish friend of mine had a Russian wife. When their son was 16, he went to the militia and applied for a passport. He opted for Jewish nationality. The official was surprised and first thought he had misunderstood, then asked him if this decision had been cleared with the boy's parents. This was indeed the case.

The officer then very carefully pointed out that the boy, since his mother was Russian, had the full right to register as a Russian. It was apparently difficult for him to comprehend that anyone would voluntarily forego the privilege of being of Russian nationality when this once-in-a-lifetime possibility was offered.

Recently there have twice been widespread rumors in the Soviet Union that the nationality entry in personal documents would be deleted. When Aleksei Adzuhbei was still editor of *Izvestia*, he launched a campaign to introduce a "labor passport," which would include details of the citizen's job history but nothing about his nationality. More recently, after Khrushchev's fall, the rumor spread again, to the accompaniment of heated private discussions, not all of which were in favor of the proposal. However, in neither case was any governmental action taken.

The fact of national differences is deeply rooted in Russian history; and distinctions based on nationality could not easily be set aside, even if the will to do so existed. In this context, the official propaganda of "friendship among peoples" has little meaningfulness or credibility. Essentially, the situation has not changed. National antagonisms and suspicions lie just below the

surface and are given at least formal recognition in the continuation of the classification of Soviet citizens on the basis of nationality.

IF I WERE ASKED what is the most striking aspect of Soviet nationality policy and of relations between nationalities in the USSR, I would say that it is the duplicity that prevails in this as in any other area of Soviet life—the contrast between the official "line" and reality. The Soviet leaders never tire of proclaiming that national antagonisms have been eliminated in the Soviet Union, but everyone knows that this is untrue—that in fact Soviet policies have, if anything, exacerbated national tensions. Even in 1949-53, at the height of the officially sponsored wave of Russian chauvinism, Soviet newspapers were full of articles about the "brotherly friendship among the peoples," and Tadjik, Yakut and Armenian poets published turgid verses voicing their "unbounded love" for their "elder brother," the Russian. This hypocrisy continues to this day, giving rise to more and more cynicism among Soviet citizens and feeding the tensions and antagonisms among the hundred-odd nationalities of the USSR.

—**I. M. Volgin**

(Mr. Volgin is the pseudonym of a Soviet journalist who considers it preferable politically to remain unidentified.)

Reform and Schism

By Michael Bourdeaux

Since 1917, Soviet state policy has consistently reflected the profound abhorrence for religion expressed in Communist doctrine. Official hostility has been directed at all religions in the territory of the USSR—Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, as well as the traditionally predominant Russian Orthodox Church and a wide variety of smaller Christian sects.¹ There have been periods of greater and lesser anti-religious pressure from the regime, but the general aims and trends of official policy have not changed. Nonetheless, religion has survived in the land of “scientific atheism”—indeed, in the face of a renewed onslaught during the years of Khrushchev’s reign, it has demon-

strated some highly interesting signs of vitality and ferment.

The purpose of the present article is to describe a reform movement which originated in the Russian Baptist and Evangelical Christian Church as a specific reaction to the anti-religious policy of the Khrushchev regime, and which has since sparked a similar demand for reform in the much more influential Russian Orthodox Church. The precise significance of these reformist trends is impossible to gauge, in part because many of the issues that have been raised have not as yet been resolved, and in part because detailed information on the developments that have been reported is so hard to come by. Still, enough evidence has come to light to warrant careful perusal by students of Russia and religious bodies alike.

It should be pointed out at the start that much of this evidence is necessarily second-hand, filtering to the West through the reports of foreign correspondents in the Soviet Union or through émigré publications. Thus the information cannot be authenticated in every detail. Yet like pieces of a puzzle, the reports that have been made fit together to establish a clear pattern of events, which at many points can be confirmed in official Soviet sources. The writer feels that there is therefore a case for accepting the reportage as valid until

¹ See Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1962, for a wide survey of the effect of communism on religions and sects in the USSR.

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