

The task of getting the Muslims to conform to standard Soviet culture has been much greater and has involved much more drastic methods than similar efforts with respect to other nationalities whose culture was either European or near-European, or so primitive as to offer no serious resistance. The effects on the Soviet Muslims of cultural regimentation and their segregation from their fellow Muslims outside the USSR have undoubtedly been considerable, but they are still very far from being decisive. Islam has certainly not been superseded by communism as an ideological concept, but there are signs of a fusion of the two in the minds of Muslim

intellectuals—a development which is not likely to be welcomed by the Communist authorities.

Muslim cultural particularism in relation to other groups, and most of all in relation to the Russians, undoubtedly exists. Whether in a political sense this particularism can be said to amount to nationalism is doubtful. Many factors militate against this—geographical separation, racial and linguistic differences, and most of all the uncompromising attitude of the Soviet regime. This last, however, may eventually be affected by the emergence of a powerful China abutting on three of the Soviet Muslim republics over a boundary of 1,800 miles.

The Yakuts

By Violet Conolly

The Sino-Soviet conflict, Chinese territorial claims against the Soviet Union, and the Red Guards' frenzied anti-Soviet agitation in Heilungkiang Province of Manchuria, often within earshot of the Soviet border city of Blagoveshchensk, have inevitably quickened interest in the state of affairs in the vast lands of the Soviet Far Eastern Region, stretching from the southern Amur River frontier far

northward to the Arctic Ocean. Until the most recent period, this huge territory of over six million square kilometers had been virtually closed to Western visitors, and the very restricted facilities now granted to selected travellers to visit such places as Yakutsk or Khabarovsk still leave most of the area within the banned travel zone. Thus, almost the only available sources of information about this region and its peoples are Soviet ones, which are exceptionally difficult to check under the circumstances.

The Soviet Far Eastern Region is now divided into seven large administrative-territorial divisions: the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (YASSR), Khabarovsk krai, the Maritime krai,

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Amur oblast (province), Kamchatka oblast, Magadan oblast, and Sakhalin oblast. The region contains the homelands of many small indigenous peoples of Tungus-Manchu, Paleosiberian (Paleoasiatic) or Mongol origin, who before the coming of the Russians in the 17th century roamed the tundra and the taiga, undisturbed by Western penetration. Many of these small peoples have already lost their identity and become assimilated to the Russian or other more numerous nationalities surrounding them. Where they survive, their rate of growth is very slow, and in all cases it is exceeded by the influx of Russian immigrants, so that it seems only a question of time before they will be completely submerged.¹ This would be in line with the aims of the current CPSU Program (1961), which welcomes the trend towards assimilation of non-Russian peoples and looks forward to the time when "complete unity" will be achieved on the basis of a culture common to all the Soviet peoples.² In view of the numerical and cultural predominance of the Russians in the multinational Soviet state, this process can only result in a devious form of Russification, however strongly the party ideologues may protest their interest in the "free development" of the national cultures and languages of the peoples of the USSR.

This study is specifically concerned with the Yakuts of the Soviet Far East, who are relative newcomers to the region and are not regarded by the Soviets as belonging to any of the above-mentioned indigenous Tungus or Paleosiberian groups of "small peoples of the North." They are in many ways a more distinctive group than any of their neighbors. For more than a millenium, they have been settled in a compact mass in the enormous area known as Yakutia, which is about six times the size of France and the largest unit in the Soviet Far East. They are more advanced than the reindeer-breeding Tungus, the Yukagirs, or the Chukchi, their neighbors. The distinguished anthropologist M. A. Czaplicka, who spent a year among the natives of northern Siberia, described the Yakuts as "the aristocrats of the tundra . . . they are at a much

higher stage of culture, both material and intellectual, than their neighbors."³

Historically, racially, and linguistically, the Yakuts differ significantly from the rest of the mosaic of peoples in the Soviet Far East. Their origin and the origins of their language were long enveloped in mystery, and indeed are still somewhat of an enigma to Soviet scholars. It is now generally agreed that the Yakuts are a Turkish people—though they never have been Muslims—and that their language is based on a mixture of Turkish with strong elements of Mongolian and Tungus, plus some hitherto undefined pre-Turkish elements that puzzle philologists. How this islet of Turkish people found its way to the land of the reindeer Tungus and other completely non-Turkish peoples of the middle Lena basin is still the subject of controversy among Soviet historians and anthropologists. From their study of Yakut folklore and archeology, Soviet scholars are now mostly of the opinion that the Yakuts, during the 10th-13th centuries, migrated in several waves from the Baikal region and further south from the fringes of the Kazakh-Kirghiz lands, up along the Lena and its tributaries, pushing the former tribal occupants of the taiga northward and eastward before them. The name Yakut is in fact a Russian adaptation of the Tungus name for these people. In their own tongue, the Yakuts call themselves Sakha, a name deriving from their Baikal ancestors.⁴

In recent years, Yakutia has become extremely important to the Soviet Union economically owing to its rich deposits of such valuable minerals as gold, diamonds, tin, mica (phlogopite), wolfram, and mercury, in addition to large reserves of coal and iron, oil and gas. The development and exploitation of these resources as a result of Russian geological research is only one facet of the history of Russian influence in Yakutia. This influence has been at work now for over three hundred years and has transformed the face of the country and its people.

The Russian Conquest

Little is known about the Yakuts before the Russian conquest of the Far Eastern region in the early 17th century. They were then settled in the

¹ Yuri Mironenko, "Population and Territorial Division," *Studies on the Soviet Union*, No. 4, 1962, p. 62; A. A. Isupov, *Natsionalnyi sostav naseleniia SSSR (National Composition of the Population of the USSR)*, Moscow, 1964, pp. 39-42.

² Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1961.

³ M. A. Czaplicka, *My Siberian Year*, London, 1916, p. 99.

⁴ M. G. Levin, A. P. Potapov (Eds.), *Narody Sibiri (Peoples of Siberia)*, Moscow, 1956, pp. 269-70.

lands between the Lena, Amga, and Aldan rivers. The Cossacks, the spearhead of the Russian advance, reached Yakutia via the river Lena and established a fortified post (*ostrog*) at Yakutsk, the site of the present capital, in 1632. A Russian military governor was appointed in 1640. In keeping with their usual practice in the conquered Siberian lands, the Russians immediately exacted a fur tribute (*Yasak*) from the Yakuts, and the severity of this forced levy, as well as the attempt to carry out a local census in 1649, caused many risings against Russian rule before the end of the century. These risings were harshly suppressed, and the Yakuts eventually learned the hard way that resistance to the Russians was futile. They either settled down to live with them peacefully or fled beyond the Russian strong arm to remote parts of the tundra and taiga. An important element in the Russians' subjection of the Yakut people was their success in winning over the tribal aristocracy, or *toiony*, to their side and using them as agents to run the country.⁵

The Yakut population in the mid-17th century, soon after the Russian conquest, has been estimated at about 26,000. Russian colonization remained small until political deportees began to arrive in the 19th century. The Yakuts at this time were semi-settled folk. They had large herds of cattle and horses but did not keep reindeer like their nomadic neighbors. They knew the use of iron and were skilled craftsmen in wood and metal. The Russians introduced them to bread, which they had not known before as they did not grow grain, and in spite of the extremely harsh Yakutian climate and the permafrost terrain, they soon learned to grow a little grain and potatoes. The Russian presence exercised a favorable influence on the local economy and culture—a fact which Soviet sources do not fail to point out. The Soviet ethnographer O. V. Yonova, for example, expresses the view that “the union of the Yakut krai to Russia had great progressive significance for Russia and Yakutia”: for Russia it was primarily of economic significance, while for the Yakuts it helped, through Russian elimination of intertribal feuding, to consolidate them into “a united people,” expedited the development of their productive forces, and gave them membership in a powerful, centralized state with an incomparably higher technique of production.⁶ The Yakuts were quick to learn new domestic arts from the Russians,



Якутки в старинных сангяхах и меховых шапках (рис. худ. М. М. Носова)

Yakuts in traditional fur coats and hats. Reproduced from S. A. Tokarev *Etnografiia Narodov SSSR* (Ethnography of the People of the USSR), Moscow University Publishing House, 1958, p. 465.

to imitate their dress, and to adopt from them tools and implements that were better than the primitive ones they had been accustomed to using.

There was also a certain amount of “Yakutization” of the Russians. Yakuts taught the Russians their hunting and trapping skills, how to live in their extremely severe climate, and also their language, which some Russians—we are told—gradually adopted instead of their own. Intermarriage was not uncommon, and there was no “color barrier” although the superior status of the Russians was certainly taken for granted here, as elsewhere in the Russian Empire. Indeed, Dr. Terence Armstrong goes so far as to maintain that probably nowhere else in the Russian dominions was the culture of the conquerors so strongly influenced, and even submerged, by that of a conquered ethnic group as in Yakutia.⁷

The darker side of Russian relations with the indigenous peoples of the Far Eastern region was

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-71.

⁶ In S. A. Tokarev (Ed.), *Istoriia Yakutskoi ASSR* (History of the Yakutian ASSR), Vol. II, Moscow, 1957, pp. 40-42.

⁷ *Russian Settlement in the North*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1965, pp. 96-97.

described by a Russian "merchant and owner of gold mines," N. L. Latkin, in a late 19th-century account of conditions in the *Yeniseiskaia guberniia*, which could also apply to Yakutia:

The history of Siberia shows clearly the merciless exploitation of natives by all who are in a position to do so, from the bread shop managers, rich peasants, Cossacks, traders and local clergy to the duly-constituted authorities.⁸

Latkin was writing in the 1880's, but his words give a general picture of Russian behavior in Yakutia from the 17th century to the end of the Tsarist regime.⁹ There were exceptions to this sort of conduct, of course—most notable of all, the religious and political deportees who began to arrive in considerable numbers in the middle of the 19th century.

The Role of Political Exiles

Yakutia was chosen as a place of exile because of its remoteness, harsh climate, and difficult living conditions. Highly educated Russians and Poles deported by the Tsarist regime for political reasons were dumped in obscure corners of Yakutia along with simple peasant exiles like the fanatical *Skoptsy* (an Orthodox sect which practiced self-castration). They made up an odd company, but in their several ways they rendered great services to the Yakut people. In particular, the scholars and scientists devoted their energies to studying the language, customs, and archeology of the country, and to exploring the physical geography of many of its lesser known areas. E. K. Pekarski compiled the first dictionary of the Yakut language between 1899 and 1930, completing this monumental work more than a decade after the Bolshevik Revolution. The Yakut Museum was founded in Yakutsk by exiles in 1891, and E. M. Yaroslavski, later a famous Bolshevik party historian, was its curator. The Polish exile V. Seroshevski made an intensive 12-year study (1880-1892) of the north Yakutian districts of Verkhoian and Kolyma, the Russian Geographical Society recognizing the value of his ethnographical research by publishing his work, *Yakuty*, in 1896.

⁸ N. L. Latkin, *Yeniseiskaia guberniia, yeio proshloe i nastoiashchee* (Yeniseiskaia Province, Its Past and Present), St. Petersburg, 1892, quoted in Armstrong, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-19.

⁹ Tsarist laws governing relations with the native populations were on the whole liberal. They forbade the sale of alcohol to the natives and made other provisions to protect the latter from the rapacity and brutality of officials and private traders. But the laws were easy to evade in view of the remoteness of the region and the laxity and venality of many officials.

Though subject to certain official restrictions, Russian exiles also participated in the so-called Siberian (*i.e.*, Yakutian) Expedition of 1894-96, organized and financed by the rich mine owner I. M. Sibriakov, which produced important scientific results in the fields of Yakut customary law, economics, and primitive religions, thanks largely to the contributions of Pekarski, the distinguished anthropologist V. G. Bogoraz-Tan, and Vladimir Yokhelson (all political exiles). In this and other scientific expeditions, the Yakuts cooperated very usefully with the Russians, guiding them through difficult and unknown areas and elucidating local myths and legends. One of the most interesting of these early study projects was the Russian-American Ethnographical Expedition through Chukotka (1900-02), organized by the American Museum of Natural Sciences, in which both Bogoraz and Yokhelson again took part.¹⁰ These two political exiles also were instrumental in stimulating the emerging young Yakut intelligentsia and encouraging the stirrings of national consciousness.

The industrious *Skoptsy* and other sectarian peasant exiles made their contribution in the field of agriculture, particularly in the development of grain and vegetable production. The best results were obtained in the Olekminsk and Viliui districts, where the methods introduced by the exiles were quickly imitated by the Yakuts and applied elsewhere. The Yakuts learned how to use new implements and to clear woodlands, and large numbers who had previously grown only hay for their animals now took up arable farming on a broader scale.¹¹ The development of the gold-mining industry in Yakutia and the neighboring Irkutsk *guberniia* created a growing market for dairy and grain products from the Lena-Viliui districts, benefiting both Yakut and Russian farmers. There were also skilled Yakut joiners and carpenters who helped to adjust construction to the peculiar permafrost soil.

Cultural and Economic Progress

During the last century of Tsarist rule, the cultural horizons of the Yakuts were considerably enlarged. The people were now converted, at least formally, to Orthodox Catholicism, although the old Shamanistic rites were often still practiced in the home. Church services in Yakut were started in

¹⁰ Tokarev, *op. cit.*, pp. 362-63.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-74.

Yakutsk in 1859 and extended later to many country districts. Some religious books were published in the Yakut language, but Russian was as a rule the language of instruction in Church schools for Russians and Yakuts alike. In spite of the lethargy and inferior educational and moral quality of many teachers and local officials, the network of schools for Yakut and Russian peasants grew slowly but steadily throughout the country. In remote places, schools were often started by devoted Russian exiles with no assistance from the government. Native literacy rose from 0.7 percent according to the 1897 census to 2 percent in 1917, but it should be noted that these figures included the Chukchi and Tungus, Yukagirs and Lamuts, among whom literacy scarcely existed. The literacy figure for the entire Russian Empire in 1917 was only 21 percent.

Commercially, the country was also developing. The Yakuts were proving themselves keen traders even in competition with the Russians. The lucrative carrying trade by pack-horse across the Yakutian tracks linking Siberia with the Pacific via Yakutsk was largely in their hands, and we hear of Yakut merchants sending representatives to China to buy tea, which was imported via the ports of Ayan and Okhotsk. They also imported goods from America and elsewhere via Ayan and Nelkan in the 1880's—because it was cheaper to import by these sea routes than overland from Russia—and in spite of the miserable state of the roads leading from these ports to the interior of the country, trade with China and America was brisk.¹² Thus, Yakutia at the end of the 19th century was less isolated from the outside world than it is today.

From the early years of the 20th century, there was evidence among the young Yakut intelligentsia of a growth of national consciousness, which expressed itself in native literature and poetry and in widespread hostility to the iniquities of Russian taxation, land tenure, and undemocratically elected institutions. The establishment in 1905 of the "Union of Yakuts" embracing many different indigenous groups—princelings (*toyony*), merchants, intelligentsia, and businessmen—was a sign of the times. Its aims were to establish the civil and economic rights of its members; to obtain recognition of all native lands occupied by the state, monasteries, churches, and deportees without the agreement of the indigenous owners as being native property; and to secure separate Yakut representation in the State Duma, the removal of police con-

trol over native social institutions, and the urgent enforcement of the statute on local self-government.¹³ The Tsarist government arrested the leaders of the Union but were unable to stifle nationalist sentiment in Yakutsk and the chief Yakut settlements. This was a genuine native movement, not influenced to any significant extent by Bolshevik émigrés. Contemporary Soviet historians are inclined to dismiss the Yakut Union as a "bourgeois-liberal" movement which did not have the "support of the broad national masses." The charge has little substance. It is like accusing Ireland's Charles Parnell, John Dillon or John Redmond of not having been "national leaders" because they did not belong to the working class.

Yakutia Under Soviet Rule

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 found Yakutia advancing socially, culturally and economically in spite of immense problems still awaiting solution. Four years of bitter civil war had to be fought out before Soviet power was firmly established and the remnants of the White (Kolchak) forces routed in 1922-23. A Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (YASSR) was then set up within roughly the same frontiers as the old Tsarist Yakutsk oblast, and its constitution was approved by the Supreme Soviet in 1923.

The new governmental setup in Yakutia was based on soviets and local party organs and was thus a simulacrum of government administration throughout the Soviet Union, taking no account of peculiar local conditions. This remains the form of government obtaining in Yakutia today. The YASSR is a constituent part of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR), and according to the hierarchical principle of Soviet government, all Yakut laws and regulations are subject to the control of both the governing bodies of the RSFSR and the highest all-Union state organs. Thus, the term "autonomous," in the Soviet usage, is not to be identified with the Oxford Dictionary definition of "self-governing," with which it has little in common. The Soviet "autonomous republics" represent, in effect, a second-class type of political unit devised by the Bolsheviks to compensate the smaller national groups, such as the Tatars, Bashkirs, and Karelians (there are now 16 such groups in all), which were not raised to full republican status on a

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 278-79.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 380-83.

par with the Russians or the Ukrainians. Professor Leonard Schapiro has defined the constitutional status of the autonomous republics as follows:

Within the Union republics there is a further division, that of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which is subordinated to the Union republic of the territory of which it forms part. . . . Autonomous republics are not awarded the "right" of secession by the Constitution. Nor do autonomous republics enjoy, even on paper, the right to conduct their own foreign relations or to maintain their own armed forces. Each autonomous republic has its own Constitution which requires approval by the Union republic to which it is subordinated.¹⁴

Accordingly, the YASSR must submit all its legislation, including budget and taxation arrangements, to the RSFSR for approval. Economically, it is dependent on Moscow for capital to develop its resources, and decisions regarding specific capital allocations for one project or another are also highly centralized. Development of Yakutia's major natural resources under the Soviet regime has always been directed from "without"—first, by the notorious Dalstroi of NKVD (Moscow's concentration camp system in the Far East), and latterly by the all-Union or RSFSR economic ministries in Moscow.

The inhabitants of the YASSR, as Soviet citizens, are represented in the bicameral Supreme Soviet of the USSR, electing one deputy for every 300,000 of the population to the Council of the Union, and as one of the Soviet autonomous republics they also send eleven deputies to the Soviet of Nationalities. Owing to the fact that many Yakuts have adopted Russian family names, it is usually impossible to distinguish Russians from Yakuts in the lists of members of these delegations. However, a recently published list of the YASSR delegation to the all-Union Council of Nationalities in 1966 specifies the nationalities of the delegates, showing that five were Russians, four were Yakuts, and two were Evenkis (Tungus).¹⁵ At the local government level, according to visitors to Yakutsk during 1965-67, Yakuts were in charge of many important posts. Thus, the mayor of Yakutsk was a Yakut in 1965, as were the President of the Republic (a woman), the Rector of the University, and some of the chief soviet officials.

Most important of all the instruments of ruling power is the highly centralized apparatus of the CPSU, represented in the YASSR by the Yakut

Obkom or Provincial Committee. The national (or autonomous) republics do not have their own national party organizations, but only branches of the all-Union party; thus, officials of any nationality chosen by the party can be switched from one republic to another. In fact, many of the most important posts in republican party organs are frequently occupied by Great Russians from Moscow with little or no local connections. All this indicates that the degree of self-government allowed to the YASSR is extremely limited.

The Population

The Yakuts form the largest and most compact native ethnic group in the Soviet Far East today, though their number is relatively minute compared to the Russians. They are still the only northern people not outnumbered by the Russians on their own home ground; however, at the present rate of Russian immigration, they also should soon be overtaken, as so many of the other small national minorities in the USSR have been. This trend is clearly shown in the accompanying table of population changes between the 1926 and 1959 censuses.

In 1926, the Yakuts constituted 82.3 percent of the population of the republic; the Russians, 10.43 percent; the Evenki and Eveni, 4.08 percent; and the remaining 3 percent consisted of scattered groups of nomadic Yukagirs, Chukchi, and small pockets of Chinese and Koreans. By the time of the last census in 1959, however, the situation had

Population of the YASSR

	1926	1959
Total	289,000	487,343
Yakuts	235,926 ^a	226,053 ^a
Russians	30,000 ^b	215,328
Peoples of the North:		13,691
Evenki (Tungus) }		9,505
Eveni }	13,000	3,537
Ukrainians	—	12,182
Tatars	—	5,172
Belorussians	—	2,548

^a The 1926 and 1959 figures for the Yakuts are not entirely comparable owing to minor changes in the YASSR boundaries during this period. In the northwest some territory was transferred to the Irkutsk oblast, while the YASSR gained other territory in the Olekminsk area.

^b This figure includes Ukrainians and Belorussians.

¹⁴ Leonard Schapiro, *Government and Politics of the Soviet Union*, London, 1965, p. 104.

¹⁵ *Deputaty Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR. Sedmoi Sozyv. Deputaty Soveta Soiuz i Soveta Natsionalostei*, Moscow, 1966.

radically changed. As a result of the immigration of large numbers of Russians to man the new mining settlements and other enterprises, the Yakut proportion had fallen to 46.4 percent, while that of the Russians had risen to 44.2 percent. Official statistics no longer mention Chinese or Koreans in Yakutia. They have most likely been deported or, if not Soviet citizens, were expelled during the transfer of both groups from the southern areas of the Soviet Far East before and during the last war.

The Yakuts are very unevenly distributed throughout the territory of the republic. About nine-tenths of them are concentrated in the central areas, chiefly in the Yakutsk and Viliui districts, while the population is very thinly spread in the north.¹⁶ The growth of the urban population has been considerable in the last forty years: official Soviet statistics show a rise from two percent in 1926 to 17 percent in 1959, and this trend continues. It is most strikingly reflected in the population of Yakutsk, which grew from 11,000 in 1926 to 74,000 in 1959 and 100,000 in 1966, and which now represents about one-seventh of the total population of the republic. The former tiny hamlet of Nezametnyi (now Aldan), which is the center of the southern Yakut gold-mining industry, is also growing rapidly (the population had reached 12,000 by the 1959 census and has probably risen since by several thousand).

Education and Culture

The Soviet period in Yakutia has seen a big leap forward in literacy, the spread of schools, and the establishment of many new cultural-scientific bodies. There has also been a considerable development of Yakut art and literature, albeit within the restrictions imposed by Marxist ideology and the rules of "socialist realism." Soviet sources dealing with these developments tend to obscure the national-cultural level already reached by the Yakuts prior to the Bolshevik Revolution and to depict them as having been wholly illiterate—a picture which, as indicated earlier, misrepresents the actual situation. Though literacy was indeed very low and concentrated among the higher social classes, the development of Yakut culture certainly antedates the Soviet period.

The Yakut language is now written in Cyrillic letters. Soviet scholars originally devised a special

form of writing for it in 1923, but this was arbitrarily replaced by the Latin alphabet for both Yakut and the other Turkish languages of the Soviet Union in 1929, and an equally arbitrary switch was made to Cyrillic in 1937. The Yakuts in 1959 were 96.3 percent literate, and a creditable percentage of the population—164 per 1,000—could boast secondary or higher education. Boarding schools or "internats" have been established to meet the needs of the nomadic reindeer-breeding and trapping people of the northern areas (some 412 were reported to exist in 1954¹⁷) and no doubt serve a useful purpose in providing education where this would otherwise be very difficult. In the beginning, however, parents strongly objected to parting with their children, feeling that they would thus lose touch with their traditional way of life and skills and be brought up in an alien ideological atmosphere.

Primary education is now given entirely in Yakut and secondary education in Yakut and Russian. There is an increasing trend among the smaller nationalities of the Soviet Union to regard Russian as their mother tongue, and this trend is apparent among the Yakuts, though it is still relatively slight. Thus, only 0.5 percent of the Yakuts had adopted Russian instead of Yakut by 1939, whereas the proportion rose to 2.4 percent by 1959. The trend is more marked among Yakuts living outside their homeland in other areas of the RSFSR where Russian influence is paramount.¹⁸

Although only a rudimentary Yakut written language and literature existed before 1917, there is now a growing volume of creative literary work in the native tongue. Two daily newspapers are published in Yakut, and a literary magazine, *Poliarnaia zvezda*, appears every two months in both Yakut and Russian. The Russian edition, which is available in the West, contrives to express, in poetry and literary articles, a genuine feeling of Yakut national pride in the country's legends and natural beauty, though its pages are also well filled with "party line" pieces and obsequious tributes to Lenin.

In Yakutia, as in other national minority areas of the Soviet Union, nationalist ideas and sentiments can be given expression only at the risk of harsh political reprisal. After a period of relative toler-

¹⁶ *Narody Sibiri*, op. cit., pp. 267-68.

¹⁷ V. V. Pokshishevski, *Yakutiia, priroda-liudi-khoziaistvo* (Yakutia, Nature-People-Economy), Moscow, 1957, pp. 91-92.

¹⁸ Isupov. op. cit., pp. 33-34.

ance towards nationalism during the early and middle 1920's, the Bolshevik regime drove this lesson home to the Yakuts by purging various local party and literary figures between 1928 and 1938. In 1928 the members of the Yakut Obkom were deposed and replaced by more amenable men, and there was a concurrent purge of native writers, its more notable victims including the poet and ethnographer, A. Kulakovski, who used his poetry as a vehicle for warning against Russian domination, and Altan Saryn, an advocate of pan-Turkism among the Yakuts. The new Obkom subsequently disbanded the Sakha Omuk, a Yakut cultural organization, and imposed curbs on the country's only nationalist literary journal. What were officially described as "the most fanatical representatives" of the Yakut national intelligentsia were deported, and it is probable that some of them wound up in the "national minority brigades" which built the White Sea Canal in the appalling conditions of the 1930's. These reprisals against the native intelligentsia further weakened the natural leadership of the country—a process which had started with the destruction of the Yakut aristocracy in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution.¹⁹

The tendency to introduce Russian words into the Yakut vocabulary to convey ideas outside its range of expression, especially terms related to technical-industrial administration, is increasing. This is a trend found in many "developing countries" where new terms are borrowed from more advanced societies to meet the needs of modernization. The official Soviet line is that the "Russian language does not drive out the national languages and does not diminish their roles. The Russian language spreads with the flowering of the national languages."²⁰ But this reassurance must be weighed against the fact that an increasing number of people of the small nationalities gave Russian as their chosen language in the 1959 census, and that one of the aims of the Communist Party Program is "the fusion of cultures" and "the formation of a single universal culture of Communist society." If such a "fusion" is realized, it is obvious from the present trend that the Russian language and culture will inevitably dominate and the minority national cultures eventually be driven to the wall.

Many higher educational, technical and research institutions are now established in Yakutsk, and a

special mining institute in Aldan works in connection with the gold industry. Yakutia's first university, which grew out of the old teachers' training college, was established in 1956. Earlier, in 1947, the Yakutsk branch of the all-Union Academy of Sciences was founded and attached to the Siberian Division of the Academy at Novosibirsk. It embraces a number of research institutes for geology, biology, etc. The important Permafrost Institute, which is attached directly to the Academy at Novosibirsk, has a staff of over 250 persons and maintains out-stations at Igarka and Chulman. It is engaged in both purely scientific work and the solution of practical problems of mining, construction, etc., in the permafrost areas of the country. Visiting experts have reported the scientific staff of the Institute to be of high quality. Soviet ethnographers, geologists and other scientists have done a great deal of work on Yakut problems, and some extremely interesting and original research studies have been published.

The Institute of Language, Literature and History is mainly concerned with research into the Yakut and other languages of the republic and is directed by a Yakut woman. However, the treatment given in 1951 to the distinguished Yakut literary historian and member of the Institute, G. P. Basharin, stands as a warning to all Yakut scholars to watch their step even today. In a book published in 1944, Basharin had dared to defend some of the pioneers of Yakut literature, Kulakovski in particular, who had been purged for their nationalist views. For this, he was violently denounced by *Pravda*, in an article published on December 10, 1951, and written by Aleksei Surkhov and L. I. Klimovich, for harboring "erroneous and anti-Marxist" ideas and seeking to justify the reactionary, "bourgeois-nationalist" character of Kulakovski.²¹ Although Basharin has since been able to publish several important works during the Khrushchev period (including a history of agrarian relations in Yakutia), he still does not appear to have a position at the Institute commensurate with his scholarship.

Yakutia's pool of trained professional personnel is growing rapidly as a result of the increased facilities for higher and especially technical training in Yakutsk. The number of doctors, for example, almost tripled between 1939 and 1959, while that of electricians and grid supervisors grew 12 times.²²

¹⁹ Walter Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, London, 1954, pp. 106-8.

²⁰ Isupov, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²¹ For details of the "Basharin incident," see Kolarz, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-10.

²² Isupov, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

Despite this, the great majority of managerial and technical personnel in Yakutia are still Slav and primarily Russian immigrants, and there is a continuing and acute lack of qualified people to meet the growing demands of the new mining and other industries of the country.

Economic Development

Over the last five decades, Yakutia has been economically transformed by geological prospecting which has led to the development of valuable new mining sites, many in remote, roadless and inhospitable areas. These natural obstacles greatly increased the cost and difficulty of exploiting the country's mineral resources. Soviet capital investment in Yakutia, which has shown a sharp upward curve during this period, has been primarily concentrated in branches of heavy industry designed to strengthen the economic might of the USSR, and in the mining of gold, mica (phlogopite), diamonds and tin.

A Yakut prospector discovered the large Aldan goldfields in southern Yakutia in 1922-23 (in an area of small older workings of a primitive nature), and extraction operations here and in the adjacent mica mines have been greatly expanded since the war through mechanization. The supply situation has also been improved by the construction of the Amur-Yakutsk main motor road, which links the Aldan mining district with Bolshoi Never on the trans-Siberian railway to the south and also serves as a winter road connection between Aldan and Yakutsk.

Aldan, now the administrative center of the gold mining industry, is reported by travellers to be a relatively well-appointed town with good public buildings. It lies in a valley in the permafrost area and has an airport. Some processing of the ore is done in two local refineries, but final processing is carried on outside the republic. The majority of the local inhabitants are Russians, but Yakuts are also being drawn into the mining industry.

Gold is also found in northern Yakutia, in the Indigirka, Yana and Kolyma river basins, but the Aldan gold mines remain the most important producer. A new gold processing plant is believed to have been completed recently at Nizhnii Kuranakh and should increase output. No precise figures of current gold production are published in the Soviet Union. In the 1930's Yakut gold output was stated by several Soviet sources to be 20-25 percent of

total Soviet gold production.²³ There is no doubt that output from the Aldan and other Yakutian gold mines is much higher now as a result of increased mechanization, the opening of new deposits, and the liquidation of the former concentration camp labor force with the abolition of Dalstroi in 1957.

The diamond resources of the Soviet Union were sharply increased by the discovery in the 1950's of three rich kimberlite pipes in the wilds of northwest Yakutia at Mirnii and Aikhal, and further north at Udachnaia-Vostochnaia, following earlier finds of alluvial diamonds in the Viliui basin. These deposits are regarded by geologists as among the richest (if not the richest) in the world, comparable to those in South Africa. They are difficult and expensive to work owing to labor and supply problems caused by their remoteness from inhabited centers and the harsh climate. Their importance to the Soviet economy is indicated by the fact that they now account for about 90 percent of annual Soviet diamond production, estimated in international trade journals at between 3 and 6 million carats. Some natural diamonds still have to be imported for special purposes, but Yakutian output is thought to be sufficient for normal Soviet requirements. A diamond institute has been established at Mirnii, and an interesting experiment is in progress looking toward the building of a completely enclosed town at Aikhal, with a micro-climate to shield the workers from the extremes of the local weather (plans for this project were to be shown at the Soviet pavillion during Expo 67 at Montreal).²⁴

The tin mines at Ese-Khaiia and Bagatai and the more recently opened Deputatski mine in northern Yakutia, together with the piesoquartz and phlogopite mica workings at Aldan, are other Yakut resources of all-Union importance. The tin deposits are especially valuable because of the scarcity of this mineral in the Soviet Union, which has necessitated large imports from Malaya to make good the deficit.

A sharp criticism of the central government's failure to act more energetically to develop the natural resources of Yakutia was voiced in 1965 by the then party First Secretary of the YASSR, S. Z.

²³ V. V. Pokshishevski, *op. cit.*, p. 105; S. S. Korshuev (Ed.), *Yakutiia*, Moscow, 1965, p. 396.

²⁴ *Soviet Life*, June 1965, reported these and other developments in the Soviet diamond industry.

Borisov, himself a Yakut in spite of his Russian-sounding name. Complaining of the underdevelopment of gold, diamond, tin and mica resources, Borisov declared:

The annual output of minerals in proportion to prospected reserves is less than one percent for diamonds, just over one percent for tin, about two percent for mica, and five percent for gold. The rich deposits of high-grade coking coal and iron ore in southern Yakutia, other deposits of non-ferrous and rare metals, and the salt deposits are not being worked at all and represent so much frozen capital, in spite of the fact that the appropriate research for getting the most out of these deposits has already been carried out and has proven the great profits which can be expected from their exploitation.²⁵

Borisov went on to hint that there was opposition in influential quarters to sinking "much capital in a sparsely-populated region." He pointed out, however, that the diamond industry in Yakutia had already more than paid for itself, and that capital investments in the Deputatski tin mining enterprise, producing the cheapest tin concentrate in the USSR, were "15-16 times less than comparable capital investments in tin mining elsewhere in the Soviet Union."

It is impossible for an outsider to judge the validity of this possibly exaggerated special pleading. There is, however, plenty of evidence in Soviet sources as to the existence in Yakutia of a serious labor problem (to which Borisov also referred) which is greatly hampering mining and industrial development. Owing to poor living conditions, unreliable food supplies, and inadequate social amenities such as hospitals and crèches, it has hitherto been impossible to attract adequate numbers of immigrants to settle permanently in Yakutia. Higher wages and bonuses are indeed paid to workers in the more inhospitable areas of the country, but they are not enough to compensate for the greatly increased cost of living, the irregular supplies of fresh food, and the lack of good housing.²⁶

The Labor Problem

As a consequence of these conditions, labor turnover is exceptionally high in the most important Yakut mining areas. Soviet sources in 1961 gave the following statistics (which are not regularly published) for migrants leaving their jobs in these

areas: 51 percent in the Indigirka mining region; 51.3 percent in the Yakut diamond trust; 65.1 percent in the Aldan mica mines; and 93 percent in the Deputatski tin mines. The main cause given for this heavy efflux of mineworkers was the inadequate or non-existent supply of potatoes, vegetables and eggs available at government stores, while these food items on the free market were 4-5 times higher in price.²⁷

Notwithstanding the special difficulties of supply, housing and communications throughout these northern territories, it is surprising that the Soviet government has not made more headway in solving the labor-turnover problem there after its long experience in the area. Its record is immeasurably less successful than that of capitalist countries like Canada or the United States in overcoming similar difficulties in their Arctic regions. Now that Stalinist restrictions on the free movement of workers have been abolished, Moscow is learning at great cost that free labor will not remain on the job in bad conditions any longer than is necessary to accumulate a little capital before seeking more attractive conditions elsewhere. Certainly, the Soviet authorities will have to devote much more serious thought to Yakutia's labor problems if the provisions in the new draft Five-Year Plan (1966-70) for building up the economic potential of the Soviet Far East and further increasing the output of gold, tin, wolfram, mercury, diamonds and mica—all found in Yakutia—are to be implemented. Moreover, when the new metallurgical plant now planned for the Far East gets off the ground, the coking-coal deposits at Chulman in southern Yakutia will probably be chosen as its fuel base, further heightening the urgency of solving the labor problem.

In view of the vast distances and the largely roadless state of much of the country, air transport is the most convenient means of moving light freight and passenger traffic. Aeroflot runs scheduled flights to over thirty small towns within Yakutia, as well as farther east, and through Siberia to Moscow and Central Russia. The Lena River system is also important for heavy freight, and supplies reach northeastern districts *via* the North Sea route and the port of Tiksi on the Arctic Ocean.

There are as yet no railways in Yakutia for transporting heavy freight, but this situation may eventually be improved by the projected construction of

²⁵ *Ekonomicheskaya gazeta*, No. 35, 1965.

²⁶ *Planovoe khoziaistvo*, No. 4, 1966, p. 48.

²⁷ "Labor Turnover in the Yakutskaya ASSR," *Polar Record*, May 1966. Data based on papers published in *Voprosy geografii Yakutii*, No. 1, 1961.

a great new rail line (Sevsib) traversing Northern Siberia and Yakutia and terminating at a Pacific port. This will be a major project comparable in magnitude to the old Trans-Siberian railway and will take at least twenty years to complete.

Agriculture

The ill-conceived Soviet attempts in the 1930's to collectivize the Yakut herds of cattle, horses and reindeer and to settle the nomadic reindeer-herding peoples caused much confusion and distress among the rural population of Yakutia. The folly of trying to change the traditional methods of reindeer herding was eventually recognized, and now the reindeer peoples are classified as "semi-nomadic." Their reindeer meat and other products find good markets in the new mining settlements of northeastern Yakutia, and their animals are indispensable for transport in the tundra. There are now some prosperous mixed reindeer collectives in the Kolyma depression, with Chukchi, Evenki, Yakut and Russian members.²⁸

Large areas of Yakutia are unsuitable for arable farming owing to the harsh climate and the permafrost soil. The best lands for wheat and vegetables are in central Yakutia and the Olekminsk district. There are large herds of cattle and horses, and Yakutsk is now supplied with meat and dairy products from the surrounding farms. As a result of intensive experimental work in plant breeding, the boundaries of agriculture in Yakutia have been moved substantially farther north than was formerly believed possible, although the practical results of these experiments are still not very substantial.²⁹ In the more inclement areas, some vegetables are grown in large glass-enclosed nurseries to supply local workers, but in far from sufficient quantities.

Conclusion

That a considerable degree of social and economic progress has been realized in Yakutia under Soviet rule cannot be denied. On the other hand, the severely limited measure of self-government allowed to the Yakuts and other native peoples of the area

stands out in sharp contrast to the USSR's constant agitation in the United Nations on behalf of full independence for all colonial peoples, however ill-prepared they may be, politically and economically, for self-rule. The Yakuts are now nearly 100 percent literate and are making an appreciable contribution to local government administration, scientific research, and other sophisticated activities in their republic. They thus are much more entitled to genuine self-government than are some of the more primitive peoples from Oceania to Africa for whom the Soviets demand independence.

Lined up against the Slav millions, a people so numerically small as the Yakuts seems insignificant. Yet, even numerically, they appear in a different light within their own homeland. There they are the largest and the dominant group of native peoples and have given their name to a country almost six times the size of France, with great natural resources. These are the significant facts locally.

Notwithstanding the imposition of collectivization, the destruction of the young Yakut national intelligentsia under Stalin, and the continued subjection of the YASSR to Moscow's overriding political control, Soviet writers blandly tout the myth of Yakut "autonomy" and "independence." Even a work of the caliber of *The Peoples of Siberia*, produced by the Soviet Academy of Sciences, can affirm: "The Yakut people received its national independence from the hands of the Russian proletariat directed by the Communist Party."³⁰ But, as pointed out earlier, the terms "national independence" and "autonomy" in the Soviet context are a far cry from genuine independence and autonomy in the accepted Western sense. The Soviet "autonomous republics" do not represent an intermediate stage in the preparation of a primitive people for self-government; by definition, they are a fixed and permanent form of political tutelage imposed on the national minorities of the Soviet Union.

It would, of course, be unrealistic to demand that the Russians grant independence to a tiny minority people like the Yakuts occupying a vast rich area of Siberia. But if the Yakuts were located in some equally rich Western colonial territory in the heart of Africa or Asia, one can imagine the clamor that would be heard from Moscow demanding the liberation of this small people and its natural resources from colonial exploitation.

²⁸ Pokshishevski, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-86.

²⁹ Armstrong, *op. cit.*, 141-43, 161.

³⁰ *Narody Sibiri*, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

The Jews

By Zvi Gitelman

Soviet policy toward the Jews can best be understood when viewed not simply in terms of specifically "Jewish policies" but rather in the wider context of general policies that have peculiar effects on Soviet Jewry—a group whose religion is tribal rather than ecumenical, whose culture presents unique difficulties for Soviet ideology, and whose extraterritoriality poses problems different from those posed by any other ethnic groups in the USSR. This is not to say that there are no policies specifically aimed at the Jews; indeed, there is striking evidence that in some key areas of Soviet life—notably, politics, culture and education—Jews are denied the rights or opportunities enjoyed by citizens of other nationalities.

This article will examine the three principal aspects of the Jewish problem in the USSR: religion, antisemitism, and assimilation as a key to the future of the Soviet Jewish community. This approach, it is hoped, will serve to bring into sharper focus both the similarities and the significant differences between the status and treatment of the Jews on the one hand, and of other ethnic and religious minorities on the other.

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To begin with, there is little question that the Jewish religion is on the decline in the USSR, perhaps more rapidly than other religions. While it is difficult to estimate the number of believing Jews (some Soviet sources have put it as high as 500,000), it is a fact that only about 60 synagogues remain open in the entire Soviet Union whereas the Belorussian Republic alone had some 500 synagogues or houses of study in the late 1920's.¹ The overwhelming majority of worshippers are in their sixties and seventies. There is a lack of religious articles and, just as importantly, of religious functionaries. There is no Yeshiva (religious seminary) in Moscow—or anywhere else in the Soviet Union.

To some extent, the decline of the Jewish faith is part of a general decline of religion in the USSR. A poll conducted by *Komsomolskaia pravda's* Institute of Public Opinion in 1961 revealed that the majority of Soviet youth considered adherence

¹ This figure is cited in the Minsk Yiddish daily *Oktiabr*, February 1, 1929. Despite the extremely militant anti-religious campaign of the 1920's conducted by the *Yevsektzia*, or Jewish Section of the Communist Party, the number of synagogues had declined only from 1,034 in 1917 to 934 in 1929-30. The number of rabbis in the Ukraine had fallen from 1,049 in 1914 to 830 in 1929-30. All in all, 646 synagogues had been seized since the Revolution. *American Jewish Yearbook* 5690, Philadelphia, 1930, p. 68-9, and *AIJB* 5691, p. 118. In contrast, 354 of 450 remaining synagogues were seized between 1956 and 1963.