

# COMMENTARY FROM BRITAIN

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## SOVIET IMPERIALISM.

by

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"The People of the Soviet Far East"  
and  
"How Russia is Ruled".

(The Geneva Conference and the recent Conference of Asian Powers at Colombo bring into focus the aspirations of the Asian countries and the attitude of non-Asian Powers towards them. One such attitude is Imperialism. Where is its home today? The question is answered here by a well-known student of Russian colonial affairs.)

Soviet Russia is the only major European imperialist power in Asia. This may be a startling and surprising fact for many and yet it is a truism that is at once confirmed if we look at the political map of Asia. India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Burma - have been freely granted their independence by Britain. Dutch colonial rule has disappeared altogether. Only a few insignificant remnants are left of the once powerful Portuguese empire. In Indo-China, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have secured their independence in agreement with France. Only Soviet Russian imperialism has not yet retreated.

The entire North of the Asian continent is ruled from Moscow. The tremendous extent of this Soviet Empire in Asia is not always fully realised for even if we confine it to the five Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union it would be almost equal in size to India and Pakistan. In reality, however, Soviet Russia's Asian colonial empire is not limited to the Central Asian Republics. For instance, one must include among Russia's colonies in Asia the vast spaces of Yakutia in Eastern Siberia, a sparsely populated area as large in size as the whole Republic of India. Another Soviet colony is the

Pacific coastal province of the Soviet Union which in 1860 was wrested from China by an "unequal treaty". Soviet colonial rule has also been extended to the "Mongolian Peoples Republic which covers a surface as large as Spain, France, Portugal and Ireland put together. On paper, it is true, the Mongolian Republic is independent but the kind of independence which she enjoys would never have satisfied Burma and Indonesia. In fact, Mongolia's entire economy is subservient to the U.S.S.R., all her political institutions are copied from the Soviet model and even in the field of culture Russian-European influence is paramount. A few years ago the Mongols were forced to accept the Russian alphabet for their language.

The existence of Soviet Empire and of Soviet imperialism is somewhat obscured by the fact that Soviet Russia's colonies are separated from the mother country not by salt water but by gigantic land masses. Otherwise, however, Russian and Soviet imperialism shows all the characteristics that are usually associated with any imperialistic system. Thus in terms of distance the Soviet colonies are further away from Moscow than many of the British and French colonies or ex-colonies are from London or Paris. Vladivostok, Soviet Russia's main port in the Far East, is as far away from Moscow as Calcutta is from London. A much smaller distance separates Paris from the French-controlled territories in North Africa than Russia's Central Asian possessions from the Soviet Capital. It is also a fact that Russia annexed her colonial territories by the same imperialistic methods which have been used by other colonial powers in the past; in some cases the establishment of colonial rule was achieved through violent conquest, in other instances recalcitrant native rulers were deposed, or weaker partners were forced to accept unfavourable treaties. The most vital parts of the Soviet Empire in Asia have been Russian for less than one hundred years. Tashkent, the present capital of Soviet Uzbekistan, was conquered

as late as 1865; Turkmenia, which lies to the East of the Caspian<sup>S</sup> Sea, was subdued only in the 'eighties of the last century; and the Tuva province, which occupies the exact geographical centre of the Asian continent, was incorporated into the Russian Empire as late as 1914. The Soviet regime does not disown any of the conquests that were made by the Empire of the Czars. On the contrary, in all textbooks that are now used in Soviet schools the point is made that the annexation of Central Asia and of other Asian territories was a progressive action and a step forward in human history.

In the early years of Communist rule many people had hoped that Soviet Russia would throw off the colonialist heritage of the previous regime and would embark on a policy of encouraging self-government and national independence. But these optimistic expectations were soon disappointed. The Communist slogan "self-determination including separation" though loudly proclaimed in other countries has never been taken seriously by the Soviet rulers as far as the peoples of Russia herself were concerned. Behind the smoke-screen of a progressive phraseology the Kremlin has conducted the most old-fashioned colonial policy in Asia. Let me mention only a few facts taken from Soviet Russia's colonial record. At the beginning of the 'thirties, the Soviet Government drove to despair the nomads of Kazakhstan by confiscating their cattle. Many Kazakh cattle breeders either perished from starvation or fled to Sinkiang province in Western China. Towards the end of the 'thirties the Russian Communist regime ordered the deportation from the Pacific coastal areas of the entire Asian population - over 150,000 Koreans and several tens of thousands of Chinese - under the pretext that Japanese imperialism might make use of them. As a European colonial power Communist Russia has swamped the territories of all Asian peoples living under Soviet rule with masses of European colonists ranging from highly skilled technicians to ordinary agricultural labourers. But most important of all, the Soviet regime has wiped out two entire generations of intellectual leaders who in

the 'twenties and 'thirties conducted an active struggle for national liberation. In the late 'forties, and right up to the present moment, the regime has victimised a third generation of intellectuals who no longer dare to advocate political freedom but who, at least, try to preserve the national cultures of the peoples of the Soviet Orient.

Stalin's death has brought no relief to the Asian peoples of the Soviet Empire. The Soviet regime has been weakened, it is true, and forced to make some concessions to the subjected nationalities, but these concessions were granted only to the peoples of European Russia and particularly to the numerically large Ukrainian people whose man-power is badly needed for a further colonisation of the Soviet East. It is significant that the new men in the Kremlin have dismissed one of the most outstanding leaders from among the Asian Communists of the U.S.S.R. - the First Party Secretary of Kazakhstan - Shayakhmetov. He was replaced by a European Communist Ponomarenko until recently a member of Malenkov's Government in Moscow. Shayakhmetov's dismissal is in all probability connected with a new scheme of the Soviet central Government under which a few hundred thousand additional European colonists are to be pumped into Kazakhstan to open up new agricultural areas. Shayakhmetov seems to have lost his post because of his opposition to this mass influx of colonists.

What has happened in Kazakhstan recently is symptomatic of the fact that in relation to its dependent peoples the Soviet regime is becoming not less imperialistic but even more so. It shows once again that "Communism" and "Imperialism" far from being opposite poles are under certain circumstances identical notions. They are certainly identical as far as Russian Stalinist and post-Stalinist Communism is concerned.

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