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An Examination of the Possible Effects of Slavic Chauvinism on the Economic and Political Development of the Southern Soviet Periphery (U)

STATUTORILY EXEMPT

Editor's Note: This paper tied for Second Prize in the 1988 International Affairs Institute Essay Contest.

INTRODUCTION

The "nationalities problem" (or the "nationalities question" as it is referred to in Soviet press) is, without a doubt, one of the most serious dilemmas facing the Soviet Union as it approaches the end of the twentieth century. This problem is brought about in part by the dichotomy which exists in the way the government, and more importantly, the party, views the various republics which comprise the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the sovereignty of these republics is guaranteed by the Soviet constitution. Each of them is guaranteed the freedom to conduct its own affairs, in its own language, to the extent that this does not go against the good of the Soviet Union as a whole. On the other hand, the government has, until recently, been actively pursuing a policy of merging these very different peoples into a single "Soviet" people.

There can be no question of the historic role played by the Slavic peoples, especially the Great Russians, in the development of first the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. Given that fact, and, perhaps more importantly, their continued dominance of the government and party, it should come as little surprise that this group should serve as the model for this new Soviet people. In fact, the government of the Soviet Union has been pursuing the goal of Russification for many years. This program has met with varying degrees of success – being the most successful in the Slavic republics of Belorussia and the Ukraine.

Not surprisingly, this program has been less successful in the non-Slavic, largely Moslem southern periphery of the USSR. It is this area, described by Dienes [5] as "an undigested and undigestibly separate realm of the USSR," and by Wimbush (in his chapter in *The Last Empire* [4]) as "the soft underbelly" of the Soviet Union, which will serve as the focus for this paper. The paper will examine several aspects of life in these southern republics in an attempt to determine what role, if any, Slavic chauvinism plays in their development. Specifically, it will look into the question of how much, or how little, influence the local titular nationalities wield in the economic and political development of their own republics. To do this, this paper will examine: (1) levels of political participation as measured by the Communist Party Soviet Union (CPSU) membership, leadership positions held within the republic party organization, and at the national level; (2) economic development levels within the republics: types of industry, capital investment levels, and possible trends for the foreseeable future; (3) demographic factors, such as the change over time in the percentage of the ethnic group within these republics as compared to the local Slavic population, education levels, type of jobs held, etc.; and, finally, (4) the degree of success of Russification as an indicator of loss of

national identity will be discussed by means of an examination of the level of Russian language usage by members of the titular nationality, and by an examination of their reluctance to out migrate in the face of strong efforts by the national government to tap this reserve of badly needed manpower.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Given the decisive role that the Communist Party plays in virtually every facet of life in the Soviet Union, an ethnic group's level of party membership must certainly be considered one of the most important indicators of its level of equality with other republics, areas, and ethnic groups.

Most observers would agree that the majority of Soviet minorities made considerable gains in this area during the late 1950s and 1960s. This increase in ethnic membership was brought about in large part through Khrushchev's policy of easing restrictions on party membership following the death of Stalin [12, pp.297–98]. However, as shown in table 1, the Moslem republics are still underrepresented in the CPSU in relation to their share of the total population, although it could be argued that this is, in part at least, a reflection of their still low levels of urbanization. According to 1986 figures published in Moscow, the party membership is only 19.9 percent agricultural [16, p.354]. In addition, there is some indication that the majority of the Moslem republics again lost ground in the later 1970s when party membership became more restrictive [10, p.173].

However, it is in the republic party organizations that the titular minorities have scored their biggest gains. While some of these republic parties were dominated by the Russians in the earlier years, by the late 1970s the minorities were frequently over-represented,[1] even in the high-prestige jobs within the party secretariat and departments. The First Secretary of the republic party is usually a native, although as happened recently in Kazakhstan, the politburo is willing to put a Russian in the job if it sees what it believes to be nationalistic tendencies beginning to surface.[2] However, as Conquest points out [3, p.129], the independence of the republic parties is tempered by the fact that ethnic Russians are usually put into key positions, from which they can keep an eye out for the politburo's interest. For instance, while as stated above, the first secretaries of the republic parties are usually natives, the second secretary is usually Russian (or other Slavic).

It must be admitted, however, that the power which the republic party organizations wield at the national level is another matter. At the beginning of 1987, there were two full members of the politburo from the Moslem republics – Dinmukhamed Kunaev, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, and First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Geydar Aliev (a former First Secretary of the Azerbajdzhan Central Committee and, prior to that, Chairman of the Azerbajdzhan Republic KGB). By the end of the year, however, there were none. In December of 1986, Kunaev was removed from his post as head of the Kazakh Party, a position he had held for 22 years, and replaced by Gennady Kolbin, an ethnic Russian. In January 1987, he was

1. In 1926, for instance, Russians made up 4 percent of the population of Uzbekistan but 40 percent of the Uzbek Communist Party.
2. Much the same thing happened in Kazakhstan in 1927, and Europeans served as First Secretaries of the republic for the next 19 years.

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Table 1

Slavic vs. Southern Ethnic Groups as a Percentage of Communist Party Membership

Nationality	1960 percentage of		1970 percentage of		1980 percentage of	
	population	CPSU	population	CPSU	population	CPSU
Russians	54.7	63.5	53.4	61.0	49.9	59.2
Belorussians	3.8	3.0	3.7	3.5	3.7	3.8
Ukrainians	17.8	14.7	16.9	16.0	16.2	16.0
Georgians	1.3	1.8	1.3	1.7	1.3	1.7
Armenians	1.3	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.8	1.5
Azeri	1.4	1.1	1.8	1.4	2.2	1.8
Kazakhs	1.7	1.6	2.2	1.7	2.7	2.0
Turkmen	.5	.3	.6	.3	.9	.4
Kirgiz	.5	.3	.6	.3	.8	.4
Tadjik	.7	.3	.9	.4	1.3	.5
Uzbeks	2.9	1.5	3.8	1.9	5.4	2.4

Figures for 1960/70 compiled from Rigby [12, p.378]. Population percentages for 1986 are estimates based on 1984 projections in Bernstam [4, p.318] and Communist Party membership figures from *Gody truda i pobed 1917–1987*.

relieved of his duties on the politburo after nearly 16 years in that post. Then, in the fall of 1987, Aliev was relieved of his politburo position "for reasons of health."

Are these firings the result of a Slavic backlash to the perceived favored status enjoyed by the minorities during the 1960s and 1970s? In the author's opinion, they are not, despite the fact that Aliev's removal leaves only one non-Slav, Foreign Minister Shcheverdnadze, on the politburo. This conclusion was reached for two reasons. First, in Kunaev's case at least, there were clearly grounds for dismissal. Investigation after his removal uncovered apparently wide-spread corruption throughout the republic. Food and new housing were reported to have been siphoned off for the republic's elite, resulting in severe shortages and long waiting periods for the average resident [17]. Aliev's case is not so clear cut. Although there were rumors circulating about his high style of living, no specific charges have been mentioned, and no investigation has begun since his

retirement. Since Aliev was rumored to be suffering health problems, this cannot be ruled out as the actual reason for his retirement. Another, and perhaps more likely cause, is just the natural wish of Mikhail Gorbachev to rid the politburo of Brezhnev holdovers, and stock it with men of his own choosing, who were more likely to support his present restructuring program.[3] This brings up the second reason – non-Slavs were not the only ones being targeted. It is widely believed, for example, that Gorbachev has been trying for some time to rid himself of Vladimir Shcherbitsky, head of the Ukrainian Party organization. That he has thus far been unsuccessful is attributed by some to the fact that Shcherbitsky still retains control of that organization [18]. In view of the riots which followed the removal of Kunaev in Kazakhstan, Gorbachev may be reluctant to tackle another active party head. Aliev, on the other hand, had served his ties with the Azerbajdzhan party and was therefore, perhaps, more vulnerable.

Nor are the Russians themselves safe in this respect. One of the first to go was Viktor Grishin, long-time Moscow party boss. Nor did his replacement, Boris Eltsin, fare any better. For these reasons, the author tends to side with those who believe that these actions were politically, rather than ethnically, motivated.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Moslem republics, with the exceptions of northern Kazakhstan and Azerbajdzhan[4] are still in the very early stage of industrial development. Most of the industry which is located in these republics is primary extractive, with the raw materials they produce being exported to previously established processing centers in the European section of the country. The obvious question is why processing centers are not being built in these areas. Is this lack of industrial development ethnically motivated, or is there a more fundamental reason for this apparent lack of progress?

Gillula, in his paper on *The Economic Interdependence of Soviet Republics*,[8] writes that the Soviet government has been using the national budget as a means of redistributing republic income. Through a study of produced versus used income in the different republics, he has demonstrated that the income of the more developed republics, especially Belorussia and the Ukraine, was routed through the national budget into the economies of the lesser developed republics. Among other things, he found that, "in 1966 the total value of used national income exceeded produced national income in seven of the eight southern-belt republics" [8, p.626].[5] In fact, the four Central Asian republics of Turkmenia, Uzbekistan, Kirgizia, and Tadzhikistan were net recipients of this redistribution plan from the mid-1960s.

While a main point of such a plan would ostensibly be to speed up the process of capital accumulation in the underdeveloped republics which in turn would allow these

3. Aliev rose to prominence through the security apparatus – first during WW II and later in the Azerbajdzhan KGB. Before becoming Chairman of that organization, he was deputy to General Tsvigun. It was Tsvigun who while later serving as Deputy Chairman of the All-Union KGB, recommended Aliev to Brezhnev.

4. Zwick, in his study of socio-economic clustering of the Soviet republics, states that ". . . after 1950 its (Kazakhstan's) socio-economic similarity to the RSFSR was clearly established. If any republic in the USSR is an adjunct of Russia, it must surely be Kazakhstan." [19] Zwick also clustered Azerbajdzhan with its Transcaucasian neighbors, Georgia and Armenia.

5. The lone exception was Azerbajdzhan which has an industrialized history going back to the last century.

mentioned above, the main export of these southern republics is raw materials. Their resources are then processed in the more industrially advanced republics and then sold back to them, which must offset at least a part of the inflow. Then too, the problem may have been exacerbated by a rapidly growing population, which diluted this excess of capital by just maintaining their economies at existing levels with precious little left over to modernize or extend their industrial base.

However, Sagers and Green [14] state that there was actually a trend towards even greater inter-republic inequality during this period. They found that by working with economic regions instead of republics, a slight divergence could be shown. They believe that the industrial dispersion policy in the Soviet Union has been guided by two apparently conflicting principles – increasing equity throughout the country and improving efficiency. As usual, efficiency won.

All sources seem to agree on one point – that after the mid-1970s any major effort to divert funds to the southern periphery came to an abrupt halt. The focus of the tenth Five-Year-Plan shifted to the development of the eastern portions of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR). More specifically, the Soviets were scrambling to keep their production of fossil fuels, a major source of hard currency on the world market, from plummeting.[6]

SOCIAL EQUALITY WITH THE SLAVIC REPUBLICS

The question of social equality will be addressed by an examination of access to secondary and higher education, types of jobs held by ethnic minorities, and the degree to which the population can be considered Russified. On the question of education, Jones and Grupp state [10, p.162] that, "the ethnic disparities in education inherited from tsarist empire were significant . . . . It is in the educational area, however, that the USSR has made the most progress in narrowing the gap between Russians and non-Russians." To an extent, education, like medicine, can be considered an extremely easy area to improve. That is, the level of education was so low when the Soviets took power that *any* improvement would have been significant. This is not, however, to slight the improvements which the Soviets have indeed made, which are considerable. And although the greatest advances were obviously made early on, the trend of improvement continued at least through the early 1970s (table 2). For example, between 1960 and 1970, the number of students enrolled in higher institutions in Uzbekistan more than doubled – from 101,300 to 232,900 students, with an increasing percentage of the students being Uzbek [11, p. 303].

Despite widespread belief that the quality of education in these regions is lower than in the Slavic republics, Jones and Grupp did not believe that a study of such factors as student/teacher ratios and percentage of teachers with higher education supported this supposition. A comparison of these factors revealed negligible differences between the Slavic and southern educational systems.[7] They did, however, admit that "the need to devote a large portion of classroom time in national schools to Russian language training must surely have a detrimental effect on other subjects" [10, p.168].

6. For an account of this oil crisis, see Gustafson [9] and Shabab and Sagers [15].
7. They also pointed out that a higher percentage of students in the southern republics attended day school, where the quality of education is supposedly higher. However, this higher rate may have been merely a reflection of the much younger population structure in the southern republics.

Table 2

Number of People Per Thousand with Higher and Secondary Education

REPUBLIC	1939	1959	1970
RSFSR	109	361	489
Ukraine	120	373	494
Belorussia	92	304	440
Georgia	165	448	554
Armenia	128	445	516
Azerbajdzhan	113	400	471
Kazakhstan	83	348	470
Turkmenia	65	387	475
Uzbekistan	55	352	456
Kirgizia	46	342	452
Tadzhikistan	40	325	420

Figures extracted from the *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities*, Table A.18 [11]

devote a large portion of classroom time in national schools to Russian language training must surely have a detrimental effect on other subjects" [10, p.168].

This leads to the theory of fluency in the Russian language as an indicator of Russification and a limiting of national sovereignty. While there has been a continued growth in the number of people claiming to speak Russian fluently, Jones and Grupp did not feel that there had been any widespread tendency of non-Russians to claim Russian as their native language. However, demographics authority Mikhail S. Bernstam, in his chapter entitled "The Demography of Soviet Ethnic Groups in World Perspective," [4, pp.320-21] writes that:

> For a number of decades, assimilation was an important reservoir for the growth of the Russians, but in the 1970s the rate of assimilation declined to half of that of the 1960s; in the 1980s this reservoir may dry up completely. Left with their natural growth only, the Russians will reach zero growth in the mid-1990s, to be followed by negative growth. An especially interesting trend is the reverse identification of individuals (or their children) who claimed to be Russians in the 1970 census, but reidentified themselves with the Turkic peoples in the 1979 census.

and that these minorities are reclaiming their ethnic heritage to take advantage of quotas in educational institutions, etc.

This author tends to agree with Jones and Grupp. While there may be a tendency on the part of some of the young, well-educated "ethnic yuppies" to identify with the Russians as a means of advancing their careers, the majority of the southern population is probably learning Russian for more pragmatic reasons. Although the direct Russian presence in this region is diminishing, anyone who has to function beyond the strictly local area will have to speak Russian in order to get by. And with the universal draft, this includes at least the majority of the male population. But, on the whole, it seems that for a number of reasons, not the least of them financial, the tendency for the near future will be more autonomy for the southern republics. As stated above, there is already a declining Slavic physical presence in the southern region. Rowland links this "return" migration of Russians to the RSFSR, the Ukraine and Belorussia, to shifts in per capita investment levels [13, p.557]. Another problem linked to the economic situation is the job market. Given the relatively low levels of industrialization within these republics (with the possible exception of Azerbajdzhan) and the rapidly swelling cadre of better-educated indigenous workers (as will be discussed later), the Russians are perhaps finding it more difficult to monopolize the more prestigious jobs in these republics.

Still another factor (and one which seems to be ignored in many studies of this topic) is that with their much lower fertility rate, as compared with that of the local nationalities, the Slavs may be beginning to feel more and more alienated from the local population as they find themselves in an ever-shrinking minority. Living in the midst of any foreign culture, and especially one as totally alien as the Moslem republics must seem to the ethnic Russian, is not easy, even when cloistered in an ethnic getto within the larger cities.[8] Whatever the reason, the Slavs do seem to be returning to the European section of the USSR.[9] Again quoting Bernstam [4, p.324],

> since the mid-1970s, the Russians and other Europeans have begun to move back to the RSFSR from Kazkhstan and Kirgizia with significant accelerations. For the first time since the advent of the Virgin Lands program in the 1950s, the RSFSR had a positive migration balance of about 287,000.

Finally, in the area of jobs, the southern minorities scored large gains in blue and white collar jobs between 1960 and 1970. While this could be expected from the increased number of ethnics who were receiving higher and secondary educations, Jones and Grupp found that by 1975 the index of ethnics with a higher education who were employed as specialists was near that of the Russians in the majority of republics and above it in Azerbajdzhan [10, p.171]. However, to offset this, only the Kazakhs from among the Moslems managed to increase their relative share of workers employed in the scientific fields [11, Table A.20].

CONCLUSIONS

The Soviet equalization policy has had mixed results in the past three decades. The Soviet minorities, and especially the late-developing Moslem republics, made very rapid strides in many areas during the 1960s, saw a slowdown of these advances in the mid-1970s, and are now experiencing an erosion of these gains. A notable exception to this

8. This opinion is based in part on the author's personal experience, having lived in eastern Turkey for 15 months.
9. For more on this reverse migration, see Roland [13].

strides in many areas during the 1960s, saw a slowdown of these advances in the mid-1970s, and are now experiencing an erosion of these gains. A notable exception to this pattern was in the area of increasing fluency in Russian on the part of the ethnic minorities. The reasons for this exception are probably the ones mentioned above, and the fact that although it was imposed upon them, the ethnic groups themselves realize the absolute necessity of learning the Russian language if they hope to compete successfully with the Slavs for the high-status white collar jobs [10, p.178].

The existence of Slavic chauvinism certainly cannot be denied, nor can the possibility be ruled out across the board that it may occasionally have an effect on policy. However, it does not seem to play a major role in the way the national government behaves toward the minorities, at least toward the Union republics. While individuals may be affected by this prejudice, the leaders as a collective group cannot afford to be. The Soviets are as aware as Western observers of the demographics of the Moslem republics. Although there are indicators that the fertility rate in these republics may finally be on the decline, the growth rates for Kirgizia is still twice that of the RSFSR, and those of Tadzhikistan, Turkmenia, and Uzbekistan are three times as high [6, Table 1]. One of the most sobering demographic facts facing Soviet planners is that according to Feshbach's calculations [6, p.5], by the year 2000 one out of every three draft-age males will be from the southern periphery. Given these facts, it cannot be considered in the best interest of the Kremlin to slight the southern republics on ethnic grounds.

In the final analysis, this erosion of advances may have been caused by nothing more sinister than a lack of funds with which to continue the programs which brought them about. As Jones and Grupp [10] summarized their findings, the Soviet equalization program

> has been most successful in promoting rapid declines in ethnic and regional disparities during periods of prosperity. It has been less successful in sustaining this progress during periods of contracting economic growth.

Unfortunately, there is little likelihood of any improvement in store for the minorities in the foreseeable future. Gorbachev's "Perestrojka" campaign stresses the fact that the only way to turn their economy around is through improved productivity. He apparently understands that they can no longer afford to follow the time-honored Soviet doctrine of increasing output through increasing the means of production. To the Soviet way of thinking, shrinking investment capital necessitates that social programs, including redistribution of national income to bring about a convergence of economic levels between republics, will simply have to go on the back burner.

Obviously, this poses a very serious dilemma for the Soviets. On the one hand, they are forced to reallocate funds from the minorities to keep their economy afloat, and at the same time, they are faced with a growing manpower shortage. Unfortunately for them, the only growing pool of manpower is in the Soviet south, and unless they can make further advances in education and urbanization in these areas, it is unlikely that the native populations will be inclined to out-migrate to take up the slack in the labor force. The only obvious way out for them is to come up with an additional source of funds with which to renew their modernization programs in the south. Given the already low share which goes into the consumer sector and the urgent need to upgrade their industrial sector, that would seem to leave the military budget, which has thus far remained sacrosanct. And while the Soviets are, if anything, even more reluctant to touch the military budget than is the U.S. administration, they too may find themselves without any choice. However, whether the current arms reduction talks can allow the Kremlin to reduce military spending to levels which would free up sufficient funds remains to be seen.

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