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THE COLONY WHERE ONE THIRD OF THE PEOPLE PERISHED

On October 30th Pravda and Radio Moscow excelled even their own high standards of hypocrisy. While posing as champions of the anti-colonial movement throughout the world, they simultaneously gave wide publicity to the hundredth anniversary of what they describe as "the voluntary entry of Kirgizia into the Russian State".

In fact Russian colonization of Kirgizia did start in the sixties of the 19th century, but it did not become a mass movement until 1907. In the first fifty years of the colonization campaign only twenty Russian settlements were founded, all in the north of the country. But between 1907 and 1915, a total of 111 new Russian settlements were established, of which nearly half were in the south-west on the Ferghana plain.

The resistance of the Kirgiz people to the Russian invasion involved exceptionally heavy casualties. Between 1900 and 1913 the Kirgiz lost more than 8% of their population<sup>1</sup>, and in 1916 they joined with the Kazakhs and the other Central Asiatic peoples in a mass revolt against the introduction of conscription for the Russian Army. In the ensuing fighting about 150,000 Kirgiz are believed to have been killed by the combined efforts of punitive expeditions sent from Moscow and the local Russian colons.

Many of the people fled over the border into China, only to die there of starvation. In the northern part of Kirgizia the native people were almost completely eliminated, and between 1915 and 1920 about 30% of the total Kirgiz population perished from all causes - the bullets of the colonialists, starvation, illness and the attrition of age.

The October revolution of 1917 did not stop the colonization process, it only changed its methods. In 1926 the Kirgiz accounted for about 66% of the population of the Kirgiz SSR, yet by the time of the 1959 census they had become a minority within their own country, with only 40% of the population. In the same period the Russian settlement program progressed rapidly, and in the twenty years 1939-1959 the number of Russians in Kirgizia almost tripled.

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1) W. Kolarz, Russia and Her Colonies, G. Philip & Son Ltd., London, 1952, p. 270

Since the war the Kirgiz have occupied less than 20% of the leading industrial posts in their own country, and less than 30% of the planning, accounting and trade jobs. (Sovietskaya Kirgizia, 10th October 1949)

Mikhail Frunze, whose name the capital city bears, was himself the communist descendant of a family of Russian colons. No one will deny that under Russian rule Kirgizia has made rapid economic and educational progress, but there must be few other colonies indeed anywhere in the world where a third of the native population was destroyed in the process. Moreover since the Kirgiz, like the Kazakhs, are now a minority in their own country the question of cui bono has to be answered by saying that the material progress achieved has been for Moscow's benefit, not for the good of the Kirgiz. Pravda's description of this centenary as a case of "voluntary accession" is a useful reminder that although the process of decolonization is now far advanced in the free world, it has not yet begun in Moscow's colonial empire. If it is argued, as is sometimes done by communist apologists, that a country like Kirgizia is too small for independent viability, the fact is that the population is more than 2,000,000, and many of the newer members of the UN have smaller populations than the Kirgiz SSR.

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