MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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WRITINGS ON THE EMPIRES IN WORLD HISTORY, VIII

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THE PLACE OF UKRAINE WITHIN A REFORMED TSARIST EMPIRE

By Arnold J. Toynbee

We have now dealt with the whole fringe of alien nationalities within the Western frontier of the Russian Empire[1]. A fringe is all that they are: their territories are insignificant slices carved from the Empire's enormous bulk, and their populations weigh light in the balance against the Russian-speaking masses that lie away to their East. The Russians have far less excuse than the Magyars for the oppression by force or fraud of their fellow-nationalities, because the most quixotic generosity could not endanger the Russian element's preponderance[2]. The mere weight of the Russian population is sufficient to assure for ever the Russian character of the Empire, and the balance of numbers is continually shifting further in its favour year by year, as colonial areas fill up in the Great North-East. The only really difficult problem of devolution within the Empire concerns the relations between the different branches of the Russian Nation itself.

The Russian race falls into two great divisions, distinguished by considerable difference of dialect: –

(i) The whole North of the country is occupied by the "Great Russian" group, which is composed of three sub-sections:

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[1] [Polish, Lithuanian, Lettish, Esthonian, Roumanian, T.T.]

[2] The following table, showing the comparative strenghts of the most important nationalities within the Russian Empire, was compiled from estimates made in 1906:

Great Russians … 55.673.000		
White Russians. 5.886.000	{Total North Russian … 61.559.000	
Little Russians … 22.381.000		{Total Russians … 83.940.000
Poles ……. 7.931.000		
Lithuanians …… 1.659.000		
Letts …… 1.436.000		
Finns ……. 2.496.000		
Tatars …… 3.738.000		
Bashkirs …. 1.493.000		
Kirghiz …. 4.084.000		

The total population of the Empire was estimated at 149.299.000 in the same year.

(*a*) The Northern, corresponding to the area of the former republic of Novgorod, where the Great Russian dialect is spoken in its most extreme form.

(*b*) The Western, coinciding with the region once subject to Lithuania, where the so-called "White Russian" variety of the dialect is current.

(*c*) The Eastern, round the original core of the Muscovite principality, where the dialect shows divergences from the pure Northern type similar to those that prevail in White Russia.

These three modifications of the Great Russian speech have remained mere parochial peculiarities, and have not aroused any separatist feelings between the populations that respectively speak them. The third, or "Moscow", type has established itself as the organ of official administration and of educated intercourse, because the principality of Moscow was the nucleus out of which the New Russia grew up as the Mongol storm subsided. The sudden birth of a wonderful literature in the nineteenth century, and the gradual spread of primary education since the beginning of the twentieth, have secured it for ever from challenge by the other local patois.

(ii) "Great Russian", then, is a single language, and all the populations that speak it form a single national unit; but when we come to the second or "Little Russian" division of the race, we find ourselves in face of a real cleavage. The extension of the "Great Russians" coincides on the whole with the forest-zone of the country. The Little Russians lie South of them, deployed in a long line on the borderland between forest and steppe, which extends from the headwaters of the Vistula and Dniestr systems in the Carpathians towards the E.N.E., till it strikes the upper course of the Don near Voronesh.

This wide-flung ribbon of population has a strong national feeling of its own. The "Great Russian" can claim that it was he who freed the race from the Moslem yoke, and that the living Russia of the present, with its glories of arms and of letters, is solely his creation; but the "Little Russian" looks back to the day before the Mongol appeared in the land, when the Dniepr, not the Volga, was the holy river of Russia, and Kieff, half way down its course, her holy city, the meeting-place of the "strong government" and the world-religion that came up to her from opposite quarters, out of the Baltic and the Black Sea. He regards himself as the true heir to this primitive tradition, and his loyalty to it is all the keener because so many centuries lie between the Golden Age and his present obscurity.

Little Russia, unlike Muscovy, never recovered from the Mongol catastrophe. She escaped from allegiance to the Moslem only by submission to the Lithuanian and Polish Catholic; and even when the Polish Empire was broken up, she did not win her unity from the re-settlement, but was divided with the rest of the spoils between the governments of Moscow and Vienna. Yet the problem of Little Russian nationalism might still have been solved. The Ruthenes of Galicia were only a small fraction of the race: the major part of it, including the national centre, Kieff, and the whole of the Dniepr basin, was once more gathered into the fold of a national Russian state; and if Moscow could have been liberal enough to accept Kieff as her peer, the Little Russians would soon have forgotten their particularism, and only remembered that they and their Great Russian brethren were all members of One Orthodox Churchy, and citizens of one Holy Russia. But unfortunately the rulers of Moscow, that true heart of Russia where all her races and dialects meet, had migrated Northwards to the Baltic, and the new regime of Petersburg, established at the farther extremity of the Great Russian area and exposed to the full influence of German ideas, had initiated a policy of uniformity as baneful as that of Joseph II in the Hapsburg lands, but unrelieved by the touch of genius that characterised Joseph's activity. Russia was to be "Great Russian", and the Little Russian division of the nation was to be neither conciliated nor assimilated, but ignored.

This unconstructive policy has been pursued mechanically for more than a century. The Little Russian language has been treated as a patois on the same footing as White Russian or the dialect of Novgorod, and has rigorously been denied any official status. All public education and administration has been conducted in the Moscow variety of Great Russian, the natural medium in the North, but in Southern Russia almost a foreign tongue. The results of this system have been unfortunate. Little Russian nationalism, effectively prevented from manifesting itself in external forms throughout its native home, the Ukraine[3], has been irritated by this wanton provocation to an unnatural tension of consciousness, and has found a new stronghold across the Galician border.

The Little Russian or Ruthene population of the Austrian Crown-lands has its grievances. Though the Ruthene peasant proprietors constitute the bulk of the population in Eastern

[3] "Ukraine" (meaning "borderland", the same word as the "Krain" of the Slovenes) is the term used to cover all districts of Little Russian population within the present frontiers of the Russian Empire.

Galicia[4], the big estates are still nearly everywhere in the hands of a Polish upper class, a relic of the Polish domination before the Partition of 1772, and in the 'eighties of the last century the Austrian government abandoned the Ruthene majority to the mercy of the Polish minority, when it was bidding for the support of the Polish vote in the parliament at Vienna.

The Poles had the game in their hands, because both wealth and education were at that time their monopoly, and they took steps to confirm their racial predominance. They compelled the Austrian government to recognise Polish as the official language of the whole province, and it has taken the Ruthenes a generation to secure a modicum of instruction in their own language at Lemberg[5] University. Resentment at their betrayal to the Poles raised a movement among them in favour of Russia, and a "Moskalophil" party grew up, whose programme was that reunion with the national Russian state which is now being realised; but the Moskalophils have always been in a minority, and no indictment against Russian policy in the Ukraine could be more damning than the almost universal rejection of Russian overtures by the Ruthenes of Eastern Galicia.

In modem Austria "official language" has not the same sinister connotation as in the neighbour states of Russia, Prussia and Hungary. Like German in the remaining Austrian provinces, Polish is "official" in Galicia in the sense that it is the vehicle of "internal service" in the administration of the country. In the "external service", however, that is, in all relations between the provincial government and the individuals subject to its jurisdiction, Austrian public law prescribes in Galicia as elsewhere the employment of the private party's native speech, if it is recognised as customary ("Landesüblich") in the district.

A Ruthene thus enjoys the right to conduct all his business with the Polish administration in his own Ruthene tongue. If he is a peasant, he can bring an action in Ruthene before the public courts: if he is a deputy, he can debate in Ruthene in the provincial diet. If he can secure a majority in his village or municipality, he may make Ruthene the medium of his

[4] The Ruthene territory amounts to about two-thirds of the whole area of Galicia, even if we make a liberal allowance for the Polish enclaves embedded in it: on the other hand, the Ruthene element is only a minority of the total population of Galicia (3.382.100 in 1900, as against 4.252.000 Poles), because the Ruthene country is more mountainous and less developed than the Western district occupied by the Poles.

[5] The German form of Russian Lvov, Little Russian Lwiw, Polish Lwów.

local self-government. If he travels on the Galician railways, he finds every official notice down to the inscription on his ticket printed in Ruthene as well as in German and Polish. In every one of these points his status presents a remarkable contrast to the position of his brethren beyond the Russian and Hungarian frontiers. Even in the sphere of higher education, where the Polish regime has laid itself open to most criticism, the number of Ruthene secondary schools in Galicia has at least risen, though slowly, since 1867, while in Hungary the non-Magyar secondary schools have steadily shrunk in numbers during the same period. On the whole, we may say that the Ruthene majority in the Eastern part of Galicia is treated as equitably as is consistent with the racial supremacy of the Polish minority in the region, and that here, as elsewhere, Austria has been Europe's pioneer in the settlement of the problem of nationality.

In Galicia, then, the Little Russian language is deprecated but in no sense banned. A society has flourished for many years at Lemberg which fosters the living literature, collects and edits the peasant-poetry of the past, and studies the philological characteristics of the dialect, with a freedom unheard of East of the frontier. The Tsar's government has held the mistaken point of view that the encouragement of traditional culture inevitably gives rise to new-fangled political aspirations, and has thereby provoked this literary group at Lemberg to become in fact the mouthpiece of a Little Russian nationalist party, which has the allegiance of a majority among the Austrian Ruthenes. This party dreams of a national state in which all fractions of the Little Russian race shall be united, and its feeling against Petersburg is so bitter that, in spite of the *entente* at its expense between Vienna and the Poles, it is ready to march under Austria's banner, and allows its canvassing in the Ukraine to assume the form of Austrian propaganda[6].

[6] It is true that to win the loyalty of the Ruthenes the Central Government at Vienna has had to reverse in some measure its Galician policy, and that it has thereby shaken the loyalty of the Poles, who were outraged to find the racial balance in Galicia being redressed from above. To drive Pole and Ruthene in double harness is really a hopeless task, and it is probable that Vienna only attempted it at the instance of Berlin. Since her bungling policy began to reconcile Russian and Pole, Germany has sought to embarrass Russia in another quarter by exploiting the problem of the Ukraine.

This bizarre situation has suddenly been terminated by the present war. In the event of the Allies' success, we have seen[7] that Galicia will pass to the Russian Empire. The whole of the Little Russian race will finally be united within Russia's frontier, but the annexation of the Galician Ruthenes will create the same situation for her as that of the Galician Poles.

She cannot afford to be less liberal at Lemberg than Austria has been. She will have to take account of her new Ruthene citizens' demands, and this will raise simultaneously the question of the Ukraine.

The Nationalists will doubtless claim the utmost, namely, the consolidation of the whole area speaking the dialect into a single political unit endowed with very extensive Home Rule, but such a solution has almost insurmountable difficulties in its way.

(i) The Little Russian area is woefully lacking in geographical compactness. It would include the Ruthene section of Galicia, and the present Russian governments of Volhynia, Podolia, Kieff, Poltava, and Kharkov, together with the Southern parts of Chernigov and Voronesh; but, as we have said, this is not so much an independent region as a border intermediate between two others.

It is true that it has acquired a peculiar economic importance, because it more or less coincides with the famous "Black Earth" zone, where during the last century agriculture has been developed on a vast scale under modem methods, bringing in its train a network of railways, and therewith the beginnings of an industrial growth. The new wheat production has not confined itself, however, to the Little Russian fringe: it has pushed out South of it into the Black Sea steppe, which, since the break-up of the Ancient World, had been a "no-man's land" swept by one wave after another of nomad barbarians, till in the latter half of the eighteenth century the Russian government wrested the title to its sovereignty from the Porte, and began to replace the handful of Nogai Tatars, that had wandered there under Ottoman suzerainty, by a steady influx of agricultural colonists.

From the outset this new population has been very heterogeneous. The Germanophil government of Catherine II copied the Hapsburg experiment of sowing civilisation by scattering plantations of German settlers, and in "New Russia", as in Hungary, the balance

[7] [A.J. Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, p. 247 and *passim*, T.T.].

was largely made up of refugees from the various Christian populations subject to Turkish oppression. The colonisation of the district received an immense impetus from the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, since when the peasants in every province of Russia have been leaving their ancestral villages and drifting into all the undeveloped areas to take up freehold allotments there; but, inasmuch as the Great Russian population of the Empire is vastly stronger than the Little Russian in numbers, the Great Russian immigrants into the steppes outweigh the Little Russian in the like proportion. When New Russia has been completely filled up, the Little Russian element will not be found to predominate, and so, when the various elements subsequently fuse themselves into one type, the "New Russian" blend will not assume a specifically "Little Russian" colour.

What is true of the Black Sea steppes is still truer of the coast upon which they open. Odessa, the new port founded in 1792, is an indispensable factor in the economic system of the "Black Earth" zone, for the whole grain export passes through its harbour; but it has no special links of tradition or dialect with the Little Russian nationality, and is essentially a common outlet and meeting-place of all races in the Empire, including the Poles, while the isolated Crimean peninsula which adjoins it on the East has remained the stronghold of a civilised agricultural and vine-growing Tatar population.

New Russia, then, has no social bonds of cohesion with Little Russia, and could never be absorbed into it; but a self-governing Little Russian unit which did not extend to the coast would geographically and economically be almost unthinkable. It would possess none of the prerequisites for self-sufficiency.

(ii) Yet even if Little Russia were able, by assimilating the coast or otherwise, to consolidate herself, a more serious difficulty would still remain: she would be too unwieldy a block for the architecture of the Russian Empire. There are two possible plans on which a federal group can be built up.

(*a*) Where the whole population to be federated is homogeneous in nationality, and the only problem is caused by its bulk, it is best organised in a large number of self-governing units, which, being *ex hypothesi* identical in quality, will probably work together in harmony, if only their parity in size and importance is secured as well. This structure has approved itself in the history of the U. S. A., and will probably be adopted as the basis of the New China.

(*b*) American history, however, has also shown that this system of equal units is extremely dangerous where the total population is divided by differences of nationality. In fact, so soon as the least divergence of national self-consciousness creeps in, it will transform the divisions between units, which formerly had merely administrative significance, into spiritual lines of cleavage, and since the units are equal and share no particular centre of gravity, there will be no constructive force to counteract this centrifugal tendency. A gradual divergence of this kind within such a structure cost the United States a civil war before they could remedy it: in a case where the national differences are violent and traditional, and where the architect has still a clean slate, to adopt this principle would be deliberate folly.

When common interest or necessity induces several different nationalities to attempt combination in a single organic political group[8], success can only come through inequality, by subjecting a number of lesser satellites to the attraction of a central planet, and the inequality must be signal. If the satellites approach the planet too nearly in mass, or the planet shrinks into too even a ratio with the satellites, they will all, when a certain point is reached, fly off at a tangent, and probably collide fatally with one another before they severally disappear in space.

The unity of the Russian Empire is to the interest of nearly all the nationalities that are members of it; but that unity can only be maintained by grouping the rest[9] round a Russian national state of immense preponderance. We have said that the Russian nation need have no fear of being swamped by its fellow-nationalities, but that remains true only so long as the nation itself remains united. The Little Russian element forms nearly a third of the whole race[10], and if it were to break off from the main body and attempt to follow an orbit of its own, it would fatally dislocate the balance of the whole Imperial system. It would approximate sufficiently in mass to the Great Russian remnant to struck with it for

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[8] As contrasted with a loose, passive concert like the proposed Balkan Zollverein [A.J. Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, pp. 216-245, T.T.].

[9] Without prejudice, of course, to their own local self-government.

[10]

Great Russians		61.559.000 (=70.5%)
Little Russians:		
In the Ukraine	22.381.000	
In Galicia	3.382.000	25.763.000 (=29.5%)
Total of Russian Nation		87.322.000

predominance, and this fratricidal strife would wear down the strength of the two fragments, and prevent them from concentrating their energy to keep the minor bodies in their courses. The result would be at worst the complete break-up of the Russian Empire, and at best a protracted political paralysis.

If this catastrophe is to be avoided, the Little Russians must abandon their particularism, and allow themselves to be reabsorbed in the indivisible body of "Holy Russia". But this can only come about if the splendid traditions of a thousand years are no longer obscured by the bitter experience of a century. The Tsar's government cannot grant the Little Russians autonomy; but it can see to it that the sacrifice of sentiment which the refusal demands shall entail no loss of honour or of material advantage, and that the Little Russians shall take up their citizenship in the new national unit gladly as the Great Russians' peers, and not sullenly as their inferiors. The Little Russian dialect must at last be given just recognition. It must not merely become the official language of those provinces where it is the native speech, but it must be allowed equal currency with the Moscow dialect in the central executive and in the common parliament, not indeed of the whole Russian Empire, but of the Russian national state that will be its core.

This Russian core will be an experiment in centralised self-govemment on a larger scale than any yet attempted[11]. It will embrace the whole country from Archangel on the White Sea to Odessa on the Black, from Petrograd on the Baltic to Astrakhan on the Caspian, and from the summit of the Carpathian mountains to the further slope of the Urals. On the East and South it will be bounded only by the vacant areas along the Trans-Siberian Railway, which still await effective colonisation, and by the military districts of the Caucasus and the Asiatic steppes, whose primary need at present is the unbroken maintenance of strong government, and which will not become able to govern themselves till many years have habituated them to a civilisation established from without. The region ripe for immediate self-government is nevertheless immense, and the population contained within the limits indicated, which will be represented in the parliament of the national Russian unit, falls little

[11] The action of the existing representative organ, the Imperial Duma, is restricted, and it cannot in any sense be considered as the governing power in Russia: ultimate authority is still in the hands of the bureaucracy.

short of a hundred millions. There are, however, several factors eminently favourable to the successful organisation of this huge mass of human beings.

(i) The geographical unwieldiness of the country is counterbalanced by the extraordinary facility of communication. The great navigable rivers have always afforded magnificent natural highways: the Volga steamer was as important a factor in nineteenth-century Russia as the Mississippi steamer was in the contemporary development of the U. S. A., and the network of railways which, as in America, has first supplemented, and now begun to supplant, the river-steamer's use, especially in the new cornlands of the South, can extend itself over the length and breadth of the land without encountering any barrier of mountains.

(ii) The Great Russian race has taken full advantage of the geographical elasticity of its habitat, and, expanding from its original centre of dispersion in the North-Western forests, has kept pace with the political extension of the Muscovite state's frontiers. In its contact with the alien races that it has thereby encountered, it has displayed a vitality and assimilative power comparable to that of the Anglo-Saxon race in America. The little patches of Ugro-Finnish population that still survive in the heart of Great Russia – Karelians between Novgorod and Tver among the Valdai hills, Cheremisses and Mordvins between Nijni Novgorod and Kazan on the Middle Volga – testify to the vanished majorities of these tribes, which have adopted the speech and nationality of their Russian conquerors as far as the White Sea. The same process is being continued to-day at the expense of the more widely spread Finnish groups of the North-East – Votyaks and Syryens and Voguls and Ostyaks –, protected though they are by the rampart of the Northern Urals[12].

The nomadic, Turkish-speaking communities, Bashkirs and Chuvashes[13], that adjoin the Volga-Finns on the South-East, wandering with their flocks among the Southern Urals and along the border of the steppes, are suffering the fate of those pathetic little Red Indian

[12] The remnants of Finnish population still awaiting absorption by the Russian race, including the Ural groups, but excluding, of course, the 2.353.000 Finns of the Grand Duchy who have a civilisation and a national consciousness superior, on the whole, to the Russian, make up a total of 2.353.000 (identical, curiously enough, with the total of civilised Finns in Finland). There are furthermore 143.000 civilised Finns in Russian territory adjoining the Grand Duchy who are unlikely to be assimilated.

[13] Bashkirs …… 1.493.000
Chuvashes … 844.000
Total ……..2.337.000

reservations in Canada and the U. S. A, round which the tide of European immigration surged higher all through the nineteenth century, till some inconsequent act of lawlessness broke the moral obligation that had so far preserved their bounds, and abandoned them to submergence beneath the flood. But the mere engulfing of inferior races is not the greatest triumph of the Russian nation: it has known how to reconcile a rival civilisation.

Christian and Moslem have met as enemies on many fields, and the result of the struggle has often brought them into the relation of conquerors and conquered. Yet whichever party has triumphed, a great gulf has generally remained fixed between the two, and enforced political union, instead of passing over, as in so many other cases, into organic political unity, has only accentuated their mutual antipathy. Russia alone has managed to solve the problem. The Tatars of the Volga-Khanates[14], conquered by her in the sixteenth century, were communities of peasants and merchants with a tradition of culture, derived from Persia and Baghdad, as strongly characterised as that which Russia herself had drawn from Constantinople and the West; yet now the Tatars, while remaining true to their religion, have become Russian in soul, and have found both the opportunity and the inclination to play a full part in the social and political life of the Russian nation. This is a victory not of race but of civilisation, or rather, what is better still, it is the blending of two civilisations into a new harmony.

It is clear, then, that the Great Russian element has the power to weld the whole hundred millions into a consolidated nation, and in the process not only Finns, Bashkirs and Tatars, but the more compact Little Russian masses as well, will ultimately lose their peculiar individuality. It would be idle for the Little Russians to complain at the prospect. If their language is henceforth given as good an opportunity for self-assertion as the Moscow dialect, and still yields ground before the latter, the cause will no longer be human violence and injustice, but the simple, unalterable fact of the other tongue's superior vitality. The Little Russian need not be ashamed of accepting for his own a language which during the last century has become the vehicle of a literature of world-wide importance, beside which the

[14] Kazan and Astrakhan.

traditional peasant ballads sedulously published at Lemberg sink into almost comic insignificance.

The new Russian nation will look not towards the past but towards the future, and the national character that will emerge will be finer than any of its component elements; for Little Russian and Tatar will nobly leaven the Great Russian lump, and «Scratch the Russian and you find the Tatar» will invert its meaning, and turn from a national reproach to be the national motto.

This homogeneous national state will finally achieve devolution, not through antagonistic, or at any rate unsymmetrical, nationalistic sub-parliaments, but through strongly developed county councils. In 1864, towards the end of the great decade of reform, Alexander II called into existence elective assemblies based, like the medieval "Estates" of Western Europe, upon distinctions of social caste, and graded in two scales: the provincial zemstvos, representing whole governments, and the district zemstvos and municipal dumas, representing their sub-divisions.

These councils did not produce many concrete results by the feverish activity that marked the first years of their existence. In 1890 their powers were severely restricted, and it seemed as though confinement to the purely consultative sphere would reduce them to complete unreality; but the revolutionary movement of 1904-6, precipitated by the disastrous war with Japan, awoke in them an unexpected energy. During the chaos into which the Empire fell for three years, they took the initiative. Repeated congresses of delegates from the local dumas and zemstvos evolved, in conference with the autocracy, the constitution of October 1905, and the elective machinery of the first national dumas was modelled on the local plan. The provincial, district, and municipal councils have not let their recovered power slip again from their hands, and a phase of really constructive activity undoubtedly lies before them.

This, then, is the Russia of the future, which we can discern through the chrysalis of eighteenth century autocracy, from which the Russia of the present has been so painfully extricating herself. It is not a mere dream of the imagination. The regime in possession fascinates our attention, just as the royal murders in Serbia occupied the whole vision of the

Magyar professor[15]. The repressive, unscrupulous police-government keeps us unpleasantly aware of its existence by the starring echoes of its misdeeds that filter through into our press, and the hysterical, often criminal, intrigues of the revolutionists, who claim to represent the *intelligenzia*, reveal a dearth of constructive ideas that almost justifies the government's attitude. Yet beneath this sordid surface a less melodramatic political activity has been at work for a generation without attracting the world's notice. The exploitation of the "Black Earth" zone, the conciliation of the Moslems, and the evolution of the zemstvos are signs of the times.

[15] [A.J. Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, pp. 192-193, T.T.].