

A PEOPLE REBORN

The Story of North Ossetia

Edited by
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INTRODUCTION

This little book is the record of a visit paid by a group of British men and women, active voluntary workers for British-Soviet friendship, to the North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic—a little country on the northern slopes of the Caucasus range. Our journey took place in December 1953, Members of the delegation, appointed by the British Soviet Friendship Society and the Scotland-U.S.S.R. Friendship Society, were:

Leslie Credland—Yorkshire area organiser, B.S.F.S.

Tom Hill—Wigan branch secretary, B.S.F.S.

Brian Pearce—Research worker*

Alfred Percival—Chairman, London area committee, B.S.F.S.

Irene Robinson—Office secretary, Scotland-U.S.S.R. Friendship Society.

Andrew Rothstein—Vice-Chairman, B.S.F.S.

Ida Stone—South Wales area organiser, B.S.F.S.

Margaret Ward—National Council B.S.F.S. (Tyneside).

David Williams—Merthyr Tydfil branch secretary, B.S.F.S.

Mrs Jocelyne Wood—North Midlands area organiser, B.S.F.S.

Colin Wright—Chairman, Glasgow area committee, Scotland-U.S.S.R. Friendship Society.

Two members of the delegation spoke Russian. Visits to various places and institutions in North Ossetia took place strictly in accordance with plans drawn up by the delegation itself.

The delegation desires to express its sincere thanks to the authorities of the Republic for meeting every wish of the delegation, and for their generous hospitality which made the visit possible; and personally to Mr, Zatsiev, head of the Cultural Affairs Department of the Ordzhonikidze City Soviet, who was the delegation's invaluable companion and walking encyclopaedia. It wishes to pay a grateful tribute to the work of all its Russian friends and interpreters, particularly Konstantin Perevozchikov and Inna Koulovskaya. Last, but not least, the delegation records its deep appreciation of the kindness of the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with foreign countries (VOKS) for the invitations to its two parent societies which enabled it to come to the U.S.S.R.

London, June 1954.

FROM POVERTY TO RICHES

BY ANDREW ROTHSTEIN

In his travel notes on *A Journey to Arzrum* the poet Pushkin wrote in 1829: "The Ossetians are the poorest tribe among the peoples dwelling in the Caucasus." Three generations later they were not much better off, Freshfield, a British mountaineer, said in 1902, after describing their funeral customs: "The Ossete idea of a future world is clearly one where 'daily bread' still continues the first and chief care" (*Exploration of the Caucasus*, vol. I, p, 102). "You don't understand how poor they are", a man told Stephen Graham at the village of Kobi (*A Vagabond in the Caucasus*, 1911, p. 169). "They never have any money in the winter. You couldn't get change for a rouble in the whole village now. They spend all they get in the summer, and live on credit all the winter," Similarly, J. F. Baddeley, the most noted British explorer of the Caucasus, recorded of this area, in his *Rugged Flanks of Caucasus* (1940): "Bread, in flat cakes of unleavened maize or millet, more rarely wheat or barley, with a flavouring of mutton fat, onion or garlic, furnished nine out of ten of the frugal meals of the Caucasian mountaineers.... The vast majority of the people killed no sheep except on special occasions, such as festivals or when honoured guests arrived. Indeed, they could not afford to do so" (vol. I, p, 94). Describing a visit to an Ossetian beauty-spot, the Tseya Valley, in July 1914, H. Raeburn wrote: "The villages are poor, the scanty clothing of the children—some wore none—is ragged" (*Geographical Journal*, March 1915).

The Ossetians whom these travellers described lived—and live—in a small territory (about 3,550 square miles, the size of Cyprus, or of Norfolk and Suffolk combined) on the northern slopes of the great Caucasus Range, midway along. In Pushkin's day they numbered less than 40,000; by the time of Mr. Freshfield's visit there were 80,000, and in 1913 some 130,000; on the eve of the recent war, in 1939, their country had a population of nearly 330,000, of whom over four-fifths were Ossetians. It is called North Ossetia to distinguish it from the territory lying south of the Caucasus, in Soviet Georgia, which is inhabited by a kindred folk, much smaller in numbers, who have set up the South Ossetian autonomous region within that Republic.

What was the reason for the poverty of the Ossetians? Their territory—then part of the Terek Region in the Northern Caucasus—is

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extremely fertile, and 95 per cent of its people were engaged in agriculture (largely a one-crop economy, growing maize). But the Cossacks, of Russian origin and settled as privileged farmers in the best lands, had an average holding of sixty-seventy acres each. The 130,000 Ossetians, four-fifths of the population, had average holdings of less than fifteen acres in the plains (11 per cent of them in 1913 had no tillage at all) and barely two acres in the hills. Many of the Ossetian poorer peasantry leased what land they had to the local kulak (rich peasant) to maintain themselves even part of the year, and went to work on his land for a share of the crop during the remainder. Most of the peasant farming was with primitive wooden ploughs—we saw specimens at the Ordzhonikidze Regional Museum, still in use in 1917. It was quite usual for them not to possess a cart—which meant that they were at the mercy of the trader or the kulak in marketing their crop.

Most miserable of all was the lot of the mountain folk, living in uncemented stone cottages, without windows, built against the rock, and scratching a starvation living out of tiny patches of ground on the hillside (often carrying the earth up in baskets to do so) or tending a rich neighbour's sheep; and of the 10,000 among them who had ventured down into the plains for a precarious existence as "temporary settlers" (what we should call squatters) on the Cossack lands at exorbitant rents—perpetually at the mercy of landlord, tax collector, Tsarist official or race hooligan.

Only some 2,000 Ossetians were engaged in industry of any kind. The Belgian-owned silver, zinc and lead works (mines at Sadon, refineries at Mizur, Alagir and Vladikavkaz) employed less than 1,000; the Belgian-owned Vladikavkaz tramways gave employment to a few, and some workers were employed at the railway workshops opened in 1913. There were also about 200 tiny handicraft establishments, employing from two to five workers, and mostly at Vladikavkaz (then mainly a garrison town)—tailors, saddlers, bootmakers, silversmiths, soapboilers, workers in small brickworks and distilleries, etc. The importance of these establishments can be judged from the average value of their output—£900 a year.

The Alagir workers' conditions were recorded in an inspector's report (*In the Caucasus*, July 1909)—12-hour shifts; pay 80-90 kopeks (1s. 8d.-1s. 10½d.) *per day*, and buy your own candles for underground work at 8½d. per lb.; frequent fines; sleeping accommodation in long sheds with dirt floors and two rows of plank bunks on

each side; often beaten by foreman, locked up in cellars, etc., for “misbehaviour”.

The Ossetian people were by no means inclined to take all this lying down. The summer of 1905—the first Russian Revolution—saw a general strike at Vladikavkaz, while the Ossetian peasants at Ardon carried out mass seizure of lands of the gentry and the Church, ploughed up for themselves lands of rich Russian settlers at Alagir, seized woods and burned forest watch-houses, etc. Moreover, Ossetian cavalry units several times refused to attack their compatriots. In December that year, when Moscow workers rose in insurrection and appealed for solidarity action, Ossetian Social-Democrats took the lead in organising armed workers’ units. “Order” was restored in North Ossetia only by mass arrests and wholesale bombardments of villages. In July 1917 the poor peasants formed their own organisation— “Kermen”, named after a legendary leader of a slave revolt—which decided to support the Bolsheviks. Thus there were both traditions and people on the side of Socialist reconstruction of life in North Ossetia when it was finally freed from the Whites in 1920, and when Stalin proclaimed that year the new Autonomous Highland Republic, based on a new principle he announced—“he who does not work, neither shall he vote” (*Works*, vol. IV, p. 419).

The first and basic change was the return to the land reform originally carried out in 1918, when the peasants took over 750,000 acres of land free of rent, and all indebtedness was cancelled. In 1922 the last remaining 3,500 families of “temporary settlers” were allotted land. In 1925 there was a mass, State-financed migration from the barren highland valleys into the plains. Owning their crops and working for themselves, the Ossetian peasants were encouraged by State cash advances to form credit, marketing and co-operative producers’ societies. The first Five-Year Plan (1928) found just under 2,800 North Ossetian peasant households (less than 12 per cent of the total, working under 4 per cent of the cultivated area) in collective farms; by 1932 the households in collective farms numbered 23,500 (over 89 per cent of the total), and they disposed of over 91 per cent of the crop area in North Ossetia. With the help of State machine and tractor stations, they revolutionised production figures, which went up from 13.9 bushels of grain per acre in 1913 (a peak year) to 19.5 bushels in 1937, the final year of the second Five-Year Plan.

By this time there had been a second fundamental change in the

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country's economy. Huge capital investments by the Soviet Government in its industrial development had begun, in order to make natural wealth available and raise living standards. The beginnings were small—for example, a tomato cannery, begun in 1926, and a factory for the dry distillation of wood at Alagir in 1927. In that year first steps were taken to build a big maize-processing plant manufacturing starch and molasses, at Beslan, in order to use this grain to greater advantage. It was completed by 1931, and added to its production in later years sugar, glucose, vegetable oil and fodder-cake. At the cost of many million roubles, the Alagir lead, silver and zinc works (nationalised in 1918) were completely modernised and mechanised; and in 1934 it was a young Ossetian engineer who took charge of an ultra-modern factory at Ordzhonikidze for the electrolysis of zinc—part of what was now the Alagir Combine. The same year the increasing needs of the Beslan plant had required the opening of a glass bottle factory (in the Regional Museum we saw the model), and in 1935 a sulphuric acid factory was opened as an extension of the Alagir Combine. Textile, clothing and timber factories, numerous power stations and engineering works were opened.

By 1940 the output of industry in North Ossetia was (measured in standard prices) thirty-three times what it had been in 1913 (for the whole U.S.S.R. the figure was eight and a half times)—and it was produced with an eight-hour day for the workers, working and living conditions improved out of all recognition, and full trade union rights. The number of workers in industry was now more than five times what it had been in 1913. And in this transformation the material, financial and organising help, received on a huge scale from the workers of Russia, played a decisive part—which the people of North Ossetia wherever we went in December 1953, constantly emphasised in conversation.

In 1953 all the 27,000 peasant households were organised in 113 collective farms, with State-owned machine and tractor stations doing 90 to 100 per cent of all the ploughing, sowing and harvesting. The yield of grain crops was now about 24.3 bushels per acre. New crops had appeared in North Ossetia—vegetables, fruits, fodder roots, soya and hemp—and new breeds of sheep, yielding fine wool. Maize was now one-third of the crop, instead of four-fifths, and used chiefly as fodder and industrial raw material; the people eat wheaten bread. Three big irrigation canals, 250 miles in total length, had been built since the Five-Year Plans began, watering a

total of 600,000 acres. Twenty-seven of the collective farms already had electric light and power.

David Williams' account of our visit to the Stalin collective farm, in another chapter, gives an idea of the tremendous economic change which Socialism has brought to the formerly miserable and downtrodden peasantry of a small country, once a colony of the Russian Tsarist Empire.

Here and there could still be seen the traces of a great recent affliction—the bombings and bombardments of the invading German Army in 1942, which (as Brian Pearce describes) reached a point only a few miles away. In the occupied areas many villages were completely destroyed; the 1942 harvest was largely crushed into the earth or burned by the advancing armies; 250 cattle departments and 360 orchards were destroyed in the collective farms, and vast quantities of produce devoured. And this circumstance—well remembered in North Ossetia—only serves to underline the impression of prosperity and individual well-being through hard work which we carried away from the countryside.

Industry also suffered severely at the hands of the Germans. At Ordzhonikidze they bombed the “Electrozinc” and glass bottle works and the wagon repair shops; workers of the Beslan plant, evacuated to the Urals in the summer of 1942, found most of the buildings destroyed from the air on their return; the Sadon ore-mines were also heavily bombed. In the occupied areas the Germans destroyed fruit canneries at Ardon and Dargokh, woodworking and other factories and three machine and tractor stations. Three thousand people were deported to Germany to do forced labour. Ossetian large-scale industry in 1946 was producing only just over one-third of what it did in 1940.

But the strenuous efforts of its workers proved as effective in reconstruction as elsewhere in the U.S.S.R. By 1949 output was over the pre-war level; by 1952 it was forty times greater than in 1913. At Beslan, two days before we arrived, the 1953 plan had been overfulfilled well ahead of schedule. New oil-wells and power stations, new canneries and jam factories, were being planned for the later stages of the fifth Five-Year Plan now in progress. A week after our visit the first domestic gas supply was to reach the homes of Ordzhonikidze citizens. At Olginskoye the village was building a piped water supply to every cottage. At the Beslan plant—conditions of the workers are described by Alfred Percival in an-

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other chapter—their families were buying silks and fine woollens, perfumes and modern literature, carpets and pianos, through the co-operative stores. And in that same Tseya Valley where—forty years before—the British visitor found the people “poor” and “ragged”, a beautiful mountain resort for the workers was developing.

Mr. Freshfield would be hard put to it today to find his “essentially primitive and mountain people” (op. cit., p. 100) in the civilised, educated and dignified citizens of North Ossetia, for whom their colonial past must be only a horrible dream.



Arriving at Ordzhonikidze Station.



City Boulevard.



At a bookshop.



Liberty Square and Ordzhonikidze Statue.

(Left to right: Irene Robinson, Ida Stone, Tom Hill, Margaret Ward, Andrew Rothstein, Brian Pearce, Jocelyne Wood, Alfred Percival, Leslie Credland, David Williams, Colin Wright.)

THE OSSETIANS IN HISTORY

BY BRIAN PEARCE

Ossetian history goes back to the Alans, a people who figured prominently in the history of Western as well as Eastern Europe in the first centuries A.D. They were the ancestors of the Ossetians of today, and the Daryal Gorge takes its name from them ("Dar-i-Alan", Gate of the Alans). They wandered as nomads over the steppes watered by the Terek, Kuban and Don Rivers until the Huns, under Attila, swept into Europe and split them into two parts. One group of the Alans moved into Western Europe; along with another wandering people, the Vandals, they passed through Spain into North Africa, where they disappear from history. The other group were forced southwards and had thenceforth to confine themselves to the country along the Terek, immediately north of the main Caucasus Range. There they began to settle down; agriculture developed among them and they entered into trading and cultural relations with other peoples of the Black Sea region. Archaeologists have found evidence, in the form of metalwork, wood-carving, weapons, ornaments, etc., of a rich artistic culture which the Alans (or Ossetians) were beginning to develop in the early Middle Ages. Their contacts were especially close with Byzantium, Georgia and the Russian principalities grouped around Kiev, and in the tenth century they were converted to Christianity. Though they did not in this period attain to a written literature, the Ossetians evolved a remarkable saga, passed down orally from generation to generation—the saga of the Narts, semi-mythical heroes, something like King Arthur's Knights, who fought against all manner of oppressors of their people, human, sub-human and superhuman. Songs and stories about the Narts helped to keep up the spirits of the Ossetians during their darkest days; now the saga of the Narts, in Russian translation, is known and loved throughout the Soviet Union.

The progress of Ossetian civilisation was checked, like that of the Russians, by the terrible Mongol-Tatar invasions of the thirteenth century. The Ossetians were forced up into the mountains, where for centuries thereafter they had to wrest a miserable living with the utmost pains from a scanty and barren soil. (The division of the Ossetian people into two parts dates from this time, for a section of them were obliged to make their way right across the Caucasian

watershed on to the southern slopes which face Georgia,) The domination of the Tatar Khans who ruled over the Crimea and the Kuban territory and at Astrakhan was a severe one, especially when these khans became vassals of the Sultan of Turkey and the Turks established forts along the Kuban coast. The Ossetians and their neighbours the Kabardians had to pay heavy tribute; their boys and girls were often carried off to Bakhchisarai, the Crimean capital, or to the great slave markets of Istanbul and Alexandria. Many of the feudal landlords who now began to emerge amongst them became converts to the Mohammedan religion, and then forced conversion and persecution of those who would not conform were added to the sufferings of the Ossetian people. When the Russians, after capturing Astrakhan, began in the middle of the sixteenth century to settle along the Terek, this helped the Ossetians by providing a counterpoise to the Turco-Tatar power in their neighbourhood; and during the two centuries of Russian struggle to drive the Turks out of the North Caucasus and the Crimean peninsula the Russians were repeatedly helped by the Ossetians and Kabardians. It is essential to an understanding of the development of relations between the Ossetians and the Russians to appreciate both that the common peoples of both nations have been actual neighbours for 400 years and that Russia appeared in the lives of the Ossetians first and foremost as a friend and ally. Russia's weakness was always Ossetia's misfortune.

In 1783, after their victory over the Turks and Tatars, the Russians built a fortress by the Terek, at the approach to the Daryal Gorge. Established on the site of an old Ossetian settlement called Dzaudzhikau, it was named Vladikavkaz, "Rule the Caucasus"; and the Russians made a great road, the Georgian Military Highway, running through the mountains into Georgia, whereby they could send troops to help their Georgian allies in their struggles with Turkish and Persian invaders. The establishment of Russian rule in their country brought certain benefits to the Ossetians—religious persecution and the slave-trade came to an end, there was some sort of legality and order in the land, and many Ossetians were able to come down from the mountains and spread out over the plain of Terek. Closer contact with the more advanced Russians stimulated them in many ways. But along with this, of course, came Tsardom with its military rule, suppression of national culture and exploitation of the peasantry; while their native landlords, the *aldars*, rich Mohammedan families like the Dudarovs and the Kundukhovs, be-

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came “loyal supporters” of His Imperial Majesty and were in turn upheld by the Tsar in their property and privileges.

Nevertheless it is significant that the Ossetians, like the Georgians, stood by the Russians and fought shoulder to shoulder with them during successive conflicts with Turkey and her allies which took place during the nineteenth century, including the Crimean War of 1853-6. The strategic position occupied by the Ossetians astride the Daryal Gorge made their attitude especially important in these struggles. Thus they contributed substantially to shaping the fate of the Caucasian isthmus as a whole and so indirectly of the entire Middle East. An Ossetian division fought in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-8 and was specially commended for its bravery by the famous General Skobelev. (Musa Pasha Kundukov, however, an Ossetian nobleman who had risen to the rank of Major-General in the Tsar’s army, deserted to the Sultan). Meanwhile, Russian capitalism as it developed in the second half of the nineteenth century took an interest in the economic as well as the strategic resources of Ossetia. A railway was built from Rostov to Vladikavkaz. The silver, lead and zinc in Ossetia’s mountains were mined. Commercial cultivation of maize began to supply starch for Russia’s growing textile industry. A few small factories appeared. At first the working class in Ossetia consisted only of Russian immigrants, but soon it was joined by recruits from among the poverty-stricken Ossetian peasants. By way of the pitifully few schools, a handful of Ossetians made their way to Russian universities. Through the Russian workers in Ossetia and through the Russian-trained Ossetian intellectuals who returned home from Moscow and St. Petersburg, modern and progressive ideas penetrated into Ossetia—ideas of struggle for a better life, against the Tsar, the Russian landlords and capitalists and their “own” Ossetian exploiters. Kosta Khetagurov (1859-1906), one of the intellectuals, began the history of written Ossetian literature with his poems, printed in a script based upon the Russian alphabet; his writings earned him exile at the hands of the Tsarist police and the unbounded love of the Ossetian people, for whom they came to rank with their ancient Saga of the Narts.

Lenin wrote of this period: “Russian capitalism drew the Caucasus into the sphere of world commodity circulation, obliterating its local peculiarities—the remnants of ancient patriarchal isolation—and created for itself a market for its goods” (*Selected Works*, I p. 378).

During the 1905 Revolution the Ossetians played an active part, and paid a heavy price in its defeat, as Andrew Rothstein has described. Many of Ossetia's best sons were killed or sent to Siberia. Only a few years later, however, there came to Vladikavkaz, to work as a proof-reader on the local paper, a Russian worker who was to play a leading part in the liberation of Ossetia and later to become one of the outstanding statesmen of the Soviet Union—S. M. Kirov. He helped to organise the first trade unions, formed a secret Bolshevik group and carried on clandestine propaganda in the villages around Vladikavkaz.

In 1917, fearing the growth of the revolutionary movement in Russia, the local reactionaries—large landowners and sheep-farmers, Grozny oil-magnates—set up a separatist government in Vladikavkaz with the aim of detaching the whole North Caucasus area from Russia and placing it under some foreign suzerainty. They looked most hopefully to Turkey, whose troops were then advancing in Transcaucasia; the richest sheep farmer in Dagestan, Najimuddin Gotsinsky, was appointed Imam, his forces were given the green banner of the Prophet, and the sovereignty of North Caucasus was offered to the Sultan. The principal stock-in-trade of the separatists was Mohammedan fanaticism; but this did not prevent them from making an unprincipled alliance with Tsarist generals and leaders of the rich colonialist element among the local Cossacks—against the common enemy, the Russian and Ossetian peoples. They could not maintain themselves long in Vladikavkaz, however. Soviet rule was set up there, led by Kirov and another Bolshevik leader who later became a very famous figure in Soviet public life, Sergo Ordzhonikidze (Vladikavkaz has been renamed after him).

North Ossetia was far from the working-class centres of Russia, and before Soviet rule could be finally consolidated there a hard battle had to be fought and much suffering endured. In the middle of 1918 the separatists and their "White" Cossack allies, encouraged by the advance of German and Turkish troops into Transcaucasia and by the occupation of Baku by a British expedition under General Dunsterville, hurled themselves on Vladikavkaz from the east. They were eventually repulsed and withdrew again into the mountains of Chechnia. Early in 1919, Soviet North Ossetia was threatened again, this time from the west. General Denikin, equipped by Great Britain through the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk, invaded the country with his "White" Army. This time Vladikavkaz fell, and

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North Ossetia lay under Denikin's rule until March 1920. Then the Red Army of Soviet Russia came to help the Ossetian partisans who were resisting Denikin, and the country was liberated. During these years of bitter fighting, some of the best leaders of the Ossetian people were killed, such as Noya Buachidze and Georgi Tsagolov. In November 1920 a great congress of the Ossetians and all the other peoples of the Terek region was held at Vladikavkaz, and there Stalin proclaimed, on behalf of the Government of the Soviet Russian Federation, the Autonomous Republic of the Highlands, with Vladikavkaz as its capital.

In 1924 the Highlands Republic was divided into separate autonomous national regions, including a North Ossetian one, and it is from this year that the country's autonomous existence is usually dated. During the later 1920's and early 1930's North Ossetia underwent a great economic and social transformation—a process of “decolonisation” which took the country well forward on the road to equality, in reality as well as in name, with the advanced socialist society of Russia proper. In 1936, when the Stalin Constitution was inaugurated, North Ossetia became an autonomous republic, with extended rights of self-government (described later by Margaret Ward).

When the Germans invaded the U.S.S.R. their offensive had two separate objectives—one was Stalingrad, with the passage of the Volga, the other was the Grozny and Baku oil-fields and the frontier of Persia. In pursuit of the second objective they advanced across the North Caucasus and entered North Ossetia.

The Germans, however, were very disappointed in the Ossetians. Because their language belongs to the Indo-European family, and because people with fair or reddish hair are frequently met with amongst the Ossetians (who are related to the Tadzhiks and the Persians), some Nazi “scholars” had convinced themselves that here were fellow-“Aryans” who would welcome the German Army. Instead, the Ossetians fought the invaders with courage and persistence second to none.

The resistance of the Ossetians was furious and stubborn; though the Germans came within ten miles of the capital they could get no farther, and in their rear on Ossetian territory they had to contend with a partisan movement as vigorous as anywhere in the Soviet Union. They massacred cattle, they burned libraries and schools, they shelled workers' housing estates, they bombed facto-

ries, they murdered women and children, old men and prisoners of war—but they could not get ahead. At the Regional Museum we saw the now yellowing leaflet, dated 10 September, 1942, in which the City Defence Committee called on the citizens of the capital to join volunteer battalions to help in repelling the Germans. The Turkish government chose this moment to add to the problems facing the defenders by concentrating troops on the Soviet border. The line was held until, with the turning of the tide at Stalingrad, Russian reinforcements poured into Ossetia and drove the Germans back. By January 1943 Ossetian territory was free again. Of the forty-six soldiers awarded the tide “Hero of the Soviet Union” for service on the North Caucasian front, thirty-two were Ossetians. The little Republic earned a special commendation from the Soviet Government in July 1944, on the twentieth anniversary of its existence as an autonomous unit, for the great struggle which its people put up during the darkest period of the Second World War. After the war, former Chechen-Ingush territories (the population of which was given the chance to develop elsewhere in the U.S.S.R.) were assigned to North Ossetia, which thus, with other additional territory transferred to it at this time, came out of the war 50 per cent larger than it went in. It now included important oil wells and the industrial towns of Mozdok and Malgobek. The great work of post-war reconstruction and building of a new and still better North Ossetia began, different aspects of which are reflected in the following chapters.

A DAY IN A SOVIET VILLAGE

BY DAVID WILLIAMS

Before the coming of Soviet Power to North Ossetia there flourished a great poet of the Ossetian people, Kosta Khetagurov. He has a thrilling poem called “Mother of Orphans”. In this poem he depicts a scene which must have been only too common an experience for the impoverished peasantry. “Some children trustfully waiting for dinner to cook, fall asleep, exhausted, by the fireside. They don’t know that their mother is boiling stones, a heap of small pebbles, in the pot.” If only Kosta Khetagurov could see his native Ossetia today! (“Sun over Ossetia”, an article which appeared in the Soviet *Literary Gazette*, 15 February, 1951.)

Along with my fellow-delegates I have seen Kosta Khetagu-

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rov's native Ossetia as it is today, and have also heard recounted tales, very similar in character to the one above, from collective farmers who were peasants in those bad old days.

The Primitive Cottage

The background picture of life in North Ossetia was made more complete by a visit we made to the Regional Museum in Ordzhonikidze, the capital city. Amid the historical data going back to 3000 B.C., there was a full-size exhibit of a primitive mountain cottage which had been in use right up to 1917. You can see pictures of them in the works of British travellers like Stephen Graham and J. H. Baddeley. This house, called a "saklia", was built of stone, with the back against the mountainside, so that the mountain formed the back wall. It was of two storeys, the roof of the first storey serving as the terrace in front of the second storey. As many as thirty or forty persons might live together in it, i.e. a large patriarchal family.

There was no chimney, only a hole in the roof; from the hole hung an iron chain, to which the iron pot for cooking was attached over the fire. There were no windows, and the hut was often filled with smoke.

How Villagers Lived Before Collectivisation

The chairman of the Stalin collective farm which we visited, in the rural district of Olginskoye, described how the peasants lived before the collective was formed. Various households had different sized holdings, some middling and a few fairly rich. But most of the people were very poor, with little or no farm equipment. Many found themselves in the position of owning a piece of land and being unable to work it due to lack of beasts of burden. As a result they were forced to lease their land to the "kulaks" or rich peasants, and work for them in exchange for the means of life for their families.

Their diet consisted mainly of a bread made from maize flour. This has been described by Stephen Graham in the book mentioned by Andrew Rothstein. When he crossed the Caucasian mountains from the south, he came to the first Ossetian village. It "could only supply me with cold copatchka and salt". He explains copatchka—"flat cakes made of maize flour, salt, milk and boiling water, about the size of soup plates, stood on end in front of the fire to toast, first one side then the other, then buried under the ashes and left to

cook". Later Stephen Graham mentions the village people eating mutton *when there was a holiday*.

The chairman of the farm mentioned to us the maize bread they ate in those days, and added: "Nowadays we don't use maize for that purpose." He related many examples of life in the old days. A rich kulak owned a threshing machine; for the use of this machine to thresh his maize, a poor peasant would have to pay the kulak 10 per cent of his crop. Poor peasants having no carts to transport their maize to market, had to sell it to the kulaks, who bought the crop dirt cheap. Kulaks would rent land from the big landowners, then lease it to the poor peasant at five times the price. Often, too, some of the foreign-owned lead and zinc mines would find a market for cheap labour among the landless peasants. To quote Stephen Graham once more: "The Ossetians have a tariff now—to lay a man out, one rouble; to murder him, three roubles." This was the kind of thing that Graham records the Russians as saying. It reflects the poverty of the Ossetian mountaineers, who were often driven to banditry..

A Collective Farm Chairman

George Gazganov is the chairman of the Stalin collective farm, which coincided in this case with the village of Olginskoye. He was one of the first to welcome our delegation. He had a magnificent head, set firm and square on shoulders that resembled the side of a barn. In his wide-set eyes that looked upon me, when he crushed my hand in his, could be detected all the qualities that had won him the leadership of this farm since its inception. The smile and twinkling eyes that greeted us endeared him to every member of the delegation.

He was born in this village and educated at the church school. This school consisted of two classes with a year spent in each class.

He worked in the village as a middle peasant, and had about fifteen acres of land. In 1926 he became the main organiser of "Societies for Joint Tillage" and succeeded in organising thirteen of them. What this meant was that in the village all the horses, implements, etc., were pooled for the season and no more. As chairman of this venture he was helping to prepare the minds of the peasants for collective farming.

In 1929 the collective farm movement first started, and George Gazganov became the chairman. The collective farm started off

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with 652 households, mostly of poor peasants. They had some draught cattle and a few small tractors, but these few were not enough for their needs, and so the cattle were used for a long time as beasts of burden. After the inception of the farm he held many other jobs, some outside the village. In 1953 after many years of service to the village he was elected chairman of the amalgamated collective farm.

Livestock and Crops

From the early days of the farm, they had rapidly progressed, until today they had a many-sided economy. Their livestock consisted of the following: 620 dairy cattle, 2,000 sheep, 280 horses, 700 pigs, 7,000 poultry and 200 beehives. These were all kept on "sub-farms" with their own chief in charge, and the figures do not take into account livestock which was individually owned. Not included, also, were a large number of goats who seemed to act in the capacity of "flock commanders" to the sheep!

When this collective farm started, the system of crop rotation was not in use, but now it has become accepted practice. On this farm there were ten different crops, including wheat, maize, soya, buckwheat, millet, potatoes, clover and other types of grass. In the administrative building we saw examples of the various products together with coloured diagrams, showing the disposition of the farm land with each crop depicted in a different colour. They had 16,700 acres under cultivation: 2,500 acres of wheat, 2,700 acres of maize, 1,000 acres of potatoes, 1,250 acres of perennial grasses, over 350 acres of various vegetables, as well as areas under millet, buckwheat, beans, etc.

Separate from the above complement of livestock and crops which was the collective economy of the farm, each individual household had the right to hold a small piece of land (from five-eighths to two acres) and a certain amount of livestock (three cows, two calves, twenty-five sheep or goats and unlimited poultry). They are free to do as they like with this land and whatever livestock they keep. If they have any surplus they can sell it in the free market.

Election of Farm Management and its Work

The highest body of the collective farm is the General Meeting of Members—all the adults working on it. They elect the management committee and also the farm chairman, both for a period of

two years. At the first meeting of the committee they elect a deputy for the chairman and one other who is responsible for the farm economy and fieldworks. Also elected at this meeting are the chiefs of the different sections, some of these being women. Before the collective farm was organised women had no rights; now they play an important role in the farm management.

The management committee draw up plans for the ensuing year; the general meeting discuss the plan and either accept it or amend it. When finally accepted they immediately start working it. The plan decides where, how and what to cultivate on each section of the farm. The farm members work in different teams, i.e. cattle, horses, wheat, etc., according to their own abilities and inclinations.

Distribution of Year's Produce

When the harvest is complete, the first call is State deliveries. The quantity to be delivered is known at the start of the season, and this is sold to the State at fixed prices. Then if there have been loans of grain seed from the State this is also repaid. A certain amount is put to seed and fodder reserve stocks, and a portion into the members' Mutual Aid Fund. Payment is also made to the local machine and tractor station for its services.

If the general meeting so decides, a further quantity is sold to the State at higher prices than is received for the State quota. The balance, which is approximately 60 per cent, is distributed among the members of the farm, in accordance with quantity and quality of the work done by each individual. This is measured in "work-days"—skilled work being rated at higher rates than unskilled. The "workdays" earned during the year are the basis for sharing out the produce after harvest.

Method of Calculating Workdays

A "norm" of standard average quantity of work, to be done in an average working day, is fixed for every kind of work done on the collective farm.

All jobs are then divided up into nine groups or grades; the simplest and least skilled is Grade 1, the most complex and skilled is Grade 9.

Grade 1 jobs are then rated as one-half of an imaginary unit, the "workday". Grade 9 jobs are rated at two and a half workdays. The grades in between increase by quarter workday per grade. Gazganov

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the chairman gave as an example that a night watchman's job in the summer months is graded at three-quarter workdays.

A bonus, also calculated in workdays, is given for exceeding the norm.

As each person does his or her job, he or she is credited in his or her book by their team leader with the appropriate number of workdays earned. The collective farm book-keeper makes an entry weekly in his books.

At the end of the harvest year he adds together all the workdays earned by all the members of the farm. The total amount produced, plus any cash received by sales, is divided by the total number of workdays. Thereby the book-keeper arrives at a quotient, measured in produce and cash, which represents the value that year of one workday.

The book-keeper (and each member) then multiply this quotient or value by the total number of workdays earned by each individual. The result is the share to which each is entitled of the year's produce—measured as nearly as possible according to quantity and quality of work performed.

In 1953, the chairman told us, the average number of workdays credited to each family was 800. The value of each workday worked out as follows: 8.8 pounds of grain, 6.6 pounds of potatoes and two roubles in cash. Therefore each family received, on the average, 800 times those amounts—plus income from their own allotments and livestock. Fodder for this livestock is provided by the farm on a workday basis.

When the management committee sell to the State over and above the fixed quota, they can ask for goods instead of cash. For example, in 1953 they sold 300 metric tons of potatoes to the State, and received three lorries in part payment.

M.T.S.

A service of utmost importance to the collective farmers is that provided by the 1st Ossetian Machine and Tractor Station. This station, which suffered certain losses during the German invasion, is now serving six collective farms. For this farm alone it has twenty-two tractors.

Going Round the Farm

Although it was almost mid-winter and not perhaps the time to

see the countryside at its best, the scene as we drove and walked around the farm was enlivened by brilliant sunshine, reflected by the snow which stretched before us towards the glistening, towering range of the Caucasian mountains.

Our first stop was at the cattle farm. Before inspecting the cattle shed, we were shown and demonstrated a mobile power plant, used among other things for sheep shearing. Of Soviet manufacture, the generator was driven by a two-cylinder 8 h.p. petrol engine, which responded immediately to the starter.

The cattle shed housed 160 head of dairy cattle, of a red steppe breed. These were provided with their individual stalls which stretched along either side of the shed. In the centre was a wide gangway, and there were also gangways at the sides of the shed between the back of the stalls and the shed wall. On the floor in front of each line of stalls were gutters which canalised all waste and excretion towards the centre of the shed, whence it disappeared underground and was carried towards a form of storage centre some way away from the shed. At one end of the shed, about twenty yards from it, was a large silo. Materials were being gathered ready for the construction of more cattle sheds of modern style and sanitary conditions, to replace older ones which were some distance away.

With the completion of this plan, the installation of electric milking would be embarked upon. On our way from the cattle shed to the power station we passed through part of the poultry farm, and saw thousands of chickens scatter with much screeching from the path of our cars. Altogether they have 7,000 poultry on this farm, quite distinct from the number privately owned by the farmers themselves.

To get out of the car and walk along the bank of the canal towards the power station was an exhilarating experience. The crisp snow beneath our feet and air like champagne reacted like a tonic. I could have done justice to my dinner then, but that was yet some hours away!

The power station, built by the collective farmers themselves, is rather small, generating only 76 kilowatts. In the development plans for this prosperous farm, however, was the construction of a much larger station, to develop 2,200 kilowatts, and it would be able to supply two other farms as well. There were three men attached to the station, one of whom took us inside to look at the generators. These were of Soviet manufacture, and it was amazing the length of

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service these had given and were still giving. The commutator rings were worn to such an extent as to make it seem impossible that they could work. Yet they still were in service, though needless to say not as efficient as they once were, and due to the growth of the farm inadequate to the demand.

At our next port of call, the pig farm, almost all the animal population came to meet us. After some argument, soon settled by the women pig-keepers, we were allowed to enter and inspect their clean and well-kept abode. Laid out with a line of stalls each side of a central gangway, there was a similar system of gutters for carrying away the waste as we saw in the cattle shed. We were delighted and amused to observe many families of piglets disporting themselves over and around their recumbent mothers. We were thankful that each stall was provided with a stout door, for in some of the stalls were housed boars which did not seem to like us. It was instructive to see the textbooks on veterinary questions in the women's apron pockets.

Proceeding on our tour of the farm, thoughts on what one could do with a tender young pig were uppermost in my mind. But our hosts could not be denied their pleasure and enthusiasm in showing us as much as possible before dark. Perhaps they were making sure we would work up a good appetite. Eventually we came to a tall, newly-built building, at the side of which flowed a hurrying stream. This was the flour mill, built by the farmers themselves to grind their wheat, corn, etc. Inside the mill the sight and smell of the planed timber, used entirely for internal structure, was most pleasant. Had there been the most fastidious building carpenter with us, he could not but agree that the workmanship could not be bettered.

Talk with Chairman of Rural Soviet

Back in the village we made towards the office of the Rural Soviet, where the chairman was to give an account of the organisation and administration of the community, treated in more detail by other colleagues. I will mention two items which particularly interested me—the shops and the water supply.

The village boasted two shops, run by the Pravoberejny District Co-operative Society. They were placed at opposite ends of the village and were both general stores. When we looked in, the local housewives were busy shopping. We saw carpets, textiles and household goods of all descriptions. One woman told us: "I can buy

all I want here, there is no need to go into town.”

One of the delegation asked the manager: “Supposing someone wants to buy a piano?” He replied proudly: “We can order it for them; as a matter of fact, last month we had three pianos on order which were delivered right to the house,”

I might mention here that the timber used in the construction of the flour mill I mentioned earlier was all ordered and bought through the District Co-op.

This year, 1953, the rural Soviet received 6,000,000 roubles from the State Bank to be used in providing a piped water supply. The ordinary budget of the village is 1,400,000 roubles per year, only 231,000 roubles being derived from taxes, the rest being supplied by the State budget of the Republic. Work on the project was under way and will be completed in 1954. This scheme did not include sanitation. The present sanitation was of a chemical earth type, seen in some rural districts of England.

The Banquet

When we had seen and noted down as much as possible, we were invited to one of the collective farmers' houses for a meal. The house belonged to two bachelor brothers, one of whom had been killed in the last war*

As we trooped into the house, all eager to sit down and get our legs under the table, a staggering sight met our eyes*

On the table was a whole sheep, roasted and cut up, so that the head of the sheep lay at the head of the table and the tail at the bottom. I was sitting near the top of one leg. There were also about fifteen chickens, with beef and tongue on side dishes. Wherever a vacant space could be found, a bottle of wine was placed—a rich red local product.

According to tradition, George Gazganov, chairman of the collective farm, and the oldest man at the table, occupied the seat at the head and was known as the table-master or “Tamada”. Round the table were eleven British delegates and about an equal number of the villagers, including the chairman of the Rural Soviet.

Almost immediately after the first few mouthfuls of food the Tamada rose and proposed a toast of welcome to us, and invited us all to “tuck in”. The custom is to drink all toasts “bottoms up”, but as we were drinking out of tumblers, and the wine being so strong, I’m afraid we were unable to carry this custom out in practice. An-

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drew Rothstein our delegation chairman, who sat by his side as deputy Tamada, explained that we were not accustomed to eating and drinking on such a scale, and moreover had a lot of work to do next day. Would he therefore mind not pressing too much, and excuse us if we didn't drink "bottoms up"? This he readily agreed to; and indeed some way through the meal, which lasted four hours, he turned down a protest made by the chairman of the Rural Soviet that the British guests were "not drinking"!

As the meal progressed I sampled liberal quantities of delicious salads, pickled tomatoes that had an exquisite taste, fresh white and brown bread with a quarter of an inch coating of creamy butter, and also an unusual dish. This appeared to be of a texture very much like our Yorkshire pudding, with a layer of roasted cheese sandwiched in the middle. It was served on large plates, each plate dressed with mutton, small round pieces on a long skewer. This very tasty food was about 12 inches in diameter and about an inch thick; with the knife provided we just cut off as much as we needed. The same applied to the meat, I must have eaten pounds of meat that night.

During the course of the meal other toasts were proposed by our hosts. These were mainly toasts of friendship towards the people of Great Britain, and one of friendship towards all the peoples of the world. We did our best in turn, as called upon by our chairman, to respond in short speeches.

During the meal the neighbours, who were still in the next room and crowded round the doorway, gave impromptu recitals of folk-singing, accordion and balalaika playing. Two-thirds of the way through the feast we had a break, and retired to another room where neighbours entertained us with more singing and folk-dancing. They requested that we contribute towards the entertainment, and so, although unable to demonstrate any of our native folk dances, we did sing a few songs. The Scots and Welsh delegates particularly upheld our musical prestige.

Called back to the feast, we did our best to put away the food that continually was put in front of us; but we could not clear the table. As a final gesture they brought in a huge roast goose! This was carved up and served at the same time as two women served four glasses of wine and vodka, which seemed to be a traditional gesture, meaning that having enjoyed our company that evening, we were being extended a welcome to come again.

A DAY IN A SOVIET VILLAGE

When we were ready to leave, they all came out to the cars to make their good-bye. I am sure that all the members of the delegation were as sorry as I to leave such genuine, friendly and hospitable people.



Tasting molasses at reslan.



In the sugar factory, Beslan.

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Workers' Club at Beslan.



*Outside the collective farm power station.
(Left to right: Irma Koulakovskaya, Alf Percival, Rural Soviet
chairman Gazganov.)*

MAKING MAIZE MORE USEFUL

BY ALFRED PERCIVAL

When in the train, some distance from Ordzhonikidze, we passed a big factory which we were told was engaged in the processing of maize (the Russian name is “kukuruza”).

That same day, while touring Ordzhonikidze, we visited the Regional Museum, to get an idea of the background and history of North Ossetia. We found that maize had been grown for many, many years. Later, at a meeting with the chairman and officials of the City Council or Soviet, we heard, among their many industries, of the Beslan Maize Processing Combine. The latter we decided to visit.

At the Third Congress of the Soviets of the North Ossetian Autonomous Region in 1927 (before it became a Republic) it was decided to start a factory for the processing of maize—“to absorb surplus peasant labour and in order to give a commercial outlet to the peasant economy”. It was realised that North Ossetia had great possibilities of development as a producer of maize for industrial purposes.

The plant was completed during the year 1932, i.e. during the first Five-Year Plan. It draws maize both from the collective farms of North Ossetia, and from some of the collective farms in other Republics through the State Grain Purchasing Organisation. It is second in the world in productive capacity, and is an extremely im-

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portant asset to the economy of the Soviet Union. They have brought the factory to the raw material—and not the raw material to the factory!

The main task at this plant is to process maize into molasses, starch, glucose and sugar, and the by-products into Indian corn oil and fodder for cattle. The residue is used as fuel in the furnaces! Each process takes place in a separate factory: hence the title of “Combine”.

It is interesting to note that there are more workers employed in this plant than there were in all the pre-Revolution industries in Ossetia. There are over 2,000 workers, 80 per cent of whom are Ossetians. Yet the factory is multi-national in character: you find Georgians, Armenians, Ukrainians and others among its workers—including women from a Moslem village in the district.

In the early days there were few people who were skilled in any way: and so a works school was set up to train the workers. Many of them have passed through that school and are now in managerial positions. The Technical School—as it is now—still carries on training, now not only of young people, but also of older workers wishing to gain more knowledge and experience of the technical work.

The plant is 100 per cent trade union organised, in the Food Industries Workers' Union. The Deputy Director and heads of several departments are Ossetians. Several shop managers are women, some of whom we talked to.

In 1938 Beslan village and factory settlement was consolidated into a Workers' Settlement, which gave them similar rights to those of a town. After the war the Beslan Workers' Settlement and the village of Tulatovo was constituted as Beslan Town, which now has its own Town Soviet and is the chief town of a district (similar to our county).

In January 1953, the plant promised to produce 1,300 tons above the plan laid down for that year, and in just over eleven months had exceeded the plan by 3,985 tons. The excess over the quota means that much higher funds are retained by the factory for bonuses and welfare facilities than is normally the case. This news we gleaned from the works' printed newspaper, published three days before our visit. This was not the first time they had exceeded their quota. In 1946-50, they achieved their Five-Year Plan in four years.

During the war period, the Germans were halted seven kilome-

tres from the plant in their advance to the south; and although it was badly damaged by shelling and bombing, it was restored in 1943 and was producing to plan within a year.

The plant is some miles from Ordzhonikidze, where we were staying, and we had an exciting ride by car over the ice-bound roads to reach it—and this on a very cold morning in December! On our arrival we had a very warm reception from the Chief Engineer, members of the Works' Committee and heads of departments. We were informed that there had been a meeting of all the workers, and they had passed a resolution to convey their warmest greetings to us and to the people of Britain. Many of the facts quoted above were given to us in a preliminary discussion. It was confirmed to us that in pre-Revolution days, there were only one or two small workshops—working by hand labour—in Vladikavkaz, which made starch from maize.

When we had finished putting questions to them, they in turn questioned us about our country. This is something that happened at every place we visited.

Then we began our tour of the plant, being told—as we had been told at the shoe factory in Minsk and the Minsk Auto Works—to “criticise anything we felt we wanted to criticise”.

First we went to the delivery section. The raw material comes in by rail and lorry, and we saw mountains of golden corn-cobs in vast open sheds, from where they are taken by conveyor belts to two silos quite near. We asked the workers for some corn-cobs as specimens to bring home and, with broad grins, they showered us with them.

From here we could see the big new extensions to the works—part of the new (1953) drive for more consumer goods. As it happens, the Combine bears the name of Mikoyan, the Minister for Trade, very prominent in that drive.

Then we entered the raw starch factory, where the management had their first and only spot of bother. Just before we entered one big room, a sulphuric acid pipe burst. The place was full of fumes, everyone was coughing and our hosts had very red faces! I think Wilfred Pickles would have had a good answer to his usual question—“Have you ever had an embarrassing moment?”

We saw the maize in this section being milled and treated and washed in vats.

The next tour was of the dried starch factory, where the grain is

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crushed and washed again in immense washing vats with constant running water, and then dried in a special room, the starch being separated from the rest at 60 degrees centigrade.

Then to the molasses factory. The maize is boiled down and treated, the syrup drawn off and filtered, the molasses separated from the vegetable oil. Molasses is used a great deal in the food industry in the Soviet Union.

In the laboratory of this factory, chemical tests are carried on all the time and we were invited to taste and test the molasses for ourselves—and did so.

We then went to the sugar factory—and this is more difficult to describe. It starts in the same way as does the molasses. The syrup is boiled and then flows down to large centrifugal separators on the floor below. From this, the glucose dries into white crystals and the sugar deposited in powder form. Here again we tasted the glucose and the sugar in the sugar laboratory, and also in the packing department. You could not distinguish the white castor sugar from our own.

Owing to lack of time, we did not visit the fodder-cake department; but here the residue from this factory and several others is made into fodder for cattle.

When the factory began, it used foreign machinery, including British; but it is now re-equipping, mainly with new Soviet machines.

We checked on the safety precautions taken. All machines were well guarded. Belt-driven machines had their belts extremely well guarded. Hot pipes and vats were protected, and there was plenty of space between the machines. The factory itself was clean, and the work flowed smoothly, without any hurrying being necessary. Although outside the factory it was many degrees below zero, the factory was warm and the workers were very lightly clothed, some without jackets and the women in summer dresses underneath their white coats. There is a first-aid post in the factory and a hospital in the factory area, with a doctor in attendance. We were given to understand that the accident rate was very low.

Wages in the raw starch factory ranged from 800-900 to 1,000 roubles per month, according to experience. Some with special skill received 1,200 to 1,300 roubles per month, and, as everywhere in the Soviet Union, there is equal pay for women.

In some sections of the factory there is a free milk ration.

MAKING MAIZE MORE USEFUL

Normal hours are: first shift 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., with 1 hour break for dinner; second shift 5 p.m. to 1 a.m., with supper break. Some shops were on an emergency 8 hour shift, with a half-hour break.

We visited the changing-rooms for men and women, with lockers for their clothes and shower-baths attached. This ended our visit to the factory proper.

By this time we were hungry and so went to the Works' Canteen, a spacious and lofty hall, brightly decorated, big enough to be a dance hall, and with a balcony overlooking it. It is open from 5 a.m. to twelve midnight, its staff working in shifts. We chose our meal from the menu. It included a dark kind of bread (a local product) with which their cheesy butter is delirious; soup—a kind of “dredger soup” (the deeper you went, the more you found in the way of meat and vegetables); an Ossetian dish called “Fitchin” (meat balls, garlic flavoured, baked in flat shallow pies of maize pastry); and sweets to follow. Many toasts were drunk in vodka and wine with the workers who were eating at the same time. In fact, it was quite a party, workers and waitresses all joining in to make our visit a very pleasant one.

We then went to the Works' Club, which was built in 1936 and the running of which is the responsibility of the trade union.

The club is surrounded by what, I am sure, is a lovely garden in the summer, but now we could see only thick snow. It is an imposing building, with large entrance hall, wide staircase and a hall supported by huge white columns, all very brightly decorated. There are in fact two halls, each seating 500 people—one where concerts are held and plays presented, sometimes with artists from as far away as Moscow, and another at the disposal of the youth for dances. There is a cinema which shows films three or four nights a week, for which a charge is made; a lecture hall, seating 100, where lectures are given on technical and general topics; a fine library, housed in a very nice hall, colourfully decorated, with tables, chairs, a wall newspaper run by the workers and containing some very satirical pieces, and a roll of honour of Stakhanovites. There are over 6,000 books in the library.

Whilst we were here, we were surprised by a woman who came up to us and spoke in very good English. By this time we should have been used to people suddenly speaking to us in English—it had happened so many times before, on the trains, in theatres, in the schools, in fact nearly everywhere. But it still came as a surprise.

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There are altogether fifty clubrooms in the building, which are used by a string orchestra, dramatic society, song and dance ensemble, youth club, etc. In one of these rooms we found a very fine electric model railway. The club manager thought that on the average 1,000 workers and their families come in every evening.

We went from here to see the co-operative shops, which were open from eight to one and from four to seven o'clock. They had a very wide range of goods, including shoes, combs, perfume, handbags, shaving soap, toys, musical instruments, books and material, etc. We saw an old peasant woman buy six metres of bright cotton print for 8.80 roubles a metre. The manager offered some to the next customer—a factory worker—but she wanted pure silk. We asked him: "What do you find goes best?" He replied, "It used to be cotton goods round here, but now it's fine woollens and linen."

We noticed the price reductions on the tags, as we had seen them in the shops in other parts of the Soviet Union, showing that the price reductions have been carried out. The shops were full of people, and some of our delegates made some purchases while we were there.

We afterwards visited the crèche and kindergarten. This subject will be dealt with in another part of the book, but I must tell this story. While at the crèche inspecting one of the rooms, our interpreter called me and said that some nurses wanted to ask some questions about Britain. They were asking me about crèches in this country, when Tom Hill from Wigan joined in. I told them not to ask him questions—he would know nothing about them as he wasn't married. Immediately two of the nurses, dark-eyed and very charming, said: "Why not stay here, we are looking for husbands." This was the first time that Tom hadn't a ready answer! The other delegates were soon out to join us to find out what all the laughing was about.

While we were visiting the shops, crèche, kindergarten, club, etc., the local people took every opportunity to greet us.

WOMEN THEN AND NOW

BY IRENE ROBINSON

If one visited a British school where the head and the assistant head were women, one would not, of course, find anything particularly noteworthy about the fact. And even if one found that the Deputy Mayor, the City Architect and the Medical Officer of Health of one of Britain's main cities were women, it would be interesting but not startling.

But to have this experience, as we did, in North Ossetia, is something quite remarkable; for only a short time ago the North Ossetian woman had none of the freedom which she takes so much for granted today. She could not sit down in the presence of men. At meal times she ate what was left over by them. She had to undertake much of the heavy, backbreaking work in addition to her household duties, and was seldom given as much consideration as the cattle on the farm. There were no recriminations for wife beating. She had no say whatsoever in the affairs of the community, or even, in fact, much say (if any) in personal matters.

What a contrast in 1953! The women we met from all parts of the Republic made a lasting impression on us—so confident, so proud of their achievements and the contribution they are making to the building of their new society; treated with respect as colleagues: with the greatest of care as women and mothers.

The introduction of the Soviet Constitution meant the granting by law of equal pay and rights for women, but this was little more than a beginning in North Ossetia. Much prejudice had to be overcome; and the women themselves, for so long subordinated to a much inferior position, found it difficult to take advantage of their new-won freedom. In any case, because of the general state of their society at that time, facilities for educating women and fitting them for the new life that was being organised were only in their infancy. However, with each year of general progress their practical emancipation has become more and more of a reality, and today the North Ossetian women play an even more prominent part in every sphere of life than British women.

They constitute from a third to a half of all the governing bodies of the Republic (Rural, City and Supreme Soviets) as well as occupying many of the leading posts. It was in the capital city of Ordzhonikidze that we found the three civic posts I have mentioned

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above filled by women. The Minister of Finance of North Ossetia is a woman, Tamara Khetagurova, and we were pleased to learn, some time after our return, that she was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. with two other women—three deputies out of twelve from the Republic. One out of the three deputies from North Ossetia to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation—the largest Republic of the U.S.S.R., of which North Ossetia forms part—is a woman.

We found on our visit to Olginskoye village that, even in this rural area which one might reasonably assume would be lagging behind the city, women were playing an equally prominent role both on the Rural Soviet (eight out of twenty-five deputies) and its Executive Committee (two out of five members); on the collective farm Management Committee (two out of seven members) as well as on the farm itself. Many of the leaders of work-teams, as well as those responsible for the scientific work on the farm, were women, and one of the milkmaids was proudly introduced to us as a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic. Many daughters of the collective farmers had already become doctors, engineers, teachers and members of other professions. Some of them had returned to take village posts after graduation, as for instance the young girl who was the English language teacher at the village Secondary School (ten-year), and her colleague the mathematics mistress, who was also vice-chairman of the collective farm Management Committee.

Of the students at the Teachers' Training Institute for the Republic, 70 per cent were girls.

* * *

Equality with men does not mean that women's conditions are in all respects the same. Indeed for the first time in the history of the North Ossetian woman her particular needs as a woman are being met. It was in the Beslan Maize Processing plant, where most of the workers are women (some are in charge of departments, and they form the largest part of the laboratory staff), that we learned of the strict industrial rule that a woman must not carry a weight exceeding 35 pounds. Personal hygiene-rooms are provided for all women workers, and a gynaecologist is included in the permanent medical staff.

Medical attention in the old days, being completely inadequate for the needs of the people, meant that women suffered particularly.

It was common for babies to be delivered by neighbours, and complications during the delivery often meant death or severe illness. It is very different today, when women not only receive all the benefits of modern medical knowledge and maternity home treatment, but are guaranteed a painless childbirth by the psycho-prophylactic method or, where for a particular reason this is not possible, by the use of drugs. Childbirth mortality is now rare, and most slight illnesses that were at one time looked upon as a natural consequence of childbirth, as well as dangerous illnesses that were feared during every pregnancy, are now almost entirely eliminated. For example, puerperal fever is so rare that it is difficult to find a "guinea-pig" for student demonstrators.

My colleague, Ida Stone, describes elsewhere the excellent children's institutions—*crèche* and kindergarten—which we inspected at the Beslan works. We did not visit any of the twenty-five kindergartens or six *crèches* run by the City Soviet of Ordzhonikidze, but from our experience at another Soviet capital—Minsk—I am sure that these adequately do their job: of ensuring that the Ossetian mother can go out to work, if she wishes, without her job or home, her own health or that of her family, suffering. She can embark on a career confident that marriage and motherhood need be no more than an interruption, and that her specialised training will still be of use to her country.

* * *

But what of the attitude of the North Ossetian men to these developments? It was interesting to note that they were equally enthusiastic about drawing our attention to the new status of women. The chairman of the Ordzhonikidze City Soviet was quick to point out to us that over 40 per cent of his Council were women. "Of course women play an important part in managing our collective farm," said our friend Gazganov, the chairman. "How could we run it without the women?"

The general rapid advance in the standard and quality of living would not have been possible if women had not been developed to play a full part in the economic and social life of the Republic.

It is very doubtful, too, whether it would have been able to withstand so effectively the onslaught of the German Army if women had not participated in its defence; and there is absolutely no doubt that without the women's help they could not possibly

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have repaired so quickly the havoc wrought by the war on their agriculture and industry. Particularly in the restoration of mechanised agriculture women played a big part. Half the post-war trainees at the 1st Ossetian Machine and Tractor Station—which services the Stalin collective farm we visited—were women.

It would be wrong to suppose that in such a short time all backwardness has been eliminated. A few survivals of the old treatment of women have still to be combatted. There have still been some cases in recent years of giving girls in marriage without their consent, attempts to get “ransom” and some cases of kidnapping. However, these are punishable by law, and the vast majority of the population are themselves taking resolute steps to stamp out these last remaining vestiges of the old system.

* * *

It is not possible to mention in detail many of our meetings with women of the Republic, but one or two are very vivid in my memory.

Perhaps the most vivid of all are the women of the Stalin collective farm. I shall never forget the girl I have previously mentioned, who sat next to me at the dinner-table for some time, without either speaking to her Ossetian colleagues or to us through an interpreter. Half-way through the dinner she was specially introduced as the teacher of English at the village school, at which she blushed furiously. We learned later from our own interpreter that she had been eagerly awaiting our arrival—the first people she had ever met whose native language was English—but that on hearing us speak in our Welsh, Scottish and English dialects she was certain that she had wasted her four years at the Teachers’ Training Institute, wondered what kind of English she was imparting to the school children, and her one concern was that during the evening she should not be “found out” by being called on to make a speech. She was overjoyed to discover that we really did talk the same English language as she did—and in fact later became so absorbed in talking to us that she forgot her original embarrassment. I overheard Tom Hill asking her if she was “courting”. She laughed and said there was plenty of time for that yet. Her preferences in English literature are George Eliot and Byron.

Among the many other women who participated in our entertainment at the collective farm were the vice-chairman of the Man-

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agement Committee, a most striking woman of typical Ossetian features, who toasted the everlasting friendship of “the wonderful British women and the Ossetian women”; the two housewife-farmworkers, who, according to custom, entered with one glass of wine for each of the women guests, drinking to our health to the accompaniment of traditional chanting; the milkmaid Supreme Soviet Deputy who danced for us, partnered by the leading Stakhanovite of the farm.

In Ordzhonikidze itself—the youngest member of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic, who accompanied us to the station to wish us a happy journey home and a happy reunion with our families. Just before we boarded the train I gave her a keepsake of our visit—a little tartan-bound volume of Robert Burns’ poems. She was delighted, and hugged and kissed me—she knew Burns’ works well, from Samuel Marshak’s translations, and expressed her admiration for his poetry.

Then the two young girls, students at the Teachers’ Training Institute, who, after we met them there, seemed to be everywhere we were, ready to offer us sweets, give us badges and other little keepsakes. They were so delighted with our visit that they were reluctant to let us go, and were also at the station to wave us farewell—but not before asking us to “please come again soon”.

* * *

It was indeed thrilling to meet the new Ossetian woman, who has a happy and ever more secure future before her.

HEALTH AND CHILD WELFARE

BY IDA STONE

When I knew I was to have the opportunity of visiting the small Republic of North Ossetia I was especially pleased as, living in another small country, Wales, I was very keen to study at first hand the health services and care of the children so far from Moscow, the capital of the Union and of the largest Soviet nation, the Russians.

Health Services

In 1913 there were only three hospitals with seventy-nine beds in the whole of North Ossetia, and these were in the towns. Out of seventy-eight doctors only three were in the countryside. About 60

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per cent of the population who at this period were living in the mountains were without any medical aid whatsoever. Vladikavkaz, the chief city, had one hospital with sixty beds, and an asylum with fourteen beds. There was no city main drainage system. Piped water was available only in the centre, the rest of the townspeople having to draw it from the River Terek—but bacteriologically this was better than the water company's supply! The street lighting was electric only in the centre, a few kerosene lamps having to "make do" elsewhere.

By 1940 the situation had completely altered. There were twenty-four hospitals with 1,601 beds, eight of these in the towns and sixteen in the countryside; at the end of 1948 this number was increased to forty-six hospitals. These figures would have been still larger if it had not been for the war, when the Germans wrecked many hospitals, polyclinics, etc. When we visited the Republic in December 1953, not only had the damage been replaced but there was much more accommodation than pre-war.

Epidemics which were common in 1913—like cholera and smallpox—have completely disappeared.

There were now 922 doctors and 1,967 medical officers with medium training. There was no shortage of nurses, and their duties were concerned with the medical side only. Serving meals, issuing toilet requisites, dusting, etc., was carried out by maids. Attached to every factory is a fully-equipped and well-staffed polyclinic (health centre) where the worker can have immediate attention of doctors and nurses in case of accidents or illness at work, and where he and his family can have medical treatment instead of visiting the district hospital.

At Ordzhonikidze, the capital of the Republic, we found that each city district also has its polyclinic, where those not working in industry can attend for treatment and advice not needing specialist attention. On the first occasion the patient may have to wait a short time before receiving attention, but for future visits appointments are made to suit the worker according to his hours. Doctors are in attendance from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. The health service is free to all, with the emphasis on preventive medicine, and during 1954 it is hoped that the whole population will have at least one check-up to prevent serious diseases developing.

There were in December 1953, more than forty health institutions in the city, including seven hospitals and two maternity

homes, with women's and children's consulting clinics in each of the three city districts, as well as the health centres I mentioned before. There is a good piped water supply available to all; asphalted streets everywhere, lined with trees; electric lighting and an efficient sewage system.

During sickness a worker is paid 50-100 per cent of wages according to period of service, out of State funds controlled by the social insurance committee in the factory. This service includes a period of recuperation in a rest home after a serious illness, or the necessary treatment in a sanatorium; with payments on the scale previously mentioned continuing. The trade union committee of the factory pays his fare if necessary.

Care of Children

In every crèche, kindergarten and school we visited there was a doctor's consulting-room, with a doctor in attendance all the time. All the children are examined twice a year, and weak children once a month. Never shall I forget my visit to the Lesnoye Forest School, or country home for delicate children, a few miles from Ordzhonikidze. We drove through snow-covered land to a beautiful country house. The sun was shining and there was the wonderful view of the Caucasian Mountain Range which seemed very near, with snow-capped Kazbek towering high in the sky.

To this school children from all over the Republic, aged seven to ten, were sent for three months or longer if necessary; there were children of many nationalities. They did not receive any special medical treatment or medicine, just plenty of good food, rest and fresh air, and all were able to carry on their studies. On an average they gained four to ten pounds, during their stay.

The bedrooms were light and airy, with big windows and outside verandas, and all had a wonderful view of the country and mountains. There were three grades in the school with a playroom for each, a reading-room and a very beautiful assembly hall with a fine carpet on the floor, a film projector, radio and gramophone, and a wall newspaper produced by the children. Here for the first time I was able to see a lemon tree, with the lemons formed.

Five substantial meals a day were provided: breakfast at eight, a snack at eleven (the children were actually having it when we arrived—tea and fancy cakes), dinner at two, tea at four-thirty, and supper at eight. The menu that day was as follows; Breakfast—fish

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and mashed potatoes with buttermilk; rice and egg pie; cocoa. Snack—mentioned already. Dinner—vegetable soup; roast mutton with vermicelli; apples. Tea—biscuits, milk and sweets. Supper—omelette; semolina made with milk and sugar; tea. The portions were most substantial. Parents visited the children once a month, and Friday was the day for letters to be written to their parents.

There was a staff of forty-four to look after the hundred children—including thirteen teachers (among them a music teacher), a doctor with three trained nurses and six assistant nurses, two laundresses, six cleaners, etc. The cost of a stay in the school was 80 roubles a month where the parents' cash income was as low as 400 roubles (this might occur in a collective farm, and could be paid out of the Mutual Aid Fund), and rose to 200 roubles a month for those earning the highest wages (1,200 roubles or over).

Crèches and Kindergartens

There is a crèche and kindergarten attached to every factory. The crèche is for children from one to three, where a mother can leave her child when she goes to work. We visited the crèche and kindergarten at the Beslan Maize Processing Combine.

It was a pleasure to see the babies in the cots in well-aired rooms, with qualified people in attendance. On one occasion, although it was very cold, the babies were out on the veranda in the open air, sleeping all wrapped in little padded pink quilted suits which covered their heads, just leaving their faces peeping out. Hung on the wall in one room was a sheet with little embroidered pockets attached for each baby's napkins to be kept separate. At Beslan the crèche had a staff of thirty-five for 110 children. The cost to parents was one rouble a day—the price of five daily newspapers.

It was fatal to visit a kindergarten: once we met the children it was impossible to get away, and our timetable just went by the board. This happened when we visited the Beslan Kindergarten, when the children were rehearsing their songs and dances (Ukrainian and Lezgin) for their New Year celebrations. The little girls had garlands of flowers around their heads and wore dresses embroidered with national designs; the boys had blouses with similar embroidery. They just loved singing and dancing for us, and were not in the least self-conscious. Their playrooms are ideal, with carpets on the floor and excellent toys of all description—toys which the

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children could build between them, teaching them to co-operate with one another. There were dolls having a tea-party around dolls' tables and chairs, and of course the much loved trucks and engines.

Children from three to seven attend the kindergartens. They are not taught any formal lessons, just to grow up happy, healthy children. They are taught to take care of all furniture and toys and not to be destructive. This was evident when we saw the embroidered cloths round the room.

Leisure Activities

We visited the Ordzhonikidze Pioneer Palace, provided for children to attend after school hours; they can take up any hobby they choose, from embroidery to making radio sets. We inspected many of their finished articles—beautiful baskets, embroidered pictures, ships of all kinds that would delight the heart of any child. There are separate rooms for each subject. They also have their drama and ballet classes, instrumental orchestras and choirs. To our astonishment we were informed they had a motor-bike circle, with two motor-bikes for training.

Open-Air Activities

The first afternoon of our arrival we visited the “Kosta Kheta-gurov” Park for children named after their national poet, who was severely persecuted for championing the cause of his people in the days of the Tsar. At the entrance to the park, and along the avenues, are lovely statues of children. There was great excitement: the two ponds had frozen and the kiddies were having a wonderful time skating, many of them being quite experienced. The whole scene was like fairyland, with the fine snow tracery on the boughs of the trees, peacocks—an unusual sight—strutting about proudly showing off their beautiful plumes, and the laughter of the children. In the park there are several playgrounds with sandpits, but these were all covered in snow. During the summer toy cars are provided. Many of the people and children in the park spoke to different delegates in English. Besides this park there are others in the city, and the chairman of the City Soviet told us of a Young Naturalists' Experimental Station and a Children's' Excursion Tourist Base, used in connection with hiking.

Ordzhonikidze has a children's theatre, children's cinema, a puppet theatre, etc., but we were unable to visit these through lack

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of time. Our visit was in the winter time, but it was very apparent there was no lack of recreative facilities for all ages. We saw children purchasing skis for the coming winter vacation. During the summer there are opportunities for sport of all kinds which we were told about very enthusiastically by the students and young factory workers we met, including two sports schools. When the people have all these opportunities for their children, it is evident they want peace and not to see their children destroyed by war.



Interviewing Georgi Gazganov, collective farm chairman (centre).

Biology room at girls' secondary school No. 27.





*Country School for Delicate Children, Lesnoye.
Autographs at Lesnoye.*



SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL CHILDREN

BY JOCELYNE WOOD

"The first thing the highlanders should do in their autonomous republic is to build schools and cultural and educational institutions," said Stalin at the foundation of the Highlands Soviet Republic, of which North Ossetia was part, in 1920.

What was the position in North Ossetia then? Eighty-eight per cent of the population was illiterate. There were only six secondary schools, available in practice only to the children of Russian officials, priests, military officers, native merchants and gentry, etc., and no higher education institutions. The only education available to the children of the mass of the people was one or two years' instruction in the three R's and the scriptures, at fifty Church and thirty-three State primary schools. In 1913 under 6,500 children attended such schools. And today? Universal literacy (since 1934), five institutes of University status, 294 schools with over 90,000 pupils.

By the eve of the war 70 per cent of school children in North Ossetia were attending ten-year schools, that is to say, receiving full secondary education to the age of seventeen. The vice-president of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the North Ossetian Autonomous Republic told us that they were still short of buildings. The Nazis destroyed a number of schools when they were driven out of areas they had occupied. But by 1955, the end of the present Five-Year Plan, all children in North Ossetia, both in town and country, will be able to attend a ten-year school to the age of seventeen. Ten-year schools are now being built so as to provide one for every group of villages. The present Five-Year Plan adopted the target of compulsory ten-year education in all towns by 1955, and universally during the next five-year period.

The Soviet Constitution guarantees to every citizen the right to education in his native language. It follows that North Ossetia has its schools conducted in the Ossetian language, and a department of Ossetian language and literature at the Pedagogical (Teachers' Training) Institute. Since there are a considerable number of Russians living in North Ossetia, and Russian, the common language of the Union, is taught in the schools as a second language, the majority of Ossetians are in fact bilingual, like many Welsh people. In Ordzhonikidze, the capital, where over half the population is non-

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Ossetian (it was formerly the Russian garrison town), there are many schools conducted in the Russian language. We found that many Ossetians prefer their children to attend Russian schools in order to be equally at home in both languages. Ossetian-speaking children attending Russian schools have special tuition in Ossetian language and literature. In many country schools, the primary grades (from seven to eleven) are conducted in Ossetian, and the higher grades in Russian.

It should not be concluded from this that the Ossetian language is passing out of use. The overwhelming majority of the people we met spoke Ossetian to one another, though most knew Russian. There is more creative writing in Ossetian than ever before, and the packed houses we saw at the Ossetian State Drama Theatre are further testimony to its vitality.

In Ordzhonikidze we visited No. 27 School, a ten-year school for girls from seven to seventeen. In the U.S.S.R., there is no kind of selection for secondary education such as we have in this country. All children in a given area go to the same school, with the exception that parents may choose, where appropriate, the language in which the school is conducted, and between a single-sex or co-educational school where both are available. Furthermore there is no kind of "streaming" within the school—no dividing of the children into classes according to "ability". All take exactly the same course, and all but a tiny percentage pass the school-leaving examination.

Soviet education experts believe that there are no inherently backward children. If a child is falling behind the rest of the class, it is the teacher's job to find out the reason. She will visit the parents and discuss the problem with them; perhaps the child is getting overtired or homework is being neglected. There is very close contact between parents and teachers, and regular parent-teacher meetings are held, usually monthly. If a child needs extra coaching, this will be arranged, often by the teacher visiting the child's home. There is no charge to the parents, but the teacher gets overtime pay. Children are also encouraged to help each other with their work; our interpreter's eleven-year-old daughter, for example, had volunteered to help two classmates with their Russian grammar. Reasonable sized classes—most of those we saw had from twenty-five to thirty pupils—are undoubtedly an important factor in ensuring that all reach the required standard.

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No. 27 school is housed in a fine three-storey building faced with white plaster. It has the spacious entrance hall and wide parquet-floored corridors, adorned with green plants, usual in Soviet schools. The director, the administrative head—there is also a headmistress responsible for the education side—told us that there was still a serious shortage of buildings, and the school had to work on two shifts (8.30 to 1, and 1.30 to 6), with about 500 girls in each.

When the bell rang we discovered the purpose of the wide corridors. Classroom doors opened and we were in the midst of a swarm of bright, laughing girls of all ages and sizes. There is a five-minute break between each lesson, and this is spent promenading the corridor with one's friends. They soon found out who the visitors were, and we were hemmed in on all sides by girls eager to ask us questions about our country, give us a message to take to their counterparts in Britain, or simply shake our hands. Several of our number found themselves decorated with the badge of the *Komsomol*, the youth organisation of the over-fifteens.

In the corridor, too, was the wall-newspaper. Some amusing drawings caught our eye: one shaming the girl who surreptitiously consumes buns in the back row; another showing two seniors so rapt in conversation while on duty in the corridor at break that the juniors run races under their noses. The newspaper, which is produced entirely by the girls themselves, is an important aid to discipline, the director said.

We went on a tour of the classrooms and saw a number of lessons in progress. The Soviet curriculum contains most of the usual subjects taught in our grammar schools and includes a foreign language, the most widely taught one now being English. We noted the generous scale of equipment in the laboratories. The assembly hall had a good stage and a film projector. Films, they said, were much used in schools. When we visited the library we found that they had two full-time librarians to look after the 12,000 books.

The school has its own Pioneer room, the Pioneer Movement is the youth organisation to which most children between nine and fifteen belong; it is roughly comparable to our Scout and Guide movements. We talked to the schools' two full-time Pioneer leaders, whose job is to organise activities for after-school hours and for the holidays.

A word about the teachers. Of the forty-nine on the staff, thirty-seven had been trained at institutions of university status. Their ba-

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sic teaching hours are three per day (six-day week), and although most actually do more than this, for everything above the three hours (including correcting exercise books) they are paid overtime. Average earnings seemed to be about 1,000 roubles a month, which would be rather more than a doctor and about the same as an average skilled industrial worker. In addition to a comfortable staffroom there was a special room where teachers could retire in peace to prepare lessons, read the education journals available there, or hold discussions on educational subjects. They told us that there is never any shortage of applications for the teaching profession.

We called in for a glass of tea at the school buffet. There the girls can obtain solid cold snacks—cold roast goose, for example—before or after school or at break. There is no hot meals service, but there are canteens in the neighbourhood where girls can go if necessary.

Finally we visited the doctor's room; for this school, like most others, has its own full-time doctor and nurse. Besides carrying out a thorough examination of each pupil every six months, and more frequent routine inspections, they are responsible for health education in the school.

We had further proof of the extent of the school medical service when we visited the "Forest School" about ten miles from Ordzhonikidze. This is a special residential school where children who are run down in health can be sent for a four-month stay, or longer if necessary. The time-table is arranged to ensure that the children get adequate rest and exercise in the fresh air. My fellow-delegate Ida Stone has already given some particulars of this school, I want to emphasise that the children coming here get their normal—grade one to four—education.

Some subjects normally taught in British schools such as art, needlework and music are not part of the compulsory school curriculum in the U.S.S.R. They are, however, a very important out-of-school activity, and every encouragement is given to children to specialise. Study-circles in these and other subjects, including some on the school curriculum, are organised at school after hours. At No. 27 School, for example, we saw the wall-gazette produced by the literary circle, and the plot where the biology circle experiment in the growing of grain and fruit trees. But most important of all are the facilities provided by the Pioneer Palaces.

The halls of a former bank at Ordzhonikidze now ring with the

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laughter of children. It has become the Pioneer Palace, and a very fine one it makes. Here children can come after school (from 4 to 9 p.m.) and participate in the activities of one of the forty-five circles which cover, not of course all possible interests, yet an astonishingly wide range. Thus they can learn ballet dancing (twenty-five boys and fifty girls were members of the ballet groups at the time of our visit), take up painting or some other branch of art, learn a stringed instrument or sing in the choir, act with the drama group, build model ships (two girls were in the circle, with many boys) or learn to work a film projector or the intricacies of fretwork, explore the history and geography of the region, play chess, take up gymnastics, study the art of photography under expert instruction, practise folk dancing or become "clever hands" about the house. This is but a sample of the activities of the Palace. There is a lending library (12,000 volumes) and a large hall, seating 400, for film shows, concerts and parties (10,000 children came to the "New Year Tree" between January 1st and 10th, 1953). And all this free—the only qualification for membership being the consent of parent and teacher. You can't spend every evening at the Pioneer Palace and leave your homework to look after itself.

"The purpose of the Pioneer Palace is to help the schools and the children," said the director. Bad work at school excludes a child from membership. As a general rule each child can only enter one circle, to make sure that as many as possible take advantage of the palace: fully 20 per cent of the city's school children do so in the course of a month. There is a full-time staff of thirteen, and eighteen additional "instructors", paid by the hour, to take such subjects, as, say, shipbuilding. Many artistes help with their special subjects.

This chapter would not be complete without mention of the school at the village of Olginskoye. So comprehensive was our tour of the collective farm at the village, that we were too late actually to go to the school, but we learnt from the chairman of the Rural Soviet two facts which speak for themselves. Although the village has a population of only 2,500, the school is a ten-year one, a full secondary school, and attendance to seventeen was last September, by decision of the parents' meetings, made compulsory for all children in the village—well in advance of the Five-Year Plan! There are thirty teachers on the staff (600 pupils), twenty-eight of whom were born in the village, and have returned there to work. Later in the evening we met one of them, Zamira Toguzova, the English teacher.

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For me she is “Miss North Ossetia of 1954”—a girl of twenty-four, of peasant stock, teaching a foreign language in a ten-year secondary school in a remote village in the Caucasus, to children whose grandparents were illiterate and hungry members of an oppressed minority.

HIGHER EDUCATION

BY TOM HILL

When one considers the fact that less than forty years ago North Ossetia was a primitive and backward country populated by a people who were nearly all illiterate and had not even an alphabet of their own; and that before the October Revolution not a single higher educational institution existed in the whole of the North Caucasus, let alone North Ossetia, one must view with amazement the rapid advance in the educational sphere since 1917, of which we were given demonstrable proof everywhere we went in the Republic.

In 1918 a North Ossetian Polytechnical Institute was set up in Ordzhonikidze the capital (then still known as Vladikavkaz), but this was later reorganised as the North Ossetia Agriculture Institute.

Then in 1920 a Pedagogical Institute was established for the training of secondary school teachers; an institute which we visited, by the way, and of which I intend to say more later.

This was followed in 1932 with the building of a college for the training of teachers of the “incomplete secondary” or seven-year schools which are still numerous throughout the Soviet Union. In 1933 mining and metallurgical institutes were established, to be followed in 1939 with the commencement of an institute for medical studies.

The same period showed simultaneously a similar growth in the number of students attending these various institutes, and the following statistics will give some extent of the progress achieved.

	1924	1927	1932	1937	1940
Institutes	2	2	4	4	5
Students	694	876	1,386	2,390	2,406

It should be remembered that all these students were the children of wage-earners, collective farmers or individual peasants; there was not a single landowner, private farmer, industrial or financial magnate, shareholder or company director among their parents.

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A significant feature of the statistics quoted above is the acceleration in growth during the periods 1929-32 and 1933-37—which corresponds to the increase in the country's wealth initiated by the first and second Five-Year Plans respectively.

Again the same period showed a further development in technical education for the many different kinds of professions, necessary to sustain continued expansion of mechanisation and industrialisation, which was even then apparent.

The following table will give some idea.

	1924	1927	1932	1937	1940
Technical Colleges	4	5	8	11	17
Students	764	702	2,067	2,260	2,980

In addition to all these, there were, then and now, hundreds of Ossetian students attending higher educational institutions in Moscow, Leningrad, Rostov, etc.—thus providing a never-ending supply of agronomists, mining engineers, teachers, accountants, lawyers, doctors and technicians for the food industry, railways, etc.

It was a striking illustration of this to find, at the collective farm we visited, that out of sixteen tenth-class pupils who left the Olgin-skoye Secondary School in 1953, fifteen had gone to Institutes in Ordzhonikidze or Moscow, and one to a technical college (to study mechanisation of agriculture).

At the end of 1953 there were over 5,000 students in the five Institutes of higher education, and thirteen technical colleges with nearly 6,400 students.

Fourteen times as many pupils as before the Revolution are attending schools. This huge increase in schools and students has naturally meant that there had to be a similar increase in teachers.

This, too, has been safely accomplished, and whereas in 1914 there were 564 teachers in all types of schools {most of them very poor schools, as Jocelyne Wood has shown), at the end of 1953 there were 4,841. Of these about 60 per cent are Ossetian by birth, a remarkable feature again reflecting the progressive march of the Ossetian people.

Whilst on the subject of teachers I may say here that the teaching profession is held in the highest esteem and regard, not only in North Ossetia but throughout the Soviet Union, and to become a teacher there is to enter a very honoured profession indeed.

Wages and conditions are commensurate with their high call-

ing. For each five years of service they receive a long-service percentage increase in their basic pay, and there is also a 40 per cent service pension on the completion of twenty-five years of service, which they get in addition to their normal salary if they decide to carry on. Teachers receive two months' holiday in the year, and special health and holiday resorts and accommodation are open to them at a discount of 70 per cent.

Thus there is every encouragement for young people to enter the teaching profession with the highest possible qualifications, secured at a university or Teachers' Training Institute. To enter the latter one must have completed a ten-year school, just as in the case of entering a university.

If I describe here our visit to the State Pedagogical (Teachers' Training) Institute, it will give a practical illustration of all I have written so far.

As I mentioned earlier, this Institute was founded in 1920 and since its inception has turned out thousands of teachers for the higher educational establishments of the Soviet Union in general, and for North Ossetia in particular. To be exact, during this period 7,255 have graduated from here, of which 2,875 were Ossetians—nearly 40 per cent.

In 1953-54 1,781 students study full time, and in addition to these there are 1,629 taking correspondence courses with the Institute, making a grand total of 3,410. They come from twenty-two nationalities. Of these 704 are Ossetians studying full time and 777 Ossetians are studying by the correspondence method—over 43 per cent. Thus the Ossetians are catching up.

The faculties here, of which there are five, are Physics and Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Geography, History and Philology, Foreign Languages, and Physical Culture and Sport. Each faculty gives a four-year course to students, producing teachers for the upper classes of ten-year schools who are specialists in its respective subjects. There is also a special course in Ossetian Language and Literature.

In the Foreign Languages faculty, the students may choose German or English, and during the course of our visit through the Institute we discovered to our delight that our own language seemed to be the predominant one chosen. How exhilarating to come upon class after class in this far-off little country on the borders of Asia, and hear our own native tongue spoken loud and clear by young people whose

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faces and bearing radiated self-confidence and assurance! It was awkward, however, being asked by the students: "How many of your school children learn Russian?"

All the rooms are well ventilated, and are centrally heated by what is known as the wall heating method, where a combination of coal and fluid is used which I thought proved very effective. Seven hundred of the students here live in the nearby hostel specially provided; naturally those from Ordzhonikidze live at home, while for the remainder lodgings are provided by the Institute (which rents them at its own expense from townspeople).

Workers who take the correspondence course are given six years before their final examinations, and are allowed two fortnightly periods during the year to allow them to come here for practical study. They are paid their full wages during their stay. Incidentally, all students are offered several jobs to choose from, five months before they graduate, and thus finish at the Institute knowing they have a good post waiting.

Teachers who are practising in the city can come here also to take a refresher course.

In the zoology department of the Natural Sciences faculty we were taken to the Charles Darwin Museum, which is the pride, and rightly so, of the whole Institute. Here we saw specimens of many kinds of birds and animals which are used for practical study. But the special reason for their pride was the fact that the complete collection had been gathered together by the Institute itself over twenty years, during hunting expeditions and outings in the mountains and forests of the Caucasus.

In the Physics and Mathematics faculty we found a splendidly-equipped workshop, complete with lathes and tools of all kinds, in which the future teachers were given instruction in their use with a view to being able to run similar workshops in their schools, and also to making their own visual aids for teaching purposes.

We were similarly impressed with the gymnasium, lavishly equipped, and the students we saw going through the various exercises were in the peak of condition. I wonder how many future champions we saw here!

It would have taken us days to go through the magnificent library, the main one, where over 20,000 books were stocked. Each faculty also has its own separate library.

I think I speak for us all when I say that we came away from the

State Pedagogical Institute in Ordzhonikidze, fully satisfied with our visit to this fine practical example of higher education in North Ossetia. We had made many new friends, and we would bring home with us a host of happy memories of a day well spent amidst cheerful surroundings.

CULTURE FOR THE PEOPLE

BY COLIN WRIGHT

Before the Revolution a very small number of progressive intellectuals could write in the Ossetian language, and these had to use different varieties of invented alphabets according to their choice, since there was no standard Ossetian script. It was only occasionally, for very short periods after the 1905 Revolution, that they were allowed to issue newspapers and periodicals in their own language.

Thus in 1906 a little paper, *Ossetian Gazette*, appeared in 500 copies, twice a week, for one month at Vladikavkaz. In 1909 a fortnightly, *News*, was closed down after ten issues. A few church magazines in later years, one or two journals published for a few months at Tiflis—that completes the tale. What a different picture exists today!

By 1940, the eve of war, there were many thousands of intellectual workers, including 360 scholars and scientists in higher education and research, and nearly 2,500 teachers with higher education. There were a number of research institutes doing important work—the North Ossetian Research Institute, studying Ossetian history, economy, language, and literature; the Highlands Seed Selection Station, making improvements in agriculture; the Non-Ferrous Metal Research Laboratory; and the Sanitary-Bacteriological Research Institute, waging the struggle with epidemics and other diseases.

Before the Revolution, there was at Vladikavkaz a local museum, containing weapons, plants and minerals arranged as curiosities for the tourist. Today, there are several museums playing a distinctly educational part. One is the Kirov and Ordzhonikidze Museum, dealing with the history of the working-class struggle in North Ossetia. We ourselves visited, secondly, the Regional Museum at Ordzhonikidze. It gives in a connected form the story of the economic, social and political life of North Ossetia from prehistoric time. Then there are the Khetagurov Museum of Ossetian Litera-

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ture, and another Regional Museum at Alagir, with others; these we did not have time to see. Museum visitors each year increase by leaps and bounds—in 1937, 18,305; in 1940, 107,388; and in 1945, 328,000.

The National Ossetian Research Institute has issued the collected works of the national poet Kosta Khetagurov. It has also gathered, from various districts, the National Epic mentioned by Brian Pearce and published it in Ossetian and Russian (1948). It has prepared for publication two volumes on the history of Ossetia and a *History of Ossetian Literature*. It is working on an Ossetian-Russian academic dictionary.

Turning to newspapers we found that, by the end of 1940, there were three national dailies, one regional daily, eleven district weeklies, four works papers, and two literary journals. We were pleased to get cuttings from the local papers, reporting our arrival and activities, and to receive at the Maize Processing Plant a copy of their works' paper, the "Mikoyanovetz", containing some practical and very forthright criticism, in working-class language, of the shortcomings in their co-op and in one of the sections of the plant.

From 1923 to 1948, 2,000 books were published in 10 million copies—about 900 popular works on scientific subjects; nearly 500 on social, economic and political subjects; nearly 400 textbooks and school books; and 220 works of fiction, poetry and children's books. Bookshops, as we saw, are extremely plentiful, and members of our delegation made many purchases. Even the local co-op stores which we visited had book sections.

Before the October Revolution there was no national theatre. Even amateur performances in Ossetian had to have personal authorisation by the Russian Governor of the Terek Province. Now three theatres put on Russian, Ossetian and foreign plays, and one evening in Ordzhonikidze our delegation attended a splendid performance of *Othello*, described elsewhere by Leslie Credland. It is of great interest, and very revealing, to note how the State Theatre of North Ossetia came into being. In 1931 a group of gifted Ossetian amateurs—eighteen youths and twelve girls—were sent to Moscow at public expense, to study at the Gorky Institute of Dramatic Art. There they constituted the first Ossetian Studio of Drama. For four years famous Russian actors and actresses passed on to them their own experiences. The students also obtained a sound higher education of a general character.

They returned to North Ossetia and founded the first Ossetian National Theatre. They have already trained a younger generation, and the Ossetians are proud of them. They play Ossetian versions of Russian classical drama, modern Soviet plays and foreign plays—Shakespeare's *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Much Ado About Nothing* among them.

In 1948 the State Theatre of North Ossetia was adjudged to be one of the leading theatres of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Tkhapsayev, whom we saw playing *Othello*, holds the title of Meritorious Artist of the Russian Federation, and Mme. Ikayeva, who played a striking Desdemona that night, is a People's Artist of North Ossetia.

The success of the theatre has encouraged the appearance of native dramatists. We met one of them, Ashaki Tokayev, a very modest and retiring young man. His play, *The Suitors*, has been translated into Russian and other languages of the U.S.S.R., and has also been played in the Bulgarian language at Sofia.

Other forms of literature are also advancing, both novels and poetry, in the native language. We saw plenty of them in the bookshops, and also a monthly literary journal—although unfortunately even our Russian-speaking members could not make anything of them, beyond discovering what they were!

To underline the importance of these facts I must again remind the reader that before the 1917 Revolution the Ossetians had only experimental alphabets, based on Russian, Latin or Georgian letters, and that the mass of the people had no knowledge of any of them. In 1923 an alphabet based on Latin letters was introduced, and in 1938 one based on the Russian alphabet, it having been discovered that the latter caters for every sound in Ossetian except one, for which a special character was introduced.

To return to music and the stage, the Ossetian Folk Song and Dance Ensemble has been in existence for ten years, and again I can vouch for the wonderfully high quality of both dancers and singers. For a whole evening, the choir, dancers and soloists entertained a full house of enthusiastic citizens of the capital, and again we were privileged to attend.

Dressed in their traditional costumes, the ensemble were a brilliant spectacle. The tall and stately women wore flowing white robes, flowered at the edges and held in by broad jewelled belts, with gaily-coloured flat caps over which gauze scarfs were lightly

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cast The men, tall and agile, were all in black—round astrakhan hats, wide-skirted tunics gathered tightly at the waist, breeches and soft top-boots—with silver-mounted cartridge-belts on their breasts and long silver- scabbarded daggers at their sides, the heritage of their mountaineer past that rejoiced the eye of a Scotsman. Their songs and dances came from far and wide—Uzbekistan, Georgia, Ukraine and Russia—but most of all were Ossetian; and in their titles were many reminiscences of their ancient village life (“Song of the Shepherd”, “Dance at the Stream”, “Dance of the Horseman”, and so forth) as well as some echoes of the new life (“Dance of Collective Farmers”, “Song of Greeting to the Russian People”). It was clear that these people, greatly as they value modern science and love world culture, also love and cherish their national heritage.

Several dozen pupils from Ossetia are studying opera at Moscow State Conservatoire, training for future Ossetian operas, just as the first actors did. Another group of students are attending the Leningrad School of Ballet. Thus when these two groups complete their training, North Ossetia will be able to set up its own theatre of opera and ballet—thanks once more to the assistance of the Russian people.

In 1946 a State Philharmonic Institution was founded, and many local musical ballet schools are flourishing, A national Documentary Film Studio is in existence,

I should mention here that the Germans during their invasion of North Ossetia in 1942 destroyed many of the 145 libraries and 74 village reading-rooms which existed before the war, and also many of the 85 clubs, large and small. At the industrial centre of Alagir they burned 15,000 books in the public library and completely wrecked the regional museum. We saw photographs of some of this destruction at the Regional Museum. All have been restored, and their numbers added to, since the end of the war.

It is desirable, however, to record these facts, to explain why even in this distant corner of Russia the people were constantly recalling the horrors of war in their conversation with us, and wondering why Britain wanted to rearm the Germans.

My colleagues have described the Beslan works' club, the club at the Stalin collective farm and the Pioneer Palace, where we saw practical proof that the best cultural achievements are made available for the whole working people of North Ossetia. Visits by leading artists, to sing, dance or act in village or factory club, or by

writers to discuss their work with collective farmers or manual labourers, are quite common.

OSSETIAN DEMOCRACY

BY MARGARET WARD

Since I returned from the Soviet Union a friend has drawn my attention to *Darkest Russia*—a weekly magazine which used to be published before the war of 1914-18 by Messrs. Odhams, for a group of British Liberal friends of Russian freedom. I was struck by a quotation in the issue of 27 November, 1912, from the speech of Mr. Haidaroff, a deputy in the Duma from the Northern Caucasus (23 May, 1912), describing the military government which had ruled the Terek province (in which North Ossetia was situated) since 1888. It had, he said, “only resulted in the ruin and degradation of the natives, a general discontent, and an extraordinary development of brigandage”. Another deputy, Tchkhaidze, declared that what the Caucasus needed sorely was “the sweeping away of this colonial policy, which yields nothing beyond a harvest of national hatred”, and “a wide scheme of local self-government and the encouragement of enterprise and other factors of civilisation”. An editorial stated (6 November): “In the Caucasus there is no law save that of official caprice and greed.”

This picture has confirmed what I had picked up in North Ossetia of how the Ossetian people used to be ruled under the old regime in their towns and villages, as well as nationally, by Russian officials, police and army officers. Even the Starosta (village elder)—whom the heads of households (not all adults) had by law to elect—was a police official, and not a real representative of his people. His duties were to see that the village paid its taxes, caught thieves, supplied the annual conscripts, etc. The standard Russian encyclopaedia of those days (*Brockhaus and Efron*) wrote: “The village Starosta as a general rule is not the guardian of the interests of his village, but the lowest agent of the administration”.

Though the village assembly of heads of families had certain limited rights, all its decisions could be set aside by the district chief, usually a local landowner. “All resolutions of the assemblies, and verdicts and findings of the parish courts, are submitted to him. All officials of the peasant administration are his subordinates. His judicial power equals that of a justice of the peace,” stated the *Rus-*

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sian Year Book, 1913 (Eyre and Spottiswoode).

Of the towns, only Vladikavkaz had a city council elected on the basis of property owned or high tax paid, which meant in practice an electorate of perhaps one per cent of the population. Other towns of the Terek province had what Brockhaus and Efron called a system of “simplified self-government”—or in plain English, rule by appointed officials.

In elections to the State Duma (a far from representative assembly), the people of the Caucasus were in a special position: they returned only one deputy per 850,000 voters, whereas in Russian territories the basis was one deputy per 234,000 (only about 25 per cent of adult males, and no females, had a vote). But this was not all. Deputies were elected, not by direct vote, but by provincial “electoral assemblies”. In the Terek province the assembly consisted of six groups: (i) large landowners in person, with delegates of smaller landowners; (ii) large town landlords and manufacturers; (iii) smaller town property-owners; (iv) delegates of Cossack heads of households; (v) *delegates of delegates* from factories with over fifty workers (those employed in smaller factories were disfranchised); (vi) *delegates of delegates of delegates* from the peasantry! And to cap it all, the first two groups—representing a handful of people—had between them a majority of seats in the “provincial assembly”, and therefore could, and did, choose the M.P.!

Thus in fact it was the wealthy, chiefly of Russian nationality, who decided the representation of this area in the Duma. It should be noticed that this was all the more outrageous because it excluded not only the vast majority of the Ossetians (then about 80 per cent of the population) but also the workers of many other nationalities: Russians, Armenians, Jews, etc. (Thus, in December 1953, there were eleven nationalities represented at the school we visited, and twenty-two at the Institute of Education.)

What a complete change the establishment of Soviet power brought!

Since the Revolution there has been a steady rise in the status of the North Ossetian people. As mentioned by Brian Pearce, at the end of 1920 Stalin made a speech at Vladikavkaz (now Ordzhonikidze) announcing the formation of the Highlands Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. We saw the plaque commemorating this event in the foyer of the State Theatre where he spoke. Besides Ossetians this Republic included five other nation-

alities, each of which elected a National Soviet to run their own territory. All peasants and workers had the right to elect and be elected to these National Soviets.

On July 7, 1924 the Highlands A.S.S.R. was dissolved, each nationality by now having distributed the land amongst the peasants and laid the foundations of an educational system. Local Soviets were functioning, and trade unions had been organised in the towns. North Ossetia took a step forward—it became an Autonomous Region within the Russian Federation (R.S.F.S.R.). As a region the Ossetians had far wider powers, particularly in economic and financial matters, than they had had as a National Soviet within the H.A.S.S.R. In 1936 came the final rise in status, when North Ossetia became an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, with its own Constitution and Supreme Soviet (Parliament).

What did we find in 1953? To put it in a nutshell, we found a State run by its working people.

We had a long talk with the vice-president of the Presidium (something like a General Purposes Committee) of the Supreme Soviet, who answered our questions about this body. It consists of 103 deputies, one per 4,000 inhabitants, and elected for four years. They include twenty-four workers, twenty-seven peasants and fifty-two intellectual workers. And these last, it was pointed out, were all the sons and daughters of workers and peasants. The deputies represented seven nationalities, Ossetians in the majority with sixty-six deputies; thirty-two were Russians and five of other nationalities. The deputies kept in close contact with their electors and carried out their instructions. "They help people to better their lives," said the vice-president. Our delegation had already met one deputy in charge of the sugar laboratory at the Beslan works, another a leading actor at the State Theatre, and a third working in the dairy department of a collective farm.

North Ossetia is represented in the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. by twelve deputies—one in the Soviet of the Union, which is elected on a population basis (one for every 300,000 inhabitants); eleven in the Soviet of Nationalities, each Autonomous Republic being entitled to eleven representatives to promote its interests. Very different from Tsarist days! How effective is this representation? I was given this example. At the April 1945, session of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., a deputy from North Ossetia asked in a budget debate for extra funds from the Union for: (1) extra

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housing at Dzaudjikau (the name by which Ordzhonikidze, the capital, was known between 1944 and 1954) and Malgobek, an oil centre, which had suffered heavily from Nazi bombing; and (2) for building a pipeline to convey gas from Malgobek to Dzaudjikau, forty-four miles away, and thus relieve the fuel shortage, there being no coal in North Ossetia. As a result of this request the Finance Minister Zverev, replying to the discussion, announced that one million roubles extra would be allocated to North Ossetia for housing, and that funds would be made available for prospecting the gas proposition. Further funds were promised for development, if the scheme was found to be practicable. In fact, the chairman of the City Soviet told us that gas for heating and cooking would be available in a week's time, i.e. at the end of 1953.

North Ossetia, as an Autonomous Republic, runs its own food, light, fuel, building materials, printing and many other industries, in addition to helping in the management of factories belonging to the U.S.S.R. as a whole or to the Russian Federation situated on its territory; it runs also many agricultural scientific establishments, house-building and road-building organisations, and trading bodies, likewise much of the education, health and social welfare machinery.

This and other advances have all been made possible through help from the Russian people, but this aid has in no way kept North Ossetia in a state of dependence. On the contrary, the aid was intended to develop its economy and make it independent financially. This stage was reached before the war, as is shown by the following table. The deficit had been covered by the Russian Federation of which the Republic forms part:

	Income	Expenditure
1924	830,000 roubles	1,500,000 roubles
1938	63 million roubles	62.3 million roubles
1940	93.7 million roubles	83.2 million roubles

How have the Ossetian people equipped themselves for the responsibilities of self-government?

First by education. My colleagues have already drawn the general picture, but it is the national aspect I should like to stress. Of the 90,000 children at school in 1953-54, 48,000 are Ossetians; of nearly 4,000 teachers in primary and secondary schools, over 2,400 are Ossetians. In all, the higher education system in North Ossetia

has trained 11,400 graduates for various professions since the Revolution— just under 3,900 were Ossetians. At the Institutes themselves, out of 453 professors and readers 108 are of Ossetian nationality. These figures show, I believe, that the backwardness with which they started cannot be overcome all at once, but that it is being overcome.

Secondly by the development of industry, which before the Revolution had been on such a small scale as to be practically non-existent. The industrial workers are the leading class in the U.S.S.R. With the development of industry has come the trade union movement, which is itself an education in the practice of democracy.

As mentioned already by Alfred Percival, the maize-processing factory we visited employed 2,000 workers, 80 per cent of whom were Ossetians. The Ossetians included people in leading jobs such as the deputy director, chief engineer, director of the sugar plant, chairman of the works' Trade Union committee. Ossetians were in charge of transport, communal services, and raw material supply. Moreover, as in factories elsewhere in the U.S.S.R., we found the various sub-committees of the works' committee, assisted by numerous volunteers elected in the various departments, running social insurance, organising safety and health inspection, supervising canteens and shops, helping to draft the wages and production plans, etc.

Thirdly by direct experience of local government, through rural and town Soviets. There are 113 Rural Soviets in the Republic, one of which we visited at the village of Olginskoye. Its twenty-five deputies, elected by secret ballot by all over the age of eighteen (one for every 100 inhabitants), were responsible for all the public services in the village. Of the elected deputies only the secretary and chairman were full-time paid officials. Seventeen deputies were collective farmers, three intellectual workers and the rest workers in other fields. Twenty-two out of the twenty-five were Ossetians. The executive committee of five, including the secretary, was composed of three men and two women, one of the women being also a deputy of the District Soviet. Sub-committees presided over by deputies were responsible for, among other things, education, health, planning and amenities, trade and finance.

Another example of rural democracy was the method of running the Stalin collective farm at Olginskoye, which David Williams has described already. It makes a remarkable contrast with the

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situation existing before 1917, to which I referred earlier.

To turn to the town authorities, the 254 deputies of the City Soviet of Ordzhonikidze, one for every 500 inhabitants, elected for a term of two years by secret ballot by all over eighteen, come, too, from every walk of life and nationality. Its responsibilities include: municipal economy, housing, trade, agriculture, health, education, physical culture and sport, social security, finance, town planning, cultural affairs. For all these there are advisory sub-committees of the Soviet, each presided over by one of the seventeen members of the executive committee, and including by co-optation a number of specially qualified citizens, members of the general public, 300 in all. In addition, we were told, many thousands of citizens help in some form or another of public work: thus, 16,000 children and adults had undertaken to plant and look after trees, now an important aspect of Soviet life! Such volunteers are called activists.

There are three wards or boroughs within the city, each with its own Soviet and similar sub-committees—and activists.

The part played by the North Ossetian women in their country's democracy is a subject in itself, and has been dealt with by Irene Robinson.

I hope that what I have said is enough to convey my impression that the democratic system of North Ossetia is sensible and humane, very different from pre-revolutionary days; and particularly that it is operated by living, flesh-and-blood men and women. It is not the strange inhuman abstraction so often fulminated against by some of our newspapers and professors.



*People's Artist Vladimir Tkhapsayev as Othello.
Zarita Britayeva, chief producer at State Theatre of North Ossetia.*



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Irrigation system in North Ossetia.

Christmas Day, 1953, in a Soviet train.



SHAKESPEARE IN NORTH OSSETIA

BY LESLIE CREDLAND

One evening in December 1953, I sat in a packed theatre, thousands of miles from London, watching a performance of Shakespeare's *Othello* in a language of which I did not understand a single word. Yet from the very start I found my attention gripped in a most unexpected way—and so did all my colleagues, who had been, to say the least, unenthusiastic only an hour before, when we received the invitation to the play.

Both the fiery nature of Othello and the machinations of Iago, his standard-bearer, were superbly presented. Iago was convincing in his assurances of loyalty to his leader, in his apparently well-intentioned advice to Cassio, Othello's lieu tenant, and in his suddenly ferocious dropping of the mask when left alone. The costumes and setting were very good indeed—but the acting was brilliant. We easily followed the mounting passions of love and hate until in act 5, scene 2, the terrible results of Iago's intriguing came to their bloody culmination. The appreciation shown by the audience had to be seen and heard to be believed. At the end of each act they stood up and clapped until one began to wonder whether there was going to be any interval before the next act.

The theatre was full to capacity with people of many nationalities. A higher percentage of the younger generation, and a very noticeable number of school children, were present.

Everyone was obviously delighted at our hearty applause, and particularly the leading actors when we assured them, after the play, that their performance would have been watched with great appreciation in Shakespeare's native land.

The reader may wonder what there was remarkable in all this? Shakespeare is performed in many countries. But this was at Ordzhonikidze, the capital of North Ossetia—in a little country where the vast majority were illiterate before the Revolution, unable to write down their own ancient ballads, much less translate Shakespeare. They had no theatres then, either. Most of them probably did not even know of the existence of Britain.

Within living memory, as I have discovered since my return, Englishmen who visited North Ossetia found that they were “rather a myth in these parts... to be taken on trust, like the miracles of the

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Bible” (Stephen Graham, *A Vagabond in the Caucasus*, 1911). One shepherd asked Graham whether the English were “Christians or Mahometans”, and was England “far away”. The one thing another man had heard about the English was that their business men, “know where all the gold and copper is, and the oil; they’ve got it all mapped out.

What a difference today! *Othello* has been staged here since 1951, with full houses every time it is put on at the State Theatre of Drama, where we saw it. But it is not only Shakespeare in translation who has attracted this recently unlettered and miserable people to our best literature. In some of the many bookshops which we visited at Ordzhonikidze we saw on sale many well-printed and well-bound works of some of our best-known authors. An illustrated copy of Scott’s *Ivanhoe* cost the equivalent of 4s. 6d., and would be a credit to any bookshelf. The pictures—it was for the very young—were the work of artists, with excellent drawing and colouring.

These were translations—but we got a deeper insight as to the interest in Britain and British culture on our very first evening in Ordzhonikidze. We were walking round the Regional Museum, seeing the record of the Ossetian people’s progress from prehistoric ages to the present time, when we became aware of the presence of a young woman who, it transpired, had heard us conversing and took the opportunity of listening to “English as spoken in England”. She had spent four years at the Teachers’ Training Institute, studying English history, English literature and geography and next year would commence as an English teacher in a ten-year secondary school. Her tutors had certainly done their part very well indeed; and if she passed her knowledge on with the same degree of accuracy then the proportion of English-speaking Russians to the Russian-speaking English will be even more phenomenal than it is already—for she must be only one of thousands. We had hoped to meet her again on the following day at her Institute, but were unable to arrange our tour to coincide with her hours of attendance. However, we met her elsewhere, and were soon to find out that this was only one of the very many people we should meet who spoke English.

The school in North Ossetia is where the foundations of cultural life are laid. I would not presume to express my opinion as to why—but the fact is that in North Ossetia English has been chosen by the youth as the first foreign language for preference, whilst

German is the second. The fluency and accuracy of pronunciation were most impressive—particularly when we found ourselves besieged by young people, anxious to try their English on us and to ask us questions about the movement for peace in Britain, during the intervals at two brilliant public concerts we attended.

During one of our many excursions we visited a girls' school at Ordzhonikidze, where an English class in its second year was in progress. From the opening of the lesson the teacher spoke in English. One of the pupils read a paragraph from a textbook. It was not an easy passage, but the child had only to be corrected three times for pronunciation. After the reading in English the pupil translated the passage into Russian. Our interpreter was able to crosscheck the verbal translation. It was very encouraging to hear the correct pronunciation of teacher and child. This was not an isolated case.

In the upper classes of ten-year secondary schools all children have to choose a foreign language, and English seemed the most favoured among the children. How surprised the delegation were, half-way through the four-hour dinner with which our hosts at the Stalin collective farm regaled them, when a shy young girl who had been sitting quietly at the table, saying nothing, suddenly spoke in perfect English!

My colleagues have already described this incident in other chapters, but this was just a little piece of evidence of how deep down the study of the English language and literature goes nowadays in this former colony, where contact with Englishmen amounted to its village folk acting as porters or selling food to British mountaineers.

I may mention that at Minsk, in Soviet Belorussia, many hundreds of miles away (where we saw a magnificent performance of *King Lear*), we also found English to be the favoured foreign language at one of the large mixed schools, No. 11, where the pupils mostly came from families employed at the big tractor works. They begin learning English in class 5, at twelve years of age, and we found an English lesson in progress here too. The children had done "lesson 5" for homework. Their teacher said (in English): "Close your copy books. Who will tell us what was in the lesson?" The girl who put up her hand made quite a good show—and when she made a mistake there was a smart boy ready to put her right! We complimented the teacher on their pronunciation. In this school no less than twelve senior classes out of sixteen have chosen English as

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their foreign language. They begin studying English literature in the 5th class, at eleven.

But to come back to North Ossetia. One of our most interesting visits was to the Teachers' Training Institute I mentioned. This is in a fine modern building, many acres in extent; but it is the oldest place of higher education in North Ossetia. Obviously the first need of an illiterate people was for teachers. Today, as Tom Hill has described earlier, it gives a four-year training to intending secondary school teachers; and one of its five faculties is that of Foreign Languages. Over half the students in this faculty are training to be English teachers. We attended a class in English and another in English Literature. The students learn Old English, and also read Chaucer, Milton and Shakespeare in the original—as well as the ever-popular Dickens, Thackeray, Byron and modern writers. It was interesting to find a Chinese girl in one class. At a little ceremony we presented an English book, signed on the fly-leaf by all members of the delegation, to the secretary of the Student Faculty Committee, and she returned thanks in a simple little speech—in English.

To sum up. From the first day at school the Ossetian boy and girl are being taught to have an outlook which may be described as international, not personal or insular. To them the world is inhabited by human beings, no matter what their race or colour. They desire to imbibe the best, no matter from what quarter it may come, and to give the best.

This explains their love of such plays as Shakespeare's *King Lear*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Othello*; Dickens' *Dombey and Son*, presented as a play; Shaw's *Pygmalion* and Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. These were all running during the time we were in the U.S.S.R.—not, of course, all in North Ossetia. It is a comforting thought that, despite all the abuse or ridicule of the Soviet people and Soviet culture which one finds in a large section of the British press, the peoples of the U.S.S.R.—even this little North Ossetian nation in a remote corner of the country—are big enough and far-sighted enough not to respond in the same ignorant and malicious way.

Three illustrations of this bring me back to the State Theatre with which I started. As we shook hands with Vladimir Tkhap-sayev, the gifted Shakespearean actor who played *Othello*, still in his make-up and gorgeous clothes, in the director's crowded little room, we learned that he is a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the

North Ossetian Republic—elected for his public services on the stage! The chief producer, Zarita Britayeva, holds the tide of Meritorious Artist of the Republic, and is a daughter of one of the first Ossetian dramatists, exiled several times under the Tsarist regime. And the translator, Grigori Pliev, is one of the best modern writers of North Ossetia, Thus it may truly be said that our English Bard has attracted some of the best talents in North Ossetian culture.

On Christmas Eve, at about 4 p.m., we boarded the train for Moscow after a send-off of bouquets of flowers, many handshakes and warm good wishes from a big and representative body of our hosts—Osman Dauev (vice-president of the Presidium of the North Ossetian Supreme Soviet), Hadji-Murat Huzmiev (secretary of that body), Mr. Hoziev and Mme. Hosieva (chairman and vice-chairman respectively of the Ordzhonikidze City Soviet), Mr. Zatsiev (head of the Municipal Cultural Affairs Department), Mme. Ikayeva (People's Artist of the Republic), Mme. Sveshnikova (secretary of the Regional Trades Council) and Mr. Tokayev (a dramatist famous all over the U.S.S.R.)—with many railway men, students and school-girls waving us “Goodbye”. We thought, as we settled down for two days and two nights in our comfortable four-berth compartments (wider and more roomy than on British lines), that the generous hospitality and facilities which had made our work so easy in North Ossetia were now something to look back to.

But this was misjudging the kindness of our hosts. Later the same day, under pledge of deadly secrecy, one of our number—Margaret Ward of Newcastle—was asked to go along to the kitchen of the restaurant car and give expert advice on “how the English cook Christmas turkeys”. She found there a huge bird, bought in the city market on the very morning of our departure and put in the refrigerator, a last present from North Ossetia. And sure enough, at 2 p.m. on Christmas Day, when we took our places in the restaurant car (which was reserved to the delegation for three hours—not a hardship to our Russian fellow passengers, who dine late) a magnificent Christmas turkey made its appearance, loudly cheered by the delegates. Never was there a bird which melted in the mouth so easily!

With two excellent cakes baked for the occasion by the kitchen staff, and the famous dry red wines of Georgia followed by Azerbaidjan port, the ground was well prepared for a typical English family gathering, with comic songs, choruses and an

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impromptu sketch in verse. And that is how Christmas was celebrated in a Soviet train, midway between Ordzhonikidze and Moscow, thanks to the forethought of our friends in North Ossetia.

TO THE READER

The two bodies responsible for sending the delegation whose report is contained in this book are:

THE BRITISH SOVIET FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY

THE SCOTLAND-U.S.S.R. FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY

Their objects are: to strengthen friendship and understanding between the peoples of this island and the U.S.S.R.: to spread factual information about our respective countries among the peoples of Great Britain and the U.S.S.R. respectively: and to secure the fulfilment of the Twenty Years' Treaty of Alliance between Great Britain and the U.S.S.R. on May 26, 1942.

If you agree with these objects, irrespective of politics or creed, join one of our Societies.

RUSSIA TODAY, illustrated (bimonthly).

RUSSIA TODAY NEWSLETTER, (fortnightly).