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THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION IN TURKESTAN AFTER THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract:

This article examines the socio-economic situation in Turkestan following the October Revolution of 1917 and analyzes its major consequences. The establishment of Bolshevik rule led to political instability, economic decline, food shortages, changes in property relations, and a deterioration in the living standards of the population. The exclusion of local representatives from governing institutions and the neglect of the national, religious, and social interests of the indigenous population intensified public dissatisfaction. The article also highlights the suppression of the Turkestan Autonomy and the growing resistance to Soviet authority. These developments demonstrate that the new political system failed to gain broad support among the local population and further deepened the existing socio-economic problems in the region.

Keywords: Turkestan, October Revolution, Bolshevik government, socio-economic situation, economic decline, food shortage, Turkestan Autonomy, Soviet authority, local population, political resistance.

On September 12, 1917, the Executive Committee of the Tashkent Soviet was re-elected. The committee, chaired by a Left Socialist-Revolutionary, included 16 Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, 10 Mensheviks, and 9 Bolsheviks. Not a single representative of the local population was included in its membership. On the night of September 12–13, 1917, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee held



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a joint meeting with the newly elected Executive Committee and adopted a decision to remove General V. Cherkes from command.

In September and October 1917, when the issue of seizing power was placed directly on the political agenda, the All-Turkestan Muslim Council operated on the basis of its own independent programme. The complex situation that emerged during this period brought the organizations Shuro-i Islam and Shuro-i Ulama closer together. This is also evident from the convening of the Second and Third Congresses of the Muslims of Turkestan and the resolutions adopted at them.

The Second Congress of the Muslims of Turkestan was convened on the initiative of Shuro-i Ulama on 17–20 September 1917. The congress resolution specifically emphasized that the time had come for the organizations Shuro-i Islam, Turan, and Shuro-i Ulama to unite and act as a single force. With the aim of centralizing their efforts, the congress decided to establish a unified political organization—the Ittifoq-i Muslimin Party, or the Union of Muslims—which would bring together all Muslim organizations and societies in Turkestan.

The congress adopted a highly significant resolution concerning Turkestan’s national statehood and its future. The resolution on local government stated:

“The 10 million Muslims who constitute 98 per cent of the population of Turkestan possess an absolute right to national and cultural autonomy based on the principles of freedom, peace, and brotherhood proclaimed by the Russian Revolution. A local government should therefore be established consisting primarily of Muslim representatives, together with a certain number of representatives of other political organizations. The concentration of power in the hands of workers’, soldiers’, and peasants’ organizations composed of small and accidental groups alien to the interests of the indigenous population is contrary to the principles of popular sovereignty and is incapable of ensuring a just social order for the local Muslim population.”



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Therefore, instead of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which was regarded as undemocratic and colonial in character, the congress substantiated the idea of establishing a territorial autonomous federation within the Russian Republic. This idea was set out in the congress resolution as follows:

1. To establish the Federative Republic of Turkestan within the Russian Federation;
2. To establish a twelve-member Turkestan Regional Committee in Tashkent to administer the population of the region. It was planned that the committee would include three representatives from the Congress of the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies, three representatives from municipal executive bodies, and six representatives from Muslim congresses;
3. To establish the Mahkama-i Sharia—a supreme legislative body, or parliament—and the office of its Shaykh al-Islam, or chief prosecutor. The body was to consist of 24 members elected for a five-year term. Its membership was specified as including five representatives from the Congress of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies and 24 representatives from the Congress of the Muslims of the region;
4. The Mahkama-i Sharia was to conduct its activities in accordance with Sharia law and the fundamental laws, or Constitution, of the Russian Republic. It was also stipulated that the Syr Darya, Samarkand, Fergana, and Trans-Caspian regions should, in accordance with the will of their populations, possess the right to form separate territorial autonomous federations and become part of the Federative Republic of Turkestan.

While the various political forces seeking power in Turkestan were struggling for supremacy, the Bolsheviks carried out a military coup in Petrograd on 25–27 October 1917 and forcibly overthrew the Provisional Government. This event was, naturally, unexpected even for the citizens of Russia.



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In order to consolidate their victory at the centre, the Bolsheviks resorted to political manoeuvring and adopted the Decrees on Land and Peace at the Second Congress of Soviets on 27 October 1917. N. K. Krupskaya later recalled that V. I. Lenin had borrowed the idea of the Decree on Land from the Socialist Revolutionaries. However, the country did not support socialist transformation. Therefore, it was evident that the Bolsheviks would not be able to retain power for long. At the same time, the question of political power was ultimately to be decided by the Constituent Assembly. The Provisional Government had adopted a resolution to convene the Constituent Assembly, and Lenin and the Bolsheviks could not openly oppose it.

Elections to the Constituent Assembly were held after the October Revolution. According to the election results, the socialist parties received a total of 59.6 per cent of the seats, including 40.4 per cent for the Socialist Revolutionaries and 2.7 per cent for the Mensheviks. The Bolsheviks received 24 per cent, while the bourgeois parties secured 16.4 per cent.

News that the Provisional Government had been overthrown through a military coup in Petrograd and that power had passed into the hands of the Bolsheviks reached Tashkent on 27 October 1917. The information was sent by A. Frolov and D. Dekanov, who had represented Turkestan at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Similar news was also sent to the region through F. Kolesov. On the same day, the Executive Committee of the Tashkent Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies sent A. Kozhevnikov to the military units in Kushka and Jizzakh to request assistance and began preparations for an armed uprising. In Turkestan, all political forces except the Bolsheviks condemned and opposed the October military coup in Petrograd.

Having learned that preparations for an armed uprising had begun in Tashkent, Chief Commissioner Korovichenko declared martial law in the city of Tashkent



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and Tashkent Uyezd on 27 October 1917. However, this measure proved ineffective. On 28 October, an armed uprising began in Tashkent, and on 1 November, Tuproqo‘rg‘on, the last stronghold of the Provisional Government in the city, was captured. Thus, a military coup was also carried out in Tashkent. Military units from Kushka, Jizzakh, Krasnovodsk, Chorjo‘y, and other cities provided significant support to the coup in Tashkent.

The Third Congress of the Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’, and Peasants’ Deputies of Turkestan was held from 15 to 22 November 1917. A total of 114 delegates attended the congress, while representatives of the region’s Muslim population participated with consultative voting rights. The central issue discussed at the congress was the political character and structure of the regional government. Speaking on behalf of the Council of Muslims of Turkestan, Sherali Lapin opposed the establishment of the rule of “a single revolutionary democracy” in the region. He emphasized that although Muslims could demand that political power in Turkestan be placed entirely in their own hands, they were nevertheless prepared to make certain concessions to the interests of the immigrant population and allow its representatives to participate in government.

The Bolshevik government headed by V. I. Lenin was well aware that the peoples of Turkestan were struggling for autonomy. This issue had already been openly raised among the ruling circles in Petrograd during the period of the Provisional Government. The words of A. F. Kerensky, Prime Minister of the Provisional Government, clearly confirm this: “The Provisional Government is aware of the needs of Turkestan and listens to them attentively. The people of Turkestan must patiently await the decisions of the Constituent Assembly.”

A legitimate question therefore arises as to why the Soviet government and the Bolshevik Party not only refused to grant autonomy to the peoples of Turkestan but also prevented their representatives from participating in the Soviet



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government. Although the Bolshevik administration established in Turkestan under F. I. Kolesov appeared outwardly different from the colonial government of Tsarist Russia and its Turkestan Governor-Generalship, in its internal content and essence it did not differ from them. Moreover, the colonial policy of the so-called Red Empire, implemented through highly calculated methods during the years of Soviet rule, as well as the devastating massacres and repressions inflicted upon the peoples of the country, left an even more tragic mark on the history of our homeland than the policies pursued under Tsarist Russia.

Following the Third Congress of the Soviets of Turkestan, F. I. Kolesov, Chairman of the Regional Council of People's Commissars, sent a telegram to V. I. Lenin. In it, he reported that the Turkestan Committee of the Provisional Government had been overthrown, that the Third Regional Congress of Soviets had been convened, that Soviet power had been established in the region, and described the general situation in Turkestan. In the telegram, Kolesov assured Lenin that the new Turkestan government fully supported the central authorities. However, before sending such a telegram, F. I. Kolesov neither attempted nor intended to study the wishes, aspirations, and interests of the local population.

The Soviet authorities did not recognize the Turkestan Autonomy, which had been established at the Extraordinary Fourth Congress of the Muslims of Turkestan held in Kokand from 26 to 28 November 1917. On 21 February 1918, it was overthrown by force and terror with the assistance of Red Army and Dashnak military units, while civilians and supporters of the autonomy were subjected to repression.

The October Revolution was imposed on Turkestan by force by a group of individuals who had arrived from Russia, contrary to the objective laws of the region's historical development, and it was not accepted by the local population. The Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed by the



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Fifth Regional Congress of Soviets, held in Tashkent from 20 April to 1 May 1918. The republic included the Trans-Caspian, Samarkand, Semirechye, Syr Darya, and Fergana regions. However, the people of Turkestan did not fully accept the new government that had been established by force. This was clearly stated in a report of the Turkestan Cheka covering the period from 15 September to 1 October 1918. The report stated:

“At present, it is still too early to say that genuine Soviet power, supported by broad sections of the working population, has been established in the Turkestan Republic. Soviet and party institutions are filled with elements that have nothing in common either with the proletariat or with the Communist Party. This is especially evident in the activities of volost and rural executive committees. Because of the absence of party work among the population, kulaks dominate the areas inhabited by Russians, while wealthy groups dominate among the Muslim population. The agrarian question is being resolved entirely in favour of the kulaks. The Russian Communist Party is in a state of complete inactivity. For example, the Andijan party organization resembles a decaying corpse. The population has no understanding of either the objectives of Soviet power or the significance of the Russian Communist Party. Therefore, any change in the structure of local government gives rise to counter-revolutionary manifestations.”

In conclusion, the political and socio-economic situation that emerged in Turkestan after the October Revolution further aggravated the region’s existing problems. The establishment of Bolshevik rule resulted in economic decline, food shortages, radical changes in property relations, and a deterioration in the population’s standard of living. The failure to give adequate consideration to the national, religious, and social interests of the local population intensified dissatisfaction with Soviet rule.



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