

THE LAST

colonies

IN ASIA

U.S.S.R. ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES

**THE LAST
COLONIES
IN ASIA**

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INTRODUCTION

Starting from the 16th century, such West-European countries as Portugal, Spain, and later France, Holland and Great Britain launched on a predatory policy in the East.

The plundering of colonies was one of the main sources of the primitive accumulation of capital, which accelerated the development of industry in Britain and, partly, in France and Holland.

Having ousted their semi-feudal competitors — Portugal and Spain — these capitalist powers started a bitter struggle among themselves for the rich Asiatic territories. In the course of this struggle and as a result of predatory wars, the British, French and Dutch colonialists had succeeded in building up huge colonial empires. The greatest of these—the British Empire—right up to the second world war had a population of more than 500 million people. Even so small a country as Holland exploited colonies with a population of over 80 million.

The appearance of new imperialist plunderers who strove for a repartition of colonial possessions—Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States—played a great part in unleashing the first and second world wars.

Small colonial countries, such as Portugal or Belgium, were able to keep their possessions in Africa and Asia due to the acute contradictions among the great powers in their fierce fight for colonies, markets, and spheres of capital investments.

The policy of the colonialists in the countries of Asia passed through a number of stages.

In the 16th-18th centuries, the colonies were objects of plunder and an important source of primitive accumulation of capital for the West-European countries.

In the period of pre-monopolistic capitalism, the colonies gradually became an agrarian appendage to these West-European countries, supplying them with raw materials and consuming the industrial goods produced by the colonial powers.

In the epoch of imperialism the countries of Asia and Africa began to serve also as spheres of capital investment. The export of capital to the colonies led to the intense exploitation of many millions of working people, yielding immense profits for the City and Wall Street money magnates, for the tycoons of Crédit Lyonnais and the Indo-Chinese Bank, as well as for the oil, tin, and caoutchouc monopolies.

The methods and forms of exploitation used in Asiatic and African colonies depended on the specific features and level of economic development of the colonial powers. Particularly complex and varied have been the methods of Great Britain in over 400 years of its colonial policy: they range from outright colonial slavery to various degrees of semi-colonial dependence (protectorates, mandates, trusteeship territories, etc.).

The Great October Socialist Revolution, which abolished the exploitation of man by man on one-sixth of the earth, showed the oppressed peoples of Asia and Africa the way to struggle for their liberation; it gave an impetus to the upsurge of the national-liberation movement in the East, and began the general crisis of capitalism, an integral part of which is the crisis of the imperialist colonial system.

In the period between the two world wars, the mighty anti-imperialist movement spread through China, India, Indonesia, Burma, Viet Nam, Korea, Malaya and the Arab countries. Though different in character, in each country it was directed against imperialist oppression.

The victory of the Soviet Union in the second world war, and the defeat of German, Italian and Japanese imperialism, dealt a second telling blow to the imperialist system of colonial oppression.

The general crisis of capitalism was further aggravated by the fact that a number of countries in Europe and Asia launched on the socialist way of development, thus forming a world-wide socialist system. The historic victory of the great Chinese people was of particular importance

in this respect. It led to the deepening of the general crisis of capitalism and to a drastic weakening in the position of such old colonial powers as Britain and France.

This created favourable conditions for an unprecedented sweep of the liberation movement among the peoples of Asia and Africa. It started the disintegration of the entire colonial system. On the ruins of the former colonial empires of Great Britain, France, Holland and Japan, over a score of independent states have sprung up. The peoples of Asia refuse to be objects of colonial oppression and are taking their destiny into their own hands.

An exhaustive characterization of the crisis and collapse of the colonial system was given by the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U.:

"The desintegration of the colonial system of imperialism is a world historic event of the post-war period. The national-liberation struggle of the colonial and semi-colonial nations has been crowned with great victories during the past ten years. More than 1,200 million people—nearly half the population of the world—have been liberated from colonial and semi-colonial dependence. Complete abolition of the colonial system is now on the order of the day. The new period in world history foreseen by the great Lenin has set in — the period when the peoples of the East are taking an active part in deciding the destinies of the world and are becoming a new, powerful factor in international relations" ¹.

The national-liberation movement has acquired the widest scope on the earth's largest continent: Asia. While at the end of the second world war about 600 million people lived in the colonies on that continent, by the end of 1957, as a result of the victories won by the anti-imperialist movement, the population of the remaining colonies was only 12 million.

The formation of independent states in Asia and Africa proceeded along two main lines: in countries where the liberation movement was headed by the working class and its Communist Party, states of a socialist type arose. In other countries of the East the liberation movement was victorious under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie.

¹ *Resolution of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, New Times, № 10, p. 3, Moscow, March 1956.*

Due to a sharp decline in the strength of world capitalism and the appearance of the socialist camp, the peoples of these countries also succeeded in winning their political independence. In the majority of these countries, however, they have not yet won complete economic independence.

The great successes of the anti-imperialist movement in the eastern countries should not obscure the fact that colonialism still remains a serious menace for millions of people. In May 1956, President of Indonesia Sukarno declared in Washington: "We are told that colonialism is dead, and that we keep lashing at a dead horse. Our answer to that is simple enough. Come to Asia and see for yourselves. Come to Africa and see for yourselves."

The situation in the countries of the East proves how true are the words of this eminent statesman of Asia.

To begin with, about 140 million people in Asia and Africa are still living in colonial slavery.

Secondly, the imperialist powers are trying to utilize their possessions in Africa and the remaining colonies in Asia as bases for all sorts of plots and provocations against the independence of the newly-formed states in Asia and Africa.

Thirdly, the imperialists, headed by the U.S.A. monopolies, are trying to split the liberation movement of the eastern peoples, to draw the countries of Asia and Africa into aggressive blocs, and to set them against one another.

Fourthly, economic backwardness, the worst legacy of colonialism, is causing great suffering to many millions of people in these countries.

In the post-war years the national income per capita in the Asian countries was one-twelfth of that in Britain. The figures for 1955 show that in Burma, Pakistan, Thailand and Ceylon it was a one-twenty-first part of that in the U.S.A. And still the imperialist powers of Europe and America are trying to impede the development of production in Asiatic countries, to check the growth of all the principal industries.

Such a policy is the main hindrance to the improvement of the economic conditions of the masses in Asian and African countries.

The imperialists' intrigues in Asia and Africa, their attempts to turn back the course of history and retain

their political and economic domination in a number of countries of Asia and Africa evoke the ever-growing indignation and protest of public opinion on both the continents. This has found its reflection in the decisions of the historic Bandung Conference, which branded colonialism as a disgrace for mankind.

The imperialist policy of the ruling circles of West-European countries and the United States towards the eastern countries meets more and more often with defeat. This is also obvious from the results of the latest sessions of the U. N. O. General Assembly. Particularly telling is the failure of the Anglo-Franco-Israeli aggression and the victory of the heroic Egyptian people.

The notorious "Eisenhower-Dulles doctrine" the outrageous interference in Jordan's home affairs on the part of American agents, the violations by the U.S.A. of the armistice in Korea, the provocations in Syria—are all facts showing that the imperialists are using "new" methods to conduct the old colonial policy which has long proved bankrupt.

In their attempt to preserve the colonial system and save it from utter collapse, the imperialists are concentrating particular attention on their last colonial possessions in Asia: Aden and some other territories on the Arabian Peninsula, Goa, Diu and Daman in India, West Irian, British Borneo and Singapore in South-East Asia, Macao and Hongkong in the Far East. These places are regarded as springboards for all sorts of subversive actions and plotting against the liberation and independence of the countries of Asia.

The British monopolists are doing their utmost to retain Singapore and Aden, their most important possessions in South-East Asia and in the Near East. Singapore commands the route from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, while Aden commands all approaches to the Indian Ocean from the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. That is why it is often called the "Near-Eastern Singapore." The strategic significance of these territories for Britain is clear. Singapore is also of vital economic importance as an industrial and port centre on the Malay Peninsula; it is one of the world's largest producers of tin and caoutchouc, while Aden and the neighbouring Arabian sultanates lie in the centre of the most important oil region in the world

One should bear in mind, too, that both these possessions, the most vital strongholds of British imperialism, are situated in South-East Asia and the Near East, i. e., in the heart of the districts swept by the mighty waves of the liberation movement.

For nine years the British imperialists waged a bloody war against the peoples of Malaya. It cost them tens of millions of pounds as well as great losses in man-power and brought no end of harm to the development of Malaya's productive forces. At last it became clear to the British monopolists that they could not check the people's will to liberty. So the ruling circles of Britain decided to resort to compromise.

The British government was compelled to grant independence to the Federated Malay States in August 1957. Attempts are being made in London to represent this as proof of the peaceful and anti-colonialist tendencies of the ruling circles of Britain.

The fact remains, however, that this step was taken by the British government only after the stark failure of the nine-year sanguinary war against the peoples of Malaya.

Moreover, British military bases and army units have remained on the territory of the Federated Malay States, and they are meant to be used against the liberation movement in the Federation and for war actions beyond its borders.

Finally, Singapore—the main economic centre of Malaya, its leading industrial district and chief port—is severed from the rest of the country; this means the loss of the most important tin-smelting factories, railway shops, warehouses and essential port structures. It also means the loss of a million people. Thus, although they signed the declaration of independence of the Malay Federation, the British imperialists are actually hampering the economic development of the Federated Malay States, depriving them of a most important industrial and trading centre, retaining their military positions in the country, and impeding the moulding of a Malay nation.

A still more active aggressive policy is pursued by the British monopolists in Aden, the "Singapore of the Near East." Taking advantage of the scant development of capitalist relations and the weakness of the bourgeoisie in that part of the Arabian Peninsula, the British monop-

lies overtly support the most reactionary feudal circles in the South-Arabian sultanates. The imperialists have converted Aden into a bridge-head for endless provocations against the peace-loving Arab state of Yemen. British aircraft take off from Aden aerodromes and bomb peaceful settlements.

Utilizing Muscat, their other military base in South-East Arabia, the British colonialists in the past two years have tried to destroy the independence of Oman and launched an aggression against Saudi Arabia by seizing the Buraimi oasis. These actions pursue a double aim: to strengthen British positions in South Arabia by weakening Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and also to counteract the influence of the American competitors by retaining the British monopoly in the oil districts of South Arabia. The intrigues of the British imperialists in this region are arousing the indignation of progressive public opinion all over the world.

No less aggressive is the policy of the Dutch imperialists. In violation of their obligations, they refuse to give West Irian back to Indonesia and have turned it into a military base for subversive activity against the Indonesian Republic. Needless to say that enfeebled Dutch imperialism would never have been able to follow this line of action without the support of the U.S.A., its senior partner in the North Atlantic Pact.

In recent years West Irian has been more and more openly converted into a military base of SEATO, an organization in which the U.S.A. plays the decisive role. At the same time the West Irian problem is being used by American diplomatic circles for blackmailing the Indonesian peoples. Not so long ago the world press aired the news that American emissaries had unofficially promised to give West Irian back to Indonesia provided the Indonesian government consented to join the aggressive SEATO bloc. This proposal was rejected but that did not deter the American and Dutch imperialists from continuing their machinations in that region.

The American monopolists give equally open support to the Portuguese, the last colonialists in India. Despite the demands of the entire Indian people, the Portuguese rulers still refuse to give up Goa, Diu and Daman which they seized over 400 years ago. The Goa district, swamped

with American arms and ammunition, is a serious menace to the peaceful Republic of India.

During his visit to India, N. S. Khrushchev expressed the feelings of the entire Soviet people when he said: "There still are such countries which, like ticks, cling to healthy bodies. I have in mind Portugal which refuses to withdraw from Goa and to relinquish that lawful part of India. Yet, sooner or later, Goa will shake off its alien fetters and re-enter the Republic of India as its integral part."²

In an effort to keep their hold on the last colonies in Asia, the imperialists are resorting to all sorts of manoeuvres. Britain, while granting independence to the Federated Malay States, retains her military bases there and cuts off Singapore from Malaya. In South Arabia, Britain is conducting military operations with the support of the local feudal rulers. The Portuguese invaders hypocritically speak of "reuniting" their possessions in India with the "mother-country", proclaiming Goa, Diu and Daman Portuguese provinces. The same methods are used by the Dutch colonialists in West Irian. These actions are supported and abetted by Washington.

The United States has become the main bulwark of colonialism. It has formed the Baghdad Pact and SEATO to fight the national-liberation movement in Asia and Africa; it is arming Portugal and Holland and egging them on to keep their colonial possessions at any cost; it is also erecting military bases there. Under cover of slogans to counter the "threat of communism" in Asia and Africa, the American monopolies are conducting an active policy of "neo-colonialism" to avert the disintegration of the colonial system, to force out their imperialist competitors and hinder in every way the economic development of the eastern countries.

The peoples of Asia, however, are fully aware of all the trickery and machinations of imperialist diplomacy and colonial policy. The Bandung Conference, attended by the leaders of 29 countries of Asia and Africa, demanded that West Irian be returned to Indonesia; Goa and other territories, to India; Aden, to the Arabs. In late December 1957, representatives of over 40 countries to the Solidarity

² *Mission of Friendship*, Moscow, 1956, p. 133.

Conference of Afro-Asian Peoples in Cairo pledged their loyalty to the principles of Bandung and demanded most emphatically the immediate abolition of colonialism. There is no doubt that the peoples of Asia will succeed in accomplishing this.

The government of the Soviet Union, which strictly adheres to its Leninist national policy, has a thorough understanding of, and deep sympathy for, the just struggle of the colonial and dependent peoples.

Public opinion in the Soviet Union takes a lively interest in the Asian peoples' struggle against the colonialists and wishes them speedy victory so that no more colonies remain on the beautiful land of Asia.

The historical Declaration of the Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties adopted in November 1957 in Moscow, sharply censuring colonialism, received the support of the whole Soviet people.

The authors of this publication³ aim at giving a brief history and an outline of the present-day position of the last colonial possessions in Asia. They want to expose the methods used by the imperialist powers to strengthen the colonial system, and, last but not least, to portray the powerful liberation movement which will inevitably put an end to the last remnants of colonial rule on the ancient continent of Asia.

³ This is a translation from the Russian edition published in 1958.

G. L. Bondarevsky

BRITISH POSSESSIONS IN ARABIA

On the Arabian Peninsula, along the shores of the Arabian Sea and the Persian, Oman and Aden gulfs, are numerous Arabian principalities: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the Compact States, the Muscat Sultanate, the independent imamate of Oman, East Aden (Hadhramaut) and West Aden.

A small district at the mouth of the Red Sea surrounds the town of Aden; the strategically important islands of Kuria Muria, Perim and Kamaran are officially Crown possessions. The remaining districts are formally not considered colonies. But no matter what the relations between these Arab principalities and Britain are, the fact remains that they are all, large and small, in colonial dependence on Great Britain.

The area of these principalities, with a population of some two million, is approximately 600,000 square kilometres.

The whole district is a desert plain, sloping from west to east. The mountainous part in the far south-west (West Aden) rises to an elevated plateau which gradually slopes toward the east. There is a sharp elevation in the plateau only in the extreme eastern part of the peninsula, in Oman, where some of the mountain peaks reach a height of 3,000 metres.

The principalities are located within the heat belt, almost entirely devoid of the beneficial effects of monsoons, and are among the most arid districts in the world. There are no rivers in the south and south-eastern parts of the Arabian Peninsula, with the exception of the few rivulets

in West Aden which get lost in the sands and fail to reach the sea. Only in winter, in the periods of rare but turbulent downpours, do streams of rain-water sweep into the hollows of dried-up riverbeds—wadi as they are called—and accumulate in natural and in man-made reservoirs. The population also makes use of wells and a system of underground canals. The lack of fresh water over almost the entire territory determines the character of the local flora. The scorching rays of the summer sun burn up all the vegetation. The landscape in these area is just a gloomy desert. In the struggle with the grim natural elements of Arabia the inhabitants have learned to seek for and find water—the source of life—in this merciless country. The green oases have become the centres of the farming population. The largest of these are Lahej, Muscat, Sharja and others.

In the mountainous districts, artificial terrace-fields have been created by the back-breaking toil of many generations of fellahs. The earth for these fields is often brought in baskets from mountains many kilometres away. The people of the Arab principalities are hardy and industrious,—excellent seafarers, fearless pearl-fishers, and skilled craftsmen.

Besides the Arabs, who constitute the majority of the population in these principalities, there are Persians, Somalis, Belujis, Indians and Negroes living along the sea-coast and in towns of the inland areas.

The people's creed is Islam. In Kuwait, Aden, Qatar, Trucial Oman and in a number of districts of Muscat nearly all the inhabitants are Sunnites.¹ About half the population of Bahrain profess Shiism.² The adherents of the Ibadite³ sects inhabit the Muscat Sultanate and the territory of the independent Oman imamate.

The population consists primarily of settled farmers—fellahs and nomad-Bedouins.

All the principalities are backward agricultural regions

¹ Sunnism, the main trend in Islam which acknowledges, together with the Koran, Sunna, the "holy tradition" on the sayings and the examples of Mohammed.

² Shiism, another trend in Islam. Its adherents deny Sunna and subject the Koran to figurative interpretation.

³ Ibadite, one of the Moslem sects characterized by their election of religious leaders.