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COMMUNISM IN YAKUTIA-THE FIRST DECADE (1918-1928)

E. Stuart Kirby

Introduction

The country of the Yakuts — Yakutia, the territory of the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (YASSR) as it became in 1922, the vast hinterland of the Soviet Far East and Eastern Siberia — is a most significant and interesting component of the Soviet Union in Asia[1]. It has enormous mineral, fual and other resources, of primary interest to Japan and the world, still only beginning to be developed. Populated mainly by the Yakuts (a 'Turkic'-speaking people with ancient and peculiar characteristics of their own), a comparatively small number of Russians (many of these more or less 'Yakutised') and very small and scattered minorities of other indigenous peoples of the Northlands, it is a special case in many ways; including that of being rapidly and purposefully changed from a 'primitive' and 'feudal' condition (in the Marxist sense of that term, i. e. backward and pre-capitalist, not in the European and Japanese sense of having a fief system of society) into a Soviet Socialist entity heading towards Communism.

Remote and isolated, Yakutia has long been mysterious to the rest of the world, which has had little information on it in either Tsarist or Soviet times. As with the rest of the USSR, however, a 'thaw' began in this respect a few years after the death of Stalin in 1953. In the 1960 s pre-existing and newly-current documentation began increasingly to be released, in Russian and in Yakut (some of the latter translated or quoted in Russian). In the 1970 s, such flow of factual information and commentary has considerably broadened and been to some extent regularised. There are now a host of sources that could be drawn on, and urgently merit wide and deep study. Only a sampling of the literature is mentioned below, but two works by an authoritative Soviet spokesman with long, close and high-level experience in Yakutia must be mentioned as basic at the present stage[2,3]. The author of those two works claims that they give the first fundamental conspectus ever published, especially on the economic and social history of Yakutia. There is a large official Soviet History of a more general nature, which is hard to obtain[4].

It is timely, then, to attempt at least an introductory presentation of this subject

1) E. Stuart Kirby, *The Soviet Far East*, London 1971, Ch. 8 and *passim*. (In English, All ofher works cited below are in Russian)
2) Z. V. Gogolev, *Yakutia between (na rubezhe) the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Novosibirsk 1970.
3) ibid., *Socio-economic Development of Yakutia*, Novosibirsk 1972.
4) *History of the YASSR*, vol. 3, Moscow 1963.

to the world public; and such is the purpose of this paper. It deals with the socio-economic phenomenology of Yakutia, because that is the fundamental aspect from the Soviet viewpoint and because the present writer is primarily an International (Development) Economist. (He has no knowledge of the Yakut language but visited Yakutia in 1976 and has travelled and researched extensively in Siberia and other parts of the USSR during the last fifty years). This article deals with the first period of Soviet *osvoyenie* (absorption) of Yakutia, from the Revolution up to the inception of full planning and collectivisation ten years later. There is no space here to carry the account further; but it is hoped to do so in later publications. The present is only a brief and partial introduction; it is highly desirable that the subject may be taken up much more fully and thoroughly. Japanese interest in the Yakutian (and other Siberian) resources (natural gas, petroleum, timber and other items) is particularly prominent and practical, but these development-potentials are of worldwide significance.

The Revolution

It is necessary to have the chronology clearly in mind. The Revolution which deposed the Tsar in March 1917 (February by the old calendar) put Russia under a Provisional Government; which rapidly despatched its officers, called Commissars, to various localities. In June 1917 *zemstvos* were introduced wherever they had not previously existed, including Siberia; as local government organs they had wider powers than the older zemstvos, including control of police, education, etc. From August a Siberian Duma (parliament for an autonomous Siberian Region) had a *de jure* existence; in practice, executive functions were in the hands of local Public Defence Committees. By that time, the Petrograd Soviet having been esteblished only two days before the February Revolution, on March 12th 1917, Bolshevik influence was beginning to grow everywhere.

The October Revolution (November 7th, new style) brought power to the Soviets. In December there was a Soviet-German armistice and the Allied countries moved towards intervention in Siberia. The Chinese moved into the Chinese Eastern Railway zone of Manchuria, the Japanese navy entered Vladivostok. In January 1918 the Russian warlord Semënov attacked the Transbaikal. In February the Germans advanced in European Russia, and early in March the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed. Shortly afterwards the Soviet Government agreed to permit the Czechs to return home via Vladivostok; some of them began to arrive there in April, at the same time as a first Japanese landing-party. Soviet-Czech conflict developed all along the Siberian railway. Czech troops seized Omsk on June 7th and Vladivostok on June 29th, where White Russian governments were established under Allied protection. In August 1918 Japanese, American, British and French forces landed at Vladivostok.

Disorder was to continue in Siberia until late in 1922. Admiral Kolchak was

Supreme Ruler in Siberia from November 1918 till he was captured and executed at Irkutsk in February 1920. The Western Allies ended their occupation in April 1918 but Japanese forces remained until October 1922. A Far Eastern Republic was recognised by the Soviet Government in May 1920, but was incorporated into the RSFSR in mid-November 1922.

Events in Yakutia must be seen on that background. Three days after the October Revolution, on November 10th 1917, a joint session of the National Committee in Yakutsk, the Central Committee of the Union of Federalists and the executive of the Yakut organisation Sakhaaimakh resolved 'all possible support to the Provisional Government ... in its implacable struggle with Bolshevism and all its manifestations'[5] and the 'United Democracy' estadlished a Committee for the Defence of the (February) Revolution, with dictatorial controls. Communists were at work among the few working-class elements and the peasantry. Soviet authorites admit that 'the working class in Yakutia was few in numbers and contained almost no industrial proletariat', moreover that 'a significant part was played by the mistakes of the Bolsheviks during and after the February Revolution'[6]. They headed the Public Security Committee, instead of opposing that bourgeois organ and instead of working in the Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

'Until it was destroyed, the Social Democrats continued to belong to the Public Security Committee'. Agricultural unions were formed, but no Soviets of Peasant Deputies. The local Bolsheviks did not call for land distribution, or split with the Mensheviks. The Mensheviks clearly had majority support, however; in the nomination of two candidates to represent the area in the Constituent Assembly, Federalists or SRs received over 42,000 votes, the Social Democrats 3,615. In the zemstvo elections that followed, the same elements predominated[7] and the new Yakutsk zemstvo did not recognise the Soviet Government. These were the only flickers of democracy that Yakutia has ever enjoyed!

The Soviet Government in Moscow and Siberia called in vain for the submission of the Yakutian Government presided over by the (Provisional Government) Commissar V. N. Solov'ëv. They refused to honour his bankdrafts, etc. He resorted to requisitions. There was a long-distance 'paper-bombardment' of telegrams. Yakutia was so cut off that Solov'ëv spoke of transferring full powers to a provincial Council 'until a uniform State authority was established by the Siberian Duma and the Constituent Assembly, not knowing that both these bodies had been disbanded'[8]. The left wing launched a general strike on February 14th; some workers held out till March 7th. However, 'the workers of Yakutia could not overthrow by their own strength the counter-revolutionary "United Democracy"; the help of the revolutionary

5) *Yakutskoye Zemstvo*, 10 August 1917.
6) Gogolev 1972, pp. 22-23.
7) Ye. M. Yaroslavski (memoirs), in *A Hundred Years of Yakutian Exile*, Moscow 1934, p. 290.
8) *Struggle for the Establishment and Consolidation of Soviet Power in Yakutia*, Irkutsk 1957, Pt. I bk. 1, p. 83.

centres was necessary'[9] even though the leftists were stronger in some outlying places, notably Vilyuisk, which from the start hailed the Soviet Revolution and refused to recognise the Yakutsk committee[10].

Thirty members of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, elected during the strike, were arrested in the middle of March, the government militia occupied the post and telegraph office, printing and electrical works, etc. Discontent mounted, in view especially of the shortage of all commodities because imports from Japan or America almost ceased (such trade was in Soviet eyes a crime). The 'help of the revolutionary centres' was then invoked. A Red Army detachment under the command of A. S. Rydzinski was ordered to move from Irkutsk on Vitim, to help the Bodaibo Red Guard group. Workers in Yakutsk received arms, and Rydzinski entered that principal town with their assistance. Soviet power was to last at that time in Yakutsk for only 35 days, but immediately showed its form. All power in Yakutsk was given to the local Soviets (in practice to the Bolshevik party). Other Soviets were formed in Olëkminsk, Vilyuisk, etc., Red Guards formed, food stocks requisitioned, rationing instituted. The Yakut bourgeoisie, for having openly stood against the Soviet power, was levied a war contribution of $1\frac{1}{2}$ million roubles and every householder had to pay 7,000 roubles for the maintenance of the militia. In some localities, some land was transferred to peasants[11].

Meanwhile, however, the Whites had occupied Irkutsk and much of the rest of Siberia. Rydzinski went up the Lena to fight the Ataman Krasil'nikov. Another Red detachment under Ye. A. Lesnevski was captured by a locally-manned White group under one Gordeyev. The Whites were strong enough to serve an ultimatum on Yakutsk, which the Reds evacuated, going to Vilyuisk; split up into small groups, the Reds only succeeded in being arrested. About fifty of them were shot. The nationalism of the Yakuts was very strong[12]. A zemstvo system was restored, under V. N. Solov'ëv; trade unions were outlawed. The left SRs went underground. Most of the members of the Federalist Union went over to the right wing of the SR party; which, with the Kadets, was legal. National organisations were combined under the direction of V. N. Nikiforov.

The continuing Civil War brought new hardships. Imports into Yakutia were running at about 10% of the previous normal, manufactured goods and agricultural implements were extremely scarce; perforce, Yakutia acted as an independent state (prohibiting immigration, levying tariffs, etc.) but one in extreme economic crisis. Some American traders sent vessels to the Okhotsk and North-east coasts; there was also some Japanese activity. In 1919 the Bolsheviks reorganised underground; lacking arms, they had to combine with the Left SRs, who possessed weapons. Together

9) Gogolev 1972, p. 24.

10) Memoirs of S. Arzhakov in *For the Soviet Power in Yakutia*, Irkutsk 1957 and of S. S. Yakovlev (E. Eristen) in *Aaspytan akhtyylar*, Yakutsk 1960 (in Yakut with citations in Russian works).

11) P. A. Oiyunski in *For the Soviet Power in Yakutia*, 1957, p. 130.

12) Yaroslavski in *Krasnaya Yakutia* 1923, 2, p. 57.

they made a successful revolt on the bitter winter night of the 14th–15th December 1919. Soviets were established in Yakutsk and other places, though in some the zemstvo form remained[13]. This was several weeks before the Red Army took Irkutsk.

The Bolsheviks had no directives from the Communist Party or the Soviet State; they received such only on March 7th. In any case they were in coalition with the Left SRs, who were prominent in the administration, the Revolutionary Staff of the Red Army. Its organ *Izvestia* was actually headed with both the Bolshevist slogan 'Workers of all lands unite' and the SR slogan 'In Struggle you will get your own Rights (*pravo svoë*)'! The Yakuts demanded the calling of a Yakut national assembly which should have full power. The Bolsheviks were unable to oppose this. In the elections to the Soviets, the SRs and others were the most successful by far. This situation, noted Yakovlev[14], was not peculiar to Yakutia; even in the villages of Central Russia, Lenin himself observed at the time, 'underdevelopment, backwardness, the darkness of the poorest peasants, placed the leadership in the hands of the kulaks, the better-off, the capitalists, the petty-bourgeois intellectuals'[15].

War Commnnism

A Revolutionary Committee was nominated from Irkutsk and the bloc with the Left SRs broken, Solov'ëv and others shot, zemstvo and legal organisations broken; there had previously been a separate law court for the Yakuts, but this was now combined with the general court. Churches and monasteries were dispossessed, vestiges of Tsardom abolished, including the famous *yasak* (tribute). War Communism was introduced in Yakutia, with the nationalisation of the key points of the economy and the public utilities (the Kempendyai salt deposits, owned by one Dotsenko, Semyonov's lead-mine, Barashkov's sawmill, flourmill and electric plant, Bertel's brewery, transport, trading firms and banks). The property of émigrés and persons who hed been shot was confiscated. The Supreme Economic Council took general charge. This phase lasted nearly two years: the New Economic Policy (NEP), decreed in Moscow in March 1921, did not come to Yakutia until after the summer of that year.

Saw-milling revived in 1920 to the extent of producing 32,000 metres in that year. State aid for the 1921 sowing was extensive; 43,000 *puds* of grain and 2,200 of potatoes were issued to the peasants and repair facilities provided. The sown area rose from nearly 20,000 *desyatin* in 1920 to nearly 30,000 in 1921, cf. 25,000 in 1917; 75% of it was in the Yakutsk area. Details of much other progress can be gleaned from the YASSR Central Archives, also the extent of the difficulties. Trade with the 'Mainland' (as Siberians call the more developed regions of Russia's 'Centre') was from Irkutsk northward by packhorse to the Lena and along it, from Vladivostok northward by sea to the Okhotsk coast, thence by packtrail to Nel'kan and river to

13) Kochnev in *For the Soviet Power in Yakutia*, p. 258.
14) ibid. p. 21.
15) Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 37, p. 312.

Yakutsk.

Just over $1\frac{1}{2}$ mn. *puds* of grain was available in 1920, but only by drawing on reserves, and this was about 12% less than the minimum needs. For this and for dairy produce, heavy procurement norms were set. Yakutia's cereal requirements for 1921 were just over two million *puds*, 10% of which was retained for seed. The ration-scales were consequently nine *puds* (nearly 150 kg.) per person per annum for cereal growers and Red Army personnel, six *puds* (nearly 100 kg.) for workers and employees; but for people in the Vilyui and northern districts, who live chiefly on meat and fish, only three *puds* or 50 kg. It was admitted however that famine was threatening on the Lena and in the towns, so these scales were drastically reduced: for growers and the Red Army by 20% to 120 kg., for workers by nearly 30% to 72 kg. and for the northerners by 50% to 24 kg. These were statutory entitlements; to get the actual issues was another question. Distinctive ration-cards connoting priorities were issued in categories A for those over 16 doing heavy physical labour, B for adults on brainwork or light physical labour, C employees not members of trade unions or workers' organisations, D children aged 2–16, E babies under 2.[16]. Thus was the Communist class-system introduced in Yakutia.

With practically no imports, the subsistence level was far from sustained. Heavy subsidies from the Centre were necessary — indeed, it must be emphasised, such has been the case right up to the present day, despite payback by the production of gold, diamonds (since the later 1950 s) and now natural gas. All these outputs required massive investment, even with the equally massive use of forced labour (Yakutia was a large part of the 'Gulag Archipelago'). In the summer of 1920 Moscow had Vladivostok send to Ayan for Yakutia nearly 200 tons of manufactures (mainly cloth), hunting gear, etc. In addition, Siberia spared Yakutia, 'from its scanty resources', 115 tons of grain, 100 chests of brick tea, 30 tons of leaf tea, plus crockery, separators, etc. In 1921 there arrived by the Lena between 800 and 1,000 tons of goods 'but there were no industrial goods to give the peasants who were providing cattle, meat and butter'[17].

The 'Scissors Crisis' was opening–soaring prices of industrial goods, falling prices of agricultural products (intersecting only by force of requisitions). The Party Secretary for Yakutia, M. K. Ammosov, reported to the Central Committee that 'the population is ragged (*obnosilos*'), for three years 80–90% of the Yakuts have had no manufactured goods or clothing; they wear skins, like the people of ancient times'[18]. A peasant would have to give a whole *pud* (over 16 kg.) of butter for 75 cm. of printed cloth, one cow for 15 to 20 *arshin* (a dozen metres) of the same commodity, if he could find it.

Land reform was studied from the end of 1919 and in July 1920 'land-use regulations' cancelled all the former classifications and decreed 'all grassland in actual

16) Central State Archives of YASSR, f. r-51, op. 1, g. 11, *l.* 30.
17) Gogolev 1972, p. 48.
18) Central Archives of Marx-Lenin Institute, f. vi, op. 26, g. 83, *l.* 97.

use to be subject to equal distribution'[19]. The pattern of holdings was (hectares) peasants 683,588, cossacks 7,958, churches and monasteries 4,310, urban areas 9,187, other private ownerships 1,160, institutions 1,500, State (*kazënno-obrochnye*) 7,239. So peasants represented some 96% of the total, none of the other categories more than 1%. But equal distribution applied only to the grasslands (*pokosnye* — hay or meadow), not including pasture, farming, hunting or fishing lands. The Soviet State's Second Agricultural Law was not even mentioned in the first documents of the Yakutian Soviet Government. This was however in a 'leftist' rather than a 'rightist' spirit of deviation, as it was assumed that *all* land would soon be nationalised. Hired labour was prohibited in agriculture, but it was shortly added that it would be allowed 'as a temporary measure, for the summer of 1920 only'. Adaptations in the other direction had to be made locally: e. g. in Olëkminsk some land grants were revoked when not utilised for one year, though the national law permitted this only after two years of neglect[20].

Moscow was far away, the local conditions very special; there was much unused land, but the best had been taken up, and in the outlands (even the Vilyui) the kulaks retained their holdings and were the only ones able and really eager to use more land. The Yakuts were 'nomadic', at least in the sense of changing their pastures once or twice a year. So 'land redistribution was carried out only in a few areas ... (the authorities) did not give a practical lead, merely issued circulars which, as one of the contemporary documents said, were "dead letters". Moreover the implementation of land-division impeded military operations against the White Bandits who appeared in the autumn of 1921 in almost all the districts of Yakutia. From February 28th 1922 the town of Yakutsk was under siege. In the territory seized by the White Bandits the Kulak *toyons* (Yakutian gentry) restored the old order. After the White Bandits were defeated in 1922, an armed struggle began' (against the same Whites !)[21].

Collectivisation was similarly weak. One small sovkhoz (State Farm) was established on the Markha in March 1920; others, conversions of estates of rich men such as Barashkov, and a number of 'communes', came into existence in 1921. A property 27 km. from Yakutsk, belonging to P. A. Kushnorev who had emigrated, became a State Agricultural College. All these were captured and sacked by the Whites in the winter of 1921–2, and did not revive in 1923. For the rest, the records are 'incomplete, inaccurate and self-contradictory'[22]. They show six *communes* organised in 1921 with only 52 members, nearly all in Yakutsk; six *artels* in 1920 with a total of 150 members, another 15 in 1921 with over 300 members.

It is interesting to examine one specific example. The 'Sorgu' Commune was founded on Communist initiative from five farms, one of which had no horse, another

19) ***Struggle*** ... (op. cit. (8) above), pp. 26-27.
20) ibid., pp. 110, 112, 120.
21) Gogolev 1972, pp. 54-55.
22) ibid. p. 58.

one horse, the others two each. Between them they had five draft oxen, 23 milch cows, one plough, four harrows, two separators, one *telega* cart, two sledges and eight scythes. The commune had to borrow tools. In the summer of 1921 its crop was 'average' at about 600 kg. of grain and 1,200 stooks of hay. Over 80 kg. of potatoes were planted but none grew. The workforce was only ten persons — of whom four were off work sick at the harvest time. The members were illiterate, could prepare no inventory or reports. Yet this was a 'typical set-up' (*tipichny ustav*)[23].

The Marxist analysis cannot number the 'rural proletariat' at higher than 16,000 persons in 1917. At that time gold and salt mining occupied 3–3,500 workers. Less than 5,000 children were at school, only 7% of the population literate. These particulars are from *Fifty Years of Yakutia in Figures*, published in Yakutsk in 1967 (p. 137); an instance of more realistic data appearing in later years, as the preceding commemorative, *Twenty Five Years of the YASSR* (1942, p. 160), stated that only seven Yakuts in a thousand were literate, only twenty in a thousand of the Russians

Sturm und Drang

NEP, introducing a mixed economy with State capitalism but extensive freedom of private enterprise, thus arrived in Yakutia not only late but under very depressed and strenuous conditions. 'The incursion of A. Pepelyayev's (White) troops into central Yakutia required the mobilisation of ecconomic resources and new sacrifices from the autumn of 1921 until the spring of 1923'. Whites controlled 'a great part of the territory' and 'besieged Yakutsk for months'. They had support from the peasants, 3,000 of whom served in the counter-revolutionary forces at that time. The Yakutian intelligentsia of upper-class origin sided with the Whites, but in a nationalist spirit. The White pressure was reduced in the summer of 1922, but did not cease for another year; they continued in dispersed groups, their leaders remained in Oimyakon as well as on the Okhotsk coast. Soviet sources allege foreign support to them, especially from Japan (represented as seeking a springboard (*platzdarm*) into Russia and the Arctic). These are all admissions from a leading Communist participant[24].

The sown area diminished by as much as a third, apparently to 24,000 ha., in 1922. With the renewed strife, the peasant reaction was to fall back on family self-sufficiency; the number of farms increased, instead of becoming fewer and more consolidated by amalgamation and co-operation, as the Communists wished, the number of units doubled[25]. But cattle-raising is far more important to the Yakut people

23) YASSR State Archives, f. r-51, op. 1, d. 227, *l.* 17; and d. 201, *l.* 2, 7, 11-12; and *l.* 1-2.
24) Ye. M. Yaroslavski, *Concerning Yakutia (Articles, Letters, Speeches and Telegrams)*, Yakutsk 1968, p. 107.
25) *Cattle-raising and Agriculture in Yakutia in 1917, 1921 and 1922*, p. 8, cit. Gogolev 1972 p. 71.

than tillage, much more the measure of progress and of social trends. The poorest rural class, *batraki* or farm-hands (in Yakutia *khamnachity*) gained some cattle in the War Communism period. 6.5% of households had no cattle in 1917, but this figure was reduced to 2.8% in 1921 and 1.7 in 1922. In 1917, 39% had between one and five head of cattle; in 1921, 48% and in 1922 58%. In 1917, 36% had between five and ten head, 33% in 1922. This shows that reduction began in the middle-peasant (*srednyak*) grade; moving up to the class with 10–20 head of cattle, these formed 16% of the total in 1917, reduced to 7% in 1922. Only 2.3% of the peasant households had more than 20 head in 1917 but this category was almost eliminated (to 0.5%) in 1922.

In terms of arable, the poor peasants did not do so well; nearly 15% of farm-households had less than a quarter of a *desyatina* (1 *desyatina*=1.12 ha.) in 1917, the same proportion in 1922. 20% of farm-households had between a quarter and a half of a *desyatina* in 1917, and this class showed the big increase, rising to 1921 and 1922. The cutting-down began with the category of households owning between half and one *desyatina*: nearly 23% of all rural households in 1917, 16.4% in 1922. Next, the share of the upper-middle rural class, those with 1–2 *desyatina*, was halved-from over 12 to less than 6%, 1917/22. Of course the reduction of the richer holdings was the most complete, the figures being: the lower *kulachestvo* (holding 2–3 *desyatina*) from 3.5% in 1917 to 1.14 in 1922, upper kulaks (over 3 *desyatina*) 3.4% to 1.8[26].

It must be borne in mind that for a considerable period the Whites occupied most of the rural areas right on into 1922, and requisitioned especially horses but also meat and dairy produce, etc; the following are instanced as showing what they took. In the Tattinsk *ulus* 700 horses, in that of Anguisk 222 horses, 29 tons of meat, five tons of butter, 21,000 bundles of hay, 'etc.'[27]. The following shows the situation in more general terms:

Overall decline[28]

Total Numbers (000 head)				Number of animals per household			
	1917	1922	decline		1917	1922	decline
horses	125	109	15%	horses	2.4	1.8[a]	33%
cattle	478	451	5%	cattle	9.0	7.6	18%
pigs	1.3	1.2	8%				

Note: a. The same source gives also 1.2 here; i. e. a decline of 50%. It must be interjected that the present writer is not responsible for inadequacies, inconsistencies, etc. in the statistics; he is merely adducing some selected but entirely typical Soviet data (and may succeed primarily in showing how much more work could usefully and interestingly be done on this subject). However, the foregoing clearly shows the trend.

26) V. D. Khaldeyev, *Peasant Economy in War and Revolution*, Moscow 1924, pp. 7-14.
27) *Outlines of the History of Yakutia in the Soviet Period*, Yakutsk 1957, pp. 107-8.
28) Agriculture Bulletin of YASSR, 1923, 4, p. 17.

New Economic Policy

Thus the 'history of the establishment of the YASSR abounded with sharp social conflicts and open class war'[29]. In 1917, 10% of households had employed hired labour, which in Communist principle should be abolished; the proportion did fall to 5.3% in 1921, but rose again to 6.2% in 1922. The kulaks' holdings had been reduced, but still remained relatively large — and the situation actually compelled them during this period to make better (more intensive) use of them. They profited from the high price of foods. Two-thirds of the Yakutians were considered to be poor peasants, only a fifth or a quarter middle peasants; the reverse of the proportions in European Russia. The former produced no surplus for the market. Hunting, most important for the local livelihood, was drastically reduced; 17% of the households had been dependent on hunting in 1917, only half that proportion in 1921 and 1922[30].

The Yakutian intelligentsia divided in this period; there were trusty Communists such as those quoted in the above (Ammosov, Barakhov, Arzhakov, etc.) and others (such as the writer Oiunski) but cases to the contrary were such as the following. R. I. Oroshin headed the agrarian reform work but also headed a 'counter-revolutionary plot' in 1920; T. Slepov participated in another in 1921, and the Commissar for Education G. Yefimov actually headed the counter-revolutionary 'VYaONU' government. Indeed 'the history of the establishment of the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1922) abounded with sharp social conflicts and open class-war'[31].

NEP was a forced retreat on a very broad front. Communications were very bad and people were slow to understand what was happening. The extent of the economic failure must be noted. Taking the 1921/22 plan, even the most controllable item, grain, showed only 50% of the target of 130,000 *puds* realised; the plan for meat of 125,000 *puds* was fulfilled only 34%, that for hay (130,000) only 24%, for butter (10,000) only 21%, while those for vegetables (67,000) and lard (2,500) were hardly fulfilled at all (0.004% each, to be exact!)[32].

A branch of the State Bank was established in Yakutsk only in 1924. Money transactions replaced barter only slowly, and only in the southern areas. There was relaxation of the forced labour which had been imposed for such activities as cartage. In the northlands the indigenous people continued to be nomadic, everywhere the peasants depended largely on hunting and fur-trapping. In 1925 the Commissariat for Internal Trade of the YASSR calculated the total 'purchasing power' of the Republic — other than the Aldan district, thus omitting a rich mining area, which worked however to the national treasury rather than the local economy — at 15.88 mn. roubles; of which extractive industry accounted for 22%, wages 19%, transport and the sale of furs 16% each, the sale of agricultural products 14%, 'other sources of income' almost as much as agriculture, with 13%. In 1926 the cash-flow was about

29) Gogolev 1972, p. 75.
30) ibid., p. 16.
31) ibid., p. 75.
32) A. Bakhshyrov in *Lena Communard*, 7 April 1922.

9% up, at 17.262 mn. roubles, but the total value of commodities available for sale 14.765 mn., so there was a surplus of available cash of some 17%.

The annual income per household in 1925 averaged about 260 of the new ('gold') roubles. Two years later (1927-8) it had greatly risen: 354 roubles was then given for the prosperous Vilyui areas. Middle peasants derived 55% of their income from cattle (meat), 32% from pasture (dairy) and 13% from tillage. The Government no longer requisitioned, it levied taxes — a more stable basis, but still very exacting. Agricultural results for 1925 were badly affected by drought. Some statistics, full of gaps, are available, such as the following.

Agricultural production and marketing[33]

	Production		Consumption		Marketable	
	000 puds	000 roubles	000 p.	000 r.	000 p.	000 r.
meat	500	4,353	393 (78%)	3,467	108(22%)	888
grain	876		476 (54%)		400(46%)	
milk	6,217		2,314 (37%)		3,903(63%)	
butter	195		180 (92%)		15 (8%)	546
hay	44,250		44,113(100%)		137 (0%)	38

In 1926-27, 139,000 *puds* of meat were marketable, 16,000 of butter. The Olëkminsk area provided nearly two-thirds of the cereals, the Yakutsk area two-thirds of the meat and three-quarters of the butter. The production of vegetables was poor. Nearly half a million roubles' worth of fish was marketed and 100,000 of hides.

The inequalities, both between groups of persons and between areas of the country, which have ever since been a marked feature of the Soviet Union, became intense in shis period. In the State sector, the *apparat* and the favoured workers had the best treatment; but there were geographical differences too. There were major gold discoveries on the Aldan, and that area began to be strongly pushed. It drew formidably on the resources of Yakutia for supplies, as well as on the Transbaikal and Soviet Far East. Local authorities were required to send to the goldfields on the Lena and Aldan, in 1926-27, 124,337 *puds* of meat, 110,000 of cereals, 14,800 of butter — respectively 89%, 28% and 99% of the marketable surpluses of these commodities (over and above the local consumption for own use) of Yakutia.

The agricultural target of the Gosplan of the YASSR for 1927-28 was over 3.7 mn. roubles, 63.5% from animal husbandry, 27.2% from forestry, a mere 4% from grazing, less than 5% from grain, a trifling sum from root crops[34]. The USSR Academy of Sciences Expedition to Yakutia made many studies. It found that on the average a large household farm with more than 35 head of cattle produced over 57

33) *General Plan for the Reconstruction of the Economy in the next 10-15 Years*, Yakutsk 1927, pp. 22-25; *Autonomous Yakutia*, p. 12.

34) ibid., p. 84.

puds (939 kg.) of cereals, its 5 or 6 members each consumed six *puds* per annum, so it marketed 20–25 *puds* (328–410 kg.). Farms with less than eight head of cattle offered no meat for sale, those with 8–20 cattle marketed on the average 150 kg., those with 20–25 were the best providers of meat, marketing 220 kg. The large units with over 35 cattle furnished on the average only 174 kg. of meat to the official channels. For butter the *doska* (scoreboard) goes differently: on the average small units with less than eight cattle marketed 23 kg. each, those in the 8–20 group only 13 kg., the 20–35 group 25 kg., while the over–35 s put 92 kg. each on the market[35]. The market area was in and around the main towns, and the development of the Aldan even accentuated this — which again the better-off farmers were best able to their advantage — but the same elements participated to best effect in the commercialisation of the life of the northern areas. In the Sub-Arctic, there was impetus to the trade in furs (valued at 3.5 mn. roubles in 1926–27), mammoth ivory (50,000 roubles), leather, etc.

Handicraft industry also developed significantly, 80%of it in the hands of Yakuts. There were 3,000 handicraft workshops in 1928, over 2,500 of them in rural areas, grossing in 1928–29 a revenue of just over three million roubles; i. e., at nearly 1,000 roubles a year per worker, much above the general rural level. This perturbed the authorities in some ways: handicraft was a 'NEP' sphere, it was 'very weakly cooperativised', having only eight cooperative 'cells' with 60 members in 1928, according to the First Five Year Plan document[36]. Generally, the strong private trade was attracting NEPmen through the high profits, especially in gold and furs.[37]. In Yakutia NEPmen numbered 521 in 1923–24, 611 in 1924–25, 981 in 1925–26 (or 756 in another report) and 1,228 in 1926–27. Party archives give 773 of these 'capitalist snakes' in 1928 in the three central areas only: 559 in the Yakutsk area, 138 in the Vilyui area and 76 in the Olëkminsk area[38]. There were others in the northern and eastern territories.

The First Five Year Plan for the whole USSR was inaugurated in 1928, heralding a new era of tensions, convulsion and troubles for Yakutia. The NEPmen, 'speculators' (a term extended to anyone who would merely be a trader or entrepreneur in the Western or Japanese setting) and others would be 'liquidated'; agriculture and other activities were to be swiftly and ruthlessly collectivised. A famous case was the prosecution in Yakutia at the end of 1929 of the capitalist enterprise with the Yakut name Kyttygas. It had a turnover of 1.55 mn. roubles, larger than that of most middle-sized enterprises in the USSR at that time, according to the Public Prosecutor[39], but this appears to be a gross exaggeration; the Prosecutor seemingly

35) *Short Reports* of Academy of Sciences Yakutian Expedition, 1929, pp. 14–18.
36) *Five Year Plan of Development of the YASSR Economy*, Yakutsk 1929, pp. 27–8.
37) I. Ya. Trifonov, *Classes and Class-struggle in the USSR at the beginning of NEP*, Moscow 1969, p. 32.
38) Party Archives of Yakutsk District Committee of CPSU, f. 3, op. 1, d. 420, *l.* 61–2.
39) *Autonomous Yakutia*, 10–11, Dec. 1929.

added a nought to the figure, as high-level official documents[40] give the turnover as 150,000 roubles. In any case the total private trade in Yakutia is given as 525,900 roubles, in 1925-26 and 560,000 roubles in the summer of 1971[41]. Prosecutors of the Vyshinski type were already becoming ferocious.

Earlier reports credited NEPmen with 52.2% of the trade in towns and 42.5% of the trade in rural areas in 1923-24; in 1924-25 their share in the urban trade was reduced to 21.2% but their share in the countryside increased to 47.3%[42]. According to Gosplan the State did 61.2% of the trade of Yakutia in 1924-25 and 68.4% in 1925-26, the cooperative sector 18.2% and 10.5%, private enterprise remained steadier at 20.6% and 21.1% respectively[43]. In 1927 there were 856 private enterprises in Yakutia with a turnover of 8.5 mn. roubles[44].

The authorities were equally concerned about the kulaks, whose grip was stronger in Yakutia than elsewhere in the Soviet Union; they had been 'little touched' as far as expropriation was concerned, though 'severely mobilised mobilised' for forced labour and often subject to 'requisitions'[44]. Various figures are given showing the kulaks' 'role' in the economy (loosely defined) at around 20%.

The basic force on the socialist side was the State Capitalist sector (that term is Lenin's own). Even there, leases and concessions had been made to foreign as well as Russian undertakings. Semyonov was recognised as managing the lead mine and processing plant he had owned, though it was nationalised. The British Lena Goldfields concern was present. The Russo-British Raw Materials Co. (RASO) was owned half by the USSR Commissariat of Foreign Trade and half by ARCOS. Originally formed in London by Leonid Krasin to promote Anglo-Soviet trade after the British recognition of the Soviet Union in 1924, ARCOS was retained as the official trade agency of the USSR in London. Allegedly used for subversive purposes, it was raided by the British police, politically incriminating documents were stated to have been found and Anglo-Soviet diplomatic relations were broken off, to be resumed in 1929 — by which time ARCOS had lost its importance. The Yakut branch of RASO was established in February 1924, dealing mainly in furs. It operated seven factories and a whole network of agents; in 1925 it handled 700,000 roubles worth of furs, over 40% of the local purchase, on the basis of bartering industrial goods for furs, a system highly agreeable to the trappers[45].

Gold production on the upper Aldan played a great part. The fields were equipped in 1928 with dredges, electrical and steam engines, the operations partly mechanised. Fisheries, building and forestry also developed. Industry's contribution

40) Central State Archives of the October Revolution, f. 1235, op. 122. d. 439, *l.* 55 and ibid. d. 443, *l.* 9.
41) Fifth All-Yakutia Session of Soviets, pp. 101-3.
42) Party Archives, Yakutia, f. 3, op. 1, d. 420, *l.* 61-2.
43) *General Plan*, op. cit. (33) above, p. 212.
44) Party Archives, Yakutia, 1651, op. 3, l. 8; but this Party figure is admittedly larger than administrative records show.
45) Gogolev 1972, p. 67.

at the beginning of the First Five Year Plan was over 19 mn. roubles, or over 23% of the total[46]. Consumers' cooperatives served all the southern areas, centred in the 'Kholbos' which was located in Yakutsk but had nearly all its operations in the rural areas. Membership of the cooperatives rose gradually:

Cooperative Membership

	urban	rural	integrated	total (100%)
1925	4,762(23%)	15,512(74%)	548 (3%)	20,872
1926	4,980(21%)	16,823(73%)	1,368 (6%)	23,174
1927	3,819(16%)	17,572(74%)	2,283(10%)	23,674

On the average one-third of the population was cooperativised by 1928, especially in the rural areas (Kolyma 72%, Olëkminsk 50%, Aldan 44%), surprisingly less in Yakutsk (28%), and Vilyui (17%) but hardly reaching the remoter outposts (Tiksi, 5½%). These appealed primarily to the poor Yakuts:

% of total cooperative membership

poor peasants	63%	Yakuts	71%
middle peasants	31%	Russians	23%
well-to-do peasants	6%	Others	5%
	100%		100%

Fifteen State trading organisations operated in Yakutia in 1924–26: principally the Yakut State Trading concern Yakutgostorg, the consumers' cooperative union Kholbos and the Materials Company (Syryo); formed jointly by the Supreme Economic Council, the Industrial Bank and the Hides and Skins Syndicate, Syryo dealt in furs, hides, skins, bristles, horsehair, etc., opened local stores and had commercial travellers. The figures on the general pattern of trade show the large presence of private trade, even though, in that respect especially, they are admittedly not complete, not recording numerous private entrepreneurs who travelled widely and without a fixed base. Partly for that reason, distinctly divergent figures are officially given, as in the two following:

Numbers of trading establishments

	(a) According to the *October Revolution Archives*			(b) According to the YASSR Commissar for Internal Trade	
	1924–5	1925–6	1926–7	1924–5	1925–6
State	43 (6%)	92 (7%)	120 (8%)	40 (6%)	37 (4%)
Cooperative	123(16%)	168(14%)	175(12%)	40 (6%)	64 (8%)
Private	611(79%)	981(79%)	1,228(81%)	611(88%)	756(88%)
total (100%)	777	1,241	1,523	691	857

46) *Control Figures for the Economy of the YASSR for 1929–30*, pp. 283–4.

It was largely a question of the distribution of imports from outside Yakutia, internal production being slight. In 1925 Yakutia, *excluding the Aldan*, imported 12.6 mn. roubles' worth of industrial goods. Yakutgostorg handled 45% of this, the Siberian Trade concern 16%, Kholbos 22%, Syryo 10%, private interests 4% (leaving very little unascribed). Of course the private traders largely purchased the arrived goods from the State enterprises and performed a valuable service in distributing them in the huge country, especially the outlands (denounced by the Party for thereby making a profit, but appreciated by the peasants). In the 1927 summer navigation season imports, excluding the Aldan, were again 12.6 mn. roubles, with the Yakut State Trading Organisation handling this time 35%, Kholbos only 10%, the Siberian Trade Organisation 12%, Syryo 15%, private firms 7% (this leaves some 20% unascribed)[47].

It must be emphasised that these returns omit not only the Aldan area (linked with the Amur area further east rather than Yakutia 'proper' or central Yakutia, which is the main purview here) but omit also the operations of the well-known British concession, Lena Goldfield Ltd., which imported some large quantity of supplies. The same applies to the following:

Volume of trade (value) of Yakutia (turnover)[48]

	Total (mn. roubles)	(index)	of which private		
			Total, mn. r.	(index)	% of total
1924/5	15.6	(100)	3.9	(100)	25%
1925/6	26.1	(168)	5.9	(151)	23%
1926/7	29.0	(186)	2.7	(70)	9%

The trends seem clear, but the picture remains distorted, not only because of the qualifications already noted but also in that Soviet commentators add that there was considerable 'contraband' traffic by Americans and Japanese through private traders from neighbouring areas who came to Yakutia for furs and gold; no figures are available for this.

The national economy as a whole was cumbersome. Most of the trading organisations were not of Yakutian registry and not fully controlled legally or administratively within the Yakutian Republic, which is part of the RSFSR, whose boundaries stretch from the Pacific to the Baltic. Decisions and policies were (and still are) shaped at a great distance in the 'Centre' (Moscow) by a remote bureaucracy with little direct local knowledge, through elaborate and slow communications.

Thus 'they' (as the authorities are so widely called in the Soviet Union) 'fixed the prices and the assortment of goods regardless of the perspectives' of Yakutia's

47) Gogolev 1972, p. 93. Report of N. G. Tkachenko, YASSR Commissar for Internal Trade, in loc. cit. (41) above.

48) Central Archives of October Revolution, f. 1235, op. 122, 443, *ll.* 27-33; and *First Five Year Plan of Economic Development of YASSR*, pp. 60-61.

development needs. Often 'they competed with each other' rather than cooperating. 'They sought, especially, valuable furs, mammoth ivory, etc. They engaged local speculators and intermediaries as agents, salesmen, representatives, etc., from the indigenous population (who) well knew the market market for furs, the roads, the migration-routes of the hunters and their living conditions ... These private traders used the credit of State and cooperative organisations, drew goods and provisions from them, including scarce items, a large total of commodities. Thus the big union of Yakut merchants, Kyttygas, had trade credits from the Yakut Trade Organisation of 200,000 roubles (in 1927/8), from the Siberian Trade Organisation of 38,600 from the Kholbos Cooperative 100,000, from the Siberian Fur Trade Organisation 30,000, and so on[49].

Over the vast distances and in the severe climate, industrial goods came from and local products were sent to European Russia some 8,000 km. away. Water transport was limited to a short season, road transport (in those days carts and sledges, nowadays more trucks plus some air-freight) was slow and difficult. Within Yakutia itself, the distances were still colossal, the terrains difficult. Towns like Tiksi, Verkhoyansk, Vilyuisk, Aldan, Tommot, the Kolyma and the rest are in a 2,,000 km. radius. Programming was on this background: organisations tried to project purchases for a year ahead of the Plan schedules — goods were quite normally a year or more en route — and to hold stocks in distant localities for two years of normal requirements. Costs of transport totalled 25–35% of the value of the goods. Cash-flows were correspondingly sluggish[50]. (The past tense is used here, but of course the same conditions still apply today). The District Party Conference in September 1928 opened with: 'a basic and most important deficiency is the distortion of trade and the weakness of the efforts made to get rid of private businessmen; the consequence has been the strengthening of private-capitalist elements'[51].

Equally scathing assertions of inadequacy were made on the other main 'front'— the vital question of the socialisation of agriculture. In 1926 there were only 16 collective farms, and in 1928 only 18, comprising no more than 291 households (or an average of 18 each). These were heavily subsidised, but making little impression.

Non-communist and anti-communist forces were very strong indeed, the system in difficulties at every turn, ten years after the seizure of power in Petrograd at the end of 1918. Such was the setting for entering on the next decade and making it one of transition to full planning and complete collectivisation, with the drastic elimination of all elements who opposed the onward march of Communism, or merely tried to stand aside from it. The interesting material now increasingly coming forward deserves close study. The above account gives only a summary review concerning the first decade; it would be a useful project to take up more thoroughly the special case of Yakutia, and to pursue it into the subsequent period.

49) Gogolev 1972, p. 92, citing *Autonomous Yakutia* 29 Nov., 1st, 3rd and 4th Dec. 1929.
50) Gogolev 1972, p. 93.
51) Resolutions of Sixth Yakutian Provincial Conferene, 1928, pp. 1–2.