

## Russian Turkestan and the First World War

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In 1914 the world war [*jang-i jahon*] broke out. In this war the people of Turkestan also were saddened by Russia's success and rejoiced at its defeat. Military taxes [*andaʒho-i barbi*] were heavy and imposed on the local population. [The Russians] took grain at low prices in the bazaars. Of course, Russian peasants were exempt from these grain taxes. This was followed by the requisition of horses. The horse was compensated according to the price set by the government, which was sometimes one-tenth of the real price of the horse.<sup>1</sup>

Writing in 1935, the Samarqandi intellectual Mirza Kukandboi Abduholiqzada presented a view of the First World War's impact on his native Turkestan (**map 1**) that was strongly influenced by hindsight and Soviet orthodoxies, but which nevertheless accurately summed up the demands the war made on Turkestan's Muslim population. It had led to the violation of an unwritten compact between the colonial state and the so-called 'natives' (*tuʒemtsy*) of a region which had never been fully incorporated into the Russian metropole: while Turkestan's people did not enjoy the rights of imperial citizenship, such as they were – Turkestan had no *ʒemstva* and was excluded from representation in the State Duma after 1906 – they were also exempt from many of its demands, paying low rates of tax and avoiding military service.<sup>2</sup>

The war ended this 'light touch' form of colonial administration, which was already under increasing strain from the growing presence of Russian peasant settlers in the nomadic regions of southern Central Asia, notably Semirechie. The first two years of conflict saw widespread requisition of livestock and other commodities, soaring levels of taxation, and rapid inflation in the price of foodstuffs and other essential goods. In the summer of 1916 this was capped by a disastrous attempt to conscript a large part of the adult male population to serve as laborers on the main front in the European war with Germany and Austria-Hungary, provoking a widespread rebellion which had still not been fully suppressed when revolution came to Petrograd in February the following year.<sup>3</sup>

Mirza Abduholiqzada was wrong to suggest that when the war broke out Turkestan's people 'rejoiced in Russia's defeat' – there was in fact strong support for the war among many Muslim intellectuals, the so-called *Jadids* and members of the Qazaq *Alash* party, precisely

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<sup>1</sup> Mirzo Kukandboi Abduholiqzoda Samarqandi *Shurishi Dizʒakb* (Samarkand: Nashriyoti "Zangzor", 2009), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Morrison 'Metropole, Colony and Imperial Citizenship in the Russian Empire' *Kritika* 13/2 (2012), 351-9.

<sup>3</sup> See the essays in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916. A Collapsing Empire in the Age of War and Revolution* ed. A. Chokobaeva, C. Drieu and A. Morrison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

because they believed that supporting the imperial regime in its hour of need would translate into a claim for equal citizenship at the war's end, a belief analogous to that of many Indian nationalists who thought supporting the British war effort would bring about Home Rule.<sup>4</sup> His writing however accurately captures the growing resentment of Russian peasant settlers which was already palpable before 1914, and the ethnic tensions that would spill over into violence in 1916. By the time he was writing, however, emphasising ethnic as opposed to class conflict was increasingly unacceptable in Soviet historiography of the war years, which helps to explain why he would be purged in 1937, while his text could not be published until modern times.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter will explore the impact of the First World War on the Russian empire's largest colonial periphery, the Governor-Generalship of Turkestan, which comprised the provinces of Semirechie, Syr-Darya, Samarkand, Ferghana and Transcaspia – the Central Asian protectorates of Bukhara and Khiva were subject to some of the same economic pressures, but were not directly exposed to mobilisation of resources and conscription of manpower in the same way. Because of this and my lack of the requisite linguistic expertise I have largely excluded them from this chapter.<sup>6</sup> I will also very deliberately avoid wider discussion of the Revolution and Civil War in Central Asia, partly because this has already been admirably covered by Marco Buttino in his contribution to the *RGWR* series, but also because I think the war years themselves have been somewhat overshadowed by our knowledge of the cataclysm that was to follow, which of course was not shared by contemporaries.<sup>7</sup> As Peter Holquist has argued, the crises which hit the empire after the outbreak of war in 1914 ran in a continuum, but some events – notably the February and October revolutions – were driven from the center in Petrograd and Moscow, while others – such as the 1916 revolt in Central Asia – followed a very

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<sup>4</sup> Tomohiko Uyama, 'Two Attempts at Building a Qazaq State: The Revolt of 1916 and the Alash Movement' in Stéphane A. Dudoignon and Komatsu Hisao, eds., *Islam in Politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early Eighteenth to Late Twentieth Centuries)* (London: Kegan Paul, 2001), 91-2; Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform. Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 237-9; Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent 1865-1923* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 176-7.

<sup>5</sup> Aminat Chokobaeva Cloe Drieu & Alexander Morrison 'Editors' Introduction' in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916*. ed. Chokobaeva, Drieu and Morrison, 4-7.

<sup>6</sup> A somewhat simplistic political history of the protectorates in this period, based entirely on Russian sources, can be found in A. I. Pylev *Politicheskoe polozhenie Bukharskogo Emirata i Khivinskogo khanstva v 1917-1920gg.* (St Petersburg: Peterburgskoe Vostokovedenie, 2005); on the rebellions in Khiva and the Amu-Darya region in this period see Ul'fat Abdurasulov 'Konflikt kak resurs: anatomiya "turkmenskikh besporyadkov" v Khorezme, 1914-1916gg.' *Ab Imperio* (2018) No.3: 141-186 & Askar Dzhumashev 'Vosstaniia 1916 goda v nizov'iakh Amudar'i: kharakter i osobennosti' in Gulnara Aitpaeva & Alexander Morrison (ed.) *Izuchenie 1916 goda: depolitizatsiia i gumanizatsiia znanii o vosstaniu v tsentral'noi Azii* (Bishkek: Maxprint, 2020), 20-40. Most existing scholarship on Bukhara concentrates on the Bolshevik reconquest of the Emirate in 1920-1 rather than on the war years. See Vladimir Genis "S Bukharoi nado konchat'..." *K istorii butajorskikh revoliutsii* (Moscow: MNPI, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Marco Buttino 'Central Asia (1916-20): A Kaleidoscope of Local Revolutions and the Building of a Bolshevik Order' in *The Empire and Nationalism at War* ed. Eric Lohr, Vera Tolz, Alexander Semyonov & Mark von Hagen (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2014): 109-35.

local path.<sup>8</sup> There were clearly links between the violence unleashed in Central Asia in 1916 and that on the battlefronts in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, but the grievances, which saw the relationship between the Tsarist state and society break down irrevocably in Turkestan before they did so anywhere else in the empire, were specific to the region. Turkestan was more deeply marked by the economic crisis and the bitter conflict between European settlers and the indigenous population, which the war unleashed, than it was by notionally ‘revolutionary’ ideals emanating from the center. There are also important parallels to be drawn between Russian Turkestan and the wider European colonial world – British India, French Algeria – which are lost when we fold the First World War into the narrative of the Russian revolution.

This chapter will be divided into three principal parts: first an exploration of the direct military connections between Turkestan and the battlefronts; second, an evaluation of the war’s economic impact; and finally a summarized account of the 1916 revolt and its origins. Throughout I will weave in the experiences of prisoners of war, mostly from the Habsburg empire, who were distributed in camps around the region from 1915 onwards, and whose post-war memoirs offer a rich and under-used source. Finally, a short conclusion will look towards the complete economic and political collapse which occurred in the last year of the war for the Russian Empire, between the February Revolution and the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918.

### **I – From Turkestan to the Front – and back again.**

Turkestan had remained under military rule since its conquest fifty years before, so one of the most immediate effects of the outbreak of war was the departure of large numbers of officer-administrators serving under *voenno-narodnoe upravlenie* for active service at the front.<sup>9</sup> This migration began at the very top, with Turkestan Governor-General Alexander Vasil’evich Samsonov, who became commander of the Russian 2<sup>nd</sup> Army which invaded East Prussia in August 1914. First appointed Governor-General in 1909 after the forced resignations in quick succession of Nikolai Ivanovich Grodekov and Pavel Ivanovich Mishchenko, both of whom had opposed increased Russian peasant settlement in Turkestan, Samsonov’s main qualification for the job was that he was an ethnic Russian nationalist who supported increased colonization – as the head of the resettlement administration in Semirechie, S. N. Veletskii, recalled, he met nothing but resistance from the military authorities ‘until 1909, when General of the Cavalry

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Holquist *Making War, Forging Revolution. Russia’s Continuum of Crisis 1914-1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Marco Buttino *Revolutsiia naoborot. Sredniaia Aziia mezhdu padeniem Tsarskoi imperii i obrazovaniem SSSR* (Moscow: “Zven’ia”, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Morrison ‘*Voenno-narodnoe upravlenie* and its discontents in Tsarist Central Asia’ *Rivista Storica* (forthcoming).

Alexander Vasilievich Samsonov was appointed to the post of Turkestan General Governor, who decisively turned the administrative wheel of Turkestan in the state direction - in favor of the Russian cause (*Russkoe delo*)'.<sup>10</sup> While the following anecdote from Mirza Abduholiqzada should probably not be understood literally, the fact that it seems to have been current when he wrote does at least indicate that Samsonov was not remembered with affection by local intellectuals, and was closely identified with what Lenin would later call 'Great Russian chauvinism':

During the time of General Samsonov in Tashkent, a horrible event occurred, which I consider it necessary to relate in order to prove the nationalism and stupidity of the great Russians. One day, Samsonov was walking in the streets when he saw a child wearing a fez. Seeing this, the brave general became angry and asked the child, "Who gave this to you?" Frightened by the power and anger of the *Janob Tura* ["Big Sahib"], the boy looked around, hoping that someone would save him from this predator. A man near the child saw the Governor-General looking at the fez, and taking the opportunity to flee, hid himself behind a large tree in the street, and looked trembling at the child. The future commander-in-chief of the Russian Army in East Prussia took the fez off the child's head and kicked and trampled it underfoot. He then went to court and ordered that the parent of the child be found and that no one, young or old, wear the Turkish fez, or they would be punished. Although they searched everywhere after the Governor-General's order, nobody would admit to being related to the child. And this was the behavior of the *Yarim-Padshah*, the ruler of Turkestan. This is not an anecdote, it is a fact.<sup>11</sup>

The significance of the fez was that it signified an adherence to Muslim modernist and reformist ideas – and, in Samsonov's mind, to pan-Islamism or pan-Turkism, given its Ottoman associations. In 1910 he had been corresponding with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over the on the threat of pan-Islamist ideas spread by Ottoman agents in Turkestan.<sup>12</sup> Samsonov would of course meet his doom on the battlefield at Tannenberg, the British military attaché Alfred Knox noting that four years as an administrator had not prepared Samsonov well for active command in the field (he suffered from severe asthma).<sup>13</sup> Apart from him, many of the younger and more energetic officers of the administration, such as Samsonov's assistant General V. E. Flug, General I. Z. Odishelidze, the Georgian who had been Military Governor of Samarkand, and General L. V. Lesh, who had governed Transcaspia, also received commands at the front.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> S. N. Veletskii *Semirechenskaya Oblast' i eya kolonizatsiya. Itogi rabot po kolonizatsii Semirech'ya za 8 let (1906-1913)* (Petrograd: n.p. 1916), 4-5. Described as a 'revolutionary turncoat', Veletskii is the chief villain in Count K. K. Pahlen's devastating account of corruption and malfeasance within Turkestan's resettlement administration: *Mission to Turkestan. Being the Memoirs of Count K. K. Pahlen 1908-1909* ed. Richard A. Pierce, trans. N. J. Couriss (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 183-4.

<sup>11</sup> Samarqandi *Shurishi Dizxakb*, 23-4.

<sup>12</sup> Samsonov to Sazonov 02/11/1910 Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI) F.147 'Srednasiatskii stol' Op.485 D.1256 'Panislamizm' ll.247-8.

<sup>13</sup> Major-General Sir Alfred Knox *With the Russian Army 1914-1917* (London: Hutchinson, 1921) Vol.I, 60, 82. Dennis E. Showalter *Tannenberg. Clash of Empires* (Hamden, CN: Archon books, 1991), 309.

<sup>14</sup> T. V. Kotiukova *Vosstaniya 1916 goda v Turkestane: Dokumental'nye svidotel'stva obshchei tragedii* (Moscow: Mardzhani, 2016), 54.

Samsonov's replacement was the 62-year-old General F. A. von Martson, who suffered from the dual handicap of poor health (he had a serious heart condition) and a German name, both of which he shared with the governor of Semirechie, M. A. Fol'baum.<sup>15</sup> The effects of this exodus were also felt lower down the administrative hierarchy, such that by the end of 1914 Turkestan was largely being run by officers who were old and infirm, and who reacted first to rumors and then the reality of the revolt with a mixture of panic and prejudice.<sup>16</sup> When he was reassigned from the Riga front and appointed to replace von Martson as what would prove to be the last Turkestan Governor-General in August 1916, General A. N. Kuropatkin (**fig.1**) wrote in his diary:

Power is in bad hands [...] Martson, acting Governor-General, is in a state of collapse. Syr-Darya military governor Galkin is drunk every day. Samarkand - Lykoshin – is blind. Ferghana - Gippius – has a screw loose [*s gvozdem*]. Transcaspia - Kalmakov - weak, weak-willed. Semirech'e – Fol'baum is better than others. The head of the Chancellery, Efremov, who manages all the affairs, is a shady character and seems to be doing things dishonestly. The Assistant to the Governor-General M. R. Erofeev is very unprepared.<sup>17</sup>

Kuropatkin himself was no spring chicken, but an 'old Turkestan hand' and former Minister of War who had been sent to Tashkent to suppress the revolt which had broken out under von Martson's inadequate leadership. Not all his judgements here stand up to scrutiny – N. S. Lykoshin, while in his 60s, spoke Persian and Turkic fluently, and he and A. I. Gippius shared an interest in and understanding of local culture, which helped them to suppress the revolt in their jurisdictions fairly rapidly, although as we shall see in the case of Samarkand province this involved the sacking and destruction of the town of Jizzakh.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile Fol'baum's response to the more serious rebellion which was about to break out in Semirech'e was panicky and ineffective, and he would die suddenly in September 1916. In his memoirs the diplomatic representative of the Turkestan Governor-General during the war years, S. V. Chirkin, confirmed Galkin's alcoholism, but also noted Kuropatkin's own tendency to surround himself with mediocre yes-men when he arrived in Tashkent in the summer of 1916.<sup>19</sup> There seems little doubt overall that the war had degraded the already fairly low quality of leadership across Turkestan's military administration.

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<sup>15</sup> S. V. Chirkin *Dvadsat' let sluzhby na vostokey* (Moscow: Russkii Put', 2006), 243.

<sup>16</sup> Oybek Mahmudov 'The "Virtual Reality" of Colonial Turkestan. How Russian Officials viewed and represented the participation of the local population in the 1916 revolt' in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916*. ed. Chokobaeva, Drieu and Morrison: 95 – 125.

<sup>17</sup> A. N. Kuropatkin diary entry, 23/07/1916 in P. Galuzo (ed.) 'Vosstanie 1916g. v Srednei Azii' *Krasnyi Arkhiv* Vol.34 (1929), 46.

<sup>18</sup> On Lykoshin see Alexander Morrison 'Sufism, Panislamism & Information Panic. Nil Sergeevich Lykoshin and the aftermath of the Andijan Uprising' *Past & Present* No.214 (February 2012): 255 – 304; for a sympathetic portrayal of Gippius and his actions see Vladimir Shvarts 'Gubernator "s gvozdem"' Parts 1-4, 23/06-26/06/2016.

(<https://daniyarov.kg/2016/06/23/gubernator-s-gvozdjom-chast-1/>).

<sup>19</sup> Chirkin *Dvadsat' let sluzhby*, 247, 254-5.

While the Muslim population of Turkestan were initially exempted from military service, European settlers were not. Two Turkestan army corps, originally formed in 1899, were recruited from the Slavic peasant population, as well as the Semirech'e, Ural and Transcasian Cossacks, and sent to the front on the outbreak of war. The I Turkestan Corps fought mainly against Austria-Hungary on the European front, while the II Turkestan Corps served on the Caucasus Front, where they would be witness to the aftermath of the Armenian genocide; they also played a major role in the defeat of the Ottoman army and the capture of Erzerum in February 1916.<sup>20</sup> Marco Buttino estimates that by 1917 almost 50% of the Slavic working-age male population of Turkestan was serving in one or other of these corps, each of which would have numbered 20,000-30,000 men, something that would render the settler population vulnerable when the 1916 uprising broke out.<sup>21</sup> However it is probable that not all the soldiers in the Turkestan corps were actually from the region – Astashov's published selection of letters from the front show that some were actually from Samara or other parts of the Volga region, but the same collection provides some evidence of the development of a settler identity as *Turkestantsy*, in the form of the following verses:

Конечно, и наших легло в этот час

Немало от подлых германцев.

Лежите, герой! Молва же о вас

Живет среди нас, **Туркестанцев.**

Так спите спокойно вдали от родных,

Пусть пухом земли Вам вся будет!

Наш Царь не оставит героев своих

И Родина вас не забудет.

'Not a few of our own at that hour laid down their lives/ at the hands of the vile Germans./ Lie there, o hero! Your fame will/ live on among us **Turkestantsy**./ So peacefully sleep, far away from your loved ones,/ may you all rest in peace! /Our Tsar will not abandon his heroes,/ and the Motherland will not forget you.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Niccolo' Pianciola 'Scales of violence': The 1916 Central Asian uprising in the context of wars and revolutions (1914-1923) in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916*. ed. Chokobaeva, Drieu and Morrison, 172; W.E.D. Allen & Paul Muratoff *Caucasian Battlefields. A history of the wars on the Turco-Caucasian border 1828-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 240-1.

<sup>21</sup> Buttino *Revolutsiya Naoborot*, 405.

<sup>22</sup> Poem from a letter written from the SW front, June 1916 in A. B. Astashov & P. A. Simmons (ed.) *Pis'ma s Voiny 1914-1917* (Moscow: Novyi Khronograf, 2015), 221.

This ethnic solidarity, and above all the experience of combat and of atrocities against civilian populations – notably the aftermath of the Armenian genocide - would be significant when some of these soldiers returned to Turkestan in 1916-17 to man punitive expeditions against the Central Asian rebels, while significant numbers of arms returned with them.<sup>23</sup>

The First Turkestan Army Corps also included the Turkmen cavalry regiment (*Turkenskii konnyi polk*, renamed *Tekinskii konnyi polk* in 1916 – see **fig.2**) the one unit of the Russian army which was recruited from Central Asia’s ‘native population’. First established in 1885 following the Russian conquest of Transcaspia, its existence represented a recognition of the exceptional ‘martial’ qualities the Russians saw in the Turkmen, in terms strongly analogous to the ‘martial race theory’ applied by the British to the Sikhs or the Gurkhas in South Asia.<sup>24</sup> During the war they served with some distinction against both the Germans and the Austro-Hungarians on the Volhynian and Bukovina fronts, where they often seem to have been used as ‘savage’ shock troops, rather like the French *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, who suffered heavy casualties in the re-capture of Fort Douaumont in October 1916 and the Nivelles offensive of 1917.<sup>25</sup> Although made up predominantly of Akhal-Teke Turkmen, from 1914 on, volunteers from other Central Asian nomadic regions were also admitted, meaning the regiment also had some Kyrgyz and Kazakh soldiers. In the summer of 1917, in combination with Muslim units recruited from the North Caucasus, it would form part of General Lavr Kornilov’s notorious ‘Savage Division’ (*Dikaia Diviziia*), with which he was supposedly plotting a counter-revolution.<sup>26</sup> Compared with the detailed histories we now have of African and Indian soldiers on the western front, it is fair to say that the story of Central Asian soldiers on the Eastern front remains unwritten.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Buttino *Revoliutsiia Naoborot*, 232; P. G. Galuzo *Vooruzhenie russkikh pereselentsev v Srednei Azii* (Tashkent: Iz. Sr.-Az. Kom. Un-ta im. V. I. Lenina, 1926), 70-1.

<sup>24</sup> T. V. Kotiukova *Okraina na osobom položhenii. Turkestan v preddverii dramy* (Moscow: NPK, 2016), 352-64; On ‘martial races’ in the British Empire see David Omissi *The Sepoy and the Raj* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), 10-46. Heather Streets-Salter *Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester University Press, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> A. V. Oleinikov “‘Eta konnitsa svoei neodolimoi i porvistoroi otvagoi ne raz sbivala germantsev s tolku’”. *Tekinskii konnyi polk – elitnaia kavaleriiskaia chast’ Russkoi armii v period Pervoi mirovoi voiny’ Voенno-istoricheskii zhurnal* (2016) No.6: 9-14; Elizabeth Greenhalgh *The French Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 31-2; Richard Fogarty ‘Tirailleurs Sénégalais’ in: *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson doi:10.15463/ie1418.10876

<sup>26</sup> For a recent account of this well-known episode see Laura Engelstein *Russia in Flames. War Revolution and Civil War 1914-21* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 159-65.

<sup>27</sup> e.g. George Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India’s Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Tyler Stovall ‘The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War’ *The American Historical Review* 103/3 (1998): 737–769.

Much more numerous than soldiers were the laborers conscripted under the ill-fated *ukaz* of the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1916, something remembered as the supreme moment of oppression for Turkestan’s population. As one Uyghur *qoshaq* (folk song) put it:

In the year '16/ we all became servants. Nicholas who issued this decree; despot Nicholas is cruel [*Nikolai zalim baghri tash*]; Nicholas who has a black soul [*dili qara Nikolai*]/is taking young men. These affairs of the padishah/ deeply touched all hearts. Nicholas gave the order to mobilise one thousand people for labor [*ming lashmanchi alsun döp*] / The poverty-stricken population who had to bear the burden of conscription were angered and distressed./ They tried to oppose the decree, wanting to avoid conscription for labor battalions./ They even argued that they were not slaves.<sup>28</sup>

Although labor conscription was hugely disrupted by the revolt that the decree helped to provoke – leading to the policy’s suspension in Semirechie - at least 125,000 men were sent to European Russia between September 1916 and March 1917 (see **fig.3**).<sup>29</sup> The first 30 echelons, each of approximately 1,000 men, were despatched between the 18<sup>th</sup> September and the 18<sup>th</sup> October 1916 on special trains as follows:

**Table 1 First 30 echelons of trains carrying conscripted laborers from Turkestan, Sept-Oct 1916.**<sup>30</sup>

Origin	Number
<i>Syr-Darya Province</i>	
Tashkent	4
Cherniaev (Chimkent)	2
Kazalinsk	1
Perovsk	1
Turkestan	1
<i>Fergana Province</i>	
Andijan	3
Kokand	2
Skobelev (New Marghelan)	2
Namangan	2
<i>Samarkand Province</i>	
Samarkand	4
Katta-Kurgan	1
Khujand	1
Jizzakh	1

<sup>28</sup> Uyghur *Qoshaq*, date unknown, trans. Ablet Kamalov in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916*, 242-3

<sup>29</sup> P. A. Kovalev 'Mobilizatsiia na tylovye raboty naseleniia Turkestana (sentiabr 1916g – mart 1917g.)' *Trudy Sredneaziatskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta im. V. I. Lenina* (1957) Novaia Seria, Vyp.XC, Kn.14, 63-115

<sup>30</sup> 'Plan perevozki pervykh 30 eshelonov rabochikh tuzemtsev Turkestanskogo kraia s 18 sentiabria po 18 oktiabria 1916 goda' RGVA F.400 Op.1 D.4543 'Po voprosu o privlechenii v rabochiia družhiny na frontakh inorodtsev, osvobodhdennykh nyne ot voinskoi povinnosti' ll.43 – ob.

<i>Transcaspian Province</i>	
Ashkhabad	1
Merv	1
Charjui (Petroalexandrovsk)	2
Tejen	1
<b>Total:</b>	30

Owing to a shortage of shipping on the Caspian, only those from Ashkhabad, Tejen and Merv were despatched by that route from Krasnovodsk to Baku and the Caucasian front, while the remainder were sent to European Russia on the Orenburg-Tashkent railway.<sup>31</sup> These trains took six days to cover the distance from Tashkent to their initial destination, Kinel' near Samara. From Kinel' they were to be sent to either Penza or Syzran (where in March 1917 the Kazakh politician Mustafa Choqaeu would encounter several wagonloads of them, apparently forgotten),<sup>32</sup> from where they were despatched to Pskov for the northern front, Orsha for the western and Kharkov for the South-Western fronts.<sup>33</sup> The Ministry of War had anticipated that these long journeys would present sanitary problems, but Kuropatkin's response to their queries was to suggest the chief difficulty lay in 'the general lack of culture of the alien [*inorodcheskoï*] masses, and some of their native characteristics: e.g. the Sarts never undress completely and consider it an insult to have to expose their genitals'.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly then, poor sanitary conditions seem to have begun at the collection points for the laborers even before they embarked on the trains, while they also generally lacked warm clothing suitable for the much colder climate to which they were heading.<sup>35</sup>

Despite these difficulties another 33 trainloads of laborers were despatched between the 18<sup>th</sup> October and the 18<sup>th</sup> November, while 93 were planned for 18<sup>th</sup> November – 18<sup>th</sup> December, and 76 more between the 18<sup>th</sup> December and the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1917, including five echelons of workers from Semirechie.<sup>36</sup> By November, however, it had become clear that Turkestan itself was suffering from a labor shortage, leading Kuropatkin to tell the War Ministry he would have to

<sup>31</sup> P. A. Kovalev *Tylovye rabochie Turkestana v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny (1916 – mai 1917 g.)* (Tashkent: Gosizdat Uzbekskoi SSR, 1957), 53-4.

<sup>32</sup> Sultan Khan Akkuly 'Kazakhi i Pervaia Mirovaia Voina ili chto skryvalos' v arkhivakh Belarusi?' Chast' III <https://e-history.kz/ru/news/show/4377/>.

<sup>33</sup> Kovalev *Tylovye rabochie*, 71-2.

<sup>34</sup> Zhurnal №.1 obrazovannago pri Glavnom Shtabe meduvedomstvennago soveshchaniia po voprosu o privlechenii inorodtsev k rabotam v tylovykh raionakh armii i vnutri Imperii na gosudarstvennuiu oboronu.' 20/08/1916 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.4543 ll.30-34ob

<sup>35</sup> Kovalev *Tylovye rabochie*, 64-9.

<sup>36</sup> 'Plan perevozki 33 eshelonov rabochikh tuzemtsev Turkestanskogo kraia s 18 oktiabria po 18 noiabria 1916 goda' & 'Plan perevozki eshelonov rabochikh tuzemtsev Turkestanskogo kraia s 18 dekabria po 10 Marta 1917 goda' RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.4543, ll.53, 62; Kovalev 'Mobilizatsiia na tylovye raboty naseleniia Turkestana', 75-8.

restrict the numbers, so that between December and March only a further 22 echelons (22,000) were sent.<sup>37</sup> The fate of these men once they reached European Russia remains under-researched, although the only Soviet historian to work on the topic, P. A. Kovalev, suggested that only a minority were sent to frontline areas and most were scattered among different industries and agricultural regions across European Russia, or indeed remained in Central Asia.<sup>38</sup> Out of the first 30,000 men, only 8,000 were sent to the Northern Front. Another 14,000 were assigned to factory committees in Kharkov, Kiev, Odessa, Ekaterinoslav, Moscow and the Caucasus region, while 8,000 were assigned to work on the Omsk, Tomsk, Tashkent and Central Asian railways. This use of the conscripted laborers took place despite protests from/by Kuropatkin, who argued that it constituted a violation of the terms of the 25<sup>th</sup> June *ukaz*, and drew attention to the severe labor shortages in vital industries in Turkestan itself, such as the coal mines at Qizil-qiya or the oil wells at Chimion in Fergana.<sup>39</sup> Kovalev estimates that overall only 33,600 workers from Turkestan were sent to the front-line areas (27% of the total), while 14,000 were assigned to factory committees, 28,000 to the railways and 44,000 to various small enterprises. 100,000 ended up in European Russia, 7,000 in the Caucasus, and 4,000 in Siberia, while 10,000 remained in Turkestan.<sup>40</sup>

Although Kovalev provides details of the many different enterprises they worked in – locomotive workshops and beet sugar refineries in Kharkov, tramways in Kazan', forestry in Belarus – the social history of Central Asian conscripted laborers, and the effect of their experiences when those who survived returned home, has yet to be fully written.<sup>41</sup> The only portion of their story which has received any recent scholarly attention relates to the Kazakh Alash movement, some of whose most prominent members – notably Alikhan Bukeikhanov and Mustafa Choqayev – were involved in relief activities for those laborers left stranded in Minsk and other areas of the Northern , as first the Tsarist regime and then the Provisional Government collapsed in the course of 1917. This account provides details of the appalling conditions many laborers were living in, but does not really explore their potential role as political agents in their own right.<sup>42</sup> These men had travelled to some of the great cities of the empire, witnessed their squalid collapse along with the autocracy's, and labored in the factories and workshops of European Russia, giving them a rare (for Central Asia) experience of industrial production. It

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<sup>37</sup> Kovalev *Tylovye rabochie*, 76-83.

<sup>38</sup> Kovalev 'Mobilizatsiia na tylovye raboty naseleniia Turkestana', 95-6 107.

<sup>39</sup> Kovalev *Tylovye rabochie*, 86-91.

<sup>40</sup> Kovalev *Tylovye rabochie*, 93-5.

<sup>41</sup> Kovalev *Tylovye rabochie*, 95-7.

<sup>42</sup> Sultan Khan Akkuly 'Kazakhi i Pervaia Mirovaia Voina ili chto skryvalos' v arkhivakh Belarusi?' Chast' I- III <https://e-history.kz/ru/news/show/4375>; <https://e-history.kz/ru/news/show/4376>; <https://e-history.kz/ru/news/show/4377/>.

seems plausible that at least some of them played an important role in the political upheavals to come.

The final direct connection between Turkestan and the battlefield were the estimated 190,000 POWs, almost all Austro-Hungarian, held in twenty-five different camps across Russian Turkestan between September 1914 and 1921, when the last of them were repatriated (**fig.4**).<sup>43</sup> Most had come from the Galician front, including at least 50,000 of the 120,000 captured at the fall of Przemyśl.<sup>44</sup> The nature of the fortress's garrison – largely *Landwehr* and *Honvéd* troops – meant that many of the prisoners were middle-aged family men in their 30s and 40s, often with considerable professional skills from their previous occupations, meaning that already in 1916 they were much in demand as craftsmen and musicians, while their skills would become still more important as Central Asia's economy collapsed after 1917.<sup>45</sup> While often lapsing into Orientalist cliché, their memoirs (mostly by officers) and unpublished testimonies held in the archives in Vienna remain a rich and under-used source for the history of Central Asia during the war and revolutionary years, as the relatively relaxed regime of imprisonment in this remote region meant that they witnessed and recorded a great deal, particularly when it came to the effects of economic crisis.<sup>46</sup> The outbreak of revolt in the summer of 1916 made Turkestan seemed a less secure place to harbor prisoners, and by the end of the year three-quarters of the POWs had been transferred to camps in Siberia. However at least 50,000 remained as witnesses

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<sup>43</sup> The standard work on the approximately two million Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war held in the Russian Empire is Reinhard Nachtigal *Russland und seine österreichisch-ungarischen Kriegsgefangenen (1914-1918)* (Remshalden: Verlag Bernhard Albert Greiner, 2003); see also Julia Walleczek-Fritz 'The Habsburg Empire's Russian Prisoners of War and their Experiences as Forced Labourers on the Southwestern front, 1915-18' & Matthias Egger & Christian Steppan 'Captured and Forgotten? A Comparison of Russian and Austro-Hungarian Welfare Provision for Prisoners of War, 1914-18' in *Military Affairs in Russia's Great War and Revolution 1914-22* Book 1: *Military Experiences* ed. Laurie S. Stoff, Anthony J. Heywood, Boris I. Kolonitskii & John W. Steinberg (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2019), 463-516. Specifically on Turkestan see Tatiana Kotiukova 'Turkestanskii Plen: Nemetskie i Avstro-Vengerskie voennoplennye v Russkom Turkestane v gody Pervoi Mirovoi Voiny' *Rossia i Sovremennyi Mir* (2017) No.3, 47-64; see also Buttino *Revolutsiya naoborot*, 301-6; 50 German officers and 2,255 men were also held captive in Turkestan during the war: Rudolf A. Mark: *Krieg an Fernen Fronten: Die Deutschen in Russisch-Turkestan und am Hindukusch 1914-1924* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013), 170-183.

<sup>44</sup> Nachtigal *Russland und seine österreichisch-ungarischen*, 32-8; Kotiukova 'Turkestanskii Plen', 48; Albert Pethö *Belagerung und Gefangenschaft. Von Przemyśl bis Russisch-Turkestan. Das Kriegstagebuch des Dr Richard Ritter von Stenitzer* (Graz: Ares Verlag, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Chirkin *Dvadsat' let sluzhby*, 249-50; Alexander Watson *The Fortress. The Great Siege of Przemyśl* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), Ch.2.

<sup>46</sup> See in particular this elaborate collection: *In Feindeshand. Die Gefangenschaft im Weltkriege in Einzeldarstellung* ed. Hans Weiland & Leopold Kern (Vienna: Amon Franz Göth, 1931) 2 vols., as well as the following individual memoirs: Gustav Krist *Prisoner in the Forbidden Land* trans. E. O. Lorimer (London: Faber & Faber, 1939); Fritz Willfort *Turkestanisches Tagebuch. Sechs Jahre in Russisch-Zentralasien* (Vienna & Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1930); Franz Praeg *Kriegsgefangen in Asiatischen Steppen. Aus meinen Kriegserinnerungen* (Dornbirn: Buchdruckerei der Vorarlberger Verlagsanstalt, 1925); Franz J. Hentschel *Auf Tamerlans Spuren. Des Ostens Dämmerung oder Aufstieg. Selbsterlebes aus Turkestan und Rußland* (Leitmerik: Buchdruckerei Dr. Karl Dickert, 1924) & Rudolf Köstenberger *Sechs Jahre in Turkestan* (Graz: Verlag von Ulrich Mosers Buchhandlung, 1920). The historian Peter Felch has an ongoing project seeking to collate testimonies and memoirs from prisoners held in Turkestan, the results of which will appear here: <http://www.spurensuche-turkestan.org/projektinformation/allgemeine-info/>

and participants in the unfolding saga of the Revolution and Civil War in Central Asia – free men once the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had been signed, but mostly still unable to return home, and increasingly in demand for their military skills.<sup>47</sup>

Alongside the trainloads of prisoners, refugees were streaming in their millions from the war fronts in Poland, Galicia and the Baltic, an exodus that took at least 70,000-100,000 of them as far as Tashkent and other Central Asian cities, where their presence may well have further dented imperial prestige.<sup>48</sup> The labor shortages in European Russia, which prompted the recruitment of Central Asians, whilst partly a product of the conscription of able-bodied men for the army, were exacerbated by this huge outflow of people from the empire's western. These migrants from the borderlands were fleeing not just from the forces of the Central Powers, but from what Joshua Sanborn has called 'Stavkaism', a combination of antisemitic and anti-capitalist prejudice on the part of Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich and his Chief of Staff, General N. N. Yanushkevich, which saw the region behind the front line devastated by Russia's own military administration to a degree that exceeded any damage inflicted by the Germans.<sup>49</sup> Another aspect of 'Stavkaism' was hostility to the mechanisms of private trade and clumsy attempts to replace these with state-controlled networks of supply and price controls. It is to the economic chaos produced not just by the war itself, but by the Russian military administration's response to it, that we now turn.

## II – The Economic Impact of War

Reflecting on his visit to wartime Russia in the summer of 1916 in a hastily-penned book intended to convince the British public and politicians to take a more positive view of this embarrassingly autocratic, corrupt and incompetent member of the Allied Entente, the traveller and professional Russophile Stephen Graham remarked that:

Their talk is all of the terrible *dorogovizna*. The pretty word *dorogovizna* means dearness of living, and it is the commonest in the townsman's vocabulary this season of the war. The price of nearly every commodity in Russia has doubled or trebled since the outbreak of war. One would expect the price of manufactured goods to rise there; but the surprising phenomenon is that, despite the overwhelming abundance of foodstuffs in Russia and Russia's inability to export any of that abundance, food has become, on the whole, dearer than in Berlin.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The representative of the Danish Red Cross charged with looking after the interests of the 38,000 prisoners who still remained in Turkestan at the end of 1917 provides one of the best accounts of their travails: Captain A. H. Brun *Troublous Times. Experiences in Bolshevik Russia and Turkestan* (London: Constable & Co., 1931).

<sup>48</sup> Peter Gatrell *A Whole Empire Walking. Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1999), 56, 92-3; Kotiukova, 49.

<sup>49</sup> Sanborn *Imperial Apocalypse*, 76-87, 245-6.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Graham *Russia in 1916* (London: Cassell & Co, 1917), 34-5. On Graham's wartime travels see Michael Hughes *Beyond Holy Russia. The Life and Times of Stephen Graham* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2014), 118-123.

We now know that it was a combination of labor shortages for sowing and harvesting, mushrooming wartime demand at the front and in expanding industrial centers, a growing reluctance of peasants to market their grain (as there were almost no livestock or tools for them to buy with the rapidly-depreciating scrip they would receive in return) and excessive military demands on the railway network which produced the phenomenon that so baffled Graham.<sup>51</sup> At the time many people – including those in positions of power – blinded by ‘Stavkaist’ prejudice and unable to see these underlying causes, instead blamed ‘speculation’, and it was this which prompted the authorities to try to introduce price controls. These generally depressed production and worsened supply problems, leading to a thriving black market and still greater price inflation, exacerbated by an enormous increase in the supply of paper money.<sup>52</sup> In July 1916 an article in the newspaper *Turkestan-skii Krai*, which expressed the views of the commercial circles around the Kokand Stock Exchange, remarked on the previously unimaginable (and to the author unwelcome) levels of state intervention in local markets brought about by the war: ‘if the great defender of the idea of free trade and industry, the famous economist Adam Smith, were to rise from the grave, he would be amazed by the fact of the all-consuming interference of government and social forces in trade and industrial life.’<sup>53</sup> As this suggests, despite its geographical distance from the front Turkestan was not immune to these distortions of the war economy, and in some ways suffered more from them than most regions of European Russia away from the front line.

The outbreak of war saw an immediate doubling of the tax burden on Turkestan’s population and extensive requisitioning of livestock, as the Kyrgyz poet Musa Chaghatay Uulu later recalled:

His Majesty Nicholas committed the first act of contempt [*Nekeleydin chongdugbu, birinchi qilghan qordugbu*]. The original outrage he inflicted was that he parted us from our land. After that he ordered a registration and requisition of cattle; we were allowed to keep only one-third of our cattle.<sup>54</sup>

While cattle were required to feed the army, horses were required for transport and as cavalry remounts: despite the persistent scepticism of the Russian army over the previous sixty years as

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<sup>51</sup> Norman Stone *The Eastern Front 1914-1917* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), 291-301; Peter Gatrell *Russia’s First World War. A Social and Economic History* (London: Routledge, 2005), 154-175; Paul Castañeda Dower & Andrei Markevich, “Labor Misallocation and Mass Mobilization: Russian Agriculture during the Great War,” Center for Economic and Financial Research at the New Economic School. *Working Paper No.238* (Moscow, 2017); Anthony Heywood ‘Spark of Revolution? Railway Disorganisation, Freight Traffic and Tsarist Russia’s War Effort, July 1914–March 1917’ *Europe-Asia Studies* 65/4 (2013): 753–72.

<sup>52</sup> Lars T. Lih *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914-1921* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 24-31; Holquist *Making War, Forging Revolution*, 26-46.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Kokand, 17 iun’ia’ *Turkestan-skii Krai* no.49 17/06/1916

<sup>54</sup> Musa Chaghatay Uulu *Qirghin* (‘The Slaughter’ [ca.1928]) trans. Daniel Prior in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916* p.316

to suitability of the 'Kirgiz' horse for military purposes (they were thought to be too small), at least 70,000 were requisitioned in the first two years of the war.<sup>55</sup> Alongside this direct extraction of financial and animal resources, the increase in grain prices would have particularly severe consequences for Turkestan, whose main cotton-growing area in Ferghana was heavily dependent on imports of grain from European Russia and Siberia. While peasants in those regions could eat or hoard their surplus of rye, buckwheat, oats or wheat, peasants growing cotton in Central Asia had no choice but to market their product, and did so under increasingly unfavourable terms of trade. Marco Buttino notes that although 1915 had seen the largest cotton harvest on record, most of it was purchased by the state for the manufacture of uniforms and munitions at a fixed price which, while 50% higher than that of 1913, was accompanied by a 100% increase in the price of grain in cotton-growing areas as the supply from elsewhere in the empire fell by a third.<sup>56</sup>

Conscription reduced the rural labor force among Russian settlers in Semirech'e and Syr-Darya provinces, affecting the local grain harvest, which was further damaged by a dry winter and spring in 1915-1916.<sup>57</sup> Although we do not have a complete price and wage series that would allow a precise calculation of how far living standards fell during the first years of the war, a comparison of pre- and post-war data from household budgets in the region shows a very significant decline in real wages and calorific intake: even by 1928 these had not fully recovered to the levels seen in 1913.<sup>58</sup>

Although it was the Muslim population who suffered most from increased prices and reduced access to food, significantly enough, the first serious stirrings of economic discontent came from Russian settlers. These were prompted at least in part by resentment that they were liable for military service while the 'natives' were not. It was the price of potatoes which had sparked the first significant food riots in Tashkent in late February 1916, largely led by women – *soldatki*, or soldiers' wives. As Governor-General von Martson reported it to the Main Staff: 'The rise in prices for foodstuffs and basic necessities and exploitation by the Sart merchants, together with the small number of police [available], led to an attempt by the common people, almost

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<sup>55</sup> Carole Ferret 'Des chevaux pour l'empire' in *Le Turkestan Russe: Une colonie comme les autres?* ed. S. Gorshenina and S. Abashin *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*, no.17/18 (Tashkent and Paris: IFEAC, 2009): 211 – 53; Sean McDaniel 'Equine Empire: Horses and Power on the Kazakh Steppe, 1880s–1920s' (Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 2019), 89.

<sup>56</sup> Marco Buttino 'Study of the economic crisis and depopulation in Turkestan, 1917–1920', *Central Asian Survey* Vol.9 no.4 (1990), 60-1; Buttino *Revolutsiya naoborot*, 45-8; Kh. Ziyoev (ed.) *Istoriya Uzbekskoi SSR* Vol.II (Tashkent: FAN, 1968), 525.

<sup>57</sup> Buttino *Revolutsiya naoborot*, 85-90.

<sup>58</sup> Beatrice Penati 'Central Asian Living Standards before and after the Revolution' (Unpublished Paper).

exclusively women, to destroy the bazaars yesterday.<sup>59</sup> With its reference to ‘Sart’ (i.e. local Muslim) merchants, von Martson’s message confirms that, unlike in European Russia, these *bab’i buntty* in Tashkent had a clear ethnic and religious dimension to them. Jeff Sahadeo has documented the powerful image of the greedy Muslim speculator found in the testimonies of those women arrested, who talked of beating the Sarts in order to teach them a lesson.<sup>60</sup>

A month later von Martson was forced to report further women’s riots in the Lepsinsk and Przheval’sk districts of the settler region of Semirechie, writing that ‘of the injured merchants the majority are Muslims whose predatory practices are especially irritating to the mob because of their freedom from military service’.<sup>61</sup> However the nature of the economic dislocation here was different: Semirech’e still had a significant grain surplus, and remained insulated from the steep increases in the price of food elsewhere in Turkestan, due to the lack of a rail connection to bring it to market (see **map 1**). For the same reason however February-March 1916 had seen a spike in the prices of manufactured goods – military governor Fol’baum wrote that the prices ‘of all manufactures – footwear, cloth, metalware, iron, sugar, kerosene, candles, matches – in January and especially in February rose by 50 – 300%’,<sup>62</sup> and it was these kinds of goods which the rioters targeted rather than food.

Despite von Martson’s assertion, the ethnic nature of the violence was also less clear-cut than in Tashkent. While in Przheval’sk district the riots did consist of settlers targeting local Kyrgyz and Dungan Muslims, (an ominous foreshadowing of the 1916 revolt that summer, when the district would become the epicenter of violence), in Lepsinsk most of the merchants targeted were in fact Russian, and the testimony of the women involved did not betray any particular ethnic or religious animosity.<sup>63</sup> Fol’baum nevertheless blamed speculation by local Muslim merchants, singling out the Tatar Kuddus Gabduvaliev, who owned a prominent shop in central Vernyi [present-day Almaty] and whose commercial agents he placed under extended surveillance.<sup>64</sup> The suspicion found everywhere in Russia that rising prices were a consequence of manipulation by ‘speculators’ and ‘dark forces’ was thus also evident in official attitudes in Turkestan, but there it was the wily Muslim merchant who took the place of the Jews who were the main victims of ‘Stavkaism’ in European Russia.

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<sup>59</sup> Cipher Telegram from von Martson to the War Minister 01/03/1916 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.4540 ‘O bezporiadkakh, voznikshikh v nekotorykh mestnostiakh Turkestanskogo kraia na pochve vzdorozhaniia predmetov potrebleniia’ l.1

<sup>60</sup> Sahadeo *Russian Colonial Society*, 170-6.

<sup>61</sup> Telegram von Martson to the War Minister 04/04/1916 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.4540 11.13-*ob*.

<sup>62</sup> Fol’baum to the Department of Police 07/03/1916 TsGARKaz F.44 Op.1 D.20063 l.13-14.

<sup>63</sup> Alexander Morrison ‘*Bab’i Buntty* in Semirech’e: Gender, Class and Ethnicity in Central Asia during the First World War’ *Revolutionary Russia* Vol.36 no.1 (2023): 34-55.

<sup>64</sup> Fol’baum to the Department of Police 07/03/1916 TsGARKaz F.44 Op.1 D.20063 l.13-14.

The local press also reflected this belief that economic woes were largely attributable to malicious speculation. In April 1916 someone writing for *Turkestaniskii Krai* under the pseudonym 'Mephistopheles' described an elaborate scam whereby the cotton-producing peasantry were forced to take spoiled grain in lieu of credit advances to allow them to sow their crop in spring.<sup>65</sup> In July a correspondent for *Turkestaniskii Kur'er* explained that the price of cloth rose as a result of shady deals and collusion between wholesalers.<sup>66</sup> The following month G. Kiselev, writing for the same paper, alleged that the current shortage of bread in Tashkent when there was apparently plenty of flour in local shops could only be attributed to a deliberate restriction of supply by bread bakers to raise prices.<sup>67</sup> In September two short but characteristic notices alerted readers to the fact that cotton-seed oil, the cheapest form of cooking fat available (because of its unpleasant taste it had not even been considered edible before the war),<sup>68</sup> was now out of reach of the poorest, as the bazaar price in Tashkent had reached 50к per *funt*. Meanwhile despite the fact that it was the height of the potato harvest, their price had risen to 4½к per *funt* and 1r 10к per *pud*.<sup>69</sup>

Shortage of fuel was also an increasing concern. Although Transcaspia had abundant crude oil and *mazut*, which was used to fire locomotives on that portion of the Central Asian railway, the Austrian prisoner of war Gustav Krist noted that already in early 1915 in Perovsk in northern Syr-Darya province, *kizyak* – animal dung - was the only available fuel for cooking. In order for the train he was being transported on to reach Tashkent, the prisoners had to be sent out into the steppe to grub for *saxaul* roots to fire the locomotive.<sup>70</sup> In September 1916 a correspondent for *Turkestaniskii Kur'er* accused the Tashkent municipality of hoarding supplies of otherwise unobtainable seasoned *saxaul* to heat public buildings, forcing the public to purchase green, newly-gathered wood that would not burn properly in domestic stoves.<sup>71</sup>

Meanwhile the real causes of economic distress at an all-imperial level – falling production of food and consumer goods, clogged and failing transport networks, and the diversion of scarce resources to the war effort – went largely unremarked in the press. At the local level the economic effects of the 1916 revolt were also severe, particularly in the hardest-hit province of Semirech'e. Przheval'sk district, where the violence had been greatest, usually

<sup>65</sup> 'Pis'ma Mefistofel'ia' *Turkestaniskii Krai* No.1 05/04/1916

<sup>66</sup> 'Kak rastut tseny' *Turkestaniskii Kur'er* 12/07/1916

<sup>67</sup> G. Kiselev 'Khlebnyi vopros' *Turkestaniskii Kur'er* 10/08/1916

<sup>68</sup> Bailey *Mission to Tashkent*, 38.

<sup>69</sup> 'Khlopkovoe maslo'; 'Kartofel' *Turkestaniskii Kur'er* 10/09/1916

<sup>70</sup> Krist *Prisoner in the Forbidden Land*, 66-7. By March 1918, when the supply of oil and *mazut* from Baku was cut off by Turkish occupation, one eyewitness claimed that the engines were being fired with dried fish from the Aral Sea – Brun *Troublous Times*, 110.

<sup>71</sup> P. 'Mysli o Saksaul'e' *Turkestaniskii Kur'er* 13/09/1916

produced a harvest of four million *puds*, but in September 1916 this had fallen to a million.<sup>72</sup> Semirech'e still had a surplus of 2 million *puds* overall, thanks to good harvests in Pishpek and Vernyi districts, but moving this quantity to the railhead at Cherniaev (Chimkent) required 100,000 cart or camel loads, almost four times the available transport.<sup>73</sup> Thus even Semirech'e, which had served as the breadbasket of Turkestan, began to see increased food prices as the harvest fell and the state requisitioned grain – by January 1917 the price of flour had risen by 218% and of meat by 225% compared to July 1914, prompting another round of rioting by *soldatki*, this time in central Vernyi.<sup>74</sup> POW memoirs note that rations began to be reduced across the board not long after the February Revolution. Willfort recalled of 1917 that:

At the beginning of the year we still had 400 grams of bread a day; soon, however, flour became an increasingly difficult item to obtain here in the country, and the reduction of bread to 200 grams a day was a measure that hit us all very hard. In connection with this, we became aware that the systematic malnutrition could not be allowed to go further. To my horror, I discovered that my body weight had dropped from 72 kilograms to below 57 kilograms in the previous month. Fats were almost completely absent from our food, and sugar was limited to 200 grams per month.<sup>75</sup>

In all, perhaps one quarter of the prisoners of war in Turkestan would die of starvation or disease before repatriation.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, overall their position was still one of relative privilege compared to the Muslim population: in Willfort's case he was cushioned by the freedom to cultivate a small garden in the Ferghana town of Skobelev where he was being held, which yielded '670 melons, 1,100 cobs of corn, cotton for two pillows and 15 kilograms of Sart beans, plus 50 fine bottle gourds'<sup>77</sup> – in prioritising the cultivation of food over cotton he was following a wider trend. In response to the drop in supply and rising grain prices, many Muslim peasants in Ferghana were beginning to sow grain on land previously under cotton, a tendency Kuropatkin was anxious to arrest, as cotton continued to be vital for the production of uniforms and munitions.<sup>78</sup> Though the cotton harvest fell very significantly in 1917, it was not matched by a sufficient increase in food production to avoid disaster. While on the eve of revolution the worst privations for Turkestan still lay ahead, the war had already thoroughly dislocated an agrarian economy whose focus on an inedible cash crop – cotton – made it much more vulnerable to starvation than the grain-growing regions of European Russia. By the end of 1917 overall grain availability per capita in Turkestan had already halved from pre-war levels to 8.6

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<sup>72</sup> Fol'baum to Kuropatkin 22/09/1916 TsGARKaz F.44 Op.1 D.20063 l.112

<sup>73</sup> Alekseev to Kuropatkin 10/12/1916 TsGARKaz F.44 Op.1 D.20063 ll.180-181

<sup>74</sup> S. N. Pokrovskii *Pobeda Sovetskoi vlasti v Semirech'e* (Alma-Ata: Izd. AN KazSSR, 1961), 47; Morrison 'Bab'i Bunty'.

<sup>75</sup> Willfort *Turkestanisches Tagebuch*, 112.

<sup>76</sup> Willfort *Turkestanisches Tagebuch*, 53; Buttino *Revolutsiia Naaborot*, 133, 301.

<sup>77</sup> Willfort *Turkestanisches Tagebuch*, 112.

<sup>78</sup> Zhurnal No.6 Turkestanского Kraevogo Prodovol'stvennogo Soveshchaniya 18/11/1916 TsGARKaz F.44 Op.1 D.20063 ll.191-3.

*puds* per person per year, below the 10 *puds* which was the estimated minimum required.<sup>79</sup> In November of that year, even a relatively privileged figure like Willfort would write that ‘*Der Hunger beginnt*’.<sup>80</sup>

### III– The 1916 Revolt

At the end of July 1916, as he and his fellow prisoners were being sent by train from Perovsk to Moscow, the Habsburg medical officer Alfred Pethö wrote that “Overnight the order came that several companies of Russian militiamen [*Landsturmer*] were to be despatched immediately, apparently to suppress a Kirgiz uprising [*Kirgisenaufstandes*] in the interior of the country’.<sup>81</sup> The 1916 Revolt was by far the most significant event in wartime Turkestan, and one whose repercussions were in some ways more severe and long-lasting than the revolutions that would come ‘by telegraph’ from Petrograd the following year, establishing patterns of violence that would endure well into the 1920s.<sup>82</sup>

The summer and autumn of 1916 marks the period when the war really began to bite in the colonies of all the Entente powers, as well as in the Ottoman Empire’s Arab provinces, producing an arc of rebellion across much of the Muslim world.<sup>83</sup> The French empire in particular saw serious rebellions provoked by conscription in the Maghreb and West Africa, where the siege of Agadez in Niger lasted over eighty days, while the Batna rebellion in Algeria required a force of 14,000 men for its suppression.<sup>84</sup> In the British Empire, apart from the Easter Rising in Dublin, growing demands for imperial manpower produced discontent but little overt resistance, although the extent of pent-up anger would be revealed in 1919 from Ireland to Canada, Egypt and India.<sup>85</sup>

Seen in this global perspective, the 1916 revolt across Russian Turkestan and the Steppe region was probably the most serious wartime colonial crisis any of the combatants had to face, and the one that carried the heaviest human cost.<sup>86</sup> Over 3,000 Russian settlers died in the initial stages of the revolt, while its suppression in Semirech’e alone saw the deaths of at least 150,000 Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, with a further 100,000 fleeing across the border to Chinese territory, many

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<sup>79</sup> Buttino ‘Study of the Economic Crisis’, 61.

<sup>80</sup> Willfort *Turkestanisches Tagebuch*, 110.

<sup>81</sup> Diary entry for 30/07/1916 Pethö *Belagerung und Gefangenschaft*, 193.

<sup>82</sup> The phrase comes from Buttino *Revolutsiia Naoborot*, 10.

<sup>83</sup> Julie Andurain & Cloé Drieu, ‘Beyond the European stage of 14-18; The other Great War in the Muslim world’ *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 141 (2017): 11-33.

<sup>84</sup> Jonathan Krause ‘Islam and Anticolonial Rebellion in North and West Africa, 1914-1918’ *The Historical Journal*, 64/3 (2020): 674-695; Greenhalgh *The French Army*, 161

<sup>85</sup> Stephen Garton ‘The Dominions, Ireland, and India’ in Robert Gerwarth & Erez Manela (ed.) *Empires at War: 1911 – 1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 152-178.

<sup>86</sup> Keith Jeffery *1916: A Global History*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 182-188.

dying of starvation and cold along the way.<sup>87</sup> It was no coincidence that this region, which had seen by far the largest numbers of peasant settlers anywhere in Russian Turkestan, with an acceleration in the last decade before the war, also saw the greatest bloodletting.<sup>88</sup> The better-organized rebellion in the northern steppe saw perhaps 50,000 rebels participating at its height, with a substantial force besieging the town of Turgai from late October to early December 1916.<sup>89</sup> In all, punitive expeditions totalling at least 15,000 infantry, 3,300 cavalry, 42 guns and 69 machine guns were employed in suppressing the revolt across Turkestan,<sup>90</sup> – small beer alongside the titanic clashes taking place along the Eastern front that year perhaps, but on a similar scale to the force the French employed in Algeria at the same time. These troops were assisted by volunteer *družhiny* (vigilantes) from the settler population, who were re-armed in response to the rebellion and in Semirech’e took the opportunity not just for bloody revenge, but for a further land-grab from the local Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Uyghurs.<sup>91</sup>

Beyond these two main centers in Semirech’e and Turgai, unrest and outright rebellion spread to all parts of Turkestan including Transcaspia, where the Turkmen fishermen of Chikishlar on the Caspian attacked their Russian counterparts, while elsewhere they refused to provide laborers.<sup>92</sup> In the cotton-growing regions of Ferghana, economic stress would lead one to expect a major outbreak, and there were reports of unrest between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> July: in Andijan - where 19 soldiers were wounded by the crowd; Assaka and Margelan – where two *aqsaqals* and 4 watchmen were killed by a mob; and also Kokand, and Namangan - where a machine gun was used to disperse a crowd of 3-4,000 who had gathered to protest against

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<sup>87</sup> G. Krongardt “Demograficheskie aspekty istorii vosstaniia 1916 goda v Kyrgyzstane” in *Vosstanie 1916 goda v Kyrgyzstane (sbornik materialov nauchnoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 75-letiiu vosstaniia)* ed. V. Ploskikh, Dzh. Dzhunushaliev (Bishkek: Ilim, 1993), 49-53 remains the most comprehensive study of the demographic consequences of the revolt. The population of Semirech’e fell by approximately 270,000, but this includes those killed directly, those who perished of exposure while fleeing, permanent exiles and missing births. See further Aminat Chokobaeva ‘When the nomads went to war: the uprising of 1916 in Semirech’e’ in Chokobaev, Drieu and Morrison (ed.) *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916*, 145-168.

<sup>88</sup> Alexander Morrison ‘Peasant Settlers and the Civilizing Mission in Russian Turkestan, 1865-1917’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43/3 (2015): 387 – 417.

<sup>89</sup> Isabelle Ohayon and Xavier Hallez ‘Making political rebellion “primitive”: the 1916 rebellion in the Kazakh steppe in long-term perspective’ in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916* ed. Chokobaeva, Drieu & Morrison, 269-70.

<sup>90</sup> This is the estimate given by Andrei Ganin in an otherwise tendentious paper which hugely underplays the level of violence used against the Central Asian population by Russian forces, and presents the rebellion as an entirely unprovoked and disloyal act of aggression: A. V. Ganin ‘Posledniaia poludennaia ekspeditsiia Imperatorskoi Rossii: Russkaia armii na podavlenii turkestanskogo miatezha 1916-1917gg.’ *Russkii Sbornik. Issledovaniia po istorii Rossii* Tom.V ed. O. R. Airapetov, Miroslav Iovanovich, M.A. Kolerov, Bruce Menning, Pol Cheisti (Moskva: Modest Kolerov, 2008), 160.

<sup>91</sup> Alexander Morrison ‘Refugees, resettlement and revolutionary violence in Semirech’e after the 1916 revolt’ in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916* ed. Chokobaeva, Drieu and Morrison, 209 – 226. The classic Soviet work on the rearming of the settlers and its deadly consequences is Galuzo *Vooruzhenie russkikh pereselentsev*,

<sup>92</sup> Acting G-G Erofeev to the War Minister, Cipher Telegram 15/07/1916 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.4546 ‘O volnenniakh sredi tuzemnago naseleniia Turkestanskogo kraia, vznikshikh na pochve rekvizitsii’ ll.24 – ob

conscription, killing sixteen and wounding 30.<sup>93</sup> Here however, the much-maligned Military Governor of Ferghana, A. I. Gippius (**fig.5**), succeeded in quieting unrest by assuming ‘native’ dress and promising on his own authority that the local population would be free to volunteer for labor duties and would not be forcibly conscripted. He he also publicly read out extracts from the Qu’ran which supposedly demonstrated that there was no Muslim prohibition on serving the Russian army in this way.<sup>94</sup> Writing to the Main Staff, Gippius insisted that:

The compulsory conscription of laborers will lead to a dead end from which there is no way out, in view of this I decided the question differently, namely: in a printed address to the native population and numerous conversations with its honored representatives, I announced that the imperial decree of June 25<sup>th</sup> of this year did not at all indicate the conscription of workers by force, but it was assumed that there would be so many volunteers that we would select the best and send them to the front.

This act of insubordination led to his dismissal as governor and despatch to the Caucasus.<sup>95</sup>

The relative wisdom of Gippius’s mollifying approach was underlined by events in neighbouring Samarkand province, where he had warned his friend and fellow military orientalist [*voennyi vostokoved*], military governor Lykoshin, that his attempts to soften the implementation of the imperial decree were unlikely to be successful: ‘If your opinion does not prevail, then you will have to resort to military force in relation to the mob’.<sup>96</sup> This came after an initial protest against labor conscription in the town of Khujand on the 6<sup>th</sup> July, where three were killed and four wounded when the crowd was dispersed.<sup>97</sup> It was followed by a much more serious violent outbreak in the town of Jizzakh on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 1916. As in Khujand, this began with an attempt by the town *aqsaqal* to draw up lists of those liable for labor conscription. As Tomohiko Uyama has noted, the absence of *metricheskie knigi* (official records of birth, death and marriage) in Turkestan meant there were no reliable birth records, leaving this process wide open to abuse by the officials entrusted with it.<sup>98</sup> One of the most vivid accounts of what happened in Jizzakh comes from Willfort’s memoir, as he was being held in the town’s *lager* when the revolt began:

In his address, the *sartische Bürgermeister* [town *aqsaqal*], apparently in agreement with the Russian authorities, indicated that those who would pay a contribution of at least 100 gold roubles could

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<sup>93</sup> Telegram from the Skobelev district commandant to the Turkestan Governor-General 13/07/1916; Makarov (Justice Ministry) to Dmitrii Savel’evich 14/07/1916 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.4546 ll.15 – ob, 17

<sup>94</sup> “Gubernator v roli propovednika korana”, *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 75 (1936), 189–191.

<sup>95</sup> Cipher telegram from Gippius to the Chief of the Main Staff 18/07/1916; Chief of the Main Staff to Gippius 21/07/1916 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.4546 ll.47 – 49. The telegram carries a comment from General Frolov that ‘I believe that the sooner Gen. Gippius is sent to a new place of service, the better.’ See further Shvarts ‘Gubernator “s gvozdem”’.

<sup>96</sup> Gippius to Lykoshin 08/07/1916 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.4546 l.36ob.

<sup>97</sup> Telegram Khujand District Commandant to the Turkestan G-G 06/07/1916 RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.4546 l.20. On the subsequent Soviet mythologisation of this outbreak see Nabijon Rahimov ‘Khodimi Dzhamolak: mif ili real’nost?’ in *Izuchenie 1916 goda* ed. Aitpaeva & Morrison, 41–65.

<sup>98</sup> Tomohiko Uyama ‘Why in Central Asia? Why in 1916? The revolt as an interface of the Russian colonial crisis and the World War’ in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916* ed. Chokobaeva, Drieu & Morrison, 31–4.

exempt themselves from military service. As a result, a wild tumult arose among the natives, especially from the poorer population. The *Bürgermeister* found it difficult to save himself from the mob that wanted to lynch him.<sup>99</sup>

When the local district commandant, Colonel Rukin, arrived in a buggy with his assistant Zokotlov, both officers were attacked and trampled and beaten to death by the mob, Willfort recalled that news of this sent their guards into a panic.<sup>100</sup>

Over the next few days groups of rebels attacked and destroyed portions of the main Central Asian railway line that ran through Jizzakh, burning all the stations as far as Cherniaev (the junction for Ferghana), and killed a further eighty Russians, though the rebellion never spread to all districts of the province.<sup>101</sup> Within two weeks it had been suppressed, and Willfort was an eyewitness to the final stage of the punitive expedition, in which the ‘native’ town of Jizzakh was completely destroyed by Cossacks in scenes reminiscent of the fate of Brody or other Jewish *shtetls* on the Eastern Front:

The Cossacks did not return from the old town until afternoon; each of them had loaded his horse richly with booty. One of them looked grotesque as he laboriously dragged a red plush sofa behind his horse. The old town - it was said – has been completely exterminated; the few old people the Cossacks encountered were unceremoniously cut down. The Russians sought to impress the natives by deploying troops in every nook and cranny and by thundering their cannons. Far into the mountains it was heard that the great Russian Empire had set up artillery here. All the villages in the area, as far as one could see in the evening, were set on fire. The attempt by the locals to shake off the Russian yoke that they had grudgingly endured for decades had been in vain; as defenceless pariahs, armed only with almost medieval weapons, they had to take to their heels before a handful of Russians with firearms. [...] Carpets, silver jewellery, silk scarves, beautiful embroidery from the mosques and much more. Had it not been for the hateful thought that so much blood attached to all these beautiful things, you could have bought the most valuable native work for a few silver roubles. New things kept being dragged in, and soon the soldiers had their pockets abundantly filled with money for things they had no doubt purchased with a bayonet thrust. Patrols came back, their horses piled high with silk blankets, precious metal jugs, and household items. Towards evening the red glow appeared again over the place where the old town had formerly been located, and the whole air was filled with a faint smell of burning.<sup>102</sup>

There could be no clearer indication that the violence of the First World War had reached Turkestan – and it did so well before the rest of the empire away from the front lines would collapse into revolutionary violence and civil war. Alongside the deaths and the physical damage, the revolt fuelled local conspiracy theories, which – like the more widespread tales of Rasputin and the Tsaritsa – undermined the legitimacy of the Tsarist state even among Russian

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<sup>99</sup> Willfort *Turkestanisches Tagebuch*, 71

<sup>100</sup> A Shestakov (ed.) ‘Dzhizakskoe Vosstanie v 1916g.’, *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 5 (60) (1933), 60–2; Willfort *Turkestanisches Tagebuch*, 72; Willfort *Turkestanisches Tagebuch*, 84.

<sup>101</sup> Telegram from the Samarkand *Prokuror* to the Ministry of Justice 14/07/1916 RGVA F.400 Op.1 D.4546 l.18; Akmal Bazarbaev and Cloe Drieu ‘The 1916 Uprisings in Jizzakh: economic background and political rationales’ in *The Central Asian Revolt of 1916* ed. Chokobaeva, Drieu and Morrison, 71–94

<sup>102</sup> Willfort *Turkestanisches Tagebuch*, 76, 78.

settlers who had the greatest interest its survival in Turkestan.<sup>103</sup> One theory promoted by G. I. Broido held that the colonial authorities deliberately provoked the revolt so that its suppression would provide an excuse for the expropriation of yet more land from the nomadic population of Semirech'e for Russian settlers. A classic example of the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy, the sheer implausibility of the notion that so destructive a rebellion might have been fostered deliberately in time of war did not prevent it from gaining widespread currency in the early Soviet period, when Broido's claims were first published.<sup>104</sup>

Probably more typical of the rumors circulating at the time was the following testimony recorded by the *Okhrana* in Vernyi, which reflected the hysteria over supposed German plots and treason that obsessed Russian opinion in the latter stages of the war:<sup>105</sup>

Ensign Golenko explained the reasons for the rebellion of the Kirgiz, and allowed himself to say: "General Fol'baum is a pure German – he gave rifles and bullets to the Kirgiz, the bastard. Everything was sold here, all the district commandants were traitors. It is possible that Fol'baum received captured officers who escaped from our captivity in Sart clothes, he is a scoundrel in the highest degree. He did not die: either he escaped alive abroad, or he was sent away. In Russia, all the high positions are occupied by Germans. In the war, a soldier is considered worse than a fly, a good [serf] owner doesn't squash flies like our superiors beat the soldiers."<sup>106</sup>

If the Tsarist regime's legitimacy in the eyes of Turkestan's 'native' population had been shaken or shattered by the 1916 revolt and its brutal suppression, clearly here as elsewhere in the Russian empire black legends of treachery in high places were doing the same for the settler population. The revolt also had its effects in the center of power in Petrograd, where in December 1916 a series of Duma deputies, led by the Tashkent-raised Alexander Kerensky, lined up to denounce both the incompetence which had provoked rebellion and the brutality of its suppression – one of the last major Duma debates before the regime crumbled altogether.<sup>107</sup>

### Conclusion – Revolution and Collapse

The story of the February and October Revolutions in Turkestan has been admirably told elsewhere – suffice it to say that as in much of the rest of the empire the first was peaceful and largely welcomed. Kuropatkin was dismissed as Governor-General in March 1917, and

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<sup>103</sup> Boris Kolonitskii *"Tragicheskaia Erotika". Obraz imperatorskoi sem'i v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2010).

<sup>104</sup> G. I. Broido *Vosstanie Kirgiz v 1916g. Moe pokazanie prokuroru tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go Sentiabria 1916g.* (Moscow: Nauchnaia Assotsiatsiia Vostokovedeniia pri Ts. I. K. SSSR, 1925), 1-2, 7, 28.

<sup>105</sup> See William C. Fuller, *The Foe Within. Fantasies of Treason and the end of Imperial Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>106</sup> Zheleznyakov (Vernyi Okhrana chief) to Semirech'e Governor Alekseev 10/01/1917 TsGARKaz F.44 Op.1 D.20075 ll.63-*ob*.

<sup>107</sup> "Stenograficheskii Otchet Gosudarstvennaia Duma. Chetvertyi sozyv. Sessia V. Zasedanie Shestnadsatoe. Vtornik 13 Dekabria 1916g" in RGVIA F.400 Op.1 D.4543, ll.68 – 89*ob*. Also published as "Takoe upravlenie gosudarstvom – nedopustimo. Doklad A. F. Kerenskogo na zakrytom zasedanii Gosudarstvennoi dумы. Dekabr 1916g." *Istoricheskii Arkhiv* (1997) no.2, 4 – 22.

replaced by a committee representing the Provisional Government, led by the respected Orientalist-administrator and Social Revolutionary V. P. Nalivkin. The decline of the committee's authority over the summer of 1917 paralleled that of the Provisional Government in Petrograd. In Turkestan, the second – Bolshevik - revolution was embraced only by the soldiers and railway-workers who made up the Tashkent Soviet, which excluded the 'natives' from representation and sought to claim for itself the power and privileges of the old colonial military administration.<sup>108</sup> The violent conflicts this measure provoked largely followed patterns already laid down in 1916 – that is, they were primarily between European settlers and the Muslim population, and it was the latter who suffered most of all from violence and reduced access to ever-scarcer foodstuffs.<sup>109</sup> For Turkestan, the political crises of the next few years were overshadowed by famine and agrarian collapse, which, as we have seen, had begun in 1916 owing to wartime disruption, but which the formal end of the First World War for Russia at Brest-Litovsk did nothing to alleviate. Turkestan's cotton economy and its dependence on food imports from European Russia and Siberia made it peculiarly vulnerable to the ongoing collapse of the rail system. From January 1918 to September 1919 the railway linking Tashkent to European Russia was cut altogether by the Orenburg Cossacks under Ataman A. I. Dutov, and Turkestan's starvation accelerated.

As revolutionary turmoil began to disrupt the colonial administration after February and then October 1917, the Austro-Hungarian POWs came to be seen less as a security threat and more as human capital whose skills were in increasingly short supply. The most important of these was their military training – here was a large reserve of European manpower that could potentially be used both to keep the local population in check and to settle scores with political enemies. The British intelligence agent Colonel Frederick Bailey estimated that half the Red Army forces in Turkestan in 1918 were Austrian prisoners of war, mostly Magyars – and while this was probably an exaggeration, they do seem to have played a prominent role in the suppression of the Kokand autonomous government and the destruction of much of the city by the forces of the Tashkent Soviet in February 1918.<sup>110</sup> While some may have been genuine enthusiasts for Bolshevik ideology, many were probably motivated to join the Red Army by the promise of regular rations and plunder: one estimate was that those who took part in the sack of

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<sup>108</sup> Apart from Buttino *op cit.* see in particular Dov Yaroshevski "Russian Regionalism in Turkestan" *Slavonic & East European Review* 65/1 (1987): 77-100; Adeb Khalid "Tashkent 1917: Muslim Politics in Revolutionary Turkestan" *Slavic Review* 55/2 (1996), 279-280; Cloé Drieu "Situation révolutionnaire au Turkestan (février 1917- février 1918): les dynamiques locales des révolutions russes », *Vingtième Siècle* 135 (2017), 87-101.

<sup>109</sup> See Sahadeo *Russian Colonial Society*, 193-207; Morrison 'Refugees, Resettlement and Revolutionary violence'

<sup>110</sup> Paul Bergne 'The Kokand Autonomy 1917-18. Political Background, Aims and Reasons for Failure' in *Central Asia. Aspects of Transition* ed. Tom Everett-Heath (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 30-44.

Kokand had each gained at least 10,000 roubles' worth.<sup>111</sup> Not long after this the March 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk transformed the prisoners' legal status from that of enemy combatants to foreign citizens in Turkestan's contested political landscape, where amongst the European settlers they formed an additional and partly independent force alongside the Cossack government in Semirechie, the SRs and their British backers in Transcaspia, and the Bolsheviks in Tashkent. So long as the railways to the Caspian and to European Russia remained cut, and Soviet power in Central Asia remained weak, they held considerable bargaining power and formed an important part of the Red Army's scanty forces. After the railway to Orenburg reopened in 1919 most sought to return home, though 5,600 were still serving in the Red Army in early 1920.<sup>112</sup>

For Turkestan's 'native' population, who had no such leverage and no Red Cross representatives to look after them, the situation was considerably worse. The long-term outcome of the multiple political and economic crises unleashed by the First World War in Turkestan was that the amount of land under cultivation shrank by 28 percent for the Russian settlers and 39 percent for the settled Muslim population. The availability of pasture for the nomads shrank by 45 percent, reflected in a staggering 63 percent decline in their numbers of livestock. It would take until 1928 for patterns of cultivation, livestock and agricultural productivity to recover to 1913 levels, when they would once again be devastated by collectivization.

Even taking into account the fragmented and inconsistent record-keeping of these years, the demographic decline was equally staggering – at least two million people 'disappeared' between 1916 and 1920, or 27 percent of Turkestan's pre-war population of 7.3 million – among nomads, who bore the brunt of the repressions following the 1916 revolt, the number was more than a third, but even if we take the maximum estimate of 270,000 Kyrgyz and Kazakhs who perished as a result of this, most of these deaths came from starvation and accompanying disease, not from direct violence.<sup>113</sup> An even smaller proportion of the demographic loss was made up of those killed at the front, or conscripted laborers who perished of cold and disease in European Russia. These devastating figures are a stark reminder that the suffering and death of the First World War extended far beyond the fighting on front line, and reached even the remotest parts of the Russian Empire.

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<sup>111</sup> F. M. Bailey *Mission to Tashkent* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), 52; Buttino *Revolutsiya Naaborot*, 302-4; Brun *Troublous Times*, 79-80.

<sup>112</sup> Buttino, *Revolutsiya Naaborot*, 304-6.

<sup>113</sup> Buttino, "Study of the Economic Crisis," 63-5.