

OTHER NATIONS

Communism and Inequality

"Racial and Ethnic Inequality: The Comparative Impact of Socialism" by John M. Echols, in *Comparative Political Studies* (Jan. 1981), Sage Publications, 275 South Beverly Dr., Beverly Hills, Calif. 90212.

From Marx to Castro, communists have been claiming that their system would wipe out racism and ethnic inequalities forever. Is their record any better than the West's?

Echols, formerly a political scientist at the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle, compared black-white relations in the United States with the Russian-Central Asian minority cleavage. He examined inequalities between Serbs and Croats in Yugoslavia and between two other like-sized ethnic groups, Belgium's Flemings and Walloons. He also studied French-Anglo disparities in Canada and Czech-Slovak divisions in Czechoslovakia. In some respects—but not all, he found—capitalist countries are moving faster toward equality than are their rivals.

Both American blacks and Soviet Central Asians, for example, lag behind their countries' majorities in income. But trends are diverging. In the United States, black family income as a percentage of white family income edged up from 52 to 62 percent between 1959 and 1975. Disposable income per capita in the predominantly Asian Tadzhik Soviet Socialist Republic fell from 63 percent of Soviet income per capita in 1940 to 51 percent in 1969.

In 1962, not one Central Asian sat on the Soviet Politburo or Central Committee, though Asians comprised 8 percent of the Soviet population. Similarly, all but a handful of U.S. Senators and Representatives were white, though 10 percent of Americans were black. By 1976, Central Asians still held less than half their "share" of seats in top Soviet ruling bodies. And blacks in the U.S. House and Senate remained scarce—3 percent and 1 percent, respectively.

By contrast, minority Slovaks in Czechoslovakia and French Canadians enjoy proportional representation. (Yet Slovaks and Québécois earn only 80 and 86 percent of Czech and Anglo incomes, respectively.) Belgium and Yugoslavia each have granted their major ethnic blocs local autonomy; income is distributed evenly among the Flemish and Walloons, Serbs and Croats. Yugoslavia's smaller minorities (e.g., Macedonians, Montenegrins), however, are less prosperous.

No communist society has created a system of chattel slavery or apartheid of the sort marking ante-bellum America or modern South Africa. But, Echols concludes, most communist leaders today give far lower priority to redressing ethnic inequalities than to striving for a healthy overall economic growth rate.