

RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

The seventeenth century dawned on the birth of what is today one of the world's great powers, Russia. Peter the Great, grandson of the founder of Russia's one and only dynasty, the Romanov, may be rightly called the father of modern Russia. He achieved this position as a result of his curiosity about the achievements and political and social organization of western Europe. Today the pupil wields a rod with a hand as powerful as that of his former master. The history of this nation of peasantry is a checkered one. To the somewhat materialist Western mind it presents unprecedented paradoxes. The downfall of the autocratic Romanov dynasty and the end of the czarist regime in 1917 brought to a close a long period of political development, of imperial aggrandizement, and of waxing and waning nationalism. The epoch extending from 1917 to the present day is probably more historical in the case of Russia than in that of any European country. At present, Eastern Europe finds itself the victim of a Russian onslaught which, up to now, the German military machine has been unable to smash. Out of this situation looms the great enigma which the world faces; namely, Russia's intentions. A review of the two periods of her history, the paradoxes which she presents, and the prelude to recent military superiority may bring much to light concerning the character and probable plan of the nation with which the Western democracies are allied. These facts may be significant of what have always been and still are Russia's foreign policies.

In the early centuries of her development, Russia remained with little exception a great example of autocracy and absolute despotism. The ruling of a vast, illiterate, peasant population was not possible by any form of constitutional or popular government. Peter the Great was a supreme despot in state, church, and government. It is worth note here that his one great ambition was the "westernizing" of Russia, through cultural imitation and commercial intercourse. Traditional Russian policy is exemplified by this great monarch's attaining a "window" to the west, through the defeat of the king of Sweden and the ultimate subjugation of what are the present Baltic States. An enlightened despot, Catherine the Great, continued the work of her predecessor,

both in government and in conquest. First, by gaining a second window to the west through the vanquishing of the Ottoman Empire about the year 1770, Russia made her first interference in the Balkan peninsula and obtained the use of Balkan waters. Secondly, Catherine the Great was a party to the infamous dismemberment of Poland in 1795. Russia's foreign policy of that day bears no small resemblance to that of present day Russia. Internally, the anarchy of recent decades was due to the breakdown of militarism which was always the iron hand of the Russian despot.

Russia maintained neutrality in no great European conflict. Even in periods of poverty and internal oppression, as at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Alexander I attempted to realize his ambitions to the west by one coalition after another for the overthrow of Napoleon I of France.

During the nineteenth century, while liberalism was waxing and waning to extremes in other countries of Europe, while constitutional governments were national experiments often ending in failures, conservatism was invariably the motto of Russian absolute monarchs. For various reasons, not least of which was the spread of influence of the czar, the eighteenth century was punctuated by incursions of that country on her western neighbours, notably as a result of Polish and Balkan controversies and disputes.

The extreme nationalism of the Slav peoples of south eastern Europe served as a means for the czar to spread his influence over southern Europe. Russia answered the cry of suppressed Slavic minorities in the Balkans by warring with the Turkish Ottoman Empire. The western powers, perceiving the projected plan of Russia, fought a disastrous war in the Crimea in the years 1856-57. This served only to check Russia's ambitions for a time. As a result of Russia's final defeat, the reigning czar carried out sweeping reforms in the direction of liberalism. These were more or less a failure except for the abolition of serfdom in its mediaeval western form. Nevertheless, the Russian Empire was strengthened. It later won a war with the Turks in 1877 and became the champion of all Slavic peoples. All these events served as a prelude to the disturbances immediately preceding the first World War.

Slavic nationalism had as its great characteristic seclusion and aversion from the West. This resulted in economic

backwardness, bankruptcy, and social unrest. Russification was a great impulse to the great Russian revolution. Again, it is true that in no country of the world was industrialization so fatal a development as in Russia. Briefly, the reason seems to have been that the rule and control of large urban concentrations could not be successful by means of the traditional autocratic government. Social unrest found its answer in the principles of Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. From political expediency measures were taken by the czar to stay the tide of revolution. But revolutionary organizations were formed. The bourgeoisie or middle class industrialists and bankers, peasants, and urban proletariat were one in their opposition to conservative autocracy. The Russo-Japanese War undermined the prestige of the Russian monarchy; all classes clamoured for constitutional government. Internal discord and social unrest weakened Russia's military strength. Her collapse brought with it the abdication of the czar, Nicholas, in 1917.

The government control was soon concentrated in the hands of a revolutionary party, the Bolsheviks. This party was backed by the Russian masses, the soldiers, the workers, and the peasants. By appeals to the lower classes of workingmen and soldiers, leaders like Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin instigated a class warfare between the proletariat and the industrialist bourgeoisie, for the betterment of the conditions of the Russian masses. What this party lacked in numbers it compensated for in leadership and organization, and in November, 1917, Lenin was able to declare a dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin, with much difficulty, was able to overcome foreign interference and internal dissent, and by the year 1921 he and his party had mastery over Russia. Interference by Western powers was well warranted, for diplomatic observers did not fail to perceive Russia's intended program.

The Comintern, formed in 1919 as an international federation, failed, however, to revolutionize the world, although Communist revolutions instigated by headquarters at Moscow brought bloody revolutions to countries like Spain and Mexico. All enemies of atheistic communism at that time hailed the suppression of the Spanish revolution as the last final blow to Russian domination of European countries. Stalin succeeded Lenin as dictator of all Russia, but was cle-

ver enough to perceive the impossibility of an "economic millennium" promised to the masses by Karl Marx. It is enough to say that Russia today is led by a man whose diplomatic ability has yet to be proved inferior to that of any of his contemporaries.

The unpredictability of Russia's actions results in no small part from inconsistencies in her recent development. Russians are in part of oriental origin. As such they share the mysticism of their eastern neighbors. The materialist Western mind will ever fail to comprehend the mystic, contemplative Russian mind. This, nevertheless, is the nation which has spread organized godlessness throughout the world for twenty years.

As a result of Russia's humiliation of 1917, she closed her doors to Western nations. She emerged on the attack on Poland by Germany in 1939 to share the spoils of that unhappy nation. Great Britain went to war because she was pledged to aid in the self-determination of small countries. Today, Russia is her ally and Poland is still the burning question. On the Balkan front Russia has realized several of her age old ambitions. Of unpleasant concern to Western democratic nations is the fact that the Russia that in 1939 pretended to be the least prepared for war of any country in the world is today, after three years of desperate struggle with Germany, leading her armies with unprecedented speed towards the gates of Berlin. To the observer of the present day, this country, besides wreaking vengeance on her greatest enemy, Germany, is at the same time regaining the prestige lost as a result of her nineteenth century defeats.

Russia's alliances with Western nations have always been to the advantage of the latter as well as to her own advantage. American lend-lease to Russia was the equivalent of guns and tanks on the Western front. Russia's debt to us is probably not so great. Her foreign policy has always been expansion to the West. It is not unreasonable to suppose that that will continue to be her policy in the years to come.

—CLETUS MURPHY, '45