

THE GREAT RIFT BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST

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The darkening clouds in the political horizon which is, in the opinion, of some observers, as grave as on the eve of Munich, has caused many people to ask why there cannot be peace in the world so soon after a terrible second world war. Now it is the Soviet Union that is a menace to peace and if Russia is smashed and the Communist influence broken, there will be peace and goodwill, if not for ever, at least for our time. So runs the imperialist argument which is not supported by history. The fact is that under capitalism war is inevitable; capitalism indeed means war. The defeat of Napoleon did not bring any lasting peace to Europe any more than the cry, "Hang the Kaiser" did in 1918.

LAST OF WARS!

British propaganda doped the people of the world with the idea that the World War 1 was a war to end wars. "Never again!" cried the Western Powers then. This illusion that the 1914-18 war was the last in the history of man lingered for sometime until it was chased out by Adolf Hitler in 1939. The level of education and peoples' consciousness of the factors that shape history having considerably increased, the common man now knows better and is now asking, "How soon will the next war be?"

WHY RUSSIA?

Why is Russia now represented as the greatest menace to peace? There are many reasons of which I will attempt only a few. The Soviet Union is moving into a society of nations, into a civilisation alien to her. The present civilization which is essentially Western derived its source from the States of Western Europe. There were many states and principalities in Western Europe each independent of the other. The rules of conduct, governing these States were first postulated by canon lawyers of the Western Church to guide these powers in their interstate relation.

CHURCH LAW

In the absence of any common authority over these States, the only hope of acceptance of these rules lay in the combined authority of the Christian Church and the Roman law. For this reason, the law of nations in its early form was both Christian and Roman. It is important to realise that the area in which these rules were intended for was very small. These lawyers, Grotius, Vittoria, del Vecchi and others, were only concerned with those parts of the former Roman Empire which had not been conquered by the Moslem invasions, nor did they address themselves to the vast expanse of Eastern Europe called Russia of which they knew and cared but little. They only thought of Russia as a semi-barbarous country which, though Christian did not accept the teaching of Rome. This way of speaking about Russia lingers till this day; the Spaniard, it is said, considers the Russian as the nearest thing to a human being.

Between Russia and the West there was little trade or intercourse, little common culture and no exchange of ideas. Churchill's "iron curtain" separating Russia from the West was erected centuries earlier, and Russian isolationism is in part an inheritance from the past. When Russia accepted international law that was patterned after Western standards, she had no alternative than to accept the status quo seeing that Czarist Russia was weak, corrupt and not able to impress the law of nations with her own stamp.

BRITISH CREATION

International law grows and continues to grow and each major power, by sheer force of her military strength, has been able to influence its growth. The international law governing the conduct of war on sea was mainly a creation of the British Admiralty. It remains basically so, supplemented, when the command of the sea passed to her, by the rules imposed by the United States Navy. For the principle of innocent passage of ships and contraband in time of war to belligerent ports is the result of an attempt of the United States to reconcile the right of a belligerent naval power to blockade enemy ports with the right of a neutral power to trade with both belligerents.

CAUSE OF FRICTION

Russia which is the strongest power in Europe today since the vacuum created by the defeat of Germany, is now trying to change the character of international law to quit her own standards in a way that is not acceptable, perhaps repugnant, to Western standards. That is one cause of friction. The second cause of the

difference between Russia and the West which difference incidentally causes a threat to peace is due to loss of unity, of the function of law in international society. The law of nations in Western Europe was based upon the assumption of a common faith, common culture, agreed standards of right and wrong, and a common, inheritance of law.

The nineteenth century for instance closed upon a world in which every State that claimed to be civilised professed itself to be bound by the obligations of the law of nations. But within the last thirty years the common cultural unity upon which the law of nations was founded was destroyed in Europe itself. The process began, but has not ended, with the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917. We have seen that Russia originally formed not part of the cultural community of Europe in which international law arose, and we should not be surprised that the disintegration of Western civilisation first started in Russia.

NEW TRANSLATION

The Bolshevik Government of Lenin, Stalin, Kamenev, Zinoviev and others, started its career by repudiation of formal obligations of the Czarist Russia, alleging that “governments and systems that spring from a revolution are not bound to respect the obligations of fallen governments.”

This pronouncement shook the foundation of law, for it is agreed that normal and peaceful intercourse between States is possible on the assumption that the life of the State is continuous, and that the form of government within a State was a matter of domestic concern, so long as the succeeding government could honour the obligations of its predecessor. The form of government of any state for the first time then became a matter of international concern and most of the powers of Europe and America rallied together to defeat the Bolsheviks, but they failed woefully.

SHAMEFUL CHAPTER

Churchill's dispatch of the units of the Royal Navy to Archangel and Murmansk to help Admiral Koltchak is one of the shameful chapters of British history. Ill-clad, ill-led, ill-fed, the Bolsheviks beat back all foreign invasion. Russia, however, remained since that date, till the rise of Hitler, an international outcast. The States of the world hoped, but hoped in vain, that the new government would be content with its domestic victory and would in due time accept its normal place in the international community of “civilised” States.

UNFULFILLED HOPE

This hope was not fulfilled for from the start the movement was planned, not only as a movement of internal reform, but as a conscious challenge to the traditional world order. It was inspired by the vision of a new world community which would overthrow and supersede the system governed by the law of nations. According to the traditional law, the world was divided into a number of independent States (all of them claiming to be “civilised”) which, however much they differ in size and power, were equal in their fundamental right, and acknowledged their obligation to one another.

Since they did not normally concern themselves with one another’s domestic affairs, it was quite permissible theoretically for any State to set up a government with any ideological complexion, provided that the new government would honour its international obligations and refrain from interference in the affairs of other countries. It is this traditional view of law that the Bolsheviks attacked, using as their weapon the doctrine of Karl Marx.

SINGLE WORLD

In place of the society or commonwealth of independent and sovereign States, Karl Marx envisaged a single world organisation based upon the principle of communism and directed from a common centre. It is too early to say now how the events in Yugoslavia, namely, the quarrel between the Yugoslavia communists and the cominform will affect this centripetal theory of communism.

Be that as it may, the theory represents an invitation to the States of the world to surrender their sovereign independence to one power which was to be a communist left dictatorship. If this new doctrine could have been confined to Russia, it could possibly have been fitted into the existing system, for the law of nations had shown itself elastic and capable of expansion to meet the requirements of non-European, non-Christian nations; for example it had received China, Turkey, Egypt and the Arab world into its fold.

AS THE YEARS PASS

Unfortunately for the Western world, the essential principles of Marxism, though not the detailed form of its expression, appeal strongly to minds which had not fully accepted the principles upon which the Western law of nations rests. The States of the Middle and Near East, Central and South Eastern Europe and all Asia are being remorselessly drawn into the orbit of Marxism. As years go on, fewer and fewer will become nations which will adhere to Western European

standards of law and order. There are some who see to this the end of Western civilization just as the Greek, the Babylonian and Egyptian civilization had to give way when they had outlived their usefulness.

IMPERIALIST WEST

But Western Europe which is imperialist in the main will fight like a wounded lion to prevent, or at least delay, the decay. Controlling a great part of dependent colonial empire that is fast being attracted by communist doctrines the nations of Western Europe naturally look on communism and Soviet Russia as the greatest threat to their privilege. Perhaps the communist witch-hunt going on in the colonial empire, in England and America, can best be seen in this light. Well has Vladimir Ilich Lenin said that the imperialist colonial exploiter will do anything for the colonial slave, except to get off his back. He may, for instance; agree to build more schools and hospitals, increase wages a bit provided they are not to go high, create scholarships, but when you tell him to go home to his country and leave you master in your country, he calls forth his army, navy and police and shows fight. That is what the French are doing in Indo-China and Madagascar, the Dutch in Indonesia, the British in many part of her "empire of free peoples" (according to Mr. Herbert Morrison).

It is safe to say that a nation abides by the law of nations patterned after Western standards only if, and so long as, she cannot influence it. Once she becomes strong she attempts to challenge some of its concepts. Britain, a naval power, insisted, for instance, on the naval right of search of mercantile vessels on the high seas in the time of war, and was equally strongly resisted by neutrals, led by America. The controversy ended in 1917 when the United States which was leading the neutral States in protest, entered the war on England's side.

TODAY'S PESSIMISM

Napoleon would not understand Britain's blockade of Europe and had to retaliate by the Continental System or the Berlin Decree, about the middle of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps, India, China, Burma, and the future States of Africa, will not accept European conception of law without modification. The pessimism of today is strengthened by the fact that nobody now seriously believes that Russia, on the one hand, and America and Western Europe on the other, can sit down to iron out their differences in an international conference. Neither the United Nations Organisation (U.N.O.) nor the Conference of Foreign Ministers bears any hope for a permanent settlement of world problems.

PILING UP ARMS

Piling up armaments in spite of solemn obligations to renounce war as an instrument of national policy, the States of Europe and America behave as if there were no charter of the U.N.O. Against the renewal of war, the world has no security except it be the poverty and wariness occasioned by the last war. Nature has endowed the white race with high scientific knowledge and material wealth but has not bestowed on them a corresponding moral value and wisdom to work only for the good of mankind. There is no hope for the future, for Europe has lost its spiritual value, lost its unity and still believes in exploitation of man by man.

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