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WHY MAKE RUSSIA RUN AMOK?

KARL POLANYI



THERE is one deadly mistake America is insured against—appeasement. So much Munich has done for her. Neville Chamberlain has driven home to Americans how obtuse such a policy was, and what ignorance of the revolutionary nature of Hitlerism it implied.

What America is not yet insured against is Chamberlain's equally fatal mistake regarding Russia. Yet this error too would be unpardonable. For Britain's blunder, which almost lost her freedom and independence, was only partly about Germany; to the same extent it was about Russia. America cannot afford to repeat it.

Unfortunately it is a law in politics that only *one* truth goes down at a time. In the case of Munich that truth was that Hitlerism was not a policy but a revolution; and that appeasement was as useless as trying to rub an earthquake the right way. The other truth, which failed to go down with the American public, though it was as patent as the first, was that Britain had underrated the constructive possibilities of Russian policy. And yet this error was as vital as appeasement itself in producing the colossal blunder.

For years America was warned not to follow Chamberlain's suicidal example with Germany; ultimately the warning was heeded, and America refused to appease Hitler. It is time to sound a similar note of warning in regard to her policy

toward Russia. Though the danger now is different, it is no less real. The point which deserves to be pondered by Americans is that Britain's errors regarding Germany and regarding Russia were only two sides of one and the same radically fallacious policy.

The popular notion held both inside and outside of America—that postwar England had no policy and was merely drifting—is mistaken. The contrary will be shown to be true. From the day Hitler was made Chancellor of the Reich in January, 1933, to that other day on which Winston Churchill became Prime Minister, in May, 1940, England not only had a policy but stuck to it doggedly. Whether it was good or bad when it was launched does not stand to discussion here. Later on—this is the point—it led to appeasement and Munich. This line became known as the Four Power Pact idea. Though little talked about, it was almost everywhere taken for granted.

Its birth is still shrouded in mystery. Publicly it was first mooted by Mussolini on March 17, 1933. Significantly the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, as well as Sir John Simon, flew to Rome and at once signed a joint declaration in support of the plan (which probably originated with Sir John Simon). It implied no less than the establishment of a Concert of Europe by the four Western Powers, England, France, Italy, and Ger-

many, to replace the League of Nations and rule the Continent, solving incidental problems at the cost of territories east of Germany.

The Four Great Powers of Europe, all of them armed, would keep one another in check and boss the rest, including the small states and Russia. Europe would be back to the old order, so-called. Euphemistically this was termed the Four Power Pact plan. It would not be idealistic but at least it might work.

Thus from the start the exclusion of Russia was absolutely essential to the Four Power Pact idea. It implied that Russian interests should be regarded as a common fund out of which partners of the pact could compensate one another if their deals did not work out smoothly. If Hitler was bent on carving up Russia nobody would stay him. The whole scheme was enormously facilitated by the Soviet's traditional foreign policy, which had been frankly revolutionary or, even worse, not quite frankly but no less definitely so.

II

THERE was then an unbreakable link between the Four Power Pact point of view and "anti-Russia." That is why it is vital for Americans to recognize that in the critical seven years, *i.e.*, until Winston Churchill took the helm and dropped appeasement, England never had any other directive line in foreign affairs than the Four Power Pact idea. Ramsay MacDonald, as well as Baldwin, Simon, Hoare, and Neville Chamberlain, and even Lord Lothian and the Cliveden set, were all—under various denominations—equally stanch adherents of that idea. They did not even stop to consider whether Russia might not after all be amenable to a positive and constructive policy, for she simply did not fit into the preconceived pattern.

It may seem surprising that the Four Power Pact idea should have been elastic enough to survive the vicissitudes of changing situations over such a long stretch of time. Formal pacts are rightly judged brittle instruments, and the less adaptable the more Powers they comprise.

But the new Concert was to be more

a factual organization of the Continent than a legal institution based on pact or treaty. This accounts for the extreme tenacity with which the plan survived. What railroaded Chamberlain to Munich was the Four Power Pact idea. He, like the other blind leaders of the City of London, was convinced that if only England were willing to make sacrifices in all directions, Hitler could be appeased and the Four Power Pact idea put into effect. Too late did he discover that Hitlerism was an elemental event, dominated not by reason but by ungovernable forces. But even when, standing by his pledge to Poland, he decided for war, he never for a moment relinquished the Four Power Pact idea. The Concert of the four Western European Powers remained the aim. The only difference was that Germany, which could not be induced into such a Concert by virtue of appeasement, should now be made to enter it under the pressure of superior force.

Looking backward, we can easily see that Chamberlain was either trying to bluff others or deluding himself. His policy implied threatening Hitler with an Anglo-Franco-Russian alliance which was a mere bluff, since he could not go all the way with Russia if his ultimate aim remained, as it did, the achievement of a Four Power Pact. Though such a pact, as far as Britain was concerned, was not deliberately hostile toward Russia, it inevitably threatened her—under the given circumstances—with destruction at Hitler's hands. The event proved that Chamberlain was deluding himself. Russia could not consent to be used against Germany unless she could feel assured that, once Germany was beaten and cowed, the war would not be switched at some juncture so as to end after all in a Four Power Pact, leaving Russia out in the cold.

Appeasement, in other words, was only one half of a formula, the other half of which was "anti-Russia," and the whole of which read: Four Power Pact. So simple are, necessarily, the broad ideas which govern the secular policies of great empires. Less simple ones would not be sufficiently adaptable. But the simpler they are the greater the misfortune should they turn out to be false.

This, precisely, was what happened. Chamberlain's mistake was both about Germany and about Russia. The only revolution the City of London had ever understood was the French Revolution of 1789. Since the German Revolution of 1933 did not resemble it a bit, the City was reassured that it was not a revolution. On the other hand, the Russian Revolution of 1917 not only resembled the French, but was in many details a veritable copy of it. Who but a fool could doubt which of the two was the enemy?

At this point, as one can see, old-fashioned gentlemanly ignorance stepped in. It had already played its part in the misappraisal of Germany, but was destined to play an equally fatal role in the misjudging of Russia. Sir Nevile Henderson's tolerance of the Nazis sprang from a restricted imagination to which he had been trained. The English public school was designed to create a national leadership immune to the virus of the French Revolution. Now there was nothing about the German Revolution to warn him that it also was a revolution, and he did not study it carefully enough to discern that, even though it did not start by dispossessing the rich, it might nevertheless end that way. On the other hand, the Russian Revolution, though obviously enough a revolution, contained constructive elements which were not apparent in the short run. It was lack of right judgment on this vital point which ultimately turned Britain's mistaken policy almost into an act of national suicide.

A brief statement should clear out of the way the usual hocus-pocus which mars discussion of Russian policies. In the first place it should be stated that the Communist Parties in the various countries of the world were—if only for organizational reasons—nothing else than representatives of the foreign interests of Russia. But while in the first years of the Revolution these interests were practically identical with the furtherance of "world revolution," this simple connection ceased later on. Communist Parties, however, continued to be active supporters of Russia's day-to-day policies, whether these happened to be for or against revolution. They argued that to a socialist no higher

interest was conceivable than the maintenance and the safety of socialist Russia. In what follows we can, therefore, discount the Communist International altogether as a *separate factor* beside the foreign policy of the U. S. S. R.

We can do so all the more safely—in the second place—since the foreign policy of Russia, like that of any other country, is primarily determined by self-interest. In this respect alliances and Leagues on the one hand, subversions and fifth columns on the other, must be regarded as instruments of foreign policy. Consequently we should never quite exclude any of them when considering her external activities.

Lastly, we should not forget the exceptional character of great revolutions; here even the interests of safety and security may temporarily take second place against other interests, whether these be rooted in social, national, racial, or religious ideologies. Such tempestuous events transcend normal state policy and stand under laws of their own. Nothing indeed is more important than to gage rightly how far the U. S. S. R. is still—or perhaps again—a world-revolutionary Power.

III

RETURN to Britain's mistaken policy regarding Russia. Manchuria, Ethiopia, and Spain paved the way for Munich. In each case for one fatal instant British policy was determined by the "anti-Russian" component of the Four Power Pact line—the settled determination not to allow her to emerge from her isolation. Instead of accepting Russian assistance to solve a given difficulty, Chamberlain, Simon, and Hoare deliberately rejected her help for the sake of Four Power Pact hopes, thus further lessening Britain's bargaining power.

Manchuria. Sir John Simon never even considered encouraging Russia to slow down Japanese aggression. Yet had he done so Japan might be still occupied today in negotiating terms for the Eastern China Railway, or, for that matter, in pacifying Korean malcontents.

Ethiopia. When the sanctions police were set on the track of the Italian aggressor it suddenly became apparent

how powerful a force the U. S. S. R. represented in the Near East. Notably Kemalist Turkey held tightly to the Russian connection; Turkey alone possessed the airports that could make the British fleet in the eastern Mediterranean safe from Italian bombers, with the help of land-based aircraft. But Great Britain had to reject Russia's friendly intervention with Turkey—which might have protected the fleet, saved the League, and averted a war. Four Power Pact policy allowed no other course. After this the League fell into a twilight sleep from which it never awoke.

Spain—the decisive instance—gets us a long way nearer to the issue of this analysis. There is no need to argue the importance of that fascist victory which broke the moral backbone of republican France. When Franco marched into Madrid, Paris became a suburb of Berlin. Politics, as Plato said, is a geometrical science. If the oldest military power of Europe and her foremost republic did not dare any longer to succor a neighbor sister republic threatened by unconstitutional rebellion, how could the people of France be expected to believe in themselves and the ideas of their free institutions? And yet, France gone, Britain would have to fight alone. When the Spanish Loyalists were left to capitulate to the German Luftwaffe in mufti, it was the British army on the sands of Dunkirk that was robbed of its defenses. But the Four Power Pact idea was more than ever Britain's policy—and the Loyalists had Russian support. This alone would doom their cause with Chamberlain and Simon. They decided that the Spanish Loyalists must perish and thereby almost sealed Britain's own fate.

What was Russia's policy in Spain taken by Neville Chamberlain to be? And what was it in fact?

The contention of course was that, while Germany and Italy intervened in Spain to increase their national power, Russia intervened to spread the world revolution. If the Communists were getting hold of every government office in Loyalist Spain (which was a fact) and had their grip on the army (which also was true), who could expect them to keep to constitutional methods or to refrain from broadcasting

Bolshevik doctrines and turning the internal battles of Spain into a training ground for world revolution?

The facts, which were never officially acknowledged by any government—even the Russian—must be pieced together from sources which for varied reasons happen to be reliable. The picture they reveal is this: The Spanish Communist Party as such had, as usual, not the slightest say in the determination of working-class policy. Everything was controlled by Russian Communists, who were directly subordinated to their home government in Moscow. That government took the line that there was no revolution in Spain—not a communist, nor a socialist, nor even a democratic one. To acknowledge the existence of any revolution was declared contrary to the interest of Russian foreign policy, and therefore a counterrevolutionary act. Anybody caught fomenting revolution in Spain, whether Communist or non-Communist, was given short shrift. Although Russian, German, and other Communists fought stoutly for Spain, they kept to the last to the position that no other cause than that of constitutionalism and legality was involved. It is known how bitterly the Communists were attacked by their own left-wingers, the Trotskyites, for this alleged treachery to the cause of the world revolution. Altogether it must have been an extremely awkward line to hold, in view of the many shades of radicalism endemic in Spain. Yet there is no room for doubt that the Russians, even under the greatest stress, held to their non-revolutionary line.

Had the British government been better informed, had the constructive possibilities of Russian policy been more fully comprehended, maybe not even the Four Power Pact line would have induced the Foreign Office gratuitously to sacrifice in Spain vastly important diplomatic and strategic positions, including even the might of the French army.

After Manchuria, Ethiopia, Spain—*Munich*. After the preliminaries, the capitulation itself. Alighting at Heston Aerodrome from the plane which flew him back from his last interview with Hitler, Neville Chamberlain waved a piece of paper which contained an empty formula over Hit-

ler's signature and his own. This document, the British Prime Minister triumphantly announced to the waiting crowd, signified "Peace in our time." There can be little doubt that he believed what he said; for what he held in his hand was no other than the long-sought treasure. The document told its own story. Germany was "appeased" and Russia was kept from the council table. True, the price was no less than the vivisection of Czechoslovakia with the approval of Chamberlain's own envoy, Runciman; and France had dishonored her solemn pledge to the victim, thus fatally giving away her weakness. But against this Chamberlain and Simon set the one supreme fact that England, France, Italy, and Germany had established a new Concert of Europe to replace the League of Nations and would rule the Continent in the future, without Russia. The phantom pact for which they had striven so long was at last in their grasp. Munich to them was the price of the Four Power Pact formula.

Within less than a year Great Britain was at war. Germany, not yet appeased, prepared to fling herself on another victim, Poland; and Russia, fearful of being isolated, and unwilling to be longer minimized by Chamberlain, with icy realism turned the green light on Germany. Another six months later, England herself was in peril, and her danger waxed until its name was Dunkirk. Thus two years after Munich only Winston Churchill and the peerless heroes of the Royal Air Force averted from England the fate of Czechoslovakia. Another year passed, and now Russia herself was gripped by the vampire, her armies retreating before the unappeased monster until the miracle of Moscow stopped its gluttonous career. But by this time the word Munich had become the pillory not only for self-deluding appeasement, but also for the intellectual complacency which had topped ignorance on Germany with no less complete ignorance on Russia.

IV

REVERT to America. Munich has made her safe from appeasement. But what about Russia? Is the State Department

immune from the fallacies which deprived Britain of the ally she needed until Hitler all but succeeded in finishing them off separately? Has Washington proved better informed on the Russian force of resistance than London was? Or has it not shown itself as sadly misinformed about Russia as Chamberlain himself in the heyday of Munich? And yet the dangers involved in an error regarding Russia—this must be emphatically stated—are, if possible, even greater to-day than four years ago, *though they may take a quite different shape*. Russia, which was pushed by the Foreign Office into co-operation with Hitler, may be goaded by the State Department into another just as desperate course.

Bluntly, that Russia's only course in the future is "world revolution" is obviously untrue. But so would be the opposite contention that she has now become a power psychologically incapable of using the instrument of revolution. The simple truth is that ultimately she will, like other countries, shape her policy according to interest and circumstance. That is why the State Department's consistent policy on Russia, so far as it is now visible to outside observers, bears comparison only with Chamberlain's and Simon's Four Power Pact adventure.

After the launching of the Five Year Plans in 1929 the evidence was that Russia was centering on her own affairs. Hence the Trotskyite split, which came precisely on the issue of the "world revolution"; for a Russia that had committed her resources to the long-term job of industrialization could no longer afford to engage in a revolutionary foreign policy. After the rise of Hitler, in 1933, she felt threatened by a power which was definitely revolutionary, and the economy of which thrived on war, while her own was endangered by it. Thereupon she swung determinedly toward a peace policy. Her discipline in the Popular Front years, especially during the supreme test of Spain—as well as in the field of collective security and sanctions—proved that she was following a constructive line even in the face of consistent disappointment. In effect no country tried harder in the years preceding Munich to strengthen the League and the international peace mechanism

than Russia. That her ceaseless solicitations were discounted as insincere by the addicts of the Four Power Pact idea will not carry too much weight. True, in joining Hitler in the fall of 1939 she released the floodgates of war, and even attacked Finland. But this, it should be recalled, was *after Munich*.

But—Munich or not—what the Stalin-Hitler episode finally proved was that the Russian Revolution was past the stage of ideological effervescence. It proved precisely that Russia was now prepared to subordinate each and every consideration to the one supreme interest of safety and security; that as an alternative to isolation she would prefer to side with her worst ideological enemy. The interests of the Russian *State* of one hundred eighty millions, not those of the Bolshevik *Party*, which forms a fraction of it, turned the rudder toward Berlin when London and Paris obdurately refused to accept her help. Thus the treaty with Hitler and the Finnish war—these acts of pure power policy—bring our argument to a head: Russia if isolated will follow exactly that line of policy which she deems necessary, whether she likes the policy or not. There is ample proof that she wants to avoid being forced into a "world revolution" line. Yet the short-lived Hitler-Stalin treaty revealed that she will not hesitate to turn to any, even the most desperate expedient, if she is left no alternative. To try to isolate Russia, to refuse to co-operate with her, to insinuate that she is *the* enemy, means simply to force her into a world-revolutionary strategy against her will, contrary to all reason and common sense—a feat comparable only to Chamberlain's resounding error.

To constrain Russia to revert to long-discarded revolutionary slogans would obviously amount to a catastrophe. And yet the compulsion upon her may become overwhelming if the State Department persists in a policy which in all logic can have no other outcome.

The temptation to Russia might lie in the lead she would gain almost without effort. Her Slavonic relations in central eastern Europe—and they are numerous—would follow her standard. The tortured social minorities in that region of

hopelessly intermingled settlements would look to her as their liberator from national oppressions. The nebulous formula of revolution would stir the natural urge for revenge into a blind passion and fan the flames of justified agrarian unrest into a devastating fire.

And yet it can be expected in all reason that such a line of extremism would be taken by Russia only as a policy of despair—despair not necessarily of her own existence, but rather of the future of her relationships to Western democracy. What indeed could embitter Russia's leaders more than to find Americans *after* Manchuria, Ethiopia, Spain, and Munich still obdurately adhering to policies suggested to the world by Hitler a decade ago? In those ten years Russia changed from the burnt-out hull of a revolution into one of the foremost industrial countries in the world, from a center of ultimately ineffective propaganda into the military bastion of the Eurasian continent. For she is not only holding Hitler at home; her support to Turkey kept Suez from Hitler after the fall of Crete, and her assistance to China prevented Japan from forming that vast empire into an impregnable fortress from which to lord the Pacific. Apart from her own lost territories sliced off her borders by Germany in 1918, she never in those ten years showed any sign of wishing to extend her frontiers—such is the make-up of this self-contained country which, like America, needs nothing but peace to be prosperous. And yet she has two formidable dangers to cope with: the Nazi peril in Europe, the Nipponese peril in the Pacific. Her alliance with Great Britain should take care of the first; but the second must loom large. Indeed, if ever the logic of geography linked two neighbors in a harmony of external interests, it is the two continental powers whose boundaries meet in the Polar regions of the Pacific, America and Russia.

Russia seems anxious that America should understand. She is soliciting her friendship. She is keen to offer to the U. S. A. what she so persistently but in vain offered Chamberlain's Britain: her permanent collaboration.

Washington, however, does not seem to care whether or not the Atlantic Charter

is interpreted as another Four Power Pact plan; for it seems to disregard the obvious implications of its apparent acts of commission and omission on Russia. These are numerous. There is the startling absence of contact on the subject of punishment of war criminals; the amazing episode of Otto Hapsburg; the apparent absence of contact with Russia on the accord with Darlan, who professed to represent Vichy—a government hostile to Russia; the exclusion of Russia from the talks of Allied general staffs; the silence on Stalin's suggested basis for permanent "Anglo-Soviet-American" co-operation. And so on—with not a single convincing proof to the contrary.

Occasional contacts and even material exchanges form no such proof. Eden visited Moscow in 1934, and France went to the length of signing a treaty of amity with Russia in 1935; yet these acts meant no break in the Four Power Pact policies of the British and French governments. Such contacts may mean much or little according to the scheme into which they are fitted. This scheme, as far as the State Department is concerned, appears to be much the same to-day as that which Chamberlain and Simon followed in their time. Washington of course applauds Russia's success against the Nazis, but appears to try otherwise to have as little to do with her as possible.

Not on a single postwar issue has co-operation with Russia apparently been

sought, and on a number of inevitable postwar issues she is already being flouted. Everybody knows that when victory is won Russia's interests must necessarily include conditions in, and plans for, Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, Yugoslavia, and Hungary—to say the least. All the published acts of the State Department indicate that in respect to none of these questions is agreement with Russia attempted. Yet the fate of the world may hang on a reasonable degree of co-operation between Great Britain, the United States, and Russia in building up the core of a development in which national civilizations can survive.

After fruitless years of shame and suffering the Four Power Pact, that master plan of a false realism, proved a will o' the wisp. To-day it can be forecast with absolute certainty that any policy in Europe which deliberately disregards Russia must lead to chaos and disaster. If Hitlerism is to go, another order must come. No power in the world can restore the old. Yet Russia may well turn out to be a constructive force among the welter of small peoples of central eastern Europe; she may well prove to be sufficiently mature to conserve that which is worth conserving (of which, in the conviction of the writer of this article, there is a lot). On the other hand, she may revert under stress to the rabid fevers of her beginnings. Why make her run amok?