

THE FOREIGN POLICY OF SOVIET RUSSIA

By Christian Rakovsky

IT is not my purpose to attempt a systematic and complete statement of the foreign policy of my government, but to lay down certain guiding lines which may aid an understanding of the relations between the Union of Soviets and other Powers and of the attitude that the Soviet Government has taken towards various international problems.

In order to comprehend the foreign policy of the Soviet Republic, it is essential first to consider another more general question. What is the aim of the foreign policy of every country? Foreign policy, it will readily be understood, is only a projection of domestic policy and, clearly, has a close relation to the form of political and social organization of the nation and to its institutions generally. Every government strives to establish with other countries the sort of relations most favorable to the strengthening and development of its own institutions.

This general rule obviously applies to the Soviet Government. Probably not many persons continue to hold the mistaken opinion that the régime created in Russia by the triumph of the revolution of October, 1917, was a transitory episode, the result of a sudden stroke organized by a handful of men who were strangers to the history of the country acting against the will of the people and against the interests and aspirations of the nation. The fact that the Soviet Government has endured for eight years and that no one questions its political solidity, proves that its appearance was not an accident but a necessity, for deep-lying reasons, both in the evolution of Russia and of the whole world.

Without going into a detailed analysis of Tsarist Russia, the following three characteristics of its political and social organization may be noted:

1. The existence of a class of feudal aristocracy possessing a great share of the land, and holding subject to its domination and exploitation the peasants who made up four-fifths of the population. A régime of absolute power with a bureaucracy, which had all the vices of unregulated bureaucracies, was essential to maintain the power of the feudal class.

2. A capitalist class, much weaker because the feudal agrarian system hampered the economic development of the country, but

for this reason the more rapacious in the exploitation of the workers.

3. Numerous national minorities, all together constituting a majority in comparison with those who could properly be called Great Russians, but subordinated to the domination of Tsarism and deprived not merely of political rights but of the most elementary rights of development of their own cultural systems.

Opposed to the old régime, consequently, there were formidable forces: peasants, workers and national minorities, waiting only a propitious moment to overthrow it. The war provided the occasion; it completely disorganized the governmental and military apparatus and opened the eyes of people who had been submitting apathetically to the Tsarist régime, to its total incapacity and superannuation.

It may be regarded as an established fact that it was not the revolution which caused Russia to quit the war, but Tsarism which demanded of its subjects an effort far in excess of their strength and which thereby destroyed itself and prepared the way for the revolution. In the first three months of the war, it is important to remember, the Tsarist Government put in the field 4,000,000 soldiers, while France mobilized 3,000,000 and England 165,000. Further, the consideration that revenues per capita in Russia amounted to \$43.10, while in Great Britain they amounted to \$260 and in France \$182.50, reveals still further how disproportionate to the economic resources of the country was the effort Russia was called upon to make. During three years of war, Russia mobilized 15,000,000 men, according to the statistics of the Allied General Staff (18,000,000 according to the Russian General Staff). The number killed was 2,500,000.

What assured the victory of the Bolshevik party was the fact that it anticipated the desires of the workers and peasants and national minorities — that is to say, of the great masses of the people — and put an end to the war so far as Russia was concerned. Even before we came into power, the Russian military front had ceased to exist in fact. The disorganization of the army had been indicated even before the first revolution of February, 1917, when the number of deserters had exceeded a million. The offensive organized by the Kerensky Government in June, 1917, only hastened this disorganization and intensified the popular aversion for the war.

Such was the historical setting of the revolution of October,

1917. This review of the origins of the Soviet power is necessary to explain its foreign policy, the aim of which had to be the defense of the new state of affairs in Russia. The first manifestation of this foreign policy was peace with Germany.

The new government realized perfectly that a triumphant militarist Germany would be the most furious foe of the Soviet régime. That was why the tactics of the Soviet Government at first consisted in attempting to maintain the unity of Russia with the Allies for the purpose of concluding peace. If this proved impossible and the Allies desired to prosecute the war against Germany, the Soviet Government was under the necessity of concluding a separate peace, but in such a way as to leave no doubt in the minds of the Russian people that this was not a democratic peace but a peace imposed on the vanquished and consequently provisional.

Sooner or later such a peace would have to give way to a life-or-death struggle with German imperialism; but for Russia to have a chance of victory it was necessary that the peasants, workers and national minorities should experience the effects of the revolution. That alone would secure support and sacrifices from the masses of the people. The Soviet power required a truce to accomplish the nationalization of the land, reorganize industry on a new basis, and grant independence to oppressed national minorities. It had to create totally new governmental machinery, tap new economic resources, and organize a new army.

First proposing that negotiations with Germany for peace "without annexations or reparations" should be conducted not by Russia alone but by all the Allies, the Soviet Government requested of Germany an armistice of three months. The Allies rejected the proposal, and Russia was forced to go alone to Brest-Litovsk, having secured an armistice of only one month.

The second part of the Soviet peace program was to unmask the hypocrisy of German militarism in consenting formally to peace "without annexations or reparations" but actually pursuing purposes of annexation and seeking considerable reparations. Our policy was of service not only to the Russian people but also to the subjects of the Central Powers, whose soldiers were deceived by successive assurances from their diplomats that Germany and Austria only desired to end the war as soon as possible. The Soviet delegation at first refused to subscribe to the German conditions and at the same time declared that Russia

would not continue the war. Only when the Germans launched a new offensive did the Soviet Government sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. But if the material victory rested with Germany and Austria, the Soviet delegation carried away the moral victory.

Despite the refusal of the Allies to negotiate peace at the same time with Russia, Soviet diplomacy sought to avoid a break with them and to keep the Germans within the limits of the treaty they had imposed. Since Germany compelled us to recognize and conclude peace with the "People's Republic of the Ukraine," which already had become a monarchist government with the aid of German bayonets, we attempted in the course of the negotiations with the Ukraine to fix a line of demarcation between the Russian army, then made up of a mixture of detachments of Red volunteers and the remainder of the old army, and the German armies.

The present writer, as head of a delegation which went in the month of April, 1918, first to Kursk and then to Kiev, was charged with the responsibility of conducting these discussions. But in spite of every effort, I was unable to get a line of demarcation fixed except on one part of the front. The Germans never were willing to establish a line in the Rostov sector, and also reserved to themselves freedom to advance whenever they wished towards the Kuban and Baku.

At the same time our Ambassador at Berlin, M. Joffe, as well as our Commissariat of Foreign Affairs at whose head was Chicherin, were trying to establish a *modus vivendi* on the basis of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Although Germany had very definite purposes with regard to the Soviet power, she did not enjoy a freedom of action sufficient to permit her fully to realize her plans. She was engaged in the struggle against the Allies; and while she was working for the collapse of the Soviet power, she also was attempting to profit, especially from an economic point of view, by the relations between the two countries. This explains why both at Berlin, where M. Joffe represented the Soviet, and at Kiev, where for five months I dealt with the Ukrainian Government (which was nothing but a screen for Germany) and with the German Ambassador Baron Mumm and the German generals, we were able to take advantage of the difficult strategic and political position of Germany in order to maintain a state of comparative peace.

I strove to avoid any troublesome incident along the line of demarcation between our two armies and to foster economic relations with the Ukraine.

Actually, warfare with Germany continued. The workers and peasants of White Russia and the Ukraine, friendly toward the Soviet power, never ceased to struggle against German oppression. Labor strikes and peasant revolts followed each other in succession. The hope of the Germans to reprovise their armies and their country from the Ukraine, which they expected to find a rich granary, was disappointed.

During all this time we tried to maintain unbroken contact with the Allies. We felt no contradiction with our ideas in cooperation with powers having a different social structure. We recognized that the stage of economic development of our country did not favor socialistic organization of its productive system. Socialization could only be partial, since heavy industries were only slightly developed. At that time we had no idea of nationalizing all heavy industry; we accepted this necessity because the proprietors opposed a systematic resistance to our program of workers' control of industry. It was only in June, 1918, in order to conquer the resistance of the proprietors and prevent the large industrial enterprises belonging to Germans from being returned to them in accordance with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, that we promulgated the law nationalizing all industries with a capital of more than a half million rubles. This included only a small part of our economic system; there remained an enormous sphere for private enterprise, particularly for the peasants and also for foreign capital. The policy of concessions to foreigners for the purpose of attracting foreign capital to aid in the economic reconstruction of the country was formulated at that time by Lenin.

We communicated our concrete plan to the representative of the American Red Cross, Col. Raymond Robins, at the time of his departure for the United States in the spring of 1918. The Allied Ambassadors having left the capital for Vologda, we attempted to ascertain the attitude of the Allies through the American Consul, Mr. Poole, and through the secretary of the Norwegian Consulate, Mr. Christiansen, but we received no reply. We learned only one thing: the Allies had set themselves the aim of restoring the Russian front against Germany. This we could not do without imperilling the newly begun work of organizing

the Soviet power and reconstructing the economic life of the nation.

What they could not accomplish by persuasion the Allies attempted to achieve by violence. The Czechoslovak Legionaries, who were permitted to leave Russia by way of Siberia, instead of Archangel as we wished, established the first internal front against the Soviet Government. On April 6, 1918, the Japanese occupied Vladivostok and began to advance into Siberia. On August 5 the English occupied Archangel. A series of revolts took place in the course of the summer of 1918 at the instigation, direct or indirect, of agents of the Allies.

One of the clauses of the armistice agreement between the Allies and Germany imposed on the Germans the obligation to keep their armies in the Russian provinces they were occupying until the arrival of Allied troops. Yet we did not give up our attempts to come to an understanding with the Allies. We accepted the first invitation extended to us in February, 1919, to attend a conference at Prinkipo. We made clear our plan for concessions, and even went so far as to declare our willingness to adjust the question of pre-war debts on condition that normal relations be reestablished between Russia and the Allies.

In the years 1919 and 1920, the hardest years for the Soviet Government, we had to fight against Allied invasions, against the armies of Kolchak, Denikin and Wrangel supported by the Allies, and finally against Poland. The failure of the policy of intervention becoming evident to some of the Allies, the Conference of Ambassadors in Paris early in 1920 abolished the blockade against the Union of Soviets. During the war with Poland, there was an attempt on the part of England to bring about peace, made just at the time when our armies were drawing near Warsaw.

The first nations to conclude peace with us were the Baltic States, who hoped that recognition by the Soviet Government of these former parts of the Russian Empire would sanctify their political independence. In 1920 we signed treaties with Esthonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Finland, and the preliminary treaty of Riga with Poland; and the following year the final treaty with Poland and treaties with Persia, Afghanistan, Turkey and Mongolia, and commercial agreements with England, Norway and Italy. These developments indicated that gradually we were entering upon a period of peace.

Among the Allied Powers the first to begin the resumption of

commercial relations with Russia was England, under the influence of her own economic difficulties. It was her initiative that was decisive in favor of sending Russia an invitation to the Genoa conference. This permitted us for the first time to establish contact with official representatives of all the other important countries, except the United States who had no representation at Genoa. But the policy of the Powers was dominated by the idea that the Soviet power, having emerged victorious from its military trials, would be overthrown as a result of internal difficulties, and by the desire to secure from us the recognition of the debts and the reestablishment of the right of private property. The credits we asked, without which acceptance of the obligation of the debts would have been only an empty phrase, were not granted. Similarly, we were invited to take part in the Lausanne conference in the hope of our signing a convention for the neutralization of the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, which would have opened the Black Sea and made it a future theatre of war.

The year 1924 marked our achievement of recognition. The appointment of the Labor Cabinet in England brought about the renewal of diplomatic relations, and this was followed in the course of the year by renewal of relations in turn with Italy, Norway, Austria, Greece, Sweden, China, Denmark and France, and in 1925 with Japan.

We have succeeded in maintaining and consolidating our position in Russia because we have pursued a program comprising four points: solution of the agrarian problem, the labor problem, and the nationality problem, and finally a policy of peace in contrast to the policy of conquest of Russian Tsarism. We came into power partly as a result of the protest of the peoples of old Russia against the World War, of which the Tsarist imperialistic policy was one of the causes; and we are forced to seek peace as a primary necessity for the solution of the political and social problems on which depends the welfare of our working classes. This will require sacrifices for several generations, and automatically will exclude any aggressive or warlike spirit. The description of the Union of Soviets as an economic state expresses a truth, in that the problems facing the Soviet Government are all of an internal character, economic, intellectual and social. Its economic functions predominate over its administrative functions because it controls the means of transport, a large part of industry, foreign trade, credit and banking, and consequently is responsible

for the conditions of agriculture. In a war, it is the Soviet Government itself which must suffer in its capacities as business promoter, manufacturer, banker and merchant.

Our immense task of reconstruction is only begun. We have a huge country, its territory comprising one-sixth of the land area of the globe, with unlimited potential wealth and a population which today numbers 140,000,000. But in economic organization it is one of the most backward in the world.

The national revenue per capita, which according to our statistics amounted before the war to about 101 rubles, had fallen to less than half that sum at the end of the civil war; and then rose again, but without reaching the pre-war level. Statistics for 1925 indicate that the revenue per capita was equivalent to about 72 rubles. The total national capital represented in industry, means of transport, agriculture, and buildings, within the present limits of the Union of Soviets, which was estimated at 54,500,000,000 rubles in 1913, now amounts after four years of reconstruction to about 36,800,000,000 rubles. That is to say, we have lost 32.7 per cent.

Our system of public instruction, although well advanced in comparison to what it was under the Tsarist régime, is still far from meeting the most elementary needs of the people.

The best proof of the progress of our agriculture is the popularity of American tractors among the peasants, but it is still in a very backward stage. Our industries, railways, roads and canals need to be restored and developed. While in the United States there is said to be one automobile to every seven persons, in Russia there is one automobile to every 50,000. Our task is to bring Russia up to the level of a modern state, and to divert men or money from this to other ends would be criminal.

Although we have tremendously extensive frontiers to guard, we have reduced our army to 560,000 men, about one-half of the army maintained under the old régime; and we are prepared to make further reductions, for the 600,000,000 rubles that we spend on our army — more than one-sixth of our revenues — could be employed better in works immediately necessary to our people. So we regret that the intransigence of Switzerland has prevented us from taking part in the conference on disarmament.

The desire of the Soviet Government to avoid entanglements of all sorts should explain our refusal to enter the League of Nations and our antagonism to collective agreements lacking a definite

purpose and to the system of alliances, to which we have opposed specific agreements such as we have concluded with Turkey and Germany and are concluding with other neighbors. If we were in the League of Nations, the necessity of taking positions on questions before it for settlement would compel us to choose between one or another political group, so that we should be continually involved in conflicts which we do not desire. Still less do we wish alliances which would involve our people in unknown issues. Even alliances formed for defense tend always to war. The example of the Triple Alliance and the Entente affords a lesson which we cannot forget.

What seems to us advisable, and what we have done, is to conclude with every possible nation accords carrying the obligations, first, to maintain neutrality in case one or the other party is attacked, and second, not to enter into political or financial or other combinations directed against either party. The advantage of these accords consists in their purely defensive nature and in the fact that nothing prevents their being concluded with all states without exception. The same obligations we have accepted towards Turkey and Germany we can accept toward all the other Powers.

I have said already that we are negotiating for similar agreements with our other neighbors. We have made proposals to all of them except Rumania, about whom I shall speak further on. We believe that these proposals ultimately will be accepted. Our neighbors, including Poland, have an interest in according us reciprocal guarantees of peace, for economic as well as political reasons. Esthonia and Latvia cannot take advantage of their situation as maritime states except as the increasing exports of the Union of Soviets continue to pass by way of their railways and ports. The same may be said of Poland. Industry in Poland has been developed, thanks to the huge market of the former Russian Empire; and it is in Russia, rather than in the more developed countries to the west, that Poland will have to find an outlet for her production.

I have set apart the case of Rumania. There remains a cause of division between us and Rumania, which prevents the conclusion of the same sort of accord that we are discussing with our other neighbors. The circumstances in which Rumania annexed Besarabia are well known. Russia, it also is well known, never was consulted regarding the fate of her former province. In March,

1918, the Premier of the Rumanian Government, General Averescu, who now is in power again, signed a treaty with the present writer, as representative of the Soviet Government, obligating Rumania to evacuate Bessarabia in two months. Taking advantage later of the fact that the Germans had occupied part of our territory, and of German support since at the time Gen. Mackensen was occupying Rumania, and also of the irresolution of the Allies in seeking to bolster up their coalition by conceding Bessarabia to Rumania, the Rumanians proclaimed themselves the masters of Bessarabia. We remember that the United States never recognized this act of violence.

The policy of the Soviet Government concerning the Bessarabian question is not to claim that Bessarabia should belong to the Union of Soviets, although this former Turkish province had only 200,000 inhabitants at the time when Russia conquered it and had 3,000,000 inhabitants at the time when it was annexed by Rumania, to whom it never had belonged. But we demanded at the Vienna Conference between Rumania and ourselves in 1924, and we are justified in demanding, that the population of Bessarabia itself be consulted. Rumania rejected a plebiscite. The people of Bessarabia, who were on the side of the Allies, are refused the rights which the Allies accorded to Germany in the question of Upper Silesia. Of course, a plebiscite should be conducted under conditions guaranteeing its genuineness. The Rumanian army and officials should leave Bessarabia.

Our policy in Asia finds its inspiration in the Constitution of the Union of Soviets, which we regard as a model of political equality between different races. It even goes so far as to admit the right of nations entering into the Union to leave it of their own free will without securing the consent of other members of the Union. And we do not apply our logic to ourselves alone; we act in the interest of conserving our institutions by applying in our policy in Asia this principle of "self-determination" — an American principle, by the way, transported to Europe by the Frenchmen who took part in the American War of Independence.

Relations between the United States and the Union of Soviets unfortunately have not been established. I do not believe that the question of the debts — granting the good will that our Government has evidenced to facilitate a solution within the limits of equity — could constitute a serious difficulty. I rather attribute the anomaly to the fact that the ocean separates the United

States from us and that the United States has not yet fully realized the political and economic importance of the Union of Soviets. And I am not speaking solely from the point of view of direct commercial relations between our two countries, but also of the rôle that Russia may play in commercial relations with countries of Europe and Asia which enjoy financial and commercial contact with the United States.

I know that what is called "propaganda" often is cited as an argument against the reëstablishment of normal relations. But the Soviet Government should not be confused with the Third Internationale. We cannot believe that America will maintain towards us a policy less liberal than the Russian Tsardom adopted during a long period towards the United States despite the fact that it was identified with the republican idea which Tsardom abhorred. Relations between peoples and states should be based, not on social theory, but on mutuality of political and economic interests.