

A REVOLUTIONARY QUARTET

Surely it is not without significance that, when we classify nations by their origins, we find that four out of five of the so-called major powers are revolutionary states. The United States, France, the Soviet Union, and China were all stamped into their present form with the die of armed rebellion and all of them still bear the revolutionary mint-mark. Time, and custom, and the handling of later generations have in some cases blurred the sharp outlines of this imprint and smoothed the milling of the coinage, but the revolutionary likeness has by no means been effaced.

Nor are these merely states which have, at some stage of their development, experienced revolutionary upheavals. Almost all nations have some such chapter in their history, but each of these four was actually created by revolt, bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh. And there is a world of difference. Certainly Italy was not unified without violence, but the story of Garibaldi, Cavour, and Mazzini is essentially the story of a war of liberation against a foreign conqueror. No doubt Germany, during her brief and inglorious period as the Third Reich, was in the throes of a revolution, but this was an abortive convulsion, creating nothing and leaving no surviving form behind it. And in spite of sentimental maunderings about the "glorious revolution" of 1688, the United Kingdom can scarcely be classed as a revolutionary state, for the importation of a Dutch king to replace a Scottish one was only the final act of a drama which had begun centuries before. The reforms that were elsewhere achieved late and all together were in England effected earlier, gradually, and—except for the episode of the Protectorate—without serious violence.

On the other hand, such an upheaval as the forced pace of westernization in Japan cannot be called a revolution unless we use the word in a figurative sense, as we do when we speak of the Industrial "Revolution." Under this sort of loose classification the Renaissance and the rise of Protestantism were also revolutions. Indeed, we have even come to speak of the emergence of a new class of industrial specialists as the "Managerial Revolution," and we may in time be led to talk of the introduction of new accounting systems as the "Bookkeeping Revolution." Yet although some changes of this type may be as important as purely political upheavals,

they are also different in kind and therefore would seem to deserve nomenclature of their own. When we examine the word "revolution" in its more pristine meanings, we find that it has normally meant a violent explosion of internal forces within a state which results in great and fundamental changes in political forms and in society.

Now since the revolutionary state is so much with us, it is clearly a phenomenon of some considerable importance. The mere fact that there are really only two nations of the first rank in the modern world and that both of these are revolutionary states would by itself be enough to give us pause. When, however, we find that four out of five of the nations which have any pretensions to being great powers have the same sort of revolutionary background, certain questions positively clamour to be answered.

Upon reflection, we may probably reject the thought that there is a necessary correlation between revolution and greatness, that some *elan*, or vital force, is generated by revolt and that this is what has carried these nations to their present eminence in world affairs. Nevertheless this, of course, is just what the revolutionaries themselves have always claimed. They have always felt that mankind was standing at the beginning of a brave new day and that bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. This faith in the future, far more than any dissatisfaction with the past, is what makes the rebel. Yet although there is undoubtedly more than a grain of truth in all of this, so many other factors have also contributed to the greatness of the major powers that we would not be justified in singling out this one quality of revolutionary *elan* as a decisive cause. Extent of territory, natural wealth, size of population, technological skill, and political affiliations are all factors that also contribute to the power of a state.

Still, if the past has any influence at all on the present, it might be worthwhile inquiring into the characteristics of revolutionary states to see whether there is anything unique about them and to look for possible patterns which they might be expected to have in common. In this endeavour we have, perhaps, some advantages on our side. Although the four revolutions that we are considering were sufficiently separated in time for a cross-section taken now to show us different stages of development, they all belong, in any sort of historical perspective, to the contemporary world. Less than a century and a half separates the American Revolution, the first of our series, from Sun Yat-sen's overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in China, while the grandson of a man who had helped to storm the Bastille might well have witnessed the capture of the Winter Palace by Trotsky's Red Guards.

Considering our revolutions in chronological order, we find that the actual revolt of the thirteen colonies was only the beginning of a series of related events. The skirmishes and battles of the Revolutionary War, the Congress at Philadelphia, the ousting of the British, and the expulsion of the Loyalists all appear now as only the prelude to the story. The sudden violence which flared up at Lexington and at Concord was no more the revolution than the noise and flash and smoke of an explosion is the real measure of the power released by detonation. After the sudden explosion of fighting was over, the revolutionary forces that had been released continued to travel outwards in wave after wave.

These waves, just like the waves of a literal explosion, were invisible by themselves. They could be detected only by their effect, as we can tell that the wind is blowing when we see the ripples moving over a field of wheat. Yet these intangible forces were nevertheless the ones of real significance. After the British acknowledged defeat, the newly formed American society expanded violently west and south-west and did its best to expand northwards as well. There was a phenomenal increase in wealth and population. The vital centre of the society shifted north from Virginia to New England and New York, and out of these momentous changes subsidiary conflicts arose. The revolution created its own opposition as it worked out its destiny. The sudden expansion to the West, the Indian Wars, the invasion of Canada in 1812, the annexation of Texas, and the influx of European immigrants seeking fulfilment of the promises engraved on the Statue of Liberty were all events which might eventually have occurred in any case. But the speed of these developments and the violence which so often accompanied them were the result of the revolutionary impetus.

Moreover, not every section of the society approved of this rapid transformation of the old order. The new American state tended increasingly to be divided into two separate societies, the one southern, agrarian, and aristocratic; the other northern, industrial, and turbulent. Eventually, to save the revolution, it was necessary to fight a great civil war so that the nation, conceived in revolution and dedicated to its principles, could endure.

The wave of revolutionary expansion continued until it was checked by the natural boundary of the Pacific in the west and by the determination of Canada and Mexico to the north and south. By the turn of the present century the revolutionary impulses had all but spent themselves, and the revolutionary society turned to its next task, which was that of adjusting to a new equilibrium. Since then the American people have

been involved in the two German wars, in the founding of the Leagues of Nations, and in the operation of the United Nations, but in all that they now do they are more concerned to preserve the *status quo* than to create new social forms.

So far then it would appear that the American Revolution has passed through three phases. There was first of all an initial explosion of violence. This in turn released expanding waves of force which continued outwards from the centre until they exhausted themselves. With this exhaustion there came the attempt to adjust to a new equilibrium.

Analogies with the physical sciences, of course, can take us only so far in history, but it is perhaps worthwhile pursuing a little farther this particular comparison of a revolution to an explosion. The three main factors that determine the effect of an explosion are the amount and type of explosive used, the strength of the container in which the initial pressure is built up, and the resistance of the medium through which the explosive waves must travel. This analogy may help us to understand the unique properties of the American Revolution, for we find upon examination that the amount of explosive which initiated the revolt was not great, that the strength of the British administrative container was low, and finally that in the vast empty spaces of the American West the revolution found a medium whose resistance was negligible. The deduction from this analogy would seem to be that the American Revolution can best be compared to a relatively low-grade explosion.

In France, on the other hand, the pattern followed was very different. If we take the explosive phase of the French Revolution to be the period between the storming of the Bastille and the 18th Brumaire, we find that the amount and type of explosive had a high order of lethality. The Paris mob, the men of the Mountain, the Cordeliers, and the Jacobins were to the embattled farmers of Massachusetts and the gentlemen of Virginia as nitro-glycerine is to cordite. The strength of the French container, moreover, was relatively high. Under the monarchy the social and economic discontent in France built up to a much higher peak before the explosion than was the case in America. The spiritual power of a Church that supported the *ancien régime*, the long tradition of a country governed by kings, the past glories of the ruling house, and the ingrained feeling for legitimacy and order which is the hallmark of a civilized society all tended, far more than mere consideration of material power, to retard the outbreak of revolt.

The expanding wave of the French Revolution was the Napoleonic epic, and the radiations of Napoleon's revolutionary energy at once beat

against the encircling barrier of legitimate monarchies. The resistance of this medium was very high, and as a result the reaction to the expanding waves was felt much sooner and much nearer to the centre than in America. Marengo, Austerlitz, Friedland, Leipzig, and Waterloo were among the concussion points. After the last great revolutionary wave had been beaten back on the summit of Mont St. Jean, the kings of Europe crept out again to feel the sun, but—although they did not know it then—they had been mortally wounded and were soon to die in the sunlight. In her phase of re-established equilibrium France was re-admitted to the Concert of Europe, and in the golden afternoon of that long Indian summer she came to feel that a true balance had at last been achieved and that the French were finally fulfilling their real destiny of being an education to Europe.

The explosive phase of the Russian revolution may be said to have begun with the abdication of the Tsar in 1917 and to have lasted until the final defeat of the White armies in the Ukraine in the spring of 1920. The violence of this phase, aggravated as it was by the intervention of the Western powers and by the resistance of Imperial generals like Denniken, was nevertheless not on the same scale as the violence in France between 1789 and 1799. In this stage it is probably fair to say that Russia followed a course mid-way between the American and the French revolutions—and this for two reasons. In the first place, the amount and type of the Russian explosive was certainly dangerously high, at least as high as in France and much higher than in America. The shocking poverty of the Russian people, the maddening obscurantism of the beaurocracy and the court, the long delay in granting necessary constitutional reforms, and—most serious of all—the disastrous defeats inflicted upon the Imperial forces in the field between 1914 and 1917, all ensured that when the explosion came it would be a big one. Yet even the murder of the Romanoffs in the cellar at Ekaterinberg, the atrocities of the Civil War, and the Bolshevik suppression of the Mensheviks and the social Democrats is a pattern which is surely to some degree less terrible than that of the French Revolution. There was, for instance, nothing in Russia really comparable to the September Massacres in France, and although the Cheka's firing squads were certainly kept busy, they were not quite as busy as the operators of the guillotine had been. One of the reasons for this was that after the successful *coup d'état* against Kerensky the Russian revolution was directed by a disciplined party of professional revolutionaries under the undisputed leadership of Lenin. Lenin was certainly no moderate, but neither was he a cornered lion like Danton nor a desperate visionary like Robespierre or St. Just.

Even more important, perhaps, was the fact that the strength of the imperial Russian container was low, and the ease with which it was burst asunder did something to keep down the violence of the explosion. The Autocracy had been utterly discredited by a long series of blunders and crimes. The ignominious outcome of the Russo-Japanese war, the criminal stupidity of the Bloody Sunday which ushered in the 1905 rebellion, the degradation of the court by its association with Rasputin, the weak and vacillating character of the Tsar, the dubious patriotism of his German wife, and the whips and scorpions with which the team of Hindenburg-Ludendorff-Hoffman scourged the Tsarist armies had all undermined the court's ability to resist. At the touch of Trotsky's probing finger the last vestiges of the old order fell like a house of cards.

The direction that would be taken by the expanding waves of the Russian revolution was for some time a matter of doubt. The resistance of the medium in the West was unquestionably high, and the Communist leaders soon became aware of this fact. They met the hostility of the West for the first time across the conference table at Brest Litovsk, and before long there was indisputable evidence that this reaction was typical of Europe. In Prussia, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the leaders of the Spartacist revolt, were murdered on their way to prison, and the *Freikorps*, springing like Jason's soldiers from the ground, promised unremitting war upon Communism. The Soviet state that had briefly been proclaimed in Bavaria fell at the first contact with the *Reichswehr*. In Finland, Marshal Mannerheim defeated the Reds; in Hungary, Bela Kun's Communist dictatorship came to an inglorious end; and in Poland, the first attempt to carry the Communist revolution abroad on bayonets fell back in defeat and disorder after a clash before Warsaw. All along her Western frontiers Russia found herself faced with a *cordon sanitaire* of hostile states, ready if need be to do battle as the kings had done against Napoleon.

Thus when Lenin died in 1924, the Communist Revolution had come to a crossroads. Only two alternatives seemed open to it—to go forward in the Napoleonic fashion, as Trotsky wished, in the pursuit of its international ideals and attempt to establish world revolution, or to follow the American example and turn to its own undeveloped areas for its expansion. This was the basic point of difference between Stalin and Trotsky, and Stalin won. For the next thirty years the Russian revolution ceased to look outwards upon the world and instead looked inwards upon itself. Russia turned to the East as America had turned to the West. Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, and Uralsk sprang up east of the Urals, as Chicago, Minneapolis, and San Francisco had sprung up west of the Ohio.

Before his death Lenin had already been faced with the choice of following a bloody Napoleonic course into Western Europe or of turning back to the East along the cart trails of rural Russia. This would have been a hard—perhaps an impossible—decision for a man like Lenin to make, for he and most of the old Bolsheviks were European by education and internationalist by conviction. Stalin had felt no such difficulty. He was a Georgian who had only once been beyond the borders of Russia; he was more than half an Asiatic himself; and he was much more at home among the cart trails than on the Western highways. Yet Stalin, like Lenin before him, died in a lucky hour. Even before 1953 Soviet society was already being faced with a hard set of alternatives—to follow the natural road of Stalinism into its inevitable *cul de sac* or to admit that the second phase of the Russian revolution was nearing its end and that it was time for the revolutionary state to seek a new equilibrium with the other nations of the world. Whether or not the new collective leadership in Russia will be wise enough voluntarily to attempt this adjustment only time will tell, but the historical forces that make adjustment necessary are inexorable ones and will not long be denied.

We are closer in point of time to the Chinese revolution than to any of the others, and for this very reason it is more difficult to speak positively here. Events may at any moment take an unexpected turn, and what appears to be a reasonably safe assertion today may in retrospect prove to be completely false. Nevertheless, with this qualification in mind, it seems true to say that the explosive phase of the Chinese revolution lasted longer than any of the others. The Manchu dynasty, which had ruled China since 1662, was overthrown by Sun-Yat-sen in 1911, and between that time and the beginning of 1950, China was in a perpetual state of revolutionary ferment and disorder. It would be unprofitable to trace the history of those four decades in any detail. They are a shifting kaleidoscope of intrigue and violence, revolt and counter-revolt, of marching armies under independent war lords, of Cantonese factions and Anfu groups, of Communists and Kuomintangs. Only when the last of Chiang Kai-shek's forces withdrew to Formosa in December, 1949, does the explosive phase seem to have passed. This judgment, of course, implies that China has had only one revolution and that the rise and fall of the Kuomintang and the emergence of Mao Tse-tung's Communist government are merely episodes in one continuous story. This, on the whole, now appears to be the most plausible interpretation of events. We do not, for instance, speak of the rise and fall of the Gironde and of the Jacobins as separate revolutions, nor do we consider that Kerensky and Lenin were unrelated phenomena in Russian history.

From so close at hand, too, it is difficult to judge just how powerful were the explosive forces in China. What we can say with certainty however, is that the resistance of the Manchu container was very low. By 1911 China was undoubtedly ripe for revolt. The death of the dowager empress Tzu Hsi, the penalties imposed on China after the crushing of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, the habit of foreign armies settling their quarrels on Chinese territory, and the whole sordid story of the European plundering of China—of 99-year leases on Chinese cities, of forced railway concessions and mining rights—all these had completely undermined Chinese confidence in the dynasty. Sun Yat-sen's three-point programme of democratic government, improved economic conditions, and freedom from foreign intervention found instant and almost universal acceptance in China.

Perhaps, then, the Chinese revolution may now have entered its second, or expanding wave, phase. The Korean War and the conflict in Indo-China may have been caused by the initial impact of these waves upon peripheral states. It will remain to be seen whether the Chinese revolution in this phase will adopt the French pattern or whether, like those of America and Russia, it will direct the greater part of its energy inwards.

Although it would be intriguing to speculate on why these revolutionary moods have been so prevalent in the past hundred and eighty years, this is not our present concern. It may be that the mood is part of some larger pattern, the symptom of some more general malaise, but what we are concerned with here is the contingent problem of how the revolutionary states have developed and how they are likely to behave in the future. One of the first facts which forces itself upon our attention in this regard is that the unit of revolution has become progressively larger. By modern standards the thirteen American colonies were a tiny political unit. The France of 1789 was very considerably larger, but nothing like as large as the Russia of 1917, while China has a population twice as large again as that of the Soviet Union. Other things being equal, this would almost inevitably mean that there would, in each succeeding case, be more weight behind the revolutionary impulses, that the expanding wave phase would be stronger and more far-reaching, and that the final adjustment would be more difficult and more prolonged.

Other things, of course, are not quite equal. France, for instance, exhausted her revolutionary impulse much sooner than any of the other states and adjusted more quickly. This was because of the greater violence of her second or Napoleonic phase. The French Revolution bled to death

at Eylau and Borodino, in Spain, and on the road back from Moscow. In just a little more than twenty years it was all over. The Soviet Union, however, has had nearly four decades to absorb the revolutionary impetus, and, since the death of Stalin, there are signs that this phase is now passing away. It is probable that Russia is even now in the throes of adjustment. The degree of autonomy that the Soviet Union has been forced to grant to Poland, the heroic defiance of Hungary which has irreparably shattered the façade of satellite unity, the first tentative concessions that have been wrung from the régime in Russia itself—all these are indications of a new trend. This trend is only to a very limited extent dependent upon the decisions of the present Soviet rulers. They may fight against it, in which case they are almost certain to be destroyed, or they may accept it and hope that the Communist Party will be able to survive in a changed environment. This last cannot be a very robust hope, for no organism can be faced with a more critical challenge than that of an altered environment. It was this, after all, that brought about the extinction of the giant saurians.

The time scale of these events cannot, of course, be predicted with accuracy, nor can the details of the struggle. It may be that the Old Guard in the Soviet Union, the men who learned their tricks from Stalin, will ultimately emerge as the political leaders of the nation. If so, they will stand for the perpetuation of the terror, for the permanence of the revolution, for the increasing violence of the revolutionary convulsions. They will refuse to admit that their little day is over and that they are for the dark. Such a refusal, however, can only hasten the inevitable. The methods of repression and terror that were used to convert an illiterate mass of two hundred million peasants into a literate, highly industrialized nation will no longer be acceptable now that the conversion is complete. Times have changed and Russian society must inevitably change with them.

Unfortunately, the world is not likely to find rest even when the Russian Revolution passes into its third phase and seeks a re-established equilibrium with other states. The Chinese Revolution is just entering its second phase, and this phase must work itself out. If this revolutionary stage could be guided and directed by moderate men, the results might be almost entirely beneficial for the world—the emancipation of Asia and Africa, the abolition of poverty, the decrease of ignorance. If, however, the expansionist phase of the Chinese Revolution is directed by orthodox Communists, the results may be completely disastrous. The cost in terms of violence, degradation, and human misery may be staggering.

There is, perhaps, one hope left, and that is that history itself helps to make history. In spite of their manifold and terrible mistakes, the leaders of the Russian Revolution did learn some things from the example of France. There has not, for instance, been a Red Napoleon. Similarly, it is possible that Chinese political leaders may yet learn from the example of Russia. So far there has been little sign of this learning, but if our analysis is right we need not be surprised, for the Chinese Revolution is only at the threshold of its second phase. There may still be time for it to seek salvation, and upon this slender hope may depend the future of the world.