

IF RUSSIA WINS THE WAR

DONALD COWIE

A GROUP of workers were talking as they sipped their tea in a Tyneside canteen; they were talking about the war situation in general and the prowess of our Russian allies in particular. Then one of them said: "You just wait till they reach Berlin. There won't be any blinking Versailles about it then. They'll have the whole ruddy world at their feet."

It was, of course, the remark of an uninformed man. But the approval with which it was received gave evidence beyond doubt that it fairly expressed a popular instinct, than which nothing is more significant in our human society. The people have a collective instinct for the truth. And it might be submitted that the particular truth in that remark points to our most important political problem of the morrow, namely the arrangement of the world to accommodate both the western democratic and the Soviet philosophies, after a military victory obtained chiefly by Soviet force of arms.

The popular instinct might be wrong, both about the outcome of future military operations on the Eastern Front, and about the ability or desire of Russia to dominate the council-chamber afterwards. The situation at the end of the war may be very different if the Red Army does not reach Berlin first, but is reinforced before then by British and American forces, rushed at high speed to the western attack this year.

Let us assume, however, that the popular instinct is right, and the war may soon be as good as over, with the German Army and Air Force half-beaten by the Russian adventure and prepared, at no far distant date, to overthrow the Nazi regime and capitulate for the sake of the unbeaten half (which might thus be preserved, even if split up, for another war later on). In that case the Red Army may reach Berlin first, and the Soviet Government may be entitled to dictate the preliminary terms of surrender.

Let us not delude ourselves here, as we have done sometimes in the past, notably at the end of the last war. It is an unpleasant law of nature and international politics that if you want to have chief say you must be able, if necessary, to dominate the

was strongest at the conference-table by virtue of her decisive intervention, and could thus impose her own ideal of peace organization on Europe. We did not, at heart, want or understand that organization, the League of Nations, so we won a war to lose the peace.

Now here are all the makings of a similar situation again, complicated still more this time by ideological factors. If Russia wins and makes the peace, her victory will be loudly acclaimed by all: it will, in fact, be a miracle and dispensation to all. But, on the one side, there will be those to acclaim the event over-enthusiastically, seeing in it the general salvation of humanity from the capitalist system. They will hope to see workers' revolutions in Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, and the rest, and to have Soviet support for similar developments in the British Empire and the United States. On the other side, there will be those to see only the triumph of the fundamental enemy, the Communist virus let loose at last. They will consider it necessary to take counter-measures at once; to subscribe money for active steps to preserve existing institutions; to intrigue and pull against the representatives of our victorious Allies in conference after international conference. It will, in fact, be the tragi-comic Genevan mixture as before.

And there is the greatest potential danger of the moment, this vital moment in world history. Similar pitfalls have gaped in the past; invariably we have fallen into them. Would there have been a Second World War at all, if only we had taken more trouble in the interregnum to know our neighbours? But we relied, as usual, upon catch-phrases and conventional notions—the Russians are Reds, the Americans money-grubbers, the Germans not so bad if given a chance, the French narrow, ourselves perfect—and we left policy entirely to our politicians, who assured us then, as now, and with a welter of rhetoric, that they were at once preserving the peace and looking after our interests.

So what?

The answer is this—and it is made by one who has often attacked Communism, and who temperamentally deplors all extensions of the power of the community over the individual. If we do really desire peace and amity in the world of the future, then we must resolve now to banish from our minds any notions of disquiet about a Russian dictate at the end of this war:

Perhaps it is useless to appeal to the so-called "better instincts", those illusory impulses which meant such a lot to writers of the present type in the past. If we did, we should underline the tremendous contribution that has been made to civilization by the Russians' stand in this war; we should point out that, but for the Russians, we would be facing to-day a struggle that might be as protracted as the Napoleonic wars, if, possibly, less successful in the end. We have learnt, however, to be chary of sentimental talk in our time. We have seen too many callous revelations of policy dictated solely by self-interest. The cynic can mock at the Finnish and Polish situations, can laugh at former Russophobes who attend dinners to Soviet ambassadors, can suggest that we did not sentimentalize over our Red Allies when the German-Soviet Pact gave Hitler the confidence to start his war and kill a million innocents, then enabled him to destroy forever the living idea of France. It is no good to inform such awakened minds that Russia had herself been let down, and was preparing all the while to save us as now. Their laughter at that would be the most painful of all.

No, that is certainly not the right approach. Nor is it necessary. It would be far better, as an example, to demonstrate that a Russian dictate at Berlin would be, in the long run, a happier event for the world than a peace prescribed in London or Washington by ourselves and the Americans. As the Russians have suffered the most in this war, and since they are far more "realistic" than Westerners, *they* might perhaps have no compunction about smashing Germany once and for all; they might perhaps entertain no nonsense about disbanding the German armed forces but not destroying German industry; they might hardly hesitate, perhaps, in the light of their experience, to settle the future of the German satellite states, even of France, in such a manner that none of them could ever collaborate in wickedness again.

Our own failures in this war have been partly due to lack of material preparation, but they have also been the product of our moral advance in modern times. We have been too civilised, too nice. And, for all our present protestations, we would probably be the same at the peace, if it was our concern alone. Once again we might be hoodwinked by our gentle upbringing into folly, and the essential Germany would remain whole, would remain intact for the final—and successful, spring.

time lucky . . . While refusing even now to give Germany all the blame for the latest war in an ever-warring world, and declining in spite of everything to look upon the Germans as a nation of criminals, we must surely recognise that the Germans have an all-consuming ambition to be "top nation"—as we and others have been—and that they are a people who will not admit defeat. But do we, and will we?

The Russians—if we are not wrong—would and will stand no nonsense. They would have the one object, so to dispose of Germany and other states that they, themselves, would not need to fear aggression for at least a hundred years. They would attain that object by the same ruthless means as they have employed so successfully in the war itself.

There are other reasons for sensible complaisancy on our part in the face of a Russian peace. We have to admit that our Allies have much to teach us in large-scale economic, even in political, organization. We should be able to see remarkable and appetising opportunities for economic collaboration of mutual benefit after the war, since the Soviet Union as a whole is still largely undeveloped, and the scorched earth policy may eventually create a huge demand for capital goods and technical work, that Russia on her own may be unable to satisfy.

Then the last doubters of the Right can be informed, from the Right, that there is, if anything, quite as much socialism in the British Empire to-day as there is in the Soviet Union. Under the impact of war, and the preparations leading up to war, our Russian Allies have had to abandon many of their most "dangerous" doctrines. Why, we heard the other day that pilots of the Red Air Force were deliberately inspired by the profit-motive, in the form of substantial cash bonuses for every German plane shot down! The Royal Air Force is, on the other hand, a perfect example of a communist institution on the best Marxian model. While we have been advancing towards practical communism, the Russians have actually been reacting from it, until our systems are very close together.

But all such arguments are unimportant beside the overriding one of future world peace. The matter is, simply, that if we don't make up our minds now to pull together with our Russian allies in policy as well as strategy, we will be unable afterwards to plan a satisfactory and lasting state of international equilibrium. We must not, at all costs, have anything like reservations in British and American high councils—"At all

Street and the City say?" — or anything like a spread of fear-cum-jealousy among wealthy people in Britain and America. That would lead inevitably to strange hitches at after-war conferences, to a lack of unanimity in the final peace scheme and consequent failure of it—to another interregnum and another war, not necessarily between nations this time, but between brothers everywhere. Such one-eyed tactics, far from exorcising the spectre of universal communism, would actually invoke it, as the exasperated world masses would turn from their established systems and revolt in the name of the only hope left, the hope which did at least save Russia.

There are only two other ways to avert such a catastrophe. One is to fight hard on the battlefield now and win the war quickly for ourselves, so that afterwards we could have our own way in everything that pleases us. But it is extremely unlikely, on past and present showing, that we shall have the warlike ability to do that. The other way is to replace many of our political leaders with really clever, and, if necessary, unscrupulous men for a change, so that afterwards we may be able to win our own way in the peace by guile. But there are few signs that it may be possible to do that. We have already seen many leaders removed in this war, and cling pathetically to the rest as if they were the only men our millions can produce for the task. And, being democratic, we hate to exalt leaders who might eventually prove too clever for *us* as well as for our foreign friends and enemies.

No, there is only the one practicable and wholly satisfactory way; which is, plainly, to keep our mouths shut as much as possible, to work hard, and to make up our minds that we will not, at all costs, be afraid of our partners in victory. Can we not see how much fear has cost us already?

And the Dominions, in particular, can help a lot here. They have never been so fearful. Their influence is growing, and should be mighty before the end. Let the appeal go out for final aid—aid in combating any tendency among us to ruin the future by ungraciousness, refusal to co-operate fully, unworthy suspicion now.