

USSR: Evil despots or mis

by David R. Marples

How dangerous is the USSR today? How great is its threat to world peace? The question has become almost rhetorical, the name of the country a synonym for every evil deed perpetrated. According to Pierre Trudeau, international affairs have reached such an impasse that war may be imminent. Is this a result of the intransigence of Soviet leaders? It is high time these questions were put into perspective.

Thirty-eight years after the end of the Second World War, we are still suffering from the effects of that conflict. Although Fascism received a decisive rebuff, there has been no long-term solution to the problems that causes conflict in Europe: nationalism and expansionism. These problems have been with the Europeans for centuries. In turn, the image of the predator — the Great Russian bear — to the east has continued. The sheer size of both the Russian Empire of the nineteenth century and the modern USSR has necessitated wary West European diplomacy and instilled fear into statesmen. Russia has long been an enemy, and it is doubtful whether the face of that enemy will be clarified in the years to come. One suspects that historians, misled by the sophisticated propaganda techniques utilized today, increasingly will come to lay the blame for almost all the conflicts of our century on the USSR.

This would be a mistake. Whatever the evils of the Soviet regime, especially in the 1930s, the USSR was not responsible for the greatest upheaval, the Second World War, a war that saw the second invasion of Russian territory in just over two decades. Further, the USSR only made its territorial gains during the war because of the blunders of two western leaders, Roosevelt and Churchill. These two renowned statesmen spent more time arguing and trying to outwit one another than uniting in the face of a common threat. As a result, they permitted the occupation of eastern Germany by the same power that had mercilessly subjugated eastern Poland in 1939-41. The outcome of this occupation was never in doubt, just as the abnegation of Czechoslovakia's continuing independence by England and France in 1938 inevitably led to Hitler's dismemberment of that country. One can expect totalitarian countries to take advantages of such "gifts" in a wartime situation. The East European countries fell like dominoes into the Soviet orbit while the western leaders continued to maintain that it was essential to show loyalty to the valiant Soviet ally.

But the Russian or Soviet presence in Europe is not a new phenomenon. What is new, however, is the involvement of the United States in this area of the world, which is

a direct result of the belated attempt to halt the Soviet westward expansion. The loser of the 1939-45 war, Germany, is still severed in two, and Berlin is still subjected to a ludicrous division between East and West. But let us reiterate: the main reason for this untenable situation is that the British, U.S. and French leaders, blinded by the danger that Hitler posed, neglected to put a stop to Stalin's ambitions.

In addition to naive western statesmanship, the division of Germany was also a result of the violent attack upon the USSR by its "ally," Nazi Germany. The Soviet presence in the heart of Europe in 1983 should be attributed less to the ambition of ruthless communists seeking world domination than to the attempt to destroy the USSR in 1941-2. After the brutal treatment of Soviet citizens at the hands of the German occupiers, we should not be surprised that the Red Army did not cease its advance until it reached the German capital. The only surprise is that Churchill and Roosevelt, whose forces could have been there first, allowed this to happen. In the same conciliatory way they ordered (at Stalin's behest) the return of more than half a million "displaced persons" to the USSR after the war, knowing that they were to receive the full force of the Soviet leader's wrath.

We have seen that the USSR has clung to its wartime gains, notably with the invasions of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), when these countries threatened to leave the Soviet orbit. But with the exception of the invasion of Afghanistan, which has not been annexed to the USSR nor included in the military alliance, it has not added to these territories. Further, the fear of "secession" by one of the satellite states (and actually carried out by one of them, Yugoslavia) is linked to the belief that some of the minority republics might use their constitutional right and follow suite: Ukraine, the Baltic republics and the

Central Asian states being the most likely.

If we have established that the danger of further Soviet expansion in Europe is not acute, should we nonetheless not state categorically that the Soviet regime should be removed as a tyranny: a government that set up the Gulag camps and that continued to persecute dissidents and particularly Soviet Jewry? Indeed we should. But we should also bear in mind that the camps are not unique to the USSR, and that the treatment of anti-government dissidents is equally harsh elsewhere. Even in Stalin's day, when one family in three had a member purged and several million peasants were deliberately starved to death in Ukraine, there was little to compare in scale with the deaths and purges that accompanied the Chinese Revolution, when between 7 and 10 million people are said to have perished before Mao-Tse Tung came to power. The British Empire was using concentration camps before either Hitler or Stalin arrived on the political scene, albeit with less rigour. The two dictators merely expanded a concept that had been well practiced elsewhere. Each time we read Solzhenitsyn we might ponder over the depths that the Soviet leadership has sunk to, but can we deny that the treatment of dissidents is equally harsh in Argentina, Chile, South Africa, El Salvador, etc.?

Persecution of one's fellow man is not unique to the Soviet state or to communism, but is widely used in every country in the world to a greater or lesser degree. We know about the Soviet camps through Solzhenitsyn or Bukovsky, but we are often ignorant of similar acts of tyranny elsewhere in the world because the media has not brought them to our attention: that is the only difference.

I have heard it said that the world peace movement, especially the current campaign against the installation of U.S. cruise missiles in Western Europe and Canada, is being financ-



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