October and the World

One of the basic features of the twentieth century has been the division of the world community into two opposing camps, East and West. By this I mean the dividing line drawn, first, between the Soviet Union and the West and, later, after other states began taking the road first traveled by the Soviet Union, between the countries of the so-called socialist camp and the developed Western countries.

This division has fundamentally determined the whole course of world history since 1917. It did not, however, have an equal effect on both sides. The negative consequences are obvious and have been much studied. The positive consequences—and there were some—have so far remained in the realm of propaganda. I think that historical science still has a long way to go toward making a genuinely objective and dispassionate analysis of all the ups and downs of the century now drawing to a close.

It is not of course a question of speculating on what the world might have been like if the October revolution had not happened. There is no basis for scientific analysis in that. But to try to weigh the actual effect of the USSR on the course of international relations—that would be an important undertaking.

Let us ask a question: While it was impossible to prevent the division of the world into two opposing systems after the victory of the revolution in Russia, might it not have been possible to avoid those extreme consequences that ultimately resulted in an endless series of confrontations culminating in the Cold War?

Reasoning theoretically, one might say: Yes, it would have been possible if both sides, immediately after the civil war in Russia and the failure of Western military intervention, had taken the road of recognizing each other's right to exist. In the real world, however, it proved impossible. Espe-

cially because, not only in Russia but to a considerable extent in what one might call the popular consciousness worldwide, the victory of October was seen as the beginning of a "new era." The division of the world into two opposing social systems was depicted by Communist ideologists as a good thing. Lenin spoke of it as final and irreversible. This is fully understandable in view of the "model" of social development the Bolsheviks were seeking to put into effect.

They took as their starting point the view that October was the beginning of a worldwide revolution. Following their example, similar revolutions would be victorious in Western Europe, then in other countries, and finally the whole world would "go socialist." But the world revolution did not happen. "Soviet" revolutions (or insurrections) were defeated in several countries. At the end of his life Lenin admitted this fact and proposed that a new course be taken, oriented toward the prolonged existence of the Soviet state under "capitalist encirclement." A new policy was proclaimed—"peaceful coexistence" (Lenin's own term) with the capitalist world.

First, the West had no confidence in this "new course." Although the West recognized the USSR diplomatically and economically, it continued its attempts by various means to overthrow the Bolsheviks. Second, the Soviet leadership—both secretly and openly—continued to support revolutionary forces whose aim was to overthrow capitalism.

The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU renounced the idea that a new world war was inevitable and spoke in favor of "peaceful coexistence." Yet five years later the party's new program, adopted at its Twenty-second Congress, declared peaceful coexistence to be "a form of the class struggle." This formula was not renounced until 1986, when a new version of the party program was adopted at the Twenty-seventh Congress.

Until that time the old orientation remained in force. In the name of an ideology that placed the peoples of the Soviet Union in hostile opposition to most of the world, our country increased its participation in the arms race, exhausting its resources and turning the military-industrial complex into the primary factor governing all politics and public consciousness in the USSR. We were feared, and we considered this to our credit, because the enemy should be afraid. And it was not just a question of our immense nuclear arsenal but also the provocative actions in which the Soviet Union engaged, such as the invasion of Czechoslovakia and intervention in Afghanistan.

All this is true, but the responsibility for the many decades of tension cannot be laid solely at Soviet feet. In the West, from the very beginning of the Russian revolution, a policy was adopted of trying to suppress that revolution.

In December 1917, for example, Leonido Bissolati, a minister of the Italian government, stated: "The influence of the Bolsheviks has reached proportions that are not without danger for us. If in the near future the Russian government does not fall, things will go badly for us. O Lord, punish the Bolsheviks!" In March 1918 Arthur Balfour, summing up the results of the London Conference of prime ministers and foreign ministers of France, Italy, and Britain, wrote the following in a dispatch to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson: "What is the remedy? To the Conference it seemed that none is possible except through Allied intervention. Since Russia cannot help herself [!], she must be helped by her friends." In early 1919 President Wilson also spoke in very definite terms: "We must be concerned that this [Bolshevik] form of 'rule by the people' is not imposed on us, or anyone else."

Wilson's "concern" was expressed in the deployment of armed expeditionary forces on the territory of Soviet Russia. And it must be acknowledged that this was not done merely to prevent "rule by the people" from spreading to other countries. The intentions of the Western powers went much further, as historical documents show.

On October 30, 1918, President Wilson approved a document (not for publication of course!) with commentary on the famous Fourteen Points, the American peace program. In this document the recommendation was made that Russia not be regarded as a unitary state. The document suggested that separate states, such as Ukraine, should arise on Russian territory. The Caucasus region was seen as "part of the problem of the Turkish empire." Another suggestion was that one of the Western powers be authorized to govern Central Asia as a protectorate. As for the remaining parts of Russia, the idea expressed in this document was to propose to Great Russia and Siberia that a government "sufficiently representative to speak in the name of these territories be created."

All this happened eighty years ago. But to judge from certain lightly tossed-off phrases and the highly "selective" diplomacy pursued by some Western countries, one gets the impression that even today "nothing has been forgotten."

I will not pursue this theme further. The documents and facts on this issue are numerous. The main point is to recognize that both sides, over

the course of all the years since the revolution, have engaged in rough confrontation, sometimes openly, sometimes secretly. After World War II this was expressed in the arms race, above all, the nuclear arms race (although both sides feared it and neither side wanted a head-on military clash, especially not with weapons of mass destruction). This struggle was also expressed in rivalry on other continents (a race to see who could win more supporters or allies). Only after perestroika began did the situation start to change. Both sides altered their approach and, to a certain extent, sought to meet each other halfway. This led to the end of the Cold War.

I should note that surviving elements of that era of confrontation have not been eliminated to this day. Most of the "holdovers" are found in the West, but in Russia, too, not all the prejudices and habits of that era have been overcome. That, however, is a separate topic.

It was apparently not possible to avoid the world's many decades of confrontation and division. But it is important to draw lessons from the past for future use. This mutually confrontational approach to international relations does no one any good; everyone has to pay the price. It should not be forgotten, moreover, that a hostile, confrontational attitude by each side toward the other only embitters both and intensifies all the dangers that may arise.

More than seventy years of confrontation, as we have said, left their mark on the entire course of world history. Even under these conditions, and despite all the contradictory aspects of the Soviet past, in which tragedy and heroism were interwoven, giving rise to totally unexpected situations, the existence and development of the Soviet Union had an enormous impact on the rest of the world.

At first, in the years right after October 1917, this impact took the outward form of mass movements that swept like waves across many countries. October inspired hope in a great many people, especially working people, that improvement in the conditions of their lives was possible. That was when the Communist movement was born, the best organized of all mass movements known to history.

We cannot close our eyes of course to the fact that Soviet Russia was a bulwark of decisive support and aid to these movements, but we also cannot keep quiet about the main consideration: What was involved was a spontaneous reaction by working people to the example set by October, on whose banners were inscribed the same kind of slogans for which they themselves had been fighting for decades in their own countries.

As Karl Kautsky wrote in 1920:

> If the low level of economic development in Russia today still rules out a form of socialism that would be superior to advanced capitalism, still the Russian revolution has performed a truly heroic feat, freeing the peasantry from all the consequences of feudal exploitation from which it had been suffocating. No less important is the fact that the Russian revolution instilled the workers of the capitalist world in a consciousness of their own power.

After World War II there emerged a large group of countries (the so-called socialist camp), representing nearly one-third of the human race. These countries not only took up the ideas of October; they also borrowed forms of government from the Soviet Union. The question of the nature of the revolutions that took place in Eastern Europe and East Asia deserves further study, particularly regarding their origins: What was the "balance" between the native popular movements in those countries and Soviet policy in bringing them into existence?

The creation of democratic, antifascist regimes was the natural result of the defeat of fascism in World War II and of the fact that the forces that had collaborated with the fascists were completely discredited. The subsequent stage, however, in which for all practical purposes one-party systems were established on the Soviet model (or something close to it), was not such a natural result. It was the result of open or secret pressure from Moscow. This also had to do with the Stalinist conception of proletarian internationalism and ideological unity among all Communist parties. Those parties, too, bear their share of responsibility for what happened. In addition, we cannot forget about the Cold War—that is, the responsibility the West also had for the policies Moscow pursued in relation to its allies.

When we began perestroika, one of the first steps we took was to declare an end to intervention in the internal affairs of our allies, to what was known as the Brezhnev doctrine. It could not have been otherwise. Having charted a course toward freedom, we could not deny it to others. Reproaches are often directed at me today, asking what I "gave up" or who I "gave it up" to. If such terminology is to be used, then we "gave up" those countries to their own people. We "gave up" that which did not belong to us. In general, I consider freedom of choice indispensable for every nation and one of the most meaningful principles in politics today.

In the opinion of George F. Kennan, the Russian revolution unquestionably accelerated the disintegration of the European colonial empires. Here, too, it was not a question of "exporting the Russian revolution." The anticolonial revolutions unfolded as a reaction to the emancipation of the nationalities of Russia, to the transformations that began to take place in the former borderlands of the tsarist empire. It was precisely the presence of the Soviet Union as part of the world balance of forces, and the attractive force of the Soviet example for the people in the colonies, that forced the colonial powers in a number of cases to make concessions to the liberation movements and grant independence to the colonies. From this point of view it is interesting to hear the opinion of a respected specialist Victor Gordon Kiernan, a professor at Edinburgh University. He wrote: "The fear that India would start to lean too far toward Moscow and socialism explains, in many respects, the granting of independence to India in 1947. Fear of the expansion of Soviet influence in the final analysis forced the West to take the road of decolonization in general."

Even from the point of view of sober-minded Westerners who are not socialists, this aspect of Soviet influence cannot be underestimated. What was involved here was a genuine quickening of the pace of social progress on a world scale.

The existence of the Soviet Union had an impact on the capitalist world itself, on everyday life in the West. As many Westerners have admitted, social policy in the Soviet Union acted as a stimulus toward the introduction of similar social programs in the West, the granting of social benefits that had not existed before October or that had generally been considered unacceptable. It turned out to be simply impossible, even dangerous, to lag behind "Communism" in such matters.

I will cite testimony from sources connected with two quite different ideological tendencies. In a Belgian socialist magazine, *Le Socialisme*, we find the following: "There is no question that the Russian revolution of 1917 and the general rise of the revolutionary movement after World War I forced the capitalists to make numerous concessions to the workers, concessions that otherwise would have required much greater effort to extract." Here, on the other hand, is a statement by Walter Lippmann, the well-known columnist, who for several decades was one of the chief molders of opinion in American society: "But we delude ourselves if we do not realize that the main power of the Communist states lies not in their clandestine

activity but in the force of their example, in the visible demonstration of what the Soviet Union has achieved."

Both statements come from the period before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Have opinions changed since then? In 1997 I had an interview with Arrigo Levi, a prominent Italian writer and commentator. Our conversation dealt with the eightieth anniversary of October. The interview was later shown on television. I can recall verbatim much of what was said, especially Levi's comment: "Communism was unquestionably a powerful catalyst for progress in other countries."

Yes, that was so. Now, on the other hand, with Russia in its present condition of crisis, when the power of its social example has faded, a new policy is gaining strength in many Western countries, a policy of cutting back on people's social rights and benefits, a desire to solve all problems connected with intensified global competition by making cutbacks in social programs at home. The French authors Jean Francois Kahn and Patrice Picard have written in this regard:

> The pathetic fiasco of the collectivist utopia had the inevitable result of spurring on the savage race for individual success, a race that of course proceeds on unequal terms. If the illusory successes of Communism contributed at first to a rejuvenation of capitalism, there is no question that the downfall of the Soviet system hastened the emergence of ultraliberal tendencies.

These are "tendencies" that in the final analysis can prove to be extremely dangerous.

In this part of the present work it seems appropriate to share my thoughts on the experience of various countries, because the entire world is changing before our eyes and an intensive search is under way for roads to the future.

We need the experience of the past as a lesson, as the source of all that is best in the cumulative achievements of the human mind, the creative product of many nations and populations. The eighty years that have passed since October demonstrate this—and they do so in two ways. The fruitful exchange of experience has truly enriched life, enriched every nation that took part in this exchange. But artificial self-isolation, the refusal to make use of the experience of others, places a brake on development and reduces the range of possibilities for every nation that takes or has taken the isolationist path. The example of the Soviet Union, which barricaded itself not

only from the social experience of the West but also from its scientific and technical progress, is highly instructive. Japan and Southeast Asia provide the opposite example. Energetically assimilating the experiences of other countries and enriching them with their own contributions, they were able in a very short time, historically speaking, to break through to the high ground of contemporary progress.

The same experience shows, however, that simply to copy from others' achievements in a mechanical way, especially in socioeconomic respects, to make one's own country over in the image of other models—even if those were very successful models—is dangerous and counterproductive. Sooner or later a high price must be paid for such a mistake.

Testifying to this in the most obvious and dramatic way is the example of Russia in the last few years. The Russian leadership has been warned many times against copying others in a formalistic way, against following outside advice that is by no means unselfish or disinterested. An important book was published in Russia in 1996: *Reformy glazami amerikanskikh i russkikh uchenykh* [The reforms seen through the eyes of American and Russian scholars]. Among the authors were several recipients of the Nobel Prize in economics. This book called attention, among other things, to the inadmissibility of mechanically applying a general "model" to the very specific conditions in Russia.

Also, of course, the history of past decades has shown quite clearly that the *imposition* of any recipes or "models" from the outside, especially with the use of forcible measures (economic or political) is, without question, ruinous. That is what happened to the Eastern European countries on which the Soviet Union imposed its model. The results are well known. Incidentally, wherever local leaders tried in some way to correct or revise the "advice from their (Soviet) elder brother," taking into account their own national traditions and conditions, things went better.

Today the whole world is watching as Washington attempts to impose on others its model of how to approach major political, economic, and social problems. It is necessary to study the American experience; there definitely is much of interest in that experience. But to copy everything that is done across the ocean is unproductive and dangerous. This is well understood in Europe. It was no accident that at a recent G–8 summit in Denver the European leaders displayed no inclination whatsoever to follow the American president's exhortations on how to stimulate economic development and solve social problems.

The natural interaction and mutual influence of different experiences, the study and utilization of whatever corresponds to one's own interests—that is another question altogether. Today that kind of interaction has become an imperative necessity not only for international progress but for national progress as well.

In recent years, especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the changes in Eastern Europe, some people have triumphantly proclaimed that everything has returned to the way it should be. (This was done particularly by Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History?*) But to take this approach is a profound error. Today's world is an entire solar system in which the West is only one of the planets. The influence of October has been very great, as seen in the fact that the world has changed so strikingly and irreversibly. A process of change on a world scale began in October 1917. The world continues to change. And it is in no one's provenance to turn back the course of history.

The many years' experience since October allows us to consider matters more broadly and to draw lessons from the past for the sake of the future.