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Book Review:

THE MONOLITH KEEPS CRACKING

Jan Librach, THE RISE OF THE SOVIET EMPIRE: A STUDY OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY. Revised edition (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965).

An attempt to deal with this complex subject of Soviet foreign policy is always a rather daring undertaking. What distinguishes Librach's attempt from those of many others is his prudent limitation of the subject—Communist doctrine as applied to foreign policy — and his ability to bring theory and practice into a broad perspective. Expounding first the theory, he then describes Soviet foreign policy "in action." Separating temporary expedients from long-range aims, propaganda from policy, and "differentiating between what Soviet Russia says from what she actually does," the author succeeds in giving "a broad survey of Soviet action in foreign relations" and in making it rather easy "to observe the recurring patterns of behavior as well as the persistence of general aims." Another limitation to which the author adheres (and which may or may not be an advantage as compared with other publications on the subject) is his use of documentary sources and quotations only "from Soviet English-language publications and from other primary documents in English."

Within this frame the author starts with a valid description of Communist doctrine, proceeds with the doctrine's implementation by diplomacy, by the methods of imperialism, i. e. war, and by the peculiar and novel means of the "cold war era," and ends his study by dealing with the "rents" in the Communist monolith that seems to keep "cracking." While describing the historical process, he brings the many details, actions, and facts of Soviet foreign policy into a persuasive and — with the exception of minor lapses — a correct perspective.

Soviet diplomatic action is viewed not only as "a continuation of the aims of Czarist foreign policy to expand the national domain in all directions," but also to transcend the old imperial ambitions "in accordance with the global aims of Communism." Soviet diplomacy has become "more extensive and sophisticated than that of its Czarist forerunner." "Doublethink and double-talk" as well as double-dealing have become "the very essence of Soviet action abroad." By shrewdly applying these methods in practice, the Kremlin successfully "traded words and promises for domination of foreign lands," until the Potsdam Conference of 1945 "marked the belated resistance" to the ever-mounting Soviet claims and became "a sign of a slowly changing tide" in Russian disfavor, brought about by the opposition of a painfully awakened Western diplomacy. But in the meantime a remarkable persistence of purpose had pushed the Soviet frontier deep into Europe. The author devotes considerable space and analytical effort to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939, the most significant example of Soviet double-dealing and "one of the most fateful acts of modern history." He concludes that the Pact, together with the secret protocol on delimitation of spheres of influence in the eastern European area "without which the main pact would not be valid", and which was the beginning of the end of Baltic freedom, was initiated and even drafted by the Russians and that it is a "myth" to maintain that Hitler was its initiator. It was a risky, but to a high degree successfully played gamble to induce Hitler into "a war of attrition with the West that eventually would leave Europe open to Communist penetration." Another example of the author's analysis of Soviet policy in perspective is his emphasis on the precarious position of the Soviet Union between potential dangers to her security from the Far East as well as from the West. Talks with the West from the post-Locarno period on to the present day negotiations on atomic test-bans and prohibition of atomic proliferation were always used "as a lever in the dispute with China, and vice versa."

In view of the ever growing military power and hostility of China it is perhaps already a misnomer to describe the Soviet Union's relationship with China simply as "a dispute" and the disruption of Soviet-Chinese communication only as a "rent in the Communist monolith." There is certainly more to it than an ideological clash of opinions, and many events which the author at the time of writing could not foresee (the explosion of the Chinese atomic bomb, for instance) point into the direction of an ever growing possibility of an open conflict and, by the same token, of an ever increasing chance for the West and the Soviet-dominated borderlands in Eastern Europe to extract concessions from the Kremlin in exchange for security.

As far as the Baltic States are concerned, their fate in the process of Soviet territorial aggrandisement is described only peripherally within the general frame of the Soviet Union foreign policy in practice and only in some detail in connection with the Soviet—Western bargaining over Soviet war aims before and during World War II. Documentary source material

on all aspects of the Baltic question, though readily available even in English, has been used scantily. The only book on the Baltic States, cited in an otherwise quite extensive bibliography, is that on Latvian-Russian Relations by A. Bilmanis. Though generally true, the treatment of the problem brings into view only parts of it; important facts for its understanding are omitted, e. g., the reaction of the Western community of nations against the "incorporation" of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union, the long and cruel Lithuanian guerilla war against Soviet rule from 1944 to 1952, and, in general, the persistent refusal of the Baltic nations to accept Soviet domination as final.

The author believes that the Soviet Empire is "in a state of slow erosion" which cannot be stopped. The Soviets no longer can exploit the two weaknesses characteristic of Western policy in the past: "One was the basic misjudgement of Russia's aims and methods, the other consisted in decisions on strategy that ignored Clausewitz's famous thesis that war is the continuation of politics by other means". The cracking of the monolith offers opportunities for the West and hope for the subjugated nations.

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