Pivot to the East

August 28, 2018

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Source: Exodus to the East: Forebodings and Events: an Affirmation of the Eurasians (Sofia 1921), accessible in Russian here.

There is a certain constantly noticeable analogousness in the situation of the world of France in the time of the Great Revolution and of Russia in the present time. However, apart from details and particulars, there is a fundamental difference that might be pregnant with the future… Then (as is the case now), Europe existed, and one of the countries of Europe brought Her a ‘new Gospel’: this country, having left its old political borders in a revolutionary burst outward, conquered nearly the entire continent; however, when it faltered in its conquests, the rest of Europe (by then united into a coalition) managed to bridle and occupy it. Before both the war and the revolution, Russia “was a modern civilisation of the Western type, [although] the least disciplined and most ramshackle of all the Great Powers…” (H. G. Wells) [1]. During the war and the revolution, however, the “Europeanness” of Russia fell away, much like a mask falls off a face, and when we saw that image of Russia that was not covered by a fabric of historical decorations, we saw a Russia with two faces… One of her faces was turned to Europe, that of Russia as a European country; as France did in 1793, she brings Europe a ‘new Gospel’, this time that of the ‘revolution of the proletariat’, of communism made manifest… Her other face, however, is turned away from Europe… Wells tells how “Gorky… is obsessed by a nightmare of Russia going East…”

“Russia going East”. But is Russia herself not “the East”?

Can one find many in Russia through whose veins there does not flow Khazar or Polovtsy, Tatar or Bashkir, Mordvin or Chuvash blood [2]? Is the mark of the Eastern spirit (its mysticism, its love for contemplation, and, finally, its contemplative laziness) alien to many Russians? One notices a certain sympathetic attraction to the popular masses of the East among the Russian masses of the common people, and through the organic fraternisation of the Orthodox with the Asian nomad or pariah, Russia truly is an Orthodox-Muslim, an Orthodox-Buddhist country.

The Bolsheviks launched a campaign of persecution against Orthodoxy and mockery of all religion. This is true. At the same time, however, the religious attitude and direction of those Russian and non-Russian masses by whose movements and breath Bolshevism lives comes to the forefront with even greater clarity and emphasised by the full force of contrast…

The Bolshevik mockery of, or the Bolshevik indifference towards religion are of as much use for understanding Russia as the Bolsheviks’ attempts to implement the eloquent prophecies of Marx in practice.

It is for this reason that Russia is not just “the West”, but also “the East”, not just “Europe”, but also “Asia”, and not even Europe at all, but “Eurasia”… For this very reason, the historical essence that was embodied in the Great French Revolution is joined by another, far from unveiled essence in the Russian Revolution…

The French Revolution was a revolution that took place in a European country with a population of 25 million and an area of 540 thousand square kilometres. The Russian Revolution is taking place in a country that is not entirely European, or even European at all, and in a country with 150 million inhabitants and an area of 20 million square kilometres. France is a part of Europe. Russia on the other hand is a “continent in itself” that is (in a certain sense) “equal” to Europe… The allies of 1814-1815 managed to pacify and occupy France. How great must the new coalition be for it to gain the opportunity to pacify and occupy Russia?.. The Great French Revolution is one of the episodes of European history. The Russian Revolution is not merely an episode of European history.

Two problems fuse together in the modern period. One touches upon deep questions of being and cultural creation; the other translates the terms of ideological denominations into the concrete language of cultural-geographic, cultural-historic reality.

Through immense suffering and deprivation, hungry and covered in blood and sweat, Russia has taken upon itself the burden of finding the truth from all and for all. Russia is mired in sin and godlessness, covered in filth and dirt; however, Russia is searching and struggling in a quest for an otherworldly city… The pathos of history will not stay its hand against those who are calm in their knowledge of the truth, on those who are self-content and full. Fiery tongues of inspiration will not descend on the beati possedentes [3], but on those who are restless of spirit: the wings of the angel of the Lord disturbed the water of the fount.

It seems as if the world has not changed, except for the fact that Russia is now absent from the comfortable civilised world. In this absence lies change, for in her special kind of “non-existence”, Russia is becoming in a certain sense the ideological center of the world.

Translating what has been said above into the language of reality, this means that a new cultural-geographical world that has not yet played a guiding role has appeared in the arena of world history. An intense gaze looks onto the future with disdain: might the goddess of Culture whose little tent had been put up among the valleys and hills of the European West leave for the East? Might she leave for the hungry, the cold and the suffering?..

We are under the spell of a premonition… And in this premonition we can obtain a source of contentment of a special kind: the contentment of those who are suffering… To surrender to contentment means to die. It is not permissible to hide that which is considered to be the truth. However, it is also not permissible to relax in premonition. It is not by quietism, but by the achievement of self-perfection that the matter of history is formed. Those who become prideful will be abandoned by the grace of seeking, and the curse of infertility will strike the self-confident… There is no inevitability. There is possibility. Only by way of intense creativity without any fear of confessing one’s mistakes and acknowledge one’s weaknesses, only at the price of constant efforts that are realised within the limits of this ‘plastic’ world that is open to will does possibility become actuality.

Translator’s notes:

[1]: A citation from Wells’ Russia in the Shadows, which is available online here.

[2]: All groups mentioned here (with two exceptions) are ethnic groups that inhabit Russia. The Khazars were a Turkic people that ruled a large khaganate that encompassed the South-Russian steps until 969 A.D. The Polovtsy (also known as the Cumans) were a nomadic Turkic people that roamed the Russian steps until their settlement in Hungary, where they were assimilated by the local population. The Tatars and Bashkirs are two Turkic peoples who live in two republics in the southern region of the Ural Mountains. The Mordvins are a Uralic people that inhabit a republic on the Volga river. Finally, the Chuvash are a Turkic people who inhabit a region stretching from the Volga to Siberia.

[3]: ‘Beati possedentes’ is a Latin expression meaning ‘blessed are they who possess’ that is usually used to illustrate the stronger position of the possessor over someone who does not possess a certain object (as the possessor does not need to prove that he owns something, whereas anyone else must do so).

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