

¶ Chapter XIII

THE LEGACY OF ROOSEVELT

ROOSEVELT CONTRIBUTED MUCH TO AMERICA. NO MAN since Lincoln has left such a deep mark upon our country. He rallied and united the majority of Americans to meet and solve the greatest crisis our country has faced. He held that majority together through four national elections. He showed the way to victory in the war, and organized its achievement. He pointed the only sure path to a durable peace in a prosperous world. The memory of Roosevelt's achievements, and how he accomplished them, is a great legacy which he left to the American people.

The high point of Roosevelt's leadership was the achievement of understanding, friendship and co-operation between America and the Soviet Union. Now America must decide: Was the Roosevelt policy of co-operation with the Soviet Union merely a wartime expediency, or can it be long-range American policy, bringing to us and the world that durable peace that was promised at Teheran and Yalta?

I consider this is the central issue for America and for the world. On the question of Soviet-American relations hangs the fate of all peoples.

This book is written to support the Roosevelt policy for America. It is the only course that protects Ameri-

*and
the denunciation of the Church-
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agreement or Roosevelt-Angolan agree.)*

can national interest, it is the only practical policy, it is the only road to a durable peace.

The Roosevelt policy of Soviet-American co-operation has a base broader than any ideology or creed. It provides for the continuation of the American capitalist system, yet it commands the support of socialists and Marxists. It provides a platform of unity for the heterogeneous majority of American progressives "from Center to Left." But it puts every ideology to the test, for any system of ideas which obstructs a durable peace has something basically wrong with it.

I myself approach the present crisis in American history from the background of a lifetime of activity as an American Marxist. But I unhesitatingly say that the non-Marxist policy hammered out by Roosevelt represents the only present salvation for America.

My right to be heard on this issue has been challenged from Right and Left. On the one hand I have been denounced as a "Soviet agent," therefore a prejudiced witness, and one who serves another country rather than his own; on the other hand I have been called a renegade from Marxism, therefore not to be trusted by the Left.

Such attacks as these are immaterial and irrelevant to the validity or otherwise of the argument of this book. In the past I have refused to discuss them. I mention them now only in order to establish this point—that to attain a durable peace America must learn how to unite persons of the most diverse ideological views and interests.

This book is written exclusively from the viewpoint of American interests and how to advance them. I am

not a Soviet agent on these questions. I have recently accepted an appointment as American representative of Soviet publishing houses, for the purpose of the exchange of publishing rights between the two countries as a measure of promoting mutual understanding. This business relationship is only a small example of how practically each person can and should do something to help bring the two countries closer together. I am as much an "American agent" to the Soviet Union as a "Soviet agent" to America.

I frankly admit that I am a "prejudiced witness," in the sense that long ago, before the war, I cast my decision in favor of Soviet-American co-operation. I have long worked for this as my main purpose. But the arguments of this book are not based upon my prejudices, but upon our own country's present interests most broadly conceived.

The arguments of this book do not rest upon any prejudice in favor of the Soviet Union or of its system of life. But it should be read with the knowledge that the author long studied the Soviet Union precisely because of being predisposed in its favor. I viewed the Soviet Union from the moment of its emergence from the Russian Revolution, as a frontier in humanity's struggle for a better world, for better ways of living. It is the same sort of frontier my own parents and grandparents followed so eagerly on the American continent since the seventeenth century.

When I grew up on the plains of Kansas this frontier, after having dominated the progressive minds of the world for two centuries, was fading out of America,

leaving a void and a frustration of spirit. The Russian Revolution rediscovered that frontier for me, and I felt a deep kinship for the new Russia from its first days. I have studied the Soviet Union constantly as one of its American friends, and visited it many times. All this has given me a prejudice in favor of Soviet-American co-operation, at the same time that it has qualified me to speak on the issue.

My only remark to the charge made by some of the American Left that I am a renegade is that I have reneged on nothing (can they say as much?) and that better Marxists than they continue to call me friend. They have been forced by events to take the same course which I have taken from foresight, even while they have denounced me.

I speak for peace and co-operation between America and Russia. I say this is possible without the Soviet Union abandoning its socialism and without the United States abandoning its capitalism.

Unlike myself, most Americans are not predisposed in favor of friendship with the Soviet Union. They come to this along the same path by which Roosevelt traveled, only by gradually realizing that this is practically the most beneficial course for our own country. Far from having favorable prejudices, most Americans have for twenty-nine years been conditioned to an attitude of fear and suspicion toward everyone connected with the Soviet Union. For sixteen years our government refused to recognize Russia as a member of the family of nations. Any American who spoke for co-operation between the two countries was at once tagged

as a "Moscow agent." During the war, when it was obvious that Soviet sacrifices were saving millions of American lives, this old unfavorable prejudice was temporarily broken down. For a while America spoke warmly, with true friendship, of Russia and things Russian. The effects of the joint war effort will be lasting. But for the present it has been largely forgotten. Even before the fighting was over America suddenly reverted to "business as usual." We are living through a revival of the old hostility against the Soviet Union in a more violent form. Americans are again being conditioned to an attitude of conflict with Russia.

If America decides for co-operation it will be despite ideological conflict and prejudices against it. That is a hard fact. There is nothing to be gained by avoiding looking at it squarely. We must find the bases of co-operation outside the field of ideology, which in the main creates difficulties more than it solves them.

But Americans must always understand that if the Russian ideology is difficult for us to understand, the American ideology is just as difficult for the Russians. Roosevelt understood this. He had a Lincoln-like ability to see ourselves as others see us—and as we will appear in history.

Soviet leaders have much the same ability as Roosevelt to understand the other fellow's approach and his problems. That is why they have never given up hopes for Soviet-American co-operation, even when America seems to have turned most violently away from it. They hold the opinion that in the end America will come back to the Roosevelt course.

Roosevelt would not have tolerated, while he was alive, the campaign of hatred against the Soviet Union which has disgraced American newspapers during the past year. He would have denounced it, and would have led in its public rejection. Probably nothing else has brought American prestige to its present low level, not only in Russia but throughout the world, so much as the wild threats about the use of the atom bomb that have become commonplace in America. Such talk intimidates no mature person, but it creates contempt toward a nation that allows such words to go unrebuked.

We are still living on the capital of good will that Roosevelt accumulated for our country throughout the world. But if we continue to spend it without accumulating more, we will soon go broke. It was Roosevelt's co-operation with the Soviet Union that headed off the spread of civil war over much of Europe and Asia after the Axis collapsed. But as America has moved away from the Roosevelt position, civil wars have begun to spread again, and fear arises like a fog over the earth.

This course of events moves away from a stable peace and raises the danger of a new war.

It is of course harmful nonsense to accuse President Truman or any responsible member of his administration of planning war, or wishing war, to enforce those American proposals which the Soviet Union has found unacceptable. Furthermore, aside from the absence of a desire for war, the present administration is of such a political composition and it relies for its existence upon such forces, as to make its conduct of an aggressive war an impossibility.

The danger inherent in the departure from Roosevelt's policy does not arise from any *intention* to make war on the part of Mr. Byrnes or any other present Cabinet member. The danger, and it is a serious one, comes from the fact that our present course ends in futility and deadlock, it is a blind alley. It engenders an atmosphere of hostility and conflict. It estranges the progressive forces at home and abroad. It destroys all perspectives of progress, of the return to a life of stable peace. It keys up all nerves, and sets the stage for surprises and sudden acts. It opens the way for the coming to power of the real war party in America.

For it is practically unavoidable that any long continuance of the present deadlock, in violation of Roosevelt's basic plans and outlook, would mean the defeat and elimination of the Truman administration, and its replacement in the 1948 elections by the reactionary wing of the Republican Party.

The Republican Party has only once in two generations nominated a liberal for the presidency—Willkie in 1940. It did so then only because that was obviously its single slender hope of winning against Roosevelt, to promise something similar and "just as good." But if it becomes obvious that the Democratic Party has failed to maintain the Roosevelt policy, and that it is coming to the elections on the platform of Vandenberg in international relations, then the Republican Party high command can name anyone it pleases with the certainty of victory. And that high command is represented by Herbert Hoover, Arthur Vandenberg, and the whole die-hard crew of Soviet haters, whose highest ambition is to

launch an aggressive war to restore "free enterprise" in Russia and the world.

Roosevelt's legacy to America can be maintained by his successors not by alliance with his traditional enemies and winning their approval, but only by enforcing F.D.R.'s policies in all fields. F.D.R.'s successors will go down to defeat and ignominy if they try to compete with the Republican Party for leadership of an anti-Soviet crusade.

Roosevelt was keenly conscious not only of the needs of the world outside but above all of our own country. He knew that those who talk of "America first," however, are the worst enemies of America because they would place our country in hostility to other lands. He knew that the American way of life depends upon a stable peace. He knew that our industries cannot operate without broadening markets throughout the world, and that only in a co-operative world can this be achieved. He knew that if we restrict the world markets with political tensions and the threat of new wars, then the result will be that America will soon plunge headlong into a new and more devastating economic crisis. He knew that a new war involving the world will mean the end of all civilization as we now know it.

It could never have happened to F.D.R. that the British could maneuver him into a corner from which they could assume the role of "honest broker" between America and the Soviets. Churchill tried it and failed. Roosevelt knew full well how unsound would be a world peace in which the two greatest powers should submit themselves to the mediation of a lesser power.

Therefore he approached the Soviet Union directly with a full appreciation of her interests, and asked of Stalin only an equally understanding approach. He found this a most practical and fruitful line of action.

It has remained for Mr. Byrnes, however, in "improving" upon the Roosevelt policy, to lead America into the pitiful position that the British are again speaking of the necessity of their "mediation."

Roosevelt knew well that British "mediation" between America and the Soviet Union could become timely only if American leaders became stupid. He knew that there are no insurmountable difficulties to reconciling the interests of this country and the Soviet Union, once America has made it the nation's purpose to do so.

This attitude is not "anti-British." It is in the true British interest and receives the support of the British people themselves, if not of the British leaders. Roosevelt gained great popularity in Britain, but Mr. Byrnes has achieved nothing of the kind.

Roosevelt demonstrated that it is possible to handle the many sharp clashes of interest between this country and Britain, without being either pro- or anti-British. The Anglo-American conflicts of interest are much sharper and more immediate than any between America and the Soviets. F.D.R. understood that there was even less reason for open clashes and diplomatic wars with the Soviets than with Britain, but he avoided both—and without surrendering American policy or interests to either. Those who criticize Roosevelt's handling of relations with the Soviet Union do so because they have

an entirely different conception of what are America's interests. They insist America's interests require that the Soviet Union shall not be a great power. Roosevelt understood that if it is impossible to treat Britain otherwise than as a great power, it is tenfold impossible in the case of the Soviet Union. It is never an American interest to attempt the impossible.

America is now going through a temporary period in which the great legacy of Roosevelt has been forgotten. America has forgotten for a while the national purpose, formulated by Roosevelt, to achieve a stable peace through co-operation of the great powers as equals.

There has been a failure of leadership. The short-sighted men of all parties have temporarily assumed command. They are ready to fight for anything—except for a durable peace.

There is today, however, a larger potential majority for the Roosevelt policies than existed during his lifetime.

In this book I am speaking only for myself, an individual without present organizational ties. But I know America and her people, her workers in mines, factories, railroads, highways, shops, and offices, with their great and complex trade unions; I know the farmers of the plains and the people of the small towns, as well as the crowds of the great cities. I even know a little of what goes on in the minds and hearts of men and women in our business circles. And I know that a large majority of my countrymen and women, although they would disagree with me on a thousand other things, are of one mind with me in seeking unity under the banner of

Roosevelt. I know they will gather with enthusiasm around any leadership which restates the Roosevelt policy for a stable peace clearly and boldly.

This is Roosevelt's great legacy to America.

This general agreement among the majority of Americans, I would put into the following words:

We want a durable peace and not merely a truce in preparation for the next war.

We know that this depends upon the collaboration of America and the Soviet Union.

We recognize that such co-operation must leave America free to be capitalistic and the Soviet Union to be socialistic—that it must be co-operation between two differing and contrasting systems.

We accept the Soviet Union's collaboration on the basis of complete equality. We know that a common policy must embody the vital interests of both countries, must harmonize with those of the majority of all lands, and therefore cannot be dictated by any ideology, whether American or Soviet.

We want the United Nations to be a place where America and the Soviet Union apply their joint policies in collaboration with others, and not a field of struggle where each strives for advantage.

We shall do everything we can to avoid the division of the world, and of separate countries, into two camps of pro-Soviet and pro-American forces in growing opposition to each other. We shall strive for a pro-unity camp which will unite both under a higher loyalty toward a common interest.

We are determined that the relative merits of the capitalistic and socialistic systems shall be put to the tests of peace, to see in practice which serves best to feed, house, clothe, and educate the peoples they serve; but that this rivalry shall not be permitted to see the test of war. We know that in another war there can be no victors, and it is even questionable how many survivors.

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