

The Degeneration of 'Pan-Slavism'

BY GEORGE C. GUINS

I

THE RAPPROCHEMENT of the Slav nations after World War II and their possible unification under the rule, or at least under the protection, of the Soviet Union presented a problem of prime importance. The idea of a union of all Slav nations is not a new one. It has originated in the awareness of their ethnic and cultural kinship.

The famous Russian writer, N. V. Gogol, recalls in one of his stories, "The Terrible Vengeance" (*Strashnaia Mest*), the ancient legend which traces the descent of the Slavs from the great warrior Slovene, who lived in prehistoric times in the valleys of Trans-Carpathia. Gogol resurrects the legend in the guise of an apparition of a mighty horseman standing on the Carpathian Mountains. This legend that has preserved the memory of the father of the Slavs reveals that Slovene had three sons; before his death he brought them to the summit of a mountain and pointed to the three directions: the fertile balmy South, the farflung West, and the boundless East. He himself became silent forever, but as if watching how his three sons and their progeny would build the three branches of Slav peoples (the Southern, the Western, and the Eastern).¹

The legend related by Gogol is probably his own invention, a variation of a kind of the bible story about origin of races from three sons of Noah. However, this story is interesting as a reflection of the ideas and moods of Gogol's time. It reflects the consciousness, born in ancient days, of the dispersal of the Slavs who were linked only by a dimly perceived common origin to their Carpathian ancestors. It reflects also a dim realization of some predestined unification awaited by the ghost of the ancestral Slovene, hovering over the cradle of Slavism in the Carpathians.

That was in the first half of the nineteenth century, under the absolutism of Nicholas I, when an original philosophy of a patriarchal state, founded on the moral principles and close relations between the Czar and

¹ P. Miliukov, "Outlines of Russian Culture" (Part I, 3rd Russian Ed., p. 42): "In the Carpathian region, along the Upper Vistula, in what is now Galicia and the Province of Volynia, was situated the most ancient settlement of the Slavs that can be traced. From this ceter, in direct connection with the migration of the German tribes, beginning with the Third Century A. D., the Slav began to spread to the West toward Oder, to the South, toward the Danube, and to the Northeast along the Dnieper and its tributaries."

people, replaced the constitutional ideas of the Decembrists. Corresponding to these ideas, a United Slavdom was imagined as demonstrating the accord and intimate friendship of all Slavs.

The founders of the Slavophile doctrine never had in mind either an annexation of the other Slav countries by Russia, or her political domination over them. However, the original ideas of the Russian Slavophiles were perverted, and became the ideology of a reactionary movement in Russia and of a Russian Slav imperialism.²

The ideology of post-revolutionary Russia, as expressed in the Soviet press, is equally alien to both old Slavophile idealism and the subsequent imperialistic trends of Panslavism:

The Russian people never identified themselves with the imperialistic and chauvinistic Pan-Slavism of the monarchists . . . The slanderous talk about 'new Panslavism' is part of an anti-Soviet campaign.³

The unification of Slav nations under the leadership of the U.S.S.R. is proceeding, indeed, by quite new methods and means inherent in so-called "Soviet Democracy." That policy may lead the Slav nations to the point of complete Sovietization and, perhaps, incorporation into the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the Slav nations may liberate themselves from the present vassalage, and the rapprochement between them and the Soviet Union may prove to be only artificial and provisional. To understand which course is the more likely presupposes an understanding of the Slavophile philosophy and of all the obstacles which prevented the realization of Panslav dreams in the past, as well as of peculiarities of Soviet procedure in uniting nations and levelling their cultural differences.

II

THE SLAVOPHILE IDEAS of the early period as formulated by Khomiakov (1804-1860), the brothers Kireevsky (1806-1856; 1808-1856) and later by Constantin Aksakov (1817-1860), emphasized the equality of all Slavic peoples, and set up an ideal of freedom of all Slavic nations.

The Slavophiles idealized Russian antiquity, in which they perceived a domination of moral principles. The Russian people had called their princes to power, had entrusted them with unlimited authority; complete

² "The Pan Slavs of the last half of the nineteenth century differed from the Slavophiles of the first half in that the latter had a soft cultural program associated with philosophy, while the former had a hard, political program associated with science and war." (Robert Blakley, "Realism and Naturalism, 1852-1971," N. Y. 1935, p. 28, see also p. 230). Cf. Thomas Marsary K., "The Spirit of Russia," London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1919, V. I. Ch. IX.

³ N. Leonidov, "The New Phase in Slav History," Moscow, *New Times*, 1946, No. 9.

understanding reigned between the people and the ruling classes. Ancient Russia had no class distinctions; the entire population was permeated with the idea of serving its country for the common good, and the position of a man in society was determined by the quality of his work.

The Slavophiles wished to see Russia establish a brotherly alliance with other Slavic nations, whom they regarded as related to the Russians by blood, and they maintained that Russia should not adopt western ideas on State and social organization, the spirit of which was foreign to the Slavs.

Subsequently, however, the theories of the Slavophiles began to undergo some changes, and to the wide masses of the population the doctrine appeared chiefly as the concept of a unification of all Slavic peoples under the general leadership and protection of Russia, "under the scepter of the Russian Czar," according to the pre-revolutionary formula.

The beginnings of Slav history are generally little known. It seems certain, however, that by approximately the ninth century the Slavic tribes had spread widely throughout the region bound in the West by the Elbe; in the Southwest by the Adriatic; in the East by the Volga; and in the Northwest by the Gulf of Finland. However, over this immense stretch of land the Slav tribes were scattered like islands in the sea, being not one large nation, but three distinct groups, those of the Western, the Eastern, and the Southern Slav groupings, related to each other by common origin.⁴

There still exists in Western Europe many Slav words and names of localities, and given a vivid enough imagination, the Slav nationalist movement could, on the basis of some facts and coincidences, build up a theory that Europe had once been a Slav domain.

As P. Miliukov states in his "Outlines of Russian Culture,"⁵ Empress Catherine II, far in advance of the Russian historians and nationalists of the XIX century, had become imbued with what Miliukov terms "ethnographic patriotism," and wrote to Grimm that she would soon be in a position to prove that the ancient Slavs had given their own names to the majority of the rivers, mountains, valleys and forests of France, Scotland, and other countries. She felt sure that the Salic law was of Slav origin, that Clovis and the Merovingians were also Slavs, since she explained the name Ludwig by Slavic etymology, lud-dvig, mover of the people. She

⁴ G. Vernadsky & M. Karpovich, "History of Russia", v. I. "Ancient Russia", New Haven, 1943, Ch. VIII.

⁵ P. Miliukov, *op. cit.*, Part III, v. 2, p. 417.

acknowledged also as a fact, and believed it to be highly significant, that the French Kings took their oath and their crowning in Rheims, on "a Slavic Gospel."

It was approximately along the same lines that the fantasies of Pan-Germanism developed, dreams which led to the idea of the triumph of the German spirit and its domination over all of Europe. The ideas of the Slavophiles followed the same road, which brought them finally to "Panrussism" or "Panslavism" with a dream that found its expression in Pushkin's words: "The Slav rivers shall meet within the Russian Sea," or poet Tyutchev's "prediction" of the Panslav Czar (Vseslavianski Czar).

No matter how sensible the proposal to unite all Slavs into one national family, can be made to seem, it proves to be far from realization at present.⁶

III

✓ SLAV HISTORY INCLUDES, it is true, several attempts in the past toward unification, but they appeared, and were realized, nearly always in separate Slav groupings, and not on a Pan-Slavic scale.

First, in the ninth century, an abortive attempt was made to unite various Slavic tribes against the Franks. The task of the unification of the Balkan Slavs was undertaken in the tenth, and later in the twelfth centuries by Bulgaria, which was at that time the most powerful nation in the Balkans. In the fourteenth century this part was played by Serbia⁷ which, under King Stephen Dushan, assumed a dominating position in the Balkans and subjugated Bulgaria.

The dream of unification was destroyed, first, after the battle of the Maritsa in 1371, mentioned in the Bulgarian national hymn, ("The Maritsa whispers, full of blood, the maiden weeps, sorely wounded") and then after the battle of Kosovo Polje (1339), mentioned in the song, "Why so sad, people of Serbia, glory calls you to the Kosovo Polje, the bloody feast." The Balkan Slavs were then cast under the oppressive Turkish yoke.

There were also attempts at partial unification made by the Western Slavs. A leading part could have been assumed in this respect either by Czechoslovakia or Poland. Both these Slav countries had reached, in the fifteenth century, a high degree of culture and national consciousness.

⁶ "A Slav Union, the whole world can observe at present, has nothing common with the ideas of a dead panslavism." (*War and the Working Class*, 1945, No. 7, p. 26). "In blood fighting an idea the Slav solidarity is reborn. There is no vestige of the old panslavism in it." (Y. Srverma, *Slavians*, 1944, No. 5).

⁷ L. A. Pogodin, "History of Serbia," St. Petersburg, 1909.

Czechs and Slovaks formed in the ninth century a single state, Great Moravia, but it was destroyed during the Magyar invasion of Central Europe in the tenth century and Slovakia passed under Magyar rule. As to the Czechs, they founded the Kingdom of Bohemia, which for centuries was among the most powerful and glorious in Central Europe. Their cultural development in many ways was far in advance of that of any other Slavonic race. However, the Czechs were always in close contact with the Germans and their culture.

After an unsuccessful revolt in the seventeenth century the Czechs lost their freedom at the battle of the Bila Hora (White Mountain) near Prague, in 1620. In a little over a generation after the Battle of White Mountain, Bohemia had lost its most important political rights, three-fourths of its nobility, its most eminent citizens, its schools of learned men, and had virtually lost its independence. When Joseph II died in 1790, the government was officially German. The Czech language had been banished from the offices of government where it was previously the official equal of German.⁸ However, two-thirds of the inhabitants of Bohemia still spoke their native Czech language, and soon thereafter, in the early nineteenth century, a resurrection of Czech culture began. Since then the national revival continued up to the time of World War II. The Czechs again reached a high level of culture, and became probably the most westernized among the Slav countries.

As an independent State soon after the end of World War I, Czechoslovakia became the most democratic nation among the Slav peoples. Due to the extermination of the Czech nobility by the Germans in the seventeenth century, and confiscation of about three-fourths of the manors, the democratization of this country became simpler and easier than in any other European countries where many survivals of feudalism still dominated.

Poland's history seemed to be more favorable to promote her to the leading place among the Slavs. In the fifteenth century Poland was, indeed, a great European country. By the fourteenth century she had united herself with Lithuania which, in its turn, had incorporated many Russian lands.

In 1410 Poland defeated the Teutonic Order at Gruenwald and Tannenberg, an event which the German nation has always considered a dark

⁸ R. J. Kerner, "Bohemia in the Eighteenth Century," New York, Macmillan, 1932, pp. 13, 50-51, 352, 371. "In consequence of the White Mountain (Bila Hora) catastrophe we, the Czechs, had lost both independence and our leaders" (Yan Shverma, "The Slav solidarity in the Czech's policy," *Slavians* Moscow 1944, No. 5).

blot upon its escutcheon, and which has inspired the Polish patriots. In the second half of the fifteenth century Poland, already in possession of the Ukraine, Galicia, and the Carpathian lands, united under her rule the territory encompassing present-day East Prussia, with Thorn, Danzig and Kuhlman, and fortified herself at the mouth of the Vistula and the Baltic Sea. A Pole, Prince Władysław, the oldest son of Kazimierz Jagiellonczyk, king of Poland from 1447 to 1492, ruled Bohemia. The Hungarians chose Władysław as their king, and he ruled Hungary from 1490 until his death in 1516.

Small wonder that Poland was then casting her eyes eastward. The subjugating of the principality of Moscow would have been tantamount to unifying practically the entire Slavic world under her rule.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century Poland was a European State undoubtedly excelling Muscovy as a cultural entity and having great possibilities of expansion at the expense of Russia. During the "Time of Troubles" the Moscow government's authority was shaken and full disorder reigned across the country, Poles seized Smolensk and Moscow, and their dreams of greatness were nearly realized. But the Russians overcame this crisis, and after that the preponderance of power shifted in favor of Russia.⁹

Poland still dominated in the Ukraine. But the Ukrainian peasants, oppressed by their Polish landlords and persecuted by a militant Catholicism, were ready to revolt against Poland. The Zaporog Cossacks headed the uprising, and their struggle against Poland began in 1635. The great revolt under the leadership of Bohdan Chmielnicki came in 1648. The Crimean Tartars supported him, but they proved unfaithful. After great initial successes the Cossacks were defeated in 1651. It became impossible for them to secure their independence, and they preferred to submit to the Moscow Czar. Afterwards Kiev and the Ukraine became part of Russia, and Moscow acquired a decisive political superiority over Poland.

This is the root of the "ancient feuding of the Slavs among themselves," as Pushkin has put it; that is, the contention between Russia and Poland for supremacy, a contention which was resolved, as could have been foretold in view of geographical conditions, in favor of Russia.

The geographic situation of Russia put her destiny at stake while she

⁹ Prof. S. Kononov, "Russo-Polish Relations: An Historical Survey," London, The Cresset Press, 1945, pp. 12-16. We find there a quotation from Prof. Stanislaw Kot: "From 1648 it became clear that Poland was threatened with catastrophe and disorder. A nation that had been strong and flourishing slipped into poverty and disorder, from which it never really recovered till the disaster of the Partitions."

was invaded by the Tartars. But since she survived and liberated herself from the Mongol yoke, the same geographic factor became much more advantageous as compared with that of other Slav countries. It opened up for Russia great possibilities of expansion and enrichment. Her power rose quickly and her culture became very original, thanks to various influences, the Byzantine as much as the Oriental, and to her absorbing many tribes each of which invested something valuable in the common cultural thesaurus.

Nevertheless, in spite of the political superiority of Russia, Polish cultural influence in Russia even strengthened during the second half of the Seventeenth century. The customs of the Polish court and the luxury of the Polish nobility impressed Russian military and diplomatic officers. Russian churchmen educated in Kiev imported into Moscow a Polish theology. However, as soon as Russia approached the Baltic Sea and entered into constant relations with the Western European Powers, she began to absorb the philosophy, science, arts, and technics of all the European nations, and then Poland lost her former cultural as well as political influence.

For some time, as stated above, Poland had a priority in the field of culture because of her close connections with Western Europe. But inasmuch as Russia established immediate connections with the great sources of Western culture and civilization, Poland lost her last advantage. Russia has excelled Poland, as she has all other Slavic nations, not only by her might but also by the originality and richness of her culture.

Inasmuch as Russian power rose, Russia became the hope of the Slav nations and peoples. While strong danger still existed from Germany, the Slav peoples cherished the dream of unification, a dream shared not only by such Russian Slavophiles as Kireevsky, Aksakov, Khomiakov, Samarin, but also by the Poles Stanislaw Staszic and Wincenty Pol, the Serbian Karadjic, the Slovak Jan Kollar, and others.

IV

MANY TIMES the Slav nations have manifested their vitality. The Russians under the Tartar yoke, the Bulgarians and Serbs under the Turks, and the Czechs, despite intensive Germanization, preserved their national spirit and the originality of their culture. The renaissance of Czech culture at the beginning of the nineteenth century was chiefly due to the efforts of a group of nationalists and to the influence of Czech literature. Many Slav scholars tried, therefore, to unite Slav science and to create a spiritual center for Slav unity:

Josef Dobrovsky (1753-1829), the patriarch of Slav philology went to Russia to carry out research in Russian history and the Russian language. He trained his pupils in the spirit of Russo-Czech solidarity. Josef Jungmann, also an eminent philologist, was credited with the foundation of the Slav library in Prague, in order to provide a spiritual center for Slav unity.

Polish lexicographer S. B. Linde worked on the project of a Slav academy. Its motive was to be the creation of a single language for all Slavs. Linde's ideal is characterized in these words: "From Kamchatka to Laba, from the Baltic to the Adriatic spreads one language of many dialects like the progeny of one father which live scattered over a huge land."¹⁰

A cultural rapprochement of the Slav nations was considered by all of them to be a prerequisite of any serious cultural influence of the Slavs in the world. Under the impression of this Slav movement Johan Herder, professor at Jona University, predicted a brilliant future for the Slavs and called them accordingly "liberators of mankind."

Under Herder's influence a Slovak, Jan Kollar (1793-1852) wrote his poem "Slavy Dcera" (Daughter of Glory) in which he expressed faith that Slav spiritual unity would be a blessing for the whole world.

The same idea was later expressed by a Frenchman, C. Robert, who taught that the strength of Pan-Slavism lay above all else in a spiritual concept entirely free of the ranging European materialism.

As early as 1894 J. Kollar uttered the following prophetic words:

What will become of us Slavs in a hundred years? What will become of all Europe? Slavic life, despite the deluge, will everywhere widen the boundaries of its steps; and that language, which the unjust police of the Germans regarded as that of slaves will resound under the roofs of palaces and on the lips of our rivals themselves. Science likewise shall flow in a Slavic channel; the costumes, customs, and songs of our people shall be fashionable on the Seine and the Elbe. Ah, would that I had rather been born in that time of Slavic empire or that later I might rise again from my grave.¹¹

These words inspired all Slavs with a creed for their great future. In writing his poem Kollar had originally in mind his beloved, but her features transfigured gradually into an ideal, and "Slavdom became his real beloved, a Laura, whom he was looking for, over whom he wept, and of whom he sang."¹²

¹⁰ Cf. Vlaho S. Vlahovic, "Two Hundred 50 million and one Slavs," New York, Slav Publications Inc., 1945, pp. 78-81.

¹¹ *Slavy Dceras*, canto III, sonnet 110.

¹² Cf. Adam Michiewicz, "Les Slaves," (Cours professé au Collège de France, Paris), 1914: "L'amante de Kollar peu à peu s'idéalise et devient une figure, un souvenir." "La Slavie est son amante, la Laure qu'il cherche partout, qu'il pleure et qu'il chante" (p. 24).

Slavophilism prospered naturally among the Czechs who hated the Germans and looked to Russia for aid. At the same time the Polish intelligentsia became inimical to Russia because of her participation in the partitions of Poland and her oppressions of the Polish national movement.

The Polish intelligentsia believed, and still believe, that sometime the Russian colossus will be broken and a Great Poland will be restored. The fate of Poland is tragic indeed, and it is understandable that Poles, proud of the brilliant past of their native country, have never ceased to dream about her renaissance.

The Polish national dreams were vividly expressed by the inspired Polish poet and nationalist, Adam Mickiewicz. He was an exponent of so-called *Polish Messianism*.

Mickiewicz refused to recognize the ability and inclination of the Russian people to unify the Slavs. In his opinion, the ancient Slavic heritage in Russia had perished, leaving but a mass of people still speaking the Slav language but with many Finnish and Tartar elements, and permeated by the Mongolian spirit, a spirit of slavery and destruction.¹³ Poland alone was a fountainhead of sincere and unadulterated striving toward a Pan-slavist unification. Poland herself, as an embodiment of the Slav spirit, has always leaned toward the West. She has been humiliated, trampled into the dust, crucified as it were, but this sacrifice gives her the right, upon resurrection, to become the saviour of the nations to whom she will transmit the qualities of true Slavic spirit.

Poland, Mickiewicz believed, would arise to life and new beauty, purified by suffering, and when she would arise war would end.¹⁴

The faith in Polish Messianism has transmitted itself to other Polish poets and writers. The messianists believed that the Christianity of the Slav nations, with the Poles as bearers of the Cross, was predestined to

¹³ See description of the Russian troops in Mickiewicz's *Dziady* III (Digression): mixed race, mixed troops, "Here a Mongolian is seen, there a homesick Lithuanian . . . the Kalmuck. . . A German officer in a coach . . ." (G. R. Noyes, "Poems by Adam Mickiewicz," New York Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1944, p. 340).

¹⁴ Adam Mickiewicz, "Des Origines Slaves," Paris, 1882: "Les Slaves sont une race religieuse, simple, bonne et forte. Il faut que l'esprit nouveau, qui fera appel à ses sympathies, représente toutes les qualités domestiques, communales et politiques de cette race; il faut que, dans cet appel, le Bohême se reconnaisse frère du Polonais et du Russe. Mais où est le berceau de cet esprit? Je le dirai du risque de déplaire à mes concitoyens russes et bohèmes et à ceux du Danube . . . Ce berceau ne peut se trouver qu'au milieu du peuple qui a le plus souffert de tous les peuples Slaves et qui a le plus servi l'Europe: le peuple polonais porte tous ces caractères . . ." (pp. 50-1, author's note).

On the Polish Messianism in Mickiewicz's works see G. R. Noyes, introduction, "Poems by A. Mickiewicz," pp. 30-2, 34 and Mickiewicz's "The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrims," especially pp. 387, 405, included in the same book.

save the rest of the world which had become steeped in materialism. The Russian Slavophiles could not therefore fire enthusiasm in Polish hearts, for a belief in the future of the Polish nation never had been extinguished.

¹⁵ Alexander I gave his Polish Kingdom a parliament, full internal self-government with separate finance and tariffs, and an army. "Under this regime the Poles organized considerable economic prosperity for fifteen years." (Kononov, *op. cit.*, p. 21).

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