

The World in Sixty Lines

Dr. Alfred Herrhausen, 1930-89

EDITOR'S
NOTE
December 1,
1989

When, just before the European Summit in Madrid, the German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher openly sponsored Alfred Herrhausen's ideas in favour of European monetary integration, the London Economist devoted to the story a title which, at the time, would have been considered just witty—"East is East, West is West and Mr Genscher is in the middle". A title that inevitably holds a sinister undertone today, in the light of the criminal attack on and the tragic death of the Head of Deutsche Bank, member of the Advisory Board of this Journal, Dr Alfred Herrhausen.

There is no doubt that Alfred Herrhausen was "in the middle", indeed at the centre, of grand politics. He performed this crucial role because of his conviction that the hour for European unity had arrived and that, thanks to the economic strength of the EEC and of the democratic half of Germany, the task of reconstructing the economy of Eastern Europe, from East Germany to as far as the USSR, could be undertaken in a way that the Kremlin could consider compatible with its security interests. It was not by accident that Herrhausen had been the first Western personality Gorbachev had welcomed in Moscow immediately after his eventful election to the position of Secretary General. The renewal of the Russian empire, the preservation of some form of control over Russia's glacis, the very transition from communism to some form of less totalitarian political organisation, could be possible only with the support of those European economic and political forces which Herrhausen best represented.

For the same reasons, it was inevitable that Herrhausen's ideas, and his capacity to transform them into political and economic initiatives, were bound not to please everybody. On the contrary, they appeared tailor-made to offend and irritate the obscure and desperate forces that specialise in carrying out such "surgical" operations as the one which marked with a black stone the day that was yesterday, November 30th, 1989.

Few people are aware, as Herrhausen was, of the economic strength of West Germany, and of the responsibilities that this very strength lays on Bonn in the construction of a new Europe, now that the post-war years are coming to an end. And in the structure of German economic might he held a key position, one that enabled him to convert ideas into reality. Under him, the bank where he emerged only a few years ago as the undisputed and undisputable head, became very rapidly the most dynamic and powerful financial institution in Europe. And at the same time, it had become more and more "europeanised" in scope, interest and behaviour, as marked only a few days ago by the entrance in its management board of the first non-German Member. Moreover, in the industrial field, Herrhausen had pushed and brought to fruition the reorganisation of the German aerospace sector. The acquisition of Messerschmitt by Daimler-Benz with the ensuing creation of Deutsche Aerospace formed the largest high-tech conglomerate on this side of the Atlantic; a group whose strategy revolves around the Airbus project, the largest and most ambitious example of technological cooperation on a European scale, and an endeavour which has given the proof of the capability of the European of victoriously challenging the most advanced sectors of American industry.

The assassination of Herrhausen will inevitably be a major blow to all his projects, and it might also hold a political message. Placed at the head of the major power centre in the strongest economy of Europe, and publicly waving the flag

of German unification within the framework of a united Europe, and of a new enhanced role of both Europe and Germany in the ex-Soviet bloc countries, and therefore in the global dialogue presently underway among the superpowers, Alfred Herrhausen, may have trespassed over some invisible limit. Indeed, as the Economist has written, East remains East, exactly as West remains West. And being in the middle, as captain of industry Alfred Herrhausen had too ostensibly placed himself, can be dangerous. Extremely dangerous.

One Role, Four Actors

EDITOR'S
NOTE
December 3,
1989

The main objective of Soviet diplomacy today seems to be the search for a counterpart in the West, capable of aiding Moscow in the face of the earthquake which is shaking Central Europe, and limiting the damage of the true collapse underway in East Germany. It is for no other reason that Shevardnadze arrived almost unexpectedly in Brussels to visit the headquarters of NATO and the EEC. Indeed, these two institutions are, in the eyes of the Kremlin, two parties in an odd quartet of possible candidates for the role of protagonist in the solving of the renewed "German question"; the other two candidates being the Bonn Government and the crowds in the streets of East German cities. Obviously, the Soviets prefer to push for the role to be filled, among the four candidates, by that actor whose interests appear the least openly in conflict with those of Moscow.

The course of events feared most by the Kremlin is one in which the Communist German State would fall apart completely, and the masses in East Germany would one-sidedly proclaim Anschluss with the Federal Republic. Even without taking into account the possibility that some million

East Germans may physically march on the border rubbing it out in the stampede, it is quite likely that a continuous bleeding of refugees could bring about the disintegration of the whole social and economic fabric of the GDR. It is also likely that in the coming East German elections, some improvised reunification movement, or the party more openly advocating it, would gather a crushing majority. This will probably sweep away not only the Communists (whose conversion to democracy and fair government is too recent to be credible), but also the movements that very recently at the "government-opposition round table" still reasserted the principle of the survival of the two German states. Only slightly less unpleasant to the taste of the Kremlin is the hypothesis that the leadership on the question of German reunification be taken up by the FRG, along the lines of Chancellor Kohl's 10 point plan, or of some less moderate scheme.

Both the previous hypotheses are more than realistic, as recent developments have shown. Both scenarios in which Germany is unified by a spontaneous decision taken by the Germans would indeed see the resurrection of Germany as a self-sufficient power, with 80 million inhabitants, technically and economically strong, on the border of a Russian empire in the process of disintegration.

This is why the USSR hopes that the other two possible candidates for the role of protagonist in the management of the Central European crisis take the lead. In Moscow's view, they could provide a helping hand in avoiding the inevitable outcome the Soviets have not yet digested psychologically: the unification of Germany in an extended FRG. Thus, in the hope of seducing NATO, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze tried to push the idea of a non-aggression treaty with the Warsaw Pact, a treaty that would guarantee the ten years or so of transition that the Soviet Union thinks it needs in order to establish a new basis for its relationship with the whole of Europe. And

the EEC, to which Moscow has always been openly hostile to the point, up to a year ago, of even denying it recognition, has now been demanded to accelerate its integration process in the desperate hope that it might bind Bonn and give different legal status to each of the two Germanys, by creating some economic association between the GDR and the Community of the twelve.

Through his visit to Brussels and his effort to enlist the help of the West in stabilisation of the ex-satellite countries, Shevardnadze, in other words, seems to be attempting a kind of strategic withdrawal of which no one knows the possible dimension, much less the ending. The alternative to it would be total loss of control in the Central and Eastern parts of that European continent which, according to the original "new thinking" in foreign policy and by Gorbachev's gracious concession, was to be organised in the fabled "common house".

The Tilsitt Raft

EDITOR'S
NOTE
December 7,
1989

Those who enjoy giving a symbolic meaning to events, have certainly seen a supernatural sign in the gale that has agitated the waters of the Malta Summit, a sign which illuminates for the two superpowers the limits of their might. Separated by the storm and imprisoned in their murderous floating fortresses, they recalled the character of the gangster played by Edward G. Robinson in the Humphrey Bogart classic "Key Largo", someone capable of frightening everybody, of kidnapping them and even killing them, yet powerless in front of the hurricane. "Tell it to stop", mocked the old, paralysed man at the end, "and if it doesn't obey, shoot it!".

Similar to the celluloid tale, it appeared as if some superior entity had decided to remind the two superpowers that there are still phenomena that will not bow even to the will of an alliance between the two most powerful statesmen on earth. A kind of "rebellion of nature" thus gave them a small lesson in humility, a lesson all the more precious in a moment when the two were dealing "in an informal way" with the destiny of the entire world.

To other observers, those who in their youth preferred the local library to the cinema, those warships shaken by the gale would probably have recalled the historical Tilsitt raft, described so dramatically in Tolstoy's "War and Peace": the raft on which Napoleon and the czar met after having deployed their armies on the two opposite banks of the river, the meeting of the two men who were at that moment absolute masters of the entire European continent, and who hammered out something resembling a peace agreement. This agreement did not, however, sufficiently take into account the maritime superpower, Britain. And it too, in the end, proved as fragile and as unstable as that raft.

There is perhaps a moral to be drawn from these similarities. Probably, the two most powerful statesmen in the world should pay more attention to the existence of forces that cannot be intimidated, any more than the hurricane in "Key Largo", by the brute force of arms. One could quote, as examples, the demographic boom underway throughout the Third World, the powerful Islamic revival, as well as the crowds that have taken to the streets in the Eastern half of Germany and the obscure forces that threaten to start a new wave of terrorism in its Western half. In other words, as on the Tilsitt raft, also on the fleet moored off Malta there was an important absence: the absence of historical forces that are not part of the bipolar system.

Literary or cinematographic comparisons, of course, very frequently can be misleading, dicembre and perhaps even more so are historical precedents. Yet it still might not be

completely useless if the American and Soviet leaderships took this opportunity for some philosophical reflection on the rebellion of the forces of nature against the forces of military technique that has so severely troubled the normally peaceful harbour of Malta.

It would not be for naught if they drew the conclusion that their task could be fulfilled, their role could be played with more respect for the legitimate aspirations of other peoples. This could provide some help to their task, a task nothing less than that of building in the place of the postwar order, whose end has been marked by the collapse of the Berlin Wall, a new international order. And among other things, this should take into account the by now undeniable economic and technical supremacy of Japan and West Germany, as well as of the unstoppable drive of the peoples from the so-called "South" of the world to a minimum of well-being.

North/South, East/West...

EDITOR'S
NOTE

January 1,
1990

Once the gigantic dust clouds created by the collapse of the Communist system have settled, the ever-increasing urgency of the North/South question is probably going to be one of the most visible aspects of the political landscape of the 1990's.

This renewed importance of the LDC's in world affairs is not only due to a positive phenomenon—the fading out of the East/West confrontation that had previously pushed the North/South problem into a position of second priority. Neither is it due merely to the fact that, in order to avoid that post-communism end up in tragedy, the West is probably going to divert towards Central and Eastern Europe most of

the development aid that used to go to the Third World. There is more than that. With the fading out of East/West rivalry, the countries of the South lose the possibility of obtaining aid from the North by playing one superpower against the other as, for instance, Egypt did to obtain Soviet financing for the Aswan Dam.

The loss of this strategic option for the South in its confrontation with the rich countries is not without political implications for the Third World itself. In taking sides in the dispute between the two social systems of the developed world, even though this was done just in order to obtain a material gain, the LDC's ended up accepting at least some element of the political approach, the social model and the system of values of either capitalism or communism. These countries ended up choosing between two visions both of which are of European origin, both attach a positive connotation to the idea of progress, and both equate progress with Westernisation. In entering the logic of East/West confrontation the countries of Asia and Africa were thus in a way sucked into the ground of the North's political culture.

Today, this is no longer the case. The end of the East/West rivalry brought about by the collapse of the Communist system strongly reduces the interest of the two blocs from the North in enlisting (and rewarding with aid) converts to capitalism or to socialism in the South. In parallel, there is an obvious decline in the interest of the Third World countries of making such a choice, since it no longer involves a semi-automatic right to economic and military support from one of the two sides. It becomes thus inevitable that in the South prevail sooner or later the forces that refuse all acceptance of the game and of the logic of the rich countries, namely those forces that conceive of North/South relations only in terms of total war (such as the narcoguerrillas of "Sendero Luminoso" in Peru) or preach a global cultural alternative to the Europeanised world (such as Islamic fundamentalists).

The Northern powers are already at war with these forces. It is indeed a hardly disputable fact that in the Andean countries, Washington is entrenching itself in jungle warfare similar in many of its aspects (sufficiently to send a shiver down the spine) to the Vietnam War. And it is also hardly disputable that the USSR is menaced with the Lebanonisation of its southern-most territories, and not in Azerbaijan only. One has only to think of the festering of the situation on the Afghan front after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, a festering that promises nothing good for the neighbouring Soviet Republic of Tadzikistan. The two situations—US involvement in South America, and Soviet involvement in the Turkish and Persian world—are of course very different, but they have in common an obvious North/South element. Neither is Europe, in its own way, immune to this problem, in spite of having freed itself from military engagement in the South through the abandonment of colonial empires in the 1950's and early 1960's. For several years, on the contrary, Europe has been swollen by an ever-growing wave of immigration from the Islamic countries, a wave that is not going to subside in the foreseeable future, given the demographic conditions of the countries of departure and the manpower needs of the countries of destination.

As the Rushdie affair in Britain and the quarrel over the Islamic veil in France have been showing, what Europe is witnessing is nothing other than the transplant from the South of a culturally and religiously unmeltable minority—a new social component which brings in itself the potential of a situation similar to the too easily forgotten “guerre en metropole”, that came into being when the Algerian nationalists brought the war onto the French mainland. It becomes legitimate therefore to wonder if the 1990's are not going to be a decade in which world conflict, instead of declining along with the improvement of East/West relations, will be fueled by unsolvable disputes related to economic, demographic, racial and religious factors, or to all of them at the same time—in a word, related to the North/South conflict.

This picture becomes even more gloomy if one considers the lack of Western unity in the face of these problems. An uncoupling that is all the more alarming, as too frequently it is taken for an established fact that the Atlantic Alliance has no institutional role to play in facing menaces coming from the South, and that should the threat of Soviet expansionism disappear, the American presence in Europe could be reduced to a merely symbolic one.

...and Middle East

EDITOR'S
NOTE
January 19,
1990

This interplay of North/South and East/West problems provides the global context in which one must consider specific security concerns that, as in the case of Arab-Israeli relations, cannot be seen as purely regional ones. Surely, there is no doubt that the evolution of Soviet policy—in both domestic and international affairs—has an impact on the Middle Eastern conflict. This impact, however, can be assessed differently if one looks at the short or long-term consequences. In the near future, the recognition of Israel by the ex-satellite countries, the liberalisation of Jewish emigration from the USSR, the creeping improvement of Israeli-Soviet relations, and the disarray of countries such as Syria (that cannot count any longer on Moscow to attain strategic parity with Israel) or Lybia (forced to much more prudent behaviour) are having a major stabilising effect in the region, namely at the expense of the so called “progressive Arabs”. But in the long run, it is easy to forecast that, orphaned of Soviet support, the Arab masses will dwindle more and more towards a strong political and cultural self-assertion, i. e. towards Islamic fundamentalism. In other words, the Middle East is going to become an area of bitterer and bitterer North/South confrontation.

Whatever may be the political judgement on the policy of the Jerusalem Government, and even if one is not primarily concerned with Israel's security requirements, these likely future developments are worth some reflection, as is Senator Dole's proposal to reduce American support for Israel. From the point of view of the European security interests in its coming confrontation with the South, this proposal comes at the wrong moment. With the possible dissolution of the Western Alliance that the collapse of the Communist system risks bringing about, the American engagement in favour of Israel is probably the only special relationship between the US and the Old World that will survive the transformations that are presently underway in Central Europe. Mrs. Thatcher's idea that Britain's special relationship could keep the US bound to Europe shows little appreciation of the peripheral position of Britain relative to the European continent, as well as of the changes that have occurred in international power relationships in the half century since World War II. And the Federal Republic of Germany, who for several decades has had the only really "special" relationship, mainly because of the Bundeswehr's contribution to NATO's military credibility in Europe, is clearly bound to a different world role now that a gigantic empty space has opened up in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Balkans.

Today, American policy towards Israel is the only foreign strategic commitment truly rooted in a consensus of public opinion, and the attitude in its favour goes largely beyond the borders of the American Jewish community. In other words, this engagement is the only one that in the foreseeable future can keep an American fleet in the Mediterranean. And through this semi-closed sea runs a very peculiar section of the worldwide North/South frontier. The waters of the Mediterranean are indeed the only possible theatre of confrontation in the entire world where the South is endowed not only with its usual, enormous demographic potential, but also with chemical warhead

missiles capable at striking at a longer, and actually, ever-increasing range.

The American Navy in the Mediterranean represents a kind of interposition force between North and South, but the developments in East/West diplomacy of the last few months do not offer any serious guarantee that it will continue in this role in the very soft underbelly of Europe's security, on the southern flank of the Continent. But as long as the American engagement in favour of Israel continues, the presence of the US Navy in Mediterranean waters will be guaranteed. Should Israel's American friends allow this engagement to be weakened, no other section of American public opinion, neither the Italian Americans nor the Greek Americans, would be able keep in existence this crucial seam that unites the two sides of the Atlantic in a single security system for the democratic countries of the North.