

War & Peace¹ by Eugen Pinschhof

© 2002 by Anton Lorenz Pinschhof

Avoid putting yourself before others and you can become a leader among men. [Lao-Tzu]

The best book written on present day events is Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Anybody having a little spare time should read it; it is not more than some twelve hundred pages long. The usual English edition tells us on the cover of each volume that Galsworthy has called it the best novel ever written, which may easily be true. But it is only half the truth; the book is much more than a novel; nearly half of it is not fiction, but a study on the history of the human race, on the soul of nations, the decisive factor in history.

Nothing better has been said on our times, than what Tolstoy tells us of Napoleon and his cardboard leadership, as against the real leadership of nations. Never has true human greatness and its source been shown with clearer insight.



The real greatness throughout the events of 1812 was not represented by a number of individuals, but was rooted in the Russians as a nation. The Russians had been fighting Napoleon with little success outside their borders in the preceding campaigns. The same Russians, once their soul was touched in the instinctive love for their country, brought to a head what the rest of Europe had been so completely unable to do, the defeat of Napoleon. They did it without preconceived plan, instinctively, without any supreme power over the actions of men about to fight for life and death; at the moment of action the leader cannot even know what is going on!

The representatives of absolute power do not possess the absolute power; they only play a part and Tolstoy tells us of what Napoleon's part consisted at Borodino: "He had kept within the limits of strict sagacity, no confusion nor contradiction can be imputed to him. He did not lose his head, did not quit the field of action. His tact and great experience helped him in this bloody tragedy to play the part of supreme ruler, as it seemed, with calmness and dignity".

These are the - mainly negative - functions of absolute power. But "whilst Napoleon was as sure of himself as ever, whilst he played his part as dictator as well as ever, whilst the enemy was the same as at Austerlitz and Friedland, whilst his address to the troops was short and vigorous, yet victory held aloof." Something strange was in the air, something which a dictator believing in himself as the only driving force of events could not understand: the soul of a nation.

Tolstoy, whilst disbelieving in the power of dictators to direct events towards a preconceived end, does not absolve them of responsibility for the evil they cause. He holds Napoleon more directly responsible than anyone else for the events of his time, but when pointing out his actual contributions to the events, he cannot describe them except in negative terms and expressions. This is one of the tests of all evil; evil tends towards the void; no wonder if its activity can best be described in negative terms.

Tolstoy's final sentence on Napoleon, "on that man always playing a part, always talking of himself, of the forty centuries looking down on his soldiers from the heights of the Pyramids, of his schemes or his objects", Tolstoy's final sentence reads: "He was, till his dying day, disabled by his darkened intellect and conscience from understanding goodness, beauty, truth and the real meaning of his actions, so contradictory were they to all goodness and truth, so far from anything human, for him to understand it!... And", he continues with one of the most striking parallels of our times, "he, the torturer of nations, ordained by Heaven to fill that part, racked his brain to prove that his sole aim had been to do them good."

Tolstoy declines to believe in the greatness of those labelled by the mob as great, the mob's lackeys including most historians; he shows us that for lackeys there can be no great men, since lackeys insist on measuring all men by their

¹ Chapter VIII: War & Peace, from the unpublished manuscript: *The Fool and the Non-Fool: Wartime Reflections of an Exile from Central Europe* by Eugen Rudolf Pinschhof (1899-1949) alias Antony Paccordis. Original manuscript in possession of John Martin Pinschhof, Somerset; Editor: Anton Lorenz Pinschhof, Brittany. This chapter's topics: *Leadership & the Souls of Nations; Tolstoy's Mistake*. [added to the cesc e-archives on Monday 25th August 2008; file name: napoleonsmistake.doc; contact archives@cesc.net].

own standard. Yet does Tolstoy, in showing us the spirit of a nation as the driving force in history, altogether deny human greatness in any leading individual? By no means. So who, according to him, is the great man in history? "The mostly simple and unpretentious figure, who understands the supreme laws by which the affairs of this world are governed". He gives however also a negative test for detecting him: he is the man, punished by the mob for keenly seeing the bearing of immediate events and circumstances on the future; the man punished by the mob for "building golden bridges" with a view to reaching this foreseen future as smoothly as possible, punished for yielding to necessity instead of trying to enforce his own will. The really great man, in other words, is he who in self-effacement acts in accordance with the necessary course of events.

The great man in *War and Peace* is Koutouzow, the Commander in Chief of the Russian armies in 1812. He was the man, who in these events, according to Tolstoy, divined the designs of Providence and submitted to its decrees, the man who was punished by the mob for doing so. He was the man "whose marvellous intuition had its source in the patriotic feeling which thrilled his soul with intense purity and passion". He alone influenced events through building golden bridges to the necessary course of things. The Czar's actions consisted in sending orders from Saint Petersburg, which, had they even arrived in time, could not have been carried out. The court only intrigued, and so did the generals under Koutouzow; the only great man was Koutouzow himself.

It is mainly one scene, one of the greatest chapters of the book, which tells us most clearly how Tolstoy wants us to see Koutouzow as his conception of a great man. It is the chapter describing the council of war, which decided the abandonment of Moscow, or rather recognised its inevitability. Koutouzow's generals were putting forward unworkable schemes which they thought could prevent a retreat beyond Moscow. Koutouzow listened in silence, uttering only a few words now and again, shaping his own opinion. When the last unworkable scheme had been uttered and the discussion had faded out, Koutouzow declared his decision to retreat beyond Moscow, taking full responsibility on himself for having given way to the necessary course of events. The events forcing him to the decision he did not and could not bring about, but the old man was the only one present to understand events, and his great deed was to not try to act contrary to the course which they had to take. None of his generals understood him, but a little peasant girl of six, present by chance, did understand at the bottom of her little heart, that Koutouzow was right in the dispute with his officers. She understood Koutouzow from a kiss, which he had given her by the same childish intuition which let him understand.

The great lesson in this great book is: if a people at heart is not prepared to be conquered, it cannot be conquered even if war seems lost according to the accepted rules and conventions of military and historic authorities. An army is only a comparatively small portion of a nation. An army can be beaten. An attacked nation, if sound at heart, cannot be, and this quite independently of the deeds and policy of its rulers. Such a nation will, from a knowledge at the bottom of its heart, automatically and without realising the meaning of its deeds, do the right thing; such as in 1812 the Russia's abandoning and burning of Moscow, abandoned first by the army and then by the civilians, happenings which Russia brought about against the outspoken will of her rulers and local authorities.

The measures of statesmen, politicians and generals, their endeavours to direct events according to their conceptions, are vain and void of reality if they have not the only quality which makes a great leader: understanding of the imminent meaning of events². A leader can be effective in many details by taking the same general direction, but he is powerless if striving in any other direction.

Where the ultimate reality lies, Tolstoy tells us too: "As we see things, the standard of right and wrong, as given by Christ, must apply to every human action; there can be no greatness where there is no singleness of heart, no kindness, no truth",³ and where an apprehension of the highest reality is lacking, there can be no greatness in the pursuance of any human affairs.

The conviction of the predominance of the spiritual led Tolstoy later in his life to a total disbelief in the value of any human institutions and to a trust in the spirit alone. The Christian anarchism of his later years was a major mistake - a typically Russian mistake. He came to overlook the fundamental fact that man, consisting of Body and Soul, required also in his social life something corresponding to the body, i.e. institutions; but how far was he from the opposite and far worse mistake (not typically Russian, but a theory evolved by a German and imported to Russia): that of trusting in institutions alone, denying altogether the Spiritual element for which they must be a vessel.

First edition for limited circulation; ISBN 1-901478-41-6; Copyright reserved © 1st April 2002 by Anton Lorenz Pinschhof.

² Almost understanding the meaning of the signs, just before it dawns on one, of events about to happen, signs which are everywhere...wondering what on earth the author was thinking & whether he got the wrong word or the wrong word order, one might conclude this is perhaps a rare case of *imminent* being interchangeable with *immanent* (OED please note). If the meaning in anything is that concept elaborated by humans to help describe & codify reality, expressing both the news always about to break and its ever present previous omens, this phrase resonates with the psychological theology of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), usually (probably wrongly) categorised as a precursor of Hegelian materialism.

³ From here till the end of the chapter, the manuscript is comprised of a hand written mature addition.