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A Rivalry in Satire: Political Cartoons of Russia and Great Britain, 1894–1914

In popular print media, during the years leading up to the First World War, satirical images of the “Great Powers” (Great Britain, France, and Russia) captured imaginations internationally. Publicists and pundits played on old symbols and introduced new visual forms to comment on domestic affairs as well as foreign policy matters. The period was marked by both changing political alliances among the Great Powers and an expansion of visual print culture. British and Russian cartoons produced at this time reflect the growth of public culture as well as the rising organization of the body politic. Political cartoonists from both the Russian and British Empires satirized developments in international relations. Cartoons were not only intended to be amusing, they were also informative. Cartoonists pandered to public taste as changes in tone provided insight into shifting national attitudes during volatile times. British cartoons maintained a sense of imperial calm, while Russian cartoons responded more animatedly to unrest and social change. Cartoons attracted a wide audience who learned about world events via the cartoons, and thus began to take greater interest in the affairs of their own nation-state. As a result, cartoons did more than simply provide parallel narratives of events; they helped establish national identity by redefining the relationships between nation-states.

This study examines a series of cartoons created between the 1890s and the start of World War I. The years leading up to the First World War saw a series of crucial realignments of power among Britain, France, and Russia. Britain came out of the period of so-called “splendid isolation” and entered into conflict with Germany. After a disastrous defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, France remained diplomatically isolated until 1892, when, in the hopes of forming a buffer against Germany, it turned to Russia. The Russian government was on an imperialist
mission, hoping to increase its international influence but facing growing internal tensions. In the midst of a changing international order, the proverbial “Great Game,” or the nearly century-long strategic rivalry between the Russian and British Empires for supremacy in Asia, came to an end with the signing of the Anglo-Russian Entente in 1907. The temporal scope of this study therefore includes Russia’s critical defeat in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War and the subsequent Revolution of 1905. The study ends before the outbreak of world war in 1914.

**Popular Media and National Symbols**

Russian and British cartoonists trivialized international conflict for the purpose of visual impact. A repertoire of national symbols was developed as each cartoonist pitted his nation against a gallery of similarly imagined figures representing other nations. The cartoonist was a dramatist as much as he was a reporter. At his prodding, the public might sympathize with one figure and deride or laugh at another.

The growth of the British Empire increased public interest in foreign policy. As a result, cartoons became an important media outlet in Great Britain. At the turn of the century, Russia also saw a shift toward bolder forms of political expression. This is evident from the surge in production of satirical postcards and lubki, or popular prints, satirizing events such as the Russo-Japanese War. At this time, censorship laws eased and cartoons of the conflict began to be published more frequently. Such an outpouring of images as a result of a particular international conflict had not been seen in Russia since the Napoleonic campaign of 1812.

Russian and British satirists used many of the same symbols to depict various international conflicts. British publications, such as *Punch*, featured Britannia, the lion, and John Bull as symbols of the British imperial agenda. Russian publishers employed the figures of the Russian *bogatyрь*, a medieval knight, as well as the Cossack and the Russian bear. The French
had Marianne; the Americans, Uncle Sam. The political presses of each empire also exchanged symbols, adopting the traditional symbols used by their historic rivals. The bear and other time-honored symbols of Russia appeared in British publications, just as John Bull became a fixture in Russia’s growing visual commentary on international affairs. No nation had exclusive use of its own symbols. A study of the use of these symbols within the context of a changing international system reveals a shift in Russian and British perceptions of their former imperial rivals, especially amid rapid rapprochement in the early twentieth century.

The predominant source of British propaganda discussed in this paper is *Punch*, one of the most popular satirical weeklies of the nineteenth century. Several different mediums of Russian propaganda are examined, including postcards, which were used as a popular format to spread news of war and revolution, *lubki*, and certain left-leaning satirical journals published from 1905-1907 such as *Nagaechka* (“Little [Cossack] Whip”) and *Novoe vremia* (“New Times”). At the turn of century, the satirical journal became one of the most popular and distinguishing cultural products of Russian media. *Lubki* were sold chiefly to the lower classes and to peasants at fairs and markets; postcards, on the other hand, were a primarily urban form of communication and reached a more sophisticated, higher income population. The illustrators of postcards and *lubki* used the same caricatures and symbols as satirical journals.

**Rivalry in East Asia in the 1890s**

During the 1890s, Russia’s interest in gaining informal control over Manchuria clashed with British trade policy in China. Mutual suspicion of Britain brought France and Russia together. Imperial competition in Asia influenced cartoon renderings of foreign relations. Russia’s competition with Britain for economic and political influence in China was an especially prevalent theme in *Punch*. An image published in 1894 by John Tenniel, the famous
illustrator of *Alice in Wonderland*, shows warming relations between the British lion and the Russian bear (Figure 1). Hardly presented as ferocious beasts, they are nonetheless dressed in military uniforms. The animals walk arm in arm, saying, “What a pity we didn’t know each other before,” as if the decades of rivalry will inevitably end in alliance. The overture of cooperation, however, was not an accurate depiction of the “real” state of affairs. The cartoonist’s tongue-in-cheek exaggeration suggests that any sign of friendship is only a facade.

**Japan Enters the Scene**

The growth of Japanese military power complicated European colonial rivalry in Asia, especially between Russia and Britain. In 1894–1895, Japan achieved victory in a brief war with China. A British cartoon, “John Stands Aloof” (1895), depicts the European spectators—France, Germany, Russia, and Britain—standing in naval uniforms around a table where a sly gambling Japan takes the spoils of war from a symbolically plump China (Figure 2). The racism of the image is startling to modern eyes. The Russian representative, in his fur cap, is particularly miffed by Japan’s winnings. Britain’s John Bull, however, does not intervene. For years to come, Japan would act as a client state of Britain, advancing British interests in the region by proxy when the British government, largely due to its rivalry with Russia, could not physically maneuver in the region. In this image John Bull appears unperturbed, coolly superior, and detached from Asian affairs despite Britain’s obvious determination to win the game.

Four years later in 1898, John Tenniel used the plush figures of the lion and bear to comment on growing British concerns regarding Russian presence in China (Figure 3). The British lion pushes a cart labeled “British trade” to a guard post at the Talien Wan Free Port, monitored by none other than the Russian bear. When he is rejected, the lion exclaims, “Why, you gave me your word!” The bear responds slyly, “My friend! *How* you misunderstand me!”

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1 See the Appendix (pp. 24-35) for all figures.
The lion replies, “Do I? Alright! *Never no more!*” Such was the nature of Anglo-Russian competition in Asia. Here, Tenniel illustrates the British irritation at disingenuous Russian designs in China, as well the British sense of superiority toward the Russians.

In contrast to their Russian counterparts, as discussed below, British satirical artists had considerably more autonomy. There was no national message to be propounded, and global events were, instead, uniformly trivialized for the purposes of popular consumption. In retrospect, the trivializing cartoons failed to anticipate the great eruption of economic rivalry and the development of hostilities between Russia and Japan five years later.

**The Russo-Japanese War: Racism, Heroism, and Imperialism**

By 1902, while Britain was attempting to contain Russian expansion in China, Persia, and Central Asia, the Japanese government was simultaneously fending off Russian encroachment in Manchuria. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 was intended to counter Russian expansion in Asia in order to protect British trade interests. In addition to immediately benefitting British actions in Persia, the start of the Russo-Japanese War in February 1904 diverted Russia’s focus toward Japan. The British-backed Japanese victory played a significant role in changing Russia’s foreign policy goals in Asia.² Only after Russia’s humiliating defeat at the hands of Japan did it seriously reconsider its original opposition to the British bid to establish spheres of influence in Central Asia. The beleaguered Russian government was in dire need of stability abroad in order to retrench and address the domestic crisis that had been precipitated by this military disaster.³

The Russo-Japanese War brought forth a wave of political satire. Postcards and *lubki* depicting the conflict gained immediate popularity. Most cartoons depicted Russia and her enemies using a variety of characters ranging from the stately tsar Nicholas to the snarling

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² Donaldson and Nogee, 26.
³ Ibid.
Cossack and the inept Russian sailor. Russia’s crushing defeat provided ample subject matter for satirical images. Many lubki of the Russo-Japanese War dealt explicitly in racist portrayals of Japanese inferiority. The lubki of this period also exhibited a satirical tendency that earlier images, for instance those from the Russo-Turkish wars, did not share. Leading up to the war, lubki emphasized Japanese cultural and military inferiority, thus implying that Russian victory was almost guaranteed. A 1904 lubok, for example, shows a dancing Cossack tossing stereotypically depicted, miniature Japanese men in the air and stomping on them as they fall to the ground (Figure 4). The hierarchy of scale in the image was intended to reinforce the Russian sense of superiority even in the context of Russia’s weakening grasp in the region. In the top right corner, atop the walls of Port Arthur, perches a roly-poly sized John Bull, partially clothed in a Union Jack vest with a ruddy nose. He is the personification of Britain. The lubok exaggerates John Bull’s characteristic stoutness by depicting his bottom half as a perfect sphere. While the British press portrayed John Bull as robust and powerful (Figure 2), John Bull, as imagined by the Russian nationalist cartoonist, is simply ridiculous. His satirical rotundity poses a sharp contrast to the vigorous Cossack. Ostensibly an ally of Japan, Britain’s humorous form in this cartoon highlights certain satirical elements, promoting, in turn, a sense of Russian patriotism. Although other images of the Cossack were often comical, here the Cossack does not exhibit any signs of deprecating caricature. He instead symbolizes valor and masculinity. The lubok satirizes the foreigner and idealizes the Russian Cossack. It reinforces a sense of Russian nationalism, mocks the British, and dismisses the Japanese.

4 Hopkirk, The Great Game, 515.
5 This cartoons recalls motifs of an earlier cartoon of a Russian peasant tossing French soldiers during the Napoleonic wars.
Russian cartoons often idealized the Cossack and portrayed him in stark contrast to the animalistic Japanese. Degrading images of the Japanese were in fact a fixture in Russian cartoons from this time period. They were especially popular among peasants who “enjoyed hearing stories about monkeys and bears.” When war broke out in 1904, feelings of nationalism, triumphalism, and racism were widespread. After the Russian loss, feelings of racism intensified, while Russian confidence waned. In 1904, most educated Russians viewed Japan merely as a small island that had only recently begun to develop. Aleksandr Pasternak recalled in 1904:

> People of my generation will probably remember those wartime posters… Alas, the posters were distinguished only by their counter-productive ability to persuade. The Japanese were uniformly portrayed as knock-kneed weaklings, slant-eyed, yellow-skinned, and for some reason, shaggy haired—a puny kind of monkey, invariably dubbed “Japs” [iaposhki] and “macaques” [makaki]. Opposing them were the legendary heroes of our army…. We knew the reality well enough! We knew that the Japanese won not only by heroism, but by their swiftness and skill in maneuver, their excellent new arms, and above all, their use of camouflage.

Despite varying views within educated circles regarding the righteousness of Russian imperialism and the reasons for Russia’s defeat, images of Japanese “macaques” or monkeys resonated both in cities and throughout the Russian countryside. In fact, this particular conflict became a popular topic of interest among all levels of Russian society in a way that earlier wars had not. Demand for information was much higher in 1904. A contemporary writer conducting a first-hand study of peasant reactions to the lubki observed that peasants would eagerly anticipate news about the conflict. They would gather to hear news read by either a literate peasant or a priest. The lubki made information accessible to an even wider peasant audience.

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6 Norris, 21.  
7 Ibid.  
9 Norris, 127.
The peasant was an especially important symbol of Russian identity. Another *lubok* from 1905 exalts the peasant using a hierarchy of scale. The *lubok*, entitled “Sitting by the Sea, Waiting for the Right Weather,” presents an overly large peasant defending Manchuria and the strongholds of Port Arthur and Vladivostok from Japan (Figure 5). The smiling peasant’s proportions are symbolic of the sheer size of the Russian landmass. He jovially leans against a giant cannon pointed across a schematic map in the direction of his enemies. John Bull and Uncle Sam appear as proportionally smaller puppet-masters, manipulating an even smaller Japan. John Bull’s expression in this image is decidedly more devious than that of the Cossack throwing Japanese men in the *lubok* discussed above (Figure 4). He firmly grips the Japanese soldier by his waist. The illustrator plays on Russian suspicions of British operations, suggesting that Japan is a mere pawn in British (and American) interests in Asia. Russia and Britain were still adversaries in 1905. These *lubki* were published toward the end of the period known as The Great Game, and they reveal the changing colonial situation in Asia and waning of Russian dominance in the Far East. The peasant’s grin displays a sense of Russian superiority that would soon be damaged by the Japanese victory.

To highlight Russian historical superiority, cartoonists used the image of the *bogatyr’* or the medieval knight. In the context of the Russo-Japanese war, the *bogatyr’* became a symbol of the timeless spirit of *Rus’,* which was believed would guarantee Russia’s victory over the Japanese, referred to as the “yellow dwarves.” In one undated cartoon, the heroic *bogatyr’* sits astride his noble steed with all of the technological advances of modern warfare at his command (Figure 6). Nevertheless, he grips a spear. The implication, as before, is that the Japanese are no match for the Russian imperial knight who is victorious, not because of technology, but because

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10 Ibid., 122.
of the fortitude of the Russian spirit. Such symbols of heroism provided a form of compensatory myth that made up for the realities of Russia’s waning power.

After Russia’s defeat, however, the treatment of national symbols changed and the overly confident tone was distinctly subdued. On a 1906 cover of the satirical journal Gudok (Whistle), Peter the Great, the “father of the Russian navy,” is shown furiously looking down at a floating boot with the Russian flag sticking out of it and ridiculing the state of the Russian ships that the Japanese sunk.\footnote{Brooks, 29.} A similar tone of disillusionment appears in a postcard depicting Russia not as the traditionally heroic Cossack or knight, but in dual forms as both an indolent imperial soldier and an incompetent sailor (Figure 7). This particular image lacks the potent nationalism of the traditional Cossack cartoons. Though it is undated, its depiction of bungling Russian characters suggests that the artist took advantage of easing censorship laws. The enlarged figures sit like children on Manchuria. A soldier turns his back and smokes a cigar; a gesture that perhaps alludes to the failure of the Russian army. A boyish, rosy-cheeked Russian sailor, who appears almost inept by his youth and inexperience, glances over his shoulder across the sea at Japan and its American and British sponsors. The Japanese general orchestrating the naval maneuver is again rendered with blatantly stereotypical features though not quite as depreciating as the image of the monkey or the clumsy soldier used before.

In another undated Russian postcard, the emperor of Japan sits astride a rearing horse as John Bull in hunting gear and Uncle Sam in his traditional stars and stripes lean against the emperor’s horse (Figure 8). The caption describes John Bull and Uncle Sam as the emperor’s “artful well-wishers.” The bucking horse teeters dangerously at the edge of a crumbling precipice. The scene does not depict a battle or exaggerate Russian prowess. On the other hand, it provides a much more sophisticated image of the political figures thus evoking the idea of
high-level diplomatic manipulation. After all, Britain’s support of Japan was not intended solely for Japan’s benefit. This image is therefore less caustic than the more graphic representations used before. Rather than highlighting the strategic benefits of the alliance between Britain and Japan, the artist suggests that this alliance might be the source of Japan’s undoing.

Domestic critics of Russian attitudes toward the Japanese often suggested that racism had blinded the public to diplomatic and military realities. A Russian prisoner of war in Japan, for example, observed the political implications of the war. Like Pasternak, he saw through the racist tone of Russian propaganda, noting “the application of such a term [monkey] to a brave enemy was both undignified and shabby…. That seemed to be the opinion at the outbreak of war. But the English knew better, and making an ally of the “monkey” was on their part a master stroke of diplomacy.” Cultural symbols that were designed for the usually pro-government lubki thus became farcical and incongruous after military defeat.

Western, particularly British, anxiety about Russia’s involvement in Asian affairs is evident in cartoons that refer to British and Japanese cooperation. For instance, Linley Sambourne’s cartoon in Punch, published in October 1905 and entitled “Why Not?,” depicts four powers—Britain, Japan, Russia, and France—at a ball (Figure 9). In the foreground, France, represented by a coquettish Marianne, says to Russia, “Aren’t you going to dance with Mr. Bull?” A female personification of Russia, dressed in folk costume, responds, “I think I should rather like to, if he wouldn’t tread on my toes.” Marianne remarks flippantly, “Oh but he won’t. He’s improved immensely. I find him adorable.” Meanwhile, John Bull and a geisha chat in a corner. John Bull, who by the twentieth century most often had a Union Jack on his waistcoat, dons his regular regency tailcoat and breeches. The geisha, the most obvious female personification of Japan, appears intrigued by his advances. The depiction of the ball guests

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alludes to a change of alliances: Who will dance with whom? While Britain may snub Russia now, Marianne’s words to Russia foreshadow the future signing of the Anglo-Russian Entente in 1907. Sambourne’s playful depiction of flirtations of the ball guests alludes to the very fluid system of alliances in Europe.

The British may have backed the victor, but their editorial cartoonists could not resist a jab at the Japanese anyway. They were convinced of their own racial superiority. As a result, despite the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, a sense of British arrogance still permeated cartoons. British artists created images that were condescending to both Japan and Russia. A contemporary British postcard shows a Russian Cossack and a barefoot Japanese peasant fighting over a torn map of Manchuria (Figure 10). The British illustration does not exhibit any of the brawn typically attributed to the Cossack by Russian cartoonists. The Cossack and the Japanese peasant tussle like children in this dual comic put-down. The traditional clothing of the Japanese peasant and his bare feet suggest that Japan may be even more backward and agrarian than Russia.

The British presses smugly celebrated Russia’s defeat. *Punch* seized the opportunity to paint its rival imperial behemoth as a weakened foe whose glory days had come to an end. One cartoon from October of 1905 depicted a crestfallen tsar Nicholas, agonizing over a giant hourglass labeled “Prestige” (Figure 11). Entitled “The Sands Running Out,” the cartoon refers to the terrible damage the defeat inflicted on Russia’s ego. The tsar does not even appear in caricature. Instead, Nicholas’ downtrodden demeanor points directly to the sullying of his regime by this war. Tsar Nicholas would become a favorite target of cartoonists as Russia faced an expansion of the body politic, a liberalizing process that Britain had undergone decades previously.

**The 1905 Revolution: Monarchy, Liberalism, and Terror**
The signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth in August 1905, which was presided over by Theodore Roosevelt, could not come soon enough for the defeated Russian navy or, for that matter, the financially exhausted Japanese. Not only did the Russian defeat precipitate a temporary retreat from Asia, it also left the Russian government to face simmering unrest at home. While it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the disastrous campaign in Japan led directly to the outbreak of revolution, it did provoke a crisis of confidence in Russia during a period that was already marked by uncertainty and discontent with the tsarist regime. Increased popular resentment of the traditional political, social, and cultural orders marked the years leading up to 1905. A growing spirit of opposition against the established orders and the development of an urban working class made of professionals and businessmen provided a social base onto which liberalism could be grafted. Of course, the term “liberalism” encompassed a wide range of ideologies. Nevertheless, the rise of dissatisfaction and willingness to criticize the tsar created a climate in which revolution could be possible.

The Revolution of 1905 prompted a temporary period of internal reform in Russia. Censorship laws eased and freedom of speech increased. Journalists and satirists could publish drawings more freely. More than three hundred different satirical magazines were published during the Revolution of 1905, which is more than had been published during the entire nineteenth century. Though many of the magazines survived only a few months before the censors caught on, production was impressive all the same; the period witnessed a rapid and prolific outpouring of artistic and literary expression.

13 Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 399.
14 Ibid., 401. “Liberal” groups emerged in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century following the 1864 reforms of Alexander II. However, it was not until the twentieth century that the liberal movements for reform gained enough momentum to break the long-standing social quiet.
15 Ibid.
16 “Russian Graphic Art and the Revolution of 1905.”
The revolution erupted on January 22, 1905, when police fired on thousands of workers demonstrating in front of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. The tsar was compelled to make concessions to the workers. The government issued the October Manifesto, which vaguely granted civil liberties and established the First Duma, a legislative assembly with the power to pass and reject laws. The First Duma was soon dissolved, but for a short period of time, there was more freedom of the press. The easing of censorship laws lasted from roughly October 1905 until the summer of 1906.17 During this time, satirical journals reached a remarkable distribution of nearly thirty million copies. Much like in the rest of the Western world, the satirical journal in Russia thus gained increasing popularity as a democratic visual medium. The Russian journals took after such well-known European satirical magazines as the British Punch, the German Simplicissimus, and the French L’Assiette au beurre. The advent of the Russian satirical journal came during an international boom of political satire that reached even the non-Russian speaking edges of the ethnically diverse Russian Empire.18 Eventually, however, the government resumed careful scrutiny of the press by imposing fines on or even closing down presses.

Before this resumption of control, vivid subversive images of the revolution abounded. Given the popular criticism of the old regime and the common demands for reform, themes of liberty and democracy flooded the visual market. One undated cartoon, entitled “Social Democracy and Autocracy,” makes a farce of the Romanov regime and its conservative ministers (Figure 12). Jointly issued by the revolutionary publishers Liberty and Light, the cartoon unmistakably endorses the revolutionary cause. The agents of the imperial government desperately steer the skiff of “autocracy,” but it appears destined to break apart upon the rocks.

17 Levitt and Minin, 17.
18 Ibid., 19. Most of these satirical journals were left leaning, critical of the tsar, and advocated for democratic reform. Some of the publications called for a complete overthrow of the regime. However, there were also right leaning, anti-revolutionary satirical journals as well.
Neither the cartoon figures of the Orthodox patriarch, imperial plutocrats, or a panicked tsar Nicholas—whose likeness is uncanny despite his miniature size—are able to salvage the wreckage. On the other hand, the boat of “social democracy,” powered by the united efforts of its rowers, navigates the waves and steers off towards the sun and the promise of a new era. As the cartoon suggests, there was a growing sense among ordinary Russians that the old system could not continue to endure as it had for centuries.

**The Bear Turns on Its Master: New Images of Revolution and Change**

The marked shift in ideology gave way to a new set of symbols. For example, an image published in December 1905 of a soldier, a sailor, an urban worker, and a rural peasant standing arm in arm personifies the idea of future cooperation for the sake of a “new” Russia (Figure 13). In this image, the sailor and the peasant, who used to be symbols of national virtue in the largely pro-government *lubki*, join the urban worker in defiance of the regime. Their slightly maniacal expressions suggest a sense of revolutionary zeal and idealism.19

The very notion of liberty as an ideal also began to take symbolic form at this time. The neoclassical figure of Lady Liberty appears in early revolutionary art as an emblem of change in Russia. One undated postcard presents Lady Liberty standing on a pedestal before a crowd of workers and peasants (Figure 14). She holds a torch and a palm frond, both symbols of victory. This particular cartoon employs a neoclassical and decidedly un-Russian image of liberty as a means of shunning the old regime. The crowd waves a banner with the words “Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood,” while, behind Lady Liberty, a funerary tribute to Karl Marx bears the inscription “Mankind.” The personification of liberty, a long-standing tradition in Western culture, had little, if any, prior place in Russian art. By importing a figure from the Western artistic canon, instead of using more traditional images, Russian artists filled a symbolic void.

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19 Brooks, 49.
There were no other images in the Russian visual repertoire that could sufficiently convey hope for the future like the figure of Lady Liberty, a Western image but, nevertheless, one with which the Russian audience was familiar.

While writers and illustrators commented on both the “impotence of the ancien regime…and the exuberance of popular liberation,” there was also an abundance of grim imagery in response to the government’s actions during political upheaval. For example, demons, skeletons, monsters, and vampires filled the pages of many journals. It has been observed that in Russia during this time, gruesome imagery was more abundant than elsewhere in Europe and probably used more frequently than in any other time in history. Marcus Levitt and Oleg Minin suggest that “an almost compulsive interest in demonism and . . . concomitant fascination with death and morbidity, [became] for many a transparent, metaphoric vision of their own lives and their society.” The fact that death and the devil were associated with the existing autocracy rather than the rebellious proletariat represents a vital twisting of symbolic rhetoric.

This change is especially evident in new images of the fabled Russian bear. A cartoon featured in a 1905 copy of Nagaechka shows the bear breaking free from its chains and standing on its hind legs (Figure 15). The graphic pool of red blood at its feet and the remnants of a uniform and a rifle confirm that the bear has devoured his guards. In a nod to simmering revolutionary sentiment that had reached its boiling point in 1905, the caption reads: “Misha got angry.” The bear bares his claws, setting his sights on the table of ministers in session on the other side of the window. Similarly, another cartoon in Burelom (“Storm Debris”) shows a

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20 Ibid., 17.
21 Levitt and Minin, 22.
22 Brooks, 44.
23 “Misha” is a common colloquialism for a bear.
smiling bear, flag in hand, who has triumphantly killed his keeper. The satirizing of such a well-known Russian symbol was remarkably subversive. The bear, long revered as a symbol of Russian ferocity in the face of foreign enemies, had now violently turned against the Russian imperial regime. It was satirical inversion at its most effective. In this particular historical moment, the bear became a symbol of the proletariat, not the forces of the empire. Just as the British press had used the bear to undermine public opinion of Russia, the newly liberated Russian satirists were now doing the same. They had recaptured a visual convention and inverted it. The Cossack, perhaps due to his association with old Russia, did not experience the same inversion; he simply fell out of fashion. As the fabled warrior of the imperial Russian frontiers and the tsar’s traditional instrument of repression, the image of the Cossack could not be as easily deployed in service of the new democratic political message. Symbols such as Lady Liberty and the bear were more easily assimilated and modified.

**Autocracy Retrenches**

The freedom of press that allowed for the publication of revolutionary images was short-lived. Stringent censorship laws slowly returned beginning in the spring of 1906. Many of the journals introduced between 1905 and 1907 were confiscated upon release. Nevertheless, demand remained so high that producers and distributors could sell banned journals for up to fifty times their original price.

British commentary on the revolution in Russian also changed and took on a wry, less zealous tone. A cartoon published in November of 1905, still in the early days of unrest, depicted Tsar Nicholas in his crown and ermine robe, slumped with worry, in the same way that the artist of “The Sands Running Out” had depicted him just a month earlier (Figure 16). In this cartoon,

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24 Ibid.
25 Levitt and Minin, 20.
the specter of Louis XVI hovers over the tsar, urging him, “Side with your people, sire, while there is yet time. I was too late!” The Winter Palace massacre appears in the background. The comparison between the doomed fate of Louis XVI and the possible fate of Tsar Nicholas was a common motif in cartoons at the time.²⁶

The Duma was also a popular subject. British satirists reveled in creating cartoons of Russian revolutionary institutions at the expense of the monarchy. Sambourne dramatized the turmoil of the Russian political crisis. In a cartoon from June of 1906, Tsar Nicholas desperately drives a sleigh labeled “Duma” with Lady Liberty as his passenger (Figure 17). As he nervously turns back to look at the pack of wolves in pursuit of the sleigh, Lady Liberty urges, “Give him his head. It’s your only chance—and mine!” The British government had introduced a series of democratic reforms nearly a half-century earlier, beginning in 1832 and culminating in 1884. Considering the substantial headway of democratic reforms in Britain, the tone of the cartoon is almost patronizing. Sambourne once again illustrates the stakes of the revolution by suggesting that the fate of the Duma and the possibility of Russian liberty are unpredictable. However, Sambourne does not simply retell the events. The element of the chase sensationalizes Tsar Nicholas’s predicament and his failure to take the Duma in the direction of the public will.

When the First Duma was dissolved in July 1906, Sambourne responded with an illustration sardonically entitled “The Death of the First Born” (Figure 18). The cartoon depicts Mother Russia in folk dress, collapsed in despair against a rock as she looks down at her fallen child—the First Duma. The image is evidently morbid. Sambourne does not glorify Mother Russia in the way typical of the Russian visual tradition but, instead, reproaches the monarchy for its loss of control. The scene implies that the monarchy has failed and that negligence has caused the demise of the Duma. There is, however, also a sense of sympathy for the Russian

²⁶ Douglas, 167.
people and their lost opportunity for democracy. In spite of everything, this cartoon implied that Russia was bound to return to her former state of imperial autocracy.

An accord with Britain ultimately became necessary for Russia after its humiliating defeat by Japan and the internal political crisis. The balance of power was shifting. East Asian nations such as Japan were gaining a military foothold. At the same time, Britain, France, Russia, and now Germany continued to solidify their spheres of influence, both pragmatically and opportunistically. However, when a “chastened Russia and a relieved Britain” signed an agreement at the Anglo-Russian Convention in 1907, the period of competition for dominance in Asia seemed to have come to an end.27 As demonstrated below, the agreement, nonetheless, did not erase the cultural and political suspicions that had vexed Russian and British governments throughout the nineteenth century.

**Skepticism Lingers After the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention**

When Prime Minister Stolypin came to office in 1906, he aimed to ensure that “Russia could turn afresh after an interval of many years, towards Europe, where its traditional and historic interests have been practically abandoned for the sake of these ephemeral dreams about the Far East for which [the Russian people] have paid too dearly.”28 In 1911, after he left office, Russian foreign minister Alexander Izvolsky recalled that establishing closer relations with France and Britain “was perhaps less secure, but worthier of Russia’s past and of her greatness.”29 Despite Russia’s weakened position, the concept of inherent Russian superiority was still at play. The creed of greatness, implicit in the historic image of the *bogatyr’*, for instance, could as easily be employed in Izvolsky’s agenda in Europe as it had been in earlier propaganda against Japan. Despite the program of the new tsarist cabinet, a long history of

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27 Hopkirk, *Setting the East Ablaze*, 3.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
mutual suspicion between Russia and Britain made the negotiations leading up to the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention tedious. As one British diplomat explained, disagreement was to be expected between the two parties, “[both] of which thought the other was a liar and a thief.”

Antipathy also persisted between the two nations after the convention. A Russian cartoon published in Novoe vremia in 1906 suggests that below the surface of negotiations, British hostility toward Russia was largely reciprocated. In the cartoon, Britannia depicted as “the new Moses” reads from the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Figure 19). The style in which Britannia is drawn bears no trace of the influence of traditional neoclassical heroism. Proportionally, she is rather awkward. The lion at her side also does not resemble the hulking version favored by Tenniel. The cartoonist makes a mockery of the time-honored British symbols. The same, of course, can be said of the less than ferocious depictions of the Russian bear in British media of the time. In the context of ongoing negotiations, this cartoon implies that looking to Britain could lead to worshipping Britannia instead of God, and that this might subordinate Russia to the political whims of a liberal and particularly arrogant empire. The cartoon criticizes British aggressiveness. The Russian government’s own expansionist aims do not appear to humble the maker of this particular cartoon. Such was the nature of the shape-shifting imperial landscape. National animosity and distrust lingered in the public imagination, and the derisive agendas of editors and illustrators dramatized this hostility.

This suspicion also characterizes a 1907 British cartoon in Punch depicting the Anglo-Russian entente (Figure 20). Aptly titled “Baffled!,” the cartoon depicts an irate Bellona, goddess of war, being led from the Temple of Peace by a pack of bloodhounds. Bellona has just come from negotiations with Russia and banners announce the new alliance between the two nations as

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30 Ibid., 209.
31 Douglas, 171.
32 Ibid., 169.
well as the older Franco-British entente. Bellona, drawn to resemble the heroic Britannia, appears to be perplexed by the alliance with the former rivals. This image was the work of Sambourne, the artist who drew the unsympathetic cartoon of Tsar Nicholas as Louis XIV, just two years earlier. Even an official political agreement between the two nations had not improved his outlook.\textsuperscript{33}

**Real Entente in the Face of War**

In the years leading to the formation of the Triple Entente and World War I, accumulated memories and anxieties weighed on the minds of both the Russian and British public. Russia had suffered heavily in the war against Japan, just as Britain had in the Boer War in South Africa. Neither nation cared to relive the bitterness of these experiences. Furthermore, the British government wanted to maintain its empire, while the Russian government hoped to reclaim what it felt was its rightful status in Asia.\textsuperscript{34} Despite some suspicion on the part of the public as well as editorial commentators, the British government was pleased with the entente. Historical sources of friction were largely removed by the agreement, freeing the British government from perennial anxiety about Russian aggression in Persia and China. Still, suspicion remained on both sides. The British and Russian governments were more guarded and even avoided using the term “Triple Entente” in the media.\textsuperscript{35}

By 1914, however, it became necessary for the two nations to come to terms with the alliance. Cartoons produced around this time reflect a new sense of solidarity. The mobilization of European armies, which soon led to the outbreak of war, did not go unnoticed in the popular media. While cartoonists played on heightening tensions in the Balkans and the arms race in the years leading to war, they did not always depict the members of the Triple Entente with the same

\textsuperscript{33} Douglas, 171.
\textsuperscript{34} MacMillan, 503.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 211.
irony seen in previous depictions of similar agreements. A Russian cartoon, for example, presents Britain, France, and Russia as neoclassical female personifications of the nations (Figure 21). Marianne dons the revolutionary Phrygian cap and holds a heart, a symbol of charity. In the center, Russia raises the Orthodox cross in a show of faith. Britannia supports a giant anchor, perhaps summoning British naval power against a new common enemy—the Triple Alliance. Bombs explode, a plane flies, and soldiers fight in the background. Britannia and Marianne look toward Russia in the center, implying that Russia is the pillar of the alliance. The fact that each image recalls Lady Liberty affirms the utility of that particular icon in depicting honor and war. For the purposes of mustering morale and war support, the three powers in this image represent an ideal of solidarity, without any trace of the earlier tones of skepticism.

**Conclusion**

In the period leading up to World War I, some signs pointed directly to war, while others suggested that peace could be possible. Popular print media relied on sensationalizing cartoons that often promoted xenophobic sentiment in order to encourage circulation. Furthermore, the profusion of contradictory and exaggerated depictions meant that readers could never feel sure of victory in the case of conflict. When war did break out, those who were engaged in political affairs were conscious of the fact that victory was uncertain and that the stakes were incredibly high. The general public, however, remained very zealous because, by its very nature, satire had diminished the gravity of the situation.

The public expected pictures, and these visual forms reached wider audiences than ever before. Conflicts were more visible to the public and seemed all-engrossing as well as personally important. Cartoons and editorials were part of a cultural contest to mobilize the popular

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36 Douglas, 199.  
37 Ibid., 200.
imagination. They stigmatized the enemy, both national and foreign. The imperial powers were constantly subverted, but never in a uniform way. As democracy spread, so did the reach and relevance of political satire. The cartoonist’s reflection on the state of empire recorded opinion, but also increasingly helped form it.

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