

VLADIVOSTOK

AND THE SOVIET FAR EAST

Given the vast distances, forbidding topography, and the existence of opposing forces, Siberia and the Far Eastern territories until quite recently played a relatively small role in the development of Russia. The first Russian penetration of the area began in the late 16th century when Cossacks built forts and settlements principally along the Amur River. Fur traders followed, and by the middle of the 17th century they had worked their way to the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk later continuing to expand eastward across Alaska, down the Pacific coast of North America eventually to what is now California. The westward expansion of the United States ultimately required the withdrawal of Russian influence northward.

From the 17th to the mid-19th century, China was able to check serious Russian expansion into the relatively rich Far Eastern territories. In 1858, taking advantage of declining Chinese strength, Russia occupied all of the territory north of the Amur River. In 1859, in a warship named "America," the Russian Governor-General of Siberia, N. N. Muraviev Amursky ("of the Amur"), explored the shores of the maritime territory and what is today Peter the Great Bay. In 1860 the Russians occupied the area east of the Ussuri River, and in July of that year landed troops and equipment to establish the first Russian military post in the southern littoral. This post eventually grew into the city of Vladivostok (from the Russian "vladet'," meaning to be master of, and "vostok," meaning east).

With the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railroad in 1905, the development of Vladivostok and the entire Russian Far East accelerated rapidly. After the loss of Port Arthur to Japan in 1905, Vladivostok became, and remains today, Russia's primary naval base on the Pacific.



During World War I the city was used by the Allies as a major supply depot. After the revolution of 1917, Japanese forces landed in Vladivostok and occupied large parts of the region. They were subsequently joined by approximately 7,500 United States troops and contingents of British, French and Italians. By 1920 only the Japanese remained, and a Far Eastern Republic was formed as a buffer between Japan and the Soviet Government. In 1922 Japanese troops were withdrawn, the Republic was dissolved, and the area was incorporated into the Soviet Union as an Oblast. In World War II, Vladivostok was one of the principal ports for the shipment of Lend-Lease supplies to the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Far East is bounded on the north by the East Siberian Sea, on the east by the Bering Sea and the Sea of Japan, by Manchuria on the south, and by the Lena River on the west. It is mainly a mountainous region with great evergreen forests in the central region and arctic tundra in the far north. The fertile Amur and Ussuri river valleys, which support crops of wheat, oats, soybeans and sugar beets, are in the south. The area has often been used as a place of exile and forced labor camps.

Economically, the Soviet Far East is essentially self-sufficient and heavy industry is located in the large urban centers of Vladivostok, Komsomol'sk, Khabarovsk and Nakhodka. Major industries are iron and steel production, oil refining, lumbering and machine building. Significant coal and oil deposits are found in the region, as well as the major source of Soviet gold, the Kolyma gold fields.

The principal cities of the area are:

--Vladivostok (pop. 500,000 [est.]) is the most important naval base and the second largest commercial port in the eastern USSR. The excellently equipped port, kept open in winter by ice breakers, is the eastern



terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Leading industries in the Vladivostok area are shipbuilding and numerous light industries largely connected with commercial fishing.

--Nakhodka (pop. 105,000 - 1970) is the largest commercial port on the Pacific coast of the USSR. It is an important naval base, and its industries include shipbuilding and fishing.

--Khabarovsk (pop. 437,000 - 1970) is a major transportation center on the Trans-Siberian Railroad and the leading industrial, oil-distribution, telecommunications and commercial center in the Soviet Far East.

--Komsomol'sk (pop. 210,000 - 1970) is situated on the Amur River and contains the largest shipyard in eastern Siberia.

