

The Atlantic Charter and Beyond

by EMERY REVES

I

WHEN the Atlantic Charter was first proclaimed, the democratic world was thrilled to the marrow. That thrill derived more from the event itself than from the contents of the proclamation. After a series of Brenner Pass Meetings between Hitler and Mussolini, each the prelude to further Axis triumphs, the high seas meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill was novel and dramatic; and it held the promise of triumphs for the enemies of the Axis.

But the time has arrived for sober consideration of the text of the Charter. Discussion of the subject, indeed, is growing. Some ask whether the Atlantic Charter applies only to the Western world or to all mankind. Others object that the document is not clear and specific enough. But nearly all the divergent critics assume that the Charter as it stands is basically right and points the way to a better future.

It is precisely that assumption which needs to be examined. Now that the United Nations have taken the offensive in a number of arenas of battle and the shape of victory is beginning to emerge, such an examination becomes especially urgent. Does the Atlantic Charter—does the world-view implicit in that document—offer a new approach to the solution of international problems?

We all know by this time that our military victory in 1918 was meaningless because we were unable to implement it with a workable peace. Military victory in this war too, will be meaningless if we do not begin immediately to clarify principles on which a workable world order can be built.

The underlying idea of the Atlantic Charter is expressed in its third paragraph:

"They (the President of the United States and the British Prime Minister) respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of govern-

ment under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them."

This is a reiteration of the old doctrine of self-determination, upon which we built the world of 1919 which crumbled so miserably and so quickly. The Atlantic Charter again proclaims the right of every nation to choose the form of government it desires—or the form imposed upon it by a ruthless minority. It bows abjectly before the fetish of "national sovereignty" with all that it implies: unlimited terror and organization for aggression within any nation so inclined; non-intervention in military epidemics until too late; blind isolationism and neutrality in a world made small by science and made interdependent by industry.

The Atlantic Charter promises to divide the world into more and yet more nations, each of them absolutely independent of the others, unlimited in its sovereign right to do mischief. It accepts the right of any country to be as undemocratic and totalitarian as it pleases, a law unto itself. It fails to recognize and to implement larger sovereignties that transcend national sovereignties, human rights that take precedence over national rights.

Self-determination is no guarantee of independence. The sad fate of the small nations set up at Versailles proves that. Even before their freedom was finally expunged by the rampant self-determined nationalism of Nazi Germany they could maintain the illusion of independence only by accepting the patronage and protection of one of the powerful nations. Independence in its absolute form produces only fear, mistrust, conflict, slavery—because it penalizes pacific nations and gives the right of way to aggressors and trouble-makers among countries.

II

It is unfortunate that in dealing with social and political problems we have

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not yet escaped the dialectic method of analysis, the method of the ancient Greeks that arbitrarily establishes exclusive opposite notions—good and bad, heat and cold, dark and light. Science, of course, has long ago discarded the procedure. It recognizes that these “opposites” are in fact the same phenomenon, differing in degree.

Of all the “exclusive opposites” which dominate our political thinking, the most dangerously misleading are those that assume “freedom” to be the opposite of “compulsion,” “dependence” the opposite of “independence.”

In our individual lives in an organized democratic society, we are free men only because there are a great many things we are *forbidden* to do and a great many things we are *compelled* to do. We are forbidden to make a nuisance of ourselves, to break laws, to put pet ideas into practice if they hurt the community. We are compelled to observe hygienic regulations, to pay taxes, to do military service. If each of us were entirely free to do whatever he wanted, we would all live in a state of permanent terror. The individual freedom and security we cherish in a democracy are ours only because strict limitations on freedom of behavior are prescribed and enforced by organized society.

If all compulsion were removed we would have not freedom but anarchy and insecurity. We had a mild approximation of such a society on the American frontier not so long ago. Anyone who has ever seen a “western” movie knows the joys of a free community where bad men gain control by force and terrorize the righteous. We are familiar with the efforts of honest individuals in such a society to band together and establish law, backed by the armed compulsion of sheriffs and deputies and sometimes the Army.

The synthesis of freedom and compulsion long recognized in the organization of our social life is still ignored in the field of international relations. So far as nations are concerned, we still believe in freedom in its absolute form. We make a fetish of “sovereignty” and shrink from

imposing limitations on a country in the exercise of its free will, regardless of the consequences to other members of the worldwide community. The nations of this earth still exist in the state of anarchy that once characterized the western American frontier. Each of them goes as fully armed as he can afford. All are ready to “shoot it out” when their honor or interests are at stake. The “good” nations depend on moral suasion because they are fearful of infringing on the “freedom” of trouble-makers—until finally obliged to band together and use force to subdue “bad” nations run amuck.

We cannot possibly prevent new world conflicts until we temper independence with law, until we acknowledge that freedom—for nations as for individuals—implies legal brakes on their free will, the sacrifice of some national prerogatives as the price for safeguarding the rest.

III

The ideal of national independence and national sovereignty was born as a wholesome reaction against monarchy and colonial exploitation. At its inception it was a significant forward impulse in the story of human progress. The American Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution, following on the development of representative institutions in England, were tremendous incentives to other peoples to seek independence and sovereignty.

The climax of this process was reached in the peace treaties of 1919, when more nations than ever before became wholly independent and sovereign. Twenty years later all those proud sovereignties were trampled and bloody. Why? Because the political system established in 1919 was an apotheosis of Eighteenth Century political ideals in total contradiction to the realities of the Twentieth Century.

Independence, sovereignty, nationality as the basis of states were wonderful achievements at a time when the industrial revolution had not yet begun, when people lived largely under rural conditions, when communications were slow and every large territory was more or less economi-

cally self-contained. Under those conditions national sovereignty was indeed a great democratic ideal.

What, exactly, did this ideal mean to the Eighteenth Century philosophers and writers who championed it? It meant that sovereign rights were to be transferred from one man, from the sovereign, to all men, to the people. It was clearly stated that sovereignty rested in the community—*la souverainete reside dans la communaute*. "The Nation" was the widest horizon conceivable as a self-supporting unit. An advance of "nationalism" at that stage meant, in the first place, the enlargement of the society, the merging of small groups into large ones.

That interpretation no longer applies today, when some hundred sovereign states exist in an industrialized and interdependent world, when it takes less time to travel from continent to continent than it did then to go from Lyons to Paris or from Boston to Philadelphia. Because the horizons of the community have been extended by the industrial revolution until they embrace the whole globe, sovereignty no longer resides in the community at all. It is exercised in unlimited and absolute style by segments of the community we call nations—an absolute contradiction to the original conception of democratic sovereignty.

In short, where the ideal of the nation in the Eighteenth Century meant a broader basis for sovereignty, today it means a narrower basis. The word is the same; the meaning has changed. If we want to lay the foundation for a new epoch of human progress, this conception of sovereignty must be revised. The idea of national independence must be interpreted in conformity with the living facts of this day, rather than inherited and outlived fetishes.

The writer is aware that such notions run against the grain of accustomed attitudes. To doubt the eternal verity of the Eighteenth Century national ideal sounds "unpatriotic". Nationalism has become as deeply rooted as the tribal emotions of primitive times. Its defenders

are intolerant guardians of a dogmatic religion. Nevertheless, the exalted cult of the nation is the greatest obstacle to life, liberty and happiness today. It must somehow be made clear to the mass of mankind that restrictions on national independence, the limitation of sovereignty by law, has become the sole guarantee of enduring peace. The new ideals—international law and supranational sovereignties—are fully consistent with local patriotism, pride in one's own country, ambition for one's own country, just as love for one's family, pride in one's city, personal ambition are fully consistent with the limited law-bolstered freedom of the individual in a democratic society.

IV

The crisis of the Twentieth Century came in 1914 and its end is still far off. It is the climactic conflict between nationalism and industrialism.

These two currents, which have dominated history since the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, are fundamentally opposed to one another. Nationalism is a process of differentiation. Industrialism is a process of integration. Industrialism—reaching out for raw stuffs in far parts of the globe, distributing its products throughout the world, dependent on freedom of exchange—seeks to break down the walls erected by nationalism. For about one hundred years it was possible for both processes to develop without catastrophic friction. But the limit of compromise and adjustment, the saturation point, was reached at the beginning of the present century. The explosion came in 1914 and is continuing in 1943; unless resolved by a bold renunciation of national sovereignty in its extreme forms, further explosions must come at ever shorter intervals.

By this time the clash of nationalism and industrialism is so titantic that it must end either in the victory of nationalism or its dethronement. If the nationalist ideal wins out (and this may happen despite the defeat of the Axis), it will put brakes on industrial development, push back the human race to a lower standard

of living and to primitive existence under autocratic regimes, casting the attainments of human progress as sacrifices on the altar of the modern goddess: the nation. The dethronement of the goddess can be accomplished only by setting up a worldwide political society within which nations, large and small, would for the first time in our epoch, have the possibility of enjoying true independence: the kind of freedom buttressed by law, autonomy in local matters, collaboration in larger affairs, the observance of elementary "political hygiene" at home to prevent the epidemics of war. Once the issue is clearly recognized, there can be no hesitation on the part of the democracies.

The meaning of the crisis of the Twentieth Century is that our shrinking planet must to some reasonable degree be brought under unified control. Our task, our duty, in this crucial period of transition is to institute the unified control in a democratic fashion. First of all we must proclaim the principles. We must re-educate the peoples of the planet, in order to loosen the hold of outlived ideals. To attempt to organize the world again on the pattern of 1919 does not make sense. It would turn our present sacrifices into a mockery and make the next war inevitable.

Many people aware of the weakness of the 1919 system and the futility of a league of nations without force are now fostering the idea of an international police force. That idea, in fact, is also implicit in the Atlantic Charter. That is just another illusion. An international police force is inevitable and unavoidable. But alone it is inadequate and will not solve the problem. A police force can be effective and useful only if it carries out the decisions of courts of law. Police without law lacks moral justification and in the long run cannot function so that the peoples against whom it acts will accept its authority without revolt.

The cardinal point in any organization on a worldwide democratic basis must be the introduction of the principle of *law*. That is the only foundation for social life in a modern state—the foundation

must be extended to the relationship between nations. We cannot rely on men's promises not to murder, on their pledges not to cheat. Neither can we regulate international relationships by mutual pledges, promises and treaty agreements.

Brute force will always be pitted against law until we accept compulsions, limitations on actions, and an organized power with the legal use of force. The old system crumbled because a peaceful collaboration of "sovereign" nations on the basis of mutual goodwill is an impossibility. The independence of a country, as of an individual, does not rest solely on the freedom of its own actions but on the degree to which the freedom of action of other nations may infringe on its own independence. The essence of freedom for nations therefore comes down to regulations of their *interdependence*.

Peace is not a period when it happens that nobody is shooting. Peace is order based on law. The operation of force, provided it is based on law and equality of peoples under such law, is just as indispensable to the conception of international peace as prisons and executions are indispensable to social order.

V

The need now is for a Declaration of *Interdependence*, a Charter of Twentieth Century principles upon which a lasting world peace can in time be erected. It will be to the United Nations of the future what the Declaration of Independence was in 1776 to the colonies which later formed the United States. The conception must precede the birth. We must make the beginning now by proclaiming the principles of interdependence. The Declaration of 1776 did not create the United States of America. Independence had to be fought for on the battlefield; and after that it took thirteen years of painful gestation before the new nation was born in the Constitution. To create the truly Interdependent United Nations will take an even longer period. Now is the time to begin.

The tragic fact, however, is that we are

not heading or thinking in that direction. The pronouncements of individual leaders of the United Nations with few exceptions presuppose a return to the old pattern of absolute national sovereignties. The Atlantic Charter—the only document stating our aims in this struggle—accepts unquestioningly the anachronistic ideals of nationalism. It does not point the way to integration, to a closer unification of nations, to a system that would embrace all nations in ever larger and larger units. On the contrary, it again asserts that each nationality has the right to its own sovereign state and to its own form of government, no matter how anti-democratic. It again gives some nation, in another decade, the right to set up another Hitler regime if it so wishes, because—let this be quite clear—there can be no intervention until too late even if we possess an international police force so long as we base our international life on the notion of full national sovereignty.

The point is not that the Atlantic Charter lacks clarity—it is all too clear—but that its principles are basically false, and will lead us back into the morass of war. It is a recapitulation of the utopian Wilsonian ideas, which we have seen in

operation between the two world wars. It is folly to imagine that they will operate otherwise after the present war, because they remain at variance with the realities of the industrial epoch in which we live.

The Atlantic Charter must be seriously reconsidered. Its two authors, in particular, must ponder the perpetuation of nationalism, implicit and explicit in that document. To endure, the new democratic world order must be built upon a rock and not upon sand. We need to lay the foundations now of a democratic world order that will make intervention a duty, whenever the laws of the established order are violated. We need a new interpretation of "the nation" and of sovereignty—one that gives all nationalities total autonomy and full sovereign rights in their own cultural, national and local problems, but not beyond that. Only a division of sovereignties—reserving national sovereignty for national matters and international sovereignty for international matters—can give us the framework of a world constitution which will express again the democratic thought that sovereignty "resides in the community."

Towards a Greater Freedom

By ERNEST BARKER

THE British Empire is a growth of more than three hundred years. Each state of the growth was intended; the whole result was not. Each geographical part was incorporated by design: the whole mass was formed without planned design or previous resolution. That is the way in which things "grow" in the course of history—if we may use the word "growth" of human doings, which can never be strictly a matter of growth.

When things have grown in this way, and we find that we have builded better

than we knew, we have to take stock: we have to consider the whole result: we have to enquire what it means—and, still more, what it can be *made to mean*. That is what has been happening to us who are members of the British Empire: we are "taking stock." It is an old process, which may be said to have begun over a hundred years ago, in the beginning of the reign of Queen Victoria, with the publication of the Durham Report of 1839 on the problem of colonial self-government.

It is a process which was speeded up, a quarter of a century ago, about the year 1917, when the idea of Dominion

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