

CURRENT MAGAZINES

THE PERILS OF A "SOFT PEACE"

The Christian Attitude to the War and the Peace—The Bishop of Gloucester, in the *Quarterly*.

Liberation and After—Editorial, in the *Round Table*.

From Chaos to Ordered Freedom—Edward Benes, in the *Fortnightly*.

AS we approach April 25, and think of the gathering of the United Nations fixed for that date in San Francisco, most of us no doubt are beset by a combination of hopes and fears, with alternate impulses of high confidence and painful misgiving. Will the leaders in conference this time do a better job than was done twenty-six years ago at Versailles? It was not a "soft" peace that was then made with the defeated German enemy, and one has sometimes heard the insinuation that its severities were the provoking cause of the Second World War. In view of the likelihood that this will be used again, as an argument for softening the rigor of our "dictated Peace", it may be useful to follow the lead of numerous magazines, British and American, which have lately reopened that old debate.

What warnings, if any, should the victors in 1945 draw from recollection of what was done by the victors in 1919?

I

It is altogether false to say that Hitler rose to power through the appeal he was able to make to Germany's passionate resentment of "the Versailles Dictate".

For ten years his effort to stir revolutionary rage on this issue had been ineffective. There was indeed, for a time, a murderous group that took revenge on one after another of the Germans who had either signed the Peace Agreement or worked for its acceptance. Erzberger and Rathenau were victims of the temper in Germany whose activities have there done so much to make the name of "patriot" suggest what is lowest rather than what is highest in human nature. But the gang of assassins operating here and there in the first years of the Republic evoked no general sympathy, and Hitler's early tours of

speech-making on the injustices of the *Treaty of Versailles* were observed with general amusement. Not for ten years of agitation did he begin to be taken seriously by the German people as a whole: by that time the chief severities of the Treaty had been either cancelled or enormously reduced, and the men by whose efforts the relief had been achieved were not of his circle: they were his bitter and contemptuous antagonists.

How, indeed, could a German audience have been impressed during the nineteen-twenties by rhetoric denouncing the settlement at Versailles because it was "no Treaty, but a Dictate"? What war in history was ever terminated by victors and vanquished meeting on equal terms, after the fashion which our pseudo-intellectuals and pseudo-humanitarians apparently now recommend, to arrange "conditions mutually advantageous"? When had Germany, at the close of a victorious war, thought of any settlement except one she would herself "dictate"? Memories of the *Treaty of Frankfort* in which the Franco-Prussian War had culminated, of the *Treaty of Brest-Litovsk* with Soviet Russia, of the *Treaty of Bucharest* with Rumania, would recur at once to German listeners as the settlement at Versailles was attacked for its one-sided character. This, they would reflect, was far from the first time the word "treaty" had borne just the sense by which the orator was so inflamed.

It was the great Economic Depression that gave Hitler his chance, as depressions always bring opportunity to a leader of revolt against "the powers that be". With catastrophic suddenness, after the break in the New York Market in 1929, vast American short-term loans, on which German industry had sprung again to life, were recalled. The consequence was a closing of factory and mill doors against tens of thousands of workers, and it needs no expert in political science to predict at such a conjuncture the rallying of a multitude round some chief who will denounce "the Government" for what has befallen them. If there had been no sudden onset of hard times, there would have been no meteoric rise of Hitler, and the propaganda against the *Treaty of Versailles* would have continued to raise only a smile. On the other hand, given the sudden hard times, somebody would have led an insurgent Germany though Hitler had never been heard of.

There is indeed much to be learned about "how not to do it" from faults of our method after the First World War. But the pro-German propagandist, already cautiously reappearing, with an argument that the Nazi movement was produced by our harsh

treatment of a prostrate foe, has been named by Lord Vansittart purveyor of "the greatest swindle in history". The chapter so entitled in *Lessons of My Life* is a memorable exposure, opportune just now for remembrance.

II

By a "soft" peace is meant, primarily, a peace which would leave to the German *Reich* the means of return, after a time, to the activities of a military Great Power in Europe. This is the risk which must be removed, not in the spirit of selfish and cruel victors, but in a spirit resolutely humane. At whatever cost to other values, such freedom from fear must be secured. In the words of Lord Vansittart's challenge to the pseudo-humanitarianism of the Bishop of Chichester, we must exclude the possibility of a third German revel over "the broken bodies of the young and the broken hearts of the old".

A misgiving in the minds of many, who recall their disappointment over the "war criminals" affair in 1919, is lest there may again be no justice. They fear that leaders of the Allies may be "soft" once more. I very much doubt whether those whose colossal guilt is unquestionable, and whom everyone of decent moral sense would desire to see made a public example by punishment, will ever come into our hands. A trial (or, as some gaily suggest, summary execution without trial) of thousands of subordinate German officials, "on the very spot where their horrible deeds were done", would lend itself, especially when passions are so high, to many a miscarriage of justice. To fix proportions of responsibility would so often be a hopeless undertaking, and the sheer enjoyment of "revenge", which is sometimes forecast in language too like that of Nazi or Fascist, is not, surely, any part of our serious purpose. What one should keep in mind as the real peril of a soft peace is that disablement of the German *Reich* may not be so complete and so lasting as to exclude the chance of military recovery. Mr. Sumner Welles and Mr. Henry Morgenthau have schemes meant in this way to be adequate, the former proposing to dissolve the *Reich* into its original mutually antagonistic separate States, the other to extinguish the whole industrial life of Germany so that only an agricultural country, incapable of developing a war machine, would remain. Of these proposals an objection to the first is that it could provide no assurance against later coalition of the German States, without frustrating those legitimate racial

affinities which have been found so valuable in human progress. The second recommends truly desperate recourse to obliterating a vast development of industrial effort, because we can think of no way to insure ourselves against its perverse use! Surely there is some other possibility? In Gladstone's famous language of hopefulness, may we not set to work again on the task, assuming that "the resources of civilization are not yet exhausted"?

III

Whatever other method is available, it must be such as prevents the peace from being a "soft" one, and, at the risk of wearing out the patience of readers to whom this seems obvious, one must meet again the protest of publicists such as Miss Dorothy Thompson who seem bent on another "appeasement".

Their assumption seems constantly to be that this war can and should be terminated as previous wars were terminated: wars in which a misunderstanding between peoples fundamentally similar had been cleared up, after much deplorable suffering on both sides, so that they could come together again for a new start. Surely the present case is not in the least like that. "Misunderstanding", "purposes and principles fundamentally similar"—is it possible to misstate more grossly than in such terms as these the relation between Germany and the Allies? There is indeed a German minority, but for any difference it has made, there might as well have been none. Unlike French, unlike Americans, unlike British, dissentient Germans seem temperamentally incapable of revolution. I see no reason to suppose that this element would prove more influential at another time than did the Social Democrats who obsequiously voted the war credits in 1914 (despite all their previous record of vociferous anti-militarism), or the anti-Nazis who have been carried off to torture in concentration camps during the present war. All honour to these martyrs. But the men directing a revived German *Reich* would be, so far as we have any means to form an opinion, of the same sort who either inflicted such tortures or watched acquiescently while others did so. There seems to be abundant proof that if Hitler had prevailed against the Allies in the field, every method he used either at home or abroad would have been endorsed by all but a helpless, insignificant minority of the German people. And this minority, like the one which made an honest effort twenty-five years ago to fulfil the requirements of the Weimar Constitution, would have no

chance at all under the conditions provided by a "soft" peace. Its leaders would soon meet the doom of Erzberger and Rathenau.

Most satisfactory, then, is the announcement that at Yalta the allied leaders agreed on division of Germany, after surrender, into areas to be occupied respectively by British, by Russian and by American garrisons. For how long? The occupation, I think, must last until there is ground to believe that a new and trustworthy spirit inspires the German people. This means a very long time indeed.

IV

One objection, occasionally heard, against the scheme is truly horrible. It runs as follows: "Put no garrisons there. Leave the defeated and disarmed Germans to proper handling by Poles, Netherlanders, Belgians, Czechs, Russians." That is a mood whose development one has cause to fear, and against which security is wanted. Like Italians in Abyssinia after Mussolini's collapse, Germans may well implore the victorious Allies to establish garrisons in their country.

The project will indeed be hard to carry out. Garrison duty will be tedious and distasteful—probably more so to British and American than to Russian troops. Even German exiles on this continent, whose anti-Nazi spirit is beyond suspicion, have drawn a warning from German experience in "occupied" countries. In Norway, for example, and Czechoslovakia, and the Netherlands. It is pointed out that the Underground in these countries proved too resourceful for effective suppression, despite the ruthlessness of the measures which a German governor was always ready to use. If, say the exiles, the Norwegian people, only three millions all told, could frustrate with such success a garrison certainly not impeded in dealing with them by considerations of mercy, what chance would there be for the agents of the United Nations, yielding so easily to the handicap of compassion, in the discipline of a people at least twenty-five times as numerous? A like argument is drawn from the ineffectual effort of Russians, extending over a century and a half, to extinguish national spirit among the Poles. Is it not acknowledged, and does not the acknowledgment find just now increasing confirmation, that Russia's repressive policy in Poland served but to stimulate the nationalism it was meant to quench?

This objection surely omits to take into account a crucial difference between the examples it cites and the case to which it applies the general principle elicited from them. Garrisons,

according to the Plan I have in mind, would be established and strategically placed in Germany, not for the purpose of extinguishing German national spirit, but to render that spirit impotent for another attack on Germany's neighbors, and the record of Russia's relations with Poland for a century and a half shows that such a method can be thoroughly effective. Germans, like Poles, might nourish, generation after generation, a bitter national resentment. But if they are rendered as powerless to threaten again the peace of Central Europe as the Poles have been, the job will have been indeed a success. Nor can any serious deterrent be found in the persistence of Norwegian sabotage. The "patriots" in Norway have kept up their underground war because Germany has been locked in desperate conflict with Great Britain and the United States, very much as the Irish insurgents in 1916 took advantage of Great Britain's situation at a dark period of the First World War. How long would they have persisted if a Germany triumphant over the Allies had secured leisure to attend with thoroughness and swiftness to Norwegian "pacification"?

There is no room for doubt that by placing garrisons in a completely disarmed Germany, assigning such spells of disagreeable duty with fairness to successive bodies of troops from different countries, the Allies can eliminate danger of *revanche* as long as they keep the system in operation. No doubt there will be an occasional murder. But there will be no "war of revenge". By this time we know what sort of equipment is needed for a great war. Experience has taught us at least that. And of such equipment Germany, under the Plan I mean, would be altogether deprived.

V

The industrial resources requisite for war are requisite also for the arts of peace. How is such military disablement of Germany to be reconciled with that Clause in the *Atlantic Charter* (Point IV of the Eight) which promises promotion rather than hindrance of peaceful industry in all countries, whether victors or vanquished?

One reply, especially favored by those who from the first detested the Clause in question, is that the *Atlantic Charter* is obsolete. They quote exultantly a sentence (torn cunningly from its context) in which Mr. Churchill excluded the defeated Powers from any contractual rights under that famous document. Many times it has been reiterated by the leaders—in

London, in Washington, in Moscow—that the *Atlantic Charter* still expresses with the utmost fidelity the principles which will govern the Peace Terms. It surely did not need to be said that the first requirement of such terms, consistently with which all other provisions must be drawn and within which they must be limited, is adequate safeguard against another German attack. If any of the class all too familiar whom Dean Inge has called “dishonest intellectuals” pretend to think this qualification negates the whole value of the Clause, let them examine the treaties which Germany has been wont to impose on a defeated Power. These will show the spirit against which the leaders at that meeting-place “somewhere in the Northern Atlantic” pledged themselves in the summer of 1941.

While the *Charter* was no contract offered to the enemy, but merely an announcement (meant to correct the lies of enemy leaders) as to what the victors intended to do, it still binds us not only as an obligation of honour but as a plain acknowledgment of what we accept as a duty. It carries, as Mr. Churchill once put it, the authority of “our customs and our nature” —set by our inheritance of Christian civilization. Those to whom Christian principles are (in the language of Hitler’s chief agent for such propagandism) no more than “the myth of the twentieth century” might relieve themselves at a stroke from this or any other moral obstacle in the way of what they want, in their own interest, to do. But no such escape is open to us, nor do we desire it. Our true problem is how to combine effective safeguards against war with effective stimulation in Germany of the peaceful arts, and surely once more our experience of these last years suggests how to solve it.

We have learned to apply methods of *rationing*, of *priority*, of *government surveillance over industrial effort*. With garrisons stationed at such centres as serve for effective control, it ought to be easily within our power to furnish such resources—oil, for example—as are needed for peaceful industry on a coupon basis, with vigilant inspection to show the purposes for which they are being applied. How much will be needed for specified “legitimate” industry, is not beyond one’s power to forecast. That nothing can be trusted to the honor or to the word of a people whose leaders have taught them to rely first and foremost on perfidy, is obvious. But we can put it out of their power by adequate (though of course often disagreeable and always disrespectful surveillance) to perpetrate again such frauds as those of the “pocket” battleship and the “purely

commercial" airplane. How long such method shall last, must depend on our evidence that some degree of trustworthiness has been developed in the German nature. Again one feels that to say so is to indicate a rather distant date.

"You cannot repudiate your debts without destroying your future credit"—a simple maxim in personal relations. It has still, apparently, to be taught in national affairs to "the most intellectual of Central European peoples". In time they will acquire it. But the process of learning will be a humiliation.

VI

From much that is being said and written, one would conclude that the question of a soft or a hard Peace means primarily the question of adequate punishment for "war criminals". Many times has stern resolve on this matter been repeated by the leaders of the United Nations. No mercy to be shown to the men at whose direction such infamous cruelties as the historian had never before to record or to describe brought still further disgrace these last years even upon the name of Germany! There is much popular misgiving, however, lest this pledge meet with the fate of a predecessor—the corresponding assurance to the British public in the last months of 1918. Already one observes here and there in the press a curious combination of pleas, the product of minds as remote from each other as it is possible to conceive, but bent from very different motives upon the same purpose of excusing the war criminals. On one side we hear how horrible is a project of revenge, and how the forgiveness of enemies is a Christian obligation. On the other side it is pressed upon us that "international law", for which we have professed ourselves so zealous, nowhere recognizes the right of any belligerent to hold individuals in a defeated country personally responsible for the acts of war in which they took official part. Seldom, surely, have the morbid extravagances of religious and of legal fanaticism served thus to reinforce each other.

But the plain man will not easily be persuaded that there is any legal or any religious obstacle fit to divert the course of justice, once he can lay hands on German commanders who buried Poles alive, on those who massacred the whole population—men, women and children—of Czech or Russian villages, and on those whose contrivances of torture made the Nazi concentration camp of the middle twentieth century a scene of which it is exasperating even to read. If either international

law or Christian moral tradition would stop us in doing here so plain a duty, it is not the duty which will be rendered thus uncertain to the honest conscience. What Carlyle once called "apotheosis of attorneyism" will be swept out of our path, with little concern even to argue against it. And our obtrusive theologians will be reminded that true Christian forgiveness is shown in mercy to those who have wronged ourselves, not in preaching generosity to the victims of wrong by which the preacher himself has suffered scarcely at all. The misfortunes of our friends, said Burke, are such as most of us can endure with fortitude.

There is indeed nothing to be said in justification of the sheer lust for vengeance, the cherished hope of exulting in the spectacle of enemy sufferings, that has become here and there vocal in the allied countries. It is intelligible enough: everyone who knows anything of what has been called "the sad pathology of the soul" knew that it would develop. So far as it has gone, we have cause for shame that the Nazi devastation of cities has been followed by such devastation of character: it is an echo of the voice of Goebbels, of Himmler, of Goering, that one hears as often as the British or American or Canadian atmosphere is defiled by expression of gleeful hope that German children will be starved as the children of other countries have been starved by German design. Pictures of the three-fold programme, "slavery, sterilization, extermination", which the Nazi propagandist machine constantly presents as the project of the Allies, have called forth from our leaders counter-statement after statement (from the *Atlantic Charter* in 1941 to Mr. Churchill's speech in parliament of a few weeks ago). We know that the wild professions of delight in infliction of pain are for British or American or Canadian people but momentary explosions of passion at an hour such as this; we know how remote from the realities of their disposition, if the time came to act, would be the account so unfair to themselves which their present language conveys. But every such outburst is disastrous. It is so readily quotable by the enemy. And enemy listeners are so quick to mistake the language of passing anger in another country for the expression of a settled mood which they so well know in their own.

Not because it would fail to provide what Bentham used to call "vindictive satisfactions" is a soft peace to be deprecated. The objection to it is that it would be full of peril for the future. It could be justified only if one had reasonable ground to think

(1) that Germany would next time keep her word, and (2) that she would respond better to generous than to stern treatment. It would surely be hard to suggest assumptions on which, more than on these, experience has shown that it would be absurd to run risk for one's self or disgraceful to run risk for others.

But though the mere joy of vengeance is a mood not fit to be countenanced, still less to be promoted, there is good reason to demand that the master criminals of the Nazi and the Fascist world be visited with such punishment as will provide a public spectacle. It should serve in some measure to undo the demoralizing effect of a long public condonation granted them by critics abroad, and withdrawn only when their crimes began to threaten the critic's own country. Untold harm was done by the British, the French and the American press which had found abundant justification for *Duce* and *Fuehrer* while their misdeeds did not affect Britain, France or America, and which all of a sudden changed a "merely political" into an "intensely moral" issue when the dictators were found to draw no distinction in favor of these unusually privileged countries.

Public execution of the arch-scoundrels might well serve to revoke those profoundly demoralizing articles and speeches by which, one hopes, a later generation of historical students will be amazed and shocked, as they examine much in the press of the allied countries during the nineteen-thirties. The advice of the Archbishop of York, that any British soldier, sailor or airman who has a chance to kill Hitler should be authorized to do so without waiting for a trial seems to me to invert in every respect both the wisdom and the humanity which the case requires. What matters about the wretched *Duce* or *Fuehrer* personally? He would beyond doubt, even if he went scot-free so far as the Allies are concerned, have no chance to plan any further world crime, as all his ingenuity would be absorbed in evading the vengeance of his own countrymen. Either of these two might, so far as risk is concerned, be left—like Shakespeare's *Wolsey*—to his "meditations". But an act of punitive justice which would have less than no value if done secretly on individual caprice would provide a splendid object-lesson if done publicly and by international authority. It would constitute impressive recantation of the foul doctrine circulated in those dark years under the prestige of so many influential guides—that crime by men in high places is excusable, or even admirable, in proportion to its success.

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