

EAST EUROPE'S NEW YORK CHARTER

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BETWEEN the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean there is a belt of territory inhabited by a number of smaller nations: Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Rumanians, Greeks and others. Some of them built their independent national states during the nineteenth century; some gained their independence, and were free to make themselves loose from the semi-feudal empires to which they previously belonged, only after Woodrow Wilson's principles were made effective after 1918.

There was a period of two decades between the two World Wars. Eastern Europe lived through serious and difficult times, as most of the world did, but it also showed its determination to live its own life. All the independent states have proved that they were natural and vital, and not artificial, constructions. It was exactly those "new" states that stood up to the Nazi aggressor. It was those new and small states that wrote an everlasting page into the history of our times: Czechoslovakia, Poland, Greece, Jugoslavia.

There was a strong trend toward collaboration and unification in Eastern Europe in the post-war period. It was a natural desire, based on similar social and economic structure, similar needs and wants, similar beliefs and battles, similar tradition and outlook on the future that bound those countries together. In the minds of many Bulgarian, Jugoslav, Czechoslovak and other statesmen and intellectuals, the idea of confederation had found place. A confederation of free peoples, and not a conglomerate of subjugated peoples, as was the character of the Hapsburg Central European Empire. The idea grew, and found its numerous supporters. But the process had to be slow and painful for many reasons, one of them being the acute international situation and the readiness of Nazi Germany to prevent any kind of system and order in Eastern Europe which might oppose her *Drang nach Osten*. Still, two regional systems were attempted, the *Little Entente* and the *Balkan Entente*. They both had many difficulties, and many blunders were committed during the time of their work, but they both sprang

from that powerful desire of those small nations to live in peace and to build a better common future.

Then came the war, the Nazi invasion of Central Europe and the Balkans. Those countries that fought the aggressor formed their governments-in-exile; those that submitted became, willingly or not, members of the Axis.

Those in exile (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Greece), having their formal governments in London, continued the fight, with means at their disposal, against the Axis. They are allies of Great Britain and her allies in this gigantic war that is being fought for the principles of democracy, international decency, and social and economic security.

Common experience, the fate of their lands, a common will to work for a better and safer future have united the governments-in-exile in their desire to come closer together and try to shape a common policy. The first result of this sincere attempt was the declaration of Poland and Czechoslovakia, signed in London on November 11, 1940, after previous discussions between the two respective governments, headed by Sikorski and Benes.

Then, on November 5, 1941, at the time of the Conference of the International Labor Organization held in New York, a *Declaration of Common Aims* was signed by the representatives of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Greece. It is undoubtedly an act of first historical significance, and, should a confederation of Central and East European states be made real, November 5 will mark the beginning of the first chapter of a new book.

It was in a spirit of democratic good-will, understanding, sincere insight, and a deep concern for the future that the Declaration was conceived. Its beginnings were a spontaneous affair; it was generated down on the floor of the MacMillin Theatre at Columbia University, where delegations exchanged views in a most informal way. It is significant that the framework, the Conference of the International Labor Organization, was a real democratic parliament of the world, a place where responsible minds of the United States, Belgium, Great Britain, Canada, Poland, Mexico, South Africa, Greece, Argentina, India and so many other countries engaged in discussion and planning.

The Declaration was signed on November 5, after the preparatory work of the delegations of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Greece, headed by Jan Stanczyk, Jan Masaryk,

Sava Kosanovich, and Aristide Dimitratos, the chief government delegates, respectively. It should be noted that strong support came from the British side, in the first place from Clement R. Atlee, Lord Privy Seal and chief of the Government delegation, and from George Gibson, vice-president of the British Trades Union Congress.

The Declaration in itself is a document composed of four main parts. The first part describes the régime of occupation and oppression that exists at present in Eastern Europe. The second part emphasizes the allied effort and the part of the populations of the four countries in this war. The third part, of which I reproduce Points Five and Six, asks for solidarity with the democratic world, and hopes for a victory of the principles embodied in the *Atlantic Charter*:

V. The countries of Central Europe and the Balkans reaffirm their profound devotion to the democratic principle, and express their solidarity with the great democracies.

VI. We express the firm conviction that the peace that will follow victory will bring to our peoples, as well as to all peoples throughout the world, enjoyment of the four freedoms defined in the Roosevelt-Churchill declaration.

Part Four is possibly the most significant one, because it sets foundations for common action in the field of social and economic reconstruction after the war. It also envisages a common destiny of the new bloc of nations in a true European new order of democracy, tolerance, economic and social progress and security:

We hope that the end of this war, which was forced upon us, will save a hundred million inhabitants of Central Europe and the Balkans from their present state of wretchedness by assuring them the possibility of stable employment, guaranteed by reconstruction and by the development of their industries, agriculture, and merchant marine, and that those peoples will be included within the sphere of international exchanges of goods and services. Special attention goes to the masses of the peasant population, and to their social and economic standards, because it is on those elements that peace and security in that region depend. It is in this spirit that our present joint declaration has been conceived, and it is in this same spirit of frank friendly collaboration that we conceive the part to be played by our countries in the reconstruction of a new Europe, enjoying a stable peace, with freedom and prosperity.

It was significant that the Declaration was signed on American soil. It was the United States and their President Woodrow Wilson, who had such an important rôle in the building of post-war Eastern Europe. It is America which is again so vitally interested in a constructive peace in that part of the world. The engineers of the Declaration were conscious that they addressed themselves partly to the American nation, and that they wanted to base their aims on the policies adopted in the *Atlantic Charter*. It was the American press that replied to that with words of encouragement and hope. On November 5, 1941, Anne O'Hare McCormick wrote in an editorial in the *New York Times* about a federation of 110,000,000 people, and under the title "First Outlines of a New Great Power."

It now rests with those responsible for the leadership of the four governments-in-exile to continue with the effort and make real the ideas of the *New York Declaration*. For the time being, one can work but on a blueprint, but blueprints become real things if there is enthusiasm, imagination, and power behind them. As it is now, the Declaration shows a way toward a better future of the masses of the peasant population of Eastern Europe.