

What Do We Want?

al-Balagh, 15 March 1945

It is said that the affairs of foreign policy have, these days, become matters of such gravity that opinion leaders ought not to neglect alerting peoples to them, and helping them understand whatever they might contain — matters bearing on their near or distant future in ways that cannot be corrected except through great effort and hardship, and a great many sacrifices that could be avoided altogether, if peoples faced their own affairs with insight and deliberation, if their leaders and statesmen spoke to them candidly, honestly, and sincerely.

Those who say this point, as evidence, to the constant, abundant discussion now taking place among the peoples of great and small states alike. Talk of the San Francisco Conference never stops in England and America, nor in the liberated European countries whose news reaches us in some semblance of order. Nothing proves this better than certain news published this very morning, on American speakers' efforts to promote the San Francisco Conference in cities and villages, and among students and schoolchildren; or the daily French radio broadcasts meant to inform the French people of the problems to be studied at the San Francisco Conference, and to convince them, and other peoples besides, of the French government's own position — its declared refusal to bind itself to any commitment except through insight, study, and genuine conviction. The French have gone so far in this that suspicions have arisen about them, forcing their own ambassador to the United States to deny the rumours circulating in certain political circles that France wishes to lead the liberated countries in opposition to the three great powers.

Nor is anything more revealing than what was published in America the day before yesterday, some of it reaching us yesterday: that Belgian public opinion has no faith in the San Francisco Conference, expects no good from it, and regards it instead as a gathering in which the representatives of the three great powers will lecture a group of minor children on social and political manners. Two things have driven the Belgians to this deep pessimism: first, the three great powers' own conduct over the Polish problem; second, the disappointment that has settled in the liberated peoples' own hearts since their liberation — they had confidently expected their freedom to be restored to them whole, and their prosperity restored to them in full, the moment the Germans were

driven from their lands. Instead, they look about and find their freedom still bound by wartime conditions, and find that a considerable distance still separates them from prosperity — indeed, from what would simply sustain their own basic livelihood.

If this is the state of the liberated European countries, where the war still rages upon their own soil, or close to their own borders, and if their own proximity to the battlefields does not prevent them from discussing these matters with such freedom and such candour, then it seems to me we ourselves might well speak with just as much freedom and candour as these peoples do. American statesmen — always inclined toward liberty — have shown their own eagerness to make the plan to be studied at the San Francisco Conference a subject of genuinely free discussion, one in which the peoples' own will appears clearly and plainly, or, at the very least, one in which the views of the leaders who guide these peoples, and inform them of what they should undertake or hold back from, appear clearly. This is why I have said, and continue to say: the fates of nations ought never be decided under martial law, nor settled without allowing people to speak to one another, and hear from one another, to speak to their own governments and hear from them, and to undertake, or hold back from, whatever they undertake or hold back from, only once their own hearts are satisfied, their own minds convinced, and their own souls at ease with that undertaking or that restraint.

One fact must simply be stated: it is a mistake to imagine that the San Francisco Conference is being met, by the liberated countries and by the peoples called the small peoples, with the warm reception it was expected to receive, or that it is spreading through their hearts the great jubilation it was expected to spread.

This is because the three great powers proved unable to be genuinely generous, or to reconcile the promises they made in hardship with the decisions they took once ease returned. The three great powers were lavish with promises in hardship, to the point that the defeated and weaker peoples became entirely certain the earth would be filled with justice, after having been filled with injustice, and that the new world order would draw no distinction between strong and weak peoples, and would never let the great powers monopolize decision-making at the small states' expense.

I do not know how the peoples of this modern age could respond to such hopes without drawing on the many lessons humanity has already learned, but respond to them they did, in any case, trusting them exactly as they responded to and trusted similar hopes after the last war — with this one difference worth noting: talk of peace and world organization remained closely guarded secrets in the last war, until the armistice was announced. In this war, however, American political circumstances required a great deal of talk about the new world, about the Four Freedoms, and about the Atlantic Charter, even while the war was raging at its most violent and most dangerous. And, strangely enough, pessimism and suspicion are not confined to the liberated nations and the weaker peoples — they find their own voice even within the three great powers' own countries.

I need offer only one example of this: the letter Professor Beveridge sent to the Times, published at the end of last week, in which he criticizes the Security Council's own voting method, arguing that, unless this method is changed, it will inevitably lead to a dangerous result — that small states will be forced to seek refuge in alliances with the great powers, an outcome bound to divide the world into spheres of influence once more, restoring competition among the great powers over these spheres of influence to a state worse than it was before the war, and hastening these same great powers toward a third war. So said Professor Beveridge — and French propagandists seized upon this letter at once, broadcasting it on the radio to support their own objection to the Security Council's voting system.

It is also a mistake to imagine that whatever the three leaders agreed upon at the Crimea Conference can amount to a final solution to the problems they addressed there. However great their own share of insight, sound judgment, and the material power now triumphant in East and West, the three leaders are not stronger than the nature of things, nor than the facts on the ground. It is enough to look at the Polish problem to see that it remains exactly as it was on the day the three issued their decision at the Crimea Conference. The Polish government resident in London has changed its own position not in the slightest, remaining one of rejection and protest; the Polish government resident in Warsaw, known as the Lublin government, remains exactly as it was, with the formation of a new government not advancing a single step — so much so that the Allies have grown genuinely anxious that the San Francisco Conference might convene without Poland present at all,

despite her being the war's very first victim, and the defeated country most deeply affected by its horrors. The fact of the matter is that Poland has not yet been invited to the conference, simply because the Allies do not know to whom the invitation ought to be addressed — though they may well know one day.

It had been assumed that Balkan questions had already been settled among the three great powers at the Crimea Conference, but Balkan problems appear never to end. Among the topics discussed in the House of Commons yesterday was the change of government in Romania: it appears the Romanian government, headed by General Rădescu, was never genuinely loyal to democracy, and that the Russians, growing anxious about their own supply lines because of it, brought it down; its own head, fearing for his life, took refuge in the British legation. The Russians resented their own allies for sheltering this refugee, and lodged their protest; Mr. Eden declared yesterday that this matter is now the subject of discussion and consultation between the British government, the American government, and the Russian government, naturally.

News still reaches us that matters in Greece remain far from calm or settled — indeed, that some Greeks have not laid down their arms, and continue to resist in certain regions. All of this means that the agreement reached among the three great powers carries real weight, without doubt, but is not what will solve the world's problems, or the internal problems of either the liberated or the defeated countries. If modern development has achieved any real progress for humanity, it is this: the fate of nations cannot be decided by individuals, but only by nations themselves; and the fate of the world cannot be decided by the great nations alone, but must be decided by the world itself, on a foundation of right, justice, and equality between the strong and the weak, the small and the great, states with vast armies and states with none at all.

It is certain that peoples have become convinced of this principle, though putting it into practice may take a shorter or longer time, and may well meet with difficulties, and obstacles may stand in its way. But nature will reach its own end, achieving freedom and equality among states, exactly as it has already achieved freedom and equality among individuals in a great many civilized, democratic countries.

It is enough to observe that a strong, wealthy individual, possessed of might and power, standing and influence, cannot, in a civilized country, assault a weak, poor individual with no share of power or

influence, without finding the state itself standing ready to deter that assault before it happens, and to punish it after it has.

It is on this basis, and on this basis alone, that peoples understand what relations among them ought to look like within an international order. Peoples will never be able to accept that four or five great powers should enjoy an immunity that prevents small states from ever seeking redress against them, should these powers do them harm.

If the Security Council's system is not changed to erase the distinction between these great powers, with their vast armies and their fleets at sea and in the air, and the small states unable to hold their own in any contest of material force — if, I repeat, the Security Council's system is not changed to erase this distinction between the two kinds of states, then the San Francisco Conference will accomplish nothing at all. It will, instead, only strengthen this same phenomenon that has already corrupted peoples' own internal life, and has now begun corrupting international life itself — the phenomenon of class struggle. The world will witness internal struggle between classes within a single people, and international struggle between the classes of powerful states, middling states, and weak states. And it was not for this that this war was fought, nor for this that peoples bore its horrors.

What, then, ought our own position to be, in all of this? I do not know what stance the delegation formed yesterday, or the day before, will take. But what I do know, and believe alone suits our own interest, is this: Egypt — weak, and aspiring to complete independence — ought not to bind herself to anything, whatever the circumstances, until her own complete independence has become an established fact, secure from every assault. And what I know, and believe befits our noble homeland's own dignity, is that the word "no," spoken at the right moment, protects peoples, individuals, and future generations alike from truly grave dangers.