

The Nature of Things

al-Balagh, 15 February 1945

The three who met in the Crimea have finally issued their joint communiqué, after a long wait for the meeting itself first, and a long wait for its decisions second. The meeting was no simple matter: the British Prime Minister had been calling for it for months, and pressed the call so insistently that the world came to imagine its affairs would never right themselves without this meeting taking place. The President of the United States was occupied with the presidential election back home, and the head of the Russian government was occupied with the tremendous, magnificent victories the Red Army was winning, and continues to win, to this very day. Then the election was concluded, the obstacles smoothed away, matters made easy, and the great figures met — and the world set about waiting to see what the meeting would reveal.

The meeting revealed two kinds of decisions. The first is of the very gravest importance, with the furthest-reaching effect on the world's own fate, and yet entirely unknown to us — something people will learn only gradually, sun by rising sun, sun by setting sun. These are the decisions concerning the organization of war plans, aimed at completing Germany's defeat, utterly annihilating her regime, thoroughly crushing her military system, and reducing Germany to a state of helplessness that prevents her from ever again disturbing the world with these detestable wars she stirs up from time to time.

Since the three have decided these plans will only be announced once they are actually carried out, the world can do nothing but continue waiting for the news the telegraph will flash to us, the news that will stir the air, that the papers will publish and the radio broadcast, exactly as it has done since this war first broke out. Who knows — perhaps there is some good in this waiting. Humanity has, over these past five years, learned every variety of waiting, and every variety of surprise; waiting will do it no harm, and no surprise will now throw it off balance.

As for the second kind of decisions, these are known fully, or nearly so, and their direction is, in any case, sufficiently clear. But the strange thing is that they taught people nothing new, and stirred in them none of that violent or gentle agitation grave news usually produces — as though the world had been calmly expecting all along that the three would arrive at exactly these political decisions they issued, since the very nature of

things compelled them to issue them precisely as they did.

World opinion first noted that the three great powers went to great lengths encouraging France, acknowledging her grave importance, and insisting she must recover her old standing among the powers organizing the world's affairs. World opinion then noted that a considerable gap separated this lavish encouragement of France from the facts on the ground: France was not invited to this very meeting that laid down the first foundations for organizing the world. She remained, instead, waiting and reserved until the meeting concluded, whereupon the three decided France could take part in the coming meetings to be held by foreign ministers, or by ambassadors.

World opinion had noted, even before this, that China had stood as the fourth power during France's absence, while the enemy occupied French soil, and that it had been said China would take part in organizing the world, and laying down the foundations of peace. World opinion then noted that China, too, was absent from the meeting of the three, exactly as France was, and that she too would be invited, after this meeting, to the other meetings, just as France would be — while the rest of the United Nations would be invited to a third kind of meeting altogether.

This means there are three tiers of powers: the first tier made up of the three states whose leaders met in the Crimea; the second tier made up of these same three states with France and China added; the third tier made up of the whole of the United Nations. There may well be something in this that offends decency, and disappoints hope — something I touched on in my last piece, regarding the tremendous horrors borne by France, China, and the other warring nations, horrors that deserved rather more recognition than has been shown so far. But this arrangement, as revealed by the three-power meeting in the Crimea, suits the nature of things entirely, at this particular moment at least.

The nature of things has never sworn itself to avoid offending decency, or disappointing hope, near or far; and the nature of things is very clear indeed: the burdens of this war, in these very days, are being borne by these three powers alone. And, as the old Arabic proverb has it, whoever prevails, takes.

As long as the Russian armies go on liberating whatever nations they liberate, and sweeping across whatever territory they sweep across; as long as the British and American armies go on fighting along the Siegfried Line, and pouring terror down upon Germany; as long as the

British and American fleets go on guarding the sea lanes — the leaders of these three powers alone are the ones capable of settling the world's affairs, whether or not the world itself is present at that settling.

The nature of things may well change, France may grow strong again after her weakness, and come to possess an army and a fleet reckoned with once more — and on that day, will France be able to take part in the settling, the ruling, and the ordering of the world?

There is another thing entirely consistent with the nature of things: the political decisions the three issued in the Crimea did not meet with unreserved approval from the hearts of the peoples who were absent from this meeting. France, for instance, has not forgotten her old standing, nor her own tremendous sacrifices, nor her great hopes, nor her confidence in the future; she has not, for these reasons, received these decisions with wholehearted approval, but has declared instead that she will take from them whatever suits her, and reserve judgment on the rest.

The three decided to invite her to take part in the occupation of Germany — an invitation she accepts, naturally enough — and decided to invite her to take part in the committee that will oversee the affairs of that occupation, an invitation she accepts as well. But she remains reserved about accepting whatever else she has been invited to, until she has studied, investigated, and clarified the underlying basis, exactly as we were saying a moment ago. She does not wish, for instance, to join the call for the World Security Conference to be held next April, except after study, investigation, and a clear definition of its basis.

Nor is this limited to France: the Polish government in London is thoroughly indignant, entirely rejecting the outcome, and American public opinion appears to share in this indignation and rejection. But the Polish government in London's own position is a very simple matter: Mr. Churchill made clear, long ago, that it was only right for her to accept the border adjustments Russia had requested — but she failed to do so, and so the three simply accepted this adjustment on her behalf instead.

It seems likely they did so only with real insight, having first ascertained the will of the Polish people themselves. It is said that Italy, too, feels a certain disappointment — but Italy is a defeated nation, and there is no great harm in her feeling disappointed; indeed, that may well be the lightest punishment awaiting her.

The three have organized Yugoslavia's own affairs along already familiar lines: there is now no choice but to carry out the agreement reached between Russia, Marshal Tito, and Monsieur Šubašić's government, an agreement already being put into effect. What is clear is that the three powers have decided to enable the liberated peoples, or those who left or were forced out of the Axis alliance, to choose, through free elections, whichever system of government they wish to be ruled by — even if this requires them to genuinely oversee those very elections themselves. The days ahead will show just how far the three powers succeed in what they intend: the satisfaction of these peoples.

There is another thing no less clear than everything already said: the three powers concerned themselves only with defeated and liberated Europe. As for the neutral states, or those that merely affected neutrality, the three took no decision concerning them at all; and as for the states that assisted the Allies, exposed themselves to danger for the sake of that assistance, tasted the bitterness of war, and bore its burdens — in the eastern Mediterranean, for instance — the three did not address them at all in the decisions they issued. It seems most likely they addressed only the matters they simply could not afford to neglect; matters capable of waiting, or of bearing themselves easily within what they call spheres of influence, need not, apparently, be studied in the Crimea, or occupy the three at all.

The world, then, proceeds through 1945 exactly as it has always proceeded: its own affairs settled by those who hold power, and those who hold the authority to bind and loose, each according to his own tier and rank of power, and of that same authority to bind and loose. The important thing is that the world will certainly enjoy whatever the Atlantic Charter guaranteed peoples — the choice of their own system of government, and life free from injustice, fear, and hunger.

In the midst of this development the three-power meeting in the Crimea has brought about, entirely in keeping with the nature of things, comes news that peace has finally settled in Greece, and that martial law has been lifted there — Greece being part of Europe, with nothing but the Mediterranean separating her from the theatres of war. Let us congratulate Greece, then, on the peace and security she has won, and sincerely wish her all the glory, honour, and dignity she deserves.

In the midst of this same development came news, too, that General Spears, formerly Britain's Minister to the Levant States, has occupied

himself, within the British House of Commons, with the problems of the Near East — and, more significantly still, has managed to form, from among a good many members of the British Parliament, a committee on Near Eastern affairs, which studies, works, speaks, and pursues its aims under his own chairmanship.

Egypt has known, between the two wars, these committees formed within the British Parliament to study foreign affairs in an unofficial capacity. They carry real weight, without doubt, since they spread awareness and inform public opinion — but it would be a very grave mistake to exaggerate the effect of such committees, or to base whatever plan we decide upon, whatever opinion we hold, or whatever hope we toy with, on their own activities and statements.

And if it is truly incumbent upon those who lead public opinion in the lands of the Arab East to know the facts of things, and to inform their own people of them, then I believe there is one fact that ought to remain constantly before them: that the world will proceed today and tomorrow exactly as it proceeded yesterday and the day before, and that the ancient Arab poet was not mistaken when he said:

*Whenever a people struck at me, I struck back at them —
tell me, O sons of Hamdan, was I the wrongdoer in this?
Gather a keen heart, a sharp sword,
and fierce pride — and injustice itself will steer clear of you.*