

The Final Step

al-Balagh, 11 January 1945

The tremendous violence in which the war in Western and Central Europe has culminated these past weeks has not managed to distract those following political affairs from their continuous, insistent preoccupation with the problems that have arisen, and continue to arise, from the liberation of the liberated European countries — for these problems are no mere phantoms occupying the mind, capable of being set aside the moment events intrude and crises multiply; nor are they hypotheses in which the intellect might find some measure of that intellectual pleasure thinkers pursue in their idle hours, seeking a way out of them. They are, rather, present realities, declaring themselves to people, imposing themselves upon them, and offering them a choice: to face them honestly, in search of fitting solutions, or to circle around them, groping for crooked ones — which produces nothing but mounting anxiety, deepening fear, and ever greater confusion.

I noted last week the meeting now being arranged between Mr. Roosevelt, Mr. Churchill, and Marshal Stalin, and that this meeting will confront the grave problems currently occupying Europe, problems over which opinions differ sharply. This week has seen the emergence of a certain line of thinking: that this meeting ought to become a gathering of four, not three, with France represented in it, given that she has recovered her own distinguished standing among the great powers, given that these very great powers have themselves acknowledged her that standing, and given that France signed the United Nations Charter at the beginning of this year.

It appears this idea had already settled in the minds of the French themselves, who aspired to it and were determined to have it, but were simply waiting for the right occasion to announce it and press their claim to it.

That occasion finally presented itself: first with France's signing of the United Nations Charter, then with Mr. Churchill's second visit to France since recognition of the provisional government, and his meeting with General de Gaulle at the end of last week, and General de Gaulle's participation in the military discussions held in Paris — and after the British and Americans had confirmed that the war could not proceed along its chartered course to victory without France taking part in it, with a

strength commensurate with her own standing, her own needs, and her own hopes for organizing the peace.

All of this has now been accomplished, and the British and Americans have agreed to supply France with everything she needs, in arms and equipment, to rebuild the great army she once possessed; the British and Americans have divided this wartime provisioning between themselves, with America undertaking to supply France with heavy weapons, and England undertaking to supply her with light weapons, along with whatever clothing and food her soldiers require.

France herself has decided to mobilize her own people, such that within a matter of a few months her army will exceed a million men; and it is certain that, under this agreement, France will have, within the next few weeks, an army of no fewer than forty divisions.

All of this means that France has now regained the political standing she held before the catastrophe, and will, within a few weeks, regain the military standing she once held as well. It follows, then, that the world's affairs ought not to be settled in her absence, for her absence would cast the gravest doubt on the worth of whatever is settled.

The Allies have long since acknowledged France's full right to take part in resolving the problems connected with Germany after the peace, and her full right to whatever guarantees, connected with Germany, her own security requires. But this is enough only for a state content merely to live in safety, security, and dignity for itself alone. If, instead, this state wishes not to reserve safety and security for itself alone, but to take part in bearing the great responsibilities of the world, so as to guarantee safety and security for the whole world, then she must shoulder burdens equal to those borne by Great Britain, America, and Russia.

This is exactly what France herself wants, since it is her own second nature, and suits her own political temperament perfectly — a temperament that loves neither self-interest nor backwardness — and since France knows no age, across the whole of her long history, in which she ever fell short of shouldering the world's own great burdens. No sooner, then, had this latest agreement to supply France with the arms she needs appeared, than the idea of inviting France to the coming meeting of the three leaders began to appear in America too; this same idea then appeared within France herself, and the French took up discussing it and pressing for it insistently. Some of their own politicians declared on the radio yesterday that the meeting of the three leaders

would fail to achieve what is expected of it, unless France took part in it — since France is an essential element of both war and peace, and since France is precisely the element capable of bridging the differing viewpoints bound to arise among the leaders once the great problems are placed under study and scrutiny.

It seems most likely that Russia will back France in achieving what she aspires to, given the alliance and friendship between them; it seems most likely, too, that the British and Americans will raise no objection to it, since they recognize the world's own need for France's assistance, and recognize the grave problems arising from France's absence and withdrawal. They have, moreover, shown France such sympathy during her ordeal, and such support since her liberation, as gives real confidence that they will help her take this final step to recover her traditional standing entirely intact.

In truth, the three leaders will find themselves facing problems that simply cannot be solved without France having her own say in them. France is a great Mediterranean power; the Greek problem cannot possibly be solved without France taking part in solving it, since France once stood as guarantor of Greek independence before the war. Nor can the Yugoslav problem be solved without France having her own say in it, since France was Yugoslavia's own ally before the war. And the Yugoslav problem is no less complex than the Greek one; indeed, it has emerged as exceedingly complex over the past two days, when Mr. Churchill, together with Mr. Eden, met with the King of Yugoslavia to discuss the grave matters agreed upon between his own government and Marshal Tito, and endorsed by Russia — matters requiring the establishment, in Yugoslavia, of a regency system like the one established in Greece, until such time as the people themselves might be consulted, by referendum, on the system of government they actually wish for.

The King of Greece has already accepted the regency system, which was established a week ago; it seems likely the King of Yugoslavia will accept a regency system too, and likely that this system will be established in the days to come. But establishing a regency system in Greece and Yugoslavia does not, in itself, solve the Greek and Yugoslav problems — it merely paves the way toward solving them. These problems must therefore inevitably be studied at the leaders' meeting, and France must take part in studying them.

The leaders will also study, at their meeting, the Polish problem; Poland, too, was France's own ally before the war, and France declared war for Poland's sake, exactly as Great Britain declared it. Between France and Russia lies a traditional friendship, and a renewed alliance; France's participation in these discussions will, without doubt, help smooth away whatever difficulties and obstacles arise in this matter.

And all this without even touching on France's own entangled interests outside Europe, interests she can neither neglect nor overlook, nor accept having settled in her absence. It is no wonder, then, that world opinion should come to think France must be present at this meeting, nor any wonder that France herself should demand to be present at it.

We do not know whether the leaders will take up, at their coming meeting, the problems of the Middle and Near East, or postpone them to a later date — but it is certain these problems need to be studied, and that the Allies' own direction of thinking on them needs to become clear. It is enough to note two matters of real gravity: there is talk, being circulated here and there, that Russia wishes to appoint a Minister of State resident in Tehran, just as Great Britain has a Minister of State resident in Cairo. This means Russia wishes to have a voice heard in the Middle East, just as Great Britain has a voice heard in the Near East. Great Britain and Russia will therefore inevitably have to agree on managing and facilitating these matters, and will inevitably have to hear, in doing so, the voice of America and France as well.

The second matter is that public opinion across the whole of the Arab lands is deeply concerned with the question of Palestine, and it is in the world's own interest that this Arab public opinion be set at ease, and know, with real confidence and certainty, that the Allies do not wish to deceive it, nor catch it unawares, nor steal the Palestine question from it by stealth, nor confront it with a *fait accompli* in this matter.

Great Britain has no less need than France to satisfy this Arab public opinion, and to be confident that it feels at ease with her own policy, viewing it without anxiety, without a sense of harm, and without suspicion.

And who knows?! Perhaps America and Russia stand in just as much need of Arab public opinion's trust as Great Britain and France do.

All of this means that the world's problems — those already visible, and those not yet visible — require not a three-way cooperation to solve

them, but a four-way one, and that France is an essential element of that cooperation.

It is quite clear that, in all of this, we have merely been depicting the direction of European politics as Europeans and Americans themselves see it; depicting that same political direction as seen by the peoples in whom these problems are actually erupting is another story altogether.