

The Small Nations and European Reconstruction

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IN THE midst of a world-wide war, it is easy to forget that one of the roots of the conflict lies in a centuries-old clash of interest and of opinion concerning the proper place of the smaller peoples in the European scheme of things. In the struggle for oceans and continents, the problem of Europe—the problem of the coexistence of large and small nations—is temporarily in eclipse. But, when the fighting is over, the victors will be confronted again by the riddle of how peoples of vastly different strength can live together in a crowded continent.

Down to the end of the seventeenth century small and compact states had many advantages in their rivalry with great empires; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries some small states were safeguarded in their existence by the balancing of the rivalries of the great powers. The war of 1914-18 first showed how greatly this sense of security had become an illusion, in view of the great disparity of the effects of industrialization and of nationalism on the large and the small nation. Since 1933 the problem of the sur-

vival of the smaller nations has been stated with a brutal insistence which will no longer be denied its answer.

One school of thought would have it that the small nation has no future. In a world ruled by force, only large and powerful units can hope to assert their right to survive. A nation whose territory can be overrun in a few days of lightning-war, whose entire population may be no greater than that of some metropolis of a larger country, and whose area and resources do not permit the development of all-round industrial power, cannot expect to survive in the traditional form of the sovereign state. Such a view was self-evident to the supporters of *Mittleuropa*, and it is a basic tenet of the Geo-politicians of today. It spells the death of the small nations, unless the hegemon power decides, in its own interest, to leave to them some sphere of domestic autonomy.

The dream of a German "leadership of Europe," which Hitler has proclaimed as one of the more modest goals of his war, can perhaps be fulfilled through

the continued and increasing exercise of force upon the peoples which his armies or his diplomacy have subjugated, or through the conquered resigning themselves to an indeterminate future of Nazi neo-slavery. Can the Dutch, Norwegians, Czechs, or Poles, to mention only four of the conquered nations, be reconciled to Hitler's "new order"? Theoretically, over several generations, through the destruction of the high-spirited and the intelligent, through the survival of "adapters" and compromisers, even a cultured and proud people might forget its history. But, living on an old soil, with reminders of their past achievements everywhere about them, shut off by a wall of injustice and arrogance from their conquerors, the peoples now overrun cannot, in the foreseeable future, be ground down to nation-less human dust.

Psychology of Nazi Rule

Hitler's Assyrian-night's dream of reducing all the non-German peoples to a nameless mass of slaves would appear merely as one more nightmare of a restless Europe, were it not for the cunning with which he has gone about buttressing his rule. By creating a system of privileged castes above castes he has made a bold appeal to deep-seated instincts of inequality, instincts which have had a longer history than has the Christian-Stoic, humanitarian-democratic ideal of human equality. Within the German people itself Hitler has anchored his power in a new caste-system which compensates even the lowest caste of Germans for its loss of human rights through the luxury of being allowed to despise still lower castes of non-Germans and "non-Aryans." Within certain sections of the peoples conquered or marked down for conquest, Hitler has fostered similar delusions of superiority and domination. In nearly every country he has found a few individuals who preferred the prospect of being associated with the Germanic "master-race" in tyranny over their own countrymen to the defense of the unity and identity of their people. Despite these transitory successes in applying the maxim of "divide and rule," the sound instinct of the European peoples rejects the Nazi witches' brew. Their resistance to the poison is all the stronger since the best that Hitler offers them within his "new order" is the lowly position of "industrial cannon-fodder." This factor, apart from considerations of national, religious and human dignity, would long keep them inwardly hostile to his system. If the genuine reconciliation of the smaller peoples to Hitler's rule is all but impossible, only two courses are open to the Nazis: the extermination or the assimilation of the "lesser breeds."

The method of extermination is, unfortunately, only too accessible. By pressing his finger on the jugular vein of the food-supply, Hitler has already inflicted indescribable sufferings upon the conquered

peoples. In addition, a price of blood is being exacted from the defeated nations for having dared to resist. Despite the enforced separation from their homes of prisoners of war and of laborers recruited through hunger, despite the grinding down of entire nations below the level of bare subsistence, the permanent impairment of the human resources of the European peoples will not necessarily follow. Once Hitler's rule is overthrown, and tolerable conditions of life and work are restored, the now subject peoples will reassert their will to live with that resilience which Europe has shown after earlier catastrophes. Finally, complete extermination can hardly be combined with Hitler's aim of perpetuating the subject populations as obedient *Sklavenvölker*, bound to the service of his world-wide ambitions.

The path of assimilation has a longer and more honorable tradition behind it. In the Middle Ages and sporadically in more recent times, the Germans, like other European peoples, have displayed a remarkable power of assimilation. This achievement of earlier centuries is now invoked to deny to other European peoples the right to a national life of their own. The time has passed when Germany can assimilate any but a few scattered individuals, and Hitler has recognized that fact by abandoning the assimilationist tradition of Germany's eastward movement.

If the smaller nations of Europe cannot be destroyed biologically, nor assimilated culturally and linguistically, then the Nazis' jerry-built structure of caste-rule, so long as it stands, will rest on a very shaky scaffolding. Hitler can never feel secure in his new slave-state until the conquered have given up hope of being released from the Nazi strait-jacket by the remaining free peoples of the Euro-American world. The logic of fear has driven Hitler on, to attempt to destroy Britain, Russia, and America. Because of the counter-logic of the struggle, and because their own safety demands it, Britain and the United States, with the assent of Russia, have set as one of their purposes the restoration to national life of the conquered peoples of Europe. Point Two of the Atlantic Charter of August 14, 1941, proclaims that Britain and the United States "desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned." Point Three states that "they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them."

The Atlantic Charter, supplemented by other declarations, has set up these and related principles as a broad guide to the post-war reconstruction. There will be little quarrel within the camp of the United Nations over the principle of national self-determina-

tion. Uncertainties are more likely to arise concerning the future safeguarding of the principle. However, there are some hopeful signs that after this war the great sea-powers are less likely to dismiss the problem of implementing intra-European security with a self-righteous reference to "old-world mentality" and with a vague hope for a "change of heart" within the German people.

Relation of Allied Powers to Post-war Europe

In turn, the peoples of the European continent will be much more concerned with the future relationship of Britain, Russia, and the United States to the maintenance of European order than with the character of the post-war regime in Germany. Within a continent which, Russia apart, has been deprived of self-determination as much by its own divisions as by Germany's strength and strategy, post-war arrangements will be shaped in very large measure through adaptation to the policies, so far as they may be defined or predicted, of the great extra-European, or mainly extra-European, powers. In no question is the riddle of the future aims and attitudes of the ultimate victors, especially of the most powerful and most unpredictable of them all—the United States—more serious than in the problem of the future of the smaller nations of Europe.

If the policies of the United States, of Russia, and of Great Britain and the Commonwealth should again be shaped by a post-war revulsion against European complexities and commitments, the non-German peoples of Europe would certainly feel obliged to secure drastic guarantees against a recrudescence of Germany's lust for hegemony. In this case, Hitler's present victims would claim to be both judge and executor of whatever system of security they might consider necessary, a system of security which the extra-European victors would, in this assumption, neither buttress nor weaken. This solution would require the immediate revival of the French, Polish, and other military traditions and power, as instruments for its enforcement. As a means of destroying Germany's geographical advantages, this solution would carry with it a drastic rearrangement of the map, the loss of the Rhineland, of East Prussia, and of Upper Silesia by the *Reich*, which would also be required to receive all German populations living beyond the new frontiers. For an indefinite period all German territory would be occupied by the armies of the now subject nations, which would also apply Hitler's own methods of economic exploitation to extract from Germany a partial compensation for the Nazis' plunderings.

This solution would probably be effective for a considerable time to come, for it would rest on a common memory of Nazi-created misery and humiliation.

The main danger to it would be that, when the will to enforce the victory had slackened, as it might slacken under the impact of domestic problems, of a realization of Germany's new helplessness, and of a tendency to form new groupings among the restored nations, the collective will to hold Germany down might be relaxed. The extreme solution would be based on an assumption that Germans must be left outside the pale of common humanity; it would thus undermine within the German people whatever traditions and interests might otherwise draw it again into the community of peoples. The resulting picture of European hatreds and turmoil is not a pretty one to contemplate. Nor is it at all certain that the extra-continental victors, even if they could wash their hands of responsibility for the political future of continental Europe, would remain unaffected by the economic and social repercussions of a policy which left the future of that part of the world solely in the hands of Hitler's victims.

Exiled Governments and Post-war Reconstruction

Fully conscious of the uncertainties of post-war American, British, and Russian policies, some exiled representatives of the conquered countries have endeavored to sketch out a system or systems of regional solidarity, as a means of recognizing and of overcoming some of the obvious handicaps which would beset the small states acting in isolation. Such a regional system of joint responsibility would enhance the capacity of the smaller nations for coordinated and even united action. It might thus temper the violence of their peoples' reaction against Nazi oppression, and might soften somewhat their natural demand that their own security be established through the complete and permanent subjugation of Germany. A system of regional groupings would, it is thought, diminish the post-war responsibilities to be asked of the extra-continental victors, and would thus make more palatable to them the idea of assuming at least a limited guarantee for post-war order in Europe.

The movement for regional consolidation has been led by the Polish and Czechoslovak governments-in-exile. The proposed Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation provides for a common policy in defense and foreign affairs, in tariffs, communications, and monetary problems. Although some provision is made for joint organs of deliberation and rule, the implementation of the Confederation would rest mainly on a close coordination between the two governments, rather than on a federal union of the two states. The Greek and Yugoslav governments-in-exile have also adopted a plan for post-war cooperation, which provides principally for the coordination of defense and foreign policy.

At the New York conference of the International

Labor Office, in November, 1941, the delegations of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Greece presented a joint declaration proposing a close coordination of their respective national policies in the post-war period. As a further step in this direction, the four delegations, on January 7, 1942, set up a joint planning board, called "The Central and East European Planning Board." Its aim is, through national and joint studies, to prepare the way for the post-war reconstruction of East Central Europe. Such proposals and agreements for regional associations and for regional planning go considerably beyond the functions assumed by the economic sections of the Little and Balkan Ententes. Yet they are subject to some of the same handicaps as their precursors.

In any arrangement short of a complete regional federation, the medium-sized and small nations which lie between the Germans and Italians on the west and the Soviet Union on the east will again be exposed to the political maneuverings of outside powers. Present projects for regional solidarity, of necessity, leave out of account Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria; it is doubtful whether these three satellities of the Axis could be won to sincere post-war cooperation in a regional bloc by any policy enforced unilaterally by the present four-power grouping and without the support and the incentives which could be furnished by the major states among the victors. In addition, Austria's role would be decisive for the stability of any East Central European confederation or bloc; the post-war conditions and aspirations of Austria are most difficult to predict.

The inability of the Scandinavian states to stand together, closely united as they have been by cultural and historic ties and by a community of outlook, must make one cautious in supposing that the far more diverse and divided states of East Central Europe can form a close and harmonious bloc even with the support of Britain and America. True, the indescribably bitter experiences of the last four years may possibly be laying a foundation for post-war teamwork. Even granted such a psychological basis, no bloc of East Central European states would be powerful enough, in population, in its industrial strength, and in geographical unity, to stand up indefinitely against a revival of German expansionism, unless it were backed by a continent-wide system of security, supported in turn by definite responsibilities to be borne by outside powers, including Russia.

The organization of a strong East Central European bloc would still fall short of providing for the security of the smaller states of Western Europe, including Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. That problem might conceivably be solved by reviving the military power of France, backed, as was projected in 1919, by definite commitments from Britain and

the United States. It is doubtful, however, whether the power of France would be adequate to carry such sweeping responsibilities, exceeding those which she bore between 1919 and 1939. The combination of a French-led West European coalition with an East Central European bloc would presumably hold Germany in check for a long time. However, its stability would rest on certain, none too solid premises: the perpetuation of the military spirit, or its revival, within the now subject countries, the maintenance of genuine solidarity among the non-German states of the continent, and the retention of the good-will and the support of the extra-continental victors.

A sketchy analysis of some proposed solutions for the problem of the security of the smaller nations of Europe has led back, in each case, to one cardinal uncertainty—the policies of the great extra-continental powers, Britain, Russia and the United States, toward the post-war order in Europe. The reordering of Europe on democratic principles will be, intellectually and politically, a far more difficult problem than the application of a primitive system like that of the Nazis. It will require the exercise of great qualities of mind and spirit, by leaders and peoples alike. Through it each people must be assured the enjoyment of its nationhood, the opportunity to realize and develop its own cultural and spiritual values. Each people must receive, within a limiting framework of over-all economic and political cooperation, the chance to secure its livelihood and to develop its resources. The psychosis of fear and revenge, which will otherwise dominate both victors and vanquished, must be gradually eliminated through steady and far-sighted treatment.

In terms of their culture and their way of life, the values of the smaller nations of Europe are naturally beyond price to their own peoples. Their contributions have also been, and will again be, of inestimable value to the development of Euro-American civilization as a whole. But the part which the medium-sized and small nations can play in meeting Europe's underlying need for political security is far smaller than the sum total of their populations and of their resources, both economic and cultural. The problem of the future of the smaller nations is primarily a problem for the wisdom and the strength of purpose of the world powers. After the overthrow of Hitler's slave-system, the smaller nations will look for guidance, in the first instance, to the British Commonwealth, to Russia, and to the United States—the three great Euro-American powers, which, for their own salvation, must now bear the burden of extricating Europe from the grip of Hitler's tyranny.

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