

The quest for peace yesterday and today [continuation]

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THE QUEST FOR PEACE YESTERDAY AND TODAY.

Memorial Lecture given by Professor William E. Rappard, of the University of Geneva, Director, Graduate Institute of International Studies, at the David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies, in April, 1954.

(Continuation)

THE UNITED NATIONS.

The historical analogies between the League of Nations and the organization which was formed a quarter of a century later under the name of United Nations are obvious.

Both were the immediate consequences of a European conflict which shortly developed into a world war. Both owed their constitution to the initiative of the United States more than to that of any other power. In both cases that country had not been involved in the origins of the war, had not borne its main brunt, but had decisively contributed to its end. In both cases also, the institution willed by the victors was intended to perpetuate peace and, at least incidentally, to make safe the fruits of their triumph. In both cases these states sought and partly succeeded in obtaining the association of others who had taken no part in the struggle. In both cases the problem was roughly the same: how to mould into a true community, or at least how to secure unity of pacific action among a large number of states most of which, and particularly the most powerful, were reluctant to bow to the wills of others and were indeed firmly resolved not to abandon the essential attributes of their national sovereignty. In both cases, finally, this wellnigh theoretically insoluble problem received practical solutions which, in spite of obvious differences, were fundamentally alike. There, however, the main analogies end. We shall note the divergencies in considering in turn the conception, the birth and the provisional outcome of the United Nations.

WHY THE UNITED NATIONS WAS CONCEIVED.

When examining the first origins of the League of Nations, we were embarrassed and indeed unable to discover its intellectual father. Its political paternity, however, we felt no hesitation in ascribing to President Woodrow Wilson. None of the early authors of the idea that the first World War should not end without giving rise to an international organization for the maintenance of a durable peace had, at the time of the armistice of November 11, 1918, anything like the power of the American President. And of those statesmen who were then at the head of the leading victorious nations, none had ever shown any pronounced interest in the idea.

Towards the close of the second World War, no one in the high councils of the victors enjoyed a position at all comparable to that of Wilson in 1918. To be sure, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin were world statesmen of the first order, whose place in history is as secure as that of Wilson. But they were essentially men of war, and as such they will doubtless remain in the annals of mankind. To them more than to all others the United Nations owed the military victory over Hitler Germany which alone made possible its foundation in 1945. But what else does it owe them?

Instead of pursuing a personal parallel which might well be deemed invidious and which would certainly prove vain for our purpose here, we would seek to discover the origins of the ideas which came to be embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, in the successive public documents which may be held to be the landmarks of its genesis.

The first of these is the so-called Atlantic Charter, of August 14, 1941. In this declaration of peace aims, President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill, proclaimed "certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world".

What was this strange document, whose signatories had found it opportune, in the midst of a raging war, to devote several days off the Canadian coast to formulate their common hopes, "after the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny", "...to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want"?

This document was assuredly strange in that it bore the joint signatures of one who was the head of a still neutral state and of one who was not only Prime Minister of the belligerent United Kingdom but the real leader of the coalition against Hitler. The clue to its true significance is to be found in its date. The 14th of August 1941 was less than two months after the Nazi invasion of Russia and a little more than three months before Pearl Harbour.

It was President Roosevelt who first proposed the



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meeting at which the Atlantic Charter was established. But it was Mr. Winston Churchill who produced the first draft of the document. We have this on his own authority as well as on that of the American delegation. In the third volume of his history of the Second World War, Mr. Churchill writes:

“Considering all the tales of my reactionary, Old World outlook, and the pain this said to have caused the President, I am glad it should be on record that the substance and spirit of what came to be called the ‘Atlantic Charter’ was in its first draft a British production cast in my own words.”

Mr. Sumner Welles who, as American Under-Secretary of State, was accompanying President Roosevelt and had more to do with the drafting of the declaration than any of his colleagues, confirmed this in the following words:

“There had been no prior exchange of views between the President and Mr. Churchill about issuing a declaration such as the Atlantic Charter. The initiative was taken by Mr. Churchill after his arrival at Argentia on the evening of August 9. On the following morning Sir Alexander Cadogan, the British Permanent Under Secretary, handed me a draft which Mr. Churchill had prepared.”

Although the sole or perhaps even the main purpose in suggesting the Atlantic Conference had not been to produce the declaration of principles embodied in the Charter and although the relations between that document and the creation of the United Nations are very remote, it is worth while, for one who wishes to discover the first authorship of the recent world organization, to probe into the conversations which took place on the subject in August 1941 between the American President and the British Prime Minister. There is no doubt whatever that the authorship belongs to the latter.

In the first draft, submitted on August 10, Mr. Churchill had inserted a fifth point which read as follows:

“Fifth, they seek a peace which will not only cast down forever the Nazi tyranny but by effective international organization will afford to all States and peoples the means of dwelling in security within their own bounds and of traversing the seas and oceans without fear of lawless assault or the need of maintaining burdensome armaments.”

In the discussion of this point which took place on the following morning, President Roosevelt had raised some objections to the reference to the “effective international organization”. This we know both because that reference was eliminated by him in the amended draft which, at his request, was prepared by Mr. Sumner Welles, and by the notes of the latter on a conversation which he had with his chief on the morning of August 11. These notes read as follows:

“I said I had been surprised and somewhat discouraged by a remark that the President had casually made in our morning’s conference, which was that nothing could be more futile than the reconstitution of a body such as the Assembly of the League of Nations. I said to the President that, if he conceived of the need for a transition period upon the termination of the war, during which period Great Britain and the United States would undertake the policing of the world, it seemed to me that it would be enormously desirable for the smaller powers to have

available to them an Assembly in which they would all be represented, in which they could make their complaints known, and in which they could join in recommendations as to the policy to be pursued by the major powers who were doing the police work. I said it seemed to me that an organization of that kind would be the most effective safety valve that could be devised.

The President said that he agreed fully with what I said and that all that he had intended by the remark which he had made in the morning was to clear his belief that a transition period was necessary, and that during that transition period no organization such as the Council or the Assembly of the League could undertake the powers and prerogatives with which they had been entrusted during the existence of the League of Nations.”

In accordance with the President’s instructions, Mr. Sumner Welles, prepared a third draft which was discussed between the President and Mr. Churchill later the same day. This third draft contained no allusion to any “international organization” either in point five or in point seven dealing with disarmament which Mr. Sumner Welles had added.

When the new draft was discussed, Mr. Churchill who regretted the omission of these words which he had suggested in point five, proposed an addition to point seven. In his history of the Second World War, he has the following comments on the subject:

“As regards the generalities of Point 7, I pointed out that while I accepted this text, opinion in England would be disappointed at the absence of any in-

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tion to establish an international organization for keeping the peace after the war. I promised to try to find a suitable modification, and later in the day I suggested to the President the addition to the second sentence of the words 'pending the establishment of a wider and more permanent system of general security'."

This suggestion seems to have given rise to a spirited exchange of views between the British Prime Minister and the American President. Mr. Sumner Welles' notes again enlighten us very usefully on the subject. He wrote:

"Mr. Churchill said that, of course, he was heartily and enthusiastically in favour of this point seven, which had been initiated by the President. He inquired, however, whether the President would not agree to support some kind of 'effective international organization' as suggested by the Prime Minister in his original draft of the proposed joint declaration.

The President replied that he did not feel that he could agree to this because of the suspicions and opposition that such a statement on his part would create in the United States. He said that he himself would not be in favour of the creation of a new Assembly of the League of Nations, at least until after a period of time had passed and during which an international police force composed of the United States and Great Britain had had an opportunity of functioning. Mr. Churchill said that he did not feel that he would be candid if he did not express to the President his feeling that point seven would create a great deal of opposition from the extreme interna-

tionals. The President replied that he realized that, but that he felt that the time had come to be realistic and that in his judgment the main factor in the seventh point was complete realism."

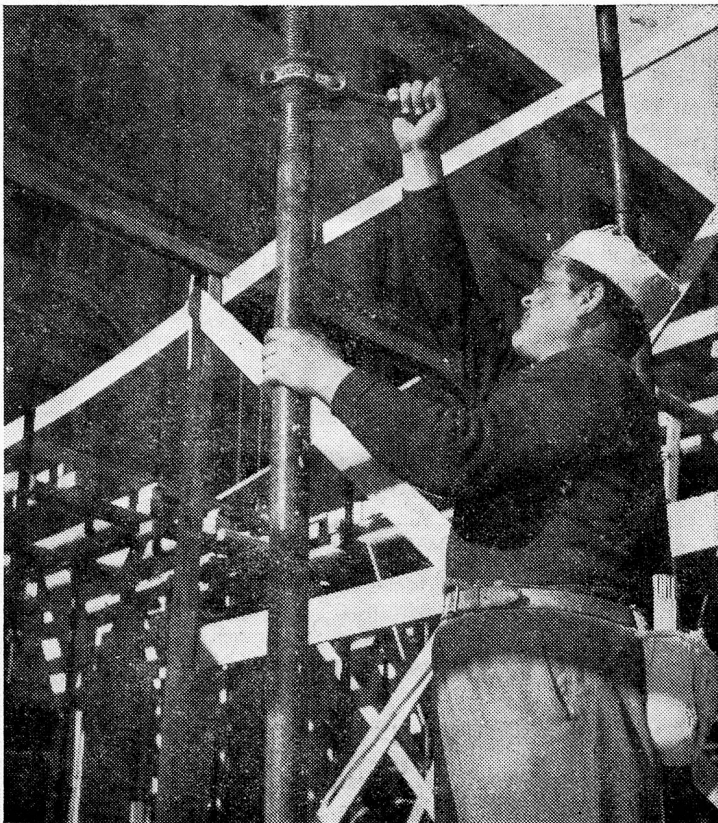
In spite of President Roosevelt's opposition, the British suggestion was retained in the final draft where it appears in the last point of the Atlantic Charter, the end of which reads as follows:

"Since no future peace can be maintained if land, sea or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten, or may threaten, aggression outside their frontiers, they believe, pending the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security, that the disarmament of such nations is essential. They will likewise aid and encourage all other practicable measures which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments."

In view of the fact that these words are the only connecting link between the Atlantic Charter and the Charter of the United Nations, it was perhaps not quite useless to elucidate their historical origin.

Our analysis has made two points quite clear. First, that the main content of the Atlantic Charter, in which a truly Wilsonian conception of a desirable, just, fair and liberal peace is proclaimed, was of British, not of American, origin. And second, that the only reference in the Charter to what was to become the United Nations Organization was inserted by Mr. Churchill and maintained in spite of President Roosevelt's objections.

(To be continued.)



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