

'The elimination of colonialism' from Le Monde (28 July 1945)

Caption: On 28 July 1945, the French daily newspaper Le Monde considers the future of the colonial empires and focuses on the changing political status of the French colonies.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 28.07.1945, n° 190; 2e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La liquidation des systèmes coloniaux", auteur:Roc, Pierre , p. 1; 2.

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The elimination of colonialism

(*Le Monde*'s own cable.)

By Opéra Mondial cable

New York, 27 July.

Are there still many avowed supporters of colonialism in its current form? Not if one judges by the active propaganda in support of international access to the colonies' resources. As regards French colonies in particular, it seems there are two ways of getting rid of them. We could do it ourselves by creating what Gaston Monnerville envisages as the 'French Community', so as to ensure the spread of our influence throughout the world, or it could be made an international issue for the benefit of the economic and financial interests of the English-speaking world.

One cannot help calling to mind the statement on colonial policy set out in the San Francisco Charter, according to which the colonial powers undertake to bring currently dependent peoples to 'self-government'.

That was certainly how the American delegation saw it, but it was not the interpretation that the Trusteeship Council in San Francisco reached unanimously.

We know that, at the Yalta Conference, the three Great Powers decided that a trusteeship organisation under the United Nations would assume responsibility for administering the old League of Nations mandated territories that were taken away from the enemy at the end of that war as well as those that voluntarily placed themselves under that international administration.

Repeated and well-orchestrated attacks on the colonial system, and particularly the French colonial system, were launched in the American press a few months before the San Francisco meeting.

For the American Administration, there seems to be an irresistible temptation to 'hold out our hand to the dependent peoples in their struggle for progress', as Commander Harold Stassen, head of the American delegation to the Trusteeship Council expressed the United States' interest in other countries' colonial issues. The French way of 'liberating' today's colonial peoples by giving them the same rights and obligations as people living in mainland France enjoys the support only of well-informed Americans who are, in fact, a very small minority. The others, for various reasons — political, economic or through simple ingrained anti-colonialism — believe in only two approaches: international exploitation of the colonies, for which the concept and plan were provided by Great Britain, or the immediate granting of independence. The first would allow the United States to get rid of Puerto Rico on excellent terms; the second would allow the granting of independence to the Philippines to be widely publicised and used as an example to be copied, although it would continue to be economically wedded to the United States and would host American military bases.

France's position at the Trusteeship Council in San Francisco was made very difficult since, although we were throwing open our country's doors to our brothers from abroad, in San Francisco we heard only very few sympathetic or understanding voices. The Arab representatives, influenced by the Syrian incidents on the one hand and the English-speaking bloc and its 'clients' on the other, did not conceal the fact that they were interested in joint exploitation of the colonial territories or early independence.

While, in theory, France was in an excellent position, in practical terms, and given the exaggerations by all parties, it was faced with a form of blackmail. Either it had to accept independence for those peoples who would be placed under trusteeship and 'self-government' in the case of other colonial peoples, or it would be subject to vociferous attacks in the Council and in the American press.

The representatives of some smaller nations nevertheless realised that this situation was a phoney one. Their support for the French position was swept aside by the heightened stakes in the debates and the massive

block voting by the United States, Great Britain, South America and the Arab states. The Netherlands found themselves in the same situation as us. Canada, Haiti, Ethiopia and Czechoslovakia amongst others would not have been unhappy had the Assembly been more reasonable and not ventured into areas where it displayed as much ignorance as generosity, since it actually determined the fate of the French and Dutch colonies, not to mention the others, with a recklessness that was surprising to say the least. China displayed moderation. The USSR attempted to keep the debate within the limits set at Yalta, but it had to yield and supported the principle of free choice and progress towards independence on which the Union of Soviet Republics is based.

So there were some in the Council who would have welcomed a return to greater sanity. This opened the way to the acknowledgement that, while the United Nations could determine the future of peoples over whom it would have trusteeship, it was, however, rather rash to eliminate at a stroke the existing colonial empires. By brandishing pan-Arabism here and pan-Africanism and pan-Asianism there, some people hoped that the existing colonial system could soon be eliminated and that, as far as possible, an international organisation would take over.

The most that the French representative could do was to point out that nothing in the adopted text could justify or permit interference by foreign states in the internal affairs of another country, as is stipulated elsewhere in the Charter. Clearly, this clause will be respected only to the extent that those states threatened with foreign intervention can make sure that it is respected.

Faced with this greed and its various manifestations, it is difficult to know what the future has in store for our Overseas Territories. It is up to us alone to win over the people by finally adopting an audacious policy whose sincerity and genuine humanity they would soon experience. This does not rule out the possibility of the English-speaking world finding markets and raw materials in our countries, but it would remove the possibility, once and for all, that certain foreign and French economic interests should threaten, in the name of a bizarre moral code, the civilising and humanising enterprise that France has undertaken.

Gaston Monnerville, Chairman of the Colonial Committee in the Consultative Assembly, is requesting total equality of rights and responsibilities for people on the mainland and those living overseas. It is up to this country to take a stand and prove to the United States that France is capable of transforming its colonial system on its own. If we are not careful, the out-dated and anachronistic aspects of the system may well create an unending source of moral misunderstandings and political and economic friction between France and the United States.

Pierre Roc