

'The problem of reparations' from Le Monde (25 July 1945)

Caption: On 25 July 1945, the French daily newspaper Le Monde looks into the economic consequences of the defeat of Nazi Germany and the issue of war reparations demanded by the Allies.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 25.07.1945, n° 187; 2e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Le problème des réparations", p. 1.

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The problem of reparations

The problem of reparations was discussed at the Potsdam Conference. It will be discussed today in the Council of Ministers and, very shortly, in the Consultative Assembly.

While France was excluded from the Reparations Commission in Moscow and thus could not state its claims directly, and while no official indication was published by the 'Big Three', the British and American press have announced that they have already begun the sharing out.

The amount demanded from Germany would amount to 20 000 million dollars, over five years. According to the *New York Herald Tribune*, the USSR will receive 50 %, the United Kingdom 20 %, the United States 20 % and the others 10 %. Another, somewhat different, estimate allots 50 % to Russia, 22 % to Great Britain and 22 % to the United States. In this case, they would all have to dip into their share to satisfy the countries that have not been mentioned.

In neither hypothesis would the allocation scheme determined at Potsdam or Yalta be considered definitive. All of Germany's victims are waiting to state their claims. It will be interesting to compare them to the 'reparations' that they will be officially allotted. For France, 600 million dollars, i.e. 30 billion francs, are at stake. Our damages and losses as a result of the German occupation amount to between 2 500 and 3 000 billion francs. Our 'reparations' would thus be to the order of 1 %.

Let us leave the experts to discuss the figures, which will, at all events, leave us to bear most of the cost of the reconstruction of France. The French Government will do its best to secure the maximum. But it must not forget that the problem of reparations is tied to other major issues.

Some of them are being debated by the USSR, the United States and Great Britain. In its zone of occupation, the Soviet Army has seized large quantities of cattle and all sorts of equipment that have been sent to Russia. The Americans and the British would like the value thereof to be appraised and deducted from the amount of reparations allotted to the USSR. The reply from Moscow was that these were spoils of war, conquered on the battlefield, and that they should be seen as being in addition to the reparations themselves.

This difference of opinion might complicate matters. If, before reparations come into the equation, there is nothing left to take from the Eastern zone, the total will have to be drawn from the other zones, which might make their situation precarious and the role of the occupying powers particularly difficult.

What is more, they will have to take into account factors other than Germany's ability to pay. France is particularly concerned about security, which would require the dismantling of war industries and should prohibit heavy industry from being rebuilt, since it forms the basis for them.

From the French point of view, reparations should consist mainly in the requisition of labour, plant and machinery, miscellaneous materials (wood, coal, etc.), production of which would not contribute to boosting German war potential. If we took that line, it would seem difficult to determine as of now how much Germany will have to contribute and the period in which it will have to do so. To achieve this result, one might be led to rebuild industries that we would be better off abolishing or cutting back.

The experience of the last war reveals several successive estimates denied by the events. We see the same failure today. Would it not have been more prudent to abandon figures and dates? Since the length of the occupation has not been determined, we could also refrain from specifying the reparations. Would it not have been best to recover as much as possible at any given time based on Germany's economic situation, since we do not know how to calculate what it will be in two or five years' time?