

'From Yalta to San Francisco' from Combat


Caption: On 14 February 1945, the French daily newspaper Combat is circumspect about the decisions taken at the Yalta Conference.

Source: Combat. de la Résistance à la Révolution. dir. de publ. SMADJA, Henri. 14.02.1945. Paris: Combat. "De Yalta à San Francisco", auteur:Gimont, Marcel.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/from_yalta_to_san_francisco_from_combat-en-5945dd90-1cd6-4313-8263-15c7efe79f41.html

Last updated: 05/07/2016



From Yalta to San Francisco

There is no point in seeking, in the final Communiqué of the 'Big Three', a retraction of what happened or of what was allowed to happen, in Tehran. Certain paths should not be retraced. And issues that have been resolved, once and for all, by the very presence of the victors, should not be brought up for further discussion.

It is clear, moreover, that, from the moment that it was deemed vital to arrange that the seat of the next conference be San Francisco, facing Japan, on a fateful day (the day after the renewal — which would seem absurd — or the denunciation — which is now plausible — of the Russo-Japanese Pact), no one approaches the partner with whom they would like to unite on a permanent basis with a programme of disruptions and repudiations. Just as in Teheran, realism prevailed in Yalta.

However, although Franklin Roosevelt never had the intention to condemn, on the shores of the Black Sea, a policy in which he had participated elsewhere, he felt, at least, obliged, before the reactions of the Congress and the calls of isolationists — converted, late in the day, to second-zone internationalism — to restrain baser instincts and introduce into the discussion the sort of tone and methods which people have quite lost the habit of employing. In the eyes of his compatriots, indeed, he seems to have achieved this rather well.

As for us, we will content ourselves with awaiting what is to come. Looking ahead to the future, and, beyond Germany, defeated and forced into submission, to the fate of nations whose most ardent wish is not simply to be freed from one form of imperialism only to be subjected to another or to several others, we would prefer to avoid any hasty acquiescence. Suffering makes men mistrustful.

In fact, without discussing the general content of the Communiqué, which, despite its expansiveness, its universality and its references to the Atlantic Charter, still resembles 'a great power dictating its wishes to the world', we find, among the resolutions of the Three, a certain reticence and notable absences which would intrigue even the most innocent minds.

We shall not criticise the Three for having delayed the redrawing of the borders of the former Third Reich. On the contrary, Winston Churchill was right to insist that nothing be decided without the input of France and of the Polish, who are far more frightened than pleased by the Oder-Neisse Line. And besides, the precision with which the Three explain to us how they will set about exterminating German militarism and Nazism and how they will eliminate or control all German industry which might be used for war production, is exactly what we were hoping for.

We shall not be so indiscreet as to ask what will become of von Paulus and his Moscow radio team in this business, no more than we shall dare to anticipate the type of collaboration which, in the minds of the Three, should reunite in Warsaw and Belgrade men who have spent recent months insulting each other. Let us admit that nations will be in a position to express themselves freely. Time, they say, sometimes puts right misunderstandings. But this is only the most optimistic hypothesis.

This said, we may marvel at the fact that no reference has been made to Austria, which is nevertheless a major issue. Whilst this issue remains unresolved, the whole of Central Europe and the Balkans will be completely powerless, from a political as well as an economic point of view.

But what worries us still more is the silence observed by the Three with respect to the role of the major powers in the international peace initiative, the principles of which were outlined at Dumbarton Oaks and reviewed and corrected in Yalta.

We are being assured that an agreement has been reached regarding emergency voting procedures. Bravo! We shall, however, timidly enquire what form they will take. Has the argument been won by the Russians, who, not so long ago, stubbornly refused to abandon the right of a veto, even if they were taking part in the conflict under consideration? Or, perhaps, in a renunciation of the rule of unanimity, have they undertaken to accept a majority verdict? Who knows! Nevertheless, the entire edifice of future peace, of true peace,

depends on this unanswered question. In other words, will the major powers continue to try to impose their will on those nations arbitrarily qualified as minor?

Our hopes are quite slim, we must admit, and one might wonder whether this was not how the Russians and Americans entered into a compromise which led to the exchange of concessions —concerning, firstly, their neighbours and, secondly, the treatment reserved for Germany — which have led to an overall accord. Europe would like to be settled.

Lastly, and from a viewpoint different from that taken up abroad by those who promote alliances and carve up of zones of influence, we continue to deem that the Three have committed a blunder in excluding France from discussions that may reach reasonable conclusions only with France present. Why defer what it would have been prudent and courteous to accept without delay? Chiang Kai-shek himself, if we asked him, would probably share our opinion, since, without wishing to offend him in any way, we are, today, struggling to accept the idea that France and China are of equal rank.

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