

Jean Monnet's thoughts on the future (Algiers, 5 August 1943)


Caption: During the Second World War, Jean Monnet, a member of the French Committee for National Liberation in Algiers, reflects on how to restore lasting peace and ensure the economic reconstruction of Europe once the war is over.

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[...]

The present course of the war [...] may lead to the imminent defeat of the enemy and the liberation of Europe. We must be ready for that moment; before it comes is when the diplomatic arrangements must be made, before it that the peoples of Europe must be educated, that we must plant in their minds the basic ideas that will make it possible to restore democratic institutions, the hope that a constructive programme for European reorganisation will bring them property and peace, and the conviction that they will only find such solutions in action through international cooperation.

In so doing we will have contributed to the groundwork thanks to which we may, by reasserting our faith in democracy and the hope of a better world, eliminate the greatest dangers besetting European reconstruction and peace, namely the belief that by affirming nationalism and national sovereignty in all its political and economic forms, the anxieties of the peoples can be allayed and the problems of the future settled.

[...]

We must consequently act before the enemy collapses. We must act now. That is the duty of the French Committee of National Liberation. It must decide on a line of conduct, sound out the Allies, not necessarily to obtain their approval but to take account, in the final form of the position the Committee adopts, of the main points on which their views diverge, because their collaboration — or at least collaboration by some of them — will be necessary to the success of our undertaking. Then the Committee must speak to France and to the world at large.

We need to attain the following goals: the re-establishment or establishment of a democratic regime in Europe, and the economic and political organisation of a 'European entity'. Achieving these two goals is essential to creating the conditions that will make peace in Europe a normal state of affairs. There will not be peace in Europe if it remains possible for regimes to be set up in which the right of opposition is not respected and in which free elections are not held. Fulfilling these two conditions is central to restoring and maintaining all the essential forms of freedom — speech, assembly, association and so on — that are the foundations on which Western civilisation has developed.

There will be no peace in Europe if the States are reconstituted on the basis of national sovereignty, with all that that entails in terms of prestige politics and economic protectionism. If the nations of Europe once again adopt defensive positions, huge armies will once again be necessary. Under the future peace treaty, some nations will be allowed to re-arm; others will not. That was tried in 1919; we all know the result. Alliances will be sealed between European nations; we all know what they are worth. The weight of military spending will prevent or delay social reform. Fear will once more be the dominant factor in European reconstruction.

The countries of Europe are too small to guarantee their peoples the prosperity that modern conditions make possible and consequently necessary. They need larger markets. It is also important that they do not devote a substantial share of their resources to maintaining supposedly 'key' industries to meet the requirements of national defence, industries which are rendered obligatory by the form that States take, with their 'national sovereignty' and protectionist reflexes, such as we saw before 1939.

Prosperity for the States of Europe and the social developments that must go with it will only be possible if they form a federation or a 'European entity' that makes them into a common economic unit.

It will obviously not be possible to achieve this 'European result' immediately. A fairly long period will be necessary to allow for the requisite discussions and the conclusion of the necessary agreements. But it is vital to make immediate provision for measures which at the very least will ensure that it remains possible to achieve such a result. As we explained above, if the liberation of Europe occurs, as now seems foreseeable, it will inevitably lead to the establishment of arbitrary authorities in Europe and the reconstitution of sovereign, protectionist States, which means that there is a serious risk that it will not be possible to achieve

the goals set out above.

[...]

We consequently need to plan European reconstruction, and by extension peace, in two stages, both in terms of reconstituting political forces in the various States and from the viewpoint of the economy. The first stage will start the moment the first soldiers of the liberating armies set foot on the continent and will last until a peace congress can be convened. The second stage will extend from the start of the peace congress to the moment — if we succeed — when a European entity is established.

[...]

The first stage, for the reasons outlined above, is the most dangerous one. All that follows will depend upon it.

From a political standpoint it is essential to provide for measures permitting the immediate establishment in liberated countries of provisional governments appointed by due democratic process.

The various European States must all take the same route, each adopting different constitutional forms suited to their needs. But nothing could do more, politically, to reassure a troubled Europe than the knowledge, before liberation, that the first thing that the liberators will do is ensure that a 'provisional government' is set up, in keeping with the rules of the Constitution, until elections by universal suffrage — held once the prisoners, workers and so on have returned home — have led to the installation of the final government.

This commitment would take the wind out of the sails of forces in the various countries that may be preparing to seize power. Not knowing that a democratically appointed provisional government will be set up immediately after liberation, the people may be suspicious of everything, and that in turn will justify, or at least encourage, a coup. Furthermore, if violent takeovers do occur, on what basis could the de facto regime take action against them, other than in public view to maintain its own authority? On the other hand, if repressive action is required before the provisional government is set up, the de facto regime will suppress attempted coups to allow the proper formation of a provisional government. In one case it is civil war, in the other law and order are upheld within the framework of the institutions.

Once the provisional government has been formed, it will uphold law and order in the name of the nation.

Law and order can only be upheld in the name of the nation within a legal framework. The root of the tragedy in Europe is the rule of arbitrary forces. Respect for the rule of law must be restored. The exercise of power must be separated from personal interests. Despotism and personality cults must be swept away. Before the emergence of the totalitarian regimes in around 1914 this was the case almost all over Europe.

Loosely worded proclamations are not enough. Public opinion must be instructed. For years, liberal, democratic values, respect for the law and truth have been systematically obscured or exposed to violent criticism. We must now bring them back into the light, without hate-filled rhetoric or calls for revolt, but with intelligence, diversity and sincerity. The public must be informed. Young people must be educated by the press, radio and schooling; democracy and respect for the law must be instilled in every mind and every conscience.

Some people fear that political parties may want to take advantage of the disorder and the confusion among our populations to assert their views and establish their systems. But if that were to happen, their action would take the form of a rebellion against the institutions and they would consequently be exposed to the same repressive measures, justified by the institutions, in which they will be encouraged to take part alongside everyone else.

From an economic point of view it is vital, from the outset, to prevent economic sovereignty being re-established. We should consequently already be asking all the governments in exile or authorities such as the

French Committee for a commitment not to establish custom tariffs or quotas until a peace treaty has been concluded.

In addition to the general reasons outlined above, it is obvious that Europe, lacking resources, will need everything available to it through trade, and that people's lives over this period will be made more difficult if customs tariffs are added to the cost of already hard-to-find essentials. It is equally obvious that if such measures are not adopted, vested interests will put pressure on governments to bring back customs tariffs, and countries will demand them, as a weapon to be used in what is commonly known as 'economic negotiations'. In no time at all inter-European protectionism will regain the upper hand, with no means of abolishing it for several years. With this kind of protectionism and 'economic nationalism' we will have reverted to the conditions prevailing in Europe before 1939:

- Question of import monopolies;
- Relief;
- Relaunch of national industries, at least to secure jobs;
- Question of Germany, which might be the only country with industry in working order;
- Need for a foreign trade monopoly managed by the Allies;
- Return by Germany of the machinery, etc., seized in occupied countries;
- Financial issues over this interim period;
- Lend Lease for overseas procurements, etc.

The plan projected for this interim period will only stand a chance of success if it is realistic. It must make allowance for the historical experience of each country. It must not draw an artificial distinction between political and economic factors, for a separation of this sort would be contrary to the lessons of history and the constraints of day-to-day government. The plan will only be able to develop within the framework of legislation which has been lying dormant for years or has more recently been shelved, but which has the advantage of having existed, of having been framed and put into effect in each of the States which has to be reconstructed. Lastly, electoral process and, more generally, the mechanisms of democratic institutions depend on an administrative organisation that it would be unwise to improvise without reference to the precedents set during the liberal era.

[...]

Under these circumstances it looks as though the first stage must be immediately to establish provisional political authorities with a democratic basis in each State; to maintain the European economy during this transitional period without introducing customs duties and the like; and not to hold the peace congress until it is possible to bring together duly mandated provisional governments from the various European countries.

[...]

The second stage is essentially the peace congress.

- Plan for the political and economic reconstruction of Europe;
- Situation of Europe in relation to the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union;
- Programme for settlement of the German question, population movements;
- Constitution of a European Inventory of heavy metallurgy;
- Monitoring of aircraft manufacture and airlines by the European authority;
- Association of the US, UK and USSR in these systems and controls;
- Political and financial organisation of Europe;
- Holding of a World Council with European participation.

[...]