

'Black sea fruit' from The New Statesman and Nation

Caption: On 10 February 1945, the British weekly periodical The New Statesman and Nation focuses on the political issues of the Yalta Conference attended by the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, the American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Joseph Stalin.

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Black sea fruit

The least expert of us could have drawn up a political agenda for the meeting of the Triumvirate. They must deal with the immediate future of Germany; they cannot ignore political difficulties in Poland, Greece and Yugoslavia; they may touch on Russia's need for loans when she faces her immense task of reconstruction; they may discuss the part she is prepared to play in the Far East. Yet the real subject of this conference must be something wider and more fundamental. Can the two Western Powers attain in their dealings with the Soviet Union a relationship of confidence and co-operation? It does not yet exist, and it will not be easy to create. The difficulty is not merely that the Western Powers are "pluto-democracies." We have also to consider the fact that Russia stood apart from the formative experiences — the Catholic tradition, the Reformation and the bourgeois revolution — that made Western civilisation. For a quarter of a century she has led a life of isolation, painfully aware of the hostility of the ruling classes in the West. That her armies have played such an outstanding part in winning the land-war in Europe may have deepened her pride; it has not relaxed her wary self-reliance.

These are the psychological conditions of an uneasy relationship. Furthermore, for the first time in world-history three Great Powers, and only three, confront each other. A balance of power such as our fathers aimed at, where there were six Great Powers or seven, is no longer attainable. To create an effective international society by calling in States of the second and third rank cannot be easy. The sooner France and other lesser Powers have a voice in the settlement the better; but, for the moment, the Big Three have a monopoly of armed force. This makes their potential division the more perilous.

Most of us know, though few of us venture to say plainly, what is the real difficulty in reaching a reasonable settlement of the German and other questions. Neither the West nor the Russians are at ease about their relationship when they look twenty years ahead: each tends to shape the future on strategical lines. The Russians fear that Big Business, American and British, may take over the industrial assets of defeated Germany, with the intention of using them one day in the final struggle against Communism. To banish that danger they talk of stripping Germany of its mechanical equipment, even if this should mean the acceptance of a permanently lower standard of life by all Germany's neighbours. "Better poverty," some may argue, "than the risk of a third world war." Given this suspicion of British and American motives, it is easy to render any argument for economic common sense suspect.

On their side the Russians seek to ensure their future safety, first of all, by creating a wide sphere of influence beyond their Western frontier — a *glacis*, which they must dominate in the political sense. In most of the States that compose it they are backing governments based on a loose coalition under Communist leadership, which will faithfully revolve in their orbit. Where, as in Yugoslavia, they have a leader of genius and the tradition of Slav brotherhood to help them, this solution works well. In Poland, a Catholic country poisoned by bitter memories, Stalin's solution, accepted by the British, has failed. The combination of Mr. Mikolajczyk and his Peasant Party with the Committee of the Lublin Poles has been thwarted by the intransigence of the London Poles. There is still apparently some hope of a compromise, and Mr. Roosevelt is said to be opposed to the extravagant, precarious plan of compensating Poland for the loss of territory east of the Curzon Line by offering them a great area of Germany up to the Oder and Neisse. From this area millions, who were to be transferred into Germany, are already in flight from the Red Army. As to the final frontier we may hear more when the Big Three report.

Turning their eyes farther West again, the Big Three must deal with another significant discrepancy between Anglo-American and Russian policy. Partly because they undervalue political warfare, partly because they dread any beginning of revolution, London and Washington are preparing to govern their zones directly, under a military occupation, which is to stretch over an indefinite number of years. Germans will be employed only in subordinate positions, and the emergence of a German Government lies, in their plans, far ahead in time. We will not stop to enquire whether any government of foreign soldiers and administrators could hope to solve the intricate problems, political, economic and spiritual, that will arise. The point is that the Russians were at one time thought to favour a very different plan which they may not have abandoned altogether. It is still within their power to use the selected prisoners who have rallied to them in the Free German Movement as the nucleus round which to form a German Government. This plan has its obvious

dangers. Even under Russian control, would a regime headed by Field Marshal Paulus make a genuine end of Prussian militarism and the Junker ascendancy? But it would presumably be a temporary stage, during which the Allies might discover the native forces capable of rebuilding a sounder German society. If these are the alternatives between which we must choose, we should decidedly prefer the Russian plan, though we perceive its risks. But no great ingenuity is required to give this scheme a sinister cast. It can be interpreted as a return to the alliance of Rapallo: a Germany ruled by anti-Nazi generals might be a perilous element in Europe; nor would its subordination to Russian control, military and political, endear it to Tory minds.

Much turns on the reception of the proposals Moscow has made, both to Washington and London, for reconstruction loans or long-term credits up to an immense total. These would be spent chiefly on machinery. The difficulty in our case is purely financial. We are heavily in debt, and our balance of trade is adverse: as soon as possible we must aim at securing a return for our exports. That is not America's case: she can afford to lend, and it will only be by lending on a great scale abroad that she can achieve full employment. But will she try to use her surplus as an instrument of policy? That, in the case of Russia, might be an unlucky inspiration. In the past the Soviet Union, at a heavy cost to her people, rejected foreign borrowing, though it offered an easy way out of her economic struggles, because she was bent on retaining her full freedom of action. The idea, attributed to Mr. Roosevelt, of making a loan dependent on Russia's undertaking not to sponsor Communist governments in Europe is naïve, and we scarcely think Mr. Roosevelt capable of anything so unrealistic.

It is not possible, if it were desirable, to go back to the old Liberal rule of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other peoples. None of us can be indifferent to the kind of government our neighbours maintain, because an ultra-nationalistic government, even if it is not actually Fascist, will be in the international field anti-social, if not bellicose. In concrete terms, the time has gone by when Europe can tolerate a Poland run by Pilsudski's colonels or a Hungary managed by Horthy's aristocrats. Peace and international co-operation can be secured in Europe only by sweeping social changes.

The Russians, none the less, would be wise to pay some attention to criticisms and suggestions from Westerners with their different democratic tradition. In our view, for example, the preoccupation of our Russian Allies with territorial aspects of security is excessive. When Germany is disarmed and the Nazi machine of terror broken for ever, the hope of a lasting peace depends not so much on the redrawing of frontiers or the uprooting of populations as on setting all Europe to the task of rebuilding the civilisation that has come so near to total destruction. Ours is a lost continent unless it can turn its thoughts from power to welfare. One urgent need faces us, and that is to set every idle hand to work again, whether in France or in Poland, in Germany or in Italy. So soon as we all sit down in earnest to plan the reconstruction of the European homeland, questions of sovereignty will sink into their proper place. The best way, as we see it, to counter Russia's suspicions and pave the way for co-operative reconstruction is that America should grant her the loan she seeks without political conditions that imply distrust. More certainly than anything else this would assure her that the West accepts her as the Great Power she is, and means to live with her in friendship.