

**Adam von Trott zu Solz - Letter to Percy Corbett - 16 June 1941**

1941

Basle, Monday.

Dear Visser t'Hooft,

here is a personal letter to Percy Corbett which I managed to write before leaving. Nobody could be more conscious of its inadequacy than I am myself. But I took your warning seriously that something if only as a token of cooperation should be sent, and gave up my plan to go to Zurich and wrote from here. Kindly forward the letter via Ned Carter and use any of its contents <sup>from 10/12/41 to 10/22/41</sup> under your own name to others. Let Ned give my regards to the same old friends as last time and add the names of Ingrid and Trude (both of whom, I believe you know as well). The \$ 500 would be IPR money to keep connexions going here in Europe.

My love to you and your family

Yours ever,

A.T.

P.S.  
 You might show the letter to Blomay whose criticism I followed on two major points.  
 I think it is necessary to correct the most mistakes and ~~add~~ a copy of the letter on other pages to ~~avoid~~ <sup>avoid</sup> any misunderstanding.

(Corbett)

as from Geneva, June 10th 1941.

Dear Percy,

I hope you will not be disappointed in so late and inadequate an answer to your admirable manuscript. We read and discussed it carefully, but we cannot as yet present you with anything half as comprehensive. My few days in Switzerland were really meant to provide the opportunity for recording our main observations on your theses, but I am afraid I am just about leaving again without having achieved much more than a pile of more or less disjointed notes. It may be a good thing that they are not accessible to me at this moment since I have decided to write to you ~~more~~ more briefly now and to send to you a more worked out memorandum later on, if you consider this desirable.

The real trouble for a discussion of "post war world", of course, lies in the fact that an ~~unfathomable~~ <sup>enormous</sup> stretch of further international deterioration seems to spread itself between now and the period of reconstruction and an equally great danger of misinterpreting the intermediate states of mind on both sides. Yet the challenge for something to substitute an adequate exchange of ideas is unmistakable, if only for the attempt to preserve the faculty of constructive discussion for a later era. For this purpose your manuscript seemed particularly welcome, both in its lack of propagandist and polemical bias and its emphasis on principles of reconstruction.

In spite of your objective and unbiassed discussion of most topics, however, ~~there~~ which was genuinely appreciated, there was of course the initial difficulty to overcome of your implicit

presupposition of a "democratic" victory. It was realised that your book for its intended publication before the end of war could naturally expound post war worlds on no other basis. Any publisher in Europe (except perhaps on this Swiss island) would have to insist on the opposite assumption, so that discussion before the end of hostilities cannot but proceed on certain basic antinomies of fact which must be left open. Its real interest at this stage would consist in the exploration as to what margin of compatible or even identical elements such opposite publications might or might not contain.

It was agreed that your book in spite of its assumption of victory contained a challenging degree of common ground for discussion. Your adoption of the pattern of regional federalism as opposed to any abstract schemes of world government meets with similar trends of thought on this side. A sound way to reconstruction does not seem to suggest itself on the basis of one power or combination of powers dominating and imposing their schemes of pacification on the rest of the world. Reconstruction, it is felt, should, as you suggest, follow out the inherent peace needs of every region concerned and only then proceed to a worldwide adjustment of regions.

4.1 We were a little surprised by not finding a more important contribution allotted to British Empire federalism in your catalogue of federal units: Europe, America, Pacific Area and Russia. Perhaps you took for granted that relations between self-governing members of the Commonwealth already form a pattern of federal units geared to a potentially worldwide system without absolute predominance of any one part. This would seem especially true, if India were to be granted full dominion-status with all this could entail for the inter-regional adjustments necessary between East and West.

Under the present ~~ex~~ scheme of things the results of your plan for the future of India, Australia and Southeast Asia would seem to raise a number of questions. It also seems doubtful whether a European federation could be conceived entirely without Russia.

Regarding your discussion of the future federated Americas there seems to be little or nothing that could be usefully contributed from this side, excepting a later mentioning of the vital economic ties between Europe and South America as probably the most important question for a discussion of this inter-regional relationship.

There is, I am afraid, an equally determined feeling that the Americas (even while leaving strictly aside what they might or might not decide to do before the end of this war) cannot possibly take Britains essential place in the reconstruction of Europe. Quite apart from the immediate issues of the war, its inevitable trend towards increased identification of British initiative with Western hemisphere interests seems to constitute a permanent threat to the inner structures of both regions. In all fairness to the intensive and honest study, carried on in America, of post-war schemes for Europe it cannot be doubted that by the nature of things actual American intervention would follow different lines than those laid down in such schemes -as indeed it did after 1919. In the mean time it can only be conceived in practical terms of a long drawn out siege in which Western Europe (including England) would have to be among the chief sufferers. The whole of Europe in fact, subject to these effects of American intervention, would be collectively pressed towards an eastern orientation before a western partnership in the reconstruction of Europe could be formed. It is not possible to neglect these intervening

4  
phases entirely in a realistic appraisal of America's potential post-war rôle in Europe.

Regarding the inner structure of the federal regions which you elaborate in your <sup>it/</sup>book it seems equally difficult to get away from the havoc that intervening war developments are likely to play with it. The actual social and economic conditions prevailing in post war society will surely be of decisive importance for a satisfactory working of institutions designed to adjust them internationally. In the face of this uncertainty there are a few more general points which may deserve emphasis regarding the structure of post-war Europe, about which alone we feel in a position to talk with any authority, at all.

Europe it might be remembered has probably undergone a more advanced transformation in the underlying conditions of modern industrial society than most other parts of the world. The causes of present events are often analysed without due regard for the comparatively long period that lies at the back of these changes. The beginning of this transformation, or even revolution, may be dated from the war of 1914-1918 or from the world economic crises both of which probably left a more lasting effect on European society than on any other region of the globe. Without entering into the moral side of this question it seems fallacious to attribute the nature of these factual changes solely to the events after 1933 or 1939. These might be more appropriately conceived as further though by no means final phases of the same elementary transformation.

Too much, in many respects, has already been written on the nature of this European revolution. But you would probably agree that a proper analysis of its character should precede any more specialised account of European post war possibilities. We will try to compile some more material for you under this heading, but

the essential approach seems to me to lie in the fact that here in Europe modern industrial society (nonexistent in this sense in the Russia of 1917) first began (by way of war, i.e. unrelieved by any full return to "peace" conditions and reinforced by yet another prewar era) to change its controls from a free play of capitalist forces to a more and more comprehensive system of state control. Present developments in America rather than the earlier phases of the New Deal suggest the beginning of a similar process in the more highly industrialised parts of the Western hemisphere. Will it not be necessary to debate post-war structures with careful reference to the new relation, or rather combination of public and economic power? A real difference may lie in the fact that America tends to regard this change as temporary, while Europe's return to a "liberal" economy after this war seems inconceivable.

A more detailed exposition of post war European possibilities must therefore further include some review of the completely new fabric of governmental functions and institutions, of corresponding changes in the relationship of state and citizen and of the new and in many respects socialist significance of the masses in public life. All these and other permanent factors are bound to make certain changes in the constitutional structure of postwar national and international society inevitable. Without minimizing the intense ideological differences still raging in Europe, it may be anticipated that former political institutions will be less in the forefront of popular demands in the post war era. The degree to which authorities will be able to deal with immediate emergencies of civilian life with justice and efficiency will be of decisive importance. The whole machinery of public control will have to be turned over as it stands to the stupendous and urgent tasks of recreating a consumption economy, of rebuilding transport on land and sea and of alleviating the worst of the housing, clothing

and food problem. And you will probably not hesitate in agreeing that the critical necessity of a close relation between the institutions and measures fulfilling these demands and what might be called the actual phase of the European revolution will be greater in this region than similar necessities in America or the Far East.

Very probably such terms as Liberty, Justice, Democracy will assume a new meaning in the type of industrial society in which we are going to live. In order to use them constructively in the discussion of post war realities it will be necessary to clear them of propagandist elements. In a society in which access to the means of productive activity is bound to be regulated, liberty f.i. will have to include the right of full protection of the individual labour contributions. Democracy may have to assert itself in further channels than those working on governments through parliaments.

It will probably be far less difficult to agree on the basic human values which must be reasserted and established in postwar Europe, than to agree on the common institutions to do so. The new emphasis on social and economic planning will encourage the growth of federal thinking in Europe, because the strongest central authority cannot hope to produce and still less to deliver the necessary goods without an increasing measure of willing cooperation (which will in fact become a vital necessity to both sides in the economic field). Central power will probably have to be strong in the immediate postwar epoch to prevent disintegration, but the effect of common economic conditions and practises will make the devolution of powers possible which will prove necessary for Europe's political pacification.

In contrast to the regions to which Europeans have emigrated in former times, Europe cannot herself treat nationality as an insignificant or vanishing factor in politics. This war and its causes have done too much to intensify national feeling, which will



in fact continue as a force to further disruption until federal ideas have been allowed to take roots. For this it will be imperative to reinstitute for those integral national units which especially the smaller countries have formed for centuries the largest possible degree of political selfgovernment and cultural autonomy compatible with federally planned economy and defense. Europe cannot -as other regions may- be safely likened to the ~~xxx~~ "Melting Pot".

It would be too early to talk of a common spirit working towards European reconstruction <sup>or</sup> anything like a federal basis. The abyss of uncertainty ~~is~~ still too deep. But most material conditions for such a development seem to be contained in the situation and will probably be brought to bear on the minds of all Europeans with increasing intensity. Their actual identity of fate will dawn on them the more the sources of their sufferings are realised in a ~~more~~ solidieric way.

This letter which ~~I~~ am afraid had to be written under rather bad time pressure contains less of a contribution to your discussion than a promise of one, if you care to have it. I should be delighted to hear of you again-

With kindest regards to you and our friends

Yours ever,

*F. Adams*

(Von Trutt)