

**Willem A. Visser 't Hooft et al. - Some Considerations Concerning the  
Post-War Settlement (with two cover letters) - March 1941**

March 12, 1941

*Also to check of York (Frank)*

Mr. John Foster Dulles,  
N E W Y O R K. City.

Dear Mr. Dulles,

I send you some notes concerning the post-war settlement which may be of interest to the members of the Federal Council Commission on this subject. They are, of course, confidential, and the name of the World Council or of the Study Department should not be mentioned in this connection.

Their value, if any, is in that they represent the common mind of four people of four different categories - the two main belligerent countries, a neutral country, and an ex-neutral occupied country. This fact is, of course, also to be treated as confidential.

We have confined ourselves purposely to the European Continental situation - since we have no sufficient knowledge of the present trend of thought in Great Britain, U.S.A., and Russia to say anything definite about these countries. We realize, however, that it may well be that those countries or one or two of them will prove to be the decisive factors of the situation.

We would be glad if this modest contribution to the work of your Commission might lead to an exchange of thought across the Ocean, and would be glad to answer any specific questions which you may want to raise. This type of discussion will be essential to avoid that we prepare for the future in isolation from each other. This is all the more necessary now that the Continents are so largely cut off from each other.

I send my best wishes for the work of your important Commission and remain,

Yours very sincerely,

Encl.:-

*Patrick?*  
*Stanton*  
*V+H*  
*Bohannon?*

C O P Y

March 12, 1941 + 4

*Same date to  
John Foster Dulles  
Nelson van Kirk*

Dear Archbishop,

I enclose some notes on the post-war settlement which are the result of a number of conversations with friends from different countries. I showed this draft to three of these friends and made certain changes on their suggestion. Thus in the present form it represents the common mind of four of us who belong to the four different categories - one of each side of the war, one from a neutral, and one from an ex-neutral occupied country. I have left out any mention of Great Britain since that side of the matter will be best studied in Great Britain itself, and since we are too much cut off from the thinking of our British friends. Russia is also left out of the picture. It is the great X which we cannot at present put into any scheme, and which may well ruin all our schemes if it gets a chance.

I have to add a point of considerable importance. By friends who belong to a group which I need not mention by name since you can guess who they are, the question is often raised :- What are the minimum-conditions on which peace would be possible? They consider the plans put forward at Malvern and in some of your addresses as maximum-propositions, but would like to know what you and others consider to be the minimum-conditions of peace. The main point is really this :- Would their country have a chance of being offered acceptable terms if it would change its regime? Or would such a change of regime be used to crush their country altogether? This is a problem which is much discussed, and it is clear that a clear answer on this point may be of considerable importance for the decisions which this group may take. At present their fear is that it is too late for an action of this kind. If, however, they could be convinced that this is not the case, they might get busy again. This whole matter is, of course, very confidential. I should, however, be glad, if you would keep Bill and George Bell informed.

We have read with interest and admiration what you did at Malvern. Please keep us informed of any further developments along this line. We need all we can get to pass it on to the right people over ~~xx~~ here.

I remain with very cordial wishes,  
Yours ever,

Enclo.:-

V 144

"John was dumb"

sent to Diller (J.F.) on March 12, 1941  
Also to W. Fingle

Based on conversations with  
and checked by three others:

- 1) - almost certainly D. Boshoffen  
(who was in Geneva second week March)
- 2) - Ekrenström (neutral)
- 3) - probably Denzil Patrick.

(added to York: what are minimum conditions  
of peace? Question obviously raised by Boshoffen)

Confidential

*sent to John Foster Dulles*

*in ~~the~~ ~~document~~  
April 1941*

### SOME CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING THE POST-WAR SETTLEMENT

(1) The great danger of discussions about the post-war settlement which take place during the war is that they may be utterly unrelated to the factual situation as it will be at the end of the war. The war has so far developed in a way which literally nobody expected, for every party has had its great disappointments and it is probable that this will continue to be the case. Moreover, as the war spreads the number of political and military elements contained in the total situation becomes so overwhelming that it is practically out of the question to foresee the final outcome of their interaction. Thus studies about the nature of the peace-time settlement tend at present to move in the realm of principles alone or in the realm of principles supported by pre-war facts. Now the danger of such studies is that they may result in another attempt to impose upon the world a system and an ideology which do not fit in with the realities of the situation. Such an attempt would be no more successful than the League of Nations which failed largely because it had no roots in the psychological and political reality of the countries most concerned. On the other hand, a plan for peace cannot be improvised in the last minute. It is, therefore, also dangerous to postpone all consideration of the post-war settlement until the day of the armistice and until the moment when we know with more certainty for what world and in what world we are to create peace.

Faced with these two difficulties we can only take a middle course and - while conscious of the provisional character of our studies - concentrate our main attention on the question: - What are some of the realities, both of a political and a psychological nature, with which - in so far as we can see to-day - we will have to count at the time of the peace-settlement? Certain changes which have taken place since the beginning of the war may at least give us some general idea of the situation which is likely to exist at the time of the armistice.

(2) The dominating factor in the European situation is without doubt that in three of the principal countries of Europe, which have been pillars of European culture and of the European political system, the bottom has dropped out of public life. Germany, France and Italy are countries in which there has been such a radical break with all that was contained in the national tradition and in which there is such a wide gulf between the ruling minority and the real life of the people that they present a political vacuum. All living traditions on which the political life of the countries was based are destroyed, and it is an open question whether they can be resuscitated. The political parties are gone, the social groupings have been dislocated, and the formations which have taken their place are compulsory groups without abiding substance which will probably break down when the police power behind them is no longer there to sustain them.

The situation in some of the smaller countries is quite different, for they have been thrown back on their national traditions and are more than ever conscious of their own past as a living and present force. This would seem to be true in Holland, Norway, Denmark and in the neutral countries. But the fact remains that three of the largest countries of Europe will probably emerge from this war as countries which have lost their

nistory' and which will, therefore, have to rebuild their national life from the bottom up.

(3) This situation has the advantage that it offers a very great opportunity for a new political beginning. There is now a

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general readiness for radical solutions of political and economic problems such as had not existed for a long time. And there is a general understanding that it will be impossible to return to the 'good old days' of national sovereignty and unrestricted capitalism. On the other hand, this situation contains so much revolutionary dynamite and so little stability that it may well give rise to further wild experiments of a dictatorial and violent character. In this connection it is to be remembered that the Communist Party is practically the only one which is accustomed to subterranean activity and is, therefore, likely to emerge as a strong force at the moment when the pressure of dictatorship ceases.

(4) In facing the problem of the future form of government of the countries in which the spiritual and political traditions have been destroyed the following considerations should be kept in mind: -

(a) It has become clear that the masses do not live by bread alone. They need goals to live for. The main problem is, therefore, not a problem of political organisation, but a problem of spiritual orientation. At this point the churches have an enormous task for which they should prepare themselves at present.

(b) The doctrine according to which the political régime of a country is its own affair and nobody else's business must be abolished, for it is now abundantly clear that foreign policy and forms and spirit of government are closely related. A compromise between these two attitudes must be found in an international guarantee of all such régimes as do not conflict with the common interest of the international community as a whole.

(c) For some time to come the European countries will have to have an authoritarian form of rule so as to avoid violent revolutions and a battle of all against all. But these forms of government should be definitely oriented towards greater freedom of expression.

(5) It is true that large numbers of people on the Continent of Europe are convinced that 'democracy has failed'. But it is wrong to draw the conclusion that, therefore, they desire some form of totalitarian government. Most of those who express the conviction that democracy has failed mean by this that the party system as practised in the last twenty years has failed, but are in no way partisans of dictatorial government and state-absolutism. They have their doubts about direct government by the people, that is of constant interference by parliaments in executive government, and desire to distinguish more clearly between the executive function of the government and the legislative or controlling function of parliaments. But they do not desire the suppression of the right of opposition and of the restrictions imposed on governments by law. Judging from the present position in many European countries, it would seem that there will be no enthusiasm in the post-war Europe for the kind of democracy practised in pre-dictatorial Germany, France or Italy, but that there will be room

for a democracy in which the government has a strong and independent position and so can act without losing precious time.

(6) There is very general recognition of the fact that it will be impossible to go back to the old European disorder in which the various European countries tried to shut themselves off from each other, both politically and economically. Some form of European federation will probably be acceptable to the large masses of Europeans who seek above all a real insurance against

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further wars and against economic ruin. And most countries will probably be willing to accept a considerable limitation of their sovereignty for the sake of the security of a larger community, if they can be sure that that community will not mean the domination of one or two nations over all others, and if they can maintain their full cultural independence.

(7) If through the economic and political organisation of Europe as a unity it becomes possible to make the frontiers far less visible and less formidable than they have been in the period from 1918 to 1939, it will also become possible to find a solution for the two eternal European problems: - the problem of the balance of power and the problem of minorities. It is clear that the minority problem would cease to be a real source of trouble when frontiers have ceased to be political and economic walls of division.

And with regard to the crucial problem of the balance of power, is it fantastic to suggest that in a European federation there should be no great powers, and that the units should be formed not by Germany, France, Italy and the many smaller states, but rather by units which do not differ too much in size and power (Prussia, Bavaria, Austria, Alsace-Lorraine, Northern France, Southern France, and so on)? It would seem that only through a radical break with the tradition of the balance of power as a balance between a few great powers can Europe arrive at that unification which it needs so badly. If, as does not seem impossible, this war ends in such a way that all Continental nations have lost the war, this solution will be more easily accepted.

(8) The most dangerous element in the situation is that there is at present an accumulation of hatred in all occupied countries which will surely seek an outlet when the moment comes to turn against the oppressor and which will demand vengeance for the sufferings which have been inflicted.

(9) Taking these various factors together it would seem that in all plans for a post-war settlement the following points need to be specially taken into account: -

(a) The peace plan must not be an a-priori construction, but be rooted in the realities of the situation.

(b) The peace plan should not be conceived in terms of a mere return to the past, but create the possibility of a new beginning in politics and economics.

(c) The nations must have time to find their feet again before they commit themselves to the new order.

(d) There must, therefore, be a considerable period between the armistice and the conclusion of peace.

(e) The new political régimes must not be imposed from

the outside, but all countries which accept a régime which is not based on state-absolutism and totalitarianism should receive an international guarantee against violent revolutions.

(f) Continental Europe must be conceived as a federation the units of which should not be too unequal in size, and in political and economic power.

(10) The task of the churches in the new order will be to create forms of community out of which new political traditions may grow. They must prepare themselves now for the tremendous task of evangelisation of the masses which will fall to them in nations

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in which all other political and cultural institutions have been destroyed or will be destroyed by the end of the war. They will have to accept much greater responsibility for the national life than they have been willing to take during the last two centuries and to become centres of new ethical productivity. This task can, however, only be accomplished if they exemplify in their own life what true community means.

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sm/24/4/41