UNITED NATIONS
The Not Quite So Brave New World

In an old mansion at Dumbarton Oaks, Virginia, six weeks’ deliberation came to an end. Foreign affairs experts of the United Nations rose and stretched their legs. Presented for consideration by the leaders of Britain, U.S.A., the Soviet Union and China was a draft plan for world security, outline of an organisation which had to succeed where the old League of Nations so dismally failed.

No one was so far committed to anything: the proposals were intended for discussion as soon as possible at a full United Nations conference. But at first glance two things were clear: (1) the planners of 1944 are less starry eyed but a good deal more realistic than those of 1918; (2) there are still big gaps to fill, even allowing that compromise is inevitable before the plan can inspire confidence.

In many ways the proposed new organisation—to be called simply The United Nations—looks considerably like the poor old League. Components: an Assembly of all member States, a Council of five permanent members and six non-permanent, an International Court of Justice, a permanent headquarters and a permanent secretariat. Fundamental aims: (to prevent aggression, settle disputes peacefully and maintain peace and security) could hardly fail to be the same.

Control by Power

But the differences are more important and more striking.

Most significant fact of all in this highly significant document is its frank recognition of the fact that the postwar world will temporarily be controlled by power, the power of four great Allied nations, with France to be included later as a fifth.

After World War I the world, its resources, its decisions on whether nations should live at peace or go to war, was in the hands of a few great nations. With its pliable insistence on principle while principle was being kicked around everywhere under its nose, the old League refused to admit that sordid truth, generously gave to all nations an equality in theory which there was no hope of achieving in practice.

This time the even the most idealistic planners have learned that the world is a place full of wickedness, that until it is cleansed and purified it is as well to recognise the fact and plan for security accordingly. Pretext is thrown away. Instead of draping their naked power in veils of sanctimoniousness, the victorious nations refuse to, but vow to use it well.

This successor to the League will be frankly exclusive. To qualify for membership a nation must be passed as “peace-loving.” Moreover, even within the elite, it will have a ruling class and a proletariat. The General Assembly will be allowed to “consider” and “discuss” the political questions in hand, even to “make recommendations,” but the Council will have the deciding word.

Another great difference: it will have real means of enforcing the will of the body of “peace-loving nations” against an aggressor. Every member is to be required “to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements concluded among themselves, armed forces, facilities and assistance necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security.”

To make sure that this does not remain a pious wish, there will be appointed a Military Staff Committee (springing from the Joint Chiefs of Staff of Committe already in existence) to “advise and assist the Security Council on all questions relating to the Security Council’s military requirements . . . the employment and command of forces placed at its disposal; the regulation of armaments and to possible disarmament.”

It will also be responsible for the strategic direction of such armed forces. Exact composition of these forces has yet to be decided, but one thing is certain: the idea of an International Air Force for the maintenance of world order, so long discussed from every angle, is dead. If such a formidable weapon were to fall under the control of any one Power or group of Powers, the others would have cause to tremble.

Also new is the idea that whenever necessary any possible disputes of a local character should be dealt with by “regional arrangements” or “agencies,” not, of course, without the general approval and direction of the Security Council.

Many of the smaller Powers who will probably constitute the Assembly may not like the power-politics basis of the new organisation at all. Examples: a good many Latin American countries, both those fairly acquiescent about hemisphere solidarity and the tie-up with the U.S. and those who think under what they consider a joke, will probably be highly resentful. Great Dominions like Canada and Australia, which object to having their achievements lumped with Britain’s, are also likely to want to know more about the new set-up’s details.

What About Russia?

There was one disturbing sign as the preliminary planning ended, a sign that the United Nations could not afford to ignore. Before they left Dumbarton Oaks, the Chairmen of the United States, British and Chinese delegations (Edward Stettinius, Lord Halifax and Dr. Welling- ton Koo) issued a joint statement. It said that a satisfactory conclusion had been reached to the discussions, and that there had been evolved an “agreed set of proposals for the general framework of international organisation and the machinery required to maintain peace and security . . .”

Why had Russia’s Andrei Gromyko not signed the statement? Doubtless because no agreement had been reached on the question of voting procedure on the Security Council, still under consideration when the draft plan was published.

Obviously it is of the greatest importance that the Big Four should see eye to eye on this matter before laying down the final Charter. The British and Americans proposed that if a member of the Council were
guilty of aggression, that member should be excluded from veto. This was right and proper — a demonstration to the world — that their policy in Eastern Europe might be interpreted at some stage by other Allies as aggression. Until they were entirely reassured on that point, agreement was impossible.

There is, in fact, among the nations which are fighting together, a lingering element of mistrust. Until it had washed away it was Utopian to talk of peace and security. If the United Nations fail to maintain the most flawless unity on the general principles of world security, what chance is there of success when they come to the really difficult details — the problems of how to treat liberated and ex-satellite countries, which forces to support and which to guard against as the nations take up the threads of peace-time life again? Most difficult and important of all, what attitude to take to the stupendous problem of Germany's future?

This is a question which has to be faced lightly, or dismissed with the cynical conclusion that a complete agreement between States so different in their outlook and composition is impossible. Upon complete accord or otherwise depends the question of whether or not the world will embark on World War III with bigger and better flying-bombs, rockets and yet unconceived horrors.

Churchill's Talks

But last week brought signs that these difficulties were being tackled. Excellent was the news that Winston Churchill had gone to Moscow to confer with Joseph Stalin. Whatever the official purpose of the visit, it was unlikely that anything either of these warrior-statesmen felt to be vital and pressing would be neglected. Still more cheering was the news that Poland's Foreign Minsiter Stanislaw Mikołajczyk had also been invited to join the party. Possibly the hopeless case of Poland could be settled by tact and patience after all. The exchanged of cordial discussion in Moscow included a statement that Bulgaria would remove its troops from Greece. As yet, the new Bulgarian Government, in power since the drastic Russian move which jerked Bulgaria out of the war and into the Soviet orbit, has not made official peace with Britain and the United States. Now there was nothing to prevent that.

Less strange and disquieting in the light of this development was the British landing in Greece. At one time it had seemed as if the Greek Government might be inclined to welcome the sudden arrivals, not merely as liberators, but as possible political allies against Bulgaria. With the Bulgarian state wiped shining clean, that would not now matter.

Perhaps, with careful tending by all five head gardeners, Evening Standard cartoonist David Low's Dumbarton Acorn, showing a happy peace, seedman at work, would at least have a chance of growing up into a great, strong tree.