

Sitting in his living room the following evening, he wondered quietly ... *And where should I find fault tonight? With the Atlantic Charter perhaps? And why not?* It seemed to him as good a target as any.

Given its newsy but unofficial title by some writer at the *Daily Herald*, a London newspaper, and drafted by Roosevelt and Churchill in 1941 before their alliance with Joseph Stalin, whom some called “The Beast,” the Atlantic Charter's signatories agreed not to seek post-war territorial advantages. Rather, the so-called Charter purposed to maintain the right of all peoples to choose that form of government under which they wished to live, and to assure a permanent system of general security.

But to Victor's way of thinking, and to that of others, and in regard to honoring the spirit of the Charter as a whole, England's Prime Minister and the American President had failed. Pointedly he felt this to be so in the matter of the Charter's points No.1 and No.2: these regarding territorial gains and adjustments of territorial boundaries.

For these two presumably insightful statesmen had naively believed that the Soviet Union would also agree, that unity with their Russian ally would be easily achieved, especially after Russia had been so treacherously attacked by Germany, and only one year after *Time Magazine* had named Stalin as the Man of the Year.

In what Victor felt may have been a spate of verbal diarrhea, Churchill had laid the groundwork for the Charter's major malfunction; that Charter point No.3, stating that all peoples had the right to self determination, would not apply to Stalin's Soviet Union. In a September speech in 1941, Churchill stated that the Charter was meant to apply only to those European states then under German occupation. Why, Victor reasoned, could the Charter's point No.3 not also extend to countries then under Soviet domination?

Then he answered his own question. The likely reason was that *Britain* had never intended for this principle to apply to *them*, to *their* colonies in India and Africa. Nor would this principle be brought to bear on other European countries which also held pre-war colonies, even after their anticipated liberation from Nazi Germany.

James Groppi then came to mind, his Italian friend and neighbor – Milwaukee’s civil rights priest of the 1960s; the renowned activist protester and the originator of Milwaukee’s open housing marches, the most famous of which became known as “Selma of the North.” When both had lived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Victor had often discussed with him the frequently questionable politics of World War II and the subsequent betrayal of Poland. Looking at the matter with hindsight, Jimmy had remarked that the Atlantic Charter appeared to him – particularly in light of Churchill’s Charter-emasculating statement – to have been written solely to benefit certain European imperialist nations during the Nazi oppression, and never for the people outside of Europe; not for those countries which, after the war, would be labeled as “third world.”

Groppi’s keen sense of racism had enabled him to detect its subtle machinations, no matter where and no matter how deep. A champion for oppressed peoples’ struggles for equality, Groppi had once startled Victor by even stating that something *good* had come out of that 1939-1945 war. Although he roundly condemned both the Dictator’s philosophy and his actions, he said that Adolf Hitler had, though inadvertently, shown certain elite Europeans what it feels like to be under the heel of an oppressor, to be colonized; what it feels like to have their lands occupied by a foreign power; their resources exploited; their people oppressed and even murdered.

Victor remembered that Groppi had taken great personal satisfaction in making that observation. “Imagine,” he said to himself, tongue in cheek, “by accidental chance Adolf Hitler actually did something good for the world.”

And perhaps Groppi had been right, Victor thought. Because Nazi aggression had shown colonialism and imperialism – generally accepted by the League of Nations prior to the war – to be what they really were: political slavery. And by the end of the war they had seen their day. The ancient glory of colonialism was forever tarnished, and the future of imperialism was at least in question, if not ruined.

Indeed, the resurrected League, now the United Nations, had established the Special Committee on Decolonization. And by the early 1960’s such decolonization was in progress. How ironic, Victor thought, that such as Hitler had given European colonists a taste of their own medicine; that by default he had inadvertently taught the world a much needed lesson.

But Lwów, Poland would receive no such benefit. Decolonization was to be on the Western side of the “Iron Curtain.” Due to the Charter’s failure, more pointedly the failure of the Anglo-American leaders who drafted it, Stalin gained for himself and his Soviet Union many new territories, thus creating a second world, the Warsaw Pact nations of Communism. To the citizens of these countries he vehemently denied any benefits of the Charter’s point No 6. Namely, freedom from want and fear.

Exasperated now with his own thoughts he surprised his wife. “Oh, Gina, Gina, Gina! ! *Basta!* Enough, mio amore. Thinking about it makes me angry.”