

---

## Interview: Erika Herbrig

---

# Revive the Spirit of FDR's Foreign Policy

*Erika Herbrig worked for many years at the Potsdam Treaty Museum in Cecilienhof Palace, in Potsdam, Germany. Birgitta Gründler, Thomas Rottmair, and Robin Högl of the LaRouche Youth Movement interviewed her for Neue Solidarität, the weekly of the Civil Rights Movement Solidarity party (BüSo), published on Nov. 16. It has been translated from German. Here are excerpts.*

**Herbrig:** The Cecilienhof was a kind of seismograph, since we detected here, in the midst of the Cold War, changes in the population and in politics. There I learned to treasure Franklin Roosevelt's foreign policy, and I am happy that the Schiller Institute and the BüSo are now making it better understood, so that people can see that there exists not just American imperialism, but also a quite different tradition. I discovered this during my work at the Cecilienhof, and I support Mr. LaRouche in his efforts to return to the conceptions of the Roosevelt era. It is a matter of survival, to understand and revive this tendency.

In 2005, we have had a series of commemorations of the events of 60 years ago. But I think that the Crimea Conference, in Yalta on Feb. 4-11, 1945, did not nearly get its due in these commemorations.

President Roosevelt, in his last great speech, on March 1, 1945, to both Houses of the American Congress, reported on the success of the Crimea Conference. This speech can be rightly considered as his political testament. . . .

Roosevelt said:

"I come from the Crimean Conference with a firm belief that we have made a good start on the road to a world of peace.

"There were two main purposes in this Crimean Conference. . . .

"The second purpose was to continue to build the foundation for an international accord which would bring order and security after the chaos of the war and would give some assurance of lasting peace among the nations of the world. In that goal, toward that goal, a tremendous stride was made. . . .

"When we met at Yalta, in addition to laying our strategic and tactical plans for the complete, final military victory over Germany, there were other problems of vital political consequence.

"For instance, there were the problems of occupational control of Germany after victory, the complete destruction of her military power, and the assurance that neither the Nazis

nor Prussian militarism could again be revived to threaten the peace and civilization of the world. . . .

"Days were spent in discussing these momentous matters. We argued freely and frankly across the table. But at the end, on every point, unanimous agreement was reached. And more important even than the agreement of words, I may say we achieved a unity of thought and a way of getting along together.

"Of course we know that it was Hitler's hope and German warlords' that we would not agree, that some slight crack might appear in the solid wall of Allied unity, a crack that would give him and his fellow gangsters one last hope of escaping their just doom. That is the objective for which his propaganda machine has been working for many months.

"But Hitler has failed.

"Never before have the major Allies been more closely united, not only in their war aims, but also in their peace aims. And they are determined to continue to be united to be united with each other and with all peace-loving nations so that the ideal of lasting peace will become a reality. . . .

"The conference in the Crimea was a turning point, I hope, in our history, and therefore in the history of the world. It will soon be presented to the Senate and the American people, a great decision which will determine the fate of the United States, and I think therefore of the world, for generations to come.

"There can be no middle ground here. We shall have to take the responsibility for world collaboration, or we shall have to bear the responsibility for another world conflict. . . .

"I think the Crimean Conference was a successful effort by the three leading nations to find a common ground of peace. It spells, it ought to spell, the end of the system of unilateral action, and exclusive alliances, and spheres of influence, and balances of power, and all the other expedients that have been tried for centuries, and have always failed.

"We propose to substitute for all these a universal organization in which all peace-loving nations will finally have a chance to join; and I am confident that the Congress and the American people will accept the results of this conference as the beginning of a permanent structure of peace upon which we can begin to build, under God, that better world in which our children and grandchildren, yours and mine, the children and grandchildren of the whole world, must live and can live. . . ."

**Q:** Politics and history is, for many people today, something dead, although it was made by living people who thought differently about it. Is this distinction the crucial point we are looking at?

**Herbrig:** Yes, that is exactly what I want to focus on. When Roosevelt died quite suddenly on April 12, 1945, and on the same day, President Truman stepped into his new position as the most powerful man in the world, the world changed.

It has often been said that Truman was poorly informed

about Roosevelt's foreign policy and goals; and it was not until the first day that he took office, that Admiral King, Secretary of State Stettinius, and Defense Minister Stimson first informed him about the Manhattan Project.

Who was this Truman really? He was not some insignificant manufacturer from the Midwest, who had no idea about anything. In the Cecilienhof Museum there is a facsimile of a well-known American newspaper, in which, in an interview on the day after the fascist attack on the Soviet Union, in reply to a question from a journalist about how the U.S.A. should respond, Truman answered: "If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible. . . ." It is well known, that Truman said this in June 1941, as a Senator. Thus, he had been orienting himself in that way politically for a few years.

**Q:** Truman was thus the representative of geopolitics, which Roosevelt, in his speech to Congress of March 1, 1945, rejected, when he called for "the end of the system of unilateral action, and exclusive alliances, and spheres of influence, and balances of power. . . ."

**Herbrig:** One can hardly imagine a worse change, from such an effective approach. With Truman, there also came the geopolitical approach to the Cold War.

I have read the so-called *Potsdam Papers*, which contain letters and statements, etc., including the telegram that Truman received, when the first atomic bomb test in New Mexico was successful. His reaction was: "Now I have a club for the bones of the Russian boys!" [back-translated—ed.] That was Truman's first reaction to the news. That was so characteristic of him!

But you can also read in *Neue Solidarität*, a multi-part series on "America's Moral Decline Under Truman," by Stuart Rosenblatt.<sup>2</sup> He shows how Stimson, who was 79 years old during the Potsdam Conference, had already, at the age of 50, at the end of the First World War, played a reactionary role.

During the conference, Defense Secretary Stimson presented to Truman a statement, in which he proposed a different foreign policy. From that moment on, West Germany would be built up as a bulwark against the East, and, in accordance with London's 1947 recommendations, the step-wise partition of Germany was set into motion.

**Q:** In this connection, LaRouche has pointed to the role of the Congress for Cultural Freedom. The same sophistry was produced in the American population and in the West, that

1. *New York Times*, June 24, 1941. The end of the quote reads: ". . . although I don't want to see Hitler victorious under any circumstance. Neither of them thinks anything of their pledged word"—ed.

2. See Stuart Rosenblatt, " 'Our Luck Stopped Here': How Trumanism Overturned Roosevelt's World," *EIR*, Aug. 16, 2002.



*Erika Herbrig is shown here while she was working at the Cecilienhof, where the Potsdam Conference took place. She gained a deep appreciation of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and a dislike of his successor, Harry Truman.*

led to the self-destruction of Classical Greece. Through sophistry, words are given a different meaning. Words like *freedom* and *democracy* have quite a different meaning for Roosevelt than for Truman.

**Herbrig:** Yes, and this was coherent with the changes in the Cabinet. It is striking to me that [Edward] Stettinius wanted, although he was no longer Secretary of State, to take part in the conference, since he had long years of experience under Roosevelt. But Truman wouldn't let him. He took James Burns instead, who had been recently appointed as Secretary of State. A lawyer! There was a completely different mode of thought, a striking difference, between Roosevelt and Truman.

I studied ancient history, and it is astonishing how much they already knew—for example, that "democracy is a whore," it can be bought. Today this has become a slogan again. But what lies behind it, when the politicians talk about democracy? What does it mean, when a George W. Bush talks about democracy? He wants to bring Iraq freedom and democracy—but what does that mean?

**Q:** Roosevelt's policy was based upon the American Constitution, on the idea that man is a cognitive being, that solutions can always be sought in the realm of ideas; while Truman represented the imperial idea of power, control, and imposing one's will. How in the world did he get to be Vice President?

**Herbrig:** Roosevelt faced domestic political problems. The first was a strong so-called fascist fifth column in the U.S.A., which openly sympathized with Hitler. He also had opponents, particularly in the Republican Party, but also in his own Democratic Party.

Roosevelt campaigned in the 1944 election for the fourth time. . . . Naturally, his enemies went after him. The issue

here was the post-war order: Roosevelt wanted his life's work to be continued without fail, with the founding of the United Nations and the reorganization of Germany and Europe after the war. Therefore, he had to at least stabilize the Democratic Party, to prevent a split during the election, which would have prevented him from achieving a new term.

The fate of the whole world, and of generations yet to come, hung on the direction of post-war policy. Roosevelt wanted no waffling. He wanted to take the responsibility for a peaceful future, and he knew the political conditions for that—"or we shall have to bear the responsibility for another world conflict. . ."—and so, he went personally to Truman—I know this from Truman's memoirs—and offered him the chance to campaign to become Vice President in 1945.

Roosevelt was forced, by inner-party conflicts, to drop his Vice President, Henry Wallace, who next to him was the most important New Deal Democrat, and to bring in the reactionary Truman, in November 1944. The 1944 election must have been very hard for him, since Roosevelt was conscious of his own importance and his political views, as distinct from this fifth column, which wanted to spread its influence everywhere and turn the world fascist.

But he died too soon to achieve his goal. It pleased me, at the Cecilienhof Museum, when many Americans, during the Kennedy years, would say, "We are Roosevelt supporters," and "Roosevelt must have been assassinated. A politician doesn't just die by coincidence, a time that is so opportune for his enemies." (Maybe you also know, that Elliott Roosevelt, his son, who was a doctor, was with him at the conference in Tehran, but not at Yalta.)

Naturally, Roosevelt was also slandered and his views were bowdlerized. The policy of *splendid isolation* had been put forward to stop Roosevelt, who, already in the 1930s, was attempting to build an anti-fascist alliance. It was said that he was a warmonger, who overestimated Hitler and fascism; and later, that he was a dreamer, who made policy by the fireside, in the so-called Fireside Chats—you know about them, don't you? Later, they turned their spears the other way, accusing him of having ignored the warnings of a coming Japanese attack against the U.S.A.

Finding his way through this jungle was not very easy for Roosevelt. What should he have done? He found himself in a situation similar to that of Stalin, who also did not heed warnings. Perhaps one cannot directly compare them, but neither statesman could simply declare war on another great power, on the basis of reports from the secret service or the military.

Then came Dec. 7, 1941, the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the mood turned abruptly. From this point on, the first steps were taken toward forming an alliance against Hitler. But it took two years.

**Q:** What were his ideas about the United Nations and the reorganization of Europe?

**Herbrig:** How deep Roosevelt's conviction was, that a broader agreement between East and West were possible, became clear during his talks with Stalin during the Tehran Conference at the beginning of December 1943. It was a bit surprising—or perhaps not really—that Roosevelt, at Stalin's invitation, stayed, along with his delegation, at the Soviet Embassy in Tehran. Churchill had also invited him, but apparently Roosevelt trusted the Soviet secret services more than he did the British, to shield him from publicity, and above all from the fascist spy agencies.

And so, the private talks between Roosevelt and Stalin took place. In these, he said, as far as I can recall from the protocols of the Soviet and American delegations in Tehran: "Marshal, there is no reason why, after the war, we should not be able to work together further. Our states have no common borders. We represent two equally strong, young peoples, who have the future ahead of them, and we both will have great tasks to solve after the war. You will first have to rebuild the destroyed western regions of your country and the industry of Siberia, while I will soon have to release several million boys from the Army, create jobs for them, and convert the gigantic wartime industry to a peacetime industry. We have no reason to fear any crises. We could deliver to you powerful industrial equipment for decades, and you could pay us back with raw materials and semi-finished goods. And furthermore, we have the great task to fulfill, to free the poor nations of the Third World from fear and worry about want, misery, hunger, and so forth." [back-translated—ed.]

**Q:** The legacy of the British Empire!

**Herbrig:** These are prescient words, and they show that President Roosevelt was not infected with any kind of anti-communist or anti-Soviet ideology. . . . He was on the same line as the well-known German poet Thomas Mann, who also in the '30s, as an immigrant to the U.S.A., said the prescient words: "Anti-communism is the most basic stupidity of the 20th Century."

Now decades have passed. The enemy image of socialism or the Soviet Union no longer exists. How important would it be now, to revive this aspect of President Roosevelt, which seemingly has been consigned to oblivion. There have been some good beginnings. The BüSo reported about a meeting between Federal Chancellor Schröder and President Putin, about European-wide transportation and other progressive agreements, such as the Eurasian Land-Bridge, connections with China, etc. These are all harbingers of hope for, finally, a peaceful future.

**Q:** Roosevelt's observation, that there is no reason why America and Russia should not continue to work together during the post-war period, as they did during wartime, is an idea that inspires us in the BüSo, and as Mr. LaRouche aptly says, America has a genuine interest in a strong, stable Eurasia.

**Herbrig:** That is the main reason that the Yalta Conference, has, unjustly in my opinion, been left half-forgotten. The same is true of the founding meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco.

But, in my view, Truman was a low-brow little politician, who wanted to quickly install himself in his new role as the most important man in the world, and so forth—already a sign of the times of the Cold War—and who was put in place immediately after the death of Roosevelt. . . .

**Q:** You say that it's hardly possible to imagine a more striking break in policy, than that which occurred with the death of Roosevelt on April 12, 1945.

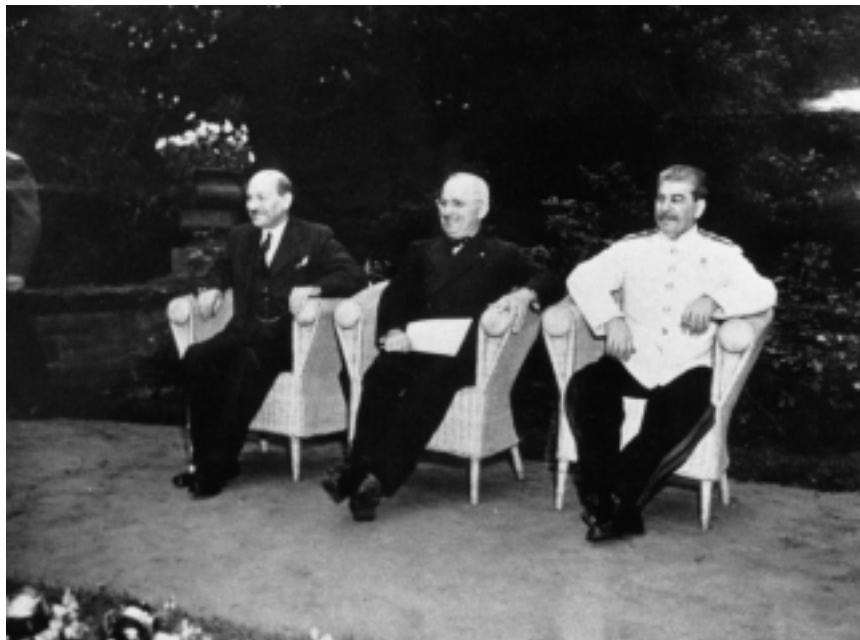
**Herbrig:** Roosevelt knew very well, that Churchill was a Communist-hater of the first rank, and indeed that this was mainly on geopolitical-imperialist grounds.

**Q:** —and also an America-hater, in fact!

**Herbrig:** Yes, Roosevelt was perfectly clear about that. I have read, in the memoirs of the Soviet ambassador in London, Maisky, who had been ambassador in London since around 1933, about a meeting with Churchill in 1934 (although I cannot say whether this discussion took place before or after the death of Hindenburg, after which Hitler assumed total power). In any case, Maisky explained how Churchill was thinking about Germany, at this point in time. If England were threatened by Germany, Churchill said, then he would go down to “the Devil in Hell, and make an alliance, in order to save Great Britain” [back-translated—ed.]. Maisky let Stalin know that he [Churchill] could be trusted on this point. Churchill had already been the Queen's Admiral in the First World War, when he was seized by fear for the future of Great Britain. One could only find him an honest partner, in an alliance to save Great Britain. But it was therefore also quite clear, that such an alliance would only last, until England was saved.

**Q:** Churchill was also not keen on having a Roosevelt era after the Second World War. The East-West scenario after the Second World War also reminds one of Great Britain's typical “divide and conquer” games. And the fascist fifth column in the U.S.A. worked directly against Roosevelt. The Dulles family was running the show.

**Herbrig:** Oh, yes! John Foster Dulles, his brother Allen Dulles, and his sister Eleanor, who sat in Switzerland and directed the activities of the secret service.



Library of Congress

*Left to right: Clement Atlee, Harry Truman, and Josef Stalin at the Potsdam Conference, July 1945. Frau Herbrig considers the Truman Administration to have been a turning point in history, repudiating the legacy of the Roosevelt Presidency.*

This so-called fascist fifth column existed in many countries. There were outright fascist organizations in Holland, for example, and in England there was a well-known fascist leader, Sir Oswald Mosley. Churchill was against such people, as long as they could pose a danger to Great Britain.

**Q:** Roosevelt wanted a post-war order in which the concept of empire, as well as fascism, would become impossible. As we have often explained, he understood the mechanism of state credit policy, whereby money can be generated in the service of the general welfare.

We, as civil rights advocates, want not only to document this history, but to use and expand upon Roosevelt's work. Mr. LaRouche makes it very clear, that this is a question of a method which one can master. It is also just such a paradigm-shift that we are working to bring about. Young people can no longer imagine that industrial policy has anything to do with peace. Full employment, in the eyes of the young generation, is something that is no longer possible. They can well imagine that a third world war could occur, but peaceful development seems unimaginable. . . .

It is our goal to drive out such pessimism. Therefore, we thank you kindly for your persistent efforts to study Roosevelt's ideas and to spread them. These are tremendously important in the domestic policy of the U.S.A., in order to free the U.S.A. from its imperial decline; as well as in its foreign policy, since the outcome of the struggle in the U.S.A. will certainly determine the fate of the world, once again.