

The ending of Armageddon: or the federal principle as the only basis for international peace, liberty and prosperity

by Lord Lothian

The greatest disappointment from which mankind has suffered since the Great War has been the failure of the League of Nations. To 'the man on the street' the League symbolized the passionate desire for the ending of war and the establishment of lasting peace, liberty and prosperity for both individuals and nations. It was the hope that the last war would be a war to end war which nerved the courage and endurance of the great majority of men and women in the final stages of the great struggle.

That hope has for the moment been utterly dispelled. The era of local war, declared and undeclared, began again in 1931. We are in the midst of the greatest race in armaments ever known, which if it continues can only lead to universal bankruptcy. And everybody feels that another world war, fiercer and more ruthless than the last, may break out at any time, either because it is deliberately provoked or because an accident or a fool may set in motion events which it is beyond the power of statesmanship to control.

All kinds of explanations are given for the failure of the League to fulfil the hopes which centered about it. Some attribute it to defects in the Treaties of Versailles, others to the fact that the League never won universal membership. Some lay the blame on the League powers for not revising the Treaties of peace justly and in time, others to their unreadiness, when revision by armed power began, to resist aggression unanimously and immediately with all their strength. Some say that the failure has been due to the unwillingness to disarm, others to delay and inadequacy of rearmament when power politics reappeared. Some attribute all our troubles to capitalism, others to the malignancy of the Dictators and their parties, others again to the treachery or blindness of democratic statesmen.

All these explanations and criticisms probably have some validity. But they none of them point to the real cause of the relapse into armaments and war. That cause does not lie primarily in defects on policy by any nation but in the system of international relationships in which we have tried to live both before and after the world war. The real cause of our troubles is that the nations are living in anarchy - by far the most fatal of all political and social diseases - the consequences of which have been intensified a hundredfold in recent times by the conquest of time and space and the breakdown of the old Pax Britannica of the nineteenth century. The Covenant of the League of Nations disguises but does not end anarchy, because, while it is a contract to co-operate, it leaves intact the root of anarchy, national sovereignty. It has been sovereignty which at bottom has prevented a liberal and timely revision of out-of-date treaties, which has driven the nations to a disastrous degree of economic nationalism, which has prevented any effective system of collective security, and which has led to rearmament as the means to international change and to the return of the alliance system. Federal Unionists believe that only by dealing with this basic cause of anarchy, national sovereignty, will it be possible for the world to climb permanently out of its present distress. And they believe that anarchy cannot be ended by any system of co-operation between sovereign nations but only by the application of the principle of federal union. They therefore stand for the adoption of that principle as the only one which can end competitive armaments and war and remove the economic causes of poverty and unemployment in the modern world.

Federal Unionists are not opposed to the League of Nations. On the contrary they share entirely the ideals for which it stands. Nor are they opposed to international co-operation. On the contrary they support it as a step in the right direction. In theory all the ideals of the League of Nations could have been accomplished by co-operation. But the reason why co-operation failed after 1918, as all earlier attempts to create an international co-operative system have failed, is precisely because they have left national sovereignty intact and because that element operates continuously and inexorably against the success of co-operation itself. That is why Federal Unionists are convinced that only by going a step beyond the Covenant and pooling some part of national sovereignty in a common organism which represents, not the national units or the governments, but the people of all the member nations as a whole, can the true ends of the League be attained.

The Consequences of Sovereignty

War is inherent in the relations between sovereign states. For when agreement fails the only instrument by which the sovereign state can defend its existence and its rights or promote its ends, legitimate or illegitimate, is by a resort to force. This is equally true whether the nations endeavour to exist in isolation or unite in alliances or accept universal contractual obligations towards one another such as the Covenant of the League of Nations. Sovereignty implies that the only instrument to which nations, in the last resort, can use to bring pressure on other sovereign nations is the violence of power politics or war.

A second consequence of this anarchy of sovereignties is that every state is inevitably driven to sacrifice the rights and independence of its own citizens in order to increase its own strength in the struggle for existence. We see this going on all about us today, notably in the demand for conscription for national defence. This will get worse until for the co-operation or anarchy of governments is substituted a federal union of the peoples. Leagues of governments are necessarily concerned with making the world safe for national sovereignty and not either for democracy or the people.

A third consequence of sovereignty is its effect in producing poverty, unemployment, social frustration and despair. Sovereignty leads inevitably to economic nationalism, whereby each state tries to be self-supporting, promotes the interests of its own nationals regardless of the economic interests of other nations and erects ever-increasing interferences with international trade, migration and the movement of capital. These artificial barriers and subsidies progressively dislocate both national and world economy by over-developing the industrial production of every national area so that there is no balance between the production of food-stuffs, raw material and manufacturing power either in those national areas or in the world as a whole. Unemployment and poverty are the inevitable result. This is equally true whether nations maintain an individualist or a socialist economy. We are not concerned, as Federal Unionists, to take sides in this controversy. We are only concerned to make it clear that it is sovereignty which is the basic cause of our economic distresses and that so long as it exists it will be impossible either for capitalism or socialism or for any variant of them, to work properly. Seventy socialist sovereign states would find it as difficult to live together in prosperity and peace as seventy capitalist states have done.

Even from the narrowly national point of view sovereignty is fatal to security, prosperity and peace. It leads to the frustration of every legitimate national purpose by diverting to armaments and non-productive activities resources which should be applied to national development and social reform.

Finally national sovereignty has been the hidden hand which has wrecked the League ideal. For national sovereignty implies that every nation sets its own interests first, and requires every individual to obey his own state and not the decisions of the League. The real reason why certain nations have never joined the League or have abandoned it, why nations have been halfhearted in living up to their obligations, why they have yielded without stint to economic nationalism, the most potent of post-war destroyers, and to rearmament, is that every nation puts national interests before the interests of other nations or of the world as a whole. They do not do this because they or their statesmen are wicked but because sovereignty implies that they regard their own interests as paramount and because there is no organism which represents or can speak or act for humanity as a whole. Until there is an organism representative of all, which can limit armaments and economic nationalism and act for the benefit of all, every nation will remain bound to provide for its own security first, and that necessity compels it to put strategic and military considerations ahead of international justice and fair play. Anarchy necessarily dethrones moral principle in international affairs in favour of self-interest. It leads not less inexorably to imperialism. For it creates a constant temptation to powerful armed states to impose their will on their neighbours one by one until they reach a position of local or world domination in the name of peace. Indeed in an anarchy, imperialism, or the control of one race by another, either in a relatively benevolent or in a ruthless form, may be the only way in which the risk of war can be temporarily ended and peace attained, where federal union is out of reach.

Thus national sovereignty is the root cause of the most crying evils of our time and of the steady march of humanity back to tragic disaster and barbarism. It is a denial of the brotherhood of man and of the principle that there ought to be one law or sovereignty, based on moral principle, uniting and governing the whole earth.

Federal Union The Only Remedy

The only final remedy for this supreme and catastrophic evil of our time is a federal union of the peoples so that while every nation is completely self-governing in its own internal affairs all the people are united into a single commonwealth for their common affairs. The principal common affairs of this commonwealth of man would be order and defence, the regulation of international trade and migration, citizenship, currency, and some forms of debt and taxation, inter-state communications, and the administration of the common assets and responsibilities of the federal union. It is for this principle that the movement known as Federal Union, which has parallel movements in other democracies, unequivocally stands. It is the only way in which the pacifist ideal can be realized in practice. It is the only way in which the artificial dislocation of trade and employment by economic nationalism can be ended, individual and national liberty can be made secure, and war can be ended among men.

Federal union, however, recognises that the establishment of a world constitution, accomplishing these blessings, cannot be accomplished at a single step. The commencement of federal union and the creation of a nucleus of world government is only possible between nations who have a sufficient unity in spirit, civilization and institutions to enable them to begin to feel that they form a single community for certain purposes once the appropriate institutions exist. To force incompatibles into a union would risk substituting civil for international war. It considers, therefore, that the nucleus should consist of nations which accept the principle that government must be conducted with the

consent of the governed, and who base their political life upon the freedom and responsibility of the individual. Any nation which accepted these principles and had demonstrated its capacity to apply them would be entitled to join.

This does not mean that such a federal union of free and responsible peoples should be opposed to any other nation or group of nations which preferred other systems. It would be willing to participate in any universal system of co-operation like the League of Nations, especially if it was equipped with machinery enabling it to limit economic nationalism and for equalizing economic opportunity and the standard of living among all nations. But federalism being the only true method of ending international anarchy nations should not refrain from federal union just because others were not ready for it. Successful federalism must rest upon the acceptance of certain common principles and free institutions seem to be the only basis for a federal community of nations.

Difficulties and Their Solution

By far the most original and complete plan for a federal union of nations is that put forward early in 1939 by Clarence K. Streit in his book *Union Now*. Streit is an American journalist who for many years was the representative of the *New York Times* in Europe, and who spent the last eight years at Geneva. Originally an enthusiastic supporter of the League of Nations as offering the world a prospect of lasting peace and goodwill, he endeavours to explain in *Union Now* why the high hopes of 1920 of making the world safe for democracy and of ending war for good have failed. He does not attribute the disaster to ideologies such as Communism, Fascism or National Socialism, or to the perversities and ambitions of dictators, or to the failures of democratic statesmen. These have all been consequences rather than causes. He sees the fundamental cause of our present distresses in the attempt of the nations to find peace and prosperity while unwilling to give up the root cause of war and poverty, insistence on their own national sovereignty. Having thus diagnosed the root of the disease, he proposes as the remedy the pooling of some part of national sovereignty in an immediate federal union of the fifteen established democracies as the nucleus of what will eventually grow into a universal system of world government. The democracies he suggests as a nucleus are the United States, Great Britain, Ireland, France, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Holland and Belgium. The Commonwealth of Nations so formed would contain some 250,000,000 people, not including dependencies; it would be invincible against aggression; so long as it existed world war would probably be impossible because nobody else could dream of attacking it; the liberties both of its individual citizens and of its constituent peoples would be secure, and the burden of armaments and the preparation of war would be enormously reduced. The increase in the prosperity and employment of its inhabitants from the removal of economic barriers to trade, migration and the movement of capital, whether its economic policy was capitalist, socialist or some combination of the two, would be immediate and immense.

Let us now consider the practical difficulties in the way of solving the problem of international anarchy on the federal principle. They are formidable. The first is the challenge of the proposal to the tradition of national sovereignty, to national pride and custom and to fear of the consequences of organic union with other peoples. But as between the fore-going peoples at any rate, these difficulties and risks are small compared with the risks they run so long as they cling to their own sovereignty- the constant risk of war, of continued unemployment and of national bankruptcy, to say nothing of the possibility of the triumph of the totalitarian way of life.

The second difficulty is that to confine the Union to the fifteen democracies mentioned above may draw too exclusive a line. It is clearly impossible to combine in a single federal union totalitarian dictatorships and democracies. But there are many countries in the world, especially in Asia and South America and Europe, which are not totalitarian even if they are not fully democratic and some method of affiliation of these countries with a federal union of democracies should be found.

A third problem is represented by the so-called colonial question. Clearly no federal union can accomplish its ideal ends if it is based on imperialism or the permanent political control of one people by another. A federal union of nations must give a constitutional right to backward peoples, self-government as soon as they are ready for it, and to take their part as constituent states when their capacity to assume full responsibility has been proved.

The Federal Constitution

A fourth problem is that of the constitution itself in a federal union of nations. Mr Streit proposes an ingenious combination of the Parliamentary and the Presidential systems in a constitution otherwise based on the American model. It is doubtful if it is possible to foresee today what a federal union of nations will be like. The form of these great historic constructions emerges red hot from events rather than from the academic drawing board. The real task is to develop a sense of community and common patriotism among nations, rising above but in no way undermining the difference and independence of nationality itself - the strongest and within limits the most creative force in the modern world - and to discover the institutions which will give full play both to national and to world commonwealth patriotism.

The nature of the problem can, perhaps, best be seen by a brief historical retrospect. Greek civilisation was developed mainly in the city states of Greece. But the Greeks could not rise above a city patriotism and the Athenians who thought that public affairs should be directly controlled by all the citizens, did not believe that a democratic community could be larger than the number of free citizens who could hear the voice of a single orator. Because Greece was unable to evolve a national patriotism or the representative institutions appropriate to it, it was in due time overwhelmed by the totalitarian state of Macedon. The concept of law triumphant over arbitrary will was developed in the semi-democratic republic of Rome and gradually grew into the majestic Empire of Rome - whose strength lay precisely in its organisation of the universal reign of law. But the Romans also seemed unable to conceive of the representative system, and the earlier democratic elements in their system withered away under the Empire, until the vitality of the heart was eaten away and the Roman system was destroyed by barbarian invasion from without and petrification and new non-political movements within. The missing representative principle was developed under the Plantagenets in England and made possible that combination of the reign of law with the principle that government must be with the consent of the governed, which is the foundation of the Parliamentary system and made possible democracy on a national scale. The Americans, confronted with the problem of uniting states which, in separating from Great Britain, had already established their own sovereignty, discovered the federal principle whereby the powers and functions of government were divided between states and commonwealth. This discovery made possible the development of a system of federal union which combined complete state autonomy with democratically controlled reign of law on a continental scale.

The task today is to create a constitutional construction which represents a step beyond the present federations of states or provinces, to bring into being a federal union of nations which will give free play to national differences and feelings and at the same time organically unite all their inhabitants under a constitutional law which itself will end war, preserve liberty and make prosperity secure. The essence of federal union is to unite the peoples under a government of laws and principle rather than of men. The exact nature of that constitution it is impossible to anticipate. It will spring from the compulsion of events. But that we are being driven toward the federal solution seems clear from the fact that if the present crisis passes away and an attempt is made to resuscitate an effective League of Nations, it will be necessary to endow this League with two powers not now included in the Covenant, if it is to be able to achieve its true ideal. The first is the power to limit the economic nationalism of its members. The second is the power to limit their armaments. Yet if any League is to do these things, both of which are essential to lasting prosperity and peace, it will have to base itself not on the co-operation but on the organic or federal principle. Finally, language need be no insuperable difficulty, because while every member nation will have the right to its language, all can agree to learn the same language.

If this federal principle be the only which can solve the urgent and tragic problems of our age there remains the vital question of time. No doubt the best answer to the problems which immediately confront us, and the best way of averting world war, of preventing the further successful aggression by the totalitarian states on the democracies, of restoring individual and national liberty, and of promoting a quick return to prosperity, would be a federal union of the democracies now. No one can say when events may not force this method of ending anarchy into the foreground of practical politics. Nobody dreamt of a League of Nations in 1914. Nobody dreamt of a Soviet Union, of Fascism, of National Socialism in that year. So now, events may move far more rapidly than any of us can now conceive. They have moved in the last few months with incredible speed. The great value of Streit's book and of other works on the subject of federal union is that when the next crisis in world government occurs public opinion will have before it an unanswerable analysis of the fundamental cause of its troubles and a clear indication of the basic principle on which alone enduring peace, liberty and prosperity can be built.

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