

regiment crosses a frontier. When force is overwhelming it can conquer without bloodshed. Germany acquired Czechoslovakia in this way and Russia made the Baltic States her vassals. Long years may pass in European history that witness no events as brutal or cynical as these. In these static periods the balance of power is so delicate that no ambitious State will risk a move. But even in these uneventful periods forces are at play; when they are equal and opposite we flatter ourselves by calling the negative result a condition of peace. We can hope for nothing better, so long as power is owned by a number of Sovereign States, each seeking its own advantage.

The only radical cure is manifestly to transfer power from these competing Sovereign units to a collective whole that includes them all. Each must surrender the primary prerogative of sovereignty, the right to make war, and with it the ownership of power and of the tools that serve for war. They must agree, that is to say, to form a Federation, and to transfer to it this prerogative of sovereignty. Henceforward the whole responsibility for defence will fall on it, and the component States are relieved of this burden.

## 5. Lionel Robbins: The Cause of International Conflict

End 1939

From *The Economic Causes of War*, London (Jonathan Cape) 1939, p. 99–109; reprinted New York (Fertig) 1968; published in Italian as *Le cause economiche della guerra*, Turin (Einaudi) 1944, pp. 95–105.

*Lionel Charles Robbins (1898–1984, later Lord Robbins) was Professor of Economics in the University of London, at the London School of Economics, from 1929 to 1961. He was Director of the Economic Section of the Offices of the War Cabinet (1941–45), President of the Royal Economic Society (1954–55) and Chairman of the Financial Times (1961–70). Among the books that established him as one of the leading liberal economists of his time were two which laid the economic foundations for much subsequent federalist thought: Economic Planning and International Order<sup>1</sup> (1937) and The Economic Causes of War (1939), each of them based on a series of lectures delivered, at the invitation of Professor Rappard, at the Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales of Geneva. The preface of The Economic Causes of War is dated 16 September 1939 and, after rebutting, in the first part of the book, the Marxist theory that war is caused by capitalism, and then identifying “independent national sovereignties”<sup>2</sup> as the root cause of international conflict, Robbins went on to propose “a genuine federation which takes over from the states of which it is composed, those powers which engender conflict”<sup>3</sup> and to make an eloquent appeal for a United States of Europe in which “the German Geist can give its best, not its worst, to Europe.”<sup>4</sup> Thus Robbins already had the conviction and the intellectual instruments which enabled him to make the key contribution to the economic thinking of Federal Union and its*

1 *Op. cit.*

2 p. 99; (see p. 45 below).

3 p. 105; (p. 48 below).

4 p. 109; (p. 51 below).

*Research Institute during the following few months.<sup>5</sup> This extract summarises his critique of national sovereignty as the generator of economic conflicts which lead to war and his proposal for a European federation.<sup>6</sup>*

(. . .) The ultimate condition giving rise to those clashes of national economic interest which lead to international war is the existence of independent national sovereignties. Not capitalism, but the anarchic political organization of the world is the root disease of our civilization.

Against this, however, it might be argued that such conflicts are not necessary.

5 See *Economic Aspects of Federation*, published first in Chaning-Pearce (ed.), *Federal Union*, and reprinted as *Federal Tracts No. 2* and in Ransome (ed.), *Studies in Federal Planning*; and the *Interim Report on Economic Aspects of the Federal Constitution* in FURI, *First Annual Report 1939–40*, which was drafted by Robbins and agreed by the members of the FURI Economic Committee (for its membership, see p. 31). The other excerpts from Robbins' writings are number 15, p. 63; 38, p. 113; 41, p. 123; 42, p. 125; 45, p. 135; 55, p. 150.

6 The 1968 edition of *The Economic Causes of War* contains an interesting new preface in which Robbins evaluates his theory in the light of subsequent experience. Although the origins of East-West tension are “ideological rather than economic” (1968 edition, p. 5), the Marxian theories of the economic causes of war remain relevant because many are still influenced by them; moreover, “the powers of independent sovereign states to pursue economic and financial policies inimical to the prosperity of others are an important factor tending to international disunity and hence to situations which may be exploited by power politics actuated by non-economic motives” (1968 edition, p. 6). Robbins then goes on to explain the evolution of his own thinking about the proposal for a United States of Europe: “The essay here reproduced ends with a section (contained in this excerpt – ed.) written in the first weeks of war, pleading passionately for the creation of a United States of Europe within which German creativeness and energy might serve the common weal rather than periodically disrupting it. It also contains a footnote referring to plans for a wider Atlantic Union put forward by Mr. Clarence Streit and others, in which I express cordial appreciation of the idea but considerable scepticism concerning its practicability. At that time, I did not conceive the possibility of an isolationist United States allowing itself once more to be involved in the inter-cine quarrels of Europe. A great deal has happened since then . . . the United States is today the active leader and defender of the civilisation of the West. Such gigantic changes of circumstance could not but affect the perspective of thought regarding the possibilities of the future. In the years immediately following the end of the war, despairing of the stability and political reliability of some of the states of Western Europe and revolted by the anti-Americanism current among influential continental politicians and thinkers whose very existence had been saved by American intervention, I abandoned my earlier position and argued against British entry into a purely European Union, setting my hopes on a larger structure developing gradually from the North Atlantic Alliance. In this I now think I was wrong . . . in my failure to realise the potentialities both of the creation, in these circumstances, of a United Western Europe and of the part that could be played in it by Great Britain . . . So I am back in a frame of mind in which the peroration of this essay is not something I wish to repudiate. But . . . I must emphasise that I continue to regard the more limited association as a . . . preliminary . . . to a more perfect and larger union later on . . . (1968 edition, pp. 6–8).

If the different sovereign states would abstain from the practices of restrictionism, if their citizens would banish from their hearts the desire for sectional advantage, these things need not happen. Rightly interpreted, the long-run interests of the inhabitants of the different national areas are not in disharmony. Whatever the prospects of momentary advantage from restrictionist manipulation and aggression, in the modern world at least, the long-run interests of all who are not sadistic maniacs lie above all in the preservation of peace.

Such was the belief of the Cobdenite liberals, in spite of the jeers of the uneducated, probably the most disinterested body of men who ever influenced the policy of a great nation. But, in spite of its nobility, it was grounded in error. It is true that, rightly interpreted, the long-run interests of the majority of the human race are not in conflict. It is true that, for humane men, the disaster of war is an evil of the first order of magnitude. But it is not true that, in the absence of the rule of law, there is any security against its occurrence. The Cobdenite liberals would have never dreamt of urging that, within national areas, the long-run interests of the majority in peaceful co-operation could be regarded as secured without a framework of law and coercion. Such a view would have been the view, not of liberals, but of philosophical anarchists. What justification had they, therefore, for assuming that, in the relations between the inhabitants of different national areas, a superior harmony might be expected? If they did not expect the mere demonstration of long-run interest, unsupported by law, to secure an absence of anti-social behaviour *within* the nation, why should they have expected that it would do so *between* nations, where the play of irrational prejudice and the lack of understanding and sympathy were so much more likely to be prevalent? Surely the truth is that, if the different national governments are free to do anything, there is a strong probability that, with the best will in the world on the part of the majority, from time to time, error or sinister interest will result in policies leading to disharmony.

We can see this very plainly if we turn for a moment from the relations of geographical groups to the relations of groups of producers. It is possible to argue that, rightly interpreted, the interests of different groups of producers are not in long-period disharmony. If one group alone restricts output, it is quite possible that it may gain; but if all groups play the same game, then most at least will be the poorer. Nevertheless, knowledge of such long-period harmonies does not justify us in believing that, if groups of producers are given by statute a position of uncontrolled monopolistic privilege, the prospect of short-period gain will not tempt them very often to abuse it. It is true that governments have sometimes acted on this assumption and that the 'experts' they have consulted have done nothing to warn them of its dangers. But experience shows that it is unwarranted. If groups of producers are given positions of monopolistic privilege, a state of affairs is created in which the emergence of policies tending to disharmony can be regarded as almost inevitable.

In exactly the same way, if geographical groups have uncontrolled powers of restriction and exclusion, if there is no framework of law limiting the actions of independent sovereign states, then a state of affairs exists in which the abuse of these powers is probable. There exists a state of affairs in which the delusions of

restrictionism and the sinister influence of the pressure groups have maximum scope and effectiveness – a state of affairs in which the deep-seated non-rational impulses of nationalism have the maximum opportunity to become entangled in the support of economic policies which ultimately lead to war. However true it may be that, in the long run, such policies can be shown to lead to impoverishment and international conflict, there is no reason to suppose that, in the absence of the restraints of a rule of law, the majority of the citizens will be sufficiently alert or sufficiently long sighted to prevent their emergence. A world organization which depends upon the continual dominance in every sovereign state of the principles of Cobdenite liberalism, is an organization which is bound not infrequently to be disorganized. The dominance in one important state or group of states of different principles is liable to endanger the whole system. A system of sovereign geographical groups is no less likely to be provocative of clashes of interest than a system of 'sovereign' groups of producers.

All this becomes very clear if we take a hypothetical example, which, but for the foresight of a small group of men and the courage and consistency of their successors, might easily have become an example in actual history.

Under the constitution of the United States of America, the governments of the different states are prohibited from imposing protective tariffs on imports or exports. They are prohibited from limiting migration or the movement of capital. All these matters are the prerogative of the federal government.

Let us suppose that things had been different. Suppose that the Constitutional Congress had broken down and there had eventually arisen, in that great area, instead of one federation, forty eight independent sovereign states.

Does any man of experience doubt for a moment that there would have arisen also, in America as in Europe, a network of restriction on interstate economic relations? Trade would have been limited. The interests in various states would have protested against the 'flood of cheap imports'; even under the present constitution there are formidable barriers in the shape of spurious veterinary regulations and such-like measures not guarded against by the founders of the constitution. Migration would have been hampered. If prosperity in one part was greater than in another, there would have been protests against the 'flood of immigrant labour'; in the recent depression, unconstitutional limitations of this sort have actually been attempted by various states. Relations of debtors and creditors would have been endangered. If the states of the middle west were depressed, not only would there be isolated failures to keep faith with eastern creditors, there would also be imposed the paralysing apparatus of exchange control and partial repudiation with which European practice has made us familiar. And the result of all this would be interstate conflict. The different governments would feel it incumbent on them to maintain national power by alliances and manoeuvres. The inhabitants of the poorer states would covet the privileges of the richer states. There would be talk of the necessity for *Lebensraum*. Where debt was repudiated, the cause of the investors might become a matter of diplomatic friction; it is easy to imagine an expeditionary force from New York invading, let us say, Kansas to protect the interests of the bondholders.

In short, we should be confronted with the whole dreary spectacle of power politics with its manoeuvres, its devotions, its mass sentiment, and its background of sinister interest, with which the history of unhappy Europe has made us so depressingly familiar. And the pacifists would say that it was due to lack of virtue. The biologists would say it was an aspect of the inevitable struggle for existence. The psychologists would say it was a manifestation of the death instinct which it would take a thousand years research to learn to sublimate. The Marxians would say it was all due to the capitalist system. And certain among the historians would hint that it was the result of dark subtle forces of which only they understood the mystery.

But in fact, it would be due to the existence of independent sovereign states. No doubt it would be possible to investigate further the catastrophe which had brought it about that this, rather than federation, had been the line of evolution. If Hamilton had not lived or if Lincoln had faltered... or if the economic interests of dissenting states had succeeded in securing the rejection of the proposals of the Constitutional Congress – any of these things might have caused the path of history to be different. But in the sense in which cause may be said to be a condition in the absence of which subsequent events could not have happened, the existence of independent sovereign states ought to be justly regarded as the fundamental cause of conflict. And since we know that it was deliberately to avoid such a state of chaos that Hamilton and his friends devised the existing constitution, we may well regard their motives as the cause of its freedom from this kind of embarrassment. In the sense which is significant for political action, it is the chaos of independent sovereignties which is the ultimate condition of international conflict. It is not only because the independent states have the power to declare war, that war is sometimes declared, it is also because they have the power to adopt policies involving clashes of national interest of which war seems the only solution.

### *The United States of Europe*

If this is so, then the remedy is plain. Independent sovereignty must be limited. As citizens of the various national states, we may hope to diminish the danger of conflict by opposing policies which tend to evoke it. But this is not enough. The apparatus of modern war is so formidable, the cost of its maintenance so onerous, the dangers of actual conflict are so great, that we cannot afford to rely on spontaneous goodwill as our only safeguard against catastrophe. There must be an international framework of law and order, supported by solid sanctions which prevent the emergence of those policies which are eventually responsible for conflict. We do not need a unitary world state; such an organization would be neither practicable nor desirable. But we do need a federal organization; not a mere confederation of sovereign states as was the League of Nations, but a genuine federation which takes over from the states of which it is composed, those powers which engender conflict. The founders of the League of Nations were right in that they recognized the need of a supernational authority; their error was that they did not go far enough. They did not realize that the

effective functioning of a supernational authority is incompatible with independent national sovereignty. But to-day we know this. The history of the League of Nations is one long demonstration of the truth of the proposition long ago set forth by Hamilton and Madison, that there is no safety in confederations. We know to-day that unless we destroy the sovereign state, the sovereign state will destroy us.<sup>1</sup>

Now, of course, it is quite Utopian to hope for the formation in our time of a federation of world dimensions. There is not sufficient feeling of a common citizenship. There is as yet no sufficiently generalized culture. In present conditions, even the electoral problems of such a body would present insurmountable difficulties. The formation of a world system, the political consummation of the unity of the human race, may well be regarded as the divine event towards which all that is good in the heritage of the diverse civilizations of the world, invites us to strive. But, whatever we may hope for in the distant future of the planet, it must be clear that, at the present stage of human development, any attempt at so comprehensive an organization would be necessarily doomed to disaster.

But it is not Utopian to hope for the construction of more limited federations – for the merging of independent sovereignties in areas where there exists the consciousness of a common civilization and a need for greater unity. In particular it is not Utopian to hope for the formation of a structure of this kind in that part of the world now most menaced by the contradictions of its present political organization – among the warring sovereignties of Europe. So far is it from being Utopian that, for those with eyes to see, it is the most urgent practical necessity of the age.

For it is surely plain that the present political organization of Europe has completely outlived its usefulness and is now nothing but a menace to the very existence of the civilization it has helped to bring forth. When the sovereign states of modern Europe emerged from the feudalism of the middle ages, their functions were liberalizing and creative. They eliminated the mass of local restrictions which were strangling economic development. They pacified the warring barons and princes and established uniformity of law over areas given over to particularism. But, at the present time, it is, not their unifying, but their separatist tendencies which have become dominant. They restrict the activities of an economic life which, in its spontaneous development, spreads far beyond their borders. They are uneconomic units for the administration of what positive functions they discharge; and the burden of maintaining the apparatus of defence which is necessary to secure their independence, threatens more and more to absorb all the energies of their inhabitants. The existence of restrictions to trade and movement between the different states of Europe to-day is as absurd as the existence of similar restrictions between different provinces at earlier periods. To an intelligent outsider unacquainted with the background of our history, the maintenance of vast armies by the states of Europe for defence against each other

<sup>1</sup> (In in the original text) For a fuller elaboration of these arguments see my *Economic Planning and International Order*, chaps. ix, x and xi. The general argument of Mr. Clarence Streit's *Union Now* should also be consulted.

must be hardly less ridiculous than would be the maintenance of armies for the separate defence of the towns or departments within these states. The system has reached breaking point; and, with the development of modern military techniques, it has no longer survival value. As gunpowder rendered obsolete the feudal system, so the aeroplane renders obsolete the system of the independent sovereignties of Europe. A more comprehensive type of organization is inevitable. Will it come by mutual agreement or by caesarian conquest? That is the unsolved question. For either there must be empire or federation; on a long view, there is no alternative.

But to create such a federation will not be easy. We have a common culture. But we have no common language. We have a common history. But it is riven by fratricidal quarrels. No one who has realized the nature of the interests involved in the perpetuation of the present powers of the independent sovereign states can be blind to the strength of the opposition to any attempt to eliminate our disunity. The federation of the thirteen secession states of the new world was almost wrecked by local particularism, even though they were united by a common tongue, common habits and the memory of recent action against a common enemy. How much harder must it be for the warring states of Europe, with none of these aids, to establish a basis of unity. It will not be easy to make the new Europe.

Nevertheless, of all the tasks which present themselves to our generation, it is that which is most worth while attempting. The age in which we live is an age in which men have worshipped many idols and followed many false visions. It has seen nationalism run mad and collectivism turn oppressor. The ideals of the romantic rebellion have proved dead sea fruit in our hands. But the great ideals of liberty, justice and mutual tolerance and the heritage of art and learning which is their spiritual outcome, have not been found wanting. The more they have become endangered, the more important we have discovered them to be. But it is just these things which are in peril from the disunity of Europe. The political structure amid which they have developed has developed stresses and strains which threaten to overwhelm them; if they are to be preserved, a constructive effort is necessary. Not merely because war is terrible, not merely because it impoverishes, but because it threatens all that is most valuable in the cultural heritage of Europe, we must devise institutions which banish it from our midst. It is because the civilization of Socrates and Spinoza, of Shakespeare and Beethoven, of Michelangelo and Rembrandt, of Newton and Pascal, is at stake that we must build a new Europe.

And now that the war has come and our hopes of peaceful developments lie shattered, this necessity is all the greater if the end is not to be chaos. We are fighting Germans. If European civilization is not to perish, we must destroy the tyranny which rules over them. No one with any sense of history and art will deny the existence of a real German problem in Europe – the incapacity for self-government, the tendency to brutality and sadism, the fascination with the death motive, the moral clumsiness, the deep sense of spiritual insecurity, which again and again, since the rise of Prussia, have been a menace to the peace and liberties of Europe. But for all that, Germans are Europeans. They are part of our

civilization; and Europe can never be completely healthy till Germany is healthy too. Somehow or other we must create a framework in which the German *Geist* can give its best, not its worst, to Europe. A draconian peace will do nothing. The Nazis must be extirpated: but we have neither the strength nor the will to keep Germans in subjection for ever. What more appropriate outcome of our present agonies, therefore, what more fitting consecration of the blood which is being shed, than a peace in which this great people, purged of its devils, shall be coerced into free and equal citizenship of the United States of Europe?

## 6. William Curry: The Fundamentals of World Order End 1939

From *The Case for Federal Union*, Harmondsworth (Penguin) 1939, p. 105.

*William Burnley Curry (1900–62) was a Scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge, where he studied physics, then spent his working life as a schoolmaster. He taught at Gresham School, Holt, at Bedales School and at Oak Lane County Day School, Philadelphia, where he became headmaster at the age of 29; and he was headmaster of the progressive coeducational Dartington School 1931–57. He was very active in the early days of Federal Union, becoming a member of its National Council in February 1940 and later Vice-Chairman. He wrote most of The Case for Federal Union in August 1939 as a popular work designed to propagate the federal idea, and revised it hastily after the outbreak of war in September. Published that autumn as a Penguin Special, by April 1940 over 100,000 copies of it had been sold. Starting with an attack on nationalism and national sovereignty, he went on to stress the need for a world-wide federation based on liberal values. He was influenced by Clarence Streit's proposal for a union of the liberal democracies, though the outbreak of war caused him to propose that Germany be offered membership.<sup>1</sup> He shows in this excerpt how the progress of science and technology has outstripped the world's political structure, based on national sovereignty.*

The progress of science and invention has changed the character of war and has made the world already one community. All war is now civil war, and its destructiveness is such that if it continues it will destroy society altogether. Unfortunately, science and invention have sped ahead of our moral and political ideas, which are still rooted in a past that science has made obsolete. The political organisation of the world, as regards the relationships between States, is still one of anarchy, and we cling obstinately to the ideas and institutions that express this anarchy. Anarchy is the condition out of which the likelihood and the possibility of war arise, and our task is to substitute order and government for the anarchy we endure at present.

<sup>1</sup> See excerpt 22, p. 75. Other excerpts from *The Case for Federal Union* are number 24, p. 78; 57, p. 152.