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THE TREND OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS SINCE THE WAR¹

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WHEN we try to survey the course of international affairs during the twelve years and more that have elapsed since the Armistice of 1918 we are apt to be bewildered at first sight by the multitude and complexity of the tendencies which we perceive. Yet, on reflection, we may find ourselves able to gather up the manifold tendencies in a single formula. The formula which I would suggest for your consideration is this: In the "post-War" period the principal tendency in international affairs has been the tendency of all human affairs to become international.

Expressed in these bald terms, my formula perhaps strikes you as an exaggeration. Let me put it to the test by very briefly considering the facts. And let us distinguish between one set of facts and another. Let us take our stand first on the economic plane, then on the political, and then on the cultural, and examine in succession the facts that present themselves to our vision on each of these horizons.

I start from the economic plane because here my formula is a truism. On the economic plane, the tendency for all affairs to become international affairs has not declared itself since the Armistice for the first time. It was well established long before the War. It goes back to the Industrial Revolution, which

¹ This paper was read at the Fourth Annual Conference of Institutions for the Scientific Study of International Relations, held at Copenhagen on June 8th-10th, 1931. The purpose of these Conferences, which were initiated by the League of Nations Institute for Intellectual Cooperation, is to facilitate cooperation between institutions for the study and teaching of international affairs in different countries. Twelve countries were represented at the Copenhagen Conference, and in addition delegates attended from four international organisations. To provide a link between the various national institutions and their counterparts in other countries, and also to arrange for representation at the Annual Conferences and the execution of the resolutions passed, National Coordinating Committees have been and are being formed. The National Coordinating Committee in Great Britain is domiciled at the Royal Institute of International Affairs and consists of representatives from that Institute, from the London School of Economics and Political Science, the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics at Aberystwyth, and the Montagu Burton Chair of International Relations at Oxford. ✓

during the concluding session of the Preparatory Commission have not deterred us from fixing a date for the World Disarmament Conference. I confidently believe that, if the first World Disarmament Conference does not achieve its purpose, we shall call a second, and that, if the second does not succeed, we shall call a third. I believe that we shall persist until we have solved not only the special problem of national armaments but the general problem of international anarchy, of which armaments are a symptom. My confidence is founded on my observation of the spirit in which we are grappling with our tremendous political task. You remember, perhaps, that one of the most famous generals in history once remarked that his opponents were invincible because they never knew when they were beaten. It is my hope that this same kind of invincible ignorance—a really heroic form of ignorance—may carry our generation to victory in our spiritual war for the establishment of universal and enduring peace.

In the spirit of determination which happily animates us, we shall have no inclination to under-estimate the strength of the political force which we are striving to overcome. What is this force? If we are frank with ourselves, we shall admit that we are engaged on a deliberate and sustained and concentrated effort to impose limitations upon the sovereignty and the independence of the fifty or sixty local sovereign independent States which at present partition the habitable surface of the earth and divide the political allegiance of mankind. The surest sign, to my mind, that this fetish of local national sovereignty is our intended victim is the emphasis with which all our statesmen and our publicists protest with one accord, and over and over again, at every step forward which we take, that, whatever changes we may make in the international situation, the sacred principle of local sovereignty will be maintained inviolable. This, I repeat, is a sure sign that, at each of those steps forward, the principle of local sovereignty is really being encroached upon and its sphere of action reduced and its power for evil restricted. It is just because we are really attacking the principle of local sovereignty that we keep on protesting our loyalty to it so loudly. The harder we press our attack upon the idol, the more pains we take to keep its priests and devotees in a fool's paradise—lapped in a false sense of security which will inhibit them from taking up arms in their idol's defence. Perhaps, too, when we make these protestations, we are partly concerned to deceive ourselves. For let us be honest. Even the most

internationally-minded among us are votaries of this false god of local national sovereignty to some extent. It is such an old-established object of worship that it retains some hold even over the most enlightened souls.

And what is the magic which gives local sovereignty its power? It is powerful, I think, because it has inherited the prestige and the prerogatives of the mediæval Western Church, which were transferred, at the close of the Middle Ages, from the whole to the parts, from the great society of Western Christendom to each of that society's "successor states," represented now by the fifty or sixty sovereign independent States of the "post-War" world. The local national state, invested with the attributes of sovereignty—invested, that is, with the prestige and the prerogatives of the mediæval Church—is an abomination of desolation standing in the place where it ought not. It has stood in that place now—demanding and receiving human sacrifices from its poor deluded votaries—for four or five centuries. Our political task in our generation is to cast the abomination out, to cleanse the temple and to restore the worship of the divinity to whom the temple rightfully belongs. In plain terms, we have to re-transfer the prestige and the prerogatives of sovereignty from the fifty or sixty fragments of contemporary society to the whole of contemporary society—from the local national states by which sovereignty has been usurped, with disastrous consequences, for half a millennium, to some institution embodying our society as a whole.

In the world as it is to-day, this institution can hardly be a universal Church. It is more likely to be something like a League of Nations. I will not prophesy. I will merely repeat that we are at present working, discreetly but with all our might, to wrest this mysterious political force called sovereignty out of the clutches of the local national states of our world. And all the time we are denying with our lips what we are doing with our hands, because to impugn the sovereignty of the local national states of the world is still a heresy for which a statesman or a publicist can be—perhaps not quite burnt at the stake, but certainly ostracised and discredited. The dragon of local sovereignty can still use its teeth and claws when it is brought to bay. Nevertheless, I believe that the monster is doomed to perish by our sword. The fifty or sixty local states of the world will no doubt survive as administrative conveniences. But sooner or later sovereignty will depart from them. Sovereignty will cease, in fact if not in name, to be a local affair.

To pious nationalists this prophecy will seem either ridiculous or blasphemous. Whether or not it is ridiculous, only time can show. As for its being blasphemous from the nationalistic point of view, I should like to make this observation: if the fifty or sixty now sovereign States of the world reconcile themselves to the surrender of their sovereignty in good time, they can look forward to preserving their existence as non-sovereign institutions for an indefinite time to come, perhaps even in perpetuity. And this is a thought in which the votaries of these idols—the pious nationalists—may find some consolation. For a local state may lose its sovereignty without losing those familiar features which endear it to the local patriot—such features, I mean, as the local vernacular language and folk-lore and costume, and the local monuments of the historic past. So long as the local state is not stripped of these harmless trappings, it will remain almost as effective an idol as ever, and its worshippers are likely to find almost as much satisfaction in carrying on their cult with bloodless sacrifices as they find to-day when their idol demands from them the sacrifice of their children's lives in the ritual of war. Here, then, is some consolation for local patriots in the event of sovereignty being transferred, by a voluntary and peaceable process, from local states to some organ representing human society as a whole. And there is also satisfaction here for those of us who—without sharing the local patriot's passion for local sovereignty—appreciate, at least as deeply as he does, the value for mankind of an abiding diversity of national cultures.

But supposing that this does not happen? Supposing that the present generation of mankind is defeated in the end, after all, in the strenuous effort which we are making to centralise the force of sovereignty and to reduce our international anarchy to order—in that event, what is the outlook which confronts us? Will the defeat of internationalism—if our cause is to be defeated—enable a rampant nationalism to go on running riot in the world for ever? If our fanatical nationalists believe that, they are tragically mistaken. Their mistake is written large, for those who have eyes to see, in the histories of other civilisations than ours—civilisations which have already run their course and passed out of existence so that the whole of their story, from beginning to end, lies unfolded for us to read and take to heart.

When we study history we perceive that the political problem with which we are grappling, in our generation of our society, is by no means unprecedented. The curse of political anarchy,

which comes from the distribution of sovereignty among a plurality of local states, has afflicted other societies before ours; but, in all these other cases in which the same situation has arisen, it has always been transitory. For anarchy, by its very nature, cures itself, sooner or later, by one means or another. The cure may come through a voluntary, pacific, rational constructive effort, such as we are making in our day—an effort to deprive the local states of their sovereignty for the benefit of society as a whole, without at the same time depriving them of their existence. Alternatively the cure may come through a blind, violent, irrational and destructive clash of material forces. Refusing to surrender their sovereignty, the local states may continue to collide with one another in war after war, until this political struggle for existence is terminated at length by a "knock-out blow." On this alternative, all the local sovereign states except one are doomed eventually to forfeit not only their sovereignty but their very existence; for, on this alternative, the anarchy will be ended not by agreement but by force; not by the organisation of a pacific League of Nations but by the imposition of a universal empire through the victory of one militant nation over all the rest.

I should like to point out that, hitherto, this has been the normal way in which international anarchy has been brought to an end. In the ancient world in the West, the incessant conflicts between the local sovereign states round the Mediterranean were brought to an end at last by the definitive victory of Rome—a victory which resulted in the elimination of every other state, to make way for the Roman Empire. And if we turn our eyes to the other side of Asia and trace the Chinese Empire back to its origins, we shall find that it likewise arose out of incessant conflicts between a multitude of local sovereign states—arose, that is, by the same process which generated the Roman Empire in our part of the world. Well, there, in these examples drawn from history, we see the fatal alternative which we, in our society and in our day, are striving to avoid. Shall we cure our international anarchy by voluntary organisation, or shall we leave it to cure itself by the blind operation of force? Shall we cure it now, while our social vitality is still strong, or shall we leave it to cure itself by a process of exhaustion? That, I believe, is the great issue which confronts us, in our time, on the political plane of international affairs. I do not believe that any other choice is open to us. In particular, I do not believe that, either by taking thought or by *laissez faire*, we

at large. No doubt they dream of creating a society which will be American in equipment but Communist in soul. Strange dream to be dreamed by statesmen for whom the materialistic, deterministic interpretation of history is an article of faith! Can any good Marxian really maintain that, if a Russian peasant is taught to do the work and live the life of an American mechanic, this Russian peasant will not likewise learn to think as the American mechanic thinks and to feel as he feels and to desire what he desires? In this tug-of-war, in Russia, between the ideals of Lenin and the methods of Ford, I suspect that Americanism is destined to be the victor; and, if I happened to be a Marxian myself, my suspicion would harden into a dogmatic certainty.

And is there not the same irony in the career of Gandhi? The Hindu prophet sets out to sever the threads of cotton which have entangled India in the activities of the Western world. "Spin and weave our Indian cotton," he preaches, "with your Indian hands. Do not any longer clothe yourselves in the products of Western power-looms; and do not, I conjure you, seek to drive those alien products out of the Indian market by setting up on Indian soil new Indian power-looms on the Western pattern!" This message, which is Gandhi's real message, is not accepted by Gandhi's countrymen. They revere the spirit of the saint, but they only follow his guidance in so far as he resigns himself to leading them along the path of Westernisation. And thus we see Gandhi to-day promoting a political movement with a Western programme—the transformation of India into a sovereign independent parliamentary state—and with a Western procedure (the whole Western political apparatus of conferences, resolutions, votes, platforms, newspapers and publicity). In this political campaign, the prophet's most effective—though not his most obtrusive—supporters are those very Indian industrialists who have done the most to defeat the prophet's real mission—the men who have acclimatised the technique of Western industrialism in India itself. Their factory chimneys, which the prophet, in his heart of hearts, must regard with dismay, rise almost within view of his retreat at Sabarmati. Stranger still, Western thoughts colour and inform the prophet's own mind. He seeks inspiration in Western works of philosophy and devotion at least as much as in the Hindu scriptures.

Surely a Gandhi and a Lenin testify, by their careers, to the strength of the movement towards cultural internationalism in our time, even more eloquently than a Mustafa Kemal or a Sun Yat-sen.

I come back now to my main thesis: that a tendency for all affairs to become international is the principal tendency in international affairs in this "post-War" age. While I have taken my thesis for granted in the economic sphere, I hope I have succeeded in supporting it, in the political and cultural spheres, by the evidence which I have brought forward (evidence which, of course, can only be illustrative and not demonstrative within the limits of time at my disposal). I suggest, then, that in our generation the social life of mankind is becoming internationalised through and through; and, on every plane of activity, this new internationalism is Western in its structure and in its complexion. Just as the world-wide economic system which has already virtually established itself is Western in its technique, so the world-wide political order and the cosmopolitan culture which we, in our generation, are seeking to create are both being fashioned out of materials of Western origin. The new international society, if it comes to maturity, will be an outgrowth of Western civilisation, a tree whose branches overshadow the whole earth but whose stem springs from European roots.

And here, in passing, I would call your attention to the strange and paradoxical position in which Europe finds herself in our "post-War" world. Europe—or, perhaps more accurately, Western and Central Europe—is the garden in which this new, world-wide, all-embracing, cosmopolitan civilisation has been nurtured. Instead of saying that the civilisation of the whole world has been coalescing into a single unity, one might say with equal accuracy that European civilisation has expanded until now, to-day, the whole world lies at its feet. After four centuries of this triumphal progress we should naturally expect Europe, the region from which this conquering civilisation has been propagated, to find herself mistress of the other continents. Far from that, we actually see Europe dwarfed and put out of countenance by the outer world which she has succeeded in bringing within her ambit. To invert a famous phrase, we Europeans have called a new world into being not to redress but to *upset* the balance of the old.

In the new world-wide society which has grown out of our old European society, the countries of Europe are now encircled by a ring of outlying countries—either colonised by European emigrants or overrun by European conquerors or opened up by European traders, but all alike brought within our ambit in one way or another—which completely dwarf our largest European countries in material scale as measured by the factors of area