

## A COMMONWEALTH OF PEOPLES.

PROVIDED we do not blind ourselves to its present defects, nor leave its undeveloped potentialities unexplored, our British Commonwealth system of regulating inter-national affairs can justly be regarded as an object lesson for those who will shape the peace. General Smuts has described it as 'this greatest experiment in political organisation, this proudest political structure of time, this precedent and anticipation of what one hopes may be in store for human society in the years to come.' On the other hand, Lionel Curtis, who shared with Smuts and others the task of creating the Union of South Africa, makes the following criticism in 'Decision and Action' (Oxford University Press):—

'In 1914 the British Commonwealth had failed to prevent the outbreak of world war. In 1919 a League was constructed on the model of the British Commonwealth, into which that Commonwealth was incorporated. By 1939 the two together had completely failed to prevent the outbreak of an even more terrible world war.'

If we are wise, we shall study, with equal impartiality, these apparently conflicting but really complementary points of view. Curtis divides political systems into two kinds; organic (states such as Great Britain, federations such as the U.S.A.) and inorganic (confederations, alliances, leagues). The British Commonwealth he regards as a mixture of both, and cites Mr. Menzies of Australia to prove that its effective functioning is primarily due to some degree of hegemony exercised by the Mother country. His book demonstrates that inorganic systems are unstable and that as regards international coalitions for war purposes 'history, when it comes to be written, always shows how the inorganic bond of alliance hastened defeat or delayed victory.' Similar considerations must have been in General Smuts' mind when he declared in a recent speech:—

'The United Nations is a new conception, much in advance of the old concept of a League of Nations. We do not want a mere League, but something more definite and *organic*, even if to begin with more limited and less ambitious than the League. The United Nations is itself a fruitful conception and on the basis of that conception practical machinery for the functioning of an international order could be explored.'

In their insistence on the need for an 'organic' international system, Smuts and Curtis are on common ground with the late Lord Lothian, Sir William Beveridge, Dr. Ivor Jennings, Clarence Streit and many others. The term 'organic' does not just mean 'organised,' nor does it merely imply a system having constitutional power to expand its boundaries or admit new members. It lies in the distinction which George Washington made between 'influence' and 'government' when he was endeavouring to persuade the American States to abandon their ten-year-old 'League of Friendship' and to establish instead the federal union which has endured to this day. His colleague, Alexander Hamilton, writing in the 'Independent Journal' (A.D. 1787) on 'the characteristic difference between a league and a government,' urged 'we must extend the authority of the Union to the persons of the citizens—the only proper objects of government. . . . In an association where the general authority is confined to the collective bodies of the communities that compose it, every breach of the laws must involve a state of war; and military execution must become the only instrument of civil obedience. Such a state of things can certainly not deserve the name of government, nor would any prudent man choose to commit his happiness to it.'

Unless the United Nations is to die on its feet like the League, it must have governmental power. Unless it is to develop in course of time into an instrument of despotism, it must derive its powers from the consent of the governed. This would necessitate a common elected parliament to deal with affairs which by general consent are deemed to be common to all the partners, and a common government answerable to its subjects through the union parliament.

These proposals are not so revolutionary as they at first appear. No democratic country would experience any practical difficulty in adopting them, and the only theoretical arguments which could be opposed to them are arguments against the democratic principle itself. Affairs common to all could be defined as defence and foreign policy, probably with particular reference to the terms of the Atlantic Charter which has been endorsed by all the United Nations. A written constitution would be necessary, since the powers of an international authority must be precise and cannot be undefined.

As I see it, objections to purely Empire federation have in the past arisen from the fear that the proposal was a cloak to make the *de facto* hegemony of the Mother Country valid *de jure*. In my view federalism is, on the contrary, the only means by which all the members of our Family of Nations can really become equal partners and still continue to function as an effective unit. But this particular controversy is not really relevant to the proposal for federal ties

between the members of the United Nations, or those of them who are able and willing to comply with the requisite constitutional conditions. Neither are the two schemes incompatible; both could be put into practice side by side, though the wider federation would in my opinion render the more exclusive one unnecessary.

It is clear that our own Commonwealth principle cannot be applied, without adaptation, to the other members of the United Nations. To extend it in an unmodified form to non-British nations having no bonds of kinship or allegiance to a common crown, and probably no common language, would only invite repetitions of the case of Eire. Worse, it would mean that the responsibility for the defence of the entire system remained the first charge on the resources of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, resources which in any event will be inadequate—unaided by voluntary or legally assessed contributions from the Dominions—to protect the British Commonwealth proper. It would mean that the other members of the United Nations would have to fall in with a financial policy decided in London, with a foreign policy formulated in Whitehall. If any such system of hegemony were to prevail over the United Nations it would be not British but American; and even apart from the natural aversion which all free men have against hegemonies of any sort, a resurgence of American isolationism after the war would mean that American 'world leadership' would be hampered and inefficient. The citizens of a democratic federation, on the other hand, govern themselves.

We have already seen the difficulties in providing for Dominion, let alone Allied, representation in the War Cabinet. The only Dominions representatives with any constitutional mandate to act in that capacity are the respective Prime Ministers, who can seldom be spared from their appointed domestic tasks. On the other hand there is no purpose in including on a War Cabinet any member who is not a plenipotentiary, since the difficulties of communicating all questions at issue to the ends of the earth for discussion, and back again, are insurmountable. If there had been a Commonwealth Parliament elected directly by the individual citizens of the entire Commonwealth the War Cabinet would have derived naturally from it, equipped with complete powers and a full mandate. If there had been such a system in existence in 1939 Ribbentrop's notorious advice to Hitler would have been different; this war would not have taken place.

Sensible constitutional machinery cannot have any other effect than to make it easier for talent, skill and initiative to take their rightful places in public affairs, and it would be mere idle carping to maintain that a federation such as is here advocated might have

deprived us of the leadership which we to-day enjoy, and which at Dunkirk meant all the difference between victory and defeat. It is natural, but mistaken, to assume that the larger States in the Union would outvote the smaller, for a study of the functioning of federations will show that voting goes more in accordance with party-political and ideological than geographical divisions. The colonial problem is apt to be another red herring. If a democratic federation made any difference to the status of non-self-governing countries it could only be a change for the better. If in any particular instance it was agreed by all the peoples concerned that a dependency should henceforth be administered by the Union government the main reason for the transfer would surely be to accelerate progress towards democratic self-government.

The innate political acumen of the democratic peoples did not in the past suffice to save them from the human failing of waiting until crises were upon them before doing anything about it. The pressure of world events towards federation is inexorable. Let us harness these forces for the common good and steer them the way we wish them to go, rather than remain supine and allow ourselves to be driven hither and thither by every wind that blows, sheltering from every fresh storm under some ramshackle improvisation. That nations must, wherever practicable, enter into organic constitutional union for the specific purpose of safeguarding their liberties is a lesson which the failure of leagues, alliances and other symptoms of Collective Insecurity has proved up to the hilt. It is equally clear that, once having taken this step, every nation can with an honourable conscience claim the right of complete independence in affairs which are its own private national concern. Only thus can we ensure that the post-war world will be built on a pattern rather more inspiring than that of a multi-cellular sponge, with nothing to choose between one cell and another. Looked at in this light federation is the only means of securing at the same time the safety and the independence of nations. By adopting the federal type of union we establish an effective and complete union in a few matters only, sufficient to ensure the preservation of complete freedom and independence in all else.

International law must be made stronger than any power which might seek to destroy it. It can be effective only if and when it legislates directly upon individuals instead of—as in the case of the League of Nations—only upon States. This is achieved by federation, which is a union of the peoples, not of governments. By this means we can apply Lincoln's famous principle in an international context; in international no less than in national affairs we should

at last achieve government of the people, by the people and for the people. We who are inherently capable of establishing a genuine international government among our own peoples owe it to ourselves, and to those who look to us for guidance and leadership, to take the first steps towards a democratic federal Commonwealth of Peoples in the cause of world peace. As General Smuts prophesied :—

‘What the infant League of Nations failed to achieve, the United Nations will attempt and will rebuild on deeper and surer foundations. We hope to build a Union which no Hitler of the future, not even hell itself, shall venture to challenge again.’

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

## PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS IN ENGLAND.

Strictly, there is no such body as *the* Catholic Parents' Association. The various parochial units may be linked with a central council, and, as in some dioceses, with a diocesan council, but in general each local association is self-contained, and has its parochial or district denomination. There is divergence in constitution and even in title, and that absolute uniformity is undesirable is evidenced by the declaration of the Bishops of England and Wales on 24th August last that 'The Hierarchy have given full approval to the formation of Parochial and Diocesan Associations of Catholic Parents under the direction of the Bishops of the various dioceses. But they do not approve the formation of the National Federation of Catholic Parents' Associations, nor of its appeal for funds.'

The Constitution approved for one English Archdiocese details the purpose of the Association thus :

- (a) To learn and teach the duties and rights of parents.
- (b) To promote and safeguard Catholic educational interests and the care of Catholic youth.
- (c) To encourage representation of Catholic parents on public educational bodies.