THE FOUNDATIONS OF PEACE

Harold S. Bidmead

To regard war merely as evil is to betray ignorance of what we have really to meet. War is a force which men set in motion in the hope of mitigating or removing some still greater evil. It is waged in order to establish a more perfect state of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers!"

But the peace-*keepers* will be blessed by few unless their strategic objective is not to prevent war but to render war redundant as a possible instrument for the progressive attainment of more perfect peace and prosperity. If armed conflict between nations had been, by some magical dispensation, abolished, Hitler would on the 1st September, 1939, have crowned his "bloodless" conquests of Austria and Czechoslovakia with a pacific absorption of Poland, leading on to the leisurely subjugation of every country in the world. War is not the only weapon in the Nazi armoury. Fortunately, when the time came to declare war upon Germany as the only remaining means of establishing a less imperfect state of peace, there was no magic rust to keep the sword of Britain locked in its scabbard.

To render war unnecessary, some other means of changing the *status quo*, as and when necessary, must be provided. In the past, peaceful change in the international sphere has been narrowly interpreted as formal change of frontiers. As Professor D. Mitrany has pointed out: "The true task of peaceful change is to remove the need and the wish for changes of frontiers." The task is, of course, even greater than that.

If disputes between men and parties of men cannot be settled one way or the other, there comes into being a state of deadlock, leading eventually to complete social paralysis. Disputes can be settled either by violence or by recourse to the intellectual force of reason. When the *pros* and *cons* have been adequately thrashed out by the interested parties, one yields to the other, or both accept the decision of a disinterested arbiter—usually chosen in advance. Through the medium of laws, disputes can often be settled by reason before they arise, and without recourse to argument and arbitration in each case.

In this imperfect world, a community can remain peaceful only by compelling its members, by force if necessary, to settle their disputes peacefully. The ultimate arbiter of disputes within a community is the "sovereign power." In an author-

itarian community, the government is sovereign—"The State is all". In a democracy the government exercises sovereignty only as agent for the people, from whom its powers are derived. National sovereignty is a conditional Trust, not an irrevocable Divine Right.

The alternative to Anarchy is Government; anarchy sometimes seems preferable to authoritarian government, but popular self-government is an ideal before which anarchy pales into the negation that it really is.

If the nations of the world are to settle their disputes peacefully, there must be established an authority to exercise sovereignty in world affairs, whilst the national governments continue to exercise sovereignty in national affairs. Sovereignty involves the making of judicial decisions, tending to build up a body of Case-Law: but it does not *necessarily* involve legislative action in the sense of making laws by which to settle disputes *before* they arise. In practice, however, a government cannot proceed smoothly if, for lack of a Statute-Book, every conceivable issue has to be settled by litigation. Furthermore, a sovereign authority is obliged to take executive action, if only to enforce its decisions. Such action involves the framing of regulations having the force of law. Though we may properly limit the legislative field over which the authority is sovereign, undue limitation leads to impotence.

Sovereignty in world affairs includes the power to decide, in the last resort, whether a question falls on one side or the other of an agreed line drawn between world affairs and national affairs. If the world authority were autocratic, there would always be the danger that—having this power—it would degenerate into the worst despotism our planet has ever experienced. It is obviously preferable that world sovereignty should vest ultimately in the people of the world, in the governed, particularly in those citizens of the world that are competent to manage their own common affairs.

"Government of the people, by the people and for the people" cannot be guaranteed by any mere paper constitution. Confer a democratic constitution upon a community of fools, and their government will become autocratic before the ink is dry. Despotism is not so much the antithesis of democracy as the absence of it, an expression of the people's inability to govern themselves. Let us say, more optimistically, that it is proof of their need for protection, education and encouragement in

the art of self-government. Men learn best not from books but from experience, from the example of others, from working models. Popular self-government will embrace the earth by degrees—not through decrees.

The best polity is one in which the powers of the government are derived from the widest electorate compatible with adequate government. Its citizens practise how to govern themselves, and their ability to do it well grows with exercise. The competent electorate widens in consequence. Democracy nourishes what it feeds on.

It is essential that the body which exercises sovereignty shall be so constituted that it never itself suffers from deadlock— that main element of anarchy which it exists to abolish. It must be able to reach decisions, to reach them so expeditiously that the disputants have no pretext to resort to violence as a more speedy arbiter, and it must be able to translate decision into action without having to rely upon co-operation from any party against whom judgment may be pronounced.

It follows, therefore, that the decisions of an international authority must not have to run the gauntlet of all the separate national legislatures before being put into effect. Laws made by the central legislature within its allotted sphere must not require ratification by any other parliament.

It also follows that the force behind the Law must be permanently at the disposal of the legislature, and must be of such magnitude as to ensure the relative disarmament of all possible litigants in the face of the Law. This principle must prevail in both national and international spheres.

If the world develops towards this ideal, events will probably follow the natural trend of evolution. Government came before popular self-government. World government will come before democratic world government, (though a system of democratic international government embracing the old established democracies could precede and pave the way to both). Vertebrate animals developed from the jelly-fish type of organism. Constitutional political forms may *follow* the development of functional organs described by Professor Mitrany. Such a system, however, could not by any stretch of the imagination be called a *Durable* Peace System until the backbone of a sovereign international authority had been formed within it. This Professor Mitrany does not deny, but he fails to give it the emphasis it demands.

The world is thus faced with a challenge. Evolution is too slow. World government on jelly-fish lines cannot sustain the strain of modern conditions. For too many decades we have been marking time in politics, whilst forging ahead in "technics," thus creating a paradise for fools and rogues. Man must consciously accelerate evolution, taking two stages in one big stride. We must establish an international government that is also democratic, and then extend it as rapidly as practicable to include all countries; it must at least embrace the whole world in the sense that even in democracies a proportion of the population has for the time being no vote (e.g. young people) and in the sense that even in the British Empire law and order is imposed from *without* on dependencies as yet unable to govern themselves from *within*.

As already pointed out, constitutional forms alone are insufficient to ensure self-government. But a good constitution can be one of the most powerful means of accelerating evolution. For ten years after 1777 the thirteen American States struggled to work the Covenant of their League of Friendship, but became ever more deeply bogged down in a spreading morass of anarchy and despair. In 1787 they drafted a federal constitution. "Look at the immediate results. In the first ten years of Federal Union the American people quadrupled their trade. The standard of living in every one of the 13 states went up and up. States that were so indebted in 1787 that they could no longer borrow a nickel were soon piling up a surplus. The various territorial and trade disputes threatening war between them then—who can recall any of them now? Some people say we cannot follow this example now because we cannot change human nature. But *they* did not change human nature *then*. All they did was to change their form of government, gear it through Federal Union to the best instead of to the worst in human nature. That done, the very people who had failed with a League in 1787 began at once in 1790 to succeed astoundingly with Union." (Clarence K. Streit, *Union Now*, War-time Edition 1943, Harper & Bros.)

World peace is not a chimaera. But it will require for its foundations courage, wisdom and patience, judiciously blended with optimism.