

CURRENT MAGAZINES

IS THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION PROVING BETTER THAN THE LEAGUE?

Peace at Paris, 1946—Editorial, in *Current History*.

Bulgaria and Rumania, Promise and Fulfilment—Mr. H. Lehrman, in the *Fortnightly*.

France on Her Own—Sir John Pollock, in the *Quarterly*.

ENORMOUS expectations were encouraged at San Francisco a year and a half ago, when speakers representative of more than fifty Powers which had shared in the great victory addressed by radio a listening world. Deeply conscious that, twenty-five years before, a Plan of Collective Security had been launched in an atmosphere of millennial promise, only to prove altogether inadequate for its enterprize, the framers of the new scheme were careful to show how significantly it differed from its predecessor. So far from accepting as an ill omen the experience of failure through which they had passed on the previous adventure, they emphasized, through the gigantic publicity machine at their disposal, the value thus supplied for guidance this time against the structural defects of the League. Of course they added a warning to hasty optimists. We were reminded that those who cherish unreasonable hopes are commonly doomed to unreasonable disappointment. But the hopes set forth as reasonable were high.

What were the encouraging circumstances on which chief reliance was placed eighteen months ago? How far can we use with confidence the same line of reflection now, after that period of trial? There may well be suggestive value, though the glance backward has much that is painful to show, in this exercise of reminiscence.

I.

A consideration emphasized tremendously at San Francisco in the summer of 1945 was the advantage of keeping altogether apart the terms to be imposed upon the defeated Powers and the framing of a new world order for "collective security". The failure of the negotiators of 1919, whose *Treaty of Versailles* had been subjected to twenty-five years of continuous abuse (especially by critics who had never read it), was ascribed, in

the first instance, to the stubborn foolishness of Woodrow Wilson in insisting that his *Covenant of the League of Nations* must be included in the terms of peace. This, we were reminded, had been a cause of needless delay in getting the ravaged countries of Europe back to normal industry after the First World War. The vast and highly contentious provisions of the *Covenant* had kept the Powers long arguing, with heated temper, on an utterly new sort of world project, while if they had been allowed to deal at once with the relatively simple problem of adjusting details within a well-understood familiar system, the return to order would have been quick. Though that "dreamy American idealist" (as Lord Birkenhead called him) could not be made to see it, this method would have given its only real chance to the wider programme he had in mind. For an atmosphere of quiet, rather than the fierce passion of victors eager for vengeance and quarrelling about spoil, would have been best for thought on whether Europe might be not merely readjusted for a time, but secured by some fundamental change against falling into chaos again. Warned by that experience, the orators at San Francisco told us in 1945, the framers of the *Charter of United Nations* would not in any way intrude even with advice or suggestion upon the framers of a peace treaty.

Great encouragement was drawn, too, from the fact that this time Russia, with her huge resources and the proof she had lately given of her enormous capacity both to fight and to endure, would be an eager cooperating force to make the new world order succeed. In 1919, she had been an outcast from the comity of Europe. It had been obvious from the first that so long as she continued so, so long as the Power which by the natural conditions of its territory and its people must mean so much to the continent had to be left out of all plans for reconstruction, only provisional and precarious settlements could be made. But the scene and its prospects had been blessedly transformed in 1945. The partnership cemented in war would endure—so said the sanguine enthusiasts, with the eloquence appropriate to the occasion—when the difficult tasks of reconstructing the fabric of Europe had to be faced. At that time the Soviet Union would prove, as before, a trusty and an unconquerable ally. If to recall this now is to strike a grim, ironic note, the purpose is not cynical. It is to urge, however painful it may be, the need of facing facts as they are, not as they were rose-colored and are still being rose-colored by propagand-

ists who—as Mr. Eugene Lyons would say—are equally notable for goodness of the heart and for strangeness of the mind.

Finally, we were bidden at San Francisco to believe that at length after the Second World War (though not after the First) the nations had learned their terrible lesson. The First had proved insufficient. But the Second, especially in view of the terrifying possibilities of the atomic bomb, must surely have scared even the most reckless into sanity.

Such was the dream at least of those described as “dreaming from the heart,” with the reasons they used—in eager effort to convince themselves just as much as to persuade others—when UNO was inaugurated in June, 1945.

II

Last April an event of sinister suggestiveness for those now contemplating UNO's work was reported in the news.

We read of the meeting in Geneva for performance of a melancholy task—the disbanding of the League of Nations. It was to be the last Assembly of that ill-fated organization. A few details still remained for adjustment—such as disposal of the territories under League Mandate, the closing up of elaborate premises, the transfer of personnel wherever possible to the service of UNO. One pathetic figure at Geneva was Henri Paul Boncour, who had been French delegate in 1923 when the League Assembly met for the first time. He was then just turned fifty: last April he was seventy-three, and what experiences he had had in France! Very naturally the burden of his speech, as he recalled the League project and the influences which from the very first had worked to make it fail, was this: Is the world sufficiently sickened even yet by the alternative, to give UNO a wholehearted support such as was never given to its predecessor?

I know no answer to M. Boncour's argument that it is unfair to blame the League for the misdeeds of those who from its foundation opposed and frustrated it. Like the Christian religion, so often reproached because it does no good to those who notoriously make no use of it, this scheme for preserving world peace is held somehow accountable for the misdeeds not of its friends and promoters, but of its enemies and assailants. It seems to have been taken for granted by those critics a quarter-century ago that what had been set up was a magic guarantee, a legal or constitutional device which would automatically

prevent war, no matter what the mood or practice of those who held formal membership within it. Of course there is no such available magic. Rabindranath Tagore put it best when he said that those looking for such a thing are like a glutton who refuses to alter his habits, but demands a drug which will automatically guarantee him against nightmares of indigestion, no matter how much he consumes. "The doctor has failed, he is no good"—exclaims such a disappointed patient, in the very tone of those who now seek relief in pouring obloquy upon the League. And yet the League, like the doctor, might be excellent, with an invaluable function, for countries which—like good patients—are "co-operative."

Extolling the merits of the departed is a gracious habit at funerals, but in this case we want to look ahead. As Mark Antony said at the last rites for Julius Caesar, we come to bury, not to praise. M. Boncour spoke of UNO and its prospects, comparing these with those of the League twenty-three years back. The *Charter*, he observed, has most of the principles of the *Covenant*. But he added the disquieting report from recent visitors to San Francisco and London, that they did not find there the same atmosphere of enthusiasm and faith which had been noted when the League was built up at Geneva. Can one find serious fault with them? At least with the older folk, if they cannot now recapture, quickly, the raptures of that past? If memories keep intruding, thoughts of a confidence back in 1919 like the confidence of the younger people now? One is forced to the sombre acknowledgment "The things that I have seen, I now can see no more".

Instructive for the present hour is a Canadian book lately off the press. It is called *The Voice of Dafoe*, a selection of the editorials on collective security written by the great Winnipeg editor during the years 1931 to 1944. They show how he fought tirelessly, dauntlessly for the League, to save it from being nullified at its times of crisis—over Manchuria in 1931, Abyssinia in 1935, Spain in 1936, Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938. One reads those editorials now with pride and shame: pride in the blend of courage and discernment and power of trenchant exposition which set that western Canadian editor in such contrast with the Rothermeres and Ward Prices and John L. Garvins then so misusing the English press; shame that such a voice was unheeded, so drowned by the clamor of those whose thought was for Japanese trade, profits in nickel, resistance to the menace of what they called "Communism," meaning there-

by little else than risk of loss of income through restriction of their own monopolies. I have read and re-read those editorials by Dafoe, not always agreeing with his contentions about what was wrong and what should be done. How could a sequence of such writings from 1931 to 1944 stand up against the criticism which experience in those years supplied? Dafoe, I am sure, if he were still with us, would now in re-reading them often disagree with himself. But the spirit and purpose were of priceless worth, amid the wretched dodgings and evasions masquerading as statesmanship which he never ceased to expose and to brand. He invites the epitaph on John Knox—that he “never feared the face of man.”

We want for UNO now a service such as he rendered—alas in vain—to the League. Above all, we need constant warnings such as he sounded against supposing that all is going well when in truth the very essence of the project is being dropped, against the facile optimism whose only anxiety is for risks from those it calls “extremist.” The obsequies of the League, after a life of 27 years, were carried out last April. UNO has lived so far less than two years. Will it survive? Or is it to figure in the international record as a case of infant mortality? I know no better stimulant to thought in this urgent matter than the new volume called *The Voice of Dafoe*.

III.

Paradoxical as it may sound, I believe the record of fierce conflict at the various Conferences of 1946 supplies the most hopeful sign of UNO's ultimate success.

In this respect it has been encouragingly unlike the League of Nations. Those who have tried to reproduce the complacent assurances of early League propaganda have been quickly silenced by a public which is not to be easily befooled by the same pretences again. A mood of cold inattention has revealed itself as negotiators have tried to excuse their own failures by complaint of the need to negotiate in public and to make frequent report to a press Conference! No doubt they would prefer the immunity of earlier diplomatic method. But we know them too well to trust them in such manner. Tragic experience has told us what to apprehend from official secrecy, and how slight should be our reliance on those who advertise themselves as diplomatic experts. Men in dignified and lucrative office under UNO, like their predecessors under the League, may strain to

the utmost the old plea for patience, for appreciation of the necessary slowness of international recovery, for discernment of the value of one slight accommodation after another, and may even bid us cultivate a sense of wondering gratitude at the progress made, rather than indulge a peevish discontent with diplomats for their inability to work a miracle. It sounds like Mr. Dooley's tribute to science, as providing mankind with a good defence for all sorts of wickedness. Speaking of Darwinism, that reflective philosopher pointed out how much excuse it gave us in almost any situation:

"For, if we started th' way th' Bible says, we have wasted our opporchunities an' ought to be in jail; but if our ancesthors were what this scientist says they are, any good lawyer cud get us off be pointin' out that with our bringin up it's a miracle we ain't cannybals."

How often are we to hear of the amazing speed with which mountains of difficulty have been scaled, and how we owe it to the praeternatural wisdom of the negotiators (who have overcome their native modesty to tell us about it) that as yet no Third World War is in sight? As these lines are written, the radio news announcer has just brought what is meant to be a reassuring message from Marshal Stalin, through Major Elliott Roosevelt, that he thinks the risk of another outbreak is negligible. Thanks, of course, to the adjusting skill with which the diplomatists have come to "understand one another" at the successive Conferences.

But this sort of comfort, used so effectively in the darkest days of League dishonor, to save officials from a dangerous investigation, is received now with fitting contempt. No one indeed wants to depreciate the improved mood of the last few weeks before the Christmas adjournment of Conferences. We have had to wait so long for anything of the kind that our disposition is rather to exaggerate than to miss its stimulating significance. But we know well that for such belated encouragement we have to thank the fighting spirit of Mr. Byrnes and Mr. Bevin, with their refusal to be put off by phrases of the earlier soporific effect, and their constant appeal—by frank public disclosure of the horrors of the Conference Table—to the resolute temper of the British and the American people.

That in this respect, and subject to these qualifications, the record of UNO has within the last few weeks begun to give ground for hope, one gladly observes. In June, 1946, Mr.

John Foster Dulles, in two memorable articles he contributed to *Life*, laid the utmost stress on the need for stern, unmistakable display of determination, and on the immense danger of conveying to the Soviet authorities the idea of British and American readiness to yield everything to persistent and uncompromising Soviet pressure. Before those articles were written, we had experienced the monstrous "War of Nerves" over Azerbaijan. Since then, we have had the bluster of demand for disclosure of the technique of atomic energy without any guarantee of the least value that this confidence will not be abused. Persistently the Fifth-Column voices (such as we had such shameful reason to recognize in Canada last year) have kept repeating their admonition to "come to better understanding" with a bloc of Powers we understand all too well already. But the record of 1946 showed how, unlike the spineless appeasers of 1938, the leaders of British and American policy were clear-eyed and resolute. Perhaps there are *saboteurs* already at work within UNO, as there were within the League ten years ago. It must be admitted that UNO has, up to date, in actual accomplishment, fewer achievements to its credit and more collapses to its shame than marked the course of the League in its first year and a half. But there is token of a change. And if the glib triflers, with their meaningless phrases about "getting the Soviet point of view" (which, alas, has been discovered long ago) are sternly put aside in 1947 as they were in 1946 by Mr. Byrnes, Mr. Bevin and Mr. Baruch, the realist temper which is a Russian characteristic will become quickly manageable.

Do the retirements of Mr. Byrnes and Mr. Baruch, so suggestively coincident in time, mean any change in the wholesome, straightforward, resolute policies they pursued? If they do, the optimism I have suggested must fade again. That would mean League folly restored, and likely to be worse than ever for frank abandonment of experiments with something better. But I won't believe, unless and until I must, that the sky which has been lately brightened is to be thus overcast again.

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