

Chapter V: National Independence and Internationalism

In the relations between states, as in the relations of groups within a single state, what is to be desired is independence for each as regards internal affairs, and law rather than private force as regards external affairs. But as regards groups within a state, it is internal independence that must be emphasized, since that is what is lacking; subjection to law has been secured, on the whole, since the end of the Middle Ages. In the relations between states, on the contrary, it is law and a central government that are lacking, since independence exists for external as for internal affairs. The stage we have reached in the affairs of Europe corresponds to the stage reached in our internal affairs during the Wars of the Roses, when turbulent barons frustrated the attempt to make them keep the king's peace. Thus, although the goal is the same in the two cases, the steps to be taken in order to achieve it are quite different.

There can be no good international system until the boundaries of states coincide as nearly as possible with the boundaries of nations.

But it is not easy to say what we mean by a nation. Are the Irish a nation? Home Rulers say yes, Unionists say no. Are the Ulstermen a nation? Unionists say yes, Home Rulers say no. In all such cases it is a party question whether we are to call a group a nation or not. A German will tell you that the Russian Poles are a nation, but as for

the Prussian Poles, they, of course, are part of Prussia. Professors can always be hired to prove, by arguments of race or language or history, that a group about which there is a dispute is, or is not, a nation, as may be desired by those whom the professors serve. If we are to avoid all these controversies, we must first of all endeavor to find some definition of a nation.

A nation is not to be defined by affinities of language or a common historical origin, though these things often help to produce a nation. Switzerland is a nation, despite diversities of race, religion, and language. England and Scotland now form one nation, though they did not do so at the time of the Civil War. This is shown by Cromwell's saying, in the height of the conflict, that he would rather be subject to the domain of the royalists than to that of the Scotch. Great Britain was one state before it was one nation; on the other hand, Germany was one nation before it was one state.

What constitutes a nation is a sentiment and an instinct, a sentiment of similarity and an instinct of belonging to the same group or herd. The instinct is an extension of the instinct which constitutes a flock of sheep, or any other group of gregarious animals. The sentiment which goes with this is like a milder and more extended form of family feeling. When we return to England after being on the Continent, we feel something friendly in the familiar ways, and it is easy to believe that Englishmen on the whole are virtuous, while many foreigners are full of designing wickedness.

Such feelings make it easy to organize a nation into a state. It is not difficult, as a rule, to acquiesce in the orders of a national government. We feel that it is our government, and that its decrees are more or less the same as those which we should have given if we ourselves had been the governors. There is an instinctive and usually unconscious sense of a common purpose animating the members of a nation. This becomes especially vivid when there is war or a danger of war. Any one who, at such a time, stands out against the orders of his government feels an inner conflict quite different from any that he would feel in standing out against the orders of a foreign government in whose power he might happen to find himself. If he stands out, he does so with some more or less conscious hope that his government may in time come to think as he does; whereas, in standing out against a foreign government, no such hope is necessary. This group instinct, however it may have arisen, is what constitutes a nation, and what makes it important that the boundaries of nations should also be the boundaries of states.

National sentiment is a fact, and should be taken account of by institutions. When it is ignored, it is intensified and becomes a source of strife. It can only be rendered harmless by being given free play, so long as it is not predatory. But it is not, in itself, a good or admirable feeling. There is nothing rational and nothing desirable in a limitation of sympathy which confines it to a fragment of the human race. Diversities of manners and customs and traditions

are, on the whole, a good thing, since they enable different nations to produce different types of excellence. But in national feeling there is always latent or explicit an element of hostility to foreigners. National feeling, as we know it, could not exist in a nation which was wholly free from external pressure of a hostile kind.

And group feeling produces a limited and often harmful kind of morality. Men come to identify the good with what serves the interests of their own group, and the bad with what works against those interests, even if it should happen to be in the interests of mankind as a whole. This group morality is very much in evidence during war, and is taken for granted in men's ordinary thought. Although almost all Englishmen consider the defeat of Germany desirable for the good of the world, yet nevertheless most of them honor a German for fighting for his country, because it has not occurred to them that his actions ought to be guided by a morality higher than that of the group.

A man does right, as a rule, to have his thoughts more occupied with the interests of his own nation than with those of others, because his actions are more likely to affect his own nation. But in time of war, and in all matters which are of equal concern to other nations and to his own, a man ought to take account of the universal welfare, and not allow his survey to be limited by the interest, or supposed interest, of his own group or nation.

So long as national feeling exists, it is very important that each nation should be self-governing as regards its internal affairs. Government can only be carried on by force and tyranny if its subjects view it with hostile eyes, and they will so view it if they feel that it belongs to an alien nation. This principle meets with difficulties in cases where men of different nations live side by side in the same area, as happens in some parts of the Balkans. There are also difficulties in regard to places which, for some geographical reason, are of great international importance, such as the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal. In such cases the purely local desires of the inhabitants may have to give way before larger interests. But in general, at any rate as applied to civilized communities, the principle that the boundaries of nations ought to coincide with the boundaries of states has very few exceptions.

This principle, however, does not decide how the relations between states are to be regulated, or how a conflict of interests between rival states is to be decided. At present, every great state claims absolute sovereignty, not only in regard to its internal affairs but also in regard to its external actions. This claim to absolute sovereignty leads it into conflict with similar claims on the part of other great states. Such conflicts at present can only be decided by war or diplomacy, and diplomacy is in essence nothing but the threat of war. There is no more justification for the claim to absolute sovereignty on the part of a state than there would be for a similar claim on the part of an individual. The claim to absolute sovereignty

is, in effect, a claim that all external affairs are to be regulated purely by force, and that when two nations or groups of nations are interested in a question, the decision shall depend solely upon which of them is, or is believed to be, the stronger. This is nothing but primitive anarchy, "the war of all against all," which Hobbes asserted to be the original state of mankind.

There cannot be secure peace in the world, or any decision of international questions according to international law, until states are willing to part with their absolute sovereignty as regards their external relations, and to leave the decision in such matters to some international instrument of government.[5] An international government will have to be legislative as well as judicial. It is not enough that there should be a Hague tribunal, deciding matters according to some already existing system of international law; it is necessary also that there should be a body capable of enacting international law, and this body will have to have the power of transferring territory from one state to another, when it is persuaded that adequate grounds exist for such a transference. Friends of peace will make a mistake if they unduly glorify the status quo. Some nations grow, while others dwindle; the population of an area may change its character by emigration and immigration. There is no good reason why states should resent changes in their boundaries under such conditions, and if no international authority has power to make changes of this kind, the temptations to war will sometimes become irresistible.

[5] For detailed scheme of international government see "International Government," by L. Woolf. Allen & Unwin.

The international authority ought to possess an army and navy, and these ought to be the only army and navy in existence. The only legitimate use of force is to diminish the total amount of force exercised in the world. So long as men are free to indulge their predatory instincts, some men or groups of men will take advantage of this freedom for oppression and robbery. Just as the police are necessary to prevent the use of force by private citizens, so an international police will be necessary to prevent the lawless use of force by separate states.

But I think it is reasonable to hope that if ever an international government, possessed of the only army and navy in the world, came into existence, the need of force to enact obedience to its decisions would be very temporary. In a short time the benefits resulting from the substitution of law for anarchy would become so obvious that the international government would acquire an unquestioned authority, and no state would dream of rebelling against its decisions. As soon as this stage had been reached, the international army and navy would become unnecessary.

We have still a very long road to travel before we arrive at the establishment of an international authority, but it is not very

difficult to foresee the steps by which this result will be gradually reached. There is likely to be a continual increase in the practice of submitting disputes to arbitration, and in the realization that the supposed conflicts of interest between different states are mainly illusory. Even where there is a real conflict of interest, it must in time become obvious that neither of the states concerned would suffer as much by giving way as by fighting. With the progress of inventions, war, when it does occur, is bound to become increasingly destructive. The civilized races of the world are faced with the alternative of coöperation or mutual destruction. The present war is making this alternative daily more evident. And it is difficult to believe that, when the enmities which it has generated have had time to cool, civilized men will deliberately choose to destroy civilization, rather than acquiesce in the abolition of war.

The matters in which the interests of nations are supposed to clash are mainly three: tariffs, which are a delusion; the exploitation of inferior races, which is a crime; pride of power and dominion, which is a schoolboy folly.

The economic argument against tariffs is familiar, and I shall not repeat it. The only reason why it fails to carry conviction is the enmity between nations. Nobody proposes to set up a tariff between England and Scotland, or between Lancashire and Yorkshire. Yet the arguments by which tariffs between nations are supported might be used just as well to defend tariffs between counties. Universal free trade

would indubitably be of economic benefit to mankind, and would be adopted to-morrow if it were not for the hatred and suspicion which nations feel one toward another. From the point of view of preserving the peace of the world, free trade between the different civilized states is not so important as the open door in their dependencies. The desire for exclusive markets is one of the most potent causes of war.

Exploiting what are called "inferior races" has become one of the main objects of European statecraft. It is not only, or primarily, trade that is desired, but opportunities for investment; finance is more concerned in the matter than industry. Rival diplomatists are very often the servants, conscious or unconscious, of rival groups of financiers. The financiers, though themselves of no particular nation, understand the art of appealing to national prejudice, and of inducing the taxpayer to incur expenditure of which they reap the benefit. The evils which they produce at home, and the devastation that they spread among the races whom they exploit, are part of the price which the world has to pay for its acquiescence in the capitalist régime.

But neither tariffs nor financiers would be able to cause serious trouble, if it were not for the sentiment of national pride. National pride might be on the whole beneficent, if it took the direction of emulation in the things that are important to civilization. If we prided ourselves upon our poets, our men of science, or the justice

and humanity of our social system, we might find in national pride a stimulus to useful endeavors. But such matters play a very small part. National pride, as it exists now, is almost exclusively concerned with power and dominion, with the extent of territory that a nation owns, and with its capacity for enforcing its will against the opposition of other nations. In this it is reinforced by group morality. To nine citizens out of ten it seems self-evident, whenever the will of their own nation clashes with that of another, that their own nation must be in the right. Even if it were not in the right on the particular issue, yet it stands in general for so much nobler ideals than those represented by the other nation to the dispute, that any increase in its power is bound to be for the good of mankind. Since all nations equally believe this of themselves, all are equally ready to insist upon the victory of their own side in any dispute in which they believe that they have a good hope of victory. While this temper persists, the hope of international coöperation must remain dim.

If men could divest themselves of the sentiment of rivalry and hostility between different nations, they would perceive that the matters in which the interests of different nations coincide immeasurably outweigh those in which they clash; they would perceive, to begin with, that trade is not to be compared to warfare; that the man who sells you goods is not doing you an injury. No one considers that the butcher and the baker are his enemies because they drain him of money. Yet as soon as goods come from a foreign country, we are

asked to believe that we suffer a terrible injury in purchasing them. No one remembers that it is by means of goods exported that we purchase them. But in the country to which we export, it is the goods we send which are thought dangerous, and the goods we buy are forgotten. The whole conception of trade, which has been forced upon us by manufacturers who dreaded foreign competition, by trusts which desired to secure monopolies, and by economists poisoned by the virus of nationalism, is totally and absolutely false. Trade results simply from division of labor. A man cannot himself make all the goods of which he has need, and therefore he must exchange his produce with that of other people. What applies to the individual, applies in exactly the same way to the nation. There is no reason to desire that a nation should itself produce all the goods of which it has need; it is better that it should specialize upon those goods which it can produce to most advantage, and should exchange its surplus with the surplus of other goods produced by other countries. There is no use in sending goods out of the country except in order to get other goods in return. A butcher who is always willing to part with his meat but not willing to take bread from the baker, or boots from the bootmaker, or clothes from the tailor, would soon find himself in a sorry plight. Yet he would be no more foolish than the protectionist who desires that we should send goods abroad without receiving payment in the shape of goods imported from abroad.

The wage system has made people believe that what a man needs is work. This, of course, is absurd. What he needs is the goods produced by

work, and the less work involved in making a given amount of goods, the better. But owing to our economic system, every economy in methods of production enables employers to dismiss some of their employees, and to cause destitution, where a better system would produce only an increase of wages or a diminution in the hours of work without any corresponding diminution of wages.

Our economic system is topsyturvy. It makes the interest of the individual conflict with the interest of the community in a thousand ways in which no such conflict ought to exist. Under a better system the benefits of free trade and the evils of tariffs would be obvious to all.

Apart from trade, the interests of nations coincide in all that makes what we call civilization. Inventions and discoveries bring benefit to all. The progress of science is a matter of equal concern to the whole civilized world. Whether a man of science is an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a German is a matter of no real importance. His discoveries are open to all, and nothing but intelligence is required in order to profit by them. The whole world of art and literature and learning is international; what is done in one country is not done for that country, but for mankind. If we ask ourselves what are the things that raise mankind above the brutes, what are the things that make us think the human race more valuable than any species of animals, we shall find that none of them are things in which any one nation can have exclusive property, but all are things in which the

whole world can share. Those who have any care for these things, those who wish to see mankind fruitful in the work which men alone can do, will take little account of national boundaries, and have little care to what state a man happens to owe allegiance.

The importance of international coöperation outside the sphere of politics has been brought home to me by my own experience. Until lately I was engaged in teaching a new science which few men in the world were able to teach. My own work in this science was based chiefly upon the work of a German and an Italian. My pupils came from all over the civilized world: France, Germany, Austria, Russia, Greece, Japan, China, India, and America. None of us was conscious of any sense of national divisions. We felt ourselves an outpost of civilization, building a new road into the virgin forest of the unknown. All coöperated in the common task, and in the interest of such a work the political enmities of nations seemed trivial, temporary, and futile.

But it is not only in the somewhat rarefied atmosphere of abstruse science that international coöperation is vital to the progress of civilization. All our economic problems, all the questions of securing the rights of labor, all the hopes of freedom at home and humanity abroad, rest upon the creation of international good-will.

So long as hatred, suspicion, and fear dominate the feelings of men toward each other, so long we cannot hope to escape from the tyranny

of violence and brute force. Men must learn to be conscious of the common interests of mankind in which all are at one, rather than of those supposed interests in which the nations are divided. It is not necessary, or even desirable, to obliterate the differences of manners and custom and tradition between different nations. These differences enable each nation to make its own distinctive contribution to the sum total of the world's civilization.

What is to be desired is not cosmopolitanism, not the absence of all national characteristics that one associates with couriers, wagon-lit attendants, and others, who have had everything distinctive obliterated by multiple and trivial contacts with men of every civilized country. Such cosmopolitanism is the result of loss, not gain. The international spirit which we should wish to see produced will be something added to love of country, not something taken away. Just as patriotism does not prevent a man from feeling family affection, so the international spirit ought not to prevent a man from feeling affection for his own country. But it will somewhat alter the character of that affection. The things which he will desire for his own country will no longer be things which can only be acquired at the expense of others, but rather those things in which the excellence of any one country is to the advantage of all the world. He will wish his own country to be great in the arts of peace, to be eminent in thought and science, to be magnanimous and just and generous. He will wish it to help mankind on the way toward that better world of liberty and international concord which must be

realized if any happiness is to be left to man. He will not desire for his country the passing triumphs of a narrow possessiveness, but rather the enduring triumph of having helped to embody in human affairs something of that spirit of brotherhood which Christ taught and which the Christian churches have forgotten. He will see that this spirit embodies not only the highest morality, but also the truest wisdom, and the only road by which the nations, torn and bleeding with the wounds which scientific madness has inflicted, can emerge into a life where growth is possible and joy is not banished at the frenzied call of unreal and fictitious duties. Deeds inspired by hate are not duties, whatever pain and self-sacrifice they may involve. Life and hope for the world are to be found only in the deeds of love.