

DEFECTS

The headlines in the press day by day, especially these days, are mostly concerned with criticisms of the United Nations. As I shall endeavour to explain, however, these criticisms are sometimes based upon the failure of the organization to do things which it was never meant to do. It is said, for instance, that the United Nations has failed to achieve unity among the nations, especially unity among the Big Powers. It is sometimes described as an organization of "Disunited Nations". It is, I believe, a point of fundamental importance to understand that the United Nations was never organized to achieve unity. On the contrary, unity was assumed among a group of states that founded the organization. The United Nations is based on the assumption that the "sponsoring powers", namely the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China (to which France was later added) would maintain that unity which had brought these powers together in a victorious coalition in the recent war. These were the powers which invited the rest of the nations to San Francisco to join them in building a world organization that would maintain the peace. It was on this assumption of their staying united, that these powers were accorded the privilege of permanent membership in the Security Council, and given the power of the veto, in order that in all major issues of maintaining the peace of the world, they would act in agreement and thus lead the other member-nations in collective action for the purpose of keeping the peace or restoring peace if it had been broken. Moreover, the veto power was granted to these nations on the assumption that it would be used "sparingly" and in such a way as would not "wilfully obstruct the operations of the Council".

It is common knowledge, which I need not labour, that these assumptions have not been fulfilled. The veto has not been used sparingly -- to say the least -- by one of the permanent members. The Soviet Union has exercised the veto 23 times to date. I do not propose to inflict upon you the technical explanation of the veto, apart from saying that it applies only in the voting procedures of the Security Council where it is referred to as the 'rule of unanimity of the permanent members'. It is, however, important to appreciate that the United Nations has not failed because of the veto. The veto is, in fact, merely a symptom of a more fundamental disease which afflicts the world today. The symptom moreover can be treated by curbing the use of the veto by the development of appropriate rules governing its use. But the disease would remain - the disease of Big Power disunity and conflict which hampers and obstructs not only the work of the Security Council but also other councils, committees and commissions where the Soviet Union is represented.

I should like to illustrate this point by reference to other important instances of this disunity and its baneful effect, in which the veto as such plays no part. In particular, in spite of high hopes and great effort on the part of several countries, plans for the international control of atomic energy and for the control of armaments have not been realized, mainly, in my opinion, owing to Soviet intransigence; and little if no progress has been made towards agreement on the military forces, that are to be pledged in advance to the Security Council for its use in suppressing breaches of the peace and stopping aggression. The Big Power conflict over the peace settlement in Europe, as well as in the Far East, reflect exactly the same pattern. It should be remembered that it is not only the Security Council in the United Nations that reflects this conflict. The Assembly, where decisions are taken by a majority, is likewise hampered, especially in its important work of international conciliation. Instead of this great public forum being used for conciliation and to bring harmony between the nations, we find only too often, as for instance last September, October and November, the Assembly being exploited by some nations for the purpose of emphasizing the differences between nations and for the purpose of scoring advantages in the propaganda and political warfare which is being waged throughout the world.