

The World We Mean to Make

Youth and the New Commonwealth

THE PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERATION UNIVERSITAIRE INTERNATIONALE

IT is with a certain bitter humour that articles by young people are read to-day. Few young people still have that burning faith in their future that is supposed to characterise youth. Nor have we, indeed, much reason to believe in the certainty of a future of any kind, good or bad. The full weight of disillusionment and uncertainty born of poverty and unemployment, social injustice and revolutions, international bitterness and wars, has fallen on our shoulders. As our countries plough their feverish paths to destruction—though now dimly aware that in death they will not be divided though in life they were at daggers drawn—we, the young in all lands, feel like helpless rats on a sinking ship. We played no part in the building of this chaotic civilisation of ours, and our influence in changing it seems small and ineffectual. Yet surely enough, unless miracles still happen, with it will end our future.

The eleventh hour has passed. Every country has started its policy of *sauve-qui-peut*. Yet everyone knows that method is no less disastrous for the world than it is for the audience in a burning cinema. When we think, we can see why everything has happened in these swiftly moving post-war years. The 1921 crisis, and more vividly the 1929 world depression, have shown us not only how interdependent all countries are, but also how closely interrelated are all their problems. Intellectually every thinking person is convinced, as Herr Hitler said in his speech on May 21st, 1935, "that looking at the matter from a broad standpoint the achievement of economic autarchy by all States, by which we are threatened to-day, is undesirable and cannot fail to have harmful consequences for all nations." Yet self-sufficiency and Empire Free Trade are daily more loudly acclaimed. We see the connections between economic autarchy, unemployment and rearmament programmes, Jew-baiting, the Oxford Group and the recrudescence of nationalist policies and National Governments. The Director of the I.L.O. remarks in his Annual Report that: "There is now a vague awareness that territorial claims and armament programmes are not the fundamental issues . . . but the symptoms. The roots are to be found in actual or threatened impoverishment, declining standards of life, insecurity for the future of themselves and their children which darkens the outlook of the present generation in so many countries. The remedy is not to be found in political pacts or frontier rectifications or disarmament conferences alone. These methods have been tried and have failed because they did not touch the real source of the trouble. So nowadays we are beginning to talk of the abolition of trade restrictions, the distribution of raw materials, the stabilisation of currencies, an international monetary agreement, the resumption of international lending, as things which are not merely required to promote economic recovery but which are indispensable to the future stability of the whole political structure." When the people of the world have been frightened and doped into thinking they have their backs against the wall in a fight for self-preservation, bullheaded, sadistic and irrational policies are acclaimed without

thought, and the leadership of morons and tub-thumpers is received as a blessing from heaven.

It would seem ridiculous that our world civilisation, with all that we find good in it, and all hopes of better things, as well as the bad, should be destroyed by intellectual laziness. Yet that is what is happening. Few post-war statesmen really understood the new diplomacy that was born with the signing of the Covenant. They made but a poor attempt to work it. Now, frightened out of their wits by the sheer fact of modern interdependence, which they cannot or will not understand, they make ludicrous efforts to revert to the pre-war methods they think they really know. After sixteen years of more or less collective living, statesmen seek to lead their countries back to the paths of power politics which achieved the World War. It is as unfruitful for youth to expect salvation from their outworn brains as from their outworn creeds.

What can youth do in its present desperate plight? Youth can do two things: it can think, and it can act. Thereby it may yet work the miracle. We can try to go on thinking clearly, rationally and internationally amid the confusion around us and under the poison of propaganda which smothers us. Our young and fresh minds can understand things it is too late for our fathers to begin to learn, for we were born into this tortured interdependent world, and have been a part of its writhings. We can act, too, with our young and strong bodies, consistently, ruthlessly. Let the mass hysteria of the totalitarian state and the inevitable doom of an irrational world be the ever present guarantors that reason shall, to the end, guide our actions.

Our immense task needs that courage of desperation which we have. We have to build a new world order, of a kind in which we would chose to live. If we wish to build a world in which peace, justice and happiness are available for all people, we have first to deal with the claims of those dissatisfied states whose military preparedness is a standing threat to our precarious peace. The people of the democratic countries are prepared to make sacrifices for peace; who, indeed, in their senses would not? We must elucidate those claims, psychological as well as economic, and try to satisfy them, in so far as our actions can be consistent with our objective. Writing off a little prestige is inevitably necessary, but if we wish to establish our good faith we must first understand and appreciate the culture, the idealism and the human needs and aspirations of the people of other countries. But, side by side with radical measures of peaceful change, we must try to re-build collective security. States are dynamic, and an international order which does not provide for this fact will not avoid war. Yet if changes are to produce justice and peace for all people they must be made under and through law. Otherwise even the changes themselves will not be peaceful. *What we want to build* is the public law of the Covenant, backed by effective international force and by machinery in the spirit of Article XI—whether by an Equity Tribunal or a standing advisory committee of the Council—for remedying growing grievances and avoiding those situations likely to result in a breach of the peace. *What we want immediately* is the establishment of an impartial fact-finding Commission (set