

**TOWARDS
INTERNATIONAL
GOVERNMENT**

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Towards international government by J. A. Hobson

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J. A. HOBSON

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Towards International Government

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P R E F A C E

AFTER this war is over, will the nations fall back again into the armed peace, the rival alliances, the Balance of Power with competing armaments, the preparations for another war thus made "inevitable," or will they go forward to the realization of the idea of "public right," as expounded by Mr. Asquith, "the substitution for force, for the clash of competing ambitions, for groupings and alliances and a precarious equipoise, of a real European partnership, based on the recognition of equal rights and established and enforced by the common will"?¹ The preservation and progress of civilization demand that the peoples go forward. But how shall "public right" be realized?

The issue is, perhaps, best approached by putting a narrower, more concrete question: How can nations be got to reduce their armaments? For this action will be the best test and pledge of the establishment of "public right" and the reliance on a pacific future. Could a conference of Powers bring about a reduction of armaments by agreement? Surely not unless the motives which have led them in the past to arm are reversed. These motives are either a desire to be stronger than

¹ Dublin, September 25th, 1914.

some other Power, in order to take something from him by force—the aggressive motive ; or a desire to be strong enough to prevent some other Power from acting in this way to us—the defensive motive. Now how can these motives be reversed? Nations may enter into a solemn undertaking to refer all differences or disputes that may arise to arbitration or to other peaceful settlement. If they can be got to adhere to such a general agreement, international law and public right will take the place of private force, and wars of aggression and defence will no longer happen. But what will ensure the fulfilment of their undertaking by all the signatory Powers? Public opinion and a common sense of justice are found inadequate safeguards. There must be an executive power enabled to apply an economic boycott, or in the last resort an international force. If this power is adequate, it will secure the desired reversal of the offensive and the defensive motives to armaments, and will by a natural process lead to a reduction of national forces.

But it is not safe for the League of Nations to wait until difficulties ripen into quarrels. There must be some wider power of inquiry and settlement vested in a representative Council of the Nations. This will in substance mean a legislative power. For peace cannot be secured by adopting a purely statical view of the needs and rights of nations in relation to one another. New applications of the principles of political " autonomy " and of " the open door " will become necessary, and some international method of dealing with them is essential. So there emerges the

necessity of extending the idea of a League of Peace into that of an International Government.

Such is the general argument of these chapters, highly speculative in parts, but directed to the needs of the situation. Many difficulties come up for consideration. What nations would enter into such an international arrangement, and upon what terms of representation? Should it be a European Confederation, or is a wider basis wanted? Finally, the reader is confronted with the objections of political theorists and historians, to the effect that all these ambitious designs are Utopian. But these objections do not take account of the new factors in the modern situation, and in particular of the rising consciousness of power in the Peoples. The new era of internationalism requires the replacement of the secret diplomacy of Powers by the public intercourse of Peoples through their chosen representatives. If the Peace which ends this war is to be durable, it must be of a kind to facilitate the setting-up of these new international arrangements. No timid, tentative quarter measures will suffice. Courage and faith are needed for a great new extension of the art of government.

The writer is well aware that his proposals and the argument by which he recommends them form an outlined sketch rather than a scheme of internationalism. Countless practical difficulties are no doubt thus evaded which will need close discussion before any substantial progress along these lines can be realized. But it seemed desirable that some such rapid and hazardous advance of speculative thought should be made, even though it might

be found that some of the positions could not be "held" while others had to be "reconstituted." Even had he felt qualified to set forth his proposals in closer-worked designs, he would have refrained from doing so. For at the present stage it is of paramount importance to try to get the largest number of thoughtful people to form clear, general ideas of better international relations, and to desire their attainment. To bury these new-formed ideas beneath mountains of detail, however relevant, is for the time a bad intellectual and moral economy. It may, indeed, be the case that this mode of appeal ignores or extenuates some difficulties and dangers that are deep-rooted in the nature of man or of national life, and are not of mere detail. The writer has had an interesting experience of these deeper differences of opinion and judgment as a member of a Committee which, under the guidance of Lord Bryce, has met constantly during the course of the war for the consideration of a constructive policy in international relations. To his fellow-members on this Committee he owes much in the way of information and of suggestion, and to two in particular, Mr. G. Lowes Dickinson and Mr. E. R. Cross, he wishes to express a special sense of obligation for the service they have rendered him in reading the manuscript of this work and in offering valued criticism of its contents.

HAMPSTEAD,

July 1915.

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