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Large States Versus Small

By Henry Steele Commager

Everyone — well, almost everyone — agrees now that if we are to have an enduring peace we must have an international organization strong enough to maintain peace, and that the United States must play a prominent if not indeed a dominant part in such an organization. But what form that organization is to take, what powers and responsibilities are to be assigned to it, what rôle the United States is to play — these are matters of increasing debate. Already a major controversy is being manufactured; already men appear determined to make and take sides. Mr. Dewey was sure the Dumbarton Oaks conference would create an issue; when no real issue emerged from the early discussions newspaper reporters and radio commentators proceeded to imagine one.

And what is this issue — or this pseudo-issue — which appears to be emerging? It is the issue of large states versus small, of a world order dictated by the four major powers or one controlled by seventy sovereignties. It is an unreal issue, but not, for that reason, less dangerous: we must never forget that in 1919 the fictitious and irrelevant question of "sovereignty" proved immensely effective in rallying American opinion against the League. It is an issue peculiarly dangerous in the United States because here, more easily than in any other nation, it can be used to set "idealists" against "realists," to stir up racial and national antagonisms, to serve party purposes, and — if we so wish — to provide a decorous and respectable excuse for repudiating whatever plan for international order is finally agreed upon.

The extraordinary public reception of and reaction to the recent books by Mr. Lippmann[1] and Mr. Welles[2] has dramatized the issue of great powers versus small states. For what

[1] *U. S. War Aims*, by Walter Lippmann. $1.50. *Little Brown.*

[2] *The Time For Decision*, by Sumner Welles. $3.00. Harper.

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the public is, apparently, getting from Mr. Lippmann's book — sometimes at first hand, sometimes at second — is an attack upon Wilsonian idealism, a repudiation of any world organization, and an argument for regional groupings dominated by the major powers. What it is getting from Mr. Welles' book is a vindication of Wilsonian idealism, a plea for a world organization not too different from the old League, and a plan for a series of territorial readjustments in central Europe and in the Far East. Now actually Lippmann does not attack Wilsonian idealism but some of its misguided manifestations; he does not propose that four powers run the world but rather that ultimate responsibility be placed upon those who alone can fulfil it, and he suggests regional groups geared into a world organization. And actually Welles is not uncritical of the Wilsonian ideals, and envisions a federation of regional systems within a world organization. Neither in analysis nor in conclusion are the two books far apart, and the points of agreement are more numerous and more important than the points of disagreement.

II

Superficially, to be sure, the books vary greatly. Mr. Lippmann has written a short essay in political philosophy, a magisterial book in the grand manner of Burke or Mill or Tocqueville; Mr. Welles has given us a long, discursive, highly personal narrative. In form, method, content, the books differ sharply. Mr. Lippmann, in order to plan wisely for the future, addresses himself to the philosophical inquiry why the United States found herself involved in two world wars — why we twice found it necessary to fight Germany, why Japan found it necessary to fight us. He finds the explanation in the fact that we are part of the Atlantic community, that we are instinctively and persistently opposed to imperialism or colonialism, that "within the region of the world which fronts upon the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the United States is the enemy of all conquerors and the partisan of national freedom."

He turns then to an analysis of the Atlantic community and, more briefly, the Russian and the Chinese communities. He outlines the policies and programs implacably imposed upon us by our membership in the Atlantic community and by our concern for the Pacific, and proposes a system of regional understandings designed to maintain peace where peace is actually threatened — within regions. The job of keeping the peace is up to the great powers and not up to any world organization. The great powers must control, each in its region, the things men fight about: the world organization cannot exercise jurisdiction over the things men fight about but only over the things they do not fight about. The principle of self-determination, Mr. Lippmann adds, can no longer be admitted to control international policy — it is a principle dis-

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integrating and even anarchistic in character; no small nation can pursue an absolutely independent foreign policy, for such independence would threaten the peace of the whole world.

These are the main steps in Mr. Lippmann's argument. In the course of that argument he says many wise and some foolish things. He insists that no nation can endure in a politically alien and hostile world and that a people who have ceased to advance their faith have already begun to abandon it.

He reminds us that our failure to recognize our legitimate interest in the maintenance of the Atlantic community has cost us dear — that twice we have belatedly fought for what we might have saved without fighting, that — to put it succinctly — "France has to be liberated in 1944 because France was not reinforced in 1939. We have to open a second front because we did not support the French front when it was still in being."

He urges the supreme importance of an understanding with Russia if peace is to endure, but adds that until Russia establishes freedom at home suspicion of her motives and of her sincerity will persist. He proposes no specific solution for the German or the Japanese problem, but suggests that we must direct our policy towards the grand end of preventing either of these defeated nations from driving a wedge between the victors, and that aside from this we should permit the Continental nations who suffered from Nazi aggression and who must in the end live with Germany to settle the German score, and permit China and other Asiatic nations to settle scores with Japan. He is, at many points, unfair to Wilson, charging to him errors for which the American political system and American public opinion were responsible. And so eager is he to emphasize the blindness of Americans in the years between the two world wars that he does grave injustice to those who fought isolationism. The isolationists, he says, were blind. "But on the whole their opponents have been equally blind; as the alternative to isolation they argued that the nation should rely upon collective security as a substitute for its own armed strength, and the diplomatic protection of its vital interests." The majority of them, needless to say, did no such thing: Mr. Lippmann should not forget that the leading organization which fought isolationism was called the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies.

III

Mr. Welles follows a different method, but both his observations and his conclusions reenforce Mr. Lippmann's argument at many points. The early chapters of his book are devoted to a swift review of American policy between two wars, a review notable chiefly for its celebration of Mr. Roosevelt's wisdom and courage, its excoriation of our policy towards Spain in 1937, and its revelation of Roosevelt's plan for peace in 1937–38

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— a plan rejected by Chamberlain. Then follows a lively account of the famous mission of 1940 — an account which contains little that is new but presents illuminating sketches of Mussolini, Hitler, Ciano, Ribbentrop, and some of the French leaders — or followers — of those tragic days. There is a long — an over-long — analysis of the evolution of our Good Neighbor policy towards the Latin American countries, interesting chiefly for its biting criticism of our present policy towards Argentina.

The most significant, if not the most interesting, chapters, are addressed to the solution of the German problem and of the problem of international organization. Mr. Welles' view of Germany is close to that entertained by Vansittart, and characterized by many of the same historical errors; his plan embraces the destruction of the German General Staff and the division of Germany into three nations, each subject, for many years, to international supervision. His plan to preserve world order calls for both regional and world organizations.

Notwithstanding the obvious differences of approach and of content in these two books, they are, it would seem, in essential agreement; certainly the agreements are more striking than the differences. Both of these experienced and judicious publicists agree on the inadequacies of the 1919 peace settlements, on the disastrous consequences of the attitude of the United States and other Western powers towards Soviet Russia, on the extent of American responsibility for the disintegration of world order during the 'twenties and the rise of totalitarianism in the 'thirties, on the bankruptcy of isolationism and of neutrality. Both agree in defending our policy towards France and even towards Spain, since the outbreak of hostilities. Both urge the importance of planning now for the future, of accepting the reality of regional groupings, of insisting upon the extension of the four freedoms throughout the world.

What are the points of disagreement, if we can use so strong a term? Mr. Welles envisions an international organization with authority to interfere in national controversies — the authority to be exercised in the first instance by the regional powers; Mr. Lippmann is insistent that the world organization can have jurisdiction over no matters that might lead to war, but only over those matters which can be settled peaceably. Mr. Welles disposes of parts of the British Empire in a high-handed manner — preserving to the United States hegemony in the Caribbean and to Russia hegemony in Eastern Europe, but denying to Britain effective control in the Far East; Mr. Lippmann is not quite so ready to fragmentize the British Empire. Mr. Welles would return Germany to the disintegrated position of the eighteenth century; Mr. Lippmann believes that there is a place for a united Germany as a trading nation within the Atlantic community.

Is it not possible that the debate be-

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tween those who favor regional and those who advocate world organizations is a sterile one just as the debates in our own Constitutional Convention of 1787 between large states and small was a sterile one? In our own history conflicts have been regional rather than between large and small states, and it is safe to say that conflicts of the future will be between the great regional groups rather than between, let us say, France and Belgium or China and Burma or the United States and Bolivia. Neither Mr. Lippmann nor Mr. Welles addresses himself seriously to the problem of avoiding or eliminating such conflicts. What, after all, is to insure peace between the Atlantic community and the Russian, what is to insure peace in the Near East or the Mediterranean area, where the regional interests overlap? Mr. Lippmann recognizes this problem more acutely than does Mr. Welles: he assures us that the Atlantic community has not and should not have any legitimate quarrel with the Russian, and he warns us most solemnly against permitting a revived Germany to play off Russia against the West or a revived Japan to play off Russia against China or China against India.

But this problem of potential regional conflicts is bound up with another and larger one which both Mr. Lippmann and Mr. Welles ignore. That is the problem touched on in the fourth, fifth, and sixth articles of the Atlantic Charter — the problem of economic security, and it is one fundamental to any enduring peace. In his last paragraph, to be sure, Mr. Welles mentions the "world revolution under way," but it is by no means clear that he uses this phrase in the same sense in which Mr. Laski used it in his notable *Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. Certainly neither of our authors do reflect on this revolution of our time.

It is a hackneyed observation that if we are to have peace we must eliminate, so far as possible, the things that make for war. Mr. Lippmann insists with characteristic clarity that we cannot make peace by blue-prints, however admirable; it should be equally clear that we cannot guarantee peace by machinery, however elaborate. We possess the technical equipment to "afford assurance that all men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want"; do we possess the enlightenment to implement this promise? We can solve the problem of production; can we solve the problem of distribution?

For conflict, both domestic and international, springs from insecurity. Insecurity — economic, political, social — explains in large part anti-Semitism and Negrophobia, explains in large part imperialism and the struggle for living space, explains in large part the doctrines of the master race and the competition in armaments. If we can provide security — security from the threat of invasion, from unemployment, from a sense of inferiority, we can remove most of the causes of war.

So our task, in providing for a world

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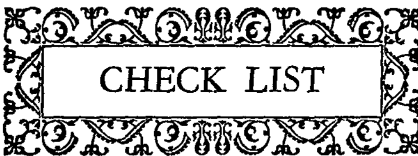
order and a lasting peace, necessarily involves considerations of domestic as well as of international policy. We learned, in our own history, that few problems were really local in character — neither slavery nor child labor nor conservation nor water power — and we learned that the argument of states rights was most of the time a shibboleth.

We must learn, in the future, that few problems are merely national in character — that what we, or other nations do about tariffs, banking and currency, labor standards, conservation, even about race relations, inevitably affects other nations. If we are to have international order we must have national order; if we are to have international security we must have national security.

We cannot go ahead to a brave new world of internationalism or regionalism and go back to the normalcy of McKinley or Coolidge. The shining strands of peace and democracy and freedom make a unified and coherent pattern.



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IT CAN BE DONE THIS TIME, by Frederick Palmer. $2.75. *Scribner's.* KEEP THE PEACE THROUGH AIR POWER, by Allan A. Michie. $2.00. *Holt.* These two war correspondents, one of them a veteran and the other a newcomer, happen to preach the same striking sermon: that the best method by which the victors in the present war can ensure the peace is to police the conquered enemy from the air and bomb him into submission should he start rearming or breaking bounds. It might be argued that Mr. Michie comes to this conclusion because his text shows he is startlingly innocent of the facts of history. But Mr. Palmer discourses on history with facility and gusto. While Mr. Michie dashed off his volume during a two-month lecture tour that covered forty states, Mr. Palmer evidently pondered at greater leisure. It is probably their aliveness to the actualities of war which makes them concur on a drastic and economic method of enforcing international decrees. Whether recalcitrant nations are to be bombarded from the air or from the sea is no more than a detail in policing. Arguments for flying bombs, for lethal gas or for total asphyxiation might similarly be advanced. These books draw attention, however, to a concrete police problem.

MEDIEVAL AMERICAN ART, by Pál Kelemen. 2 vols. $22.50. *Macmillan.* The ancient civilizations of our Southwest, Mexico, Central America and the Andes still are explored and interpreted mainly from the archaeological and ethnical viewpoints. Kelemen's book represents the first major attempt to evaluate their outstanding products strictly in the light of the esthetic. There are 960 unusually beautiful photographs, grouped in divisions devoted to pre-Columbian architecture, sculpture, pottery, weaving, metalwork, work in semiprecious stones, murals and manuscripts, objects representing miscellaneous applied arts, and "facets of daily life." This is truly a work of very high value.

PIONEERS! O PIONEERS!, by Hilary St. George Saunders. $2.00. *Macmillan.* Mr. Saunders did America in six weeks, sent here by the Ministry of Information after his sweeping success with *Combined Operations* and *The Battle of Britain*, but what he saw on his whirlwind tour packs his volume with entertainment. He hands the palm to Andrew Jackson Higgins as the outstanding American he met. A librarian by trade, a man of letters by instinct, Mr. Saunders has a keen eye for sunsets, pretty girls and the menu card, but also for the deeper implications of war.

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