Chapter XXV

War and the Need of Economic Unity

THE MILITARY necessity, the pressure of war between nations and the need for prevention of war by the assumption of force and authority in the hands of an international body, World-State or Federation or League of Peace, is that which will most directly drive humanity in the end towards some sort of international union. But there is behind it another necessity which is much more powerful in its action on the modern mind, the commercial and industrial, the necessity born of economic interdependence. Commercialism is a modern sociological phenomenon; one might almost say that is the whole phenomenon of modern society. The economic part of life is always important to an organised community and even fundamental; but in former times it was simply the first need, it was not that which occupied the thoughts of men, gave the whole tone to the social life, stood at the head and was clearly recognised as standing at the root of social principles. Ancient man was in the group primarily a political being, in the Aristotelian sense,—as soon as he ceased to be primarily religious,—and to this preoccupation he added, wherever he was sufficiently at ease, the preoccupation of thought, art and culture. The economic impulses of the group were worked out as a mechanical necessity, a strong desire in the vital being rather than a leading thought in the mind. Nor was the society regarded or studied as an economic organism except in a very superficial aspect. The economic man held an honourable, but still a comparatively low position in the society; he was only the third caste or class, the Vaishya. The lead was in the hands of the intellectual and political classes,—the Brahmin, thinker, scholar, philosopher and priest, the Kshatriya, ruler and warrior.
It was their thoughts and preoccupations that gave the tone to society, determined its conscious drift and action, coloured most powerfully all its motives. Commercial interests entered into the relations of States and into the motives of war and peace; but they entered as subordinate and secondary predisposing causes of amity or hostility and only rarely and as it were accidentally came to be enumerated among the overt and conscious causes of peace, alliance and strife. The political consciousness, the political motive dominated; increase of wealth was primarily regarded as a means of political power and greatness and opulence of the mobilisable resources of the State than as an end in itself or a first consideration.

Everything now is changed. The phenomenon of modern social development is the decline of the Brahmin and Kshatriya, of the Church, the military aristocracy and the aristocracy of letters and culture, and the rise to power or predominance of the commercial and industrial classes, Vaishya and Shudra, Capital and Labour. Together they have swallowed up or cast out their rivals and are now engaged in a fratricidal conflict for sole possession in which the completion of the downward force of social gravitation, the ultimate triumph of Labour and the remodelling of all social conceptions and institutions with Labour as the first, the most dignified term which will give its value to all others seem to be the visible writing of Fate. At present, however, it is the Vaishya who still predominates and his stamp on the world is commercialism, the predominance of the economic man, the universality of the commercial value or the utilitarian and materially efficient and productive value for everything in human life. Even in the outlook on knowledge, thought, science, art, poetry and religion the economic conception of life overrides all others.  

1 It is noticeable that the bourgeois habit of the predominance of commercialism has been taken up and continued in an even larger scale by the new Socialist societies though on the basis of a labour, instead of a bourgeois economy, and an attempt at a new distribution of its profits or else, more characteristically, a concentration of all in the hands of the State.
For the modern economic view of life, culture and its products have chiefly a decorative value; they are costly and desirable luxuries, not at all indispensable necessities. Religion is in this view a by-product of the human mind with a very restricted utility — if indeed it is not a waste and a hindrance. Education has a recognised importance but its object and form are no longer so much cultural as scientific, utilitarian and economic, its value the preparation of the efficient individual unit to take his place in the body of the economic organism. Science is of immense importance not because it discovers the secrets of Nature for the advancement of knowledge, but because it utilises them for the creation of machinery and develops and organises the economic resources of the community. The thought-power of the society, almost its soul-power — if it has any longer so unsubstantial and unproductive a thing as a soul — is not in its religion or its literature, although the former drags on a feeble existence and the latter teems and spawns, but in the daily Press primarily an instrument of commercialism and governed by the political and commercial spirit and not like literature a direct instrument of culture. Politics, government itself are becoming more and more a machinery for the development of an industrialised society, divided between the service of bourgeois capitalism and the office of a half-involuntary channel for the incoming of economic Socialism. Free thought and culture remain on the surface of this great increasing mass of commercialism and influence and modify it, but are themselves more and more influenced, penetrated, coloured, subjugated by the economic, commercial and industrial view of human life.

This great change has affected profoundly the character of international relations in the past and is likely to affect them still more openly and powerfully in the future. For there is no apparent probability of a turn in a new direction in the immediate future. Certain prophetic voices announce indeed the speedy passing of the age of commercialism. But it is not easy to see how this is to come about; certainly, it will not be by a reversion to the predominantly political spirit of the past or the temper and forms of the old aristocratic social type. The sigh of
the extreme conservative mind for the golden age of the past, which was not so golden as it appears to an imaginative eye in the distance, is a vain breath blown to the winds by the rush of the car of the Time-Spirit in the extreme velocity of its progress. The end of commercialism can only come about either by some unexpected development of commercialism itself or through a reawakening of spirituality in the race and its coming to its own by the subordination of the political and economic motives of life to the spiritual motive.

Certain signs are thought to point in this direction. The religious spirit is reviving and even the old discouraged religious creeds and forms are recovering a kind of vigour. In the secular thought of mankind there are signs of an idealism which increasingly admits a spiritual element among its motives. But all this is as yet slight and superficial; the body of thought and practice, the effective motive, the propelling impulsion remain untouched and unchanged. That impulsion is still towards the industrialising of the human race and the perfection of the life of society as an economic and productive organism. Nor is this spirit likely to die as yet by exhaustion, for it has not yet fulfilled itself and is growing, not declining in force. It is aided, moreover, by modern Socialism which promises to be the master of the future; for Socialism proceeds on the Marxian principle that its own reign has to be preceded by an age of bourgeois capitalism of which it is to be the inheritor and to seize upon its work and organisation in order to turn it to its own uses and modify it by its own principles and methods. It intends indeed to substitute Labour as the master instead of Capital; but this only means that all activities will be valued by the labour contributed and work produced rather than by the wealth contribution and production. It will be a change from one side of economism to the other, but not a change from economism to the domination

2 The connection between Socialism and the democratic or equalitarian idea or the revolt of the proletariat is however an accident of its history, not its essence. In Italian Fascism there arose a Socialism undemocratic and non-equalitarian in its form, idea and temper. Fascism has gone, but there is no inevitable connection between Socialism and the domination of Labour.
of some other and higher motive of human life. The change itself is likely to be one of the chief factors with which international unification will have to deal and either its greatest aid or its greatest difficulty.

In the past, the effect of commercialism has been to bind together the human race into a real economic unity behind its apparent political separateness. But this was a subconscious unity of inseparable interrelations and of intimate mutual dependence, not any oneness of the spirit or of the conscious organised life. Therefore these interrelations produced at once the necessity of peace and the unavoidability of war. Peace was necessary for their normal action, war frightfully perturbatory to their whole system of being. But because the organised units were politically separate and rival nations, their commercial interrelations became relations of rivalry and strife or rather a confused tangle of exchange and interdependence and hostile separatism. Self-defence against each other by a wall of tariffs, a race for closed markets and fields of exploitation, a struggle for place or predominance in markets and fields which could not be monopolised and an attempt at mutual interpenetration in spite of tariff walls have been the chief features of this hostility and this separatism. The outbreak of war under such conditions was only a matter of time; it was bound to come as soon as one nation or else one group of nations felt itself either unable to proceed farther by peaceable means or threatened with the definite limitation of its expansion by the growing combination of its rivals. The Franco-German was the last great war dictated by political motives. Since then the political motive has been mainly a cover for the commercial. Not the political subjugation of Serbia which could only be a fresh embarrassment to the Austrian empire, but the commercial possession of the outlet through Salonika was the motive of Austrian policy. Pan-Germanism covered the longings of German industry for possession of the great resources and the large outlet into the North Sea offered by the countries along the Rhine. To seize African spaces of exploitation and perhaps French coal fields, not to rule over French territory, was the drift of its real intention. In Africa, in China, in Persia,
in Mesopotamia, commercial motives determined political and military action. War is no longer the legitimate child of ambition and earth-hunger, but the bastard offspring of wealth-hunger or commercialism with political ambition as its putative father.

On the other hand the effect, the shock of war have been rendered intolerable by the industrial organisation of human life and the commercial interdependence of the nations. It would be too much to say that it laid that organisation in ruins, but it turned it topsy-turvy, deranged its whole system and diverted it to unnatural ends. And it produced a wide-spread suffering and privation in belligerent and a géné and perturbation of life in neutral countries to which the history of the world offers no parallel. The angry cry that this must not be suffered again and that the authors of this menace and disturbance to the modern industrial organisation of the world, self-styled civilisation, must be visited with condign punishment and remain for some time as international outcasts under a ban and a boycott, showed how deeply the lesson had gone home. But it showed too, as the post-war mentality has shown, that the real, the inner truth of it all has not yet been understood or not seized at its centre. Certainly, from this point of view also, the prevention of war must be one of the first preoccupations of a new ordering of international life. But how is war to be entirely prevented if the old state of commercial rivalry between politically separate nations is to be perpetuated? If peace is still to be a covert war, an organisation of strife and rivalry, how is the physical shock to be prevented? It may be said, through the regulation of the inevitable strife and rivalry by a state of law as in the competitive commercial life of a nation before the advent of Socialism. But that was only possible because the competing individuals or combines were part of a single social organism subject to a single governmental authority and unable to assert their individual will of existence against it. Such a regulation between nations can therefore have no other conclusion, logically or practically, than the formation of a centralised World-State.

But let us suppose that the physical shock of war is prevented, not by law, but by the principle of enforced arbitration
in extreme cases which might lead to war, not by the creation of an international authority, but by the overhanging threat of international pressure. The state of covert war will still continue; it may even take new and disastrous forms. Deprived of other weapons the nations are bound to have increasing resort to the weapon of commercial pressure, as did Capital and Labour in their chronic state of “pacifist” struggle within the limits of the national life. The instruments would be different, but would follow the same principle, that of the strike and the lock-out which are on one side a combined passive resistance by the weaker party to enforce its claims, on the other a passive pressure by the stronger party to enforce its wishes. Between nations, the corresponding weapon to the strike would be a commercial boycott, already used more than once in an unorganised fashion both in Asia and Europe and bound to be extremely effective and telling if organised even by a politically or commercially weak nation. For the weaker nation is necessary to the stronger, if as nothing else, yet as a market or as a commercial and industrial victim. The corresponding weapons to the lock-out would be the refusal of capital or machinery, the prohibition of all or of any needed imports into the offending or victim country, or even a naval blockade leading, if long maintained, to industrial ruin or to national starvation. The blockade is a weapon used originally only in a state of war, but it was employed against Greece as a substitute for war, and this use may easily be extended in the future. There is always too the weapon of prohibitive tariffs.

It is clear that these weapons need not be employed for commercial purposes or motives only, they may be grasped at to defend or to attack any national interest, to enforce any claim of justice or injustice between nation and nation. It has been shown into how tremendous a weapon commercial pressure can be turned when it is used as an aid to war. If Germany was crushed in the end, the real means of victory was the blockade, the cutting off of money, resources and food and the ruin of industry and commerce. For the military debacle was not directly due to military weakness, but primarily to the diminution and failure of resources, to exhaustion, semi-starvation and the
moral depression of an intolerable position cut off from all hope of replenishment and recovery. This lesson also may have in the future considerable application in a time of “peace”. Already it was proposed at one time in some quarters to continue the commercial war after the political had ceased, in order that Germany might not only be struck off the list of great imperial nations but also permanently hampered, disabled or even ruined as a commercial and industrial rival. A policy of refusal of capital and trade relations and a kind of cordon or hostile blockade has been openly advocated and was for a time almost in force against Bolshevist Russia. And it has been suggested too that a League of Peace\(^3\) might use this weapon of commercial pressure against any recalcitrant nation in place of military force.

But so long as there is not a firm international authority, the use of this weapon would not be likely to be limited to such occasions or used only for just and legitimate ends. It might be used by a strong nation secure of general indifference to crush and violate the weak; it might be used by a combination of strong imperial Powers to enforce their selfish and evil will upon the world. Force and coercion of any kind not concentrated in the hands of a just and impartial authority are always liable to abuse and misapplication. Therefore inevitably in the growing unity of mankind the evolution of such an authority must become an early and pressing need. The World-State even in its early and imperfect organisation must begin not only to concentrate military force in its hands, but to commence consciously in the beginning what the national State only arrived at by a slow and natural development, the ordering of the commercial, industrial, economic life of the race and the control at first, no doubt, only of the principal relations of international commerce,\(^4\) but inevitably in the end of its whole system and principles. Since

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\(^3\) Afterwards realised as the League of Nations.

\(^4\) Some first beginnings of this kind of activity were trying to appear in the activities of the now almost moribund League of Nations. These activities were still only platonic and advisory as in its futile discussions about disarmament and its inconclusive attempts to regulate certain relations of Capital and Labour, but they showed that the need is already felt and were a signpost on the road to the future.
industry and trade are now five-sixths of social life and the economic principle the governing principle of society, a World-State which did not control human life in its chief principle and its largest activity would exist only in name.