Chapter XXIII

Forms of Government

The idea of a world-union of free nations and empires, loose at first, but growing closer-knit with time and experience, seems at first sight the most practicable form of political unity; it is the only form indeed which would be immediately practicable, supposing the will to unity to become rapidly effective in the mind of the race. On the other hand, it is the State idea which is now dominant. The State has been the most successful and efficient means of unification and has been best able to meet the various needs which the progressive aggregate life of societies has created for itself and is still creating. It is, besides, the expedient to which the human mind at present has grown accustomed, and it is too the most ready means both for its logical and its practical reason to work with because it provides it with what our limited intelligence is always tempted to think its best instrument, a clear-cut and precise machinery and a stringent method of organisation. Therefore it is by no means impossible that, even though beginning with a loose union, the nations may be rapidly moved by the pressure of the many problems which would arise from the ever closer interworking of their needs and interests, to convert it into the more stringent form of a World-State. We can find no safe conclusion upon the immediate impracticability of its creation or on the many difficulties which would stand in its way; for past experience shows that the argument of impracticability is of very little value. What the practical man of today denies as absurd and impracticable is often enough precisely the thing that future generations set about realising and eventually in some form or other succeed in bringing into effective existence.

But a World-State implies a strong central organ of power that would represent or at least stand for the united will of the nations. A unification of all the necessary powers in the hands of
this central and common governing body, at least in their source — powers military, administrative, judicial, economic, legislative, social, educational — would be indispensable. And as an almost inevitable result there would be an increasing uniformity of human life throughout the world in all these departments, even perhaps to the choice or creation of one common and universal language. This, indeed, is the dream of a unified world which Utopian thinkers have been more and more moved to place before us. The difficulties in the way of arriving at this result are at present obvious, but they are perhaps not so great as they seem at first sight and none of them are insoluble. It is no longer a Utopia that can be put aside as the impracticable dream of the ideal thinker.

The first difficulty would be the character and composition of this governing body, a problem beset with doubts and perils. In ancient times it was solved readily enough in smaller limits by the absolutist and monarchical solution with the rule of a conquering race as the starting-point, as in the Persian and Roman empires. But that resource is no longer as easily open to us in the new conditions of human society, whatever dreams may in the past have entered into the minds of powerful nations or their Czars and Kaisers. The monarchical idea itself is beginning to pass away after a brief and fallacious attempt at persistence and revival. Almost it seems to be nearing its final agony; the seal of the night is upon it. Contemporary appearances are often enough deceptive, but they are less likely to be so in the present instance than in many others, because the force which makes for the disappearance of the still-surviving monarchies is strong, radical and ever increasing. The social aggregates have ripened into self-conscious maturity and no longer stand in need of a hereditary kingship to do their governing work for them or even to stand for them — except perhaps in certain exceptional cases such as the British Empire — as the symbol of their unity. Either then the monarchy can only survive in name, — as in England where the king has less power even, if that be possible, than the French President and infinitely less than the heads of the American republics, — or else it becomes a source of offence,
a restraint to the growing democratic spirit of the peoples and to a greater or less degree a centre, a refuge or at least an opportunity for the forces of reaction. Its prestige and popularity tend therefore not to increase but to decline, and at some crisis when it comes too strongly into conflict with the sentiment of the nation, it falls with small chance of lasting revival.

Monarchy has thus fallen or is threatened almost everywhere — and most suddenly in countries where its tradition was once the strongest. Even in these days it has fallen in Germany and Austria, in China, in Portugal, in Russia; it has been in peril in Greece and Italy; and it has been cast out of Spain. In no continental country is it really safe except in some of the smaller States. In most of them it exists for reasons that already belong to the past and may soon lose if they are not already losing their force. The continent of Europe seems destined to become in time as universally republican as the two Americas. For kingship there is now only a survival of the world’s past; it has no deep root in the practical needs or the ideals or the temperament of present-day humanity. When it disappears, it will be truer to say of it that it has ceased to survive than to say that it has ceased to live.

The republican tendency is indeed Western in its origin, stronger as we go more and more to the West, and has been historically powerful chiefly in Western Europe and dominant in the new societies of America. It might be thought that with the entrance of Asia into the active united life of the world, when the eastern continent has passed through its present throes of transition, the monarchical idea might recover strength and find a new source of life. For in Asia kingship has been not only a material fact resting upon political needs and conditions, but a spiritual symbol and invested with a sacrosanct character. But in Asia no less than in Europe, monarchy has been a historical growth, the result of circumstances and therefore subject to disappearance when those circumstances no longer exist. The true mind of Asia has always remained, behind all surface appearances,

1 Now in Italy too it is gone with practically no hope of return.
not political but social, monarchical and aristocratic at the surface but with a fundamental democratic trend and a theocratic spirit. Japan with its deep-rooted monarchical sentiment is the one prominent exception to this general rule. Already a great tendency of change is manifest. China, always a democratic country at bottom though admitting in its democratic system an official aristocracy of intellect and a symbolic imperial head, is now definitely republican. The difficulty of the attempt to revive monarchy or to replace it by temporary dictatorships has been due to an innate democratic sentiment now invigorated by the acceptance of a democratic form for the supreme government, the one valuable contribution of Western experience to the problem at which the old purely social democracies of the East were unable to arrive. In breaking with the last of its long succession of dynasties China had broken with an element of her past which was rather superficial than at the very centre of her social temperament and habits. In India the monarchical sentiment, which coexisted with but was never able to prevail over the theocratic and social except during the comparatively brief rule of the Moghuls, was hopelessly weakened, though not effaced, by the rule of a British bureaucracy and the political Europeanising of the active mind of the race. In Western Asia monarchy has disappeared in Turkey, it exists only in the States which need the monarch as a centralising power or keystone.

At the two extremes of the Asiatic world in Japan and in Turkey the monarchy after the close of the war still preserved something of its old sacrosanct character and its appeal to the sentiment of the race. In Japan, still imperfectly democratised, the sentiment which surrounds the Mikado is visibly weakened, his prestige survives but his actual power is very limited, and the growth of democracy and socialism is bound to aid the weakening and limiting process and may well produce the same results as in Europe. The Moslem Caliphate, originally the head of a

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2 Now with the liberation of the country and the establishment of a republican and democratic constitution, the ruling princes have either disappeared or become subordinate heads with their small kingdoms becoming partly or wholly democratised or destined to melt into a united India.
theocratic democracy, was converted into a political institution by the rapid growth of a Moslem empire, now broken into pieces. The Caliphate now abolished could only have survived as a purely religious headship and even in that character its unity was threatened by the rise of new spiritual and national movements in Persia, Arabia and Egypt. But the one real and important fact in Asia of today is this that the whole active force of its future is centred not in priesthood or aristocracy, but, as it was formerly in Russia before the Revolution, in a newly-created intelligentsia, small at first in numbers, but increasing in energy and the settled will to arrive and bound to become exceedingly dynamic by reason of the inherited force of spirituality. Asia may well preserve its ancient spirituality; even in its hour of greatest weakness it has been able to impose its prestige increasingly even on the positive European mind. But whatever turn that spirituality takes, it will be determined by the mentality of this new intelligentsia and will certainly flow into other channels than the old ideas and symbols. The old forms of Asiatic monarchy and theocracy seem therefore destined to disappear; at present there is no chance of their revival in new figures, although that may happen in the future.

The only apparent chance eventually for the monarchical idea is that its form may be retained as a convenient symbol for the unity of the heterogeneous empires which would be the largest elements in any unification based upon the present political configuration of the world. But even for these empires the symbol has not proved to be indispensable. France has done without it, Russia has recently dispensed with it. In Austria it had become odious to some of the constituent races as the badge of subjection and was bound to perish even without the collapse of the Great War. Only in England and in some small countries is it at once innocuous and useful and therefore upheld by a general feeling. Conceivably, if the British Empire,\(^3\) even now the leading, the most influential, the most powerful

\(^3\) Now no longer Empire but Commonwealth.
force in the world, were to become the nucleus or the pattern of the future unification, there might be some chance of the monarchical element surviving in the figure — and even an empty figure is sometimes useful as a support and centre for future potentialities to grow and fill with life. But against this stands the fixed republican sentiment of the whole of America and the increasing spread of the republican form; there is little chance that even a nominal kingship representing one element of a very heterogeneous whole would be accepted by the rest in any form of general unification. In the past, at least, this has only happened under the stress of conquest. Even if the World-State found it convenient as the result of experience to introduce or to reintroduce the monarchical element into its constitution, it could only be in some quite new form of a democratic kingship. But a democratic kingship, as opposed to a passive figure of monarchy, the modern world has not succeeded in evolving.

The two determining facts in modern conditions which alter the whole problem are that in this kind of unification nations take the place of individuals and that these nations are mature self-conscious societies, predestined therefore to pass through pronounced forms of social democracy or some other form of socialism. It is reasonable to suppose that the World-State will tend to strive after the same principle of formation as that which obtains in the separate societies which are to constitute it. The problem would be simpler if we could suppose the difficulties created by conflicting national temperaments, interests and cultures to be either eliminated or successfully subordinated and minimised by the depression of separative nationalistic feeling and the growth of a cosmopolitan internationalism. That solution is not altogether impossible in spite of the serious check to internationalism and the strong growth of nationalistic feeling developed by the world war. For, conceivably, internationalism may revive with a redoubled force after the stress of the feelings created by the war has passed. In that case, the tendency of unification may look to the ideal of a world-wide Republic with the nations as provinces, though at first very sharply distinct provinces, and governed by a council or parliament responsible
to the united democracies of the world. Or it might be something like the disguised oligarchy of an international council reposing its rule on the assent, expressed by election or otherwise, of what might be called a semi-passive democracy as its first figure. For that is what the modern democracy at present is in fact; the sole democratic elements are public opinion, periodical elections and the power of the people to refuse re-election to those who have displeased it. The government is really in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the professional and business men, the landholders, — where such a class still exists, — strengthened by a number of new arrivals from the working-class who very soon assimilate themselves to the political temperament and ideas of the governing classes.4 If a World-State were to be established on the present basis of human society, it might well try to develop its central government on this principle.

But the present is a moment of transition and a bourgeois World-State is not a probable consummation. In each of the more progressive nations, the dominance of the middle class is threatened on two sides. There is first the dissatisfaction of the intellectuals who find in its unimaginative business practicality and obstinate commercialism an obstacle to the realisation of their ideals. And there is the dissatisfaction of the great and growing power of Labour which sees democratic ideals and changes continually exploited in the interests of the middle class, though as yet it has found no alternative to the Parliamentarism by which that class ensures its rule.5 What changes the alliance between these two dissatisfactions may bring about, it is impossible to foresee. In Russia, where it was strongest, we have seen it taking the lead of the Revolution and compelling the bourgeoisie to undergo its control, although the compromise so effected could not long outlast the exigencies of the war. Since then the old order there has been “liquidated” and the triumph of the new

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4 This has now changed and the Trade Unions and similar institutions have attained an equal power with the other classes.

5 Written before the emergence of the Soviet State in Russia and of the Fascist States. In the latter it is the middle class itself that rose against democracy and established for a time a new form of government and society.
tendencies has been complete. In two directions it may lead to a new form of modified oligarchy with a democratic basis. The government of a modern society is now growing an exceedingly complicated business in each part of which a special knowledge, special competence, special faculties are required and every new step towards State socialism must increase this tendency. The need of this sort of special training or faculty in the councillor and administrator combined with the democratic tendencies of the age might well lead to some modern form of the old Chinese principle of government, a democratic organisation of life below, above the rule of a sort of intellectual bureaucracy, an official aristocracy of special knowledge and capacity recruited from the general body without distinction of classes. Equal opportunity would be indispensable but this governing élite would still form a class by itself in the constitution of the society. On the other hand, if the industrialism of the modern nations changes, as some think it will, and develops into a sort of guild socialism, a guild aristocracy of Labour might well become the governing body in the society.\(^6\) If any of these things were done, any movement towards a World-State would then take the same direction and evolve a governing body of the same model.

But in these two possibilities we leave out of consideration the great factor of nationalism and the conflicting interests and tendencies it creates. To overcome these conflicting interests, it has been supposed, the best way is to evolve a sort of world Parliament in which, it is to be presumed, the freely formed and freely expressed opinion of the majority would prevail. Parliamentarism, the invention of the English political genius, is a necessary stage in the evolution of democracy, for without it the generalised faculty of considering and managing with the least possible friction large problems of politics, administration, economics, legislation concerning considerable aggregates of men cannot easily be developed. It has also been the one successful

\(^6\) Something of the kind was attempted in Soviet Russia for a time. The existing conditions were not favourable and a definite form of government not revolutionary and provisional is not anywhere in sight. In Fascist Italy a cooperative State was announced but this too took no effectual or perfect shape.
means yet discovered of preventing the State executive from suppressing the liberties of the individual and the nation. Nations emerging into the modern form of society are therefore naturally and rightly attracted to this instrument of government. But it has not yet been found possible to combine Parliamentarism and the modern trend towards a more democratic democracy; it has been always an instrument either of a modified aristocratic or of a middle-class rule. Besides, its method involves an immense waste of time and energy and a confused, swaying and uncertain action that “muddles out” in the end some tolerable result. This method accords ill with the more stringent ideas of efficient government and administration that are now growing in force and necessity and it might be fatal to efficiency in anything so complicated as the management of the affairs of the world. Parliamentarism means too, in practice, the rule and often the tyranny of a majority, even of a very small majority, and the modern mind attaches increasing importance to the rights of minorities. And these rights would be still more important in a World-State where any attempt to override them might easily mean serious discontents and disorders or even convulsions fatal to the whole fabric. Above all, a Parliament of the nations must necessarily be a united parliament of free nations and could not well come into successful being in the present anomalous and chaotic distribution of power in the world. The Asiatic problem alone, if still left unsolved, would be a fatal obstacle and it is not alone; the inequalities and anomalies are all-pervasive and without number.

A more feasible form would be a supreme council of the free and imperial nations of the existing world-system, but this also has its difficulties. It could only be workable at first if it amounted in fact to an oligarchy of a few strong imperial nations whose voice and volume would prevail at every point over that of the more numerous but smaller non-imperialistic commonwealths and it could only endure by a progressive and, if possible, a peaceful evolution from this sort of oligarchy of actual power to a more just and ideal system in which the imperialistic idea would dissolve and the great empires merge their
separate existence into that of a unified mankind. How far national egoism would allow that evolution to take place without vehement struggles and dangerous convulsions, is, in spite of the superficial liberalism now widely professed, a question still fraught with grave and ominous doubts.

On the whole, then, whichever way we turn, this question of the form of a World-State is beset with doubts and difficulties that are for the moment insoluble. Some arise from the surviving sentiments and interests of the past; some menace from the rapidly developing revolutionary forces of the future. It does not follow that they can never or will never be solved, but the way and the line any such solution would take are beyond calculation and can really be determined only by practical experience and experiment under the pressure of the forces and necessities of the modern world. For the rest, the form of government is not of supreme importance. The real problem is that of the unification of powers and the uniformity which any manageable system of a World-State would render inevitable.