

**THE INTERPLAY OF REALISM AND IDEALISM  
IN THE THOUGHT OF LIONEL CURTIS:  
A CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPTION OF THE  
`FIRST DEBATE` IN INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS**

Ph.D. thesis at the Department of  
International Relations, London School  
of Economics and Political Science

submitted by Aysen Dilek Lekon

London 2003

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UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE AND IDEALISM

THE THOUGHT OF LOWELL CURRIER

A DEGREE OF THE CONCEPTION OF THE

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## Abstract

This thesis analyses the writings of Lionel Curtis (1872-1955), in particular his federation projects, from an International Relations perspective. It argues that the textbook versions of the so-called 'First Debate' between naive idealists and hard-boiled realists is inadequate for a meaningful conceptualization of Curtis's thought.

Instead, a neo-Gramscian perspective is adopted here, in which the relations between state and civil society is the crucial variable distinguishing between different state/society complexes. In this interpretation, Curtis's federation plans had two aims: First, integrating the Lockean heartland against Hobbesian contenders and colonial independence movements. Second, stemming Britain's relative decline vis-à-vis the USA within the heartland.

Chapter One summarizes the textbook characteristics of idealism and realism and discusses some criticisms of and alternative versions to this dichotomy.

Chapter Two follows the revisionist interpretations of E.H. Carr's writings and argues that his position cannot be reduced to putting down idealism in favour of realism.

Chapter Three provides an overview of Curtis's life and major activities.

Chapter Four traces out textbook elements of idealism and realism within Curtis's writings and shows that he could be placed into both camps.



Chapter Five introduces the neo-Gramscian framework used in the thesis, particularly the work of Kees van der Pijl.

Chapter Six gives an overview of three political movements which are of relevance for understanding Curtis's thought: empire federalism, new liberalism and social imperialism.

Chapter Seven shows how elements of these movements as well as of liberal internationalism and of the state monopoly tendency appear in Curtis's writings.

Chapter Eight discusses what Curtis had to say about other state/society complexes of the Lockean heartland, the Hobbesian contenders and the colonial Prize area.

The Conclusion summarizes the argument.

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## Introduction

### **Why Lionel Curtis?**

In 1951, towards the end of his long life, Lionel Curtis reflected over the disasters that mankind had encountered during the first half of the 20th century. The maintenance of national sovereignties had twice pushed the world into a gruesome war. And at the time of his speech, people were already living in dread of a third one.

However, there was hope. Curtis referred back to the proposal of a South African union, drafted by him and others half a century ago and eagerly taken up by wise politicians, that had ended all threat of war between the English and the Boers at once. And now, the Canadian Senate had just passed a resolution calling for a convention to form a federal union encompassing the countries of Western Europe and Northern America. The idea of Atlantic federal union was supported in the U.S. by 27 Senators. In the United Kingdom, both Prime Minister Attlee and opposition leader Churchill were thought to be sympathetic to the project.

But, ultimately, it was the intellectuals who bore the heaviest responsibility. If they would tell the ordinary people the truth about international relations, i.e. that the abolition of national sovereignties was necessary, they could unlock the gate to peace. By their failure to have done so in the past, they had proved themselves guilty of the cataclysms that had, so far, befallen this century.

Looking to the future, Curtis was guardedly optimistic. If the right decisions were made now,

historians of the year 2000 A.D., living in a world of peace, order, prosperity and happiness, would be looking in astonishment at the chaotic first half of the 20th century and wonder why statesmen had been so slow to draw the lessons of World War I and to do away with national sovereignties.<sup>1</sup>

Today, the magical year 2000 has passed. An Atlantic federal union does not exist and is not soon to be expected. And neither can we claim to be living in a particularly peaceful and orderly world. With hindsight, it is easy to smile at the apparent naivety of Curtis's vision. Single-issue blueprints for a golden future, in this case federal union and the abolition of sovereignty, have gone out of fashion. Pre-Mandela South Africa hardly recommends itself as a model the rest of the world should emulate. It is difficult to comprehend how a North Atlantic super-state, whose combined power would have raised concern by other states, particularly the Soviet Union, could have contributed to world peace. Furthermore, Curtis's lecturing about the heavy responsibilities for world peace that intellectuals like himself have to bear appears as inflated self-importance.

No wonder, then, that even Curtis's main biographer does not take his pet projects very seriously. After narrating how Curtis, in his function as Acting Town Clerk of Johannesburg in 1902, had carried through a decision to extend the city borders

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<sup>1</sup>. Lionel Curtis, 'The 'Fifties as Seen Fifty Years Hence', in International Affairs 27 (1951), pp.273-84, here pp.273-77, 284.

to include the mining areas surrounding it,<sup>2</sup> Deborah

Lavin comments:

In the process he had recognized a principle he believed to be of fundamental significance: that the common interest of any community ... could not be served by the mere co-operation of separate authorities but only realized organically, in a common organ of administration ... Seldom can an idea have been so relentlessly applied. The argument originally formulated for the mines was elaborated and extended with no apparent sense of incongruity to ... the Union of South Africa, the federation of the British Empire, even ... a single world government.<sup>3</sup>

Lavin considers it particularly odd that Curtis managed to convince himself that the ideal of a federal unification of the Empire-Commonwealth, which according to her was already outdated by the end of World War I, could serve as model for a world state and as a panacea for all international problems.<sup>4</sup> From all this, we can get the impression that Curtis was something like a trader in intellectual patent medicine. Why should one bother to deal with him and his work, except as a historical curiosity?

But things are not as easy as that. There are four reasons why he deserves to be treated better than that. First of all, alongside his utopian federal projects for which, among those few who know of his existence at all he is most famous (and notorious), Curtis had a more practical side as well. Although he held official posts only for comparatively short periods, he was well-placed within the networks (old boys' and others) of the British ruling and governing

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2. Deborah Lavin, From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, pp.40-45.

3. Ibid., pp.45-46.

4. Ibid., pp.ix-x, 323.

classes to leave his mark at important political turning-points.

When he referred to his role in the transformation of the four British colonies into the Union of South Africa in 1910, this was not mere boasting. While Curtis was not the only midwife of the new white Dominion, his own contribution as member of the High Commissioner's staff was nevertheless extremely important. Later on, Curtis in typical fashion acted as unofficial adviser to the Government of India and the India Office. His proposals on the extension of self-government in India were to a large extent taken over by the authorities and materialized as the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919. Although this was hardly the intention of either Curtis or the India Office, these reforms clearly set India on a track leading ultimately to independence. And, shortly after, as official Adviser to the Colonial Office, Curtis also tried his hand at the Irish cauldron. Selling *de facto* independence for Ireland as nominal Dominion status to both London and Dublin, he helped to bring about the Irish Free State in 1921. Finally, turning from politics to academia, it was Curtis who founded the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

South African Union, Indian `dyarchy`, the Irish Free State, the RIIA - this is a heritage that is hardly to be neglected. Curtis's plans for federal unions (encompassing either the British Empire, or Europe, or the North Atlantic area, or the whole planet) might be ignored. Nevertheless, his achievements as political adviser and institutional founder are big enough to secure him a respectable

place in history, even if his federation projects were just naive pipedreams.

But were they? This brings us to the second reason of taking him and his ideas seriously. True, all that has come out of the ambitions for imperial federation is the Commonwealth of Nations - a solid detached house rather than the magnificent palace Curtis dreamt of. The Atlantic union project had its heyday in the 1940s but has by now sunk without a trace - unless we consider NATO as a scaled-down version of it. On the other hand, the project of European unification remains alive and well, and we might still live to see the emergence of a European federal state. Ironically, if such a development will happen, Great Britain is more likely to stay outside or to be dragged along rather than leading the process, as Curtis had hoped.

As far as world federation is concerned, its realization is a much more remote possibility. Nevertheless, the idea of replacing the system of nation-states by a world government has not completely dropped off the agenda but is still propagated by some.<sup>5</sup> A more modest proposal that does not aim to eliminate nation-states but to limit their power has recently been made by Anthony Giddens. He envisages a kind of global EU, with a parliament, administrative body, inter-governmental association and federal court of law.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, such ideas are not to be dismissed lightly. Given the global problems, it may be argued

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5. Maja Brauer, Weltföderation: Modell globaler Gesellschaftsordnung, Frankfurt am Main etc.: Peter Lang, 1995.

6. Anthony Giddens, The Third Way: A Renewal of Social Democracy, Cambridge: Polity, 1998, p.144.

that the construction of a world-wide governmental body is even more urgent today than it was in Curtis's time. Seen from this aspect, his proposals still remain of interest.

This does not mean, however, that they do not deserve severe criticism. But this criticism should not be based on their alleged 'impracticality' but rather the configuration of interests that was behind these projects. This is the third reason why Curtis is of more than marginal interest. If we only look at the specific means he propagated, i.e. the different federal unions, we can say that all his ambitions have failed miserably. But if we rather turn our attention to the ultimate agenda underlying these projects, the record is much more impressive.

It is one of the core arguments of this thesis that Curtis was not a starry-eyed lover of mankind but that he had a quite down-to-earth (but, nevertheless, problematic) vision: A close cooperation between the United Kingdom and the United States against outside challengers and the establishment of an Anglo-Saxon global hegemony. This ultimate agenda was not only his own pet project but was consistently pursued by influential groups on both sides of the Atlantic. Curtis's specific proposals fell on deaf ears. Nevertheless, his implicit and sometimes not-too-implicit assertion of the moral superiority of the Anglo-Saxons and their God-given right to manage world affairs found a much more favourable audience. In this respect, the many books, articles and speeches that Curtis and other pan-Anglo-Saxonists produced were far from wasted.



Yes, there is no North Atlantic federal union today. Nevertheless, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the alienation between the present US government and the 'Old Europe', the special relationship between Washington and London has reached an unforeseen importance. Were Curtis alive today, he would probably have applauded the American-British campaign in Iraq as a moral crusade. He would only have added that, had the US and Britain federated, Saddam Husayn would never have dared to misbehave in the first place.

From the perspective of the history of IR as a discipline, there is a fourth reason why Curtis deserves to be rediscovered. This is the light his approach, and the context of this approach, throw on the discussion about whether there really was a 'First Debate' and, if so, how this debate should be conceptualized.

### **The First Debate Revisited**

It is a widely accepted wisdom in International Relations scholarship that the inter-war period witnessed the 'First Great Debate' of the discipline. It is often asserted or taken for granted that in this period classical realism clashed with naive idealism, a dispute reaching its culmination with the publication of E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* in 1939, and the consequent defeat of idealism by realism. *The Twenty Years' Crisis* is seen as a realist manifesto which issued in a 'paradigm shift' in International Relations thought and paved the intellectual ground for the postwar hegemony of realism.

Behind this common wisdom there are several interconnected assumptions. First, it is assumed that realism and idealism are, at their very basic forms at least, by and large uncontested terms. For realism, the major actors in the world are nation-states. These nation-states struggle with each other for political, economic and ideological power, i.e. their relationship is characterised by an ineluctable conflict of interests. Therefore, power and use of force in interstate relations represent the prime dynamics of the international system. They are, together with state interests, the main elements which students of international studies should focus upon.<sup>7</sup> Realists do not expect any essential change in this situation. The best one can hope for is the balancing of power.

Idealists, on the other hand, are those who in one way or another envisage progress in overcoming the conflictual aspects of international relations. In the discipline, idealism is normally used to denote liberal internationalism. It is conceded that idealist approaches to international relations have been very variable: Examples of such idealists range from those of the inter-war era, who came up with an array of proposals aimed at the circumvention of the war-prone conditions in international relations which had caused the havoc of the World War, to the 'neo-idealists' of

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7. Whether this assertion is based upon an emphasis on human nature as guided primarily by competitive instincts, as in classical realism, or upon a conception of the 'international system' having its own logic which constrains state 'actors', as in the structural realism of Kenneth Waltz, the result in terms of how the general picture of world politics looks is, according to more generalised accounts of realism, the same.

the 1990s who focused on international regimes. Idealists put their bets on the pacific aspects of capitalism in combination with the essentially consensus-oriented human nature and the resultant potential for a harmony of interests. With some measures derived from the application of liberal democratic political theory to domestic and international politics, these factors lead in the long run into a benign direction. According to the idealists, and contrary to the pessimistic and defeatist parables of realism, progress in international relations is possible.

The second assumption is that idealism and realism constitute a dichotomy. One is either a realist, or an idealist. Connected to this assumption is the supposition that the inter-war era witnessed a 'Great Debate' between liberal internationalists (like Norman Angell, Alfred Zimmern, and Arnold Toynbee) and Carr as the representative of realism. Allegedly, realism emerged as the victor of this contest in the postwar period, as illustrated by the increasing dominance in the 1940s International Relations of such classical realists like Frederick Schuman, Reinhold Niebuhr, George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau.

Finally, following on from the previous assumptions, it is assumed that Carr was a 'typical realist'. In most textbooks, he is counted among the early realists. Connected to this, we are told that Carr claimed in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* that there was a dichotomy between realism and idealism.

To sum up, mainstream conceptions of realism and idealism in International Relations stand on a posited,

transhistorical dichotomy between these two traditions, which is often conceived of as a crude juxtaposition of *realpolitik* to liberal moralism. The legitimacy for this distinction is traced to Carr's work and an alleged 'First Debate' between these two opponent views. The alleged dichotomy between realism and idealism has been so strongly determining for the conceptualisation of these two wide-ranging traditions that one can call it one of the founding myths of the discipline.

However, this founding myth, or cluster of founding myths, need to be critically reevaluated. In the first place, contrary to some facile interpretations, the thesis agrees with revisionist accounts which question the uncontestability of the meaning of the terms realism and idealism. Both of these approaches to IR are a composite of different strands of thinking. There is not one realism and one idealism, but two broad traditions which have evolved over time in response to varying ideational and material circumstances. This seems to be a commonplace assertion. Furthermore, systematising the features of schools of thought inevitably brings about a certain amount of simplification and distortion. Despite this, it could be claimed that the canvassing of realism and idealism in IR textbooks is often done with too broad a brush. And there is a very specific reason for this: The above-mentioned process of dichotomization based upon an alleged 'First Debate' allegedly instigated by Carr.

The thesis further follows the revisionists by rejecting the dichotomy of realism and idealism, both

in the sense these terms are understood in IR, and in the specific sense in which Carr (according to the IR textbooks!) allegedly employed them. This dichotomy is apparently possible in the context of the above-sketched caricatures of realism and idealism. However the thesis aims to show that even on these terms, such a dichotomy is not sustainable.

Connected to this, the thesis rejects the view that the inter-war period provided the stage for a `Great Debate` seen in terms of a constellation of IR realists against IR idealists. There were numerous debates in international relations thought in this period. The relatively limited controversy between Carr and the liberal internationalists was one of these. None of the inter-war debates on international issues, however, matched the oft-alleged `paradigm debate` between the IR sense of realism and idealism.

What has all this to do with Curtis? Because his major works were published during the two world wars and the inter-war period, he clearly belongs to the generation of the alleged `First Debate` in IR. If we look at his work from the the perspective of the idealism vs. realism dichotomy, a (for that perspective) very surprising fact emerges: Curtis could be equally well placed within either camp. This does not mean that he was an eclectic syntheziser who somehow found a compromise solution between idealism and realism. On the contrary, he was, in some ways, a consequent realist who, however, drew idealist conclusions from this very realism. The example of even one writer whose work transcends the dichotomy in this way is important, because it can help to illustrate how

weak what I have called the founding myth is. Much more important for the perspective of this thesis is, however, the social and intellectual context surrounding Curtis, and the light this context throws upon the connections between inter-war idealism and realism.

While this thesis owes a lot to the revisionist accounts challenging the traditional image of inter-war IR, most of these accounts are not completely satisfactory. Despite having done a good job of closely re-reading the key texts of that period, most of them neglect the specific historical background within which these texts need to be placed. The case for seeing a continuum rather than a dichotomy between inter-war realism and idealism, which this thesis asserts, cannot simply be raised at the textual level but has to address the material circumstances, particularly the forms of capital accumulation which prevailed while these texts were written. For this, the thesis resorts to the neo-Gramscian perspectives in IR, especially the writings of Kees van der Pijl.

Although they have not directly addressed the alleged 'First Debate', the neo-Gramscians see academic treatises as serving concrete interests: either interest in reproducing existing conditions, or interest in changing things. Such interests can, in turn, be identified as those of certain classes, or factions of classes. However, parochial interests need not be advanced directly. Here, Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony comes in. A stable hegemonic order, whether domestically or internationally, is one in which the dominant group or state expresses its own



demands or legitimates its own position in a way that also claims to meet the agendas of the other groups or states.

It is this line of thinking that is also behind Carr's charge that the inter-war idealists were hypocritically concerned with the 'have'-states' interest in the *status quo*. Indeed, we will see that Carr has been an inspiration to Robert Cox. In any case, this charge of hiding concrete interests behind seemingly value-free scholarship can also be levelled against the realists. In the case of Curtis, both idealist and realist elements were invoked to provide intellectual defence both of Britain's specific position vis-à-vis other capitalist powers and of the liberal Anglo-Saxon world against authoritarian Continental states.

For an analysis along these lines I draw upon two kinds of distinction developed by van der Pijl. First, there are different concepts of capitalist control tied to different capital factions: Liberal internationalism (tied to money capital and light industries), the state monopoly tendency (tied to productive capital, particularly heavy industries), and corporate liberalism (tied to finance capital as the synthesis of money and productive capital and geared especially to consumer industries). These 'comprehensive concepts of control'

are political formulas that lend cohesion and cogency to the rule of particular classes and fractions of classes by translating idealized class and fractional viewpoints into a strategic orientation for society as a whole.

They derive the authority for such a formulation from their key role in the economy,

which at particular junctures in the process of capital accumulation and social development acquire a relevance beyond<sup>8</sup>

the strict functions of such classes and fractions of classes.

Second, there is the distinction between the Lockean heartland (consisting of state/society complexes with an autonomous, largely self-regulating civil society) and the Hobbesian contenders (consisting of state/society complexes in which the state apparatus is dominant over society).

The ideas of Curtis represent the transition from British to American hegemony with the accompanying transition from liberal internationalism to corporate liberalism via the state monopolistic tendency. The ideas of Curtis, which reflect many of the major intellectual discussions that took place in Britain at that time, illustrate all of these transitions extremely well. Through his ideas, therefore, we can trace the evolution within the Lockean heartland in the early twentieth century, reflected in the transition from British to American hegemony. In this way they also provide a suitable basis for criticising the mainstream conceptualisations of realism, idealism and of the 'First Debate'.

There are two kinds of fusion, two ways of seeing interwar realism and idealism as a continuum rather than a dichotomy here. On the one hand, a number of the classical realists, as immigrants from Germany, combined the power-political elements related to the

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<sup>8</sup>. Kees van der Pijl, 'Ruling Classes, Hegemony and the State System: Theoretical and Historical

Hobbesian state-society complex with idealist elements related to the Lockean state/society complex. On the other hand, Curtis and those close to him like Alfred Milner were with their social background related to the Lockean state/society complex. They therefore had internalised concepts like the liberal philosophy of the *Pax Britannica* as reflected in ideas of 'England's mission'. Nevertheless, they borrowed from discourses related to the Hobbesian state/society complex like efficiency, social imperialism, and the critique of British parliamentarianism. Their ideas are thus a different example of the integration of thought patterns related to, respectively, the Lockean and the Hobbesian state/society complex.

#### **The Outline of the Chapters**

As has been indicated, the major aim of the thesis is to level a critique of the mainstream IR conceptualisations of realism, idealism and of the 'First Debate' through the example of Lionel Curtis and the intellectual and social milieu surrounding him. Based mainly upon IR textbooks, the first chapter summarizes these mainstream understandings. This thesis starts with the claim that there is a wide-spread but wrong textbook account of the 'First Debate'. To substantiate this claim, it is necessary to refer to the mainstream books and articles themselves. Sources used include British, American and German publications. The use of German textbooks can also demonstrate that

what I have called the textbook account is by no means restricted to Anglo-Saxon IR.

In recent years, there have been numerous reappraisals of these mainstream accounts. On the one hand, there are those accounts which reconceptualise International Relations as a whole, and in this context opt for different understandings of realism and idealism. On the other hand, there are those writers who have started a critique of the mainstream accounts from a liberal perspective. Many of these reappraisals, despite having rectified some misunderstandings about the 'First Debate', remain ideological, since they are reappraisals only at the level of ideas. They therefore reproduce many of the misunderstandings in a reverse way.

Since many of the postwar assumptions about realism, idealism, the 'First Debate' and the genesis of IR are premised on a specific interpretation of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, the way one sees the 'First Debate' is very closely related to the way one interprets that book and its author, E.H. Carr. Because of this, the second chapter is devoted to Carr. After referring to some liberal-oriented accounts criticizing Carr's incoherent use of his bogeyman-term utopianism (or idealism) I will point to further inconsistencies in the book with respect to the dichotomous relationship between realism and utopianism. Furthermore, for all his insistence on the importance of power and his despising of the concept of a naturally existing harmony of interests, Carr betrays his own version of a malleable world.

Expanding upon recent insights on Carr's dialectical use of his terms, I will argue that these apparent contradictions disappear if we distinguish between the polemical and the substantial parts of the book. In substantial terms, Carr enlisted both the 'sociology of knowledge' and his sense of the historical process to uncover the interest- and time-bound background of allegedly universalist and benevolent projects.

The chapter continues with a short discussion of recent reappraisals of Carr from post-positivist quarters. The common denominator of these reappraisals is a challenging of the postwar reading of Carr as a positivist thinker, and his main contribution to IR as consisting of his power-political attack on idealism. They include a reading of Carr which locates him close to Gramscian historical materialism, which is the approach preferred in this thesis. It has to be underlined, however, that the thesis does not claim that this new reading of Carr provides us with all the answers. Rather, it sees this different reading as rendering clues which should be further developed in the context of critical theory in IR.

In the third chapter, the thesis looks more closely at the case of Lionel Curtis. The chapter provides a biographical overview of his life and lists his major activities and ideas. In particular, his role in the imperial politics concerning South Africa, India and Ireland is mentioned - without, however, going into details about the elaborate constitutional devices he developed for these countries. The content of his publications is only briefly summarized, since a more

detailed discussion of them will be found in the following chapters. Finally, there are also short discussions of the groups he was involved with, foremost among them the Round Table, but also the Federal Union and the United Europe movements.

Chapter Four deals with the textbook version of the 'First Debate' as applied to Curtis. Curtis could be seen as both an IR idealist and an IR realist. For example, he shared the normative concerns and the optimistic faith in human reason and the possibility of global cooperation usually accorded to the idealists. On the other hand, according to the shallow and generic interpretation of realism which still prevails in the discipline, Curtis could also be seen as the archetypical realist.

If realism consists of the deep awareness of the unavoidable conflict of interests in the context of an anarchical international system, an emphasis on power, and a head-on defense of the national interests of one's country, then Curtis would have easily fulfilled the requirements of such a realist. The dichotomous, 'paradigmatic' conceptualisation of the relationship between realism and idealism seems singularly ill-placed for the interpretation of his worldview. An alternative approach is necessary.

In Chapter Five, an overview of the alternative line proposed here is given by a discussion of Gramsci, Cox and van der Pijl. I do not attempt to provide a comprehensive summary of their thought. Particularly given the richness of Gramsci's works, this would have been too vast an undertaking. This chapter thus restricts itself to a short treatment of Gramsci's



distinction between political and civil society, his concept of hegemony and its implications for revolutionary action, and the role of the intellectuals. In the case of Cox, I dwell upon his criticism of IR realism as 'problem-solving theory' and his particular understanding of hegemony. Finally, van der Pijl's distinction between different forms of accumulation and the accompanying concepts of control and the characterization of the Lockean heartland and the Hobbesian contenders are summarized.

In Chapter Six, the major currents of thought in early 20th century Britain which aimed to supersede old-style liberalism will be discussed. There was, in Gramscian terms, a hegemonic crisis within Britain's historic bloc at the turn of the century, during which a number of political movements came to the fore. These were the - somewhat dated - imperial federation schemes resurrected by Curtis and his companions, the so-called new liberalism representing the productive-capital perspective, and social imperialism, which largely followed state-monopolist currents of thought.

In the ideas of Curtis conceptions of a 'world-state' based upon an initial 'Empire Federation' between Britain and her Dominions, and clear articulations of Britain's national interests in a context of declining hegemony were firmly welded together. This will be demonstrated in two steps.

In Chapter Seven, it will be shown that Curtis's works, including his later publications, were decisively shaped by the discussions of the turn of the century. The connections with Empire federalism are obvious. Furthermore, a close reading of his

publications shows that Curtis adhered to the new liberal and especially to the social imperialist agenda of the early 20th century for the following 50-odd years. This will be demonstrated by summarizing his criticism of traditional liberal internationalism, his stress on the individual's need to realize himself through society, Curtis's ambivalent attitude to democracy, his emphasis on the typical social imperialist pet issues of social reform and 'efficiency' and his stance towards coloured immigration. It will also be seen that his rejection of Tariff Reform is not to be misinterpreted as a distancing of himself from the social imperialist agenda.

Chapter Eight proceeds to look at Curtis from another angle. It develops the idea that the common denominator bringing together the realist and idealist strands in the thought of Curtis was the search for a new hegemonic stabilisation for Britain and the world order underpinned by the *Pax Britannica*. Dwelling upon his approach to the Dominions, the United States, the Hobbesian contenders and the 'coloured races', the thesis argues that all his federal union projects need to be seen as attempts to simultaneously strengthen the Lockean heartland and to bolster as much as possible Britain's ultimately handing over the torch to the USA. It will be shown how he cunningly developed schemes for British leadership vis-à-vis the Dominions and Western Europe, for a comfortable place for Britain once the ultimate American hegemony would be in place, and for a continued subordination of the Asian and African

peoples. All these schemes were expressed within the principles of equality, altruism and self-government.

The conclusion briefly summarizes the thesis's argument.

## **Chapter One**

### **Mainstream Understandings of the First Debate**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter has two aims. First, it tries to dissect what I call the mainstream version of the 'First Debate'. It summarizes what idealism and realism supposedly say about human nature, ethics, the international system and recommendable policies; when the 'First Debate' allegedly took place and what the outcome was; and which role E.H. Carr is allocated in this account. As sources I use a number of treatises on IR history (beginning with a seminal article by Hedley Bull) as well as introductory textbooks. This will provide us with a framework within which, as a first step, we can discuss the writings of Curtis in Chapter Four.

Second, some alternative approaches are discussed: one which sees the idealism/realism debate not restricted to a certain phase of IR but actually encompassing the whole discipline; one which redefines the terms and gives them a meaning completely different from the mainstream accounts; and one which recommends dispensing with the terms idealism and realism altogether. Finally, a number of revisionist writers with liberal leanings are discussed, who question the conventional accounts of the 'First Debate' but simultaneously rise to the defence of the idealists.

#### **Idealism and Realism According to Hedley Bull**

What are the common conceptions of realism, idealism and of the 'First Debate'? Let us start with

an overview of IR's history provided by Hedley Bull at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Aberystwyth chair.<sup>1</sup> According to Bull, the foremost distinguishing characteristic of interwar idealism was its progressivism: the belief that through conscious intervention on the international system of enlightened minds a peaceful and just world order could be created and, indeed, was already in the process of being created. For this process, the past was poor guidance. The idealists gave precedence to internationalist morality over national interests, but thereby failed to explain how the former was determined, and confused it with international law. As a consequence, idealism became the doctrine of the *status quo* powers.

The idealists believed in the possibility of international cooperation and harmony, fostered by the spread of democracy and by the peaceful effects of global financial and commercial links. They discounted the principle of state sovereignty, old-style diplomacy and the balance of power. Instead, they recommended arbitration mechanisms, international law, disarmament, a system of collective security under the League of Nations, or the establishment of an international police force.

In contrast to the idealists' progressivism, the realists stressed the cyclical pattern of international politics and the need to draw lessons from the past. The notion of national interest had to take precedence

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<sup>1</sup>. Hedley Bull, 'The Theory of International Politics 1919-1969' in Brian Porter (ed.), The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics 1919 - 1969, London: Oxford University Press, 1972, pp.30-55, here pp.33-39.

over international morals. By upholding the statesmen's duty to their own nations the realists criticized the moralism of the idealists in moral terms.

The international system was for them anarchical and conflict-ridden, thus necessitating the pursuit of power politics. Consequently, the realists favoured state sovereignty, secret diplomacy, the balance of power and, if necessary, limited war.

Despite these differences, for Bull idealism and realism have at least similar starting points in discussing questions of morality. Being more careful than many later writers, he also points out that many apparent similarities of IR realism with Machiavelli, Hegel or Treitschke are only skin-deep.

Bull identifies a specific period for the debate between both schools. Idealism rose as reaction to the experience of World War I and dominated IR during the 1920s and early 1930s. It was then replaced by realism, which set the disciplines' agenda during the late 1930s and the 1940s. This was related to the highly conflictual character of international affairs during that time. Afterwards, realism was in turn challenged by behaviouralism.

Among the idealists mentioned by Bull are Zimmern, Noel-Baker, Mitranj, Dickinson, Woolf and Brailsford. Concerning the realists, he stresses their heterogenous character. The list includes Carr, Niebuhr, Morgenthau and Kennan. In the case of Carr, Bull foreshadows later revisionist accounts. He stresses the important influence that the Marxist analysis of ideology, as mediated through Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, exerted upon him. Bull correctly mentions the polemical

character of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, which had contemporary relevance and did not attempt to provide claims of universal and permanent validity.

Nevertheless, in saying that Carr's target was utopian liberal internationalism, Bull plays down the degree to which Carr was equally distant to hard-core realism.

Bull's account of the 'first debate' is far from neutral. For him, the substitution of idealism by realism was a development beneficial to the discipline. He dubs the idealists as superficial and as lacking intellectual depth and explanatory power:

The quality that shines through all their work is innocence, a disposition to accept the externals of international relations at face value, which in later generations of writers was dislodged by greater influence upon them of the social sciences.<sup>2</sup>

While realism also comes in for criticism - it is dated, contains tautologies and shifting definitions, and lacks high standards of theoretical refinement - Bull still sees it as an advance over idealism. In particular, realism has the function of deflating the facile optimism and narrow moralism that passed for an advanced attitude to foreign affairs in the English-speaking countries.<sup>3</sup>

Despite all qualifications, Bull's article provides most of the ingredients of a story that is told over and over again: There was a somewhat immature foundation period of IR, during which a bunch of nice but naive people were busily creating cloud-cuckoo-lands based upon an unfounded faith in human progress. IR only reached the stage of a science proper once the

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2. Ibid., p.36.

3. Ibid., p.39.

hard-headed realists with their sober pessimism got in charge.

Of course, the details of the story vary, and not everyone depreciates the idealists in as stark terms as Bull. Nevertheless, if we combine the different information given by a number of publications, the following account emerges of what the terms idealism and realism are supposed to mean and how they are to be evaluated.

#### **Human Nature and the Possibility of Progress:**

In a recent introductory textbook about International Relations, the reason for studying liberalism (like in most conceptualisations, inter-war idealism, by which liberal internationalism is indicated, is seen as a subset of the liberal approach to IR) is given as the following:

To form your own opinion about the most keenly debated issue in IR: the pessimistic view of realism versus the optimistic view of liberalism.<sup>4</sup>

In many textbooks, similar general assumptions about how the realists and the idealists (or liberals) conceive human nature and the results of this conception for their respective views on world politics are made. According to these mainstream interpretations of realism and idealism, progressivism versus resignation as prime characteristics associated with these paradigms is connected to their differing conceptions of human nature and reason.

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4. Robert Jackson and George Sorensen, Introduction to International Relations, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.108.



It is, therefore, this fundamental divide between the willing or unwilling submission, which characterizes realism, and the optimistic insistence to attempt to surmount the obstacles that is frequently taken to constitute the main narrative of the realism/idealism debate.

To give another example, we are told that idealism is concerned with how the realm of international politics *ought* to be, i.e. a peaceful world community. Realism focuses upon how the international realm *is* and tries to draw lessons from the past.<sup>5</sup>

Liberalism-idealism is habitually spelled in the same breath with concepts like:

optimism ,....., a belief in social and political mutability, an emphasis on global interests and cooperation through international law and organisation, and a renewed faith in public opinion.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, it has the connotation of progressivism: the belief in the possibility of the reform of the international system and the desire to reform it.

This image is wide-spread:

Indeed this attempt to reform the international milieu is a defining characteristic of the liberal tradition in international ethics.

asserts Michael J. Smith.<sup>7</sup> Even Peter Wilson, who, as will be shown below, is aware of the artificiality of

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5. Reinhard Meyers, 'Internationale Beziehungen als akademische Disziplin', in Dieter Nohlen (ed.), Lexikon der Politik, vol. 6, Internationale Beziehungen (ed. Andreas Boekh), Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1994, pp.231-42, here p.232.

6. Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach, The Elusive Quest : Theory and International Politics, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988, p.92.

7. Michael Joseph Smith, 'Liberalism and International Reform', in Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel (eds.), Traditions of International Ethics, Cambridge etc:

the label idealism, still argues that the common denominator within the diversity of the thought of those dubbed idealists is their desire for conscious progressive change.<sup>8</sup>

The confidence in the feasibility of reform in idealism/liberalism stems from the `belief in the human capacity for wisdom`, which is a `hallmark of the liberal tradition`.<sup>9</sup> Human beings are in essence potentially reasonable and altruistic, although these characteristics are in competition with animalistic instincts and can be thwarted by imperfect political arrangements. Idealists thus stress the need for education and the primacy of ideas.<sup>10</sup>

Human beings have the potential to create a just order for the whole of humankind. In this broad form, liberal idealism is the reassertion of the Enlightenment project: It is the retrieving of the Kantian conception of partly rational human beings who

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Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp.201-24, here p.202.

8. Peter Wilson, `Introduction: *The Twenty Years' Crisis and the Category of "Idealism" in International Relations*`, in David Long and Peter Wilson (eds.), Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, pp.1-24, here p.13.

9. Lucian M. Ashworth, Creating International Studies: Angell, Mittrany and the Liberal Tradition, Aldershot etc.: Ashgate, 1999, p.203.

10. Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, Explaining and Understanding International Relations, Oxford: Clarendon, 1990, pp.19-20; Charles W. Kegley Jr., `The Neoliberal Challenge to Realist Theories of World Politics: An Introduction`, in Charles W. Kegley Jr. (ed.), Controversies in International Relations Theory: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge, New York: St. Martin's, 1995, pp.5-23, here p.4; Michael Joseph Smith, Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger, Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1986, pp.55-56; Trevor Taylor, `Utopianism`, in Steve Smith (ed.), International Relations: British and American Perspectives, Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985, pp.92-107, pp.94-95.

are able to evaluate what is genuinely of benefit to them, i.e. peace, and willing to achieve the harmonious existence as a community of mankind as soon as they are not prevented from doing so. The conclusions of idealism/liberalism regarding the harmony of interests or the possibility of the progressive development of human society flow from this basic assumption about human nature.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the alleged conception of human nature according to the liberal internationalists that such general accounts construct is somewhat mystifying. The usual account starts with the premise: 'Liberals generally take a positive view of the human nature.'<sup>12</sup> Then frequently, a connection is drawn between this positive view about the goodness in humans and reason: They have great faith in human reason and they are convinced that rational principles can be applied to international affairs.<sup>13</sup>

Next, typically, this potential for acting reasonably will be connected to long-run interests. The liberal internationalists

believe that individuals share many interests and can thus engage in collaborative and cooperative social action, domestically as well as internationally, which results in greater benefits for everybody at home and abroad.<sup>14</sup>

Such accounts create a confusion between the moral and interest-based arguments of the liberal internationalists.

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11. Ashworth, Creating, pp.7-16, 133-36.

12. Jackson and Sorensen, Introduction, p.108.

13. Ibid., p.108.

14. Ibid., p.109.

In the same textbook mentioned at the beginning of this section, of the four basic premises of realism, two are

(1) a pessimistic view of human nature; ... (4) a basic scepticism that there can be progress in international politics that is comparable to that in domestic life.<sup>15</sup>

This, again, reflects the mainstream view.

We frequently find claims like 'the core of human nature, for realists, lies in the egoistic passions, which incline men and women to evil'<sup>16</sup> or 'human nature is plain bad; that is the starting-point for realist analysis.' Human inclination for aggressive behaviour arises from Freudian urges for hatred and destruction or, alternatively, from the Christian original sin.<sup>17</sup> Humans are caught in a tragic contradiction between their material capabilities and their spiritual limitations, resulting in a chronic state of fear of others. This fear, in turn, creates a boundless search for security by gaining power over others.<sup>18</sup>

There are objective laws in human nature, which has to be dealt with as it is, not as it ought to be.<sup>19</sup> Consequently,

(r)realists tend to hold pessimistic views on the likelihood of the transformation of the current world into a more peaceful one.<sup>20</sup>

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15. Ibid., p.68.

16. Jack Donnelly, 'Twentieth Century Realism', in Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel (eds.), Traditions of International Ethics, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp.85-111, here p.86.

17. Jackson and Sorensen, Introduction, p.42.

18. Reinhard Meyers, Die Lehre von den Internationalen Beziehungen: Ein entwicklungsgeschichtlicher Überblick, Königsstein and Düsseldorf: Athenäum and Droste, 1981, pp.52-53.

19. Hollis and Smith, Explaining, pp.23-25.

20. Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, International Relations and World Politics: Security, Economy, Identity, 2nd ed., Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 2001, p.21.

Human lust for power and the resulting struggles cannot be abolished.<sup>21</sup> For the foreseeable future, power politics and the constant danger of war will remain with us.

### **Ethics**

Another dichotomy between idealism and realism refers to the former's universalism and the latter's moral relativism. One textbook definition puts the matter into a handy nutshell:

Realism emphasizes what separates political entities and people. *Idealism* is another tradition of political thought that emphasizes what unites people.<sup>22</sup>

At other textbooks we are told that, for the idealists politics is a function of ethics while for the realists it is exactly the other way round. For the idealists, there are universal and progressive standards with which they want to guide their state's foreign policy. For the realists, the state can at best set through its own particular code of morals within its borders. Otherwise, its behaviour must not be guided by universal moral standards but by the principle of national interest, i.e. ultimately its own survival.<sup>23</sup>

It is repeatedly stressed that idealism, in implied contrast to realism, is a normative approach.<sup>24</sup>

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21. Kegley, 'Neoliberal Challenge', p.5.

22. Viotti and Kauppi, International Relations and World Politics, p.49. Emphasis in the original.

23. James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey, 5th ed., New York: Longman, 2001, p.508; Donald M. Snow and Eugene Brown, The Contours of Power: An Introduction to Contemporary International Relations, New York: St. Martin's, 1996, p.138.

24. Timothy Dunne, 'Liberalism', in John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds.), The Globalization of World

It presumes the principal absence of major clashes of interests both within human society as well as between states. However, the idealists differ among themselves over the question whether this harmony of interests comes into its own under conditions of national self-determination, of capitalism allowing the rational pursuit of self-interest, of socialism, or of following a natural moral order. But they agree that there is an objective justice deriving from universal morality which can be detected through reason and experience.<sup>25</sup>

The general conception of human nature in realism, on the other hand, precludes any straightforward application of morality to international relations. Each state has its own particular values and beliefs affecting its behaviour while, in the absence of a culture common to humanity, there can also be no international moral community.<sup>26</sup>

Realists adhere to an ethic of responsibility, which considers the danger that an individual act, praiseworthy as it may be on its own, can have adverse effects for the greater good of a nation. Conversely, immoral acts can be justified if they foster this common good. Furthermore, realists tend to charge seemingly universal principles as covers for the more

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Politics: An Introduction to International Relations, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp.147-63, here p.152; Hollis and Smith, Explaining, p.19.

25. Taylor, 'Utopianism', pp.93-94. See also Reinhard Meyers, 'Idealistische Schule', in Dieter Nohlen (ed.), Lexikon der Politik, vol. 6, Internationale Beziehungen (ed. Andreas Boekh), Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1994, pp.200-04, here p.201.

26. Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, Contending Theories, p.508; Timothy Dunne, 'Realism', in John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds.), The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations,

parochial self-interests of the dominant states. Thus, they incline to moral relativism.<sup>27</sup>

It is also assumed that according to realist analysis the international arena is divorced from the domestic arena. Realists are supposed to believe that the conditions for a moral society do not apply at the international realm, because there it is national interest rather than morality which has the upper hand. Here, the hierarchical, orderly state of human relations that is provided domestically by the state does not obtain, and there is a worsened anarchical condition. Trying to act from the moral vantage point in international relations would not be prudent. Power, in this account, becomes an end in itself. Consequently, realism is considered to be un-normative, juxtaposed to its idealist, i.e. 'normative' antagonist. According to Barry Buzan, post-WWII realism was distinguished from inter-war idealism by its emphasis on 'the need to study the international system as it was, rather than as one might like it to be'.<sup>28</sup>

However, as Ferguson and Mansbach point out, the image of a normative idealism juxtaposed to an objective realism dealing with the 'facts' as they are is problematic. With their favouring of the national

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Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp.109-24, here pp.116-17.

27. Dunne, realism, p.117.

28. Barry Buzan, 'The Timeless Wisdom of Realism?' in Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), International Theory: Positivism and Beyond, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.47-65, here p.48. Although, to be fair to Buzan, he also asserts that 'the contrast between realists and idealists, though real, should not be overdrawn'. Furthermore, he mentions realisms normative bias towards conflictual assumptions.' See *ibid.*, pp.48-49.

interests the realists themselves are guided by normative assumptions although they hide them behind the cloak of alleged objectivity. It is not that idealist analyses were more "normative and prescriptive", but that they were more overtly so.<sup>29</sup>

### **Image of International Politics**

For textbook idealists, there exists a world community consisting of individuals and groups. International politics has the potential character of a non-zero-sum game. War simply does not pay and is also not inevitable. Making use of the domestic analogy, idealists see the need for a kind of international governance regulating interstate relations on the model of the societal order within a state.

Furthermore, they assume that state goals can change and are not necessarily of an aggressive kind. Democratic states tend to be peaceful and, consequently, the extension of democracy and national self-determination will make international affairs less and less war-prone. Another factor giving reason for hope are the forces of modernization and of economic interdependence, which have changed the character of interstate relations. Increased cross-border links and free trade promote peace.<sup>30</sup>

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29. Ferguson and Mansbach, Elusive Quest, p.96. Emphasis in the original.

30. Arthouros-David Calamaros, Internationale Beziehungen: Theorien - Kritik - Perspektiven, Stuttgart etc.: W. Kohlhammer, 1974, p.23; Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, Contending Theories, p.66; Dunne, 'Liberalism', p.152; Hollis and Smith, Explanation, p.18; Jackson and Sorensen, Introduction, p.39; Kegley, 'Neoliberal Challenge', pp.4, 10-13; Meyers, 'Internationale Beziehungen', pp.232-33; Taylor, 'Utopianism', p.97.



Realism comes up with the reverse picture. In the above-mentioned textbook, the two other defining characteristics of it are:

(2) a conviction that international relations are necessarily conflictual and that international conflicts are ultimately resolved by war; (3) a high regard for the values of national security and state survival;<sup>31</sup>

Instead of a world community, there is the anarchical system of states which are in continuous struggle for power with each other. International politics is a zero-sum game. As far as the domestic analogy is concerned, realists do not have a pacified society in mind but, rather, a Hobbesian pre-societal state of nature. In the absence of a world-wide monopoly of violence and due to the existence of limited resources, competition is the rule.

States are the only actors which count on the international stage. Their primacy is highlighted by the principle of sovereignty and they are conceptualized as unitary and rational. Motives and ideological preferences of statesmen are irrelevant for the observation of their behaviour. Only the pursuit of interest defined in terms of power counts. Acquisition of military capabilities is more important than economic performance. The latter gains relevance only in so far as it contributes to power.<sup>32</sup>

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31. Jackson and Sorensen, Introduction, p.68.

32. Dunne, realism, pp.114-17; Hollis and Smith, Explaining, p.25; Kegley, 'Neoliberal Challenge', pp.4-5; Meyers, 'Internationale Beziehungen', pp.232-33; Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism, New York and London: Macmillan and Collier Macmillan, 1987, pp.6-7; Michael Zürn, 'Neorealistische und Realistische Schule', in Dieter Nohlen (ed.), Lexikon der Politik, vol. 6, Internationale Beziehungen (ed. Andreas Boekh),

## Policy Recommendations

For idealists, the establishment of a pacific international order is the ultimate aim. To achieve this, they put their bets upon education and the power of an enlightened public opinion; upon diplomacy and mechanisms for arbitration of international conflicts; and upon disarmament, the outlawing of war or even full-blown pacifism. But particularly high on the idealist shopping list are international organizations like the League of Nations, collective security and international law. Some idealists want to go even further and call for the establishment of an international police force dealing with offenders of peace.<sup>33</sup>

As Taylor points out, idealism is ambivalent concerning an even more far-reaching scheme: a world authority overriding the states. While many idealists favour this idea on both emotional and practical grounds, others believe that it is possible to reform the international system without the abolition of sovereign states.<sup>34</sup>

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Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1994, pp.309-22, here pp.310-11.

<sup>33</sup>. Calamaros, Internationale Beziehungen, pp.23-24; Theodore A. Coulombis and James H. Wolfe, Introduction to International Relations: Power and Justice, 4th ed., Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1990, pp.8-9; Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, Contending Theories, pp.65-66; Dunne, 'Liberalism', p.152; Hollis and Smith, Explanation, pp.19-20; Jackson and Sorensen, Introduction, pp.38-39; Kegley, 'Neoliberal Challenge', pp.12-14; Meyers, 'Internationale Beziehungen', p.233; Smith, Realist Thought, pp.56-60, 62, 67; Taylor, 'Utopianism', pp.95-97; Viotti and Kauppi, International Relations Theory, p.61.

<sup>34</sup>. Taylor, 'Utopianism', p.98.

Discounting the possibility of achieving world peace for good, the textbook realists propagate more modest goals, namely the successful pursuit of national interests within the context of a stable interstate system. Realists are not only sceptical about the effectivity of international organizations and international law but also consider military alliances between states as fragile. In the end, states must resort to self-help in order to guarantee their security and continuing existence.

This reliance upon self-help creates a ceaseless security dilemma: As one state increases its power to gain security, others feel bound to follow suit. This security dilemma can be mitigated by the balance of power system (being contrived or coming into place automatically), which, however, will occasionally break down. Making use of secret diplomacy complements the realist programme. So does recourse to war, if all other means fail to provide security.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Dichotomy Between Idealism and Realism**

Viotti and Kauppi argue that a too rigid idealist-realist dichotomy can be misleading ... since many realists also incorporate value considerations in their analyses and prescriptions.<sup>36</sup>

This is correct, although they might have added that

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<sup>35</sup>. Calamaros, Internationale Beziehungen, p.24; Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, Contending Theories, p.67; Dunne, 'Realism', pp.117-18; Kegley, 'Neoliberal Challenge', pp.4-5; Meyers, 'Internationale Beziehungen', p.233; Viotti and Kauppi, International Relations Theory, p.7.

<sup>36</sup>. Viotti and Kauppi, International Relations and World Politics, p.501. See also their International Relations Theory, pp.34, 522-23.

also many idealists incorporate power politics in their accounts. As it stands, Viotti's and Kauppi's qualification of the dichotomy implies that realists, but not idealists, have the open-minded approach.

Others stress that both realism and idealism have a normative and ontological orientation<sup>37</sup> or that both schools are rooted in the Enlightenment belief in progress - although idealists understand progress in static-ethical terms while realists have a dynamic and relativist understanding of it.<sup>38</sup>

But many authors are less careful. They see a 'marked contrast'<sup>39</sup> or 'radically different philosophical foundations'.<sup>40</sup> Idealism and realism are polar opposites.<sup>41</sup> They stand in sharp contrast to each other ... because of their differing approaches to the origins of institutions and political behavior generally.<sup>42</sup> This stressing of the dichotomy goes hand in hand with a certain judgement between the two schools.

### Evaluations

Given the implicit pro-realist bias in many textbooks, it is not surprising that they tend to agree with Bull that realism, though far from flawless, is an advance over idealism. The latter is charged with wishful thinking and illusions while the former brought

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37. Calamaros, Internationale Beziehungen, p.26.

38. Meyers, Die Lehre, p.49.

39. Smith, Realist Thought, p.54.

40. Couloumbis and Wolfe, Introduction, p. 6.

41. Meyers, 'Idealistische Schule', p.200.

42. Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, Contending Theories, pp.507-08.

the discipline from the realm of speculation down to earth, to the facts.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, idealism is journalistic and legalistic and is wanting in terms of methodology, theory and systematic collection of empirical support. In contrast, realism provides more coherent statements and an explicit terminology.<sup>44</sup>

Sometimes, the discounting of idealism is merely implicit, coming to the fore in statements like this: Norman Angell's high hopes for a smooth process of modernization and interdependence foundered on the harsh realities of the 1930s.<sup>45</sup>

Michael Smith, though not at all a scholar uncritical to realism, hardly hides his opinion about the idealists. He scornfully refers to 'the idealist hymn of internationalism' and charges them with 'exasperated outbursts' and 'schoolmasterly admission'.<sup>46</sup>

And, to give a final example:

After World War II a new generation of pragmatic scholars arose, determined never again to succumb to the lure of an idealism so powerful that it had prevented their predecessors from ... confronting ... the probing tactics of Asian and European totalitarian powers in the 1930s.<sup>47</sup>

### The 'First Debate'

There is some confusion in the literature about when exactly the 'First Debate' is supposed to have taken place. There are those who follow Bull in seeing the 1920s as the high-time of IR idealism, while placing the realist response to the period from the

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43. Calamaros, Internationale Beziehungen, pp. 24-26.

44. Meyers, Die Lehre, pp.57-58.

45. Jackson and Sorensen, Introduction, p.40.

46. Michael Joseph Smith, Realist Thought, pp.54-55.

47. Couloumbis and Wolfe, Introduction, p.21.

1930s to the 1940s or 1950s.<sup>48</sup> Alternatively, and probably reflecting the point of view of American rather than British academia, the debate between idealists and realists is placed into the 1950s and said to have continued until today.<sup>49</sup> Two widely divergent narratives about the timing of the alleged discussion between both schools or of the replacement of idealism by realism have found their way into the literature. Already this should make us beware of accepting at face value the image that there was a clearly identifiable 'First Debate' between idealism and realism in which the former was defeated by the latter.

#### **Interpretations of Carr**

Beyond launching the established understanding of realism and idealism, Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* has also provided us with 'the classic evaluation of the birth of the discipline of International Relations'.<sup>50</sup> As mentioned, this 'classic evaluation' is generally taken to indicate that the inter-war era was dominated by a (misguided) liberal internationalism, which failed to prevent the increasing ineffectiveness of the League of Nations and the rise of Nazism and Fascism. By matching the facts of the inter-war and

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<sup>48</sup>. Calamaros, Internationale Beziehungen, p.24; Jackson and Sorensen, Introduction, p.44; Meyers, 'Internationale Beziehungen', p.231; Snow and Brown, The Contours, p.16. Viotti and Kauppi, International Relations Theory, p.2.

<sup>49</sup>. Coulombis and Wolfe, Introduction, pp.20-21, 157; Meyers, Die Lehre, p.57; Snow and Brown, Contours, p.138.

<sup>50</sup>. Torbjörn L. Knutsen, A History of International Relations Theory, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993, p.205.

postwar eras more successfully, Carr's book has allegedly symbolized the paradigmatic victory of realism over idealism. Implicit in this assumption is the view of Carr as a pioneer of postwar realism. As Timothy Dunne points out,

there is without doubt a consensus in the discipline that Carr's text is the symbolic representation of an hierarchical dualism between 'political realism' and 'utopianism'.<sup>51</sup>

No wonder, then, that Carr is often presented as a self-conscious realist. For example:

Carr astutely labeled the liberal position 'utopian' as a contrast to *his own position, which he labeled 'realist'*, thus implying that his approach was the more sober and correct analysis of international relations.<sup>52</sup>

Even when it is not claimed that Carr called himself a realist, he is frequently portrayed as *the founder* or one of the founders of realism, who successfully criticized the idealists.<sup>53</sup>

This is done by mentioning the anti-idealist polemics in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* and, at the same time, ignoring Carr's own version of utopianism and his rejection of unbridled realism. Thus, Carr is supposed to have a pessimistic view of the human nature - just like Morgenthau.<sup>54</sup>

Carr's morality, according to such a reading, is a morality stamped by power. International law for him is nothing but the reflection of power. It is the *status*

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51. Tim Dunne, 'Theories as Weapons: E.H. Carr and International Relations', in Michael Cox (ed.), E. H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp.217-33, here p.231 n.26. Emphasis in the original.

52. Jackson and Sorensen, Introduction, p.41-42. My emphasis.

53. Buzan, 'Timeless Wisdom', p.48; Hollis and Smith, Explaining, pp.21-22; Snow and Brown, Contours, p.16.

quo powers of the international system which determine the rules of the game. Idealism, which claims to provide a universal standard, is nothing but the reflection of the interests of such 'have' and consequently status quo powers. The progressivism of idealism and the attempt to apply universal standards of justice to the interpretation and conduct of international relations are only so many reflections on a thin veneer covering up ruthless calculations of self-interest and power. In other words, realism is the honest perspective and idealism something like the hypocritical version of realism.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, since realism is often taken to have remained essentially the same since its initial articulations, i.e. about power struggles between nation-states, Carr's conception of power is also interpreted in this way. According to this assumption, Carr's realism perceives international relations as the sum of the power-driven interactions of black-box-like sovereign states in an unchanging context of international anarchy.<sup>56</sup>

What he understands by idealism is, according to this view, the naive resistance against such 'facts' and the mistaken assumption that wishful thinking can change them. Carr's message is allegedly that one should focus upon how the world is instead of how it

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54. Jackson and Sorensen, Introduction, p.44; Snow and Brown, The Contours, p.16.

55. Jürgen Hartmann, Internationale Beziehungen, Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2001, p.24; Hollis and Smith, Explaining, p.22.

56. Hartmann, Internationale Beziehungen, pp.23-24; Jackson and Sorensen, Introduction, p.44; Snow and Brown, The Contours, p.16.



ought to be, and that the achievement of permanent peace is unlikely anyway.<sup>57</sup>

Others qualify Carr's realism by mentioning that he was against extreme versions of it and that he saw international politics as an interplay between power and morality.<sup>58</sup> While this interpretation of Carr is more to the point than simply describing him as an idealism-basher, it still reproduces the well-worn dichotomy. For example, Viotti and Kauppi stress that, although being a precursor of realism, Carr cannot be easily labelled. In his opposition to extreme realism, he sees idealism/values and realism/power as intertwined. So far, so good. But when referring to his image of international politics, Viotti and Kauppi simply mention his Thucydidean aspects (the role of fear and the exercise of power begetting more desire for power) and his emphasis on international anarchy.<sup>59</sup>

In the end, Carr has to be placed in a camp, and this seemingly can only be realism. Thus, even for these more balanced interpretations, Carr has effectively constructed a sophisticated image of level-headed realism tempered with a slight but healthy dose of idealism.

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57. John Baylis, 'International Security in the Post-Cold War Era', in John Baylis and Steve Smith, The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp.193-211, here p.196; Snow and Brown, The Contours, p.16

58. Calamaros, Internationale Beziehungen, p.25; Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, Contending Theories, p.67; Dunne, 'Realism', pp.112-13; Meyers, Die Lehre, p.48; Viotti and Kauppi, International Relations and World Politics, p.285.

59. Viotti and Kauppi, International Relations Theory, pp.40-41, 522-23.

So far, we have seen the mainstream version of idealism, realism and the 'First Debate'. While this version can still be found, particularly in the introductory textbooks to IR, there are by now a number of alternative accounts or criticisms. Some of them will now be discussed.

### **The 'First Debate' as the Debate**

The general method of describing the history of the discipline is in terms of a succession of paradigm shifts.<sup>60</sup> As such this is a useful analytical tool. However, with their generic, all-encompassing and ideologically loaded descriptions that prevail in IR, realism and idealism seem in one way or another to appear in all the paradigm debates. While it is probably correct that some of their elements remain the same throughout the paradigm debates, due to over-generalisations the substantial ways in which their meanings change over time and across differing contexts are easily missed.

For instance, according to some writers, the reincarnation of the realism-idealism dichotomy has been pronounced within the context of the Third Debate, which is generally accepted to have been a debate between realism/neo-realism, liberalism/globalism/pluralism, and neo-Marxism/structuralism. Indeed, according to some, the Third Debate itself is comprised of the controversy between state-centric accounts

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<sup>60</sup>. Steve Smith, 'The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Genealogy of International Relations Theory', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds.), International Relations Theory Today, Cambridge: Polity, 1995, pp.1-37, here pp.13-21.

versus transnationalist ones, which partly corresponds to the debate between realism and idealism.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the major dispute in the discipline is taken by some to be that between realism and idealism.

The debate between neo-realism and neo-liberalism (the latter is also called the Harvard School of neo-liberal institutionalism),<sup>62</sup> which developed from the Third Debate, has, according to some scholars, been one space where the original confrontation between realism and idealism has been explicitly played out. In this view, neoliberalism is considered a form of 'neoidealism'.<sup>63</sup> In the mid-nineties, Steve Smith has proclaimed this debate to be 'currently the most significant within the mainstream of US international theory'.<sup>64</sup> It is a debate which to some extent harks back to the 1970s controversies between state-centrism and transnationalism, but 'has much more to do with the debates between pluralist and neo-realist paradigms of the 1980s'.<sup>65</sup> The major issues of contention center around the prospects for international cooperation: Both 'paradigms' are state-centric and start from a

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61. Ibid., p.21.

62. Smith, 'Self-Images', pp.18-24. For a liberal critique of the Harvard School, see David Long, 'The Harvard School of Liberal International Theory: A Case for Closure', in Millennium 24 (1995), 3, pp.489-505.

63. See, for instance, David Baldwin (ed.), Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993; Charles W. Kegley Jr., 'The Neoidealist Moment in International Studies? Realist Myths and the New International Realities', International Studies Quarterly, 37 (1993), 2, pp.131-46; Kegley, 'Neoliberal Challenge', pp.9-14, and the other contributors to Charles W. Kegley Jr. (ed.), Controversies in International Relations Theory: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge, New York: St. Martin's, 1995.

64. Smith, 'Self-Images', p.23.

65. Ibid., p.22.

given condition of international anarchy between nation-states. Neo-liberals represent the optimistic view that international institutions and the dynamics of the global economy contain within them substantial possibilities for mitigating international conflicts. To those who consider this rather limited debate to represent the major controversy in IR, the whole history of IR has taken place in the clash between realist and liberal approaches:

Since its advent as a discipline, theoretical debate in (IR) has ranged primarily within the boundaries defined by the discourse between the realist and liberal visions. To a large degree, this division encompasses most of the other theoretical variants that have arisen at one time or another.

proclaims Charles W. Kegley Jr.<sup>66</sup>

This expanded conception of realism and liberalism, and of the substance of International Relations, enables writers like Kegley to see inter-war idealism simply as an earlier form of liberal internationalism. Indeed, in the context of this debate neo-liberalism is often used interchangeably with neo-idealism. This is a significant distortion of the body of thought labelled inter-war idealism: Although there was a liberal internationalist flavour to much inter-war idealist writing, interwar liberal internationalism was more varied than that subscribed to by the neo-liberals. On the other hand liberal internationalism was only one strand in the bulk of inter-war idealist

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<sup>66</sup>. Kegley, 'Neoliberal Challenge', p.1.

writing, alongside currents further to the right and left of the political spectrum.<sup>67</sup>

The problem with such expanded understandings of realism and idealism is that not sufficient attention has been paid to their changing contexts, and to the different meanings realism and idealism have been given in different contexts and by different writers. The attempt to define the core of realism and idealism in sweeping accounts has inevitably led to distortions and anachronisms. Concerned about this, one writer has even gone as far as denying the epithet 'theoretical tradition' to these two concepts, seeing each of them instead as 'an interconnected series of themes'.<sup>68</sup>

#### **Same Terminology, Different Content**

Martin Griffiths retains the idealism/realism dichotomy but expresses his dissatisfaction with how these terms are usually used within IR. Starting with realism, he asserts that its

content and epistemological status (and therefore the criteria for its evaluation) remain elusive. (...) In part this is due to the variety of contexts and debates within which Realism has been discussed in the field. In the 1930s and 1940s the debate was framed around a Realist-Idealist axis. In the 1970s Realism was contested by liberal analyses of the causes and consequences of an allegedly growing global interdependence. In the 1980s there emerged a three-cornered debate between competing Kuhnian 'paradigms', among which Realism dominated. Given that the meaning of Realism has been partly constructed by historically

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67. David Long, 'Conclusion: Interwar Idealism, Liberal Internationalism, and Contemporary International Theory', in David Long and Peter Wilson (eds.), Thinkers of the Twenty Years Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, pp.302-29, here p.318.

68. Kimberly Hutchings, International Political Theory: Rethinking Ethics in a Global Era, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 1999, p.15.

variable theoretical and political issues, its identity has also varied over time.<sup>69</sup>

Griffiths's own solution to cracking this nut is using idealism and realism in a way that is very different from the textbooks. For him, both are defined according to their respective position vis-à-vis freedom and necessity. Idealism reifies either freedom or necessity. In the first case, it becomes an 'idealism of imagination' that neglects the existence of any constraints. In the second case, it becomes either an 'idealism of nostalgia', which is in effect a reactionary utopia, or an 'idealism of complacency', which celebrates the world as it is as the best of all possible. While 'idealism of imagination' comes close to textbook idealism, Griffiths dubs two thinkers usually considered as arch-realist, i.e. Morgenthau and Waltz, as representatives of, respectively, 'idealism of nostalgia' and 'idealism of complacency'. In contrast, realism as defined by him presupposes the dialectical interplay of freedom and necessity. The foremost representative of realism as understood by Griffiths is Hedley Bull.<sup>70</sup>

Griffiths thus sees realism as a sum of negative claims, which can only be understood contextually and as juxtaposed against its idealist opposite.<sup>71</sup> According to Stefano Guzzini:

R.N. Berki and Martin Griffiths go as far as to argue that realism consists merely of negative claims.

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69. Martin Griffiths, 'Order and International Society: The Real Realism?', in Review of International Studies, 18 (1992), pp.217-40, here p.217.

70. Martin Griffiths, Realism, Idealism and International Politics: A Reinterpretation, London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

71. *Ibid.*, p.159.

Indeed, philosophically speaking, realism is unthinkable without the background of a prior idealist position deeply committed to the universalism of the Enlightenment and democratic political theory.<sup>72</sup>

It may be added that the same could be said for idealism. It has also always been defined against its realist 'other', and since the specific components of this 'other' have changed over time, the conceptualisation of idealism has changed accordingly. These two terms are frequently used in an intuitive and even pejorative sense, as a summary of what the other is not. This leads to two caricatured approaches in IR, which have difficulty standing on their own.

However, let us go back to Griffiths. While I agree with his assumption that idealism and realism can only be properly understood if seen as defined against each other, I wonder whether he does not throw out the baby with the bathwater, namely in asserting:

The labels are all wrong. Carr should not have couched his argument in terms of 'reality' and 'utopia' and therefore realism and idealism. Instead his posited dichotomy refers to the split between nostalgic and imaginative idealism.<sup>73</sup>

It is of course perfectly legitimate to reject a specific definition of a term and to use a different one instead. However, Carr can hardly be blamed for not having read Griffiths's book. And what Griffiths has done is not so much overcoming what is usually considered the idealism-realism debate but merely putting different labels: Textbook idealism becomes 'imaginative idealism' and textbook realism

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<sup>72</sup>. Stefano Guzzini, Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: The Continuing Story of a Death Foretold, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p.16.

<sup>73</sup>. Griffiths, 'Order', p.233.

metamorphoses into `nostalgic/complacent idealism`. In any case, Griffiths's account focuses upon relocating what are usually understood to be the major postwar realists into his framework and has little to say about the inter-war thinkers.

### Dropping the Terms

Martin Ceadel stresses the inadequacy of the realism/idealism dichotomy. Testing the usefulness of these categories for understanding the war and peace debate,<sup>74</sup> he has found them deeply unsatisfactory:

(R)ealism and idealism are so vague as to conceal important distinctions. It is self-evident that the term idealism cannot do justice to the diversity of ideological approaches adopted by crusaders, pacifists, and optimistic and mainstream pacifists, and needs to be broken down into different sub-categories.<sup>75</sup>

The term realism does not fare any better. According to Ceadel there are two major interpretations of `reality`: The `moderate` and the `extreme` versions. These versions are at odds with each other on two intertwined issues: First, on the issue of whether one should approach reality `neutrally/normatively`:

The `moderate` majority of realists accept the need to be realistic about the current distribution of power and the direction in which social rivalries are heading; but they do not necessarily admire this distribution/wish to struggle to reach a final showdown. Indeed, they try to limit the role power plays in human affairs by fostering societal norms at the expense of anarchic tendencies ...<sup>76</sup>

For the `extremists` (by which Ceadel seems to mean Hegelian nationalists), on the other hand, the anarchic condition of reality is good from a normative

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74. Martin Ceadel, Thinking About Peace and War, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp.9-20.

75. Ibid., p.15.

76. Ibid., p.15.



point of view, and it should not only be tolerated, but even welcomed: In the most extreme versions of this mode of realism, for which Ceadel uses the term 'militarism', war and human competition in general are perceived as Darwinian opportunities for self-improvement.

According to Ceadel, the distinction is a fundamental one. Ceadel enlists Raymond Aron as a thinker who has perceived the stark incompatibility between the 'moderate' realists of post-WWII American academia, and the turn-of-the-century German militarist school, a prime exponent of which was Treitschke.

The other issue which divides these two forms of realism, again following Ceadel, is the extent to which the reality can be interpreted as constituting a state of anarchy. According to the moderates, the reality is anarchic enough to render idealist reforms impossible. However, it is 'not too intractable as to prevent a modicum of order being salvaged in most cases',<sup>77</sup> for example through the mechanisms of armed truce and balance of power. Extremists, in contrast, are thoroughly pessimistic about the prospects for even a minimal level of order and balance to be achieved for any noteworthy stretch of time.

Ceadel had tested the usefulness of the realism/idealism divide on the specific issue of war and peace and found it wanting:

As a characterization of the doctrinal dimension of the war-and-peace debate ... the realist/idealist dichotomy is problematical. For one thing, it produces some strange judgements: all militarists are deemed to be realists, even though some of them assert that every

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<sup>77</sup>. Ibid., p.16.

effort should be made to transcend the constraints of 'reality'; all crusaders are branded as idealists, even though some of them are conservatives; and pessimistic pacifists are classified as realists, even though all of them totally reject military force. For another, it has inappropriate philosophical connotations: in particular, although a militarist inspired by a Hegelian conception of the state as a moral being which must expand to fulfill its own destiny is clearly realist as the term is conventionally used in international relations, he would be classified in orthodox philosophical terminology as an idealist.<sup>78</sup>

What does Ceadel propose to get out of the straightjacket of realism/idealism? Ceadel presses 'the subdivisions of ideologies which are already familiar from domestic politics',<sup>79</sup> i.e. fascism, conservatism, liberalism, social democracy and socialism, to the service of creating a more adequate categorization. This would capture all the arguments in the war and peace debate. Introducing domestic categories to what is apparently the prime international issue for him, i.e. the war and peace debate, will provide us with 'the possibility of almost limitless refinement' in distinguishing between different standpoints.<sup>80</sup>

Ceadel rightfully points to the heterogeneity of the terms idealism and realism. Particularly important is his distinction between moderate and extreme realism, which shows that mainstream realist IR writers should not be mixed up with militarists of the Treitschke school.

On the other hand, the fact that idealism and realism can be divided into a lot of different sub-groups is, in itself, no reason to drop the terms altogether. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether

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78. Ibid., p.15.

79. Ibid., p.17.

80. Ibid., p.17.

Ceadel's recommendation to use the terminology of domestic politics instead is so much of an improvement. The problem of heterogeneity can hardly be overcome that way.

### **The Liberal Comeback**

In line with the large-scale overhaul in the discipline of the established wisdoms of realism, there is an intensifying interest in the myths that the still predominantly realist discipline of International Relations has constructed about itself. The result is an increasing motivation to go back to the debates of the inter-war era. These recent explorations, which take the debates of the inter-war period seriously and evade superficial categorizations, have gone a long way to rectifying the myths mentioned above. There is now an increasing amount of literature questioning the realism-idealism dichotomy and the existence of a 'First Debate'. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, liberal-idealist discourse seems to have found an opportune moment for attempting to replace realism as the mainstream discourse in IR.<sup>81</sup>

To begin with, there is a problem with the labels in this discourse. A book called *Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis* edited by David Long and Peter Wilson shows how variegated the group of writers usually

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<sup>81</sup>. Scott Burchill, 'Liberal Internationalism', in Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (eds.), Theories of International Relations, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1996, pp.28-66, here p.28. Similarly, Ashworth claims that the end of the Cold War has given a new relevance to the ideas of liberal internationalists like Angell and Mittrany. See Ashworth, Creating, particularly pp.130-54.

dubbed idealists was in reality. Consequently, both editors express reservations about using that term.

As Wilson writes in the introduction, 'it might be contended that realism and idealism are loaded terms *par excellence*.'<sup>82</sup> Specifically for idealism, Wilson asserts:

There is hardly a word in the vocabulary of International Relations that is shrouded in as much confusion as idealism. It is a term widely used in debates on international relations but few attempts have been made to define it. It has all too frequently been assumed that anyone conversant in international theory knows more or less what it means. But this assumption is not well-founded ...<sup>83</sup>

This is a situation for which Carr's easy categorizations in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* are at least partially responsible. Wilson illustrates how difficult it is to unravel the definitional confusion by isolating a determining characteristic of all idealist thought. Although one can identify progressivism as the smallest common denominator, Wilson concedes that it might be futile to consider idealism a coherent tradition.<sup>84</sup>

Long argues in a similar vein, calling the idealism-realism dichotomy 'something of a pretence'.<sup>85</sup> He stresses the diversity of inter-war thought on IR, distinguishing between two groups. On the one hand, there were the academics, whose writings shared a focus on states as prime units of the international level, a normative concern with the avoidance of war, and an

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82. Wilson, 'Introduction', p.6.

83. Ibid., p.3.

84. Ibid., pp.3-14. See also Peter Wilson, 'The Myth of the "First Great Debate"', in Review of International Studies 24 (1998), pp.1-15, here pp.8-9.

85. Long, 'Conclusion', p.323.

interest in international organizations like the League. To the degree that one can identify a battleline between idealists and realists, it was over the possibility of interstate cooperation under the umbrella of such organizations. A special sub-group were economists writing from an international perspective.

On the other hand, there were the non-academic publicists, an even more heterogenous group. Among them were left-wing and conservative internationalists and internationalist lawyers, but also nationalist and pro-imperialist authors.<sup>86</sup>

From another perspective, Long divides the liberal internationalists into three groups: The Cobdenites, who stuck to free trade and non-intervention; the Hobbesian idealists, who advocated international organizations and collective security; and the new liberal internationalists, who called for functionalist international bodies reigning in global *laissez-faire*. In addition, there were socialist internationalists rejecting existing organizations like the League, and conservative cultural internationalists.<sup>87</sup>

To come back to Wilson, he also criticizes the mainstream account of realism defeating and replacing idealism during the late 1930s and the 1940s. Of these accounts he says:

Being usually part of a much wider account of the growth of International Relations as an academic discipline, they have been almost invariably brief and couched in the most general terms.<sup>88</sup>

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86. Ibid., pp.302-12.

87. Ibid., pp.312-18.

88. Wilson, 'Introduction', p.8.

The consequence is that:

Postwar accounts of idealism have also created the impression that the inter-war years constitute a more or less hermetically sealed period of idealist thought beginning in 1919 with the creation of the League and ending in 1939 with the publication of Carr's critique and the outbreak of war.<sup>89</sup>

Wilson has conclusively shown that the 'First Great Debate' was born in the pages of Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. Exchange between realists and idealists was by and large not a consciously conducted disciplinary controversy. It was only by being polemically called 'utopians' that the liberal internationalists rose to defend themselves, and then mainly to vehemently reject being seen as 'utopians'.<sup>90</sup>

Connected to this, there was no general 'paradigmatic' defeat of idealism by realism. Wilson reminds us that

although E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* is generally regarded to have had a devastating impact on the 'utopian' thinking of the inter-war period, the utopians themselves, or at any rate those so labelled by Carr, did not feel particularly devastated by it.<sup>91</sup>

There was no inter-war paradigm-shift from idealism to realism.

Similar arguments have been advanced by Lucian Ashworth. He, too, considers the whole concept of the 'First Great Debate' as a myth that needs to be unravelled.

The re-articulation of the realist-idealist Great Debate is important, because it demonstrates that Angell's ideas, and by implication the ideas of the

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<sup>89</sup>. Wilson, 'Introduction', p.16.

<sup>90</sup>. For a general survey of the responses of the liberal internationalists to Carr's book, see Peter Wilson, 'Carr and his Early Critics: Responses to *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 1939-46', in Michael Cox (ed.), E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp.165-97.

<sup>91</sup>. Wilson, 'Carr', p.165.

liberal internationalist paradigm leading up to Mitrany, were not the victims of a superior realism. Liberal internationalism, in the form it took with Angell and Mitrany, still awaits a proper and sustained realist critique.<sup>92</sup>

In juxtaposition to Carr's and Morgenthau's conception of human nature as the determinant of human behaviour, liberal internationalists like Leonard Woolf have upheld the more 'realistic' (in a common-sense way) view that:

(B)oth human nature and human intellect effect action. Education, experience and other forces external to human nature can increase the role of the intellect in the determination of human nature, thus limiting the effects of nature. The all-too-frequent possibility still exists in liberal internationalist thought that people will not use their intellect properly, thus the realist notion of a nature-determined political realm - a realm of struggle - forms part of the liberal internationalist interpretation, albeit a representation of the World we have to move away from.<sup>93</sup>

Like Wilson, Ashworth holds that the image of a paradigm shift from idealism to realism is a misconception. According to him:

The period of the 1930s has been treated more as a vindication of realist thought, and the disproving of idealism, rather than as the site of different ideas about the international sphere.<sup>94</sup>

There were three different kinds of discussion in which the participants used an idealism-realism dichotomy. The first was the attack by Carr and Morgenthau on liberal internationalism and the limited responses of Angell, Woolf and Zimmern to Carr. Second, and unconnected to the first, there was the discussion between idealist supporters of the League and realist pursuers of appeasement in the late 1930s. Third, there

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<sup>92</sup>. Ashworth, Creating, p.106.

<sup>93</sup>. Ibid., p.115.

<sup>94</sup>. Ibid., p.107.

was a postwar debate within realism about the relationship between power and morality.

In the 1930s, a more virulent discussion over the question whether capitalism causes war took place within IR, without invoking the terms idealism and realism. In Britain, the adherents of liberal internationalism were challenged not by the realists but by the left, and in the United States, by the isolationists.<sup>95</sup>

The aim of the reappraisals sketched above frequently seems to be to redress the discussion in favour of liberal internationalism. Undoubtedly, this liberal questioning of established wisdoms has had numerous beneficial effects like taking the progressive thought of the period out of the straightjacket of naivety, and of drawing our attention to the profound distortions involved in the mainstream ideas about realism, idealism and the First Debate. Despite a promising beginning, however, occasionally the very same myths which have just been demolished are quickly resurrected again. It is asserted, for example, that the idealists were not oblivious to questions of power, or that a First Debate, in the form in which it is usually raised, never took place and that realism never intellectually defeated idealism. Since, however, the aim is simultaneously to defend the positions of the liberal internationalists, both the dichotomy of realism-idealism and the myth of the 'First Debate' have to be reconstructed.

For example, Wilson laments that

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<sup>95</sup>. Ibid., pp.108-09, 126-28.



a rich variety of progressivist ideas have been consigned to oblivion as a result of an uncritical acceptance ... of Carr's ... text.<sup>96</sup>

Despite his earlier statements about the limited value of the term idealism, he on this occasion treats all writers called idealists as one group, just labelling them 'progressives' instead. Likewise, Long indicates that idealism means internationalism, of which there are liberal, socialist and cultural-conservative sub-groups.<sup>97</sup>

Ashworth claims that the end of the Cold War has given new relevance to the ideas of liberal internationalists like Angell and Mitrany.<sup>98</sup> Although he does not take the arguments of the liberal internationalists at face value and finds fault with them from a critical theoretical viewpoint, however, Ashworth believes that their 'claims put in normative terms may still give their ideas force in the modern era'.<sup>99</sup>

### Three Cheers for Idealism

In a similar vein, Andreas Osiander<sup>100</sup> claims that the 'shared paradigm' of the inter-war idealist writers has 'from E. H. Carr onward' been 'dramatically misconstrued'.<sup>101</sup> Carr has established the view of the inter-war idealists as a group of writers oblivious to

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96. Wilson, 'Myth', p.1.

97. Long, 'Conclusion', p.318.

98. Ashworth, Creating, ch. 6.

99. Ibid., p.149.

100. Andreas Osiander, 'Rereading Early Twentieth-Century IR Theory: Idealism Revisited', in International Studies Quarterly 42 (1998), 3, pp.409-32.

101. Ibid., p.409.

questions of power, inspired by a `naive, voluntarist progressivism'.<sup>102</sup> In fact, it is not progressivism as such that characterizes these writers as claimed by Carr and subsequently by Bull, but their theory of history based upon conceptualizations of `an inescapable, directional historical process'.<sup>103</sup>

Osiander asserts in a very similar way to Wilson:

The narrative typified by Carr and Bull should be amended and reformulated because it effectively serves to suppress an important part of the intellectual heritage of the discipline.<sup>104</sup>

Realism and idealism, according to Osiander, are both responses to industrial modernity, but while the idealists have drawn the right lessons in forming adequate responses to increasing interdependence of communities under forces of globalisation, realism harks back to a pre-industrial time. In the inter-war era, it was not so much that realism had addressed the inadequacies of idealism, but rather that idealism had been a response to popular realist conceptions incorporated in the `traditional foreign-political attitudes and modes of behaviour'.<sup>105</sup> The idealists were only too well aware of these long-established arguments and had already successfully assimilated them before Carr portrayed the idealists as reactionary, and realism as a new, critical approach.

The main problematique of the interwar idealists for Osiander lies not so much in moralistic formulations about avoiding war, but in the historical

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102. Ibid., p.410.

103. Ibid., p.409.

104. Ibid., p.412.

105. Ibid., p.415.

analysis of industrial modernity. It was this analysis that led them to focus on the

dangerous discrepancy between the new reality of worldwide economic interdependence and existing political structures<sup>106</sup>

as well as the entrenched popular perceptions based upon these anachronistic structures.

The main implication of this is that the interwar idealists were by far not oblivious to issues of power and conflict. On the contrary, conceptualizations about the anarchical character of international relations or balance of power, `two key aspects of realism`<sup>107</sup> (including, according to Osiander, Carrian realism), were given a much more satisfactory treatment by the idealists than by the realists with their cyclical view of history. It had, for example, been a member of the British League of Nations movement, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, who had popularised the term `international anarchy` by employing it in his 1916 book *The European Anarchy*, and although Dickinson's analysis, according to Osiander, was largely realist (and according to David Long, `Hobbesian idealist`), the concept had received wide recognition by idealist writers aswell, foremost among them Leonard Woolf, Norman Angell, and Alfred Zimmern.

Indeed, the idealists were very far removed from being the naive optimists who believed that advanced capitalism rendered war impossible. Instead, they provided sophisticated analyses of the contradictions between the entrenched nationalistic ways of thinking

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106. Ibid., p.415.

107. Ibid., p.412.

and increasing global interdependence, as well as the contradictions stemming from the joint existence of democratic and undemocratic state structures on the world stage. These analyses often led them to conclude that under increasing globalization, conflict and anarchy could even be intensified. The main idea was that the world had not yet adapted itself to the obsolescence of the political structures and ways of thinking which had corresponded to an earlier stage of capitalism. The idea of states as autonomous units with conflicting interests prevailed. The result, according to Ramsay Muir was threat of 'chaos', while Angell feared, in the 1913 edition of *The Great Illusion*, that 'the combination of advanced economies and backward politics actually made war more likely.'<sup>108</sup> Zimmern, on the other hand, with his particular emphasis on the contradictions between democratic and undemocratic forms of state, noted

the increasing *fragmentation* of the world as a result of the rise of the idea of national self-determination and the virulence of national feeling.<sup>109</sup>

The most common solution suggested by the idealists, continues Osiander, was not a misplaced trust placed on public opinion, but a learning process, whereby democracies would play the leading role. There was also no uniform trust placed on the League of Nations as an instrument for overcoming 'power politics', as Carr claimed. Zimmern, for instance, was one of the staunchest critiques of the League of Nations, since it did not provide the mechanisms for

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108. Ibid., p.416.

109. Ibid., pp.417. Emphasis in the original.

the great-power management of the international system, which Zimmern considered to be essential until democracy had spread through the world. Collective security, under the existing conditions, could not be a policy for the world as a whole.<sup>110</sup> Zimmern, who distinguished between democratic 'welfare states' and undemocratic 'power states', emphasized that the real contrast was not 'between welfare politics and power politics but between welfare politics and pure power politics.'<sup>111</sup> Later, Zimmern, noting the impossibility of abolishing power from the political system, asserted that 'the real distinction is not between power and no power, but between the right and the wrong use of power'.<sup>112</sup>

Thus, Osiander asserts:

Somewhat paradoxically perhaps (in light of their perception as apostles of world peace), authors like Angell, Woolf, and Zimmern were thus far more ready to advocate the use of force when it came to dealing with what Zimmern called the 'power states' than was E. H. Carr, whose backing of appeasement in the original 1939 edition of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* was famously expunged from the post-war re-issue.<sup>113</sup>

In sum, according to Osiander, from a post-1989 perspective it appears that, after all, the IR idealists of the early part of this century were right in the long term. In contrast, realism is seriously hampered by not being able or willing to come to terms with the lessons of modernity.<sup>114</sup>

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110. Alfred Zimmern, 'The Problem of Collective Security', in Quincy Wright (ed.), Neutrality and Collective Security, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936, pp.3-89.

111. Ibid., p.59. Emphasis in the original.

112. Alfred Zimmern, Spiritual Values in World Affairs, Oxford: Clarendon, 1939, p.40.

113. Osiander, 'Rereading', p.428.

114. Ibid., p.430.

A problem with Osiander's account is with his portrayal of Carr as more or less a mainstream realist. Although he concedes at one point that Carr was not typical,<sup>115</sup> he still emerges as a complete forerunner of postwar realism. If Carr's realism and concept of power comprised mainly of addressing anarchy and balance of power, why did he make the distinctive contribution and not, say, Dickinson? As we will see in the next chapter, it is precisely because he ignores the most important component of Carr's approach, the critical and non-positivist dimension, that Osiander arrives at this erroneous depiction of Carr and fails to understand the essence of Carr's critique of the idealists.

Thus, the myth of Carr as the founder of state-centric and positivist realism remains constant. It is not surprising that this myth proves to be the most resilient one, since it is precisely this conception of Carr which results in the other two myths, i.e. that there was a self-conscious 'First Debate' and that realism defeated idealism. The new liberal questioning of Osiander (but also of Ashworth) has kept Carr in the straightjacket of mainstream realism. Furthermore, it could be argued that in effect the claims raised in these reappraisals do not amount to much beyond what the liberal idealists had already articulated in response to Carr's critique.

Like the mainstream views, these accounts also start from the wrong premise of seeing Carr as a typical, positivist realist. Carr has overwhelmingly

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115. Ibid., p.423.

been portrayed as a power-obsessed realist (power seen as an end in itself) with no sense of the need for moral correctives to the exigencies of national interest. This results in a certain view of the inter-war IR thought and of realism and idealism. However, a recent re-reading of Carr has questioned the image of him being a mainstream realist.

### **Conclusion**

Let us, for convenience's sake and at the risk of doing some injustice to the more balanced accounts used here, briefly summarize the mainstream accounts of idealism, realism and the 'First Debate'.

1. Idealism has a positive view of human nature and believes in progress. Realism is pessimistic concerning the possibility of human improvement.
2. Idealism believes in universal ethics. Realism is relativistic. It puts the national interest and an ethic of prudence first.
3. Idealism assumes the existence of a world community with common interests, particularly between democracies. Realism sees mainly states and considers international politics a zero-sum game.
4. Idealism proposes structural reforms in the international system, for example collective security. Realism recommends adhering to the existing rules of the game like the balance of power.
5. Both schools are dichotomous and incompatible.
6. Idealists are well-meaning but naive. Realists take account of the facts and thus advance the discipline of IR.

7. There was a debate between idealism and realism (either between the 1930s and 1950s or from the 1950s onward), in which the latter defeated the former.

8. Carr was the godfather of mainstream realism.

If we buy this version, the interpretation of Curtis seems to be fairly easy: one of these wholly-headed dreamers who came up with useless, because illusory and non-scientific, blueprints that ignored reality. But can we accept this? A lot of revisionist writers think not.

Kegley argues that the debate between idealists and realists has been going on throughout the discipline's history, its latest incarnation in the shape of neo-liberalism confronting neo-realism. Griffiths turns the traditional definitions on their heads, labelling arch-realists like Morgenthau and Waltz idealist and seeing in Bull the real realist. Ceadel points towards the heterogeneity of both terms and advocates their replacement by domestic political distinctions, like socialist, liberal and conservative.

Another group of revisionist writers tackles the works of those writing on IR during the alleged 'First Debate' head-on. Wilson, Long and Ashworth correctly point to the artificiality of the term idealism and deny that there was a big debate, with realism coming out as victor. Nevertheless, under their hands idealism simply becomes progressivism or (liberal) internationalism. Another revisionist, Osiander, puts up a straightforward defence of idealism over realism. All these writers agree that Carr had a key role in establishing the dichotomy. What, then, did he mean by these terms?



## Chapter Two

### The New Look on Carr

#### Introduction

As we have seen, the authority for the primary mainstream assumptions about realism, idealism and the 'First Debate' has frequently been drawn, implicitly or explicitly, from E. H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. The widespread view of this era is one of idealist dominance, crushed by the devastating blow of Carr's realist assault on the one hand, diplomatic crises, the collapse of the international liberal system and the onset of the war on the other. It is alleged that Carr's book, by successfully accounting for the collapse of the League of Nations system, sparked off a paradigm shift.

All of these myths stem from a single cause: The postwar accounts of the book have often been rather crude and instrumental. For instance, although in *The Twenty Years Crisis* Carr had supported the policy of appeasement towards Germany, with the dropping of the *status quo/non-status quo* argument, it has been possible to adapt the book to the policy-requirements of the Cold War era as an argument of why Soviet Union should not be appeased. Thus, running blatantly against the grain of the compromise-minded stance of Carr vis-à-vis *non-status quo* powers, with a focus on its elaborations of power politics, *The Twenty Years'*

*Crisis* has almost effortlessly become a tome for postwar realism.<sup>1</sup>

In line with the recent body of revisionist literature on Carr, this chapter argues that little, if any, evidence for the mainstream versions of the idealism-realism debate can be drawn from his work. First of all, Wilson and others have convincingly shown that Carr fails to provide any clear-cut definition of what realism and, particularly, utopianism are supposed to mean. Starting from there, I will suggest that *The Twenty Years' Crisis* can best be comprehended by distinguishing between the polemical and the substantial arguments of Carr. While he vehemently puts down the utopians in many sections of the book, he at other occasions betrays striking similarities with their approach.

Nevertheless, on the substantial level there is indeed a sharp criticism by Carr of unreflective and unhistorical modes of thinking. Having outlined the interpretation of Carr's approach, which will be applied to the main topic, i.e. Curtis, I will briefly discuss recent reappraisals of Carr as a utopian or a 'critical' realist.

### **Turning the Tables on Carr**

In the first place, for a book that is mainly about the realism-idealism controversy, and which has been of such crucial import for generating the mainstream textbook descriptions of realism and

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1. William T.R. Fox, 'E.H.Carr and Political Realism: Vision and Revision', in Review of International Studies 11 (1985), pp.1-16.

idealism, it is striking that one looks in vain for clear definitions of these terms in the text. Their conception in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* is intuitive and eclectic, in marked contrast to the clarity and coherence surrounding these terms in the bulk of the subsequent literature on how Carr allegedly defined them and what they therefore mean.

Cecelia Lynch has taken Carr to task in an article on the contribution of peace movements (in particular, Anglo-American ones) to the evolution of international norms.<sup>2</sup> She points towards Carr's contradictory use of the term utopianism<sup>3</sup> and to his oversimplified and too dismissive treatment of those criticized by him. Idealism is neither unchanging nor monolithic. Carr's dichotomy of realism and utopianism and his historically unspecified, ideologically loaded use of the latter term has seriously hampered our conceptualization of a number of ideas and agents.<sup>4</sup>

The labelling of movement groups and campaigns as 'utopian' as opposed to 'realist' ... has created a stigma around attempts by social forces to influence the course of peace and security affairs.<sup>5</sup>

Lynch, however, goes too far when she - in the vein of Ashworth and Osiander - pictures Carr as a typical realist dismissive of international law, ethics and organization.<sup>6</sup>

According to Timothy Dunne, there is a striking generality (and inconsistency) with which Carr assigns the category to a multitude of referents, from

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2. Cecelia Lynch, 'E.H. Carr, International Relations Theory, and the Societal Origins of International Legal Norms', *Millennium* 23 (1994), 3, pp.589-619.

3. *Ibid.*, p.593 n. 15.

4. *Ibid.*, pp.594-99, 615-19.

5. *Ibid.*, p.594.

6. *Ibid.*, pp.595, 597.

individual thinkers and particular texts, to different disciplines and finally to domestic and international political orders (blurring its ontological status as 'principle' or 'action' in the process.)<sup>7</sup>

His realism seems to be not 'a theoretical construct but a critical weapon that Carr turned against „utopianism“'.<sup>8</sup>

The most penetrating criticism of Carr's use of terminology has been advanced by Wilson. As already discussed in the previous chapter, he asserts that realism and idealism are terms shrouded in confusion, a situation for which Carr is at least partially responsible. Carr himself did not 'set out systematically the key features of the inter-war utopian school'.<sup>9</sup>

Particularly utopianism is not a carefully defined scientific concept but a highly ambiguous and impressionist one. Carr only gives a vague outline of its core characteristics. It is mainly defined by its defects, which, however, are quite heterogenous - from fake universalism to certain faulty policy proposals.<sup>10</sup>

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7. Tim Dunne, Inventing International Society: A History of the English School, Basingstoke, London and New York: Macmillan and St. Martin's, 1998, p.29.

8. Ibid., p.24.

9. Peter Wilson, 'Introduction: The Twenty Years' Crisis and the Category of „Idealism“ in International Relations', in David Long and Peter Wilson (eds.), Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, pp.1-24, here p.12.

10. Ibid., pp.6, 12-13; Peter Wilson, 'The Myth of the „First Great Debate“', in Review of International Studies 24 (1998), pp.1-15, here pp.10-11; Peter Wilson, 'Carr and his Early Critics: Responses to *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1939-46*', in Michael Cox (ed.), E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp.165-97, here p.190.

Carr has used utopianism as denoting a widely-ranging set of meanings. For instance, as a doctrine that:

(i). rejects an existing state of affairs in preference for a more desirable, but not yet existent, other;  
(ii). is based on unverified and artificial (meaning 'concocted'? 'abstract'? 'false'?) generalizations; and  
(iii). postulates as an economic, political or moral bench-mark a condition that has no historical precedent.

Moreover, at the beginning of his final chapter:

in the space of three pages, Carr uses the term 'Utopia' as a synonym and/or descriptive label for six significantly different things: (i) the peaceful and harmonious world order of the nineteenth century; (ii) the attempt to recreate this order; (iii) any liberal international order; (iv) any peaceful and harmonious world order; (v) any code of international morality; (vi) 'visionary hopes'.<sup>11</sup>

If one considers, in conjunction with this inflationary range of meanings, the sheer number of concrete examples of utopians (notably Angell, Zimmern and Toynbee, but also, for example, Churchill, the two Roosevelts, Rhodes and Bosanquet),<sup>12</sup> the looseness of the term becomes obvious.

Most venomously, utopianism for Carr is a term of abuse. It parades as an empty category with pejorative connotations against all things Carr happened to disagree with.<sup>13</sup> The result is grave, for, as an effect of Carr's indiscriminate and normatively loaded categories, a very rich slice of progressive thought within the discipline has been confined to the intellectual dustbin.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, Carr's own proposals

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11. Wilson, 'Carr', p.189-90.

12. Wilson, 'Introduction', pp.14-15; Wilson, 'Myth', p.11; Wilson, 'Carr', pp.190-91.

13. Wilson, 'Introduction', p.13; Wilson, 'Myth', pp.1, 12; Wilson, 'Carr', p.190.

14. Wilson, 'Myth', pp.1, 12, 14.

for a reform of the international system, which are not that different from those of the liberal internationalists, have also been neglected.<sup>15</sup>

### **Carr's Contradictions**

The criticism by Wilson and others concerning Carr's pejorative and confusing use of the word or idiom utopian is well-taken. Indeed, the problems with *The Twenty Years' Crisis* are by no means restricted to the lack of proper definitions. Working backward from our scheme of mainstream idealism-realism outlined in the last chapter, let us see what Carr has to say about the merits and dismerits of both approaches, about their compatability, about progressive change at the international level, and about the character of the international system.

On a superficial look, there is certainly plenty of material in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* on which the assumption that Carr was a self-conscious realist could be based. In the first part of the book, Carr provides the notorious juxtapositions of realism and idealism (or, in his terminology, utopianism), which have helped to spawn the postwar textbook descriptions of these terms. He starts with an account of how 'immature' and 'purposeful' idealist thought, which is allegedly a symptom of the initial stages of thinking on any subject, in the face of the facts slowly has to give

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<sup>15</sup>. Wilson, 'Introduction', pp.14, 19; Wilson, 'Myth', pp.12-13.

way to ruthless analysis. The same, asserts Carr, applies for the `science` of international politics.<sup>16</sup>

Through the polemical employment of associations, Carr (calculatively?) builds up an image of idealism as aspirational, teleological and wishful thinking, characterizing the early `immature` phases of a social science. This is the stage where:

wishing prevails over thinking, generalization over observation, and in which little attempt is made at a critical analysis of existing facts or available means.<sup>17</sup>

In stark contrast to the introduction of utopianism with such an array of hopelessly negative connotations, realism enters the stage accompanied by a chorus of boisterous phrases like `serious critical and analytical thought`, `hard and ruthless analysis`, `hallmark of science` and `thinking over wishing`.<sup>18</sup>

But, having demolished it so ruthlessly in some sections of the book, in other parts Carr no longer blandly claims that utopianism is without merit. For example, he concedes that it has the vision that makes any progress in international relations possible in the first place. Crude realism, untempered by a reasonable measure of utopianism, would be bound for as catastrophic a failure as a totally unqualified, naive utopianism. If things would be left to such a realism - bereft of a finite goal, emotional appeal, moral

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16. E.H. Carr, The Twenty Years` Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations, 2nd ed., London and Basingstoke: Papermac, (1939) 1995, pp.6-10.

17. Ibid., p.8.

18. Ibid., p.9.

judgement and grounds for action - no change in the international order would be possible.<sup>19</sup>

The arguments in many sections of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* are built upon juxtapositions of utopia and reality or the alleged attributes of realist and utopian ways of thinking. For example, there is the juxtaposition of purpose and analysis, free will and determination, theory and practice, the intellectual and the bureaucrat, left and right, and finally, ethics and politics.<sup>20</sup> This can easily lead to the assumption that these juxtapositions indicate that realism and idealism are two hermetically sealed, antagonistic, and therefore incompatible perspectives.

Furthermore, Carr uses the term 'antithesis' to characterize the relationship between realism and idealism.<sup>21</sup> If all this is not sufficient evidence that Carr perceives the relationship between idealism and realism as a full dichotomy, a sentence from the book seems to provide the final proof: 'Politics are made up of two elements - utopia and reality - belonging to two different planes which can never meet.'<sup>22</sup>

Then again, there are passages which contradict the impression of the hermetical separation of utopianism and realism. For example, Carr hints that 'mature thought combines purpose', i.e. utopianism,

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19. Ibid., pp.84-88.

20. Ibid., pp.12-19.

21. Ibid., p.12.

22. Ibid., p.87.



`with observation and analysis', i.e. realism.<sup>23</sup> And some pages later, we read:

Political science must be based on a recognition of the interdependence of theory and practice, which can be attained only through a combination of utopia and reality.<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere, Carr calls for a compromise between the utopian concept of justice and the realist one of power.<sup>25</sup> He even manages to make contradictory sentences like these:

This constant *interaction of irreconcilable forces* is the stuff of politics. Every political situation *contains mutually incompatible elements of utopia and reality, of morality and power.*<sup>26</sup>

This confusion is heightened by Carr's explanations of how a sound policy should look like. On the one hand, a whole battery of textbook idealist projects and proposals is scornfully put down, be it trust in public opinion,<sup>27</sup> the Briand-Kellogg-Pact,<sup>28</sup> collective security,<sup>29</sup> the League of Nations in both its present and a potentially reformed shape,<sup>30</sup> international law and arbitration,<sup>31</sup> or an international police force.<sup>32</sup> European unity and world federation also do not get a mild treatment<sup>33</sup> - although there is some ambiguity here, to which we will come back in Chapter Four.

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23. Ibid., p.10.

24. Ibid., p.14.

25. Ibid., p.202.

26. Ibid., p.88. Emphasis added.

27. Ibid., pp.32-35.

28. Ibid., p.30.

29. Ibid., pp.8-9.

30. Ibid., pp.29-31, 219.

31. Ibid., pp.159-90.

32. Ibid., pp.8, 30.

33. Ibid., pp.9, 30, 78-80. 194, 202, 219.

On the other hand, the very Carr who discounts all these schemes comes up with ambitious projects of his own at the end of the book: the formation of vast geographical units effectively superseding existing sovereign states and enjoying *de facto* autarky.<sup>34</sup> To this is added an economic restructuring of the world by cross-border cooperation providing financial aid to poorer countries and replacing the profit motive with social ends.<sup>35</sup>

In his 1940s writings, Carr elaborated upon this. He envisaged a future Europe functionally integrated in terms of military security and economic cooperation, including pan-European banking and planning authorities, but retaining its existing administrative and cultural units. In addition, he had the hope for a continuing postwar cooperation between the USA, the Soviet Union and Great Britain (including Washington's handing-over of nuclear weapons to the UN) and even hinted at the establishment of a global authority responsible for overseeing order and possessing its own forces.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to see why all this should be less utopian than the schemes Carr put down so mercilessly in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*.

Finally, there are his equally variable statements on the character of the international system. Again, it is possible to read Carr as drawing the picture of a

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34. Ibid., pp.211-13.

35. Ibid., p.219.

36. Edward Hallett Carr, Conditions of Peace, London: Macmillan, 1942, pp.242-70; Edward Hallett Carr, Nationalism and After, London: Macmillan, 1945, pp.51-60; Charles Jones, E.H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.90-96, 105-10.

system of competing states locked into a ceaseless conflict. When he argues that peace may be good for countries like Britain but not necessarily for Germany and that an open world economy favours the industrially leading countries but not agrarian ones like Yugoslavia or Colombia,<sup>37</sup> he takes states and their needs for granted.

The state is presented as a special kind of collective body, enjoying the loyalty of its component individuals to a degree not matched by other institutions. Given international anarchy, its recourse to self-help is seen as legitimate.<sup>38</sup> What is more, domestic policies are described by Carr as irrelevant for the external behaviour of states.<sup>39</sup> According to Rosenberg, the state for Carr is an 'irreducible category':

In short, Carr's 'science of international politics' poses questions not of the state but implicitly on its behalf. And this is, of course, a signature of realism. Its deepest assumptions are grounded in the ideological needs of the social practice - namely, diplomacy - whose norms it articulates.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, Carr upholds the view that it is profitless to imagine a hypothetical world in which men no longer organize themselves in groups for purpose of conflict; and the conflict cannot once more be transferred to a wider and more comprehensive field. As has often been observed, the international community cannot be organized against Mars.<sup>41</sup>

The assumption of a separation between economics and

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37. Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, pp.50-57.

38. Ibid., pp.145-46.

39. Ibid., p.127. See also Jones, E.H. Carr, pp.38-40, 48.

40. Justin Rosenberg, The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations, London and New York: Verso, 1994, p.11. Emphasis in the original.

41. Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, p.213.

politics is foolish. In fact, the former is subordinated to the latter as an instrument of power policy.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, Carr also tells us that the state is not a necessary form of human organization but historically contingent. Territorial power units may even disappear again at a future time, and Carr in any case assumes that the nation-state as it exists today is bound to decrease in importance. Already now, sovereignty is a blurred concept that says little about the actual degree of independence enjoyed by states.<sup>43</sup>

Carr thunders:

To make the harmonization of interests the goal of political action is not the same thing as to postulate that a natural harmony of interests exists ...<sup>44</sup>

However, it is obvious, when he writes about how to achieve 'peaceful change' by a process of bargaining between 'have' and 'have-not' powers,<sup>45</sup> that he deems the harmonization of interests as both aspirable and possible. War is not inevitable.

Furthermore, in his 1940s writings Carr finally replaces state-centrism by the image of 'an incipient world society based on respect for individuals across state borders.'<sup>46</sup> In these publications, Carr deals with economic aspects not from the angle of how they can increase a state's power. At issue is, rather, how living standards can be improved through planning under

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42. Ibid., pp.106-10, 114-20.

43. Ibid., pp.153 n.4, 210-13.

44. Ibid., p.50.

45. Ibid., pp.191-202.

46. Paul Howe, 'The Utopian Realism of E.H. Carr', in Review of International Studies 20 (1994), pp.277-97, here p.296.

conditions of international economic interdependence.<sup>47</sup> Instead of his previous dismissal of domestic factors he comes to see the beginning Cold War as a conflict between different ideologies and not just powerful states.<sup>48</sup>

Last but not least, the whole composition of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* is somewhat contradictory. The near-dogmatism of the first part of the book stands in stark contrast to the concrete proposals for an international planning authority which are advanced in the final section. It looks like something of a riddle how Carr initially describes realism and idealism as completely incompatible, then goes on to define the idealists as nothing more than hypocritical realists (so they are not a muddle-headed, feeble-minded and up-in-the-clouds bunch after all), and finally, in a last sweeping shift, how he arrives at a 'synthesis' of realism and idealism, himself coming up with strikingly idealistic proposals according to his very own terms. What are we to make out of all this?

### **Carr's Dialectics**

Carr has simultaneously formulated a transhistorical conception of the dialectic of realism and idealism. According to Wilson:

In Carr's view, this dialectic permeated all political thought and action, including that province of the world's political life we call international relations. This simple and elegant framework enabled Carr to

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47. Carr, *Conditions*, pp.129-53. See also Jones, E.H. Carr, pp.77-80.

48. Paul Rich, 'E.H. Carr and the Quest for Moral Revolution in International Relations', in Michael Cox (ed.), E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp.198-216, here p.210.

survey an astonishingly wide terrain with seemingly remarkable coherence.<sup>49</sup>

According to Charles Jones's analysis of the polemical use of language in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Carr employs in the book a dialectical method, thereby drawing upon Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* in an idiosyncratic way. Mannheim understands by 'ideology' the apology for a conservative point of view and by 'utopia' the rationalization of the demand for radical change. Both of them can be questioned by using the theoretical tool of the 'sociology of knowledge' which exposes 'ideology' and 'utopia' as rooted in the social conditions of their respective adherents.

According to Jones, under Carr's hands Mannheim's 'ideology' becomes 'utopianism'. It is subsequently demolished by the critical weapon of 'sociology of knowledge', dubbed realism by Carr. Professing to tread the golden middle way between 'infantile' utopianism and 'senile' realism, Carr then enters the stage with his own views, which are presented as a 'mature' synthesis. With his skillful rhetorics, Carr appeals to the overwhelmingly male, elderly and conservative part of his readership. Simultaneously, the dialectical method and frequent positive references to Marx are used as a bait for left-wing readers.<sup>50</sup>

For Tim Dunne, the relationship between realism and idealism has been completely misunderstood by the critics of Carr from opposite sides, including Hedley Bull, Hans Morgenthau and Leonard Woolf. United in condemning his relativism, they have not been

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<sup>49</sup>. Wilson, 'Introduction', p.2.

<sup>50</sup>. Jones, E.H. Carr, pp.54-60, 127-32.

perceptive to the subtle interplay of realism and idealism in Carr's thought. Carr has in fact subscribed to a revisionist interpretation of the relationship between these 'two poles' which shows how history and science move through dialectical stages. In contrast to conventional approaches, there is no sharp dividing-line between true and false. The misrepresentation of Carr has been made possible by, on the one hand, ignoring his specific recommendations for the facilitation of peaceful change in international politics and, on the other hand, by the tendency to understate the degree to which Carr mentions the necessity for moral foundations.<sup>51</sup> Dunne also quotes T.L.Knutsen who has made a similar point about the conformistic suppression of the dialectical elements in Carr's thought by postwar generations, who have considered utopianism a naive alternative to realism; ... a straw man which they could knock over in order to better portray the mature wisdom of the realist alternative.<sup>52</sup>

We should, however, be careful not to assume that Carr in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* has no powerful axe at all to grind and is simply building up artificial extremes by utopianism and realism. The sociology of knowledge aka Carr's realism is more than just a rhetorical device. For a start, it could be asserted that in textual terms the book should be read at two levels: the polemical and the substantial.

Carr's vagueness when it comes to definitions, the

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51. Tim Dunne, *Inventing*, pp.31-32.

52. Torbjörn L. Knutsen, *A History of International Relations Theory*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993, p.224.

stark dichotomies that he sketches and the anti-utopian statements concerning the international order and potential ways to improve it all indicate the polemical purpose behind the argument. Nevertheless, there is also a not fully articulated theoretical core in Carr's assertions which is not necessarily in tune with the polemical aspects. If we shift through and put aside the extensive polemical and manipulative elements he employs, two important aspects stand out: his views of international ethics and of progress.

#### Unmasking 'Universalism'

Statements like the utopians not being able to provide 'a disinterested and universal standard'<sup>53</sup> have been frequently read not as a general critique of the ideological construction of knowledge, but as a realist assault on idealism. In fact, Carr's proclamation that what seem to be disinterested universal standards are in fact the reflection of power at a certain time and under certain conditions of the 'status-quo powers'<sup>54</sup> and his concept of the relativity of thought have resulted in him being seen (in comparison, for example, to a Morgenthau or a Niebuhr) as a realist who is particularly insensitive to ethical questions. Allegedly, according to Carr, 'anything goes'. Many analysts 'have tended to conclude that Carr was an

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53. Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, p.80.

54. See, for example, *ibid.*, p.80.



advocate of *raison d'état* in which ethics was largely a product of power.<sup>55</sup>

Carr, however, clearly states that there exists an international community, albeit one handicapped by the inequality between its component states and by the absence of the notion that the good of the whole overrides that of the parts. Nevertheless, there are wide-spread assumptions of certain moral duties of states towards individuals (avoidance of inflicting unnecessary suffering, protection of 'backward races' and of national minorities, refugee relief) as well as towards each other (keeping of treaties). Carr hopes that from this embryonic international community a wider sense of world-wide solidarity may develop. This solidarity is not to be rooted in an automatic harmony of interests but in the moral obligation of those states which profit most from the international order to make concessions to those who profit least.<sup>56</sup> For once, he approvingly quotes the otherwise maligned Zimmern that ordinary people must realize that public affairs have become world affairs.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, in contrast to the wide-spread cliché of Carr being a nihilist, a number of scholars have confirmed that he did base his own position upon certain values. Justin Rosenberg resolves the puzzle of the realism of Carr in Carrian pragmatism geared to the securing of British foreign policy interests:

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55. Rich, 'E.H. Carr', p.198.

56. Ibid., pp.141-43, 147-53.

57. Ibid., p.152.

For Carr shared the urgent policy orientation of the idealists he was criticising: if their utopianism was an involuntary recoil from 1914, his own realist corrective was equally an injunction to learn the lessons of the 1930s. He was, after all, an ex-diplomat. But as a result, Carr's is from the outset a discourse of *raison d'état*.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, despite his left-leanings, Carr regarded his ideological position as wholly consistent with a thoroughly patriotic pursuit of British interests.<sup>59</sup>

This seems to conform to Jones' pragmatic/

Machiavellian/normative conception of realism, which is, however, not the same as textbook realism.

Furthermore, Carr's own projects for a more harmonious international order based upon an integrated Europe, large-scale planning and concessions to the 'have-nots' were all motivated by the goal of stemming British decline.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Peter Wilson asserts that, while a difficult writer to categorize, Carr shared with his Fabian and socialist contemporaries 'the conservative purpose of keeping Britain in the front rank of nations'.<sup>61</sup>

What, then, is Carr's complaint against utopianism, if it is not as such the advocacy of progressive change out of concern for the interest of one's own nation-state? The answer is given in Chapter Five of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* where, in Carr's

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58. Rosenberg, *Empire*, p.11.

59. Jones, *E. H. Carr*, p.xi.

60. *Ibid.*, pp.19-20.

61. Peter Wilson, 'Radicalism for a Conservative Purpose: The Peculiar Realism of E.H. Carr' in *Millennium* 30, (2001), pp.123-36. The quotation has been taken from the abstract.

words, the `by far ... most formidable attack which utopianism has to face<sup>62</sup> is launched.

Explicitedly drawing upon the sociology of knowledge, Carr is at his biting best in showing how analytical judgement is affected by one's social circumstances and interests. For example, when Germany was a rising power but not yet perceived with hostility, British philosophers admired Hegel and their historian colleagues discovered the Teutonic roots of English civilization. Once Anglo-German relations soured, these academic fads disappeared again.

Likewise, universally-sounding political principles are dependend upon specific interest configurations. As long as her strong position in naval and economic terms was assured, Britain considered the submarine or protective tariffs as immoral. The taint of immorality disappeared in the case of the latter once Britain found it convenient to shift to protectionism herself.

Even worse, representatives of strong countries first proclaim that what is best for the world is best for their country and then reverse the argument, saying that whatever their country does represents the interests of humanity. As a specifically devious case Carr singles out internationalism, which is embraced by the dominant countries in order to cement the *status quo* against catching-up powers.<sup>63</sup>

While having much fun in pointing out double-

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62. Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, p.65.

63. Ibid., pp.65-81.

standards, Carr does not castigate them as hypocrisy pure and simple but as result of inequality, whether domestically or internationally:

Theories of social morality are always the product of a dominant group which identifies itself with the community as a whole, and which possesses facilities denied to subordinate groups or individuals for imposing its view of life on the community. Theories of international morality are, for the same reason and in virtue of the same process, the product of dominant nations or groups of nations.<sup>64</sup>

In terms of the theoretical essence of the work, it was not the idealism in Carr's own mind that he was putting down. In other words, it was not idealism as such, seen in terms of the envisaging of reform in the international system, but the unreflective and hypocritical way of conceptualising reform displayed by many advocates of collective security that was being attacked. Carr's critique of unreflectivism, and not his critique of idealism, I argue, is his main contribution to the discipline. Unfortunately, his own polemicism has had the effect of obscuring this, most profound aspect of his work.

Realism for Carr is a tool for reflective thinking, for uncovering power structures. For him, knowledge is always embedded. Theory emerges out of practice and flows back into it, thus making change possible.<sup>65</sup> This distinction corresponds partially to the distinction between the rationalists and the reflectivists that Robert Keohane drew at the ISA conference in 1988,<sup>66</sup> and which for some time became a

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<sup>64</sup>. Ibid., p.74.

<sup>65</sup>. Ibid., p.14.

<sup>66</sup>. Steve Smith, 'Positivism and Beyond', in Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), International Theory: Positivism and Beyond, Cambridge,

prime categorization of IR theories. However, considering that by now the term reflectivist seems to be reserved mainly for post-modern or post-structuralist discourses in IR, i.e. those that totally reject the possibility of neutrally judging among different truth-claims, it might be considered to locate Carr in the category of reflexivism.<sup>67</sup>

### **Progress and History**

Ashworth claims that realists (by which he indicates Carr and Morgenthau) think that human nature is determined by instinct and not reason.<sup>68</sup> As far as Carr is concerned, let us look at the following passages from *The Twenty Years' Crisis* for the ultimate proof that this was not the case:

Man in society reacts to his fellow men in two opposite ways. Sometimes he displays egoism, or the will to assert himself at the expense of others. At other times he displays sociability, or the desire to co-operate with others, to enter into reciprocal relations of good will and friendship with them, and even to subordinate himself to them. In every society, these two qualities can be seen at work.<sup>69</sup>

For Carr, therefore, no less than for many of the liberal internationalists of the inter-war era, human nature was a composite of the impulses of `coercion and conscience, enmity and good will, self-assertion and

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New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.11-44, here p.12.

67. Reflexivism is a category originally developed by Anthony Giddens. For its application in IR see Mark Neufeld, `Reflexivity and International Relations Theory', *Millenium* 22 (1993), 1, pp.53-76.

68. Lucian M. Ashworth, Creating International Studies: Angell, Mitrany and the Liberal Tradition, Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999, p.115.

69. Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, p.91.

self-subordination'.<sup>70</sup> These pointed, according to Carr, to

one important conclusion. The utopian who dreams that it is possible to eliminate self-assertion from politics and to base a political system on morality alone is just as wide of the mark as the realist who believes that altruism is an illusion and that all political action is based on self-seeking.<sup>71</sup>

Carr does not hold the view that human nature is transfixed, as Morgenthau does. Neither does he think that history is simply the eternal repetition of power struggles between the different units of an anarchical system.<sup>72</sup>

There are a few passages in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* which seem to betray a transhistorical perspective, for example Carr's mentioning of the *Pax Romana* and the *Pax Britannica* together<sup>73</sup> or his comparison of modern internationalism with Ancient Egyptian or Chinese universalism.<sup>74</sup> Generally, however, the book is bristling with a sense of change and of certain institutions and ideologies being rooted in very specific historical conditions. As mentioned, Carr reminds us that not only the state but any kind of territorial organization of power was absent during some phases of history and may also pass again in the future.<sup>75</sup>

In particular, Carr draws a contrast between the long 19th and the 20th century and interprets the

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70. Ibid., p.92.

71. Ibid., p.92.

72. Randall Germain, 'E.H. Carr and the Historical Mode of Thought', in Michael Cox (ed.), E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp.322-36, here pp.328-29.

73. Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, pp.76, 215.

74. Ibid., pp.78-79.

75. Ibid., pp.210-11.

`crisis' as resulting from the persistence of outdated institutions and dogmas. Let us start with liberal democracy. According to Carr, it is based `on a balance of forces peculiar to the economic development' of 19th century Western countries and failed to hold its own when after 1919 it was transplanted all over the world.<sup>76</sup> National governments and one-party systems have now increasingly taken its place.<sup>77</sup> `Mass production' of public opinion and its centralized control through state schooling and standardized mass media have taken over.<sup>78</sup>

Let us now look at the principle of national self-determination. Carr asserts that it only appeared compatible with a harmonious international order when the break-up of multiethnic empires and not, as after WWI, the drawing of borders between different nation-states was at stake.<sup>79</sup>

In the third place, Carr goes into some detail to show how the ideology of *laissez-faire* and the accompanying notion of a harmony of interests are based upon very specific economic and technological conditions. In principle, Carr claims that the *laissez-faire* ideology had already become obsolete at the very time when it was formulated by Adam Smith in 1776. It matched a pre-industrial society of small producers, not the industrial one with its large-scale production and proletarian workforce.

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76. Ibid., p.29.

77. Ibid., p.210.

78. Ibid., pp.121-22.

79. Ibid., pp.45-46.

However, the very factor that undermined *laissez-faire* in principle, i.e. industrialization, also gave it a new lease of life. By propelling economic expansion and growth, it enabled the problematic aspects of the doctrine to be covered up.<sup>80</sup>

The prosperous and harmonious 19th century global order was held together by British hegemony, which manifested itself in naval supremacy, London's management of the global finance and monetary system, predominance in trade and the spread of English as second language.<sup>81</sup> From the 1870s onward, this order started to pass with the rise of working-class consciousness and social legislation at the domestic level, and the emergence of protectionist-minded new industrial powers challenging British hegemony at the international level.<sup>82</sup>

Around 1900, the old order finally came crashing down as new territories for economic expansion were no longer available. Immigration restrictions and colonial rivalries followed, culminating in World War I, whose effects further stimulated economic competition between countries.<sup>83</sup> A new era dawned, in which the principles of economic autarky supplanted free trade.<sup>84</sup>

Carr at one stage writes of the 'abnormal, *laissez-faire* interlude of the nineteenth century.'<sup>85</sup> This could be interpreted as him seeing the post-WWI conditions as return to a transhistoric normalcy.

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80. Ibid., pp.44-45.

81. Ibid., pp.114-15, 118, 213-14.

82. Ibid., pp.46-49.

83. Ibid., pp.57-58.

84. Ibid., pp.112-14.

85. Ibid., p.107.



However, although Carr considers autarky as such as age-old he clearly differentiates between its versions under pre-modern and modern conditions. Under the former, autarky was simply the natural state. Under the latter, it is a contrived policy aiming to restrict the disruptive effects of global capitalism and to bolster national power.<sup>86</sup> Another indicator of the contrast between the 19th and 20th centuries is the relative decline of capital investments abroad and their increasing function of financing exports.<sup>87</sup>

In a sweeping overview, Carr envisions a historical period starting with the French Revolution and coming to a close at the time of his writing. This period is characterized by changing kinds of demand for equality: first between individuals, then between classes, and finally between nations.<sup>88</sup> In a subsequent publication, Carr further elaborates upon the triple decline of liberal democracy, national self-determination and *laisser-faire* economics, upon the accompanying moral crisis and upon the general inadequacy of 19th century institutions to the new times.<sup>89</sup>

Carr's dynamic, and not static, image of the historical process links up with his criticism of unreflectivist ideologies. The problem with them is not just that they are rooted in the self-interest of the powerful but that they may also lose contact with reality. Given Britain's predominant role in the

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86. Ibid., p.111.

87. Ibid., pp.115-17.

88. Ibid., pp.209-10.

89. Carr, Conditions, pp.14-125.

international economy during the 19th century, the doctrine of the harmony of interests, for all its flaws, was not completely implausible. Economic ruin for Britain would have affected the whole world negatively.<sup>90</sup> However, under the more competitive conditions of the 20th century, it no longer made sense to stick to that doctrine. The tragedy, for Carr, is that obsolete 19th century ideologies were, under US-American influence, reintroduced into the treatment of international affairs.<sup>91</sup>

For all his despise of easy assumptions of harmony, however, Carr was not oblivious to the possibility of progress, as his own schemes for a new international order demonstrate. He also, on other occasions, forcefully asserted his optimistic beliefs.<sup>92</sup>

Randall Germain has characterized Carr's approach as 'historical mode of thought' rather than commonplace realism. For him, it

resides in the series of claims it makes regarding the construction of social experience and the form of knowledge appropriate for comprehending the social world. In Carr's case, these claims center on how we are to understand the possibility of human agency (including the role of ideals and guiding myths in the making of history) and the nature of institutional change in the modern world.<sup>93</sup>

The writer, who finds on the basis of this historical mode of thought affinities between Carr and among others, Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi, asserts:

Considered on these grounds, Carr's singular contribution to the discipline of International Relations lies not so much in his celebrated articulation of political realism...

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90. Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, p.76.

91. Ibid., pp.28-29, 49-50.

92. Jones, E.H. Carr, pp.18-19.

93. Germain, 'E.H. Carr', pp.322-3.

Rather, his principal intellectual achievement in International Relations, and his enduring legacy, remains the way he infuses a concern with the historicity of knowledge into how both power and change are understood within the history of international politics.<sup>94</sup>

For Carr, there is considerable room for human agency, although an agency constrained by the social context within which one has to act. Furthermore, humans do not act so much as individuals but, rather, as members of an institutionalized group. Of particular importance in providing motivation for action are certain myths, of which the doctrine of the harmony of interests is just one example.<sup>95</sup>

#### **Carr the Critical Realist, With Emphasis on the Critical**

‘There is certainly room for readers to develop quite divergent readings of Carr’s realism.’ says Charles Jones.<sup>96</sup> The recent interest in Carr and the ‘First Debate’ is not limited to the liberal questioning. There is also a substantial re-evaluation of Carr from the post-positivist direction. There seem to be two major conclusions that have resulted from these re-evaluations.

One conclusion, which is still largely based upon the mainstream understanding of realism and idealism, is that Carr was not a realist but a ‘utopian realist’. To these revisionist writers, Carr even in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, this most realistic of his works, is still to some degree a ‘utopian realist’. His position

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94. Ibid., p.323.

95. Ibid., pp.329-31.

96. Jones, E.H. Carr, p.105.

is riven with more ambiguities than a simplistic realism would warrant. Emphasis is made upon how Carr perceived careful change possible,<sup>97</sup> how he puts his hope upon the long-term empowerment of previously excluded groups into democracy,<sup>98</sup> and how he envisaged the boundaries of political communities and their potential expansion, leaving nationalism behind.<sup>99</sup> Others draw parallels, but also find contrasts, between Carr and the English School.<sup>100</sup>

The second interpretation is more far-reaching: Carr was one of the earliest thinkers in IR who laid the groundwork for post-positivism.<sup>101</sup> As realism has increasingly come under meta-theoretical fire in the last two decades, one major response of the writers sympathetic to this tradition, but simultaneously aware of the seriousness of the post-positivist challenge, has been an intensifying recourse to the 'classics' of realism. The main idea is that the historicist, pragmatic tradition of realism outlined by this pedigree stands in stark contrast to the shallow, 'scientific' and dogmatic articulation of realist precepts by most of the postwar realists, reaching a culmination with neorealism. Therefore, realism should

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97. Ken Booth, 'Security and Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice', in International Affairs 67 (1991), pp.527-45.

98. Howe, 'Utopian Realism'.

99. Andrew Linklater, 'The Transformation of Political Community: E.H. Carr, Critical Theory and International Relations', in Review of International Studies 23 (1997), pp.321-38. Linklater, however, chooses to sail under the flag of critical theory rather than utopian realism.

100. Dunne, Inventing, pp.34-38.

101. Charles Jones, 'Carr, Mannheim and a Post-Positivist Science of International Relations', in Political Studies 45 (1997), 2, pp.232-46.

shed the assumption of being able to provide the basis for a 'science of International Relations', and taking the intrinsically non-positivist implications of the classical pedigree on board, should turn the weapon of the post-positivists back on themselves.<sup>102</sup>

In the enterprise of expelling positivism from realism, the torch is held by Carr:

Meta-theoretical coherence is achieved by concentrating on the social construction of knowledge and of the central importance language plays therein. What follows is the resurrection of Carr's scepticism and materialist theory of knowledge directed against Waltz.<sup>103</sup>

This interpretation has been criticized by Guzzini, for whom Carr should rather be

seen as belonging to this generation of classical scholars who, after the shock of the First and the Second World War, became historically conscious of, and theoretically active with regard to the problems before them, like Max Weber, Raymond Aron, Karl Polanyi and Istva'n Bibo'.<sup>104</sup>

Guzzini emphasizes that Carr's realism was simply a rhetorical strategy and adds:

And, indeed, what a Realism theory that would be, which does not recoil from optimism and which does not share a cyclical theory of history?<sup>105</sup>

Finally, Carr is also interpreted as approaching international issues in the same vein as the self-

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102. Barry Buzan, Charles Jones and Richard Little, The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993; Jack Donnelly, Realism and International Relations, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

103. Stefano Guzzini, Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: The Continuing Story of a Death Foretold, London and New York: Routledge, p.222.

104. Stefano Guzzini, 'The Different Worlds of Realism in International Relations', in Millennium 30 (2001), 1, pp.111-21, here p.121.

105. Ibid., p.120.

conscious proponent of critical realism, Robert Cox.<sup>106</sup> Locating Carr close to Cox, I argue, catches the compass of his work better than just an emphasis upon its sociology of knowledge, hermeneutic, or pragmatic/normative realist aspects. For Carr was at the same time a materialist, who saw the close connections between continuously changing domestic and global social forces, and the consequent forms of state/society complexes. His interest in states stems largely from this historicist approach, and not (at least not merely) from an attempt of achieving long-run British interests through the medium of a reified conception of state. All of these issues, as we will see below, overlap with Robert Cox's critical hermeneutical historical materialism.

According to Cox's own account, Carr was one of the major influences on his work.<sup>107</sup> Cox clearly distinguishes between the classical realism of Carr, and the postwar realism of scholars like Morgenthau, whose attempt to create an ahistorical science of International Relations found its culmination in the neorealism of Waltz. Unlike the reified statism of postwar IR scholars, in Carr's work historical totality was not reduced to isolated spheres and states were

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106. For this interpretation see particularly Richard Falk, 'The Critical Realist Tradition and the Demystification of Interstate Power: E.H. Carr, Hedley Bull and Robert W. Cox' in Stephen Gill and James H. Mittelman (eds.), Innovation and Transformation in International Studies, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp.39-55.

107. Robert W. Cox, 'Influences and Commitments', in Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, Approaches to World Order, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp.19-41, here p.27.

seen as embedded in their specific sociological and historical context.<sup>108</sup>

Carr, according to Cox, was aware of the dynamic interactions between social forces, states and world orders. For example, he approvingly refers to Carr's account in a less-known work, *Nationalism and After*, of the global changes from the late 19th century onwards: Then, the incorporations of the working classes (social forces) as participants in the Western states accentuated the movements towards economic nationalism and imperialism (forms of state). This, in turn, caused a fragmentation of the world economy and engendered a more conflictual phase in international relations (structure of the world order).<sup>109</sup>

In the words of Cox:

There was no disposition in Carr to isolate levels of analysis. He saw the interrelatedness of industrialization, change in the forms of state, change in ideas, and change in world order. Carr brought an historical mode of thought to whatever he wrote about. He was equally alive to economic, social, cultural, and ideological matters. He studied individuals, especially those whose intellectual influence marked an era; but most of all, he brought all these elements to an understanding of structural change.<sup>110</sup>

Unlike postwar scholars like Morgenthau and Waltz who transformed realism into a form of problem-solving theory, Carr was able to stand back from the historical structure which constrained the particular

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108. Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States, and World Orders' (1981), in Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order*, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.85-123, here pp.91-92; Robert W. Cox, 'Multilateralism and World Order' (1992), in the same volume, pp.494-523, here pp.502-05.

109. Cox, 'Social Forces', pp.100-01.

110. Cox, 'Influences', p.27.

configurations of material capabilities, ideas and institutions of his time, `treating it as historically conditioned and thus susceptible to change.<sup>111</sup>

There is a parallel between Carr's conception of the worldview of *status quo* powers and Cox's conception of problem-solving theory. Like Cox's problem-solving neorealists of the postwar period, the liberal internationalist advocates of the (historically specific) national interests of *status quo* powers of the interwar era took the given order, and the power relations underpinning that order as given and fixed in time. Their attention therefore was mainly focused on the reestablishment of equilibrium, to create the prewar conditions which would sustain the anachronistic conditions of the *Pax Britannica*.

### Conclusion

On inspection, it turns out that the common conceptions of realism, idealism and of the `First Debate' are often grounded in a specific reading of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. The arguments that Carr advanced in the book have been largely caricatured and distorted. Furthermore, many of the polemical assertions that Carr made have been taken at face-value, without an account of the historical context in which the book was written and of Carr's political and normative stance and motivations. The result has been the ironing out of the complexities in the book.

Carr did not have just one conception of utopianism and realism. As Wilson has shown, these

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<sup>111</sup>. Cox, `Social Forces', p.91.



terms are far from clear in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. Furthermore, Carr stresses their dichotomous character but also claims that sound policies need to integrate them both. He bemoans that the utopians neglect power and conflict and, with a slight of hand, disposes of their reform schemes. However, then he himself conjures up utopian-looking projects holding out the prospect of a juster world. Utopianism and realism seem to be firmly embroiled in each other.

Despite the apparent confusion coming from Carr's less than rigorous and frequently polemical use of his terms, there is also an underlying, coherent sense in which he employs them. In this substantial sense, Carr's realism corresponds to a sociology of knowledge in the vein of Mannheim while his target, utopianism, is the unconscious hypocrisy of those in power.

The latter are unable to admit the embeddedness within their own interests of the seemingly universal standards propagated by them. It is this unreflectivism, not as such the attempt to create a better world, which is subject to Carr's powerful critique. Carr's upholding the possibility of progress and his unmasking of ideological fancy footwork are based upon his deep sense of the historical process and of collective human agency.

In this respect, there exist many overlaps with critical IR theory in its Marxist variant. Drawing on not immediately apparent aspects of Carr's work, they point to his ability to overcome the dichotomy of realism and idealism. Carr's sophisticated perception of the agency-structure, power-knowledge dynamics and his consequent ability to see the structures of the

international system not as immutable clearly run against the grain of orthodox realism. His ability to acknowledge the constraints arising from the distribution of international power, but simultaneously to see the possibilities of transformation within the existing system develops out of his dialectical conception of realism and idealism. These aspects of his work point to the existence of the dimension of an immanent critique in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*.

This immanent critique can also be directed at the work of Lionel Curtis, to whom we now turn.

## Chapter Three

### Lionel Curtis: A Benevolent Imperialist

#### Oxford as an Influence on Curtis

Curtis was born in 1872 to a clergyman's family. After attending preparatory school at Malvern, he was educated at Haileybury, a public school which had originally been the East India Company College, and whose graduates filled the ranks of the Army or the Colonial Service. In 1891, Curtis went to New College, Oxford, to study Mods and Greats.<sup>1</sup>

Oxford always had a special relationship with the Empire. This was not only due to the immense number of Oxonians who subsequently filled the posts where the major decisions affecting the Empire were made. Being the breeding ground of many philosophers and historians with an imperialist vocation, Oxford was a most appropriate context for providing the elements of the specific kind of imperialism that Curtis would later subscribe to.

Two watershed events that took place in the nineteenth century paved the way to the patriotic imperialism that held the end of the century Oxford in its grip. The first, the Oxford Movement of the 1830s and 1840s, with its ruthless piety, alienated the unorthodox. The second event was the publication of Darwin's *Descent of Man*, followed by Winwoode Reade's

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1. Deborah Lavin, From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, pp.3-14.

*The Martyrdom of Man*. These two events caused a precipitous decline in religious conviction, which was to be superseded by the concept of imperialism as an inspiring moral force.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Oxford was teeming with renowned imperialist scholars, and those that ascribed a greater role to the state: Ruskin scorned the parliamentary system and the Manchester School, advocating a positive role for the state in providing education, housing and pensions for the unprivileged in a hierarchically ordered society. Jowett focused on the vocation of imperialist administration as good government. T.H.Green elevated the state to a moral good, and similarly advocated social reform. His pupil Arnold Toynbee articulated the attack on the social effects of the Industrial Revolution further. Thomas Arnold, Professor of Modern History, considered the social progress of states as comparable to that of individuals. Focussing on the juxtaposition of the Teutonic (of which the British were considered to be a part) to the other races, William Stubbs, Edward Freeman, and J.R. Green articulated 'Oxford's ideas about race'. In the years when Curtis was at Oxford, Froude was preaching imperial federation there.

This intellectual atmosphere, which had reached a zenith at the time of his studenthood, irrevocably stamped Curtis's lifelong ideas. Furthermore, it was not only the classicists and historians of Oxford that

had this impact, it was also some of his predecessors like Alfred Milner, an alumni of Balliol College, and the High Commissioner in South Africa under which Curtis worked. In combining the philosophy of the state of T.H. Green with a passionate imperialism, Milner already represented in flesh what was later to become a substantial component of the imperialistic philosophy of Curtis.<sup>2</sup>

### **First Steps Into Career**

After graduating from Oxford in 1894, Curtis became the Manager of Haileybury Guild, a society of volunteers from his former public school doing social work at London's East End. He organized Salvation Army-like activities for working-class boys and got involved in housing schemes.

Afterwards, while training to become a barrister, he worked as personal secretary, first for Leonard Courtney, a Liberal Unionist MP, and then for the Vice-Chairman of the London County Council. These spells into national and municipal politics prepared him for his later activities.<sup>3</sup>

In 1899, the Boer War broke out and was at first going badly for Britain. Amid the patriotic uproar the bad war news created, Curtis enlisted as volunteer and did war service as cyclist messenger. In June 1900, he was discharged and went back to England. On coming back

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<sup>2</sup>. Richard Symonds, Oxford and Empire: The Last Lost Cause?, London: Macmillan, 1986.

<sup>3</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, pp.14-21.

to South Africa in October, Curtis applied to work with Lord Milner, Governor of the Cape and British High Commissioner in South Africa. Initially he was appointed as assistant to the Imperial Secretary, but was then transferred to Johannesburg.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Colonial Official**

Curtis's spell of office consisted of his tenures as Town Clerk of Johannesburg (1901-03) and as Assistant Colonial Secretary of the Transvaal (1903-06). In both functions, he left his mark on the municipal organization of South Africa.

In Johannesburg, Curtis saw to the establishment of a Town Council, first nominated, then elected, and thus laid the foundations for municipal self-government. Compared to the previous Boer regime in Transvaal, the competences of the municipality were enhanced. Nevertheless, Curtis saw himself as guider rather than executor of the Councillers and undertook several measures to regulate business and social affairs. His most important - and most controversial - action was the enlargement of the town's boundaries to include the mining areas of the Rand and thus making the mining companies liable for paying municipal taxes. Not surprisingly, this was unpopular among the companies but Curtis mollified them by taxing only the value of land and buildings and not the mineral treasures underground.

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<sup>4</sup>. Ibid., pp. 21-39.

As Assistant Colonial Secretary, Curtis set up a completely new municipal system throughout the Transvaal. Again, it was built upon the principle of local government. He also dealt with poor relief, public health and 'Asiatic affairs'. After a row with the other Assistant Secretary over their division of competences, Curtis quit the Transvaal service.<sup>5</sup>

But his real work in South Africa had just begun. This has to be seen in the context of his participation in a group of young men devoted to Milner. They were collectively dubbed his 'Kindergarten'.

#### **Milner and his 'Kindergarten'**

Although the Round Table as a formal movement emerged in 1910, its origins go back to the group called Milner's Kindergarten, the coterie of young civil servants, most of them from the Oxford colleges of All Souls and New College. They were brought together by Milner in the aftermath of the Boer War to assist him in the reconstruction of the country in the specific way he envisaged. It was at the Kindergarten that Curtis developed his early ideas on federal forms of unification.

One of the most controversial figures of the 'new imperialism', Milner was a man whose genuine attachment to the Empire and non-partisan attitude were coupled, on a more negative note, with the traits of an anti-democrat who despised party politics and parliamentary

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<sup>5</sup>. Ibid., pp.40-62.

democracy passionately.<sup>6</sup> For him, the British Empire was the symbol and epitome of British racial supremacy. His influence over Chamberlain had been an immensely important factor on British government's decision to declare war against the Boers.<sup>7</sup> Since his appointment in 1897, Milner's aim had been to create a single dominion out of the colonies and republics of South Africa, an aim for the realization of which he had seen the war as a necessary sacrifice.

The end of the Boer War had brought the two republics, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, under British control, but with no intention of coming under a single dominion with the others. The practical difficulties of unification forced Milner to set his hopes on a federal system with wide-ranging autonomy for the member states: Federalism would not only solve the existing administrative problems but also be the surest way of holding the four South African colonies under the British flag.<sup>8</sup>

It was also not a coincidence that Milner had needed the assistance of a whole team of young recruits from Britain. One aim, indeed, was to break the

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6. Hans-Christoph Schröder, Imperialismus und Anti-Demokratisches Denken: Alfred Milner's Kritik am politischen System Englands, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1978.

7. Eric Stokes, 'Milnerism', in Historical Journal 5 (1962), 1, pp.47-60.

8. Walter Nimocks, Milner's Young Men: The 'Kindergarten' in Edwardian Imperial Affairs, Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 1968, pp.17-53.



influence of what Milner interpreted as the corrupt and inefficient Boer bureaucracy.<sup>9</sup>

Milner's plans for the union of South Africa had one crucial prerequisite: There had to be an influx of the British population into the Transvaal and Orange River Colony before responsible government was restored to them. Otherwise, with the persisting dominance of the Boers in terms of population, the premature granting of self-government to these dominions, and the unification of South Africa under their terms, were bound to produce the diametrically opposite result: A white-ruled South Africa under Boer dominance, and the concomitant severing of the link to Britain. The expected immigration from Britain before self-government would be restored was therefore vital in Milner's vision of the future of South Africa.

Milner hoped that the economic overspill from the Transvaal mines, coupled with an agricultural boom, would draw settlers from the white dominions and Britain. Subsequent events caused the scheme to collapse: The mines could not be restored in time, and an agricultural drought savaged the land. The labour shortage in the mines had to be met by the import of Chinese labourers, whose ruthless treatment caused a public outcry in Britain, ushering in the Liberal victory of 1906. To Milner, the election result

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<sup>9</sup>. Kenneth Ingham, 'Philip Kerr and the Unification of South Africa', in John Turner (ed.), The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty, London: The Historians' Press, 1988, pp.20-32, here p.22.

signalled the ultimate death-knell of his hopes. In fact, by the time he was leaving office in April 1905, embittered by the catastrophic failure of his policies, he had already lost all hope of seeing the South African unification in his lifetime.

As Milner and his supporters had fearfully anticipated, the policies of the Liberal government changed the existing balances swiftly in favour of Boer dominance: the establishment of responsible government in the two Boer-dominated former republics. The political livelihood among the Boers became unstoppable after the restoration of self-government. The unity and single-mindedness of the Boers contrasted sharply with the hopeless divisions among the English-speaking community of the Transvaal. They were divided between the Milnerite 'Progressives' and the 'Responsibles', who were sympathetic to the Boers and against a South Africa governed from Whitehall.

Before the Transvaal election of February 1907 the Kindergarten threw their lot decidedly behind the Progressives.<sup>10</sup> They were also deeply involved in the producing of a memorandum, as we will see below. Kindergarten's role in South Africa did not come to an end with the crushing defeat that the Progressives suffered at the elections. Curtis and Richard Feetham enjoyed new positions as appointed members of the Legislative Council, the upper house of the Transvaal legislature. The Council enabled the Crown Colony

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10. Nimocks, Milner's Young Men, p.66.

Government, despite the latter's official life coming to an end with the elections, to preserve at least a pocket of influence for a further five years. Two other members of the Kindergarten, Robert Brand and Philip Kerr continued in their positions as the secretary and assistant secretary respectively of the Intercolonial Council.

The year following the Transvaal elections saw a series of further electoral results which in a very short span of time changed the balances in South Africa radically to the favour of the Boers. The Boer electoral victory of November 1907 in the Orange River Colony was followed by the victory in the February 1908 Cape Colony elections of the South Africa Party, which was favourable to the Boers and hostile to the Milnerites. Dr Jameson's trusted Progressive government was thus replaced by a government headed by an implacable foe of the Milnerites, Merriman.

Despite these catastrophic reverses, the members of the Kindergarten were able to preserve their optimism. They had started to approach the Milnerian aim, a South Africa faithful to the empire, from a different angle. Milner's dreams could yet be achieved. Furthermore, they could result from the immediate unification of the four South African colonies, despite the fact that the Boers were now in a strong position. Whatever the starting point, they argued, the political stability and economic expansion that would come in the wake of unification would produce large-scale

immigration, which could only be British.<sup>11</sup> In this belief they were backed by the new High Commissioner, Lord Selborne.

### **The Selborne Memorandum**

It took some time for the Kindergarten to follow their pragmatic instincts and switch to this new tactic. The occasion triggering this shift in approach was probably their reading of the biography of Alexander Hamilton by Frederick Scott Oliver.<sup>12</sup> A staunch advocate of imperial federation himself, Oliver's book was a plea to derive the lessons of the American unification as a model for more efficient government of the British Empire.

In formulating this new policy, the Kindergarten initially ran against opposition from both the Boer and the British sides. True, the unification of South Africa had been a part of British policy for the last fifty years.<sup>13</sup> But just like Milner, many British leaders believed that unification would be safe only in the aftermath of a sufficient influx of British settlers to overbalance the Afrikaners.

The Boers were also principally favourable to unification, since they could see the golden opportunities it offered. However, they similarly thought that early unification, before Boer political

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11. Ibid., p.75.

12. Ibid., pp.77-8. See also Lavin, From Empire, pp.68, 71.

13. Lavin, From Empire, pp.64-65.

power had been completely established, would not be wise.<sup>14</sup>

At the time that the Kindergarten had started to come out in support of immediate unification, i.e. by the middle of 1906, the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony had not yet gained responsible government and the subsequent elections ensuring Boer political power had not yet taken place. Furthermore, in the Cape Colony Dr Jameson was still the Prime Minister.

By the summer of 1906, Kindergarten was already deeply involved in clandestine meetings about immediate unification, whose first concrete outcome would be a memorandum on the issue. The memorandum would include, first, a review of the existing relations between the colonies and the underlining of the dissatisfactory aspects of division, and then a plea for unification with a draft constitution. Curtis was chosen as the editor of the memorandum, which would be the joint work of the group. Through Milner, Kindergarten secured the financial assistance of the Rhodes Trust for the project.<sup>15</sup>

Despite some delay due to the frictions between Selborne and the Kindergarten on the style of the material and the extent of Colonial Office involvement, the memorandum was completed by the end of 1906, before the Transvaal election took place.<sup>16</sup> Anticipating that

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14. Nimocks, Milner's Young Men , p.76.

15. Ibid., pp.78-80.

16. On the issue of the disagreements between Selborne and the Kindergarten, see Nimocks, Milner's Young Men, pp.83-84, and Lavin, From Empire, pp.73-76.

the result of the elections would make the achievement of their aims more difficult, in the final part of the memorandum the Kindergarten pressed for urgent consideration of unification.

The next question was how to circulate the memorandum with the weight of Selborne behind it but without simultaneously stimulating suspicions of Downing Street interference among the South Africans. This was achieved through an ingenious scheme which enlisted the support of Dr Jameson. In November 1906 Curtis visited the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, to convince him that the best way to fend off suspicions of outside interference was to make it look as if Selborne had been asked by Jameson to produce such a document. Jameson was enthusiastic in his support, and in January 1907 the memorandum was distributed to each of the colonial governments under Selborne's name, with the assurance that it had in no way been the result of an interference by the imperial government.

The same method was followed in the process of getting the memorandum published. This time, to gain yet more trust from the Boer side, the support of an Afrikaner leader was sought. The Kindergarten found this support in F.C. Malan, the editor of the influential *Ons Land*. In contrast to most of the Afrikaner leaders who at the time of the memorandum's publication objected to immediate unification, Malan had been supporting the latter before the Kindergarten

approached him. He was convinced by the Kindergarten first to lend his support to the memorandum.

It was finally published in July 1907.

Although the memorandum was received as favorably as it could under the present circumstances, the Kindergarten was determined not to rest on its laurels. They believed that the most effective means of harnessing support for immediate unification would be the founding of an organisation which would propogate their vision.<sup>17</sup> It was planned to launch the idea of a country-wide and cross-party organization working for unification under Kindergarten leadership during a dinner party given by Abe Bailey. One of the biggest financial supporters of the Kindergarten, Abe Bailey was also one of the richest people in South Africa and a staunch supporter of the Progressives. In contrast, the Transvaal Boer leaders Botha and Smuts yet refused to cooperate. With its plan for an organization because of the obstacles shelved, the Kindergarten instead focused on the collection of information which could be resorted to when the unification process took off.<sup>18</sup>

The fruit of the information thus gathered was borne by the publication in 1908 of two books. One of

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17. Nimocks, Milner's Young Men, p.91.

18. There was, in fact, an attempt to turn the Fortnightly Club, an organization previously created by the Kindergarten in October 1906, into the Transvaal committee of the proposed new organization. This was however not repeated in the other colonies. Furthermore, the Transvaal committee thus established in April 1907 had a much more restricted function than what was originally foreseen: As mentioned, it focused only on the collection of information to assist Curtis. See Nimocks, Milner's Young Men, pp.95-97.

them, edited by B.K. Long, contained the constitutions of several federal states and their comparison. The other one, which was much more important for the articulation of the unification philosophy of the Kindergarten, was a two-volume book by Curtis: *The Government of South Africa*. Despite the disclaimer at the beginning of the first volume that the aim was only to provoke discussion, the book was a plea that South Africa had no choice but to unite. Furthermore, there was a marked confusion in the book about the form of unification that was proposed, with the later sections leaning not to federal but to unitary government. According to Nimocks, 'Curtis's failure to restrict himself to the collection and digestion of facts' was not only because 'Curtis was a propagandist in spite of himself'. There was a further reason lurking behind the discrepancies in the book.<sup>19</sup>

By early 1908, the Boer leaders had made a complete shift in their approach to the issue of unification. By this time political power in the Transvaal, Cape Colony and Orange River Colony had passed safely to the hands of the Boers or to those friendly to them. In the changed political climate, the Boer leaders started not only to support unification, but to press for a unitary rather than a federal government. Not only was it cheaper, but it was an effective means of forestalling potential inter-state

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<sup>19</sup>. Ibid., p.99.



frictions that would create a sphere of permanent intervention from London.<sup>20</sup>

### **Towards South African Union**

Following the change of heart of the Boer leaders, the unification process in South Africa finally and swiftly took off. Shortly after the publication of *The Government of South Africa*, the leaders of the four colonial states had begun in earnest to draw up a constitution. It was not, therefore, the pivotal role of the Kindergarten alone, as they with their high self-regard were often inclined to claim, but also the initiative of the Transvaal politicians Botha and Smuts that had been determining in the process of unification. It was in fact only when they started to swim with the tide of Boer political leaders that the Kindergarten could see their vision of 'closer union' in South Africa taking flesh, and themselves having any impact on the process.

Despite this, the Kindergarten *did* have important influence on the flow of the events: Before *The Government of South Africa* was published, the statistical material which had formed the backbone of the study had been made available to Smuts, with whom the Kindergarten had started to develop a much more positive relationship from early 1908.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Robert Brand was one of the architects of the draft

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<sup>20</sup>. Ibid., pp.101-02.

<sup>21</sup>. Ibid., pp.104-05.

constitution which was produced before the National Convention on unification began.

For the Kindergarten, the specific provisions of the constitution for the representation of the constituencies were vital for ensuring that their changed method of arriving at the Milnerian aim was successful. These had to be arranged such that the expected arrival of the British migrants could have a 'cleansing effect at the ballot box.'<sup>22</sup> Although the respective provisions of the draft constitution presented by the Transvaal delegation to the Convention were subsequently rejected by the colonial legislatures, the constitution in its final shape included electoral provisions the leaders of the British community felt able to accept. The Kindergarten had had a significant impact upon this outcome.<sup>23</sup>

Once the National Convention had agreed upon a joint constitution, the constitution had to be accepted by the legislatures of all four colonies. Finally the time had come for the Kindergarten to pour their proselytizing energies into the running of an organization whose aim it would be to convince the white population of South Africa that not just union, but the constitution with its specific provisions, were for their benefit.

For this purpose, the Kindergarten in May 1908 launched the campaign of 'the Closer Union Societies'.

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22. Ibid., p.106.

23. Ibid., pp.105-06.

The method of conviction would be simple: The emphasis on a national identity composed of both Boer and British elements. Curtis was at the vanguard of this attempt at the instrumental use of a non-Party and supra-racial South African identity (which, of course, did not include the native component) to create an organically united South Africa and a South African nationalism.<sup>24</sup>

The movement quickly grew to substantial proportions, and the first issue of the accompanying journal to the movement, the *State*, appeared in December 1908 under the editorship of Kerr.<sup>25</sup> The *State* was an interesting medium reflecting both the philosophy of the Kindergarten and the means they employed to get this philosophy accepted. The method they had previously used in the *Selborne Memorandum* was once more resorted to with full vigour: They portrayed themselves as South African patriots, and made a deliberate attempt at presenting unification as a 'South African' issue rather than a means to secure British dominance. They were not after protecting the interests of Britain; they were neutral and benevolent observers of the problems of South Africa.

The *State* went to great lengths to hammer this point home: A unique South African culture as the joint product of the two white races was emphasized, rather than separate British or Afrikaner cultures. They underlined the existence of a 'Cape heritage', to whose

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24. Lavin, *From Empire*, pp.86, 90-95, 97, 100.

25. Ingham, 'Philip Kerr', pp.27-30.

formation the Cape Dutch had made as big a contribution as the British. They used any source they could lay their hands on:

Bibliography, archivism, conservation, architecture, and history were regarded as a means to the invention of a typically `South African` heritage that would unite into one `nation` the two dominant white `races` ...<sup>26</sup>

All matters of potential national relevance were canvassed: The `native problem`, railway union, and defense were presented as intractable issues which could only be resolved through unification; and the questions of a national language, anthem, capital, and all other symbolic expressions of national unity were explored. With its vehement emphasis on a common culture and common problems as the binding elements towards the formation of a union between previously separate states, the State was `the testing-ground for the subsequent activities of Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr`.<sup>27</sup>

In the meantime, the Kindergarten had become increasingly more staunchly in favour of immediate unification. The autocratic and self-enclosed tendencies they had harboured all along, reached their zenith:

The Kindergarten, endorsing the local demand for the return of self-government, soon felt themselves at the centre of events and ceased to regard the Colonial Office in London as the fountain-head of policy. Milner's objective of a united Dominion of South Africa

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26. Peter Merrington, `The State and the „Invention of Heritage“ in Edwardian South Africa`, in Andrea Bosco and Alex May (eds.), The Round Table: The Empire/Commonwealth and British Foreign Policy, London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1997, pp.127-33, here p.128. See also Nimocks, Milner's Young Men, p.115.

27. Merrington, `State`, p.133.

under the British flag on the pattern of Canada or Australia assumed the dimension of a faith as they began to formulate orthodoxies they fancied were their own: that to rule an empire by party government at Westminster was 'a farce'; that federation of the South African colonies was the only means possible to solve the railway crisis and other local problems while at the same time furthering the imperial ideal.<sup>28</sup>

In the end, the efforts of the Kindergarten bore fruit and the South African union came into being in 1910.

### **The Foundation of the Round Table**

After what they assumed was a successful venture of uniting South Africa and their own omnipotent role in the process, the Kindergarten turned their attention to the whole Empire. They had by now started to feel that by employing the same tactics they had used in South Africa, they could act as an influential pressure and study group to help accomplish the daunting task of merging 'imperial' aspects of the sovereignties of Britain and the Dominions. In this way, the Empire would be transformed into an organic union. The group they formed would be called 'The Round Table'. Curtis was from the onset the most relentlessly energetic of the Kindergarten in pursuing the idea.

To offset any potential suspicion that this was an agenda dictated from London, it was crucial for the founders of the Round Table that their movement should be an Empire-wide one. To spread the gospel in the Dominions, numerous branches of the group would have to be founded in each of them. The central coordinating

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<sup>28</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, p.64.

office, the Moot, would be located in London, and there a journal, also called *The Round Table*, would be edited and published, with contributions from both the Moot and Dominion writers.<sup>29</sup> With his boundless energy and dedication, Curtis gladly took the role of 'an itinerant delegate' who 'would spread the word and maintain personal connections with the Dominions.'<sup>30</sup>

There were considerable differences of opinion between Curtis and the rest of the Round Table, which flared up as early as the 1910s. Initially, the controversies revolved around the timing of the movement towards imperial federation. The contrast, for example, between Kerr, who expected the maturing of the requisite conditions to take as long as fifty years, and Curtis, who expected a much shorter transition period, was striking.<sup>31</sup> The fervour of Curtis, who was determined to override all restrictions of time and plausibility, was also at odds with the more down-to-earth approach of Leo Amery. According to Amery, it was a vain hope to dream of imperial federation before there was that certain 'practical federal spirit in the air.'<sup>32</sup> There were further differences between Curtis and the others regarding the main target-country to which the Round Table should direct its attention. Curtis insisted on capturing the opinion-forming elite in the Dominions, since, in his opinion, it was these

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<sup>29</sup>. Ibid., p.108.

<sup>30</sup>. Ibid., p.108.

<sup>31</sup>. Alexander May, *The Round Table, 1910 - 1966*, Ph. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1995, p.46.

<sup>32</sup>. Ibid., p.47.

countries which would have to make the necessary sacrifices, while the others thought the attention should focus on Britain. By 1913-14, however, 'the Moot had effectively agreed on the necessity for domestic propaganda.'<sup>33</sup>

More seriously, while it was agreed that the ultimate aim of the movement was 'imperial government', 'federation' or 'organic/closer union' for the British Empire, there was no unanimity over what these rather vague terms were exactly supposed to mean and how the ultimate goal was to be reached. On the one hand, there were those, principally Curtis, who propagated federation from an all-or-nothing perspective. On the other hand, there were the advocates of a closer cooperation between Great Britain and the Dominions, stopping short of immediate federation. Unqualified Dominion support during the First World War strengthened the hand of these more careful Round Tablers.<sup>34</sup>

Such disagreements within the ranks of the group contributed to its secretive methods, which, combined with their genuine elitism created distrust against them within Britain as well as in the Dominions, as we shall see below. This image of the group is also

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33. Ibid., p.47.

34. Ibid., pp.3, 44, 46-47, 98-99, 108-09, 117-19, 165-71.

sustained by some writers, for instance Nimocks and Kendle.<sup>35</sup>

The writer of a thesis on the Round Table, Alexander May confirms the Nimocks-Kendle view that the Round Table was not only an - at times irritatingly - secretive organisation, but that it was 'patently elitist'.<sup>36</sup> However, he holds a more sanguine view regarding the legitimacy of this secretiveness and elitism. The notorious elusiveness of the Round Table, asserts May, was more often a testimony to the divided councils within the group, than the result of a conscious strategy. Further, '(a) degree of disingenuousness was thought necessary to allow „the gradual formation of right opinion.“'<sup>37</sup>

May challenges the existing opinion that the 'target-audience' of the Round Table was 'a handful of well-placed politicians'. In fact, the Round Table aimed to reach out to the public, despite defining the 'public' in a rather restricted way. The ideas propagated by the Round Table were addressed in the first instance to the selected few, the intellectuals, media representatives, businessmen and lawyers, 'the „opinion-makers“ who could force politicians to act'.<sup>38</sup>

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35. John Kendle, Federal Britain: A History, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, pp.79-104; Nimocks, Milner's Young Men, pp.138-219.

36. May, Round Table, p.51.

37. Ibid., p.48.

38. Ibid., pp.50-1.



### **The Conflicts With the Dominion Groups**

In 1909, Curtis visited Canada for the first time with the aim of establishing Canadian branches of the Round Table. During the visit, he was faced with the disillusioning reality of the Canadians' less than enthusiastic response to schemes of imperial federation. Contrary to the stipulations of the programme of the Round Table, whose lynchpin was the urgent necessity of positive action to keep the unity of the empire, the general feeling in Canada seemed to be for the cooperation of autonomous countries which would be held together by 'common sentiment and common interest', an attitude which was blatantly unpalatable to Curtis.<sup>39</sup>

Lurking behind this cool reception of the idea of imperial union was the distrust against the secretive methods of the Round Tablers, a feeling which, to varying degrees, was to emerge in the other Dominions and even in Britain. Despite the Round Tablers' claim in not being interested in politics, the record of the Canadian Round Tablers in being fairly deeply immersed in politics did not help to dispel the thickening aura of suspicion.<sup>40</sup>

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39. James Eayrs, 'The Round Table Movement in Canada, 1909-1920', in Canadian Historical Review 38 (1957), 1, pp.1-20, here p.1.

40. Ibid. p.7.

### **The Green Memorandum**

In 1910, Curtis penned the first memorandum advocating the organic union of the Empire. *The Green Memorandum* was a tract outlining the ideas Curtis was to repeat, albeit with modifications that did not touch the essential substance, for the rest of his life.

Curtis set out the case for the organic union, or federation, of the British Empire, by dramatically depicting the dangers that the whole of it faced. The awareness that the British Empire was no longer in a position of unchallenged hegemony stamped the whole narrative. Urgent constitutional changes were required to protect the Empire.

The memorandum was addressed to the opinion-makers and politicians of all the five Dominions and of Britain. The focus, however, was on Canada. With detailed chapters about the geography, population, economic and political prospects of Canada and on Canada's relations with the United States, the ground for the core thesis was prepared: If Canada wanted to preserve its separate identity and not to be swallowed economically by its southern neighbour, it had to support the organic unity of the British Empire. Without that, the independence of not just Canada, but of all the Dominions, would at best be only 'nominal'. Furthermore, the organic unity of the Empire was the only means of preserving the 'spirit of liberty', represented by Britain and the Dominions, from threatening states. Britain's own relatively meagre

resources were not sufficient to curb the appetite of aggressive powers from attacking the Dominions and Britain herself.

Curtis saw the popular argument in Canada, that the cooperation of nations united by one flag, one crown, and one citizenship would ensure the unity and security of the Empire, as a policy of drift which would ensure the breakdown of it. The security of the Empire could not be based upon separate sovereignties but only be attained by the pooling of these sovereignties, in other words, through organic union.

What, however, was precisely meant by the 'organic unity' of the Empire and the pooling of the sovereignties? According to Curtis these lofty concepts were in fact to be applied to a very specific realm: Namely defence and foreign affairs. What Curtis envisaged was an imperial parliament responsible for defence, foreign affairs and colonies. It would have the power to tax according to the financial capacity of each country. It was not only the Dominions that had to make changes for the highest common interest of all of them, that of preserving their national security and independence. Britain itself was equally taken to task: She would have to accept that it would be one unit among many.<sup>41</sup>

The *Green Memorandum* had been intended as a manifesto for the Round Table movement. Instead of support and praise, however, its publication stimulated

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<sup>41</sup>. Lionel Curtis, *The Green Memorandum*, London and Bungay: Richard Clay and Sons, 1910.

wide-spread criticism within the ranks of both the Moot and the Dominion groups. For members of the Moot like Brand, Craik, and even Kerr, the proposed imperial federation did not stretch far enough: Why, for example, could not the power to tax on matters other than defence, or to determine tariffs also be centralised? For the Dominion groups, on the other hand, the codified nature of the proposed changes were anathema.<sup>42</sup>

#### **The Round Table and Ireland in the Context of `Home Rule All Round`**

Nowhere is the duplicity of the motives of the Round Table, and the rifts and twists of opinion this caused within its ranks more apparent than in the protracted discussions surrounding the Irish problem. For the solution that the Round Table advocated for this problem, i.e. `home rule all round`, was directed not only at solving the Irish problem as such, but also, at a greater measure, conceived as a means of solving the imperial problem. The whole discussion was consequently bedevilled by profound differences of opinion as to what it meant in terms of the organic union of the Empire, preventing the Round Table from taking a very clear stance.

`Home rule all round`, i.e. the federalization of the United Kingdom, was a concept closely intertwined with the discussion about home rule for Ireland. Home rule for Ireland had been endorsed in a speech of Gladstone made in 1886. Joseph Chamberlain,

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<sup>42</sup>. May, Round Table, pp.84-88.

representing the radical wing of the Liberal Party, opposed this on the grounds that it would cause the separation of Ireland from Great Britain. Instead, he came up with the proposal for 'home rule all round', which to him 'offered a way meeting the Irish demands whilst maintaining a superior imperial Parliament at Westminster'.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, Chamberlain aimed to radicalise Liberal politics, for the local governments that he had in mind would have extended powers. The whole structure would be bolstered by

secularisation and free education, the establishment of popular local governments and sweeping land reform which taxed the propertied classes and thus underpinned financially these democratic reforms.<sup>44</sup>

Despite its decentralising appearance, it 'inevitably implied a centralisation of politics, equating a strong central government with efficient politics'.<sup>45</sup>

Simultaneously, Chamberlain wanted to 'dish the Whigs and challenge Gladstone's position as party leader'.<sup>46</sup>

There were two principal motives, beyond that of solving the Irish problem, which caused the Round Table to have a keen interest on the issue.<sup>47</sup> The first one was the conviction that federalism in the United Kingdom had to precede the attempts at federalising the Empire. One could tie the issue of Irish home rule to

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43. Elfie Rembold, 'Home Rule All Round': Experiments in Regionalising Great Britain, 1886 - 1914', in Ulrike Jordan and Wolfram Kaiser (eds.), Political Reform in Britain, 1886-1996: Themes, Ideas, Policies, Bochum: Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1997, pp.169-192, here p.170.

44. Ibid., p.171.

45. Ibid., p.171.

46. Ibid., p.171.

47. J.E. Kendle, 'The Round Table Movement and "Home Rule All Round"', in Historical Journal 11 (1968), 2, pp.332-53, here pp. 334-35.

the full-blown federalisation of the United Kingdom and see it as the first step towards the creation of separate domestic parliaments for England, Wales, and Scotland:

To separate `Irish` from `British` affairs could be construed as a start in the process of separating `British` from `imperial` affairs; there would be created various levels of parliamentary government, and at each level the politicians and administrators concerned would become experts in, and address themselves seriously to, the particular problems with which they had to deal.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, this would be just the sort of constitutional shift they craved for to create an imperial parliament unburdened by local issues.

The erstwhile separation of powers in Britain was all the more important, because it would give the signal to the Dominions that in joining an imperial federation, they would be joining it on equal terms with the United Kingdom. It was also expected to create a better impression in countries like Canada and Australia which were already federations.

The second reason that was frequently upheld for justifying the federalisation of Britain was to prevent the congestion at Westminster as such, so that the parliament could deal with the domestic problems of Britain on a more efficient footing.

Curtis was convinced of the necessity of `home rule all round`, but the issue did not go undisputed by the group. The early controversy surrounded the amount of the possible financial burden to Ireland. The

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<sup>48</sup>. D.G. Boyce and J.O. Stubbs, `F.S. Oliver, Lord Selborne and Federalism`, in Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 5 (1976), 1, pp.53-81, here p.63.

ensuing discussion revealed that the whole group, in varying degrees, had started to be more cautious, even pessimistic, about the possible impact of 'home rule all round' for imperial unity. The hard-liners in the movement, which happened to be the Unionists, Amery among them, had no qualms about it: 'Home rule all round' was a step towards the dissolution of the empire rather than its opposite. In this they were backed by Milner. Then there were the ones, Kerr and Curtis among them, who took a cautious middle-line.

Kerr was willing to use the concept of federation, simultaneously with the home rule issue, for the instrumental purpose of acquainting people with the idea. He was, however, unequivocal that the foundation of an imperial parliament could come about only through the joint acting of the Dominions and Britain together: The premature separation of powers within Britain could not serve the purpose. On the other hand, there was no reason why there had to be different parliaments dealing with local issues within Britain: The desired separation between the imperial parliament and its domestic counterpart could as well be achieved through the creation of a single domestic parliament for Britain.

Curtis was also losing his earlier conviction about the necessity of federalising Britain before bringing the empire together in a federal union. It was in this mood that the first phase of thinking about the issue by the Round Table was completed.

When, in September 1910, the Constitutional Conference formed in the previous May appeared in danger of breaking up over the question of home rule for Ireland, the group was once more faced with the necessity of advocating federalism in the United Kingdom. This time it was not advanced as a theoretical endeavor related to the complicated question of imperial union, but as a practical and urgent solution to the looming crisis in the country. It was at this point that F.S. Oliver started to make more consistent efforts to help communicate the necessity of creating an Irish parliament, together with a single parliament for the rest of the United Kingdom, and a joint imperial parliament for both Ireland and Britain. The leader of the Conservative Party, Balfour, however saw home rule as the first step towards the dissolution of the United Kingdom. When the Conference finally broke down, a possible federalist solution as a means of resolving the immediate difficulties was shelved as a public discussion.

The Round Table, however, continued brooding over the matter. Unsurprisingly, Amery and Milner were firmly against the granting of home rule to Ireland. In this they were opposed by members like Brand and Oliver. However, it was the introduction of the Government of Ireland Bill in 1912 by the Liberal government that provoked the biggest rift in the movement up to that point and beyond, leaving a



permanent gap between hard-line members like Amery and Milner, and the rest.

The Government of Ireland Bill proposed the creation of a parliament for Ireland, which would deal with the domestic issues, including the tariff policy. Foreign affairs of Ireland, defence, taxes, foreign trade and similar matters were left to the British government.

The Bill provoked the criticism of both hard-line members and those who were most open-minded about the federalisation of Britain. The former, particularly, Amery, saw it as going too far, while the latter, led by Oliver, and including Curtis, saw it as not going far enough in certain respects. The resulting split brought Milner and the federalists within the movement into opposite camps, particularly as Milner's position started to harden in 1914.

To make matters yet more complicated, there was no full agreement among those who supported the federalisation of the United Kingdom. Oliver, for example, while not questioning the principle of home rule for Ireland, was appalled by the content of the Bill: He was bitter that the right to control the tariffs had been left to Ireland, and that the Bill did not see Ulster as a separate unit within Ireland. The imperial federation that Oliver conceived could only be built upon strictly defined roles for different levels

of Parliament: Trade was a topic which should be left to the imperial parliament.<sup>49</sup>

This shift of opinion among the core members of the group, including Curtis, testifies to the importance of the preservation of the empire for the Round Tablers. When worried about the effects of 'home rule all round' for the unity of the empire, the Round Tablers have proved to be much less enthusiastic about the scheme, than when more practical considerations had forced them to adopt it.

The Ireland crisis reached its apogee in 1913-14 when Ulster refused to accept any autonomous all-Irish authority imposed by the Liberal government. With the Conservatives openly supporting the rebellious Protestants, the United Kingdom seemed to be on the brink of a civil war. In this situation, Curtis and his fellow Round Tablers Brand and Grigg tried to offer the 'home rule all round' scheme as a compromise solution. While they won Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, as a temporary convert and got at least a sympathetic hearing from some of the Conservative camp, their mediatory effort failed due to the rejection by Prime Minister Asquith.<sup>50</sup>

The outbreak of World War I shelved the issue of Ireland, if only for the time being. While the Round Table's attempt to act as a mediator between government and opposition failed, it nevertheless is an indication

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49. Ibid., pp.63-4.

50. Lavin, From Empire, pp.121-24.

of their influence that they got serious attention from the top politicians.

### ***The Commonwealth of Nations***

The First World War was 'a watershed for the Round Table movement'.<sup>51</sup> Their attention claimed by different war-time duties, the members of the group were unable to retain the unity of purpose that had brought them together. With his staunch belief in the urgency and feasibility of an 'organic union', Curtis became more and more of a maverick. This was also the stage when for Curtis the discussion started to revolve around broader schemes of a world federation vanguarded by a federation among Britain, the white Dominions and the United States.

In terms of publications, the next stage was the publication of a - compared to the *Green Memorandum* - even more wide-ranging work: *The Commonwealth of Nations*. As with its predecessor, this was also strictly speaking the fruit of a joint effort by members of the Round Table, although the one who actually synthesized their opinions, edited and wrote the work was Curtis.

In 1913, Curtis visited Canada to prepare the groundwork for the impending book and to get feedback. However, as usual his visit turned into an effort to proselytize his own rather dogmatic views. In an address at the University of Toronto, for example,

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<sup>51</sup>. H.V. Hodson , 'The Round Table 1910-1981', in Round Table 71 (1981), 284, pp.308-33, here pp.316-17.

after illustrating the infeasibility of the present state of the relations with the Dominions, he first 'objectively' reviewed the possible ways in which their relations with Britain could develop.

Gleaned from his contacts in the Dominions, the alternatives that Curtis sketched were the following: The continuation of the existing status-quo; full independence; the development of a much looser connection to Britain based upon voluntary cooperation and symbolized by a common crown and common flag whereby the Dominions would control their own foreign policies and Britain would become one partner among many; and finally what was most dear to Curtis's heart:

That there should be created for the United Kingdom a government which exercises powers which are the exact equivalent to those exercised by the governments already established in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Newfoundland. Such a domestic government would have no more responsibility in the control of foreign policy or of the few but all-important functions which are inseparable from the conduct of foreign affairs than is now enjoyed by the Dominion governments.<sup>52</sup>

The crucial catch was of course the following:

These few but all-important functions would then have to be entrusted to a general government over which a Canadian, an Australian, New Zealander, South African or Newfoundlander would exercise exactly the same control as an Englishman, Scotchman, Welshman or Irishman.<sup>53</sup>

In 1916, Curtis published the result of his research as *The Commonwealth of Nations*. An abbreviated version containing his specific constitutional proposals appeared in the same year as *The Problem of*

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52. Lionel Curtis, *The Round Table Movement, Its Past and Its Future: Address Delivered in the Senate House of the University to the 'Round Table' Groups at Toronto, Nov.18, 1913*, unpublished manuscript, p.18.

53. *Ibid.*, p.18.

the Commonwealth.<sup>54</sup> The books extended the argument of the *Green Memorandum*, with the term 'Empire' being replaced by the more flashy 'Commonwealth'. Curtis repeated his argument that present institutional arrangements within the British Empire/Commonwealth were insufficient and that only an organic union, namely a Commonwealth government responsible to a directly-elected Commonwealth parliament, would do. He bolstered this argument by delving into history and contrasting the 'Asiatic' spirit of autocracy with the European concept of commonwealth, built upon the rule of law and mutual responsibility among the citizens. He added a new twist by at least indicating that the torch of commonwealth did not need to be monopolized by the whites but that other races could also be uplifted.<sup>55</sup>

Not everyone in the Round Table group liked this added emphasis. Critics like Brand, Malcolm and also the vaunted Milner deemed the concept of commonwealth as too abstract and irrelevant to the principal aims of the group and objected to the indications of a future equality between the races.<sup>56</sup>

Critical comments also came from Australia, one of the Dominions where the Round Table recruitment drive had registered its greatest successes. The Melbourne Round Table group was formed by Curtis in 1910 during his visit to the Dominion. The general distrust which the methods of the Round Table evoked in all settings

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54. Lavin, *From Empire*, p.128.

55. L. Curtis, *The Commonwealth of Nations: A Inquiry into the Nature of Citizenship in the British Empire, and into the Mutual Relations of the Several Dependencies Thereof*, London: Macmillan, 1916.

56. May, *The Round Table*, pp.93-95.

quickly became apparent in Australia, where the elite composition of the members, most of whom had close ties to Britain, created an 'image of imperial conspiracy'.<sup>57</sup> Further, having a genuine attachment to the Empire, but equally patriotic, the members of the Australian Round Table found it difficult to resolve the occasionally appearing conflicts of interest between Britain and Australia. In the wake of a series of incidents which strengthened their feeling of not being adequately consulted and taken seriously, by 1918 the Australian Round Table had already gone as far as dropping the aim of a full-blown imperial federation from its agenda. They still wanted advances in the imperial union, but these advances had to come about through the free choice of independent nations, and not dictated by Britain.

### **Indian 'Diarchy'**

Already from 1912 onwards, there was some discussion within the London Round Table whether and how India should be represented within the imperial parliament. This was another issue dividing the group. Some members openly upheld blatantly racist views, others - Curtis among them - were at least willing to consider some Indian representatives on a non-voting basis. When the impact of World War I made it obvious how much Indian nationalism had been boosted and that

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<sup>57</sup>. Leonie Foster, 'The Australian Round Table, the Moot and Australian Nationalism', in Round Table 72 (1983), 288, pp.473-83, here p.474.

no return to pre-war conditions in India were feasible, the Moot started to rethink their assertions.<sup>58</sup>

On invitation of the Governor of the United Provinces, Curtis went to India on a fact-finding mission in 1916 and stayed until 1918. Coming with already pre-conceived ideas, he managed to alienate both the British administrators of the Indian Civil Service as well as many sensitive Indian nationalists. The former, autocrats at heart, disliked Curtis's call for greater self-government. The latter were hurt when Curtis, in a leaked-out letter to Kerr, seemed to compare Indians with Africans. However, he mended fences with the moderate nationalists and also influenced the opinion of India Secretary Montagu.

Instead of a separation between a British-controlled executive and a powerless (and thus obstructive) legislative elected by the Indians, Curtis proposed a system dubbed (on loose parallels with the Ancient Roman Empire) 'dyarchy'. According to Curtis's blueprint, responsibilities at the provincial level had to be divided. Issues like vernacular education, health services, public works and control of municipalities were to come under legislatures elected by Indian voters. Other issues as well as control over the Government of India were, for the time being, to remain in the hands of the British officials. As time went on, more and more issues could be transferred to the Indian-controlled bodies until, at the end, the central government would also become responsible to an elected

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58. Lavin, From Empire, pp.115-16; May, Round Table, pp.189-92.

body. India would then take its place as a fully self-governing part of the Empire/Commonwealth.

These ideas largely shaped the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919, although the latter in some ways diverged from Curtis's original plan. The separation of powers between the two provincial bodies was diluted, thus strengthening the hand of the governors. On the other hand, a greater representative element at the central government level than allowed by Curtis was implemented. All in all, Curtis's foray into colonial politics had been a success and was duly recognized as such by the bulk of the London Round Table.<sup>59</sup>

A historian dealing with the Indian reforms of 1919 and, later, of 1935 has tried to identify their ultimate spiritual roots, which also throw light upon the general work of Curtis. According to Studdert-Kennedy,

dyarchy and federalism were only two of the weapons available from the imperialist armoury to politicians across the party spectrum.<sup>60</sup>

Those Britons willing to grant India more autonomy were not completely governed by pragmatism and expediency.<sup>61</sup> They were inspired, at least as strongly as the urge to preserve British material interests, by common models of historical change, national development and political evolution.<sup>62</sup>

As the determining historical constituents of this

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<sup>59</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, pp.135-57; May, The Round Table, pp.192-200.

<sup>60</sup>. Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, British Christians, Indian Nationalists and the Raj, Delhi etc.: Oxford University Press, 1991, p.8.

<sup>61</sup>. Ibid., p.12.

<sup>62</sup>. Ibid., p.12.



model, Studdert-Kennedy lists

a sophisticated common sense, which had been articulated and developed by figures such as Maine, Stubbs, and Burke,<sup>63</sup>

the lingering influence of Victorian versions of social Darwinism, `German historicism associated with Ranke`,<sup>64</sup> in particular `British Hegelianism sustained at Oxford from before the turn of the century by the pervasive influence of T.H. Green.`<sup>65</sup> It was the combination of these influences that was taught by the history schools of Oxford and Cambridge.

It was self-evident to these products of the Edwardian upper classes that any political development worthy of the name must be the natural outgrowth of organic continuities, of the rational consolidation over time of encapsulating social structures, evolving steadily towards a state of unitary nationhood, even perhaps, in the fullness of time, beyond it. The proof ... they saw in one society, the British one, a paradigm of rational organic evolution. A unique combination of geographical and historical circumstances had allowed the British to evolve a socially coherent community which was capable of resolving its difficulties and of acting through the mechanisms of political balance, that is, through the established and competing political parties. The parties were nested firmly into the institutional structure of the law and administration, themselves the product of experience or purposive history.<sup>66</sup>

In this view, British trusteeship in India, which would continue until Indian society could be deemed to have reached the requisite level of maturity, was a most natural, providentially determined phenomenon. Indeed, it was an obligation. As we will see, such notions also influenced Curtis's concept of the Commonwealth.

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63. Ibid., p.12.

64. Ibid., p.12

65. Ibid., p.30.

66. Ibid., p.13.

### **Attending the Peace Conference**

Having in effect included India in his vision of a federal Commonwealth, Curtis after his return to Britain in 1918 further broadened his vision. Zimmern introduced Curtis into the League of Free Nations Association, of which H.G. Wells was the most prominent member, and which later became the League of Nations Union. It was in this context that Curtis came to embrace the idea that war could only be permanently abolished if there would be a world government.

For the time being, however, Anglo-American cooperation was the call of the day. *The Round Table* tried to enlist new American members, and Curtis wrote an article calling for the US to take over the concept of trusteeship and to accept tropical mandates. Largely on account of this article, Under-Secretary of State Cecil invited Curtis to join the League of Nations Section at the Paris conference. However, his attempts to influence the American delegation on the mandates issue did not bear lasting fruit.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Foundation of the Royal Institute of International Affairs**

The establishment of an institute of international affairs, which would constitute a forum for discussion, for the meeting of public officials, lawyers and others interested in international affairs, and which would enlighten public opinion, was an idea that was realized

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<sup>67</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, pp.158-63.

during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. It was initiated by the members of the British and American delegations, and originally it was conceived of as an institution which would have branches in both countries.

Curtis's role in the founding of the institute and in defending it against its Foreign Office opponents at the initial stages cannot be overemphasized. In particular, his gifts as a fund-raiser were very important. It was largely due to him (and to one of his Canadian businessmen friends, who footed the bill) that the RIIA acquired Chatham House.<sup>68</sup>

#### **The 1921 Anglo-Irish Settlement**

More than ten years after he had given up his seat in the Transvaal Legislature, Curtis briefly held office once again: first as Secretary to the British Delegation for the Irish Treaty (1921-22), then as Adviser in the Irish Branch of the Colonial Office (1922-24).

After the end of the war, the crisis in Ireland once more reached the boiling point. By now, Irish nationalism had radicalized that much that home rule was no longer acceptable. For Curtis, Dominion status was a possible way to reconcile Irish demands for independence with British wishes not to let the Green Island completely go. On the strength of an article at *The Round Table* and due to the influence of his fellow Round Tabler Griggs, who was then Lloyd George's

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<sup>68</sup>. Ibid., pp.165-76; M.L. Dockrill, 'The Foreign Office and the Proposed Institute of International Affairs, 1919', International Affairs 56 (1980), pp.665-72.

private secretary, Curtis's view gained ground in the Cabinet and he was himself invited to join the negotiations with the Irish leaders.

This occasion necessitated Curtis to define what Dominion status meant, now that the relationship of Britain with Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand was undergoing changes. As he explained to the Irish delegation, all Dominions were on an equal basis to Britain and sovereign in both internal and external affairs. Nevertheless, each component member of the Commonwealth was to abstain from actions negatively affecting the unity of the whole.

Curtis successfully convinced the Cabinet not to insist upon obligatory free trade for the new Irish entity but to hold on to the concept of common citizenship. He also granted that the Irish Free State would become a member of the League of Nations and appoint its own diplomatic representatives. Ultimately, he was willing to accept *de facto* independence for the Free State as long as three elements remained between Britain and Ireland: common defence at war, a common allegiance to the King symbolized by an oath, and common citizenship.

The treaty of 1921 met these conditions. It contained the establishment of a provisional government by the members of the Southern Ireland Parliament. The provisional government would be the Irish body responsible for signing the treaty and administering Southern Ireland for one year after the signing of the treaty, or until the Free State was established. The Irish parliamentarians had to give an oath to the British Crown by virtue of common citizenship. Britain

would, for the time being, maintain naval bases.

Northern Ireland was free to decide whether it would join the Free State. If it opted out, a boundary commission was to define the new borders.

After the signing of the treaty, Curtis developed a good working relationship with Cosgrave, the President of the Irish parliament. This helped to make the treaty accepted in both Westminster and Dublin. However, the boundary commission never worked efficiently due to Ulster's rejection to appoint its commissioner.<sup>69</sup>

Arguably, the episode constitutes one of the high points of Curtis's political career. One writer goes as far as asserting that he was not only responsible for the articulation of the British position, but in fact so vital a role did Lionel Curtis play in the formulation of British policies connected with this incident that the story is nearly as much about him as the incident itself.<sup>70</sup>

The importance of Curtis's influential position stems from the way Curtis interpreted the implications of the treaty from a staunchly imperialist perspective. The most crucial leg of Curtis's interpretation was that the foundation of the Irish Free State should not in any way be channeled by the Irish into the breaking of the union with Britain. Dominion precedent had to be firmly observed in all stages leading to the implementation of the treaty. For the British delegation, the most important element was to ensure

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<sup>69</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, pp.180-226.

<sup>70</sup>. John McColgan, 'Implementing the 1921 Treaty: Lionel Curtis and the Constitutional Procedure', in Irish Historical Studies 20 (1977), pp.312-33, here p.312.

that the provisional government, which was dependent for its sources of finance as well as for its legitimacy on the British parliament, would be seen from the onset as the rightful Irish government.<sup>71</sup>

### **The Round Table in the Inter-War Period**

An organic union of the Empire/Commonwealth remained the long-term goal of the Moot, and there were times when this goal was expressively stressed. However, for the present the need for closer cooperation, stopping short of federation, between Britain and the Dominions was pointed out. In this respect, the group moved away from the ideas dear to Curtis. Even he, for a time, accepted that his federation projects could not be immediately realized.<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, his Commonwealth principles now found greater favour. Together with the other catchword, trusteeship, it gave the Round Tablers intellectual ammunition for the preservation of the colonial empire against European and American internationalists, colonial nationalists, and the Communists. Simultaneously, it allowed the Moot to pose as opponents of 'old-style' (i.e. explicitly and not implicitly racist) imperialism.<sup>73</sup>

There were also new tendencies which Curtis shared with the rest of the group. Particularly, after WWI the Moot laid greater stress on British-American

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71. Ibid., pp.312-33.

72. May, Round Table, pp.214-20, 249-51, 305-09, 324-31, 356-58.

73. Ibid., pp.257-67.

cooperation, although there was some disappointment about the US's relapse into isolationism.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, there was also some interest in Continental Europe.

After all, Round Table was not the only British pressure group which claimed a stake in informing public opinion and influencing policy formation over the reconstruction of the international system after the First World War. Another major pressure group, with a score of influential people, especially academics, in its ranks, was centered around the journal 'The New Europe'. Despite the journal's short life-span (1917 to 1920), the New Europe movement was a major source of influence not only for the policy-makers but for the Round Table itself.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the discrepancy in the political bases of the two movements (the Round Table largely consisting of Unionists, the New Europeans of Liberals), and despite their original agendas being very different from each other, as a result of their joint influence on post-World War I policy, the aims of the two groups gradually started to cross-cut each other. This happened through two channels. First, an informal discussion group was formed at the beginning of the war. Tracing the connections between the two movements, Goldstein asserts:

This informal group illustrates not only the complex intertwining of those concerned with foreign policy,

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74. Ibid., pp.220, 324-31.

75. Erik Goldstein, 'The Round Table and the New Europe', in Round Table 87 (1998), 346, pp.177-89.

but also the personal relationships between those often identified with differing public views.<sup>76</sup>

Second, some of the most vocal members belonging to both groups got governmental posts during the Lloyd George coalition, which came to power in 1916. The Prime Minister's Private Secretariat, nicknamed 'the garden suburb', was an important channel through which especially the Round Table could exert influence upon policy-making.<sup>77</sup> Philip Kerr became the Private Secretary to Lloyd George from 1917 to 1921.

There were, of course, other motivations, which meant that the agendas of the two movements were intermingled at a deeper level.

During and after WWI the Round Table showed a marked interest not just in imperial reform but in the postwar European order. The removal of sources of volatility of Europe would enhance British security, a prime interest of the Moot. This led the Round Table to develop an interest in the various solutions being proposed for the European settlement.<sup>78</sup>

Similarly, the New Europeans were by no means interested only in a European vocation for Britain.

While the New Europe supporters were promoting a new approach to the continent for Britain, they likewise had to be aware of the other concerns of the British Empire. A focus on Europe by no means meant a distancing from the Empire.<sup>79</sup>

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76. Ibid., p.180.

77. Ibid., pp.180-81. See also J.A. Turner, 'The Formation of Lloyd George's "Garden Suburb": "Fabian-Like Milnerite Penetration"?' in Historical Journal 20 (1977), 1, pp.165-84. The mainstream acceptance of the influence of the Round Table within the influential circles via Kerr, however, has been challenged by John Turner and Michael Dockrill, 'Philip Kerr at 10 Downing Street, 1916 - 1921', in John Turner (ed.), The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty, London: The Historians' Press, 1988, pp.33-61, here pp.34-36. They assert that by the time Kerr had joined the Garden Suburb, his interests had already started to move away from those of the mainstream of the Round Table, i.e. the 'native question' instead of imperial federation.

78. Goldstein, 'Round Table', p.178.

79. Ibid., p.181



Indeed, they went as far as thinking of proposing the formation of a new 'Imperial Democratic Party', and the British Prime Minister to be someone from the Commonwealth.<sup>80</sup>

### **Africa and China**

After the war, Curtis was no longer exclusively tied to the Round Table. Besides his role in the RIIA, he also from 1921 onwards held a Fellowship at All Souls College at Oxford and got involved with a movement to reform the university during the early 1930s.<sup>81</sup>

A lot of his attention during the interwar period went to African affairs. First, there was the rather ill-fated affair of the 'Commonwealth Trust', involving the transfer of confiscated enemy property to a British-run philanthropic venture. When the government considered restitution to its previous owners, Curtis as member of the Trust's board fell out with the Colonial Office.

Second, and more constructively, Curtis got stirred by reports about forced labour in Kenya and started a campaign for better treatment of the 'natives'. This campaign contributed to the 1923 Devonshire declaration, in which the Colonial Office, if only rhetorically, stressed the primacy of 'native rights' for Britain's African possessions.

Third, it was Curtis who recruited Lord Hailey to compile the *African Survey* for the RIIA. Published in

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<sup>80</sup>. Ibid., p.181.

<sup>81</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, pp.255, 261-63.

1938, the *Survey* was the first systematic and comparative study on African affairs, leaving its mark on that generation of Africanists.

Fourth, when Curtis once more visited South Africa in 1935, he was enthusiastic over the fusion of parties of the pro-British Smuts and of the Boer nationalist Hertzog. Under the impact of this enthusiasm, he publicly demanded the transfer of the British protectorates of Swaziland, Basutoland and Bechuanaland to South Africa. With this campaign, he brought the Colonial Secretary and most British Africanists up in arms against him.<sup>82</sup>

With indefatigable energy, Curtis between 1927 and 1932 also showed a strong interest in China. The background was the partial re-unification of the civil war-ridden country by the nationalist KMT under Chiang Kai-shek. British-Chinese relations got tense when China asked for the abolition of the International Settlement in Shanghai, a territorial enclave in which British interests were strongly represented. In typical Curtis fashion, he went - with already preconceived ideas - for a fact-finding mission to Shanghai in 1929-30, where he was lionized by the international business community but also by the prominent Chinese.

Curtis's good advice was for the British Foreign Office to take a more decisive policy in supporting the KMT government but, at the same time, to resist the latter's claim on the International Settlement. His Chinese phase ended with the publication of *The Capital Question of China* in 1932. The title reflected his

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<sup>82</sup>. Ibid., pp.227-39.

conviction that Shanghai and thus China, if suitably reformed, held the key for world peace.<sup>83</sup>

### ***Civitas Dei***

Originally, Curtis's Oxford fellowship was to enable him to complete an additional volume of *The Commonwealth of Nations*. By the mid-1920s, however, his perspective had widened considerably into the direction of a different book. Called *Civitas Dei*, it was finally published in three volumes between 1934 and 1937. What was new in comparison to *The Commonwealth of Nations* was the explicit - albeit idiosyncratic - Christian message. The title was deliberately chosen to challenge Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast to Augustine, who sharply differentiated between worldly and heavenly affairs, Curtis held that God's kingdom could already be achieved here on Earth. The principle of commonwealth, understood as the mutual devotion of people to each other was the key for it. From this mutual devotion sprang responsible self-government based upon reason and conscience. Curtis claimed that the commonwealth principle had been invented by the Ancient Greeks and been given universal appliance by the message of Christ, whom Curtis portrayed as a social reformer rather than a supranatural being.

He hammered these issues home by an extended overview of human history from Antiquity to the very present, and then extended his argument to the future.

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<sup>83</sup>. Ibid., pp.239-52.

<sup>84</sup>. Ibid., pp.259-61, 339.

Claiming that world peace was not to be the ultimate aim but rather the means toward the real aim, i.e. the growth of human devotion to each other, Curtis held that this means could not be achieved as long as the world was divided into several states. He thus ensued a world-wide commonwealth.<sup>85</sup>

Curtis had thus completed his mental travel, begun during WWI, from imperial federation to world government. Even though most reviews tended to be critical, *Civitas Dei* enjoyed wide acclaim. Particularly to the younger generation it offered a majestic vision during difficult times. Indeed, the Mussolini and Franco governments took it serious enough to prevent translations into Italian and Spanish.<sup>86</sup>

#### **Under the Shadow of War**

As a whole, the Round Tablers in the second half of the 1930s tended at first towards a policy of appeasement towards the rising power of Nazi Germany. However, and in contrast to the Chamberlain government, they turned towards a more confrontational stance as the decade went on.<sup>87</sup>

Curtis had a similarly ambivalent position. On the one hand, he from 1936 onwards favoured rearmament and unilateral British guarantees for Western Europe against any attack. During the Rhineland crisis, he criticized his friend Kerr (by now Lord Lothian) for making a pro-appeasement speech in the House of Lords.

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85. Lionel Curtis, *Civitas Dei: The Commonwealth of God*, London: Macmillan, 1938.

86. Lavin, *From Empire*, pp.268-70, 272-73,

87. May, *Round Table*, pp.343-56.

On the other hand, as member of an All Souls study-group on foreign relations in 1937-38, Curtis rejected Foreign Office plans for Britain to play off Germany against the Soviet Union or, alternatively, to enter into an anti-German alliance with Paris and Moscow. Curtis's hope was that an internal reorganization of Czechoslovakia on the Swiss model would meet the needs of the German minority there and thus take the sting out of Germany's claims.<sup>88</sup>

In 1938, Curtis attended the Commonwealth Relations Conference in Melbourne. However, this conference turned out to be a big disappointment for him since most of the Dominion delegates proved to be unconcerned over specific developments in Europe, particularly the Czech crisis. There was no support for his well-worn plan for a closer imperial union. From his perspective, the only positive aspect was his new friendship with Ernest Bevin, then a union leader, who appeared to be open for a closer coming-together of the Commonwealth.

Curtis met another potential ally when he returned to Britain via the United States. There, he met Clarence Streit, who had just published a widely-acclaimed book called *Union Now* in which he called for an immediate union encompassing the remaining democracies, including the US. Enthusiastically, Curtis established close contacts with Streit and drummed up

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<sup>88</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, pp.275-76, 278-81.

support in Britain.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, he became involved in another federal movement.

### **The Federal Union**

Federal Union was a pressure group which was founded in July 1938 as an informal movement by Derek Rawnsley, Charles Kimber and Patrick Ransome, three men steeped in the experience of the First World War and the draw towards the second. Its main purpose was to advocate a federation of the European democracies, to which Italy and Germany could join later. The aim was to prevent future European wars. To this end, it was most important to influence the public opinion in Italy and Germany. As a transition from the previous ideas of imperial federation to those about a European federation the Federal Union occupies a very interesting place.

The foundation of the Federal Union provided Curtis with a new forum to channel his energies of fund-raising and drafting programmes of action. Together with Wickham Steed and Barbara Wootton he formed a panel of advisers to the group. Apart from formulating a statement of objectives for the Union, together with Kerr, who was by then Lord Lothian, this advisory panel wrote to many influential people of the

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<sup>89</sup>. Ibid., pp.281-84.

time, advocating the cause of federalism as a means to overcome the problems caused by national sovereignty.<sup>90</sup>

By 1940, however, Curtis had irrevocably fallen out with the group, in particular with Kimber. His efforts to affiliate the Federal Union to the Round Table had backfired. The Federal Union emphasized the European federation much more than the Atlantic federation which Curtis defended.<sup>91</sup>

The roots of the split go back to the foundation of the organisation. The foundation of the Federal Union had coincided chronologically with the publication of Clarence Streit's book, *Union Now*. Curtis and Lothian tried hard to turn the Federal Union into a vehicle of the ideas propagated by Streit.<sup>92</sup> A compromise was reached at the end between the 'Hamiltonian' members of the group like Lothian and Curtis, and those advocating a European federation. This compromise however, while accounting for the flourishing popular success of the Federal Union at the beginning, gradually caused the weakening of the whole movement.

After the fall of France, (there was) a very severe clash of ideas, (at the end of which) the younger generation came out on top. The price of internal battle was, however, a fall in the number of local groups and membership and a much more limited influence in the political debate on the aims of the war.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>. John Pinder and John C. de V. Roberts, Federal Union: The Pioneers: A History of the Federal Union, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990. p.11.

<sup>91</sup>. Andrea Bosco, 'National Sovereignty and Peace: Lord Lothian's Federalist Thought' in John Turner (ed.), The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty, London: The Historians' Press, 1988, pp.108-23, here pp.120-21.

<sup>92</sup>. Andrea Bosco, 'Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union Movement', in Journal of Contemporary History 23 (1988), pp.465-502.

<sup>93</sup>. Ibid., p. 487.

Thinking retrospectively over the fate of the Federal Union, Kimber does not restrain his disapproval of the methods used by the 'Hamiltonians', in particular by Curtis, to pull the movement into the direction they wanted. '(T)o us', declares Kimber, 'Europe held the key to war and peace and we were thinking only of European democracies.'<sup>94</sup> Before he and his friends could develop their own idea of a European federation, however, they were 'overtaken by the wide publicity which Clarence Streit's *Union Now* obtained.'<sup>95</sup> The draws of people who were pulled towards the Federal Union on the success wave of Streit's book, and who wanted an Anglo-American Union, according to Kimber, were the cause of the future weakness of the movement.

Too many different ideas vied for support among the movement's sympathizers. There were Kimber and his friends, who were the representatives of a generation frustrated and angry at the wasted opportunity to establish a viable peace after the First World War. There were former members of, or those influenced by the Union of Democratic Control, like Leonard Woolf; and the likes of Bertrand Russell and H.G. Wells, who were asking for world government without developing concrete ideas about how to reach this goal. And then of course there were the imperial federalists, led by Curtis and his Chatham House friends, as well as Lothian.<sup>96</sup> While they were

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<sup>94</sup>. Charles Kimber, 'Foreword' in Patrick Ransome (ed.), Towards the United States of Europe, London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1991, pp.1-11, here p.5.

<sup>95</sup>. Ibid., p.5.

<sup>96</sup>. Ibid., pp.6-7.



all agreed that national sovereignty must give way to federation, there were wide disagreements over the question of which nations (to) propose as members of the federation.<sup>97</sup>

This was the reason, asserts Kimber remorsefully, that although the Federal Union had caught the imagination of a substantial part of their generation, it could not fulfill its promise of becoming the successor of the League of Nations Union in terms of popularity.<sup>98</sup>

There was another reason why the popular movement for a European union, after enjoying an unprecedented success from 1939 to 1941, started to sink inexorably into relative oblivion in Britain. This was loss of confidence in Europe as the war took its course, as well as the growing dependency on the United States, in a context when the postwar world order visions of the United States government centered on a power-balance sustained by the 'big three'. These developments gradually pulled the popular sympathies in Britain away from a union with Europe and towards a union with the United States.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, after the summer of 1940, the emphasis gradually changed. While the central themes of war aims and the need for a new international order continued to

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97. Ibid., p.6.

98. Ibid., p.5. On the issue of the mixed groups harboured under the roof of the Federal Union also see Pinder and Roberts, Federal Union, pp.13-4.

99. Walter Lipgens, 'General Introduction' in Walter Lipgens (ed.), Documents on the History of European Integration, vol. 2, Plans for European Union in Great Britain and in Exile 1939-1945, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986, pp.1-20, here p.5. Also see in the same volume: Philip M.H. Bell and John Pinder, 'Introduction to Part One', pp.223-25 and John Pinder, 'Federal Union 1939-41', pp.26-124, here pp.26-34.

attract much intellectual labour, people ranging from Lionel Robbins to William Beveridge found their ideas, in tandem with the policies of the British government, going through a metamorphosis.

The upshot in the deteriorating relations between Curtis and the Federal Union came in 1944. As the result of a series of meetings between the representatives of the European resistance movements, as well as two representatives from the German underground movement, a manifesto was issued in Geneva in July 1944. The manifesto was advocating nothing less than a federal union between European peoples. The Federal Union warmly endorsed the manifesto. This was the last drop for Curtis. He protested vehemently that this was the death-knell of the British Commonwealth, and the harbinger of a Europe dominated by Germany.<sup>100</sup> It was not that Curtis did not support a possible European union, it was rather that he had his own ideas about the precise nature of this union.

## **World War II**

With the outbreak of the new war, a section of the RIIA came under the wings of the Foreign Office as the Foreign Press and Research Service (FPRS). Curtis was on this organization's council in 1939-41 and briefly took over the editorship of a number of papers on world order and peace aims. However, he was unable to distinguish between his official work and his personal

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<sup>100</sup>. Pinder and Roberts, Federal Union, pp.83-86.

crusade for world federalism. This naturally affected the style of his editorship, caused opposition and ended in his resignation.

In 1940, when France was just going down to defeat in the face of the German *blitzkrieg*, newly-elected Prime Minister Churchill made his spectacular offer of a British-French union. Although this proposal has to be seen as an emergency measure to make France stay in the war, Curtis jumped at it. He wrote to the Foreign Secretary proposing important modifications: The union offer should be extended to the Dominions and the smaller European democracies. However, with this proposal he met almost unanimous opposition at the Moot.

He was more successful in another function. From 1942 onwards, Curtis participated in a Balliol College scheme of a weekly course for British, Dominion and American servicemen on leave, among whom his lecturing and his propaganda for federalism were immensely popular. He also published a number of pamphlets, in which he stressed his idea of a federal union encompassing the Commonwealth and Western Europe, later to be joined by the USA. Such was the amount (and repetitiveness) of his wartime publications that many review editors, much to his chagrin, started to ignore them.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, pp.286-89, 293-97.

### **World War: Its Cause and Cure**

The arguments of the wartime tracts were compiled and extended in his next big book, *World War: Its Cause and Cure*, published in 1945.<sup>102</sup> The book opens with a mind-boggling and sweeping account of the history of the concept of commonwealth from Ancient Greece, via the British Empire to the American federation.

Curtis seemed on the face of it to provide just another war-time proposal for merging national sovereignties to overcome wars. He proclaims boldly at the beginning of the book:

The relations between sovereign states is a field of anarchy, where the will of the stronger must in the end prevail. And this must always be so until nations have ceased to be sovereign, and have brought themselves under the rule of one international state.<sup>103</sup>

As one goes through the book, however, it quickly becomes apparent that what he understood under 'international government' was, as usual, rather limited. Curtis proposed in effect only a union for defence. All other matters including the control of the distribution of taxation and therefore tariffs were to be left to national governments. He conceded that issues like trade, migration and shipping could not be entirely divorced from the concerns of an 'international government responsible for the common security'.<sup>104</sup> However, all the international government would be entitled to do would be to make suggestive

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102. Lionel Curtis, World War: Its Cause and Cure, 2nd ed., New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946.

103. Ibid., p.13.

104. Ibid., p.177.

proposals to the member governments, leaving the ultimate decisions on these matters to them.<sup>105</sup>

Ultimately, the federal union should consist of all the democracies. Curtis thought that the United States would not be willing to join the commonwealth from the beginning. However, as they saw the success of the world government, especially the example of Canada, they would also be drawn into it, which would seal the success of world peace once and for all.

#### **The Round Table in the 1940s**

Although the Round Table and its journal continued alive and well into an age very different from the one in which the Moot had been founded, Curtis became more and more the odd man out. The bulk of the older members now came to oppose his federalism and to opt for cooperation within a British Commonwealth consisting of sovereign states. The younger generation tried to mediate between Curtis and the others.<sup>106</sup> In 1945, a compromise was adopted which once more reasserted a vague 'union of nations in an organic Commonwealth' as the group's ultimate aim. However, this was merely seen as a possible ideal for the far future. Despite this attempt to build bridges between Curtis's unreconstructed federalism and the more pragmatic attitude of the rest, he became more and more isolated within the group.<sup>107</sup>

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105. Ibid., pp.177-78.

106. May, Round Table, pp.367-71.

107. Ibid., pp.375-81.

## United Europe

In an ironic twist of events Curtis, who had fallen out with Federal Union over his emphasis for Atlantic rather than European union, came to embrace the latter concept after the war. As usual, however, he tried to mould it into a specific way.

In the postwar atmosphere there was at any rate no shortage of schemes about how and why a union in Europe should come about. After the throwing of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the receptive public for the schemes of an international federation had also expanded considerably.

A varying degree of projects on European union were voiced, which partly competed, partly overlapped with the European vision of the Federal Union. On the one hand, there were ideas about Europe as a 'Third Force' between the United States and the Soviet Union. Ideally, this Europe had to include both western and eastern parts of the continent. Europe, stranded as it was between the two power blocs, held the promise to act as a mediator between the two, while standing forth as a haven of democracy - in particular, of social democracy.

The emergence and strength of the Third Force movement was contingent on the discrediting of the conservative elites due to their collaboration with the fascists. This was coupled with the widespread critique of capitalism as the cause of the war. As result of such factors, there was a general shift to the left in

the postwar European political scene. Not only did the Communists manage to increase their public support to unprecedented levels in countries like France, Italy and Czechoslovakia, but the Christian Democratic parties in France, Italy and Germany employed anti-capitalistic programmes.

The victory of the British Labour Party in July 1945 gave a new lease of hope to the proponents of the Third Force, particularly because in the election campaign the party had employed the idea of a 'United Socialist States of Europe', that would be uniquely placed to establish a constructive dialogue with the Soviet Union.

In December 1946 the various groups advocating the Third Force joined forces under a Europe-wide umbrella organization called Union Europeenne des Federalistes. However, the totally unsympathetic approach of the Soviet Union, which saw the Third Force movement as nothing more than a Westbloc targetting herself, was the undoing of the movement.

In the meanwhile, however, a specific interpretation of the Third Force movement was employed by the British Foreign Secretary under the Labour government, Ernest Bevin. Bevin's ideas of the Third Force were conditioned by his concern for the post-war power of Britain, in particular by his aim of anchoring Britain to the European market as a counter to the overweening power of the United States. To him, the Third Force meant essentially British dominance in a united Europe, which he saw as best represented as a third Monroe doctrine. The kern of this united Europe

had to be a military pact between Britain and France. The end result of long negotiations was the Dunkirch agreement of March 1947, which made no reference to the German issue.<sup>108</sup>

A different group wanted the integration of Western Europe as part of a western bloc including the United States. Eastern Europe, according to the proponents of this view like Konrad Adenauer or Winston Churchill, was already lost. What was required was not to act as a mediator between the two non-European blocs, but to contain the Soviet aggression under the protection of the United States. It was in this debate, engendered by the Zurich speech of Churchill of September 1946, that Curtis found a more suitable forum to channel his enthusiasm about the new world order.

His lifelong dreams finally seemed to come close to realization when Curtis was invited to join Churchill's newly-launched United Europe movement in 1946. Curtis from that point on started to vigorously propound a European federation, although he once more added his own emphasis. He was keen to recruit American support, including Secretary of State Marshall, for the European union project. At the same time, he wanted the Dominions and later other states to join in one way or another.

In 1948, Curtis attended the Hague Conference, organized by the International Committee for Movements of European Unity, as member of the British delegation and was exuberant when a motion for federalism was

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108. Wilfried Loth, Der Weg Nach Europa: Geschichte der Europäischen Integration 1939 - 1957, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1990, pp.28-34.



passed. However, disappointment was to follow. The federalists within the British European movement were opposed by the functionalists, namely David Mitrany. In contrast to Curtis, the functionalists did not see the need for a supranational state and opted for intergovernmental economic and defence cooperation.

Furthermore, in what appeared to Curtis as a betrayal, Bevin prevented the establishment of an elected European assembly in favour of a nominated Council of Europe. Once more, the idea of a full-scale federation was not exactly scuttled but postponed to the future. Additional federal tracts by Curtis could not change this fact.<sup>109</sup>

#### **Last years**

As if to compensate Curtis for the failure of his projects, an impressive amount of honours were given to him. Already in 1947, he had been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Chatham House. In 1950, the Attlee government made him Companion of Honour. One year later, Cologne University gave him a honorary degree, claiming that he had inspired Chancellor Adenauer's federalist foreign policy. His eightieth birthday led to a torrent of congratulations from Britain's political and academic elite. A personal investiture by the King followed.<sup>110</sup>

Curtis had started a career of half a century in South Africa. It ended in connection with another British colony, Cyprus. A visit there in 1951 was the

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<sup>109</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, pp.303-15.

<sup>110</sup>. Ibid., pp.305, 315-19.

final occasion for Curtis to offer his advice. Calling for better Crown Colony government and rejecting nationalist demands for cession of Cyprus to Greece, he recommended the transfer of all British troops in the Suez Canal zone to the island to appease the Egyptians. As in the case of South Africa, India and Ireland, British imperial aims were to be squared with local nationalisms.

After that, Curtis spent his last years withdrawn. He died in 1955.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>. Ibid., pp.320.

## Chapter Four

### Idealism and Realism in the Works of Curtis

#### Introduction

In this chapter, elements of textbook idealism and realism in the thought of Curtis will be traced and connected to his works. We will, however, begin with his interpretation of the Christian message. His specific theological key assumptions are as important for an understanding of Curtis's body of thought as Niebuhr's pessimistic version of Christianity on the thinking of Morgenthau.<sup>1</sup>

Having introduced Curtis's theological argument, we will return to the textbook version of idealism and realism outlined in Chapter 1. Referring to Curtis's statements on human nature and progress, on international ethics, on the fundamental patterns of the international system, and on the necessary policy steps to be taken, I will show that he can be placed equally well in either the textbook idealist or the realist camp. We will also see that he himself referred to that dichotomy but had an understanding of idealism and realism that was rather different from the one used in contemporary textbooks.

The argument will not be that these idealist and realist elements in Curtis's work represent antinomies. On the contrary, Curtis successfully bridges the

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1. On Niebuhr and Morgenthau see Torbjörn L. Knutsen, A History of International Relations Theory: An Introduction, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992, pp.223-26.

apparent contradictions between idealism and realism thanks to a simple and coherent general argument transcending the artificial boundaries produced by the textbook accounts of the 'First Debate'.

In this analysis of Curtis's argument, I draw upon his writings irrespective of their specific year of publication. Thus, a statement from the 1910s may be supplemented or contrasted by one from the 1950s. While not unproblematic in the case of some other writers, in the case of Curtis this method seems to me defensible. After all, Curtis's general assumptions were largely fixed from his earliest writings onwards and only got refined, but not fundamentally revised, later on. For example, while he only pinned down his theological ideas in the 1930s, the conclusion he drew from them can already be seen in his earlier writings.

Many of Curtis's writings appeared anonymously in *The Round Table*. This produces two problems. First, it is not always absolutely clear which ones were really written by Curtis.<sup>2</sup> If in doubt, I have assumed that the said article was by Curtis. This method is legitimate in view of what is at the same time the second problem: Articles in the magazine were to express the collective viewpoint of the whole London Round Table group.<sup>3</sup> One might thus argue that certain statements in a *Round*

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2. Compare the slightly different identifications of his authorship in Deborah Lavin, *From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, p.347 and Alexander May, *The Round Table, 1910-66*, Ph. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1995, pp.473, 478 for the articles 'End of War' and 'Price of Liberty'.

3. May, *Round Table*, pp.78-79.

Table article are not `really` Curtis's but express the view of the larger group. However, given Curtis's strongly held opinions over the matters he found worthy of attention it appears unlikely that he bowed to group pressure in a substantial way. In any case, the Round Table articles fit well into his general body of thought.

#### **Curtis, the Christian Imperialist and an `Expounder of Commonplaces`**

Gerald Studdert-Kennedy has drawn attention to an aspect of Curtis's work which has been almost totally marginalized in later works about him, but which, he asserts, was the kernel of his philosophy: The importance of Christianity for his political vision.<sup>4</sup>

Curtis's political schemes would not make complete sense as long as one interprets his motivations as those of an imperialist with a penchant for developing constitutional blueprints, asserts Studdert-Kennedy. In fact, `Curtis derived his guiding theory as a man of affairs from an understanding of his Christian commitment.`<sup>5</sup>

It was of course not only Curtis for whom Christianity constituted an ever-present reference and,

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4. Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, British Christians, Indian Nationalists and the Raj, Delhi etc.: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp.27-46; Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, `Christianity, Statecraft and Chatham House: Lionel Curtis and World Order`, in Diplomacy & Statecraft 6 (1995), 2, pp.470-89; Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, `Political Science and Political Theory: Lionel Curtis, Federalism and India`, in Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 24 (1996), 2, pp.197-217.

5. Studdert-Kennedy, British Christians, p.32.

indeed, pillar of political theory. The kernel of the discourse which was strong enough to `define and circumscribe`<sup>6</sup> Curtis's ideas were shared by his friends Hichens and Lothian: All adhered to Christian Whig historiography.<sup>7</sup>

This social gospel was spread by successive generations of recruits to public and imperial service, from public school and university men ...<sup>8</sup>

Whatever its variations, it was fairly broadly shared in the intellectual environment surrounding Curtis. In the case of Curtis and many others, this Christian Whig historiography was combined with another vibrant discourse, that of `British orientalism`<sup>9</sup> to form Curtis's vision not only of India, over which Studdert-Kennedy particularly focuses, but of the providential mission of the British in the evolution of humanity more broadly conceived.

Studdert-Kennedy challenges today's federalists, who assert the importance of the heritage of Anglo-Saxon federalism, with failing to see the focal point that Christianity had constituted for that earlier generation of federalists. The new `specialist enthusiasm`<sup>10</sup> centered around this Anglo-Saxon federalism disregards that

whatever the continuities that link the impulses behind inter-war and contemporary federalist conviction, the former have by no means been wholly incorporated into the latter.<sup>11</sup>

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6. Studdert-Kennedy, `Political Science`, p.204.

7. Ibid., p.203.

8. Ibid., pp.200-1.

9. Ibid., p.204; Studdert-Kennedy, British Christians, pp.16-26.

10. Studdert-Kennedy, `Christianity`, p.470.

11. Ibid., p.472.

And, what is perhaps most tragic for our understanding of those past thinkers is that

what has not survived into the late twentieth century federalist debate was of crucial importance at the time.<sup>12</sup>

Studdert-Kennedy asserts:

Religious commitment of whatever kind separates both (Curtis) and them from today's neofederalist partisans of European and world unification, as it does too, of course, from the empiricism and realism which constitute the dominant discourse in contemporary international studies generally.<sup>13</sup>

For Studdert-Kennedy, Curtis's importance stems from his `comprehensive command of the span of „sentences“ of which the discourse is composed.<sup>14</sup> Being in no way an independent thinker but an `expounder of commonplaces',<sup>15</sup> Curtis gave voice to the beliefs and concerns of not only the `Anglo-India public', but also of a very big segment of the larger British public.

Studdert-Kennedy emphasizes particularly Curtis's influence over Hichens, whose involvement in the Industrial Christian Fellowship movement of the inter-war period he has examined in a separate book.<sup>16</sup> Curtis's theology is `an extrapolation to the imperial context of the ideology described in that study.'<sup>17</sup> Curtis was in close contact with several high-level members of the church in India.<sup>18</sup>

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12. Ibid., p.472. Emphasis in the original.

13. Ibid., p.474.

14. Studdert-Kennedy, British Christians, p.20.

15. Ibid., p.27.

16. Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, Dog-Collar Democracy: The Industrial Christian Fellowship 1919-1929, Oxford: Macmillan, 1982.

17. Studdert-Kennedy, British Christians, pp.21-22.

18. Ibid., p.22.

In a comparison between Curtis and his Chatham House colleagues Martin Wight and Arnold Toynbee, Studdert-Kennedy emphasizes the central place that St. Augustine occupied with respect to the political philosophy of them. Wight was the most pessimistic of all three, following the Augustinian distinction between the heavenly and earthly realms most strictly. Toynbee, with his broad-minded position with respect to the possibility of incorporating other cultures, occupied a middle position between Curtis and Wight. Curtis, locating the other end of the spectrum, with his suspect Christian philosophy, fully denied the Augustinian distinction.<sup>19</sup>

#### **The Theological Argument in *Civitas Dei***

The core of Curtis's religious thinking is to be found in *Civitas Dei*, particularly in volume three. Curtis starts his argument with a comparison of the respective merits of the natural and the social sciences and their mutual relationship. This is a topic that had particularly affected the discussion within

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19. Studdert-Kennedy, 'Christianity', pp.473-80.



turn-of-the-century German sociology.<sup>20</sup> Curtis is clearly in the anti-positivist camp. For him, there is a difference between the natural sciences and the humanities, the former concerned with knowledge and the latter with wisdom. The natural sciences are based upon the measurement of facts and testable hypotheses, which can sometimes be proved by dramatic demonstrations, like the invention of aviation. The humanities are also concerned with the collection of data and with hypotheses. But the aspect of free will makes those sciences concerned with the relations between human beings intrinsically less precise than the natural sciences.

Nevertheless, the contribution to the development of human affairs of major religious, political or philosophical thinkers is as big as that of great physicists. Curtis asserts that it is possible to discover through political sciences the principles of life. This is to be done by thinking through what the ultimate aim of human life is supposed to be. Once such a final aim is found all the other questions can be answered - even though, unfortunately - political sciences are too often unconcerned with practical policies.

But in any case, for finding the ultimate aim the natural sciences provide poor guidance since, because of their intrinsic character, they are

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20. Alan Swingewood, A Short History of Sociological Thought, 2nd ed., Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1991, pp.128-33.

compartmentalised. Thus, if the humanities try to emulate them, a problem arises: The means obscure the end and become themselves ends. In this case, the question of what the ultimate end should be is neglected.<sup>21</sup>

Having rejected a positivist understanding of the social sciences, Curtis turns to the issue of faith. With equal strength he asserts that the answers to the riddles of life cannot be found in miracles or supernatural revelations. In this respect, the founders of Christianity have misunderstood Jesus. Even if miracles would continuously happen there would not be any proof that they represent a message by God. Furthermore, if detailed answers to the questions about the ultimate meaning of life would simply be given by divine revelations, humans would not have any freedom to choose. It is this freedom which sets humans apart from animals. Curtis thus stresses that one has to try to use one's own conscience and mind to answer these questions.

He brings this point home by a short excursus on the development of religious thought. Originally, humans treated the forces of nature as anthropomorphic gods. As long as religious thought was passed orally from generation to generation, no more sophisticated creed could develop. With the invention of writing, this changed. It was now possible to refer back to the

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<sup>21</sup>. Lionel Curtis, Civitas Dei: The Commonwealth of God, London: Macmillan, 1938, pp.827-34, 924-25.

teachings of past sages and to reflect upon and develop them. On the other hand, writing at the same time enabled the codification of religious creeds, bringing about the danger of their ossification. The Catholic Church, with its claim to decide for the believers what is right and what is wrong, is an institutional example of that danger.<sup>22</sup>

But if neither natural sciences nor supernatural authorities answer our question, how are we supposed to do this? For Curtis, the use of reason and conscience gives at least some hints. He refers to two dichotomies: between pleasure and conscience, and between matter and spirit.

In life the principle of pleasure is in continuous clash with what the conscience demands. In response to the question which one should prevail, a hint is given by the fact that, if everyone just acted according to his pleasure, the world would sink into chaos. In contrast, if everyone acted according to the demands of conscience, society would break off its restrictions on genuine freedom, which could then develop to an ever-increasing degree. From this Curtis concludes that our instinctual senses of what is right and wrong are valid.<sup>23</sup>

Another issue concerns the dichotomy between matter and spirit. Human body is different from human personality. Like Descartes, Curtis explains that, even

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22. Ibid., pp.835-38, 851-63.

23. Ibid., pp.839-41.

if we do not know what exactly we are, we know that we are. Matter or spirit - which one constitutes the basis of the ultimate reality? Curtis uses an argument going back to Pascal: Let us assume that matter is the ultimate reality. Our existence would then end with our deaths. In case that we would mistakenly assume that spirit would be all-important and the distinction between right and wrong is valid, that mistake would have no long-lasting consequences for us. On the other hand, let us assume that spirit is the ultimate reality. In this case, the choice between right and wrong would be of utmost importance. Mistakenly assuming the predominance of matter over spirit would have disastrous consequences. And since it is not possible to prove that matter is the ultimate reality, Curtis recommends assuming that spirit is more important and that our distinction between right and wrong is a valid one.<sup>24</sup>

From these assumptions, Curtis draws the conclusion that the final reality, i.e. God, is of the same order as the human personality, but only more perfectly developed. And as the highest expression of personality is creativity, we can assume that God is ultimately involved in constant creation. Thus, while it is not always possible to clearly define good and evil, they can at least be guessed from practical experience. The former is a creative principle, the latter a destructive one.

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<sup>24</sup>. Ibid., pp.841-43. On Descartes and Pascal see Otfried Höffe, Kleine Geschichte der Philosophie, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001, pp.156-57, 163.

If God's qualities can at least be guessed by seeing Him as personality developed to the utmost degree, there is one further conclusion. God creates humans who are at least remotely akin to Him, and this means that they also have the capability for creation. Indeed, they are supposed by Him to participate in His work of creation.

Life has undergone an evolutionary development, resulting in the domination of humans. Through God's plan, His creatures became step-by-step aware of themselves and acquired a sense of right and wrong. Jesus was the so far most perfect of all men in this respect. However, in a system ordered by God's laws, most humans could be like him.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, Curtis asserts that humans, though imperfect, can principally develop more and more into the likeness of God. The material world is not to be damned but is undergoing a continuous process of creation in which humans should participate. Even if the meaning of life cannot be grasped as a whole, humans cannot avoid the necessity to act, using their power to distinguish between good and evil. Although God does not directly interfere into this work of continuous human creation, the example of highly-developed personalities - the so far most outstanding one being Jesus - can act as a guidance. By doing good, one gets into closer community with God.<sup>26</sup> And, to come to a point that is the *leitmotif* behind Curtis's political prescriptions:

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25. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.843-50.

26. Ibid., pp.864-71, 948.

The sense of duty in men to each other was what bound them together and bound them to God. This, not pleasure, was the ultimate element of value in life. To increase and perfect this sense as the principle of life was the end and object of human existence. (...) The structure of human society itself must be based on the laws of God, on realities. The supreme task was to bring into being an order of society in which the indefinite duty of each to all was fully expressed, applied, and called into existence.<sup>27</sup>

This, then, is the meaning of the title *Civitas Dei*:

To see and to do the will of God in this world ... and so to create his Kingdom on earth is the first and foremost duty of men.<sup>28</sup>

### **Human Nature and the Possibility of Progress**

Curtis can indeed be characterized as a full-blown idealist - but in philosophical rather than IR terms. He strongly asserts that force and material interests in themselves are unable to create a stable order, whether on the national or international level. Force, in particular, is only an instrument. Whether a state is able to use it depends ultimately upon the loyalty of its citizens, i.e. the spiritual factor.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the character and stability of a certain kind of government rests on the kind of moral principles possessed by its subjects or citizens.<sup>30</sup>

Taking the fatalism of old-style diplomats to task, Curtis asserts the importance of free will.<sup>31</sup> This

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27. Ibid., p.883.

28. Ibid., pp.950-51.

29. Ibid., p.8; Lionel Curtis, 'World Order', in International Affairs 18 (1939), pp.301-20, here p.304.

30. Lionel Curtis, The Capital Question of China, Port Washington-London: Kennikat, (1932) 1970, p.67; Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.71.

31. Lionel Curtis, 'The Price of Liberty', in Round Table 10 (1919), pp.1-20, here p.1. See also L. Curtis, The Commonwealth of Nations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Citizenship in the British Empire, and into the Mutual Relations of the Several Communities Thereof, London: Macmillan, 1916, p.10.

is, of course, in line with his theological argument about the necessity to use one's reason and conscience. At one stage, he goes as far as saying that the word 'impossible' has to be barred from the British political dictionary and that defeat is produced by the defeatists' state of mind.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the difficulties in creating an imperial or world-wide federation are not of a technical kind. The problem is to convince the human mind - but this is a problem that can be overcome.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, history is on the side of progress. Curtis interprets the course of human development as the struggle between three principles superseding each other: the tribal one; the autocratic/despotic one; and the one of commonwealth, i.e. freedom.<sup>34</sup> It was not so much material interests but the clash of two contradictory ideas, autocracy and freedom, that was behind wars like the ones between Spain and England during the 16th century.<sup>35</sup>

Like the spirit of freedom, autocracy is not so much based upon brute force or rational self-interest but on an idea - in this case that of religious duty to the deities, of whom the ruler is a representative.<sup>36</sup> This kind of government leads to stagnation: The

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32. Curtis, Capital Question, pp.286-87.

33. Lionel Curtis, The Green Memorandum, London and Bungay: Richard Clay and Sons, 1910, p.61; Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.934, 946.

34. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.12.

35. Ibid., pp.137-38.

36. Ibid., pp.7-8; Philip Kerr and Lionel Curtis, The Prevention of War, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923, pp.139-43.

rulers, intoxicated by the idea of their divine right for absolute domination, lose all sense of proportion. At the same time, the minds and characters of their subjects remain stunted.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast, a commonwealth is based not upon the feeling of duty of subjects to a ruler but upon the selfless devotion the citizens feel towards each other. Laws are not divinely set but decided upon by a competent public opinion.<sup>38</sup> A state governed by the principles of commonwealth provides a continuous growth in the character and mind of its citizens, enabling them to judge about measures concerning the general welfare.<sup>39</sup> Putting its trust into human reason, the commonwealth is ultimately bound to prevail over autocracy.<sup>40</sup>

Related to the commonwealth, the concept of freedom is one which appears frequently in the work of Curtis, being adapted to different circumstances. In an echo of 'England's mission' ideas, he asserts that national greatness does not lie in wealth but in the spirit begotten of freedom which rises to responsibility in the running of colonial empires.<sup>41</sup> In the progressivist spirit, he defines freedom as the power of society to control circumstances.<sup>42</sup> On a

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37. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.46-48.

38. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.23-24; Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, pp.139-43. A more detailed treatment of Curtis's understanding of the commonwealth principle is given in Chapter 7.

39. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.51-53.

40. Ibid., p.71.

41. Curtis, Green Memorandum, p.27.

42. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.11.



different occasion, he states that freedom and order stimulated the growth of a mutual sense of duty among the people, with material prosperity as a by-product.<sup>43</sup> Finally, in a Cold War tract Curtis says that the principles of freedom are more powerful than weapons, i.e. Soviet weapons.<sup>44</sup>

In this evolutionary development from tribe via autocracy towards commonwealth, religious faith plays an all-important role. As we have seen, autocracy is based upon religious legitimation. Most Ancient cultures imagined their gods as beings having the same passions but more power than normal human beings. The Hebrews developed the insight of a just God not belonging to the order of matter but being completely spiritual. Nevertheless, living in the autocratic stage of government, they still tended to imagine Him as a stern king.

The principle of the commonwealth was first developed by the Greek city-states. However, the devotion people felt towards each other was restricted to their respective *polis* and completely excluded non-Greeks. For Curtis, it was the genius of Jesus to connect and universalize these Hebrew and Greek concepts. He preached that the fatherhood of God also meant the brotherhood of men. To feel devotion and duty towards all one's fellow humans was the best way to express devotion to God. And this could be done best

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43. Curtis, Capital Question, p.300.

44. Lionel Curtis, World Revolution in the Cause of Peace, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949, p.153.

within a society ordered by the laws of God. This idea of the divine commonwealth was suppressed by the Roman Empire but re-emerged 1000 years later in Europe, particularly England, from where it has spread ever since.<sup>45</sup> Given this, the possibility for a boundless improvement of humanity exists.<sup>46</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter 1, faith in human progress is seen as one of the characteristics of textbook idealism. From this perspective, the above seems to put Curtis firmly into that camp. However, Curtis's optimism is somewhat ambivalent and contains some darker aspects.

First of all, he is optimistic for the long rather than for the short term, proclaiming that a self-governing world commonwealth consisting of Christ-like citizens will take not longer than one million years to be realized (!).<sup>47</sup> However, if the first steps into that direction will not be made within the next centuries, these centuries will bring great tribulations, which will be worse than the descent of Graeco-Roman civilization into the Dark Ages.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to Bull's idealists, for whom the process of progress is already at work, Curtis is actually a pessimist on the short term - unless the crucial step of establishing a nascent world commonwealth is taken.

Second, Curtis echoes the classical realist motif of the mismatch between humankind's technological and moral development. Material progress has by far outrun

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45. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.851-53, 873-87.

46. Ibid., p.284.

47. Ibid., p.931.

48. Ibid., pp.900, 906-07, 916, 932, 938.

man's ability to control himself.<sup>49</sup> With some foresight, he in 1919 warns of the dangers the future control of atomic energy might have in store.<sup>50</sup>

Third, like a good mainstream realist, Curtis boldly proclaims that in human affairs there are laws which work themselves out with the same uncompromising logic as those of Nature herself. It is not by ignoring those laws, but only by learning and obeying them willingly, that men may reach to freedom and dominate fate.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, Curtis insists that his analyses are based upon the 'facts', as can be seen in his criticism directed at President Wilson, i.e. one of the textbook idealists. Before proclaiming principles (i.e. the 14 Points) one must first ask oneself how these principles would be applied in the light of the facts.<sup>52</sup> It was the Englishmen's 'instinct for realities' that explains their role in history.<sup>53</sup> A new League of Nations, this time 'based on realities', needs to be constructed.<sup>54</sup> Or, on another occasion:

But the problems of life cannot in fact be solved by action based upon wishful thinking. They can only be solved in so far as those concerned are prepared to face unpleasant facts and distasteful exertion.<sup>55</sup>

Is not all this similar to the realists' claim that they base their prescription on how the world is rather than how it should be? In any case, this stress on

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49. Curtis, 'Price', p.6; Curtis, 'World Order', p.305; Lionel Curtis, Decision, London: Oxford University Press and Humphrey Milford, 1941, pp.36-37.

50. Curtis, 'Price', p.8.

51. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.705.

52. L. Curtis, 'Introduction', in: L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, Oxford: Clarendon, 1920, pp.xxviii-xxix.

53. Curtis, Capital Question, p.261.

54. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.916.

55. Lionel Curtis, World War: Its Cause and Cure, 2nd ed., New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946, p.3.

`realities' stands somewhat in tension to the claim that everything can be done if only the right spirit is there.

In addition to these doses of realism, Curtis's progressivism is somewhat at variance with that of mainstream idealism. He does not believe that people should rationally pursue their interests, with a global harmony of these interests thus coming into being. On the contrary, this would throw humanity into chaos and destroy civilization. What Curtis wants is rather that people utilize their altruistic potentialities.<sup>56</sup> While in mainstream idealism there is, as I have argued, a slight tension between proclaiming human goodness and recommending enlightened self-interest, this tension does not exist in Curtis's thought.

Furthermore, he repeatedly mentions structural constraints thwarting the development of the human spirit. For example, the aggressive spirit of the European continental powers is geographically determined.<sup>57</sup> And his experience within a yet divided South Africa convinced Curtis that it was this very division that caused virtuous politicians to unnecessarily distrust each other.<sup>58</sup>

Curtis states that calamities like wars do not arise due to the shortcomings of statesmen or of the masses but due to faulty political systems.<sup>59</sup> Despite

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56. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.840.

57. Curtis, Green Memorandum, p.7.

58. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, pp.94-95; Curtis, 'World Order', p.302; Curtis, World War, p.1.

59. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.899-900; Curtis, World War, p.1.

the importance he attaches to education, however, he is of the opinion that social and political structures shape human characters more than race or education.<sup>60</sup>

The growth of the human mind depends

not merely upon what it is taught, nor even upon the example of others, but also upon the structure of society in which it grows up.<sup>61</sup>

Autocratic governments stifle the growth of the human character, while free institutions stimulate it.<sup>62</sup> The character of humans depends, therefore, in the last instance upon the environment. Men cannot grow to perfection unless the structure of society is ordered in accordance with the laws of God.<sup>63</sup>

Of course, Curtis stresses the importance of social structures in order to bring home his point that fundamental changes in them are necessary.

Nevertheless, there arises a structure-agency problem in his writings: If the character of humans are decisively shaped by the structure of the society in which they live, where do reason and conscience come in? How can society be reformed if its own determining influence over people's minds prevents this very reform?

In fact, Curtis bridges this structure-agency problem by bringing in outstanding personalities. He assures us that, for a new idea to become powerful, it is not the number of its initial adherents but rather

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60. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.901; Curtis, World War, p.9, 20, 69-70.

61. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.881.

62. Curtis, 'Price', p.3; Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.46-51.

63. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.195-6, 881-82, 892-93; Curtis, World War, pp.9-10, 20, 70.

their quality that counts.<sup>64</sup> Who are these quality people? At the first instance, 'helping the world across the gulf which arrests its progress' is the responsibility of intellectuals and particularly political thinkers.<sup>65</sup> The task of implementing the necessary improvements is, however, left to charismatic politicians ('trusted leaders') who over the heads of existing institutions appeal directly to the people.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, such trusted leaders as well as more daemonic personalities should be seen as agents of God:

From time to time creation is brought to a standstill by obsessions, fixed ideas in the minds of men which no longer apply to the changing conditions of life. I think that when this happens the Master Creator Himself sees to it that some man has been born great enough to release the deadlock ... Napoleons and Hitlers may be needed to shatter obsolete systems. Others far greater, like Washington and Lincoln, are sent at the right moment to show how the work of creation can be renewed on a higher plane.<sup>67</sup>

With his faith in the power of the right spirit, his evolutionary view of history, and his claim that human perfection is attainable Curtis thus resembles the textbook idealists. Nevertheless, there are some pessimistic strains in his argument qualifying this progressivism, particularly his insistence upon the power of social constraints. He bridges this apparent contradiction by referring to divinely-sent persons who are able to break out of the social constraints and

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64. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.143-44.

65. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.925. See also ibid., p.930; Curtis, World War, p.3; Lionel Curtis, 'The 'Fifties as Seen Fifty Years Hence', in International Affairs 27 (1951), pp.273-284, here pp.275, 284.

66. Lionel Curtis, The Way to Peace, London: Oxford University Press and Humphrey Milford, 1944, pp.49-53; Curtis, World War, pp.91, 93-94, 104-06, 146-53; Curtis, 'Fifties', p.283.

67. Curtis, World War, pp.270-71.

provide the agency needed for creating a better world. This is progressivism, but - with the religious connotations and the reference to charismatic leaders - a kind of progressivism that one would not necessarily expect from textbook idealism.

### **Ethics**

On the face of it, Curtis - like a good textbook idealist - adheres to universalist ethics. He rejects a viewpoint putting the national material interest at centre stage. Instead, Curtis favours internationalism.<sup>68</sup> Curtis the textbook idealist also castigates 'the evil doctrines of the Prussian autocracy' that in inter-state relations no ethics apply and that everything that serves the national interest is allowed.<sup>69</sup> He singles out that alleged classical piece of transhistorical textbook realism, the Melian dialogue.<sup>70</sup> For him, the Athenians' claiming that might is right find their present-day successor in the Germans invading neutral Belgium and Luxemburg.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, according to Curtis, the British Empire is internationalist - it is built upon principles which are not narrowly British but human.<sup>72</sup>

Not only has the Commonwealth principle history on its side but it will be ultimately embraced by all

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68. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, p.146.

69. Lionel Curtis, 'The End of War', in Round Table 5 (1915). Pp.772-96, here p.789.

70. As an example for textbooks treating the Melian dialogue as a realist text see Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism, New York and London: Macmillan and Collier Macmillan, 1987, p.78.

71. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.231-37.

72. Ibid., p.686.

humans.<sup>73</sup> Even now, it is at work within societies still under the spell of autocracy:

The Indian or Chinese peasant who urges his neighbours to remove filth through the agency of the village council is bringing a little nearer the day when the growing volume of spiritual life will issue in a commonwealth wide enough to include first his nation and then all human beings, and establish the rule of law for them all.<sup>74</sup>

True, England has pioneered the principle of freedom for the European nations. A successful application of this principle in India will also bring it to Asia and Africa.<sup>75</sup> Bringing the Orientals to a higher order is indeed the noblest task yet done for the cause of freedom.<sup>76</sup> As Curtis reassures an Indian readership: 'Freedom, which in its political aspect is responsible government, is a human and not a Western ideal.'<sup>77</sup> The commonwealth was first conceived in the West, but the monotheistic religions from which it has to draw today come from the East.<sup>78</sup>

So far, so good. God's Kingdom on Earth is open to everyone, even Orientals. But, as in the case of his progressivism, Curtis's universalism is subject to some heavy qualifications. First, being spiritually-based, it is not the kind of universalism embraced by liberal internationalism (and thus textbook idealism). Curtis

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73. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, p.140.

74. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.894.

75. Curtis, 'Introduction', pp.lx-lxi.

76. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.176-77.

77. L. Curtis, 'Letters to the People of India on Responsible Government' (1917), in L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, Oxford: Clarendon, 1920, pp.357-466, here p.431.

78. Ibid., p.431.



says that, contrary to the tenets of the Manchester School, self-interest cannot bind people together or provide a motive for the continuous cooperation of humans.<sup>79</sup> Material interests could initially draw the members of the society together, but only selfless devotion could be trusted to hold them together.<sup>80</sup>

Second, his universalism is also somewhat contradicted by his claims about the differences between the peoples. That all Asiatic people have similar characteristics, i.e. a mind-set leading to stagnation,<sup>81</sup> fits into the Orientalist discourse of that time. But what are we to make of his assertion that the British spirit of freedom is uncomprehensible for the Continentals?<sup>82</sup> True, one day Continentals and Orientals will be uplifted to the stage the Anglo-Saxons have already reached. But for the time being, there are deep cultural gaps within the world which, one would assume, do not make the spread of universalist ideas easy.

Third, Curtis expressively celebrates cultural diversity. This takes, on the one hand, the shape of religious tolerance:

Men view reality as they view a mountain from different sides, and there must be various kinds of worship to suit the different orders of mind.<sup>83</sup>

Any creed claiming to have solved the riddles of life

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79. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, p.136; Curtis, World War, pp.10-11.

80. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.319.

81. Ibid., pp.3-4, 124.

82. Curtis, Green Memorandum, p.7-8.

83. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.871.

for good has a totalitarian aspect.<sup>84</sup>

On the other hand, Curtis also supports the segregation of races. Writing about late Antiquity, he scathingly refers to cosmopolitan religions crushing the minds of men, contributing to the formation of mixed races and preparing them for slavery.<sup>85</sup> For the present, Curtis rejects a kind of `human society in which all the racial elements have been mixed into one conglomerate'.<sup>86</sup> Instead, there must remain different nations, and

no attempt should be made to assimilate one to another. The utmost scope should be given to each to develop its own individual character.<sup>87</sup>

One might argue that the `individual character' of nations could include ways of thinking that are not easily compatible with the universalism Curtis proclaims.

Nationalism is indeed an important creed for Curtis. Giving good advice to both British and Indians, he enthuses: `(B)y nationalism only can the soul of people be saved.'<sup>88</sup> At the same time, however, he decries the spirit of national bigotry among the great powers that makes them either try to dominate others (i.e. German expansionism) or to refuse taking part in responsibilities for the rest of the world (i.e. American isolationism).<sup>89</sup> Curtis wants a nationalism

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84. Ibid., p.861.

85. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.61.

86. Curtis, World War, p.78.

87. Ibid., p.100. See also Curtis, Commonwealth, p.686.

88. L. Curtis, `The Structure of Government Continued' (1917), in L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, Oxford: Clarendon, 1920, pp.291-325, here pp.301-02.

89. Curtis, `End', pp.773, 785.

understood as ties of mutual esteem and affection between a people out of which love for a greater unit will develop. In the case of Indian nationalism, it has to be compatible with loyalty to the British Empire/Commonwealth.<sup>90</sup> Likewise, it should be possible to simultaneously feel loyalty to one's nation and to humankind as such:

The cosmopolitan who decries patriotism as such is usually a materialist at heart. He cannot understand how a special devotion to one land and the people it contains is compatible with devotion to the welfare of mankind at large.<sup>91</sup>

We see here how Curtis brings together universalist and relativist aspects. His universalism is actually quite limited - the mutual devotion of people to each other and the principle of freedom and self-government. These are, of course, very elastic terms under which multiple practices can be subsumed.

Again, as in the case of his progressivism, Curtis's universalism makes him resemble a textbook idealist. Nevertheless, there are some heavy relativist aspects in his ideas of ethics. If relativist thinking is a sign of being a textbook realist, Curtis's writings at least contain some elements of that as well.

### **Image of International Politics**

Certain passages within Curtis's writings express a view of international politics that resembles, if not exactly that of textbook idealists, that of modern interdependence theorists. He refers to 'a highly

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<sup>90</sup>. Curtis, 'Letters', pp.397-98.

<sup>91</sup>. Curtis, 'Price', p.9.

interconnected world' to which the 'old national state' is no longer adapted.<sup>92</sup> As the effects of World War I - touching even the lives of Nepalese hillmen - demonstrated, all human communities have become dependent upon each other.<sup>93</sup> By now, even actions on the part of small countries affect the whole human society.<sup>94</sup> This 'growing interdependence' is the result of two centuries of technological progress.<sup>95</sup>

While Curtis's remarks on interdependence are few and far between, he has a lot to say about the different behaviour of autocratic states and commonwealths. In this, he in some respects foreshadows Michael Doyle's Kantian-inspired argument about the democratic peace.<sup>96</sup>

To begin with, for Curtis the internal conditions of a state affect its behaviour on the international level. Referring to Plato's remark that wars are caused by the internal diseases of states, he points towards Germany's autocratic system and Britain's exaggerated stress on individualism.<sup>97</sup> Generally, however, it is autocracy only that is blamed for wars by him. He rejects the assumption that stronger states will necessarily bully weaker ones around. This is true for monarchical Germany and Austria-Hungary but not for

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92. Anon. and Lionel Curtis, A Canadian Criticism on 'The Problem of the Commonwealth' and the Author's Reply Thereto, 1916, p.37.

93. Lionel Curtis, 'The World in Conference', in Round Table 10 (1920), pp.721-55, here pp. 727-29.

94. Curtis, 'World Order', p.305.

95. Curtis, Decision, p.46.

96. Michael Doyle, 'Liberalism and World Politics', in American Political Science Review 80 (1986), pp.1151-69.

97. Curtis, 'End', pp.793-94.

Great Britain and the USA. When a monarchy, France behaved aggressively; when a republic, more peacefully.<sup>98</sup>

Where does this difference come from? Dictators are intoxicated by power and 'seldom content with the mastery of their own people'.<sup>99</sup> At the same time, their subjects have got used to the idea that force is an ultimate value.<sup>100</sup> Autocracies have other reasons for being warlike. They rest on military prestige<sup>101</sup> and need strong armies to keep democratic movements down.<sup>102</sup>

While threats to peace come from autocracies and dictatorships, commonwealths are unlikely to go to war with each other.<sup>103</sup> Citizens living in a commonwealth are used to putting public interests above their own. Consequently, they are also less likely to press parochial national claims at the expense of other peoples.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, they have learned the art of being compromise-minded and tend to be concerned with economic rather than military issues.<sup>105</sup>

All this fits well into a liberal internationalist image of the international system. On the other hand, Curtis also provides a more realist analysis. Because they affect matters of war and peace, foreign affairs,

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98. Lionel Curtis, 'Windows of Freedom', in Round Table 8 (1918), pp.1-47, here pp.5-6.

99. Curtis, World War, p.43.

100. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.889.

101. Curtis, 'Letter', pp.390-91.

102. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.684

103. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.889-91.

104. Ibid., p.893.

105. Ibid., pp.649-50.

always take precedence over domestic issues for him.<sup>106</sup> He sees the idea that economic issues should take priority over political ones as 'one of the profoundest fallacies'.<sup>107</sup> Thus, in the early 1930s he expects that a recovery from the great depression will come through a successful disarmament conference.<sup>108</sup>

Likewise, after WWII he attributes the existence of economic protectionism to the fear of war. If the latter would be removed free trade will automatically follow.<sup>109</sup> Taking issue with Richard Crossman from the left wing of the Labour Party,<sup>110</sup> he emphasizes that, before a decision about the respective merits of capitalism and socialism can be made, military security against the Soviet threat has to be achieved first.<sup>111</sup> He also takes functionalists like Mitrany - according to Long and Wilson one of the major inter-war idealists - to task.<sup>112</sup> They ignore that economic problems can only be solved once the political ones have been tackled.<sup>113</sup>

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106. Lionel Curtis, 'The League of Nations and the British Commonwealth', in Round Table 9 (1919), pp.468-94, here p.489.

107. Curtis, 'Fifties', p.284.

108. Curtis, Capital Question, p.235.

109. Curtis, World War, p.82.

110. Deborah Lavin, From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, p.312.

111. Lionel Curtis, 'Pool Resources for Peace', in R.H.S. Crossman and Lionel Curtis, United Europe - Yes, but how?, 1948.

112. Lavin, From Empire, p.312; Cornelia Navari, 'David Mitrany and International Functionalism', in David Long and Peter Wilson (eds.), Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, pp.214-46.

113. Curtis, World Revolution, pp.140-41.

Furthermore, Curtis puts the state into the centre of analysis. The state cannot be dispensed with and in importance overrides all other kinds of human association.<sup>114</sup>

Curtis first extends the imperial federation principle to the level of a world state in a 1915 *Round Table* article. He starts from premises a realist would whole-heartedly agree with: Due to the division of the world into separate states, it is inevitable that their disagreements would cause wars from time to time. Attempts at international cooperation are incapable of preventing wars in the final instance.

So far, we have a staunchly systemic agenda. However, Curtis does not stop here. He now goes from the international level to that of the individual in explaining why agreements between states cannot prevent wars: The reason is the obligation for an individual to obey the commands of his own country, even if that meant violating these international agreements. The only solution is to extend the logic of the state to its consequent conclusion: Instead of the existing many states, there has to be a single world state to whom the individual obligation is to be directed. Only this can end wars.<sup>115</sup>

He repeats this argument vehemently in *Civitas Dei*: If the only factor binding men together 'in the last analysis' is the sense of duty to each other, then

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114. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.89; Curtis, World War, p.15.

115. Curtis, 'End', pp.783-85.

the 'attempt to relate national states to each other on a basis of compact' can only end in failure. There is no real hope for future peace

until some conscious effort is made to unite human society on the basis of the infinite claim of society to unlimited devotion from each of its members ... (There had been) only one political thinker of recognized authority, Benedetto Croce, who has clearly and firmly stated this view.<sup>116</sup>

We have thus a mixture of the international and individual levels of analysis<sup>117</sup> to explain why wars occur: Humans feel loyalty to only one sovereign political entity (individual level), and the world is divided into several of such entities (international systemic level).

Curtis repeats the systemic part of the argument again and again, making this concise statement: 'A society divided into sovereign nations must from the nature of the case lapse into war from time to time.'<sup>118</sup> He also enlists the 'interdependence' analysis into this argument: In a world that, on the one hand, has become smaller as the result of technological progress and, on the other hand, remains fragmented into different states wars will inevitably pop up again and again.<sup>119</sup> Economic dependence of states upon each other keeps fueling conflicts.<sup>120</sup>

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116. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.922-3.

117. Compare Barry Buzan, 'The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations Reconsidered', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds.), International Relations Theory Today, Cambridge: Polity, 1995, pp.198-216.

118. Lionel Curtis, The Open Road to Freedom, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950, p.15.

119. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.938; Curtis, Decision, p.46; Curtis, World War, p.4.

120. Curtis, 'World', p.754.



The unlimited obedience of citizens to one state only thus prevents them from feeling loyalty to an inter-state alliance.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, changes in population size and other internal conditions of the different states will sooner or later break such a compact apart.<sup>122</sup> In his later works, Curtis expands upon this problem by distinguishing between two kinds of political systems, organic and inorganic ones. Organic systems simply refers to modern sovereign states. Under the term inorganic system, Curtis lumps together feudal polities, sovereign states combined in a confederation, sovereign states combined under the same monarch, military alliances, and the League of Nations.<sup>123</sup> The fact that 'inorganic' is a residual category into which every political entity which is not a sovereign state can be put shows that the latter is for him the basic unit of international relations. In this respect, he is once more on the side of the textbook realists.

Inorganic systems are highly unstable because people do not feel the same unlimited loyalty to these entities as they do towards their states. Under these circumstances, any attempt for sovereign states to abandon only parts of their sovereignty to an international body is bound to create paralysis. For

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121. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.43-46.

122. Curtis, 'League', pp.470-71.

123. Curtis, Decision, p.35; World War, p.61.

Curtis, sovereignty and the accompanying loyalty cannot be divided - it is an issue of all or nothing.<sup>124</sup>

As far as Curtis's analysis of the existing international system is concerned, therefore, we have an idealist and a realist interpretation standing side by side. On the one hand, we are told that commonwealths are generally peaceful. From this one could conclude that the task at hand is to turn all sovereign states into commonwealths. This, of course, would not necessitate a world state. But, then again, Curtis asserts that it is the anarchical character of the international system as such that is behind wars. How do these two arguments fit together?

The key is to be found in the effect international anarchy produces upon the commonwealths. On the one hand, people living in a democratic state tend to focus on domestic well-being and to hold themselves aloof from international affairs. Thus, Germany dared to start World War I because she did not expect Great Britain and the USA to intervene on the side of France and Russia.<sup>125</sup>

On the other hand, even though they are by inclination peaceful, when commonwealths fight for their freedom against autocracies the spirit of national egotism also infects them. Curtis demonstrates this with the case of Germany's treatment by the victorious allies. Instead of supporting the fledgling

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<sup>124</sup>. Curtis, Decision, pp.35-38; Curtis, World War, pp.61-63. See also Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.910.

<sup>125</sup>. Curtis, 'League', pp.472-74.

democracy of the Weimar Republic, the Allies undermined it by insisting upon harsh reparation clauses. This policy backfired. German democracy was overthrown and replaced by a new warlike autocracy.<sup>126</sup>

The lesson is clear. As long as the world remains divided into several sovereign states, even the more peaceful ones among them will not completely shed their more aggressive tendencies. This, in turn, results in policies which undermine the spread of the commonwealth principles to the autocratic parts of the world. Only a merger of sovereignties leading to the long-term abolition of international anarchy can simultaneously assure the extension of democracy.

In the context of the beginning Cold War, Curtis envisions how this would happen. Once a federal Commonwealth encompassing Western Europe and the Dominions is in place, the Eastern bloc will automatically break up and the Communist dictatorships be overthrown.<sup>127</sup>

### **Policy Recommendations**

Despite publishing books with titles like *The Prevention of War*, *The Way to Peace* or *World Revolution in the Cause of Peace*, Curtis insists that the prevention of war should not be the ultimate aim of statesmen. A policy simply based upon the limited aim of preserving peace is a negative one and bound to

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<sup>126</sup>. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.897-99.

<sup>127</sup>. Curtis, World Revolution, pp.151-54.

produce opposite results. The real goal should be the spread of freedom and the increasing devotion of all humans to each other. If this is achieved, peace will come as a by-product.<sup>128</sup>

In giving his good advice for going into the direction of this aim, Curtis once again presents a cocktail of idealist and realist elements. In best idealist fashion, he puts his trust into public opinion, particularly if influenced by religious thought and the churches.<sup>129</sup> True, public opinion needs time to mature for the right ideas.<sup>130</sup> But '(a)ppeals to reason calmly and persistently made prevail in the end'.<sup>131</sup> Men with a real case stated fairly and patiently can convince public opinion.<sup>132</sup>

Furthermore, public opinion is potentially peaceful since, as he states in several works, common people are less obsessed with national sovereignty than politicians, bureaucrats, political journalists and experts, who mistake their means as ends in themselves.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, '(p)ublic opinion agreed that the „one thing which mattered to-day was the prevention of war“'.<sup>134</sup>

There are, however, qualifications to all this. Curtis particularly blames public opinion in the

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128. Curtis, 'End', p.772; Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, pp.146-47; Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.286, 891; Curtis, Way, p.54; Curtis, World War, p.184.

129. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.897, 920.

130. Curtis, Way, p.14.

131. Curtis, 'Introduction', p.lviii.

132. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, p.104.

133. Curtis, Way, pp.6-9, 94; Curtis World War, pp.213-21; Curtis, World Revolution, p.53.

134. Curtis, World Revolution, p.127.

victorious Allied states for the faulty construction of the League of Nations<sup>135</sup> and for the disastrous treatment of Germany. This is once again connected with the shape of the international political system:

The public opinion of the peoples ... would not allow (the statesmen) to do what in the interests of those people themselves was so obviously wise. The institutions of a national commonwealth, however great and however highly developed, do not suffice to reveal to the people of one nation how inseparably its interests are bound up with those of human society as a whole.<sup>136</sup>

Curtis expresses his distrust of old-style secret diplomacy. While the proceedings of the conferences must be secret, their convening and their attendants should be open to the public.<sup>137</sup>

For a number of reasons, he is also critical of the balance of power system. First, there is its doctrine of compensation. It allows strong states to expand at the expense of weaker ones under the pretext of offsetting a similar power gain by a rival. Second, since an absolute equilibrium of power is not achievable, the logics of balance of power causes the formation of hostile alliances. This ultimately leads to war. Third, it breeds a kind of diplomacy geared towards intrigue. This, in turn, hides from the public and even many statesmen the importance of international relations. Fourth, it ignores that stronger states did not necessarily behave aggressively towards weaker ones. Thus, Great Britain and the USA command a greater

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135. Curtis, 'League', p.468; Curtis, 'World', p.743.

136. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.899.

137. Curtis, 'League', pp.481-82; Curtis, 'World', p.753.

amount of power than Germany but, at the same time, are more peaceful.<sup>138</sup> He goes as far as saying that the balance of power 'has outlived its time by a century' and only got a new lease of life during the 19th century because of Great Britain's and the USA's aloofness from permanent alliances.<sup>139</sup>

At the same time, Curtis the textbook realist questions the propriety of a number of measures to improve the harmony of inter-state relations. Diplomatic attempts to convince Continental powers of naval disarmament will just backfire because, as we have seen, the Continentals are unable to comprehend Anglo-Saxon peaceful intentions.<sup>140</sup> To prevent wars, international conferences and councils, the Hague tribunals and or arbitration treaties are all to no avail.<sup>141</sup> The Locarno treaties and the Briand-Kellogg pact have failed.<sup>142</sup> International arbitration arrangements in particular are too legalistic. While able to deal with the symptoms, they fail to address the underlying causes of conflict.<sup>143</sup>

Curtis also does not hold international law in a too high regard. According to him, if during the earlier stages of World War I 'a pedant obsessed with the technicalities of international law' had been US ambassador to Britain, the British blockade against

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138. Curtis, 'Windows of Freedom', pp.4-6, 13, 20.

139. Ibid., p.12.

140. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.7-8.

141. Curtis, 'End', p.784.

142. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.830.

143. Curtis, 'World', p.733.

trade with Germany might have caused an Anglo-American confrontation. Luckily, the actual ambassador, like a good textbook realist, had cared more about the security risks a victorious Germany would have brought to the USA than about legal niceties.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, the problem with international law under conditions of international anarchy is that it creates a conflict of loyalties.<sup>145</sup>

As we have seen, Curtis bases these pessimistic statements on the assumptions that inorganic political systems, or compacts between sovereign states, cannot be stable. Due to the devotion statesmen and people feel towards their respective state, national egotisms are sooner or later to break up such a system.

Curtis likes to illustrate this by the fate of the US Confederation of 1781-89. It was in a chronic financial crisis because the component states did not pay the contributions due to them and the Confederation itself lacked independent taxation powers. Furthermore, the component states erected customs against each other. The Confederation also proved unable to administer the jointly-held territories to the West and to execute treaties with foreign powers. Disagreements about how to proceed in a dispute with Spain nearly caused the same states to return to British rule. The

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144. Curtis, Capital, p.257.

145. Curtis, 'World Order', pp.307-08.

merging of state sovereignties into the US union turned out to be the only solution.<sup>146</sup>

Given this lesson of history, Curtis discounts the plans to bring greater unity to the British Empire/Commonwealth by simply establishing an Imperial Council in which Britain and the Dominions would be represented. Such a body can only effectively work if there would be unanimity between the members states. Since there would be no mechanism to settle disputes over policies it would increase friction rather than provide closer cooperation.<sup>147</sup>

However, his favourite negative example is the League of Nations. In 1918, when the idea of that institution had just been mooted, Curtis advised caution. Great Britain cannot allow her freedom of action to be bound by the League, which might, after all, misjudge the intentions of an aggressive state.<sup>148</sup>

In his 1918-20 articles, Curtis singles out three defects of the young League. First, it gives the wrong impression of being a world government even though it lacks effective powers to fulfill these expectations. Second, the presence of small states on the League's Council complicates the search for a joint policy, which should be settled by the great powers among themselves. Third, there is no mechanism ensuring that

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<sup>146</sup>. Curtis, Green Memorandum, p.12; Curtis, 'Windows', pp.22-23; Curtis, 'World Order', pp.302-03; Curtis, Decision, pp.12-13; Curtis, World War, pp.37-38; Curtis, World Revolution, pp.18-23

<sup>147</sup>. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.71-72, 83, 132-33. See also Curtis, Way, pp.87-91.

<sup>148</sup>. Curtis, 'Windows', pp.10-11.



heads of government, rather than ambassadors without power for responsible decisions, are attending the Council's session. In effect, Curtis wants the League to be a regular conference of the great power statesmen, including the USA. Only such a system, and not a premature international organization, could have avoided the turn of events leading to WWI.<sup>149</sup>

Curtis accepts the idea that the German colonies and the non-Turkish provinces of the Ottoman Empire should become administered by specific countries as League of Nations mandates. He, however, warns that, in order for that system to work smoothly, agreement between the major powers is necessary. This agreement might not always be forthcoming.<sup>150</sup>

Some years later, he recommends Britain to clarify its own policy regarding China rather than looking towards the League of Nations for a solution. The League's efficiency depends upon the degree to which its members were able to cooperate. The tendency to treat it as a world government, which it is not, will only backfire.<sup>151</sup> He acknowledges that it does useful work, as in fighting drug traffic and white slavery and helping states in financial troubles, but that it ultimately has too many limitations.<sup>152</sup>

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149. Ibid., pp.10-11, 16, 18-20; Curtis, 'League', pp.476, 482-87; Curtis, 'World', pp.731-52. See also Curtis, 'World Order', pp.319-20.

150. Curtis, 'Windows', pp.22-28.

151. Curtis, Capital Question, pp.273, 303-04.

152. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.908; Curtis, Way, p.39.

The later collapse of the League of Nations system is for him one of the best examples of the inability of sovereign states to achieve peace via collective security.<sup>153</sup> The immediate reason of this collapse, according to Curtis, has been the fact that the League had needed the consent of all of its members for important decisions. Besides, statesmen representing member states had been distracted by domestic issues.<sup>154</sup> More generally, the problem with the League of Nations is that it, and particularly its Covenant, is a travesty of the American constitution, drawn in disregard of all the principles upon which this constitution was based.<sup>155</sup>

The Covenant has been ignored because the prime loyalty of politicians rested with their own states. Thus, when countries like Abyssinia faced attack, they were left to their fate.<sup>156</sup>

Curtis thus argues that inorganic unions like the League paved the way to war because they provided the illusion of collective security. Thus, states did not see that they had to rely on their own strength.<sup>157</sup>

Given its limitations, the League cannot be reformed. Curtis discounts the idea - mooted by

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153. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.908-18; Curtis, pp.18-19, 97; Curtis, World War, p.46.

154. Curtis, 'World Order', p.320; Curtis, Decision, p.21.

155. Curtis, 'World Order', pp.306-07.

156. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.909-10, 912-14. See also Curtis, 'World Order', pp.306-07; Curtis, Decision, p.21; Curtis, Way, pp.18-19, 40; Curtis, World War, p.46.

157. Curtis, Open Road, p.13.

idealists like Davies<sup>158</sup> - to equip it with its own police force. Such a force would require the unlimited loyalty of its members and own financial resources and could thus only be achieved if the participating states would merge their sovereignties.<sup>159</sup> Short of that, Curtis actually recommends that Britain and the Dominions should leave the League of Nations and foster a new international organization with less ambitious aims, particularly without the pretension to provide collective security.<sup>160</sup>

After WWII, Curtis is also sceptical about the newly-founded United Nations, which, for him, is just another of these futile compacts between sovereign states. Observing the divisions among the UN's members and particularly the Soviet Union's refusal to wholeheartedly cooperate he identifies the Security Council as actually being a danger to peace. The outbreak of the Korean War is for him a further proof that the UN has failed from the onset.<sup>161</sup>

Curtis also questions the abilities of military alliances to persist, particularly in times of peace. Because they need the consent of all the governments of the member states, such alliances have cumbersome decision-making processes. Furthermore, changing

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158. Brian Porter, 'David Davies and the Enforcement of Peace', in David Long and Peter Wilson (eds.), Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995 pp.58-78.

159. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.910-12.

160. Ibid., pp.914-16. See also Curtis, 'World', pp.752-53.

161. Curtis, World Revolution, pp.44-46; Curtis, Open Road, pp.15, 18, 20; Curtis, 'The 'Fifties'', p.173.

perceptions of national interests on the part of the member states sooner or later breaks such alliances apart.<sup>162</sup>

Writing during WWII, Curtis agrees with Walter Lippmann that the persistence of a triple alliance between the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union would be a good thing. However, he doubts that this alliance will endure for long or that, on its own, it will be able to prevent another war.<sup>163</sup> He also does not hold NATO in very high regard. After the alliance's establishment, he just mentions it briefly and in a dismissive way. He quotes a military specialist, who decries NATO's cumbersome organizational structure, lacking a constant decision-making apparatus at the top level.<sup>164</sup>

We see that Curtis in equally strong terms rejects both the idealist attempt at inter-state cooperation and collective security and the realist reliance on a balance of power mechanism. Instead, he argues that Britain or, later, the Western democracies should make themselves strong enough that they can deter any attack.<sup>165</sup> He stresses:

The safety of free systems is always to look to their own strength and not to measures for weakening their enemies.<sup>166</sup>

And the best way to foster the strength of free systems is for them to federate with each other. This is the

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162. Curtis, Decision, p.38; Curtis, World War, p.63.

163. Curtis, Way, pp.21-22; Curtis, World War, p.225.

164. Curtis, Open Road, pp.18-19.

165. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.7-8; Curtis, Decision, p.29.

166. Curtis, Decision, p.16.

reason why in the late 1930s, as we have seen, he opposed playing off Germany and the Soviet Union against each other, or Britain entering an alliance with the latter.

His ultimate prescription for the international political system is perhaps best captured in a number of rhetorical questions he asks in *Civitas Dei*:

Is not the strongest sense of patriotism as a matter of fact produced in the most highly developed commonwealths? Is not the end and object of the state to increase this sense of duty in men to each other? Is not the state in the form of the commonwealth the most effective agency for developing this sense of duty in men in the mass? On the other hand, can a state limited to one section of human beings, and organised on the basis of the infinite duty of all its members to that section alone, fully develop their sense of duty to human beings outside that section? (...) Can a system of compacts between sovereign states from its nature be trusted to restrain them from using force against each other? (...) Can the state fulfil its essential function of increasing the sense of duty in men to each other, in the form of the merely national state? Can the sense of duty in men to each other be developed to its utmost capacity until they are organised in one state, subject to one law, in such manner that they are led to feel that their ultimate duty is owed to the human race as a whole, and not to one part of it? Have men any prospect of attaining a higher plane of civilisation than that reached, so long as they are organised under national sovereignties?<sup>167</sup>

Yes, this all sounds like what one would expect from a textbook idealist. Indeed, world government, in attempting not simply to reform but completely to remodel the whole international system is as such as idealist as could be. Nevertheless, the important thing is that Curtis comes to his conclusion of the necessity for a world state after having provided a ruthlessly realist critique of idealist schemes like collective security.

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<sup>167</sup>. Curtis, *Civitas Dei*, pp.926-27.

## The 'First Debate'

In 1909, his patron Milner wrote about Curtis:

He is a bit of a visionary and an idealist, and he has great schemes. But I think he is thoroughly impressed with the necessity of caution.<sup>168</sup>

An American admirer of his article 'Windows of Freedom' of 1918 calls it 'one of the most eloquent statements of responsible idealism'.<sup>169</sup> The 'early' Curtis, who was more known for his plans of imperial rather than world federation, was then perceived by contemporaries as an idealist. This was then considered as nothing negative, the more so since he was also deemed 'responsible'.

Later on, when the World Commonwealth had moved to centre stage in his writings, the perception grows more critical. Edward Grigg, one of his fellow Round Tablers, writes in a review of *Civitas Dei*: 'Lionel Curtis is already widely suspected and denounced as one of those idealists who undermine empires'.<sup>170</sup> As far as the undermining of empires is concerned, nothing could be further from the truth, as we will see in Chapter 7. Nevertheless, it is interesting that by the 1930s the term idealist seems to have gotten a more negative connotation. Before the publication of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, however, idealism had not yet found its realist sparring partner.

During the 1910s, Curtis is himself advocating something resembling Carr's later call for a synthesis between utopianism/idealism and realism. Mentioning two prominent Round Tablers, he indicates that Olivier is not amenable enough to Dominion and working class

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168. Lavin, From Empire, p.110.

169. Ibid., p.160

170. Ibid., p.268.

sensitivities while Zimmern might `lose touch with realities`. However, both perspectives, if brought together, provides a valuable combination.<sup>171</sup> On another occasion, Curtis criticizes Wilson for his `reckless idealism`. But he continues that the defects of visionaries losing connection with details and of power politicians lacking a sense of `the wider aspects of truth` cancel each other out. Both kinds of people are necessary.<sup>172</sup>

He first uses the idealism vs. realism dichotomy in his early 1930s writings on China, although in a - for today - slightly puzzling way: Realists were those who wanted republican China in the 1910s to have a strong executive; idealists were the adherents of a strong parliament.<sup>173</sup> Then again, he claims: `A realist policy usually ends by proving that its authors were blind to the nature of genuine realities.'<sup>174</sup> Curtis seems to understand by realists those who lack the courage for bold changes. But, on another occasion, Curtis distinguishes `genuine` realists, who favour self-government by the people, from fake realists, who live in the past and want China to return to a monarchic system.<sup>175</sup>

It is in his 1940s writings that Curtis self-consciously puts himself into the utopian camp and keeps on criticizing the realists. The latter are those who are poking fun at the federal project and, indeed,

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171. May, Round Table, p.221.

172. Curtis, `League`, p.469.

173. Curtis, Capital Question, pp.123-24.

174. *Ibid.*, p.287.

175. Lionel Curtis, `Shanghai`, in Round Table 21 (1931), pp.738-68, here p.753.

any kind of change.<sup>176</sup> They are also those who consider war as inevitable.<sup>177</sup> And Harold Nicolson, diplomat and self-proclaimed realist, complained in a letter to Curtis that he seemed to think that realists were insensitive to human sufferings.<sup>178</sup> Curiously, Curtis also charges the realists for wrongly expecting that Britain in cooperation with the Dominions and the USA would be able to secure world's peace again.<sup>179</sup> In fact, we would today put those believing into the possibility of peace through interstate cooperation rather into the textbook idealist camp.

However, Curtis also gives us his definition of the term 'realist', a broad one and a more narrow one: Realists always brand as visionary any suggestion for a radical change in the system to which they are used, and, in doing so, appeal to that deep-seated factor in human nature - inertia.<sup>180</sup>

And:

One school ... refuse to waste time on 'Utopian' discussions. They are chary of projects which the politicians decline to consider. I know one distinguished professor who declines to discuss the idea of an international state, because he believes that no democracy will ever consent to relinquish its national sovereignty.<sup>181</sup>

If Carr uses the term 'utopian' sometimes as a residual category, Curtis does the same with realist. Anyone who opposes change in general and the federal project in particular is a realist. The broad definition approximately corresponds to the identification of

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176. Curtis, Decision, pp.62-63.

177. Curtis, War or Peace?, London: Oxford University Press and Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1946, p.33.

178. Lavin, From Empire, p.315.

179. Curtis, Decision, pp.31-32.

180. Curtis, Action, pp.33-34.

181. Curtis, World War, p.3.



textbook realism with pessimism. The narrower one, however, includes also most of those whom we would today consider textbook idealists. But, to make matters even more complicated, Curtis also declared himself to be on the side of 'hardboiled realists' against groups like Federal Union.<sup>182</sup> All this shows that the idealism-realism dichotomy, just established in the 1940s, was already subject to confusion - in any case in the writings of Curtis.

His remarks on *The Twenty Years' Crisis* are quite interesting. According to Curtis, Carr argues that 'relative power will always determine the issues between sovereign states'<sup>183</sup> and that Carr 'is unable to contemplate a human society which is not split up into sovereign states'.<sup>184</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 2, this interpretation overlooks the 'critical Realist' side of Carr and is an early example of the textbook version of Carr. At the same time, however, Curtis also says that, as long as there is no world state, Carr is completely right about the determining aspect of power.<sup>185</sup> What, then, separates Carr and Curtis?

### **Curtis and Carr**

First of all, both writers have completely different starting points. Curtis's Christian argument is wholly alien to Carr. Indeed, despite frequent

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182. Lavin, From Empire, p.303.

183. Curtis, Way, p.85.

184. *Ibid.*, p.86.

185. *Ibid.*, p.85.

references to Niebuhr,<sup>186</sup> Carr does not address theological issues directly. The only exception is the claim that Jesus deemed politics as inherently evil and thus boycotted it<sup>187</sup> - a claim which is, of course, completely at odds with Curtis's dream of creating God's kingdom on Earth.

On the other hand, as we have seen, there is Carr the non-positivist. He asserts that in the humanities there is a much greater intermingling between the investigation of facts and the purpose of this investigation than in the natural sciences. A social scientist is inevitably not only observing but also changing social phenomena.<sup>188</sup> This overlaps with Curtis's assertion that, due to the existence of free will, the humanities cannot have the same precision as the natural sciences.

Both Carr and Curtis are at one in upholding the faith in the possibility of human progress. Furthermore, Carr like Curtis stresses that the reasons of calamities like wars cannot be blamed on the shortcomings of certain individuals but have to be found at a deeper level.<sup>189</sup> On the other hand, Curtis one-sidedly stresses the importance of free will in contrast to Carr's more balanced, dialectical

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186. E.H. Carr, The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations, 2nd ed., London and Basingstoke: Papermac, (1939) 1995, pp.xi, 77, 85, 94, 95, 105, 145, 154 n.33.

187. Ibid., p.93.

188. Ibid., pp.4-5.

189. Ibid., p.x.

approach.<sup>190</sup> While Carr locates human action in social conditions and envisages it as collective, Curtis's argument runs into an unacknowledged structure-agency problem overcome by the existence of great thinkers and charismatic leaders.

One can guess that Carr would not be very convinced of Curtis's solution. He makes dismissive-sounding remarks about the intellectuals' self-important claim to provide guidance for the men of action<sup>191</sup> and about Wilson's tactics of appealing to the people over the head of the established political `bosses'.<sup>192</sup>

Carr and Curtis both see the existence of a world community and of international ethics. As in the case of the notion of progress, Carr is much more careful and circumscribed than Curtis. The latter's insistence that each nation should retain and fully develop its own characteristics and his call for an `unbigoted' nationalist spirit resembles the tenets of 19th century liberal nationalism as described by the former. Carr's critique of that movement - its untenable assumption of a harmony of interest between one's own nation and humanity at large<sup>193</sup> - is also applicable to Curtis. On the other hand, like Curtis, Carr also rejects the Athenian position in the Melian dialogue - if only fleetingly.<sup>194</sup>

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190. Ibid., p.12.

191. Ibid., p.14.

192. Ibid., p.33.

193. Ibid., p.46.

194. Ibid., p.200.

Coming to the character of international politics,  
Carr writes about

the meaningless question whether ... our political troubles have economic causes or whether ... our economic troubles have political causes ...<sup>195</sup>

This charge of being meaningless might also be directed at Curtis, who expressively argues that economic problems have political causes. However, what Carr himself writes about the way economic factors are used for the pursuit of power on the parts of states makes it obvious that he, too, sees politics as having priority over economics.<sup>196</sup> In this respect, Carr and Curtis see eye to eye.

Carr's account differs from Curtis's with respect to the behaviour of democratic states. As we have seen, in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* Carr discounts domestic elements in terms of their influence on a state's external behaviour and does not see democracies as more peaceful than autocracies. In this respect, the gap with Curtis's model is quite wide.

Furthermore, in contrast to Curtis's expectations for a harmonious future, Carr strongly argues that conflicts between human groups cannot be eliminated.<sup>197</sup> These human groups need not necessarily be states. The state is not a necessary form of human organization but historically contingent. Territorial power units may disappear altogether at a time yet far ahead, and Carr in any case assumes that the nation state as existing

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195. Ibid., p.108.

196. Ibid., pp.106-20.

197. Ibid., p.213.

today is bound to decrease in importance and that sovereignty is a blurred concept. He believes that several formally sovereign states can be efficiently integrated in military and economic terms - a possibility discounted by Curtis.

If state-centrism is a characteristic of realism, than Curtis is a bigger realist than Carr. As we have seen, he considers the state as such as inevitable for developed human communities and he is adamant that sovereignty is indivisible. He would have counted Carr's blocs as inorganic political systems bound to break down.

Still, there is some common ground. Like Curtis, Carr also believes that an international order cannot be built upon a coalition between a multitude of nation-states each with their own power-resources.<sup>198</sup> The difference is that Curtis reifies the concept of sovereignty, while Carr does not.

Concerning policy recommendations, there is agreement between Curtis and Carr that there must be no apotheosis of international law and that not too much should be expected of international arbitration.<sup>199</sup> Both see the Briand-Kellogg Pact or Davies' idea of an international police force as impractical.<sup>200</sup> Carr's criticism of the League of Nations - that it uses an abstract rhetoric not in line with reality, that there are too many small powers on the Council and that it

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198. Ibid., pp.x, 101, 216.

199. Ibid., pp.159-90.

200. Ibid., p.30.

has been neglected by influential politicians<sup>201</sup> - reads like a carbon copy of Curtis's reservations twenty years earlier. And Carr, like Curtis, advocates a mixture of force and appeasement vis-à-vis Nazi Germany.<sup>202</sup> In one respect Curtis turned out to be more in touch with 'realities' than Carr. While the latter during WW II hoped for a continuation of the wartime alliance between Washington, London and Moscow, the former was more sceptical.

Carr was certainly not as optimistic as Curtis that the British could somehow reserve for themselves the position of powerful junior partner of the USA. He writes cynically about the

dream that British supremacy, instead of passing altogether away, will be transmuted into the higher and more effective form of an ascendancy of the English-speaking peoples. The *pax Britannica* will be put into commission and become a *pax Anglo-Saxonia*, under which the British Dominions ... will be cunningly woven into a fabric of Anglo-American cooperation. This romantic idea goes back to the last years of the nineteenth century ... when Cecil Rhodes had one of the first recorded versions of world empire based on an Anglo-American partnership.<sup>203</sup>

Asking why the USA should be so keen to take the British on board, Carr clearly hedges his bets on straightforward American dominance.<sup>204</sup> Given the joint impact of the Reagan and Thatcher revolutions on the rest of the Western world and the recent events in Iraq, one may perhaps wonder whether, after all, Curtis was not closer to the mark than Carr.

At other passages of *The Twenty Years' Crisis* Carr also appears dismissive of the world state idea. He

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201. Ibid., pp.30-31, 40 n.12.

202. Ibid., p.202.

203. Ibid., p.214.

204. Ibid., p.215.

says that few people want it<sup>205</sup> and that it is usually only advanced by the dominant states.<sup>206</sup> After outlining his own vision for a new international order, Carr finishes his book with the words:

This, too, is a utopia. But it stands more directly in the line of recent advance than visions of a world federation or blue-prints of a more perfect League of Nations. Those elegant superstructures must wait until some progress has been made in digging the foundations.<sup>207</sup>

Now, on a superficial reading it appears to be quite clear what Carr would have thought about Curtis - just one more of these starry-eyed utopians coming up with unattainable blueprints. However, note well that Carr argues that a world federation *must wait*. He says neither that it is unattainable nor that it is not desirable. In other words, Carr would not necessarily have rejected Curtis' final goal.

Indeed, in his writings from the 1940s Carr calls for closer military and economic links between Britain and Western Europe. At the same time, Britain must strengthen her ties with the Commonwealth. Leading such a large multi-national bloc, Britain would act on an equal footing with the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>208</sup> As we will see, Curtis's plans were on similar lines. There was, of course, the difference that Carr did not immediately envisage a political federation and

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205. Ibid., p.9.

206. Ibid., pp.78-79.

207. Ibid., p.219.

208. Edward Hallett Carr, Conditions of Peace, London: Macmillan, 1942, pp.187-209; Edward Hallett Carr, Nationalism and After, London: Macmillan, 1945, pp.72-74; Charles Jones, E.H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp.92-93, 105, 115.

a merger of sovereignties - which was the specific issue dear to Curtis. However, at one stage Carr writes this about European integration:

(W)e may find that we have constructed something which mankind will come gradually to recognize as indispensable to its future well-being and which can some day be given ... wider geographical extension and constitutional forms. When this stage has been reached, it will be time to think of formal agreements, of definitions of functions, and of constitutional rules.<sup>209</sup>

In this quotation, Carr comes close to the vision of a British-led integrated Europe becoming the kernel of a world-wide political entity. The difference with Curtis lies in the fact that Carr envisages formal federation as the end-point, not starting-point, of political integration.

We will come back to some other parallels and contrasts between Curtis's and Carr's respective approaches in the last two chapters. However, from the above it should be clear that, while there are clearly stark differences between both writers, these differences can only partially be related to the alleged dichotomy of the 'First Debate'. In some respects, Curtis was as realist as Carr, perhaps even more.

If Carr was more open to the kind of schemes Curtis propagated than first meets the eye where, then, is the difference between them in this respect? Where Curtis lays himself open to Carrian criticism is his insistence that his schemes have nothing at all to do with interests and power politics. The axe Carr had to

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<sup>209</sup>. Carr, Conditions, p.273.



grind was exactly against such ignoring of the specific interests behind high-sounding internationalist phrases.

### **Conclusion**

If we adapt the textbook understandings of idealism and realism, as summarized in Chapter 1, to Curtis, we end up in a quandry: Curtis believes in progressivism and the boundless improvement of the human character, but this progressivism is tempered by his stress on structural constraints to human agency. He presents the Commonwealth as a universal principle but at the same time celebrates nationalism and cultural diversity. He develops a version of the theory of the democratic peace but contradicts this by the pre-Waltzian claim that war is inevitable as long as international anarchy persists. He rejects *realpolitik* and the balance of power but also deems international organizations and collective security measures as futile.

We might get out of this quandry of adequately placing Curtis by simply claiming that he was a contradictory thinker who happened to have both an idealist and a realist side. But by this we would seriously underestimate his capacity as a political thinker. His views may have been naive and hypocritical but they are internally coherent. Curtis successfully bridges the four contradictions mentioned above by referring to charismatic thinkers/leaders, by giving

his universalism a very broad and elastic shape, by showing how international anarchy negatively affects the otherwise peace-loving behaviour of commonwealths, and, most importantly, by using a realist analysis of world politics to bring home the necessity of an idealist project, i.e. world federation. Curtis himself addresses the idealism-realism dichotomy but in a way different from what we know from the contemporary textbooks. Despite completely different starting-points there are a few interesting similarities between his argument and Carr's.

Of course, Curtis's particular blend of textbook idealism and realism may be idiosyncratic. However, the broad range of criticism against the traditional interpretation of the First Debate, as summarized in Chapter 1, indicates that he was not just the exception which proves the rule.

If the textbook dichotomy is not helpful in classifying Curtis, and indeed the other interwar thinkers, where else can we then turn? My assertion is that we must not remain simply at the level of ideas and exegesis of texts but also consider the economic and social conditions which were behind the works of political thinkers. Furthermore, we have to trace which classes, and faction of classes, these thinkers represented.

## Chapter Five

### The Neo-Gramscian Perspective

#### Antonio Gramsci

Although he was influenced by thinkers as diverse as Machiavelli and Sorel, not to mention Marx, Antonio Gramsci's major intellectual mentors were the Italian philosophers Croce (who later arranged the translation of Curtis's *magnum opus* into Italian)<sup>1</sup> and Labriola. Labriola had developed a critique of the positivistic interpretations of Marx. Croce's anti-positivism, in contrast, was based upon Hegelian idealism. While both thinkers criticised the positivistic, gradualist and mechanical interpretations of socialism prevailing in the Italian socialist movement of the time, Labriola considered this to be the result of a misinterpretation of Marx, while for Croce, the positivism of Italian socialists could be traced to Marx.<sup>2</sup>

Croce's anti-positivism, in particular, held Turin in sway around the time that Gramsci started his university studies there. Much of Gramsci's later thinking evolved within the frame of a polemic with Croce. Gramsci was also a supporter of Lenin's theories of positive action, that the revolution should be done at any moment that the opportunity arose, even in a country dominated by peasants. As we will see below, however, Gramsci did not think that this same

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1. Deborah Lavin, From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, p.470.

2. Lynne Lawner, 'Introduction', in Antoni Gramsci, Letters From Prison: Antonio Gramsci (ed. and transl. by Lynne Lawner), New York: Noonday, 1989, pp.3-56, here pp.18-20, 45-47.

revolutionary strategy was suitable for Western European countries. There, a premature attempt on the part of the proletariat to grasp power could produce opposite results.

According to Gramsci,<sup>3</sup> the state encompasses not only the administrative, military and legal machineries enforcing a monopoly of coercion (political society), but also institutions like the church, the educational system, the press, political parties, or trade unions (civil society). The latter supplement the coercive character of the state via constructing popular consent. It is important to note, however, that Gramsci did not always use this expanded concept of state. There are also times when he refers to the more conventional understanding of the state as an 'administrative, governmental and coercive apparatus'.<sup>4</sup>

In depicting civil society as a realm beyond the capitalist market, as a realm which stands between the

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3. The following discussion is based upon: Walter L. Adamson, Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980; Robert W. Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method', in Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, Approaches to World Order, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.124-43; Robert W. Cox, Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, pp.409-10 n.10; Alan Swingwood, A Short History of Sociological Thought, 2nd ed., Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1991, pp.205-14.

4. Indeed, in Gramsci's thought 'the concepts cannot usefully be considered in abstraction from their applications, for when they are so abstracted different usages of the same concept appear to contain contradictions or ambiguities.' See Robert Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method' (1983) in Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, Approaches to World Order, Cambridge:

individual and the state, Gramsci employed a Hegelian understanding of civil society, which:

contained two important innovations. First, it made independent associations and public opinion a core component of civil society, granting them a role as political and ethical mediators between individuals and the state. Second, for all its invocation of the communal dimensions of human existence, Hegel's concept of civil society acknowledged the centrality of conscious, reflexive individuals in the construction of modern civil society.<sup>5</sup>

Understood as the combination of political and civil society, the state according to Gramsci is not a neutral arbiter above society, but is embattled by certain competing social groups or classes. If such groups/classes go beyond the stage of expressing their interests in purely economic terms and start to develop a coherent ideology for themselves, they form what Gramsci calls a 'historic bloc'. There are times when such a historic bloc forges political alliances with other groups, without, however, weakening its own superior position in that process. In this case, we can talk of hegemony: The ruling class provides the intellectual and moral leadership for the rest of the society, a process during which it passes its own morality, customs and practices to the rest of the society.<sup>6</sup> Consensual hegemony is achieved within the

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Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.124-143, here p.126.

5. Alejandro Colás, International Civil Society: Social Movements in World Politics, Cambridge and Malden: Polity and Blackwell, 2002, p.42.

6. Gramsci used the concept of hegemony in two related, but separate senses. First, it was used in juxtaposition to 'domination', namely 'the state's monopoly on the means of violence and its consequent role as the final arbiter of all disputes'. In this sense, hegemony meant 'the consensual basis of an existing political system within civil society.' In the second sense, hegemony meant a specific historical stage during the evolution of class consciousness. This

realm of civil society, while political society relies upon coercive domination.

If a historic bloc achieves both domination and hegemony, its own position as a ruling class will rest upon quite solid foundations. This was, according to Gramsci, the case in Western European countries like Great Britain and France. But there were also cases where the ruling historical bloc exerted domination but failed to develop a strong hegemony. This was what happened in Czarist Russia and Liberal Italy.<sup>7</sup> The reason that a socialist revolution triumphed in the former in 1917, but failed during the *biennio rosso* in the latter in 1919-21 had to do with a further, crucial variable: the strength of civil society vis-à-vis political society.

In pre-revolutionary Russia, civil society had existed only in a nascent form. Once the Bolsheviks

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was the stage when a rising class passed beyond the 'economic-corporative' level, i.e., where individuals went beyond the levels of feeling a measure of affinity with members of their trade or profession, without, however, having any sense of common class interests, and the level of seeing mere common economic interests among themselves. The hegemonic level was the one when the members of a class gained true class consciousness through developing 'a common intellectual and moral awareness, a common culture.' See Adamson, Hegemony, pp.160-61, 170-71.

<sup>7</sup>. In fact Gramsci examined at least three types of nonhegemonic systems. One was simple class domination as in pre-revolutionary Russia. Another was the practice of *transformismo* in Italian politics between 1860-1914, namely 'the predominance of political society over civil society in such a way that the subaltern classes are held in a passive position because their potential leadership is co-opted.' A third system was the pseudohegemonic one where 'the government in power, in order to gain a functional equivalent of hegemony, pretends to exercise its power in the name of a class which in reality it does not represent', as in the Napoleonic Empire where Napoleon's rule was exercised to some extent in the name of the bourgeoisie, but 'was essentially

had captured the coercive side of the state apparatus by a revolutionary 'war of movement', they were in control.<sup>8</sup> In Italy, by contrast, there was a strong civil society. However, the leading factions of the bourgeoisie controlling political society had only a relatively weak hold over this civil society. In such a situation, the right revolutionary strategy would have been the establishment by the working classes of a hegemony for themselves within civil society through a revolutionary 'war of position'.<sup>9</sup> Their failure to do so had opened the way for the fascists to take over the decomposing structure of political society and to make their own, though only partially successful, bid for hegemony over civil society.

Of crucial importance for the establishment of a hegemony are the intellectuals - broadly defined by

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independent of bourgeois interests'. See Adamson, Hegemony, p.175.

8. 'War of movement' meant the actual revolutionary moment, when the proletariat seizes power.

9. By 'war of position' Gramsci meant the stage when the proletariat, as an organised and class-conscious force, prepares itself for the next stage; namely the revolution as such, which will be brought about through a war of movement. According to Gramsci, it would be politically irresponsible to go ahead with a war of movement when the conditions for the successful completion of a war of position are not ripe, i.e. when the power-balance is clearly in favour of the bourgeoisie. The war of position was crucial for the emergence of the cultural consciousness of the proletariat and their cultural delinking from the bourgeoisie. See Theo Votsos, Der Begriff der Zivilgesellschaft bei Antonio Gramsci, Hamburg and Berlin: Argument, 2001, p.33. A war of movement, and the related concept of 'permanent revolution' can make sense where the civil society is not developed, as in pre-revolutionary Russia. Where it is developed, where there are political parties and trade union movements, however, the classical revolution theory has to be altered, and the war of movement replaced by the war of position. A new revolutionary theory suitable for the conditions of Western societies was thus articulated by Gramsci. See *ibid.*, p.81.

Gramsci as all those who mediate ideologies within civil society as well as between civil society and political society. Thus, intellectuals do not only include members of the free professions like academics, journalists, publishers or lawyers, but everyone involved in the organisation of administrative, productive or cultural tasks.

Gramsci further distinguished between traditional and organic intellectuals. The former are an autonomous group not directly attached to a specific class. The latter, in contrast, are 'experts in legitimation', who grow out of a rising historical bloc and express its interests in a way that aimed to appeal to society at large. In order to establish its hegemony, a historic bloc has first to win over traditional intellectuals to its cause, and subsequently to develop its own organic intellectuals.

Seen from this perspective, Curtis's claim about the intellectuals' heavy responsibility for war and peace no longer appears so boisterous. Indeed, Curtis can be characterized as an organic intellectual who, quite successfully, contributed to the production of legitimacy - both domestically and internationally - for Britain's ruling historic bloc.

Given the penetration of civil society by those controlling political society in Western Europe, an economic crisis will not necessarily affect the state, since its effects can be offset by the stabilizing influence of hegemonic consensus. However, a hegemonic crisis is likely to appear if the ruling classes fail in an undertaking, particularly war, for which they have sought consent from society at large; if



substantial new groups entered the political stage and make their own bid for hegemony; and if the intellectuals threaten to withdraw their support from the historical bloc.

Short of revolutionary upheaval, such a crisis can be resolved either through the emergence of a single party unifying the different political factions and establishing a new hegemony, or by the emergence of a charismatic, 'Caesarist' leader. This was, of course, what had happened in Italy with the take-over of Mussolini.

As will be seen later on, early 20th century Britain also faced a hegemonic crisis. However, in contrast to 1920s Italy the ruling class in the United Kingdom was cohesive enough to weather the crisis. Instead of withdrawing their support, the organic intellectuals (including Curtis) provided new concepts like new liberalism and social imperialism that, while failing to offset Britain's decline on the international level, still helped to keep the domestic power structure intact.

### **Robert Cox**

Notwithstanding doubts about the 'applicability' of key Gramscian concepts like hegemony, historical bloc and civil society out of the context of the nation-state,<sup>10</sup> International Relations scholars inspired by Gramsci have extended the use of these concepts, particularly hegemony, from the domestic to

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<sup>10</sup>. Randall D. Germain and Michael Kenny, 'Engaging Gramsci: International Relations Theory and the New

the international level.<sup>11</sup> There is by now a rich literature of new Gramscians, what is also sometimes dubbed the 'Italian school' in IR. Although the specific ontological units that are analysed vary (for example, international organizations in the case of Cox, a transnational ruling class in the case of van der Pijl, or the transnational state in the case of William Robinson,)<sup>12</sup> in general this literature focuses on the emergence of a global civil society as the reflection of a hegemonic world order.

Despite denying belonging to any school,<sup>13</sup> it has been Robert Cox, who through two seminal articles published in the early eighties, introduced IR scholars to Gramsci.<sup>14</sup> There are other reasons, apart from this introductory function, why Cox is considered to be a key figure, not only of the new Gramscian school, but also of critical IR thought generally. One is the sheer compass of his work on the dialectics of change in historical structures which includes the dynamics between social forces of production, states, and world orders. The other reason is that:

Cox's unique method for understanding the structures of world order has not been matched elsewhere in the emerging critical tradition for its flexibility and

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Gramscians' in Review of International Studies 24 (1998), pp.3-21.

11. See for example, Stephen Gill (ed.), Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

12. William I. Robinson, 'Social Theory and Globalization: The Rise of a Transnational State' in Theory and Society 30 (2001), 2, pp.157-200.

13. Germaine and Kenny, 'Engaging', p.4 n.3.

14. Robert Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory' (1981), in Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, Approaches to World Order, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.85-123; Robert Cox, 'Gramsci'.

adaptability to research problems. Unlike other methods, Cox's approach is designed to incorporate both the static and dynamic aspects of structures, and thus the use of historicist and positivist epistemologies is conceivable within the parameters of his method, in different instances.<sup>15</sup>

Let us briefly look at these two articles. The first article fulfilled the joint task of outlining Cox's approach and positing 'critical theory' as a juxtaposition to 'problem-solving theory', by which Cox in specific terms targetted IR neorealism.<sup>16</sup>

Theory, according to Cox, 'is always for someone and for some purpose.'<sup>17</sup> Theory can serve two diverging purposes. Either it is a 'problem-solving theory', which

takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized, as the given framework of action.<sup>18</sup>

Or it is 'critical theory' which poses questions about the given order. These questions include the power basis of this order, lying in material capabilities, ideas and institutions, and questions related to the attempt to historicise the order, i.e. to see it not as a transhistorical structure but as concretely located in a certain historical epoch.

The most that problem-solving theory attempts is to consider the potentials for tactical adjustments when the equilibrium within the given order is disturbed, in order to make the order work smoothly. In

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15. Timothy J. Sinclair, 'Beyond International Relations Theory: Robert W. Cox and Approaches to World Order' in Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, Approaches to World Order, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.3-18, here p.8.

16. Cox, 'Social Forces'.

17. Ibid., p.87. Emphasis in the original.

18. Ibid., p.88.

contrast, with its historicist epistemology, critical theory demystifies the given order and looks for possibilities of transformation that lie within that order.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of Curtis, it might be argued that his more 'practical' works on South African unification and Indian dyarchy represent a problem-solving approach while his calls for a world federation would be his critical-theoretical side. After all, he is aware of the historicity of the international state system and, far from taking it for granted, calls for its replacement. Nevertheless, this would be too generous on Curtis. As we will see, his federation proposals were just a big problem-solving device for his unquestioned assumption, i.e. Anglo-Saxon hegemony.

Distancing himself from a generic form of Marxism, Cox located his work in a specific, undeterministic understanding of historical materialism. This form of historical materialism, to Cox, is a synonym for critical theory and corrects the shortcomings of neorealism, to Cox a prime example of problem-solving theory, in four major respects.

The first correction is to neorealism's conception of conflict. According to Cox, both neorealism and historical materialism focus on conflict. However, where neorealism considers conflict as determined by structural factors or as embedded in a never-changing, power-seeking human nature, historical materialism sees in conflict the potential for propelling structural change.

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19. Ibid., pp.87-91.

Second, historical materialism directs the attention away from the horizontal level of rivalry between the great powers, the prime focus of neorealism, to add to this dimension the vertical one concerning issues of dominance, hegemony and imperialism in the global political economy.

Third, historical materialism broadens the realist perspective by paying attention to the relationship between the state and civil society. Neorealism, as we have seen, largely perceives of the state as isolated from the social structure within which it is historically embedded, or sees civil society in a conflictual relationship to the interests of the state, whereby the *raison d'état* is reified. Coxian historical materialism, on the other hand, employs the conceptualization of the relationship between the state and the civil society in the works of Antonio Gramsci, to see state/society complexes as the prime entities of a world order and for discovering the specific historical forms taken by these complexes.

Fourth, historical materialism draws the attention to the production process and the power relations underlying this process, a field neglected by neorealism and collapsed onto the reified concept of the national interest. According to Coxian historical materialism, the production process, and the power relations it is based on and that it reproduces, are integral parts of the historical process which determines the specific forms that state/society complexes and world orders take.

According to Cox, each action takes place in a `framework for action`, whereby the task of the

critical theorist is to historically unravel this framework. Cox's framework for action has the form of a historical structure, a particular combination of thought patterns, material conditions, and human institutions which has a certain coherence among its elements.<sup>20</sup>

Cox further employs the concept of historical structures as ideal-typical devices to be applied to specific spheres of human activity. Cox's chosen spheres of activity are:

(1) organization of production, more particularly with regard to the *social forces* engendered by the production process; (2) *forms of state* as derived from a study of state/society complexes; and (3) *world orders*, that is, the particular configurations of forces which successively define the problematic of war or peace for the ensemble of states.<sup>21</sup>

Social forces, forms of state, and world orders can be seen as 'particular configurations of material capabilities, ideas and institutions' that mutually influence each other.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of the historical structure in Cox bears a strong resemblance to Gramsci's historical blocs. The particular 'configuration of forces' inherent in the historical structure comprising of the three dimensions of ideas, institutions and material capabilities does not cause actions in a deterministic way. Rather, it materializes itself in the shape of pressures and constraints. Each of the dimensions bears upon the other two and has the potential to bring about changes in them, producing a multidimensional and undeterministic conception of historical change.<sup>23</sup>

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20. Ibid., p.97.

21. Ibid., p.100. Emphasis in the original.

22. Ibid., p.101.

23. Ibid., pp.95-97.

Unlike neorealism which does not analyse those forms of dominance where the power structures get mystified behind universalized ideologies, and focuses on power as an aggregation of material resources, Cox distinguishes between hegemonic and nonhegemonic historical structures. Hegemonic structures are those in which the power basis of the structure is less openly displayed than in nonhegemonic ones.

A hegemonic world order does not simply mean the dominance of one state over the rest, as in conventional hegemonic stability theory.<sup>24</sup> Rather, the dominant state and the historic bloc behind that state are able to spread their own ideological order globally and to find allied classes in other states. A hegemonic world order is thus based upon a degree of consent between the major state units. It reproduces the paramount position of the hegemonic state and of the classes controlling it, but it also gives some advantages to the less powerful.

A hegemonic order is contrasted with forms of dominance like imperialism, which rely on the exercise of naked power without resort to any consensual strategy. Both *Pax Americana* of the post WWII era, and the *Pax Britanica* of the mid-nineteenth century, were, according to Cox, hegemonic structures since they involved the establishment and sustenance of dominance not merely thorough the use of economic and military capabilities, but also the universalisation of an

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<sup>24</sup>. For hegemonic stability theory see Isabelle Grunberg, 'Exploring the "Myth" of Hegemonic Stability', in International Organization, 44, (1990), 4, pp.431-77.

ideological structure which underpinned the dominance.<sup>25</sup> As we will see, Curtis had an important part in providing ideational support for both the declining British hegemony and its supersession by the American one.

In the second article, Cox deepened the Gramscian analysis. After introducing several Gramscian concepts, Cox reflects upon whether it is possible to employ Gramscian analysis of hegemony in international relations. In line with the arguments raised in his earlier article, in both *Pax Britannica* and *Pax Americana* Cox sees a hegemonic world order, with the political, economic and social aspects forming a coherent whole.<sup>26</sup> According to Cox:

Hegemony at the international level is thus not merely an order among states. It is an order within a world economy with a dominant mode of production which penetrates into all countries and links into other subordinate modes of production. It is also a complex of international social relationships which connect the social classes of different countries. World hegemony can be described as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure; and it cannot be simply one of these things but must be all three.<sup>27</sup>

#### **Kees van der Pijl**

Drawing upon the insights of Gramsci and Cox, Kees van der Pijl asserts that the history of political thought cannot be adequately conceptualised in isolation from the changes in the process of capital accumulation.

The cosmopolitan, liberal internationalist philosophy of British hegemony, which reached its

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25. Cox, 'Social Forces', pp.102-07; Cox, Production, pp.7-8.

26. Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony, and International Relations', pp.135-7.

27. Ibid., p.137.



pinnacle in the nineteenth century, was based upon the rise of `sector A` industries and the process of extensive accumulation, as well as the accompanying predominance of the worldwide commercial circuit sustaining the distribution of locally produced goods. Extensive accumulation originated with the industrial revolution, and the dominance of the textile and food industries. It held its dominant position until well into the nineteenth century. Production was characterised by a low organic composition of capital, with the output comprising primarily the means of consumption.

In the course of the nineteenth century, there was a gradual transition to intensive accumulation. Intensive accumulation was characterised by a high organic composition of capital and the primary supply of producer goods. The dominant industries were those of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, namely metals, oil and engineering, the so-called `B` industries.

Since the period of intensive accumulation went hand in hand with the rise of protectionist rivals to Britain like Germany, the scale of operation of these industries was national, often related to the Hobbesian state-society configuration. This meant that they normally drew upon state support and that, consequently, the border between their foreign activities and official foreign policy became blurred. The rise of an organised labour movement, and the accompanying organisation of the employers completed the picture, which was of a comprehensive

countermovement to cosmopolitan liberalism and can be summed up as the state monopoly tendency.

However, for some time, the internationalisation of the circuit of the money capital hid this countermovement. Until World War I, and in the 1920s, high finance represented a transnational system holding the various national industrial blocs together. With the Great Crash of 1929, however, this mask could no longer be kept and:

The emergency tutelage under which bank capital was placed by governments and the policy of the 'euthanasia of the rentier' prescribed by Keynes then inaugurated a period in which the productive-capital perspective, summed up in Polanyi's concept of social protection and reflecting the high level of socialisation typical of an economy centring on the production of investment goods, reigned supreme. The international circuit of money capital virtually collapsed.<sup>28</sup>

During the same period, in the United States there was a shift to progressive accumulation, characterised by a combination of labour and capital-intensive processes and the dominance of the research-intensive sector 'C' industries like automobiles, chemicals and electrical engineering. As for the scale of operation of these industries, the emphasis on secure national markets was combined with a process of active internationalisation. This can be summed up as a corporate liberal phase.<sup>29</sup>

To connect the process of capital accumulation with the realm of ideology, van der Pijl resorts to the concept of 'comprehensive concepts of control' which unite specific ruling class configurations behind them

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28. Kees van der Pijl, Transnational Classes and International Relations, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p.56.

29. Ibid., pp.56-7, 63.

by providing implicit but definite joint programs. They are

political formulas that lend cohesion and cogency to the rule of particular classes and fractions of classes by translating idealized class and fractional viewpoints into a strategic orientation for society as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

In line with the Gramscian concept of hegemony, the authority for such concepts of control is derived from the key role that certain classes and fractions of classes acquire at specific stages in the capital accumulation process. This role goes beyond the strict functions of these classes in this process.<sup>31</sup>

Van der Pijl distinguishes between three concepts of control. First, there is liberal internationalism, based on the money-capital perspective. Due to the local scope of textile production and its resulting dependency upon far-flung commercial and credit networks, this specific concept of control is connected with the phase of 'A'-industries. Its adherents are mainly bankers, merchants, rentiers and smaller industrialists. Domestically, this concept embraces *laisser-faire* and sound money. On the international level, it stands for free trade and cosmopolitanism.

Second, there is the state monopoly tendency that is based on the productive-capital perspective, which is in turn connected with the growth of 'B'-industries. Economics of scale need the existence of a national market and strive to remain independent of the fetters of money capital. The productive capital perspective

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30. Kees van der Pijl, 'Ruling Classes, Hegemony, and the State System: Theoretical and Historical Considerations', in International Journal of Political Economy 19 (1989), 3, pp.7-35, here p.8.

31. Ibid., pp.7-8.

has been formulated by economists like J.A. Hobson and J.M. Keynes with their sharp criticism of rentier power. However, its most consequent applier was Henry Ford. The principles of `Fordism` are three-fold: First, assembly-line and mass production; second, high wages to stimulate demand; third, paternalistic welfare patterns. Elements of corporatist collaboration between employers and workers as well as state intervention into the economy were added to the recipe. Given its national focus, the state monopoly tendency looked askance at liberal internationalism.

However, after an abortive start under Wilson's Presidency, a synthesis between the money- and productive-capital perspectives was achieved during the later part of the New Deal. This reflected the rise of `C`-industries and is called the corporate liberalism concept of control. While state intervention, demand management and welfare elements were taken over from the productive-capital perspective, the new synthesis simultaneously embraced the internationalist and free trade aspects of the money-capital perspective. Given the hegemonic position of the United States after World War II, this synthesis of the two perspectives was well-adapted to American economic needs. Under US tutelage, it spread also through Western Europe.

These three concepts of control have also developed projects for greater political integration of existing states. Versions of European unity have been mooted by adherents of all of them. The European unity schemes of liberal internationalism and corporate liberalism were not directed against the USA, while the `Euronational` project of the state monopoly tendency

were. Projects for Atlantic integration were particularly an outgrowth of the synthetic concept of control although one can distinguish between two subtypes. The intergovernmentalist project of 'Atlantic Union', which had its apogee during the 1940s, was a corporate liberalism tinged by the older liberal internationalism, which still retained adherents in Great Britain. In contrast, the 'Atlantic Partnership' idea of the 1960s tried to accommodate corporate liberalism with a lingering-on state monopoly tendency as represented by Gaullist France.<sup>32</sup>

Van der Pijl completes his theoretical apparatus by an important distinction between two sets of state/society complexes.<sup>33</sup> In correspondence with the needs of the capital accumulation process, since the seventeenth century there has been a continuous, transnational, and uneven expansion of the 'Lockean heartland' of originally Anglo-Saxon countries, which are characterised by the strict separation of the state from the civil society, and the predominance of the self-regulating forces in the latter. This expansion of the Lockean heartland has taken place at the expense of the Hobbesian state system, which is represented by the 'catching-up' countries like France, Germany or Russia/Soviet Union, and their gradual incorporation into the Lockean realm. The expansion of the Lockean

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<sup>32</sup>. Kees van der Pijl, The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class, London: Verso, 1984, pp.8-34.

<sup>33</sup>. In putting the emphasis on the ideal-types of Lockean and Hobbesian 'state-society complexes' instead of the emphasis on states that prevails in mainstream international relations, van der Pijl has been influenced by Robert Cox. See van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, p.64 and Cox, 'Social Forces', p.96.

heartland further involved the process of incorporating the developing Hobbesian rim countries. Besides, there is also the 'Prize area', i.e. the periphery, where there are only weakly developed states or colonial territories. The Prize area is mainly controlled or dominated by heartland powers in order to provide additional resources.<sup>34</sup>

Since the Lockean state/society configuration found its ideal-typical form in the Anglo-Saxon realm, with Great Britain at its core, this begs the question of what was special in Britain. As in the other centers of the original bourgeois revolution (Holland, France, and the U.S.), in England capitalist society emerged under the auspices of a strong absolutist state that provided the conditions for the transformation of feudal or colonial conditions into capitalism. This kind of state was idealised in Hobbes' *Leviathan* of 1651. However,

in England bourgeois society became largely self-regulating, i.e., the state could remain in the background and only in case of emergency had to step in actively to regulate social relations. Only when state-guaranteed money and law no longer suffice to solve social conflict, the state appears in full view as active, public power, destroying the image of neutrality in the process.<sup>35</sup>

Through the industrial revolution, the industrial bourgeoisie of Britain proceeded to become the most powerful and self-conscious faction of that class. This was, however, a faction that was primarily oriented, not to production, but to commerce and finance, a perspective that was related to British supremacy as

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<sup>34</sup>. Van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, pp.64-97.

<sup>35</sup>. Van der Pijl, 'Ruling Classes', p.18.

the workshop of the world and the center of international finance and shipping. It was therefore truly cosmopolitan. The British ruling classes, together with the ruling classes within the greater, Lockean 'Anglo-Saxon nation', namely those in North America, Australia and New Zealand, and white South Africa, formed a cosmopolitan transnational society.<sup>36</sup>

In this way, the British Commonwealth, in particular, provided the original nucleus of the Lockean state-system:

In contrast to the strong interventionist state of the continental European type dominating a society lacking national cohesion (a factor also operative in the USA), the Anglo-Saxon 'nation' in the late 19th century was spread across several states, together constituting what was to become the British Commonwealth. The Lockean state and the system of representative democracy and common law, organically complementing a vigorous civil society, thus assumed an intercontinental format in the Commonwealth. At the level of the ruling class, the Commonwealth operated 'as a system of interlinked groups, organizations and societies within the greater community' that simultaneously 'was able to avoid in very large measure the growth of rigidities and compartmentalization in its political, economic and social structure.'<sup>37</sup>

The informal and private nature of the Commonwealth, the non-existence of a public structure meant that:

its inaccessibility to democratic demands was secure and class struggle lacked a clear focus. This was a subjective, class consideration on the part of the architects of the Commonwealth, but also reflected the remoteness of the international sphere to a working class under the sway of social imperialism. Given the level of wealth, ethnic homogeneity, civil freedoms and rule of law, the chances that demands for democracy would assume a class content moreover were limited. (In South Africa, racial segregation of course was the presupposition for this).<sup>38</sup>

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36. Kees van der Pijl, Class Struggle in the State System, Amsterdam: Center for Economic and Political Studies, 1988, p.5.

37. Ibid., p.5.

38. Ibid., p.5.

According to van der Pijl, the withdrawal of the Lockean state is accompanied by a `specific stage of socialization`, the development of what Gramsci calls the first level of superstructures:

This level comprises that part of social life in which people, whether directly active in the labor process or not, are engaged in shaping their personal lives and engaging in social connections of a prepolitical nature. Such connections are friendships, families, clubs, and comparable bodies, and also those with an institutional form and even an economic basis of their own, such as churches. As the development of the productive forces proceeds, the shortening of the working day allows this area of life to develop into a sphere increasingly autonomized from class relations. Individualization, typical of this `first level of superstructures`, to an ever greater extent complicates and cuts across the fixed juxtapositions of class relations properly speaking.<sup>39</sup>

The degree of emancipation of society in terms of the `first level of superstructures` that in this way parallels the withdrawal of the Lockean state in the Lockean state society configuration means that such states have only a limited degree of autonomy left.<sup>40</sup>

Traditionally centered in Continental Europe, the Hobbesian countries are the late-comers, who entered the capitalist development process during the heyday of the second-generation industries mentioned above: namely steel, chemicals and electricity. In contrast to the Lockean countries, where the capitalists were oriented to circulation (finance and commerce) instead of production, the ruling classes in these Hobbesian countries oriented themselves to the production process in order to catch up with the more advanced Lockean core. Since the conditions for capital accumulation did

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39. Van der Pijl, `Ruling Classes`, p.18.

40. Ibid., p.19.



not originally stem from the civil society, the state elite had to engender reforms from above, in the form of 'passive revolutions'.<sup>41</sup>

Nationality was subordinated to the development of the productive forces, which, in turn, were considered as the tools of a strong state. The hegemony of the bourgeoisie of the Hobbesian state/society configuration, its concept of control, was therefore constructed from the vantage point of production, and made different kinds of economic forms restricting the self-regulating market possible, from the interventionist state down to cartels and corporatism.<sup>42</sup>

During the First World War, the Hobbesian states challenged the hegemony of the liberal internationalist bourgeoisie, namely the bourgeoisie of the English-speaking world, together with that from the Low Countries and Scandinavia, but also influencing class formation in France, Germany and Northern Italy. The anti-bourgeois wave continued with the abortive European proletarian revolutions which took place in the aftermath of the war, as well as the Bolshevik Revolution.

The hegemony of the liberal internationalist bourgeoisie had been sustained until the First World War through informal ties between elements of this bourgeoisie that were attached to the circuits of money and commodity capital. Beyond this, however, the Hobbesian orientation during its heyday (c.1900-40)

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41. 'By "passive revolution" or a "revolution without a revolution" Gramsci generally meant elite-engineered social and political reform.' Adamson, Hegemony, p.186.

42. Van der Pijl, Class Struggle, p.6.

spread as state-monopoly tendency even to the bourgeoisie in the Lockean area.<sup>43</sup> Although the general destiny of the Hobbesian bourgeoisie was to become submerged into an expanding liberal-internationalist bourgeoisie, this was not a one-sided process:

(T)he productive and state counterpoint to self-regulating liberal internationalism would leave an enduring imprint, captured by Polanyi in The Great Transformation of 1944 (1957) but also reproduced within specific segments of the ruling class on account of the accumulation requirements of particular industries. The prominence of productive capital in the profit distribution process here has remained an indicator of corporatist, and state-relayed forms of bourgeois hegemony.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, although the Lockean system has been expanding, its character through the twentieth century has been essentially different from the nineteenth century, the heyday of classical liberalism.

The phases of the state monopoly tendency and of corporate liberalism determined the transition from *Pax Britannica* to *Pax Americana*. In line with his general theory of the continuous but crisis-ridden and uneven expansion of the Lockean heartland since the seventeenth century, van der Pijl has developed his conception of hegemony. It differs not only from that endorsed by the mainstream conceptions prevailing in the International Political Economy literature, but also from the neo-Gramscian versions, including that of Robert Cox. Furthermore, it differs from the accounts of Paul Kennedy, Immanuel Wallerstein and George Modelski. What is shared by all the previous accounts is their conception of hegemony as based on the

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43. Ibid., pp.5-6.

44. Ibid., p.6.

dominance of a single power, and the consequent sharp split between British and American hegemonies.

According to van der Pijl, however, the expansion of the Lockean heartland should be conceptualised as the societal integration of more than one power. The transition from *Pax Britannica* to *Pax Americana* was part and parcel of a general process of the spreading out of a transnational civil society, and the internal pacification within the North Atlantic community of states. In this sense, British hegemony, as the representative of the Lockean state-society complex, has not disappeared, but simply got transformed into the dominance of the North Atlantic community, underpinned by American dominance.<sup>45</sup>

We have mentioned above the specific type of socialization that culminates in the development of the first level of superstructures that accompanies the receding of the Lockean state from civil society. To use van der Pijl's words once more, this type of socialization simultaneously increases the mutual dependence of people and the semblance of their independence. This is a transnational process, because it cuts across the fixed pattern of the state system, and supports a normative structure superior to those coinciding with particular states. Hence we should preferably speak of a *Lockean heartland* rather than of individual Lockean states. The transnationalization of society is essential here; a transnationalization propelled by the internationalization of capital.<sup>46</sup>

The Lockean heartland is associated with a process of pacification. Within its bounds, power politics takes back-stage in a double sense. On the one

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<sup>45</sup>. Kees van der Pijl, Vordenker der Weltpolitik: Einführung in die internationale Politik aus ideengeschichtlicher Perspektive, Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1996, p.21; van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, pp.70-71.

<sup>46</sup>. Van der Pijl, 'Ruling Classes', pp.18-19.

hand, in the conduct of the relations between the component units of the heartland classical diplomacy has disappeared. This is reserved for their dealings with those outside of the heartland. Even in this case, however,

power-realist positions are increasingly undermined by the internationalization of capital and the cultural penetration of the periphery, and the shifting coordinates of the community boundaries that accompany them.<sup>47</sup>

With reference to the history of IR thought, we can draw one conclusion from the concepts outlined by van der Pijl: The relationship between inter-war idealist thought, and the works of the classical realists of the 1940s and 1950s is characterised by a continuum. Both of these strands of thinking were connected, on the one hand to the shifts in the process of capital accumulation, on the other hand to the accompanying transition from the *Pax Britannica* to *Pax Americana*.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

We would do well always to remember Cox's assertion that a theory is for someone and for something. Thus, instead of trying to squeeze interwar writers like Curtis into the straightjacket of the idealism vs. realism dichotomy, it is more fruitful to ask ourselves what the interests behind his proposals

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<sup>47</sup>. Ibid., pp.18-19.

<sup>48</sup>. Van der Pijl himself does not express this conclusion clearly but tends to retain the idealism-realism dichotomy. See Vordenker, pp.91-93, 214-16. However, in Transnational Classes, p.111 he points out that both Zimmern, the idealist and Carr were members

and assertion might have been. In this respect, Gramsci's concept of hegemony and of the organic intellectual are of particular relevance. Organic intellectuals are constructors of legitimacy for a ruling class, or class faction. They provide intellectual ammunition for such a ruling groups' penetration of civil society with their own world-view.

Hegemony can not only be analysed at the level of the nation-state (as Gramsci did, for example in demonstrating the insufficient penetration of civil society by Italy's ruling classes) but also at the international one (as Cox pioneered in the case of the *Pax Britannica* and *Pax Americana*).

Although the more successful class factions operate on a transnational scale rather than one limited to their specific nation-state, it is still necessary to look at the specific configurations of class forces within the state/society complex of a given writer. Employing the model of van der Pijl, we should look for indications of the money-capital and, respectively, the productive-capital perspective in the writings of a specific author. In other words, the question is not only whether he or she embraces a harmonious or competitive understanding of world affairs but also what he or she has to say about domestic economic matters, for example *laisser-faire* or corporatism. Furthermore, these issues can be linked with how a writer approached the relations of the Lockean heartland with the Hobbesian contenders. This is of particular relevance for the inter-war period,

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of the same circle, the Rhodes-Milner group, which will be discussed in Chapter 8.

which was a time when the heartland faced serious material and ideological challenges.

Admittedly, money-capital vs. productive-capital and heartland vs. contenders are again dichotomies. However, these concepts should not be considered as mutually incompatible. The *Pax Americana* rested on the successful integration of the two capital perspectives under corporate liberalism. Indeed, it is possible to interpret classical realism as a synthesis between the liberal assumptions of the heartland and the *realpolitik* world-view of the contenders. If the historical process we are talking about involves the expansion of the Lockean heartland in terms of the production pattern, it has found one aspect of its ideological counterpart in the synthesis that the classical realists, with their Continental background, have made.

## Chapter Six

### The Intellectual Background: Empire Federalism, New Liberalism and Social Imperialism

#### Introduction

As we have seen, idealist and realist elements are equally important components in Curtis' body of works. The dichotomous textbook version is thus not very helpful for a proper understanding of his thought. An alternative approach is suggested here: Curtis' thought should be seen in the context of the intellectual ferment that shook Britain about the turn from the 19th to the 20th century. Then, the previously dominant version of liberalism was subject to a two-pronged attack: by new liberalism from the left and by social imperialism from the right. Curtis' work cannot be adequately understood without referring to the discourses of that time. These discourses, in turn, can be usefully interpreted by reference to the framework developed by van der Pijl.

This chapter aims to provide a thematic list of the main ideological currents which are of relevance in the context of Curtis' work. It begins with an overview of 'Gladstonianism' (aka 19th century liberalism), which was the particular bugbear of the new early 20th century movements, and of its decline. Then, we will deal with the development of the imperial federation idea. That section shows that the Round Table did not 'invent' imperial federation but that this motif has a history going back to the earlier 19th century. Next, there will be a discussion of new liberalism and its successors. Curtis shared with it the rejection of an

overtly individualist approach in favour of one putting the communal bonds between people and the mutual obligations arising therefrom into the foreground. A treatment of new liberalism can thus show the wide impact of the anti-*laissez-faire* ideology that also motivated Curtis. However, it is in the context of the early 20th century social imperialism that he can be best placed. In his writings, Curtis always retained some prime parameters of the social imperialist ideology but, dropping its overtly Social-Darwinist aspects, managed to present them in an internationalist cloak. An overview of British social imperialism in its Fabian, Liberal and Conservative versions will thus be given. Finally, the apogee of social imperialism in the Lloyd George coalition will be briefly described.

#### **`Gladstonianism`**

As we will see in the next chapter, Curtis repeatedly denounced what he called the `Manchester School` or `Cobdenism`. However, in general the most favourite *bête-noire* for the early 20th century British social imperialists was another representative of 19th century liberalism, William Gladstone. There was an agreement between both supporters and antagonists of social imperialism in seeing it as a new creed in sharp opposition to an older one, `Gladstonianism`.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G.R. Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899 - 1914, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971, p.132; Robert Scally, The Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition: The Politics of Social Imperialism, 1900 - 1918, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, pp.42, 49.



To uncritically accept this terminology does, of course, mean observing Victorian Britain largely through the eyes of the Edwardians. As Scally has pointed out, for the early 20th century social imperialists, Gladstonian liberalism was a catch-all phrase covering everyone not agreeing with their views.<sup>2</sup> With this note of caution in mind, let us have a closer look at Gladstonianism and its relationship to Cobdenism and the Manchester School. But prior to this, an excursus on the mid-19th century configuration of the general world order as well as the social forces and the state/society complex in Britain is in order.

During the first two-thirds of the 19th century, the dominant capitalist sectors were the labour-intensive industries oriented to consumption, for instance food and textiles. These industries operated on a local scale, but their products were distributed all over the world via far-flung commercial networks.<sup>3</sup> This was made possible by the dominating free trade system and, already towards the end of the liberal era, the general acceptance of the gold standard.

After the revolutionary upheavals of the first half of the century, the major European countries enjoyed political stability thanks to a *modus vivendi* between the aristocratic and bourgeois classes, and high levels of economic growth. Britain, as the leading

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2. Scally, Origins, pp.23-24.

3. Kees van der Pijl, Transnational Classes and International Relations, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, pp.55-56.

industrial, as well as trading and financial country kept the whole system going. By her control of the high seas and manipulation of the European balance of power Britain had prevented the reactionary Holy Alliance from intervening against liberal revolutions in Europa and Latin America. Britain thus indirectly sponsored the spread of the liberal state and ensured the undisturbed workings of a world economy disembedded from the social and political realms.

While the United Kingdom was the prime gainer from the liberal world order, the tenets of this order were accepted by the other European countries as well. In the non-European world, indigenous governments and dominant classes were, wherever possible, converted to the liberal creed. However, Britain also resorted to military intervention and colonial rule when necessary.<sup>4</sup>

Mid-century Great Britain was the archetypical liberal state carrying out five basic tasks: The removal of residual feudal and mercantilist laws and practices; sponsoring a free market for goods and labour through tariff reduction and Poor Law reforms; ensuring the soundness of money through an autonomous central bank; protecting the market mechanism from potential disturbances by the provision of an effective administrative and coercive apparatus; mobilizing capital via enacting new laws conducive for private capital formation and via providing infrastructural

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<sup>4</sup>. Robert W. Cox, Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, pp.126-29, 143-47.

services<sup>5</sup> - although, in this last respect, the British state already then lagged behind the Continental ones.<sup>6</sup>

What were the components of the hegemonic bloc running the British liberal state? On the Marxist side, Anderson and Nairn have highlighted the specificities of the British compared with the Continental European cases by their emphasis on the aristocratic hegemony, which stopped the fledgling bourgeoisie on its tracks and co-opted labour as a 'corporate body'.<sup>7</sup> This thesis overlaps with cultural explanations of British economic decline in the twentieth century. In an influential book, Martin Wiener held the 'nonmaterialist' culture of English middle- and upper classes responsible for the crippling of the 'industrial spirit' in Britain.<sup>8</sup>

However, the most sophisticated recent analysis of Britain's social structure has come from Cain and Hopkins. According to them, the dominant socioeconomic strata in Britain has not been the manufacturing classes (who, they allege, were representatives of fragmented and provincial business enterprises, and were relatively less wealthy and prestigious). Instead, who held the access to the circuits of power in conjunction with the state from the Glorious Revolution

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5. Ibid., pp.130-3.

6. Perry Anderson, 'The Figures of Descent' (1987), in Perry Anderson, English Questions, London and New York: Verso, 1992, pp.121-92, here p.143.

7. Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis' (1964), in Perry Anderson, English Questions, London and New York: Verso, 1992, pp.15-47; Tom Nairn, 'The British Political Elite', in New Left Review 23 (1964), pp.19-25.

8. Martin J. Wiener, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980, Harmondsworth: Penguin, (1981) 1992.

of 1688 onwards, were the rentier landowners and the merchants and financiers in the City of London. Cain and Hopkins label them 'gentlemanly capitalists'.<sup>9</sup> In our view, it is more appropriate to refer to them as the capital factions related to the money-capital perspective.

These factions staffed and controlled the administrative apparatus not only through permanent networks between leading politicians and City bankers and merchants. They also implanted their value system, 'a common view of the world and how it should be ordered', which had been borrowed originally from the landed aristocracy.<sup>10</sup> The worldview of those committed to the money-capital perspective was reinforced ideologically through institutions like the Anglican Church and public schools and Oxbridge.<sup>11</sup> Its influence was particularly felt in those parts of the 'official mind' which were closely concerned either with the management of government finances, such as the Treasury, or with Britain's overseas responsibilities and possessions.<sup>12</sup>

It was within this complex edifice incorporating political, economic and cultural networks that the aristocrats, who experienced a general decline in their

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9. P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688 - 1914, London and New York: Longman, 1993; P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction 1914 - 1990, London and New York: Longman, 1993. For some of the recent critiques of the Cain and Hopkins thesis see Raymond E. Dumett (ed.), Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism: The New Debate on Empire, London and New York: Longman, 1999. In the introduction, for instance, Dumett says that Cain and Hopkins perceived the gentlemanly capitalists as too monolithic a class.

10. Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation, p.28.

11. Ibid., pp.22-42.

12. Ibid., pp.123-4.

influence between 1850-1914, had found themselves a place.<sup>13</sup> The co-option of the industrial bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was not nearly so complete.

The hegemonic ideology holding this historical bloc of landowners, city financiers, merchants and insurers as well as their provincial industrialist allies together has been dubbed 'Gladstonian liberalism' or, alternatively, the 'Manchester School'.

The mainstream description of 'Gladstonianism' presents it as the combination of *laissez-faire* at home and unfettered free trade and anti-imperialism abroad: The attempt to show the stark contrast between the 'new imperialism' of the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the Gladstonian liberalism of the middle of the nineteenth century, often culminates in a somewhat exaggerated reading of these aspects of Gladstonianism. Sykes, for instance, lists the building blocks around which Gladstonianism was centered as follows:

(F)ree trade, a non-interventionist, neutral, minimal state, low taxation, low military expenditure, religious liberty and constitutional progress, a moralist foreign policy and avoidance of foreign entanglements.<sup>14</sup>

Domestically, Searle asserts, mid-Victorian government revolved around three elements: Responsibility to public opinion; cheapness, efficiency and impartiality; and a high degree of autonomy for

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13. Ibid., p.137.

14. Alan Sykes, The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism 1776 - 1988, London-New York: Longman, 1997, p.73.

local governments.<sup>15</sup> Gladstonian liberalism was singularly intolerant to any form of centralization and to the leading role of `experts` in policy-making. For example, Gladstone supported the Civil Service Reform as proposed by the Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1854. This reform replaced patronage by competitive examination, but made knowledge of the classics, good character and all-round judgement rather than specialist skills the main criterion.<sup>16</sup>

Cain and Hopkins have addressed the motives behind the 19th century distrust to state regulation. This attitude towards the state in the domestic realm was embedded in a broadly-based consensus about the dangers of governmental mismanagement in the context of the remarkable success of the `natural economy` in Britain during the previous two centuries. For the bourgeoisie and many of the workers state interference into the economy was associated with the blocking of the natural circuits of the economy for political reasons, which in turn was related to corrupt aristocratic rule. Thus:

The desire for freedom of individual economic choice merged readily into a general hostility to aristocratic government, the national debt and `Old Corruption`, providing a common anti-aristocratic focus for both middle-class and working-class radicals....<sup>17</sup>

On the one hand, there was the new, industrial society, where the rational, commercial, pacific virtues and interests of individuals brought forth the highest common good. On the other hand, there was the old,

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15. Searle, Quest, pp.15-16.

16. *Ibid.*, pp.16-27.

17. Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation,

militaristic, landed aristocracy, bent upon war and conquest.

This was particularly the way how representatives of the Manchester School like Richard Cobden saw things. Their struggle against the remnants of 'feudalism' concentrated upon two grievances. First, they were opposed to the privileged legal position of the Anglican Church to the detriment of other, 'nonconformist' Protestant creeds. Second, they directed their rage against the power of the big landowners, which was manifested by the protectionist Corn Laws, low taxes on land, the system of primogeniture, and the general permeation of the Parliament, the Foreign Office, the diplomatic service and the army officer corps by the members of aristocratic families. Themselves manufacturers from Northern England or London professionals, the Cobdenites found the core of their supporters among artisans and shopkeepers.<sup>18</sup>

Although they were a very vocal minority within the Liberal Party, the Cobdenites never dominated British politics. Middle-class radicals like Cobden had made their bid for power in the 1830s and 1840s. However, they were ultimately integrated as junior partners into the hegemonic bloc by the Reform Bill of 1832 and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. These reforms from above separated the radicals from their potential allies, namely the working classes, whose own

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pp.141-42.

18. G.K. Searle, The Liberal Party: Triumph and Disintegration, 1886 - 1929, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1992, pp.11-18, 20.

attempts to overcome the historic bloc through the Owenite and Chartist movements sunk without any trace. Once no longer perceived as a danger by the ruling bloc, the more `respectable` sections of the working classes were granted voting rights in 1867 and 1884. In a repetition of the strategy of 1832, they were thus separated from the less prosperous sections.<sup>19</sup>

Within the Liberal camp, the Cobdenite radicals uneasily co-existed with the moderate Liberals, the Whigs. Although open to the interests of manufacturing and pragmatically committed to a reforming course, the Whigs were as much representatives of landownership as the Conservatives were. It was the achievement of Gladstone in his different positions as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Prime Minister and leader of the Liberal Party to hold these divergent factions together. While sometimes using a rhetoric quite similar to that of the Cobdenite radicals and sharing their vision of a minimal state, Gladstone had at the same time a high opinion of the aristocratic elite and of what he perceived as their disinterested service ethos.<sup>20</sup>

The fact that Gladstone never fully embraced the anti-landowner and anti-Anglican stance of the Cobdenites should make us beware of lumping Gladstonianism and Cobdenism together. One can, however, use Gladstonianism as a loose by-word for the mid-Victorian political consensus in Britain. What justifies naming a whole ideology after Gladstone is the fact that he managed to gather a large following

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<sup>19</sup>. Anderson, `Origins`, pp.20-23; Anderson, `Figures`, pp.157-59; Cox, Production, pp.134-37.

<sup>20</sup>. Searle, Liberal Party, pp.11-28.



from all classes, thus stabilizing the position of the hegemonic bloc. He achieved this feat by propagating a limited role for the state, thus embracing a tamed version of Cobdenite 'Manchester' radicalism shorn of its more limited middle-class ideology directed against both the aristocrats and the workers.<sup>21</sup> The Conservatives, while posing as champions of traditional institutions like the monarchy, the House of Lords, the Anglican Church and landownership, in effect embraced the liberal ideology of individualism, free trade and responsible government as well.<sup>22</sup>

Turning to international relations, it was here that Cobden and Gladstone were closest to each other. Given their dislike of the aristocratic Foreign Office, the radicals rejected adhering to the balance of power doctrine and instead tended to favour a reliance on the positive effects of free trade and non-intervention. Alternatively, a policy of active support for oppressed nationalities was called for.<sup>23</sup> For the radicals, free trade was 'a faith from which any deviation was characterised as a fall from grace.'<sup>24</sup>

Gladstone likewise refused to accept the logics of power politics and international rivalry. He embraced the belief in international law, arbitration and morality instead. Most famously, he in 1876 castigated

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21. Anderson, 'Figures', pp.146-47; Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation, pp.142-43.

22. Searle, Quest, pp.26-27; Sykes, Rise, pp.79-80, 84-85.

23. Searle, Quest, pp.14-15.

24. C.C. Eldridge, England's Mission: The Imperial Idea in the Age of Gladstone and Disraeli: 1868-1880, London: Macmillan, 1973, p.2.

Disraeli's anti-Russian and pro-Ottoman foreign policies by publishing his best-selling pamphlet on the 'Bulgarian Horrors'.<sup>25</sup>

The effects of Gladstonianism on British imperialism are widely interpreted as the privileging of a 'natural' hegemonic role for Britain in a world of free trade. The implication was that Britain should refrain from fostering aggressive, expensive and formal forms of imperialism. The corollary of Gladstonianism in the conduct of international relations was liberal internationalism. According to Long, the latter was rooted in classical political economy, utilitarianism and the thought of Kant.<sup>26</sup> Gladstonianism in international relations was simply the practical application to the conduct of Britain's global role of the theoretical tenets of liberal internationalism.

For Gladstone, Britain did not have to forgo her own economic interests to constitute the central pillar of a world of general peace and prosperity. This neat overlap of the moral and the material realms was one of the most appealing aspects of Gladstonianism. On the one hand, it was widely believed that Britain would always emerge as the dominant industrial nation in a realm of free competition even in the absence of her formal imperial possessions. While he did not go as far as proposing the dismemberment of the Empire, Gladstone

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25. Sykes, Rise, pp.87-89.

26. David Long, 'Conclusion: Inter-War Idealism, Liberal Internationalism, and Contemporary International Theory' in David Long and Peter Wilson (eds.), Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis, Oxford: Clarendon, pp.302-28, here p.313.

was convinced of the inherent physical and mental superiority of the British people. This would always lead to the commercial superiority of Britain even in a world where she would be deprived of all her imperial possessions and spheres of influence.<sup>27</sup>

Policies of retaining the colonies at the cost of military expenses and the possibility of war with other powers found little enthusiasm, putting butter on the bread of the 'separationists'.<sup>28</sup> Cobden and Bright agitated from the Parliament, enumerating the disadvantages of keeping the colonies, particularly those with responsible government (for instance that they had become a burden on the British Treasury and that they weakened Britain's defensive power), as compared to the diminishing advantages (that they refused to take any more British convicts and led an independent commercial policy.)<sup>29</sup>

According to Max Beloff the dissolution of the Empire was even 'taken for granted'.<sup>30</sup> Since Gladstone's whole focus was upon the intrinsic strength of Britain, he was not concerned much with the defence of Britain's formal imperial possessions either. Even as far as the 'white' colonies of settlement were concerned, he wanted them to shoulder their own responsibilities as

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27. Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation, p.204.

28. J.E. Tyler, The Struggle for Imperial Unity, 1868 - 1895, London: Longman and Green, 1938, pp.7-20.

29. Eldridge, England's Mission, p.2.

30. Max Beloff, The Imperial Sunset, vol. 1, Britain's Liberal Empire, 1897 - 1921, London: Methuen, 1969, p.39.

soon as possible, relaxed in the belief that a close informal link would always exist between them and Britain.<sup>31</sup>

A glance at Britain's position in the world economy and the interests that sustained this position clarifies the cause of this attitude. We have to remember that the British Empire in this period was an 'informal empire' geared to the interests of the financial and commercial sectors, who benefited from open markets rather than preferential arrangements. Furthermore, the investment and trade flows that these sectors engendered were not restricted to the areas under the sway of the Empire.<sup>32</sup>

Among its numerous benefits, free trade, particularly after the first signs of class conflict had loomed up in the horizon after the 1880s, was also resorted to as the bourgeois ideology most suitable to dissipate impending social unrest. The catch-word here was the 'cheap loaf'. As Cain and Hopkins put it:

Free trade and cheap government had different origins. But it is clear that, after 1840, both Peel and Gladstone accepted the view that free trade, like low taxation, was vital to stamp out corrupt vested interests, to remove politics from the contaminating influence of commerce and to confer a benefit - cheap food - which, being seen as universal, would damp down social conflict and lead to class reconciliation.<sup>33</sup>

These aspects of Gladstonianism, Cobdenism and the Manchester School have traditionally led to the interpretation that the period 1840 to 1870 represented

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31. Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation, pp.204-05.

32. Ibid., pp.276-315, 397-446.

33. Ibid., p.143.

the climax of anti-imperialism',<sup>34</sup> and that reaching its apogee with the Gladstonian government of 1868, pacifism and a more or less cavalier attitude determined the general attitude towards the Empire. One should be careful, however, not to overdraw the anti-imperialism of the Gladstonian era. During the Gladstonian age there might have been relatively less emphasis over working out the formal connections between different parts of the empire. Nevertheless, a general 'empire feeling', also relating to the notion of prestige, was wide-spread.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, it was under Gladstone's second spell as Prime Minister (1880-1885) that Egypt was occupied by British troops and Afghanistan and the Transvaal put under British suzerainty.<sup>36</sup>

Further, to the extent that there was a condemnation of the Empire, more often than not this stemmed from the concern that the Empire helped sustain aristocracy and corruption at home.<sup>37</sup> Most of the so-called 'Little Englanders' wanted a better-governed Empire, not necessarily a smaller one.<sup>38</sup> The 'Little

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34. William L. Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism 1890-1902, vol. 1, New York and London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1935, p.70.

35. Ged Martin, "Anti-Imperialism" in the Mid-Nineteenth Century and the Nature of the British Empire, in Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin, Reappraisals in British Imperial History, Toronto: Macmillan, 1975, pp.88-120.

36. Sykes, Rise, pp.101-04.

37. Martin, "Anti-Imperialism", p.95; Miles Taylor, 'Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the Radical Critique of Imperialism during the Nineteenth Century.', in Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 19 (1991), 1, pp.1-23.

38. E. Green and M. Taylor, 'Further Thoughts on Little Englandism', in Raphael Samuel (ed.), Patriotism: The

Englishers, in other words, were not really for a Little England. Their criticism was directed not to the Empire as such but to what they perceived as a system which sustained aristocratic rule, corruption, and illiberal, undemocratic practices at home. Imperialism meant the necessity of a standing army and taxation at home. Because it was not just the white Dominions but other parts of the world that were forcefully brought under the sway of the Empire, it meant the corruption of the ruling classes.<sup>39</sup> What the little Englishers saw as the ideal empire was

a centrifugal one, in which the forces which were conducive to political stability at home, such as commerce and responsible citizenship, would radiate outwards and be reproduced overseas, thereby leaving the metropole unencumbered by the financial burden, psychological delusion and vested interests which had characterised previous empires.<sup>40</sup>

On the face of it, the Conservatives under Disraeli and Salisbury were, in contrast to the Liberals, the imperial party. In his Crystal Palace speech of 1872, Disraeli had foreshadowed the social imperialist programme by calling for a `national` instead of a `cosmopolitan` foreign policy. Attempting to forge a coalition between aristocrats and workers

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Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, vol. 1, History and Politics, London and New York: Routledge, 1989, pp.103-09, here p. 104.; Martin. `Anti-Imperialism`.

<sup>39</sup>. Richard Gott, `Little Englishers`, in Raphael Samuel (ed.), Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, vol. 1, History and Politics, London and New York: Routledge, 1989, pp.90-102; Green and Taylor, `Further Thoughts`; Taylor, `Imperium`.

<sup>40</sup>. Taylor, `Imperium`, p.18.

against the middle classes, Disraeli wanted to connect his imperial programme with social reform at home.<sup>41</sup>

However, in practice the contrast between Gladstone's 'anti-imperialism' and Disraeli's 'imperialism' was not that stark. The difference rather resolved around the centrality of the white Dominions for Gladstone in contrast to the empire of trade and defence with an emphasis on India in Disraeli's concept of Empire.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, for Disraeli the self-governing colonies were just 'millstones'. Another bone of contention between Gladstone and Disraeli were the latter's more aggressive policies vis-à-vis the Boers and Afghanistan and his firm opposition to any Russian-sponsored dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. His successor Salisbury whole-heartedly participated in the scramble for Africa, but the short Liberal government of 1892-95 did not provide much of a contrast. At the same time, not much had come out of Disraeli's call for social reforms.<sup>43</sup>

#### **The End of the Liberal World Order and Its Repercussions Upon British Politics**

During the last third of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th, global capitalism entered a new phase. There was a shift to capital-intensive accumulation focused on producer goods industries, namely metals, oil and engineering. These new

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<sup>41</sup> . Michael W. Doyle, Empires, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986, pp.281-83.

<sup>42</sup> . Eldridge, England's Mission.

<sup>43</sup> . Doyle, Empires, pp.283-88, 293-95.

industries were no longer localized as those of the previous phase but were identified with their respective national economies and with state support.<sup>44</sup>

As we have seen, this shift in the mode of accumulation overlapped on the one hand with the rise of new powers like Germany which challenged the British dominance based upon liberal internationalism, on the other hand with the rise of the socialist labour movement.

By 1900, Germany had taken the lead in new industries like electrical engineering or chemicals.<sup>45</sup> Thanks to two factors - an educational system tuned towards technical efficiency and the availability of venture capital - Germany was well-placed to profit from a new wave of technological change. This wave stimulated science and capital-intensive forms of production.<sup>46</sup> Although the US was also emerging as a major competitor to the British economy during that period, due to her ability to overturn the European balance of power<sup>47</sup> it was Germany that stuck in John Bull's craw.<sup>48</sup>

As for the rise of the labour movement, this necessitated a more vigilant attitude by the ruling class. In sum, accompanying the demise of the *Pax Britannica*:

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44. Van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, p.56.

45. Peter Mathias, The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700 - 1914, 2nd ed., London and New York: Routledge, 1983, p.383.

46. David S. Landes, The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1969, p.327-58.

47. Ibid., pp.326-27.

48. Ibid., p.327.



new forms of class organisation and direction emerged. (...) The combined effect of this changing configuration of forces was to shift the emphasis in bourgeois class formation from the cosmopolitan to the national level, shaping a state monopoly tendency in the bourgeoisie (tendency, because a full state monopoly would be incompatible with capitalist relations of production.)<sup>49</sup>

This shift ushered in a new, non-hegemonic world order. To repeat briefly, liberal internationalism was replaced by a tendency for state monopolism.<sup>50</sup> In relative terms, the organization of production in this non-hegemonic order was more insulated from the world economy and resolved more strongly around the state.<sup>51</sup>

Let us look briefly at the international and domestic components of this shift. As we have seen, this was the time when Britain not only lost her previous quasi-monopoly of industrial strength and started to lag behind some of the newcomers, but also stopped being able to single-handedly manipulate the balance of power. The latter underwent a transformation as new great powers, including extra-European ones entered it. Within Europe, two competing military alliances emerged, one of which Britain ultimately entered.

With the end of the liberal world order, the liberal state was likewise in for profound changes. On the international level, it now pursued protectionism and scrambled for colonies. On the domestic level, the liberal state metamorphosed into the welfare-

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<sup>49</sup>. Van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, pp.106-07.

<sup>50</sup>. Ibid., pp.56, 63.

<sup>51</sup>. Cox, Production, pp.7-8.

nationalist state, which was characterized by nationalism, an emergent system of social security and economic planning, and tripartist corporatism involving a collaboration between the state apparatus, large-scale industries and the unions of the dominant economic sectors.<sup>52</sup>

In the case of Britain, these years saw the rapid growth of a new labour movement which, however, consisted largely of skilled workers and tended to focus upon narrowly economic rather than political issues.<sup>53</sup> Under pressure from the rising labour movement, the hegemonic bloc enacted a number of welfare measures like workmen's compensation (1897), unemployment relief (1905), old-age pensions (1908) and national health insurance (1911).<sup>54</sup>

Great Britain, which had been the model for the 19th century liberal state, in a piecemeal fashion transformed itself into a welfare-nationalist one. Nevertheless, the hegemonic bloc (City finance and service interests, the by now declining landowners, and the Northern industrialists as junior partners) remained largely in place.<sup>55</sup>

The demise of the *Pax Britannica* and its replacement by a new, non-hegemonic world order on the international level as well as Britain's transformation from a liberal to a welfare-nationalist state sparked

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52 . Ibid., pp.151-64.

53 . Anderson, `Figures`, pp.157-60.

54 . Ibid., p.160; Cox, Production, pp.166, 173-74.

55 . Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Crisis, pp.11-30.

off a number of new political movements, to which we come now.

### **`Federate or Disintegrate': Imperial Federation and Federating the United Kingdom**

In contrast to the (as seen above, with qualifications) cavalier attitude of Gladstonianism towards the Empire, the imperial federation movement put it at the forefront of its concern. Imperial federation was a cyclically re-emerging, but nearly always integral part of British imperialism from mid-eighteenth century onwards.<sup>56</sup>

Ged Martin, for example, challenges the view that imperial federation was 'a late nineteenth century phenomenon which grew out of a supposed reaction against earlier "anti-imperialism"'.<sup>57</sup> Instead, he points to the striking continuity of the themes and the people between the debates that raged at the end of the century and earlier nineteenth century debates.

'Imperial federation', as a generic description is in any case a misnomer. Imperial federation was only one of a set of proposals, all concerning the closer unity of the empire. This broader parcel of proposals, for which Martin prefers the name 'Empire federalism', was

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56. Ged Martin, 'The Idea of Imperial Federation', in Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin, Reappraisals in British Imperial History, Toronto: Macmillan, 1975, pp.121-38. He argues that the renewed interest in imperial federation was usually occasioned by the emergence of federation in one of the colonies. In the early 20th century, this occasion was the South African union.

57. Ged Martin, 'Empire Federalism and Imperial Parliamentary Union, 1820 - 1870', in Historical Journal 16 (1973), 1, pp.65-92, p.65.

a persistent debate from early nineteenth century onwards. In fact, he reminds his readers 'the Imperial Federation Leaguers were just as divided as their predecessors' among this 'family of ideas'. In other words, one cannot talk about an epochal shift from earlier ideas about closer union to a more specific 'imperial federation'.<sup>58</sup>

Martin emphasizes that 'Empire federalism' covered three main forms. There were, first, relatively tame ideas that stretched only as far as the limited representation of the white Dominions in the British parliament. Secondly, there were ideas concerning the founding of extra-parliamentary units, like conferences, which would provide a link between the constituents of the Empire. Thirdly, there were super-parliamentary proposals, involving the foundation of a single Imperial Parliament with executive powers in certain issues: the full-blown 'imperial federation' tradition. Urged as early as mid-seventeenth century, the more limited forms of representation were the fundamental ingredients of Empire federalism. Extra-parliamentary ideas had emerged in the 1830s, to be followed shortly afterwards by the first super-parliamentary ideas.

The history of 'Empire federalism' is a history of phases of enthusiasm, followed by periods of lull. It was often a problem in one of the Dominions that gave a fresh zeal to the idea. The troubles in Canada in the

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<sup>58</sup>. Ibid., pp.65-92.

1830s, for example, had triggered a panic and a sustained campaign to offer parliamentary representation to Canada as a tactical means of containing the unrest. By 1837, this more limited form of Empire federalism had already become a standard element of imperial thinking. It had its heyday between 1846 and 1852. However, once Canadian self-government had crossed a critical threshold, Empire federation in its most limited form was shelved. The American Civil War discredited federal forms of government for a while, and it was only after the end of the war and the foundation of the Canadian Confederation that empire federalism came back onto the stage.

The enthusiasm for empire federalism after the 1870s was characterised by 'the same confusion of aims, with colonial representation only slowly giving way to super-parliamentary union'.<sup>59</sup>

John Kendle reminds us that the issue of federating Britain with the self-governing Dominions was often closely embroiled with the issue of creating federations in the Dominions and in Britain herself. When looking at the development of federal thought in Britain we should not focus only upon imperial federation, but should see the debate at these three levels: Proposals about federating the different parts of the empire, especially the white Dominions; those about bringing the Dominions and Britain together in an

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<sup>59</sup>. Ibid., p.71.

organic federal union; and those about federating the United Kingdom itself.

Starting from the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the thorny issue of the conditions of the unification of England and Scotland surfaced, the federal idea in general was a sporadically appearing topic of discussion.<sup>60</sup> Whatever its distinct forms, it was always the perception of a domestic, i.e. pertaining to the United Kingdom, or external, i.e. pertaining to the Empire, crisis that sparked off the federalism debate. In the case of the debate about federalizing the Dominions, it was the crisis in North America, the agitation in Ireland, and the discussions over the unification of Australia and Canada in federal forms that first brought the issue forth in the nineteenth century.<sup>61</sup>

The idea of 'imperial federation', although going as far back as the beginning of the nineteenth century in its origins, was cast into a more clearly defined form only from mid-nineteenth century onwards. Then the problem of the congestion at the Westminster parliament and the ideas over uniting imperial defense started to be discussed.<sup>62</sup> It was, however, as late as the 1860s, that concerns over the future of the Empire started to shake off the established centralist constitutional orthodoxy with a more sustained force. Increasingly,

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60. John Kendle, Federal Britain: A History, London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

61. Ibid., p.19.

62. Ibid., p.37.

proposals about yet vague concepts of the closer union of the empire surfaced. They were a reaction to what was perceived as the cavalier attitude of the Gladstonian administration to the colonies and Dominions.<sup>63</sup> The foundation of the Royal Colonial Institute in 1868 was a clear sign of the growing interest in the closer union movement.

The early 1870s saw the ideas of imperial federation voiced even more frequently and forcefully.

During the decade

at least 150 schemes for the consolidation of the empire were published. An increasing number of commentators believed that they had found in the federal system a solution to the problem.<sup>64</sup>

Without concrete, clear analyses of what was truly implied by imperial federation or closer union, however, the new proposals rang as hollow as their predecessors. It was against a backdrop of widespread suspicion and lack of sustained support by any political party that the advocates of imperial federalism continued to forge and voice their proposals. Their apparent naivety about the plausibility of their schemes stemmed from their apathy to systematically analyse the meaning of federalism. This was only to be expected, since they continued to see imperial federation only as a means of offsetting the waning hegemony of Britain and the perceived inefficiency of the Westminster parliament. There was no convincing response to their critics, who ruthlessly

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63. Ibid., p.39.

64. Ibid., pp.39-40.

revealed the essential deficiency in their position: After all, federation meant the voluntary coming together of equals, not the condescending handing over of certain powers by an imperial power to her colonies. Simultaneously, with a flagrant ignorance of the budding nationalism in the white dominions, it was taken for granted that the rulers of these dominions would be as willing as the empire enthusiasts in Britain to join in an imperial federation dominated by Britain.

In 1884, one year after Seeley's seminal book *The Expansion of England* was published, the imperial federation movement was finally emerging from the marginal sidelines. It tried to claim a stake in the discussions of the more influential circles through the foundation of the Imperial Federation League. The League attracted many Liberals dissatisfied with Gladstone's dilatory foreign policies as well as Liberal Unionists advocating social reform, namely Chamberlain and Milner. There were also federalists by conviction, like Seeley.<sup>65</sup>

The League was dissolved in 1893. From its inception it had been beset by the very same problems that had doomed the imperial union movement since its earliest stirrings in the 1850s: The problem of defining what was exactly meant by `imperial

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65. John Pinder, 'The Federal Idea and the British Liberal Tradition', in Andrea Bosco (ed.), The Federal idea, vol. 1, The History of Federalism from the Enlightenment to 1945, London and New York: Lothian Foundation Press, 1991, pp.99-118, here pp.109-10.



federation', and the resulting inability to set up a clear strategy of how to proceed.<sup>66</sup> In fact, in order to bring unity to the movement and to gain a broad-based public appeal, potentially cumbersome issues like detailed definitions and programmes had been deliberately avoided. Like their predecessors, what most members of the League understood from imperial federation was some sort of closer, strengthened union between Britain and her Dominions.<sup>67</sup> The use of the word imperial federation in the title of the League was blatantly pointless. The League included not only self-proclaimed federationists, but also people whose understanding of imperial federation stretched only as far as a loose advisory council.

With the collapse of the Imperial Federation League, the movement lost some momentum. A fresh impetus had to await the foundation of the Round Table in 1910. Imperial federation had been a remarkably persistent topic in the face of the strength of its critics, and at certain points it had been widely discussed. Nevertheless, its success rate in capturing

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<sup>66</sup>. Michael Burgess, 'Empire, Ireland and Europe: A century of British Federal Ideas' in Michael Burgess (ed.), Federalism and Federation in Western Europe, London, Sydney and Dover: Croom Helm, 1986, pp.127-50, here p.128; Martin, 'Idea', pp.130-31.

<sup>67</sup>. Michael Burgess, 'Federalism and Empire: Edward Freeman, Imperial Federation and British Federal Ideas for the British', in Preston King and Andrea Bosco (eds.), A Constitution for Europe: A Comparative Study of federal Constitutions and Plans for the United States of Europe, London: Lothian Foundation, 1991, pp.253-66; Kendle, Federal Britain, p.48.

the mainstream British political opinion during the nineteenth century had been less than brilliant.<sup>68</sup>

John Kendle lists a number of reasons for this. There were, first, doubts about the plausibility of an imperial federation. Realistic observers of dominion nationalism and of the sheer distance separating Britain from her far-flung empire were not convinced by the bombastic statements of empire enthusiasts. The second group of reasons were related to the concerns of those who questioned that Britain herself would be better off in an imperial union. This was the position of people who were staunchly convinced of the merits of undivided sovereignty and of Britain's dominant position in the Empire. They stressed the flexibility of the unwritten British constitution, which would only be harmed by being put into the straightjacket of a federal constitution. In their eyes, imperial federation would inevitably involve the handing over of power by Britain to the Dominions. It spelled the first step towards the dissolution of the empire, rather than being a step towards its consolidation. Thirdly, socialists were not happy about the conservative implications of imperial union.<sup>69</sup>

The imperial federation movement brought under a common rubric a panoply of political positions. In a broad sense, the Round Table can be located within these changes sweeping across party lines.

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68. Kendle, Federal Britain, pp.48-54.

69. *Ibid.*, p.54.

## **New Liberalism**

Like its social imperialist rival, the new liberal creed was primarily represented by members of the professional middle classes. But, in contrast to the social imperialists, the new liberals were not so much active politicians but intellectuals inside and outside of academia. They made themselves heard through printed media and provided the theoretical background for policies executed by some members of the Liberal government of 1905-15. Foremost among new liberal thinkers were the 'two Hobs' - the sociologist Leonard Hobhouse and the economist John A. Hobson.<sup>70</sup>

Flourishing during the quarter-century preceding World War I,<sup>71</sup> new liberalism was a branch of liberal thought in general. Liberalism as such can be characterized by four tenets. First, the faith in the rationality and perfectability of humans, accompanied by the belief in progress through gradualist reforms. Second, the concept of freedom as necessary precondition and, at the same time, expression of man's rational and just behaviour. Third, the emphasis upon the well-being of society as a whole over sectional interests. Fourth, the demand for a political system allowing maximum space for individual freedom through limited and representative government.

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<sup>70</sup>. Michael Freedon, The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform, Oxford: Clarendon, 1978, pp.3-4, 160 n. 172; Searle, Liberal Party, pp.65, 101-02.

<sup>71</sup>. Freedon, New Liberalism, p.2.

Despite continuity among these broad parameters, new liberalism disposed of three elements belonging to its 19th century predecessor. First, the notion of natural rights innate to the individual and independent of society. Second, the idea that private property is an inviolable expression of man's freedom. Third, distrust of the state and particularly the demand that it should refrain from interfering in the workings of the economy. All this went overboard and was replaced by new concepts.<sup>72</sup>

Coming close to textbook idealism in this respect, new liberalism had an optimistic view of the human character and gave priority to ethical aspects. Assuming a fusion between man's rationality and his ethical behaviour,<sup>73</sup> the new liberals believed in his ability to rationally control both society and himself.<sup>74</sup> Social reforms aimed at the removal of obstacles to the exercise of these abilities. At issue was the fullest possible development of individuality, understood as creative self-expression of one's personality and not to be mistaken with atomistic individualism.<sup>75</sup>

For the growth of individuality, not only liberty - as upheld by traditional liberalism - but also material welfare was considered important.<sup>76</sup> Another expression of new liberalism's optimism was the

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72. Ibid., pp.22-23.

73. Sykes, Rise, p.129.

74. Freedman, New Liberalism, pp.8, 92.

75. Ibid., pp.15, 18, 23, 29-30, 66.

76. Ibid., pp.52-55.

assertion that mankind underwent an ethical progress, leading to ever wider and more intense solidarity expressed in orderly cooperation between humans.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, the existence of a world-wide human community and the importance of international law was stressed.<sup>78</sup>

While sharing 'old' liberalism's optimism concerning progress and human rationality, new liberalism gave these notions a new twist by emphasizing the individual's interrelationship with society. The idea of society being an artificial creation resulting from contractual relations between individuals was discarded.<sup>79</sup>

In this respect, the thought of British philosophical Idealists - namely T.H. Green, who left his mark on the spiritual life of Oxford at the time Curtis was studying there - provided an important springboard. However, the degree to which new liberalism fed upon Idealism is controversial.<sup>80</sup> Green dwelt upon the concept of the common good and the need to consider the well-being of others as crucial for the well-being of each. However, like traditional

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77. Ibid., pp.48-49, 92-93.

78. James Meadowcroft, Conceptualizing the State: Innovation and Dispute in British Political Thought 1880 - 1914, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, pp.159-60.

79. Freedon, New Liberalism, p.23.

80. For an account stressing the importance of Green see F. R. Flournoy, 'British Liberal Theories of International Relations (1848 - 1898)', in Journal of the History of Ideas 7 (1946), 2, pp.195-217. For the sceptical interpretation see Freedon, New Liberalism, pp.16-18, 55-56.

liberalism he did not transcend individualism, lacking any supra-individual concept.<sup>81</sup>

In contrast, for the new liberals the interests and rights of individuals could only be realized through the well-being of the whole community, which was understood as an organization of rationally cooperating persons. The community had to protect the individuals' liberties. However, it did not primarily exist for that purpose, as 'old' liberalism had asserted. Rather, the community was itself best served by the full personal development of its individual members. Likewise, material welfare fulfilled the needs of individuals but, through this function, also benefitted the community as a whole.<sup>82</sup> This was, once more, the assumption of a harmony of interests between individuals and society, which - far from being discarded towards the end of the 19th century, as Carr would have it<sup>83</sup> - remained alive and well.

The links between the interest of the individual and that of the community was an indirect one. In other words, the interest of the community did not necessarily correspond to the immediate interest of the majority of its members.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, social reforms were not pursued to result in short-term private happiness but rather in the 'good life' of the

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81. Freeden, New Liberalism, pp.18, 57-58.

82. Ibid., pp.49, 66-67, 110-13, 238-39.

83. E.H. Carr, The Twenty Years' Crisis: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations, London and Basingstoke: Papermac, (1939) 1995, pp.48-49.

84. Freeden, New Liberalism, pp.13-14.

citizens.<sup>85</sup> Because the short-term interest of individuals could (despite the long-term harmony of interests) clash with the good of the whole, compulsion was sometimes necessary.<sup>86</sup>

Everything was to be judged according to how it contributed to the well-being of the whole. Baptized 'social utility' by Hobson, this communal good was, somewhat contradictorily, seen as an objective standard that, at the same time, was based on an increasing consensus.<sup>87</sup> In any case, society was not simply the sum of its component parts but a moral entity in its own right. In line with its optimistic assumptions, new liberalism considered society as held together by growing altruism and self-sacrifice.<sup>88</sup> There was, however, some disagreement among the advocates of new liberalism as to whether one could go as far as seeing society equipped with its own 'mind' or 'general will'. If so, new liberalism was also unsure to which degree the individual wills were fused with this collective will.<sup>89</sup>

Despite dabbling with such Idealist concepts, new liberalism did not rely on meta-physical speculation. On the contrary, it stuck to the positivist notion that moral truths can be discovered by science. In terms of method, the new liberals made use of a mixture of induction and deduction. Ultimate principles had first

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85. Sykes, Rise, p.171.

86. Freedon, New Liberalism, p.67.

87. Ibid., pp.101-02.

88. Ibid., pp.28, 74, 93.

89. Ibid., pp.67-68, 105-08.

to be established to order and synthesize external facts. Values were not considered inferior to science. Rather, the latter was to bring awareness of the ethical potentiality of the historical process. Whether this potentiality would be realized remained subject to human decisions.<sup>90</sup>

The new liberals enlisted the findings of biology to sociology. Darwin and Spencer were appreciated for making the application of general evolutionary laws to the study of society possible. Nevertheless, this did not mean the embracement of Social Darwinism. On the contrary, the new liberals used Darwinian methods to claim that the higher a species stood on the evolutionary ladder, the more it was prone to cooperation and altruism rather than competition. Ethical, not physical fitness was the key to survival.<sup>91</sup> Despite this, not all new liberals managed to keep clear of the pseudo-science of eugenics or calls for the tight control of the physically or mentally 'unfit'.<sup>92</sup>

While asserting the importance of free will and ideas<sup>93</sup> and of the superiority of mind over matter, new liberalism interpreted the human mind as a natural phenomenon and as part of the evolutionary process. Human consciousness was to that degree an evolutionary factor in that it replaced natural selection between

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90. Ibid., pp.8-11.

91. Ibid., pp.78-82.

92. Ibid., pp.172-94.

93. Ibid., pp.9, 91, 251.



biological characteristics by intellectual selection between different ideas. The rational self-direction of society under the guidance of reformers was thus also an aspect of evolution.

New liberalism also parted with Spencer over his extreme individualism. Besides evolution, it borrowed another element from biology. This was the image of society as an organic unit whose parts are mutually dependent upon each other but which is more than the sum of its parts. While usually enlisted to bolster conservative ideologies, in the hands of the new liberals the organic analogy provided intellectual ammunition for social reform.

Society, like a biological unit, had physical needs. Since diseases of the parts affected the whole, reform measures could not be piecemeal but had to address the whole social body. Most importantly, the organic analogy brought home new liberalism's point that the individual only had a meaning as part of the whole - just like a cell belonging to a body. However, to reconcile this with the emphasis on individuality it was at the same time stressed that the different cells of the social organ need not be uniform. On the contrary, they should possess as much variation between each other as was compatible with the functioning of the whole. Finally, state action could be justified by drawing parallels between government and brain.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>. Ibid., pp.89-91, 94-97, 103-04, 113-15.

State agency was a key concept for new liberalism. Again, it owed something to T.H. Green, who wanted the state to remove hindrances to the individual's full development. In practice, however, he just came up with demands for land reform and temperance.<sup>95</sup> New liberalism went far beyond this. By compulsion and regulation, but also by protecting liberty and providing welfare,<sup>96</sup> the state was to establish the conditions which would enable individuals to become active members of the community.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the state could serve as instrument for the rational transformation of society.<sup>98</sup>

In these functions, the state was seen by the new liberals as an outgrowth of cooperative action by individuals, not classes.<sup>99</sup> In the higher interest of the community, it had to prevent selfish minorities from sabotaging general improvements.<sup>100</sup> Most importantly, the state had the moral function of reforming the mind of its citizens. This aspect was based upon the premise that individual willpower, while important in itself, was not sufficient for personal character improvement. A physically and ethically healthy environment was indispensable. This is where the state came in.<sup>101</sup>

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95. Ibid., pp.18, 58.

96. Ibid., pp.54-55, 68-70.

97. Ibid., pp.59-60; Meadowcroft, Conceptualizing, p.149.

98. Meadowcroft, Conceptualizing, pp.170-71.

99. Freeden, New Liberalism, p.114.

100. Meadowcroft, Conceptualizing, pp.147-48.

101. Freeden, New Liberalism, pp.15, 58-59, 163, 170-77.

In institutional terms, the state was considered by new liberalism as a specific type of organization. It differed from others like the family or voluntary associations by possessing coercive power within specific territorial limits. While earlier forms of social units had been bound together by kinship or, already on a higher evolutionary plane, by the authority of a supreme ruler, the modern state was based upon the concept of citizenship. Since the state served the common good, the citizen in turn owed it loyalty. This loyalty was bound to the state's democratic, participatory characteristics. Voting was not only a right but also a duty.<sup>102</sup>

In more specific terms, the political reform agenda of the new liberals included universal adult franchise, proportional parliamentary representation, an elected Upper House replacing the House of Lords and the introduction of referenda. Autonomy for minority nationalities (i.e. the Irish) was upheld and opposition to colonialism stressed.<sup>103</sup>

However, there existed some contradiction between the espousal of democracy by the new liberals and their underlying elitism. On the one hand, the power of bureaucracies and of 'experts' was to be curbed.<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, social reformers were to arouse individual minds to their ethical potential.<sup>105</sup> Together

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102. Meadowcroft, Conceptualizing, pp.138-39, 144, 197.

103. Ibid., pp.142-43, 165, 197-202.

104. Freedon, New Liberalism, pp.29, 183.

105. Ibid., p.91.

with the notion of an objective communal good (to be identified by whom?), this adds an elitist element.

The biological analogy also created some ambivalence in this respect. A government of experts could be compared to the organism's nerve centre, to which the cells sent information but whose directions they had to follow. Furthermore, the fact that different parts of an organic unit have different functions and degrees of importance could be interpreted as heavily qualifying the notion of democratic equality. But, on the other hand, the organic metaphor also stressed the indispensability of each part to the whole. From this one could conclude that no social class must be prevented from exerting its obligation to take part in the governing process.<sup>106</sup>

The core of new liberalism's reform agenda was, however, in the economic and social realm. 19th century-style *laissez-faire* was either rejected or reinterpreted.<sup>107</sup> In contrast to traditional economists, who focused upon the productive process, new liberals gave greater weight to distribution and consumption. Quality of human life rather than productive efficiency was to be given priority. New liberal economists were aware that production remained important. Drawing upon the proto-Keynesian theory of underconsumption, however, they held that a redistribution of income would increase purchasing power and consequently have a

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106. Ibid., pp.109-10, 113.

107. Ibid., pp.32-35.

positive feedback on the general state of the economy.<sup>108</sup>

Considering that it was society that ultimately enabled individuals to acquire wealth, it had thus a right over that wealth. During the 19th century, this kind of reasoning had already been used for demanding taxes on rising land values. Now, new liberalism used it to qualify the individual's right on property vis-à-vis society.<sup>109</sup> Instead of a class-based concept of redistributive taxation, in which the rich owed some obligations to the poor, new liberalism embraced the notion of the social community as a quasi-person having its own property rights. This societal property was to be used for a comprehensive social policy.<sup>110</sup> Another area where the new liberals gave a new meaning to old concepts was their treatment of monopolies. Since the latter restricted free economic competition (hallowed, after all, by 'old' liberals) the state could justly subject them to administrative control or, at least, heavy taxation.<sup>111</sup>

In terms of welfare provision, the new liberals moved from a restorative notion of social reform (i.e. giving help to certain disadvantaged groups) to a regenerative one, by which society as a whole was to profit.<sup>112</sup> Old-age pensions, right to work, feeding of schoolchildren and obligatory health and unemployment

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108. Ibid., pp.19, 100-01, 128-34.

109. Ibid., pp.20, 42-44.

110. Ibid., pp.45-46, 140-45.

111. Ibid., pp.44-45.

112. Ibid., pp.118-28.

insurance were seen as expressions of the mutual obligation between individual and society and as enabling the former to contribute to the smooth functioning of the latter.<sup>113</sup>

Together with these welfare measures, a progressive income tax and free education,<sup>114</sup> new liberalism also envisaged large-scale nationalizations. The state was to take over routine industries while activities demanding a greater amount of creativity and competition would be left to the private sector.<sup>115</sup> This meant state ownership of railways and power industries, plus nationalization of urban and most rural lands and the establishment of state-operated credit facilities.<sup>116</sup>

All this, however, was not intended to clip the wings of the upper classes. New liberalism had an ambivalent attitude towards organized labour (after all, a sectional interest) and vacillated between wooing the working and the middle classes. In the end, the organic concept of community envisaged a harmonious society free of class conflict. Social reform was not aimed at specific groups but was to improve the ethical character of all members of society.<sup>117</sup>

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113. Ibid., pp.200-06, 215-38.

114. Meadowcroft, Conceptualizing, pp.178-79.

115. Ibid., pp.194-95; Freedem, New Liberalism, pp.70-74.

116. Freedem, New Liberalism, pp.149-50; Meadowcroft, Conceptualizing, p.179.

117. Freedem, New Liberalism, pp.150-58; Searle, Liberal Party, pp.67-68; Sykes, Rise, pp.173-75.

Despite adhering to some elements of liberal internationalism (a world-wide community and international laws), new liberalism was an expression of the state monopoly tendency. As mentioned above, Hobson has been identified by van der Pijl as one of the major economists developing the productive-capital perspective. Given new liberalism's emphasis on distribution and consumption over production, this might appear contradictory. However, it was new liberalism's goal to overcome underconsumption by income redistribution, its demand for welfare measures and state intervention and its organic approach indicating the absence of class contradictions that fitted well into the patterns of the state monopoly tendency.

With respect to the Liberal Party itself, the new liberal mood was already reflected in the policies of the government that came to power in 1905. After a long time in opposition, the Liberals showed a greater attention to wide-spread poverty and set their bets upon state action to overcome a potential source of social instability. While sticking to free trade, the Liberal government implemented some welfare schemes and a bureaucratic national insurance system.<sup>118</sup>

### **Left and Centrist Liberalism**

World War I triggered a crisis for liberalism - both as a party and as an ideology - that continued

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<sup>118</sup>. Anderson, 'Figures', p.160.

unabated in the interwar period. The memory of the war and the starkly accelerating economic problems propelled a sharp decline in liberal faith. More specifically, the emerging consensus around new liberalism within liberalism at large was abandoned in response to the pressures generated by the war and by the economically and politically turbulent period in its aftermath. This was the result of several factors.

First, the events of the world war badly shook the optimistic faith in progress and in human rationality that had sustained new liberalism's reform impetus. Second, rising national prosperity, the material underpinning of welfare schemes, likewise fell away. Instead, the concrete economic problem of chronic unemployment came to the fore.<sup>119</sup>

Third, wartime military and industrial conscription made the liberals rethink their previous enthusiasm for the state. Instead of acting as a benevolent and rational instrument for pursuing the well-being of the community, the state showed its more seamy, oppressive side. The new liberals now went at distance to 'German' Idealism,<sup>120</sup> a development mentioned by Carr to illustrate his thesis of the relativity of thought.<sup>121</sup>

Fourth, there was an intellectual polarization. British liberalism was challenged from the left, as

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119. Michael Freedon, Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914 - 1939, Oxford: Clarendon, 1986, pp.9-10.

120. Ibid., pp.18-44.

121. Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, p.67.



well as from the right. Although liberal intellectuals largely stuck to the Liberal Party, the seduction of the Labour Party was simply too strong for some. Socialism was eating into the reserves of influential middle-class opinion, as witnessed by cases like the Webbs. Liberalism had to renew itself by fresh ideas. As it happened, these ideas were generated by the Liberal Party at a time of serial splits within the party, which ushered its irreversible decline.<sup>122</sup>

Debates over the place of labour, the role of the state and industrial organization eventually divided liberal opinion into two wings: left and centrist.

Taking on board the legacy of new liberalism (including its two master thinkers, Hobhouse and Hobson), the left wing of liberalism continued to focus on the interaction of politics and ethical issues. For the left liberals, the harmonious collaboration of individuals as part of an organic community necessitated the ascendancy of a society-based morality. Ever willing to enlist natural scientific support, the left liberals integrated new trends of psychology into their societal models. Especially the theory of a collective group mind appealed to them.

Left liberalism kept embracing the liberal shibboleths of equality, property and liberty but gave them a particular twist. Equality was not to lead to

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<sup>122</sup>. John Campbell, 'The Renewal of Liberalism: Liberalism Without Liberals', in Gillian Peele and Chris Cook (eds.), The Politics of Reappraisal: 1918-1939, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1975, pp.88-113.

sameness but to the fullest expression of individuality, and it was to be dependent upon the individual's fulfillment of communal obligations. Property rights were important but had to be qualified by social needs and communal priorities. Liberty could be disentangled into different kinds, with one aspect (the development of one's potentiality) sometimes necessitating limits on another (the absence of constraints).

While still seeing the state as the organized expression of the community, left liberalism tended to consider power as something to be overcome by the extension of the democratic principle. It was argued that states did not rest upon force but upon the inner psychology of those organizing them.<sup>123</sup>

Centrist liberalism overlapped on a number of issues with new/left liberalism but diverged from it in some major respects. First, while accepting that the inroads made by the state into industry and commerce should not be rolled back, centrist liberals rejected the notion of the state as a neutral instrument acting for the whole society. Second, centrist liberalism stressed the ideological contrast to socialism and trade unionism. Third, it was not philosophically oriented<sup>124</sup> but stuck to straightforward economics. Indeed, one of its most prominent representatives was no one less than John Maynard Keynes.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>. Freedman, Liberalism Divided, pp.223-93.

<sup>124</sup>. Ibid., p.128.

<sup>125</sup>. Ibid., pp.154-73.

De-emphasizing the community-oriented aspects of new liberalism, the centrists rediscovered the notion of man as a rational maximizer of economic opportunities. Welfare definitely took second place behind individual liberty. The necessity for productive efficiency and for industrial rationalization was highlighted. Centrist liberalism did not throw social reform overboard but approached it under material and expediency-related aspects rather than ethical considerations. It celebrated capitalism and gave priority to the financial interests of capital owners over those of the state and of the workers. In particular, the idea of a capital levy on war profits was staunchly opposed. Instead of theoretical models, centrist liberalism upheld the merits of pragmatic experimentation.<sup>126</sup>

Centrist liberalism's recommendations for economic policies were outlined in a programmatic manifesto called *Britain's Industrial Future*, produced by teamwork in 1928. In it, the state was allocated an important role in the running of the economy, most strikingly by a public works scheme to fight unemployment and by a national investment board channelling savings into desirable ventures. But, in contrast to new liberalism, individual and state activities were seen as existing side by side rather than as interpenetrating. The manifesto took a favourable view upon economic monopolies. Property

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<sup>126</sup>. Ibid., pp.129-54, 173-76.

ownership, instead of being qualified by communal control, was to be more widely distributed.<sup>127</sup>

While pre-war liberalism had focussed upon improving the material circumstances of the working classes, the increasing assertiveness of organized labour during and after the war necessitated a conceptual adaptation. Left and centrist liberals were at one in being sceptical of unions making use of the strike weapon as bargaining stick. Institutionalized conflict between social groups was against the grain of liberal tenets, whether it was the centrist one of industrial efficiency or the left one of a harmonious community. Either way, union power was seen as a sectional interest holding the community at large at ransom.<sup>128</sup>

Thus, even left liberals wanted restrictions on the right to strike in order to prevent 'private quarrels' from harming the whole community.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, even centrist liberals could express their concern about the inappropriate amount of power exerted by the managers running joint-stock companies.<sup>130</sup> As far as nationalizations were concerned, liberals had a middle-of-the-road attitude, neither opposing them completely nor seeing them as panacea. Left liberals were moderately in favour but giving greater importance to 'public control' of industries than to the ownership

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127. Ibid., pp.105-18.

128. Ibid., pp.49-50, 112, 197-209.

129. Ibid., p.204.

130. Ibid., p.260.

issue as such. Centrists tended to be relatively more circumspect of nationalizations.<sup>131</sup>

There was, on the first look, agreement between both wings of liberalism on the necessity for greater worker involvement in the running of industries. The short-lived Whitley Councils, established at the end of the war, were generally applauded by the liberals. Providing equal representation for employers' associations and trade unions, the councils dealt with working conditions, including wage levels. The liberals also called for giving the workers a share in industrial profits and in the management of the companies.

However, the different liberal factions meant different things by this call for the extension of democracy into the economic arena. For the centrists, there was no question that 'democracy' in industry was to be very different from political democracy. In effect, what they were after was merely dividing the labour movement by giving some sections of it a greater stake in the companies but leaving capitalists' profits and control largely in place. In contrast, left liberals, while not trying to dispose with businessmen as such, were taking the notions of co-management and profit-sharing more literally.<sup>132</sup>

Although perhaps not centrist liberalism's most sophisticated thinker, Philip Kerr aka Lord Lothian is

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<sup>131</sup>. Ibid., pp.188-93.

<sup>132</sup>. Ibid., pp.49-66, 112, 151.

of specific interest for our topic. Being a fellow Round Tabler and close friend of Curtis, he also came to share the latter's apotheosis of world government. Having entered the fold as Prime Minister Lloyd George's private secretary, Kerr was a newcomer who up to that point had little to do with established liberalism. If Lloyd George's social policies were to a great extent a bid to save labour from socialism, Kerr was a particularly successful synthesizer of this mood. This was illustrated especially by his proposal in 1924 of a version of 'self-government for industry', in which the economy was to be run independently of the government by a hierarchy of councils with a permanent council at the top formed of the representatives from the Federation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress. Kerr, who was by now Lord Lothian, was also sympathetic to the issue of planning, as long as it did not involve what the Labour Party was propounding, i.e. nationalization.<sup>133</sup>

Although he was reserved about too much state interference into the economy, Kerr/Lothian argued for granting more 'responsibility' to labour, for tackling excess inequalities of wealth by redistributive taxation and for the control of economic monopolies. In this way, he hoped to achieve class harmony and thus to

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<sup>133</sup>. John Turner, 'Introduction: Lord Lothian and His World', in John Turner (ed.), The Larger Idea: Lord Lothian and the Problem of National Sovereignty, London: The Historians' Press, 1988, pp.1-19, here pp.7-9.

preserve the ultimate control over the economic realm by the upper classes.<sup>134</sup>

Even more than new liberalism, centrist liberalism adapted elements of the productive-capital perspective. Retaining the concepts of state intervention and of a harmonious society without class struggle, it also embraced corporatism and, compared to new liberalism, a strong pro-business perspective emphasizing the need for productive efficiency.

#### **The Rise of the Social Imperialist Movement**

‘Gladstonianism’ was bolstered, among others, by the concept of the ‘cheap loaf’. Accordingly, with the above-mentioned qualifications, the attitudes to the Empire were relatively lukewarm. By the end of the century, however, British informed opinion was discussing imperialism with a remarkable vigour. We have already seen some aspects of this new imperialist wave while discussing the imperial federation movement. At this section, we shall deal with those aspects which combined imperialism and social reform at home.

In these debates, it was not only the elite that was involved: The discussions of the second half of the nineteenth century brought in their wake a palpable and gradually intensifying strengthening of the British interest in the Empire at the level of the policy-makers as well as the general public. The vigour with which the benefits of the Empire were juxtaposed to its

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<sup>134</sup>. Freedon, Liberalism Divided, pp.103-04, 115-16, 192, 347-48.

costs was noteworthy because it was succeeding decades of utilitarian, commerce and finance oriented and 'informal' attitudes to the relations with the Empire.

As far as the concrete policy proposals about the restructuring of the Empire were concerned there were many points of divergence. However, there were three aspects where most of the new interpretations differed essentially from Gladstonian imperialism. One was the way the underlurking fears of decline had found their way into these discussions: The concern with decline induced a tariff reformer as much as an imperial federationist to look at the white Dominions and to see there the genesis of a new, 'Greater Britain.' Secondly, imperialism was tied in these discussions to the welfare of the masses and the related issue of 'national efficiency' in Britain. It was now imperialism, not the advocacy of free trade that was used as the dominant bourgeois ideology to provide the bulwark against labour unrest and socialism on the one hand, the erosion of British global hegemony on the other. Thirdly, there was the consensus that imperialism had to be directed, and not left to its own workings: The state had to step forward to take the role of an efficient manager of the Empire and the engineer of domestic social reforms. Further, this had to be an authoritative state led by capable experts immune to the vagaries of political life. Taken together, these three points represented such a substantial alteration of the entrenched parameters



that from the 1880s one could talk about the increasing challenge of Gladstonian liberalism by a new paradigm, whose components will be examined more closely below.<sup>135</sup>

The causes of this change were various. Trying to uncover these causes involves, accidentally, going back to some of the themes raised earlier, since, as mentioned, the movements of empire federalism, new liberalism and social imperialism were quite enmeshed in each other. Not only the motivations for these movements were frequently common, but so were the policies proposed.

Coming to social imperialism, let us start with the international factors. According to one somewhat fatalistic interpretation, the old, informal and commercial empire contained the seeds of its own destruction: The unstoppable dynamics of global power shifts dictated that in order to protect her commercial interests, the British state would in any case be gradually drawn towards more formal forms of control.<sup>136</sup> Even if one would not subscribe to the determinism in

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<sup>135</sup>. This strengthening of the imperialist tide however, should not be seen in unqualified terms. It has been argued, for example, that contrary to the frequent claim that the working class by the end of the century, for instance during the Boer War, gave its undisputable support to the war and to imperialism, there were significant voices within the labour movement which were against imperialism. See for example, Preben Kaarsholm, 'Pro-Boers', in Raphael Samuel (ed.), Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, vol. 1, History and Politics, London and New York: Routledge, 1989, pp.110-26. About the late 19th century not constituting a general watershed in imperialist feelings see Martin, 'Anti-Imperialism', p.117 and Eric Stokes, 'Milnerism', in Historical Journal 5 (1962), 1, pp.47-60, here pp.59-60.

<sup>136</sup>. Bernard Porter, The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1995, 3rd ed., London and New York: Longman, 1996, pp.8-12, 28-29.

this particular interpretation, however, it is clear that by the end of the nineteenth century the established interests of Britain were endangered on not just one, but several planes.

On the one hand, there was the relative decline of Britain, which made itself felt simultaneously in military, industrial and commercial fields. The British army and navy were jointly challenged. Hobbesian Continental countries were strengthening their armies through compulsory conscription. In addition, they had started to carve out empires of their own. Germany and the United States had emerged in the 1890s as two new naval powers. The concrete foreign-policy consequences of the weakening of British power had already been displayed in 1870, when there had been a big shift in the European balance of power with the exclusion of Britain's say.<sup>137</sup> Traditionally having put less emphasis on Europe, Britain was now witnessing with alarm that she was losing her grip on the continental balance of power.<sup>138</sup>

At the same time, there was an ever-growing pressure on the fiscal system. Gladstone's great budgetary achievements were only possible because of specific favourable political conditions in Europe, which enabled Britain to square naval supremacy with

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<sup>137</sup>. Beloff, Imperial Sunset, p.22-23.

<sup>138</sup>. This awareness of a Continental challenge was, of course, also the spark that ignited a new wave of schemes for imperial union, like Curtis's.

low defence expenditures. The Boer War, however, put a lot of pressure on the budget.

The response the two main parties to this state of affairs was different. The Liberals continued to adhere to free trade with an emphasis on direct taxation directed mostly towards the landed aristocracy (as exemplified by Lloyd George's 1909 budget, the House of Lords crises of 1909-11 and the Liberal land campaign that followed), thus attenuating the connection of the Liberals with the aristocrats. In contrast, the Conservatives, as defenders of aristocracy and the status quo, resisted direct taxation but resorted to tariffs by 1910. Furthermore, all this occurred in a context in which, after the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts, an expanded electorate made new demands upon the public purse.<sup>139</sup>

What, however, made the military weakening and the fiscal problems really severe was that they were intertwined firmly with the relative British decline in the industrial and technological spheres at a time when 'A'-industries were eclipsed by 'B' ones.<sup>140</sup>

According to Searle, it was the rise of continental powers which could command wide resources that made the British first become aware of the concept of power - power not only to underwrite the liberal world system, but as a moral good in itself. The moral and utilitarian aspects of Gladstonian liberalism had

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<sup>139</sup>. Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation, pp.202-03.

<sup>140</sup>. Van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, p.56.

neatly overlapped. Protectionism not only made no sense from an economic point of view, but it was rendered immoral. With the rise of new powers, it became obvious that these old tenets were not valid for economic success. For a while, British public and political discourse conceded the success of the continental powers while proclaiming these policies to be undemocratic and immoral. In the end, however, the reformulation of the liberal edifice that had underpinned the policies of the nineteenth century became inevitable.<sup>141</sup>

The ultimate implication of all these developments, even to the most convinced Cobdenite, was clear. Whatever its credentials in the past, the concept of embroiled peace and economic prosperity promised by the proponents of the Manchester School did not seem to be the order of the future. What mattered in this new world were: First, size; second, military as well as economic success underlined by an 'efficiently' organised state apparatus and economic system; third, a newly born national-consciousness and aggression, as displayed in the policies of the newly-unified Germany and the United States, and of Russia. War itself had become an instrument of national policy and a symbolic reaction to laissez-faire.<sup>142</sup>

To make matters more complicated, however, the mood prevailing among the British elite at the turn-of-the-century was not conditioned only by these

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<sup>141</sup>. Searle, Quest.

<sup>142</sup>. Tyler, Struggle, pp.14-16, 20.

`external` developments which challenged the power-political position of Britain on the world stage. There were also a set of domestic factors, which drew the attention of this elite in a way that had not been experienced before to the problems of the `working man`. According to Paul Kennedy, behind this concern was increasing population and urbanisation.

The creation of formal political parties to ensure the implementation of the aims of the working classes was an outgrowth (of this).<sup>143</sup>

Seen from the perspective of both the industrial and financial bourgeoisie and their landed class allies, the rise of a class conscious labour movement opposed to bourgeois social hegemony<sup>144</sup> and the vulnerability of this newly created electorate to socialism signalled a very serious threat. One way of facing this threat was to gain the support of this electorate, a concern which spurred both major parties to emphasize social reform in their policy programmes.

Wilfried Fest comments with respect to social imperialism:

(R)esonance in public political debate (of social imperialism) achieves a new quality in the late Victorian epoch. The year 1886 can be taken as a watershed in the development of Britain's political system. From then on both major parties turned their attention to social factors like income and employment.<sup>145</sup>

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143. Paul Kennedy, The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism: 1860 - 1914, London: Ashfield, 1980, p.322.

144. Keith Williams, The British State, Social Imperialism and Emigration from Britain, 1920-22: The Ideology and Antecedents of the Empire Settlement Act, Ph. dissertation, University of London, 1985, p.40.

145. Wilfried Fest, `Jingoism and Xenophobia in the Electioneering Strategies of British Ruling Elites Before 1914` in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (eds.), Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914, Oxford: Macmillan, 1981, pp.171-89, here p.171.

And, in the view of Taylor:

Two imperialists, each in other ways so different from each other, Disraeli and J. Chamberlain, were both, after all, to be social reformers.<sup>146</sup>

The turning point was the Third Reform Act of 1884 which transformed the electorate into a mass one.

In this context, it is appropriate to mention a debate which has thrown additional light on the social and intellectual background of these groups and their motivations. This debate has been initiated by Arno Mayer's controversial argument that the eve of the First World War witnessed a revolt, not from the European left, but from the European right. Mayer has argued that industrialisation and the creation of an autonomous middle and a potentially revolutionary working class caused a reaction from an anachronistic landed and aristocratic elite. This reaction came to a head in the years following the pacification of the working class prior to the First World War. Although Mayer's thesis was limited to central Europe, his ideas have provided a stimulating starting point for a comparative analysis of the Edwardian right. To what extent can Edwardian 'constructive imperialism', of which the Round Table was a part, be considered as the by-product of this broader 'revolt from the right'?

Geoffrey Searle argues that Edwardian right was a very different species from the Central European right of the same period. It was not a consistent anti-modernisation movement instigated by an atavistic

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<sup>146</sup>. Tyler, Struggle, p.19.

landed class. Although there were such elements, the Edwardian right was a very complicated movement. This refers to its social composition, but also to the wildly contradictory aims it pursued. Instead of being a homogenous group of disenchanted aristocrats a la Mayer, the Edwardian right included men who, in terms of class, socialization and their understanding of politics, could be best interpreted as a rising stratum of intellectual bureaucrats and professionals. They rejected the amateurism of the traditional elite. As far as their approach to industrialisation is concerned, their proposals as a whole added up to a curiously ambivalent mixture of pro- and anti-modernist views. They were able to combine two contradictory kinds of critique. On the one hand, they lambasted against alienating urban conditions, social problems, class hatred, materialism, pacifism and cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, they also took the idle and feeble-blooded aristocracy to task. Furthermore, they were also able to combine the critique of bureaucracy with the advocacy of German-style efficiency.<sup>147</sup>

The discourse which prevailed among the ranks of Edwardian imperialist intelligensia, argues Karl Rohe, was a modernising discourse, not a moralising one. It was 'post-liberal': For them, the classical liberalism

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147. Geoffrey Searle, 'The „Revolt From the Right“ in Edwardian Britain' in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (eds.), Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981, pp.21-39.

of the mid-Victorian era with its embracement of *laissez-faire* had to be left behind. It was out of touch with realities and no longer a hallmark of social progress. Prime inspirations for the emergence of post-liberal discourse were perceived decline and the example provided by Germany. The admiration for German-style organisation, which was widely perceived as boosting production, captured the imagination of groups which otherwise had substantial differences: Witness the gulf separating the Fabians from Conservative groups.

There was a further factor uniting the Edwardian intelligensia as a novel generation: their social composition. Post-liberal social thought went hand in hand with the growth in numbers of non-commercial middle-class people. The Victorian university reforms had provided them with new opportunities and increasing self-confidence. This post-liberal attitude to modernisation reached a culmination in new imperialism, which, like German-style efficiency, claimed a broad commitment from the Edwardian elite.

Under the impulse of new imperialism, Britain finally made the transition from the small-scale society of liberal mid-Victorian Britain to a post-liberal large-scale one. This process fitted well into the interests - of both material and non-material kind - of the new middle classes. Thus, Edwardian imperialism was not primarily conditioned by the defensive mood of a declining elite, but the vigour of



a rising one.<sup>148</sup> Curtis can be well placed into this rising elite.<sup>149</sup>

Leaving the simultaneous rise of organised labour and of the professional intelligentsia aside, there was a third domestic factor relevant for the rise of social imperialism: rival economic interests within Britain. E.H.H Green has propounded the thesis that in certain key respects, the sociological bases of Gladstonian liberalism and imperialism at the turn of the century had not been eroded. On the contrary, with the transition to the gold standard the financial sector had tightened its grip within British economy, and the dependence of Britain on 'invisible exports' had intensified. At the same time, the gold standard and the increasing power of the financial bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the British administration was perceived by sections of the industrial sector as fundamentally contradictory to their own interests.

There was a 'great hinge' in British society whereby prosperity, economic dynamism and population moved away from the industrial north and Midlands towards the service sector of the south and south-east. Not only the pressures for Tariff Reform and bimetallism, but also the realised projects of the new

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148. Karl Rohe, 'The British Imperialist Intelligentsia and the *Kaiserreich*', in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (eds.), Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981, pp. 130-42, here pp.136-41.

149. As we have seen in Chapter 3, he had a middle-class background and was heavily influenced by his spell at Oxford.

imperialism like the scramble for Africa, claims Green, partly stem from the reaction of significant sections of the industrial bourgeoisie to their worsening predicament. Tariff Reform would, thanks to its protectionist aspect, shield them from the vagaries of the international market, bimetallism would reduce the detrimental effects of the gold standard, and the preemptive acquisition of new areas would provide for them protected new markets before other protectionist powers could get hold of them.<sup>150</sup> The strengthening of Cain's and Hopkins' 'gentlemanly capitalists' - or, better, those committed to the money-capital perspective - had in a paradoxical way been one of the causes paving the way to the strengthening of the new imperialist philosophy.

Finally, mention should be made of the autonomous development of certain kinds of thought. First, there was the 'efficiency' discourse, which was influenced by Continental theories of Social Darwinism and the works of Kidd, Pearson and Bosanquet. In a Fabian tract of 1896, for example, Sidney Webb

first began to draw upon the arguments of the Social-Darwinists and neo-Hegelians in developing the concept of 'social efficiency,' later to blossom into the influential Fabian 'National Minimum' program. The concept of 'social efficiency' was formulated by Sidney Webb in the context of the 'race struggle', integrating Fabian collectivism with the currently esteemed theories of Benjamin Kidd, Karl Pearson, and Bernard Bosanquet. Fabian social analysis and prescription was to be scientific, empirical, and unburdened by sacred shibboleths, in the manner of Darwinist biology and the young science of sociology. The ultimate rationale for

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150. E.H.H Green, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Economic Policy 1880-1914: The Debate Over Bimetallism and Protectionism' in Raymond E. Dumett (ed.), Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism: The New Debate on Empire, London and New York: Longman, 1999, pp.44-67.

the suspension of individual freedoms and the laws of nations preached by Kidd and Pearson was, put simply by Webb, 'the lesson of evolution ... that interracial competition is really more momentous in its consequences than the struggle between individuals.'<sup>151</sup>

Originally, 'national efficiency' was an attempt to make cultural and institutional changes in Britain to create a social organization that would follow the German model. Two culprits of decline that come up pretty often in the recent literature (lack of systematic development and application of modern science, and an educational tradition aimed at gentlemanly amateurs) were already then held as two of the reasons for the beginning decline. Running through many of the discussions, there was a curious mixture of glorification of Bismarck's combination of social policy and military strength, and anti-German rhetoric.<sup>152</sup>

Second, there was also the need for an intellectual defence of the empire. The Boer War was a turning-point regarding the feelings of a considerably large section of the British public for the Empire - at least for the empire that Chamberlain, but especially Milner, cherished. The atrocities of the war had created a public outrage against what was widely perceived to be an illiberal, aggressive notion of imperialism, while the defeats suffered by the British

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151. Robert J. Scally, The Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition: The Politics of Social-Imperialism, 1900 - 1918, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, p.50.

152. Searle, Quest. For the simultaneous admiration towards and disparaging of Germany at this period see Günther Hollenberg, Englisches Interesse am Kaiserreich: Die Attraktivität Preußen-Deutschlands für konservative und liberale Kreise in Großbritannien 1860 - 1914, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1974.

army had caused a high level of demoralization.

Particularly loud were the protestations of orthodox liberals, radicals, and socialists who pointed out that the imperialism exhibited in South Africa

could no longer be portrayed as a defense of the interests of all classes in the nation at home - not while the Colonial Office and the governor in the Cape were widely pictured as no more than willing instruments of the Rand mine owners and City financiers.<sup>153</sup>

At the end of the Boer War, a new language of imperialism had to be invented. As the logical culmination of the processes described above, this could only be a social-imperialistic language, i.e. one that tied the domestic and international effects of imperialism into an inseparable whole.<sup>154</sup>

All these developments called for a double-thronged state action which had both domestic and international facets. Economic and political power; social reform and defense; industrialisation and international prestige were now firmly intertwined issues which had to be jointly addressed by both the Unionists and the Liberals. 'Industrialisation, market-seeking, commercial rivalry and the foundation of colonies' were now closely related issues.<sup>155</sup> The

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153. Scally, Origins, p.30.

154. Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt, Imperialism: The Significance of a Political Word 1840 - 1960, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965, pp.81-249; Andrew S. Thompson, 'The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire: Imperial Discourse in British Politics, 1895 - 1914', in Journal of British Studies 36 (1997), pp.147-77.

155. Tyler, Struggle, p.17. On the close relationship between state interference in the economy to promote industrialisation in the context of a successfully appeased working class, and imperialism abroad, see Bernard Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform: English

precise nature of the `social imperialist` inclinations within different parties and pressure-groups varied, but in a general sense it was a common theme.

### **The Social Imperialist Agenda**

The social imperialist revolt against `Gladstonianism` was a movement crosscutting the traditional divisions between left and right. The Fabians, Liberals and Conservatives each had their social imperialist wing. The first to be affected by internal divisions was the Liberal Party during the Boer War. A strong minority led by former Prime Minister Lord Rosebery refused to go along with the party leadership's demand for immediate negotiations with the Boers.<sup>156</sup> The Boer War also galvanised the Webbs and Shaw into a pro-imperialist position which won a narrow majority among the Fabian Society in 1900. Faithful to the Fabian strategy of permeating existing parties, the Fabian imperialists hoped to turn the Liberal imperialists into a vehicle for their aims. This failed due to Rosebery's vacillations.<sup>157</sup> However, once the Liberals came into government in 1905, Liberal imperialists like Foreign Secretary Grey and War Secretary Haldane were in a position to shape Britain's foreign and defence affairs while leaving domestic

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Social-Imperial Thought, 1895 - 1914, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960.

<sup>156</sup>. Scally, Origins, pp.32, 57; Semmel, Imperialism, pp.59-60.

<sup>157</sup>. Scally, Origins, pp.29-72; Searle, Quest, pp.107-41; Semmel, Imperialism, pp.53-82.

matters to the traditional and left wings of the party.<sup>158</sup>

In 1902, the Webbs made another attempt at shaping a new political force by rallying Fabian, Liberal and Conservative imperialists into an exclusive club called the Coefficients. Unfortunately for them, the emergence of the Tariff Reform movement split the club and strangled all hope of turning it into the core of a new 'national' party.<sup>159</sup>

Launched by Colonial Secretary Chamberlain in 1903 and masterminded from the vanguard-like Compatriots club, the Tariff Reform movement included prominent conservatives like Milner, Amery, Oliver (all, at one stage, also Round Tablers), the influential journalists Garvin and Maxse, and the geographer Mackinder.<sup>160</sup> Although, by dividing the party, the Tariff Reform movement contributed to the loss of the 1906 election, a majority of Tory MPs was nominally committed to protectionism. But after the lost 1910 elections and the coming of new issues like Home Rule and House of Lords reform to the fore, it lost influence. The imperial preference aspect, the core of Chamberlain's programme, was dropped in favour of straightforward protectionism by the Conservative party.<sup>161</sup> The social

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158. Scally, Origins, pp.135-36; Semmel, Imperialism, pp.134-36.

159. Scally, Origins, pp.73-95; Semmel, Imperialism, pp.53-82.

160. Scally, Origins, pp.110-15; Semmel, Imperialism, p.92.

161. Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation, pp.218-21; Semmel, Imperialism, pp.126-27.

imperialists of all parties had only partial success in putting their agenda into reality. It was under the wartime Lloyd George government that they got new opportunities.

The starting point of social imperialist thought was the criticism of Gladstonian *laissez-faire* and exaggerated individualism. Particularly Sidney Webb accused these notions as reactionary and as leading to degeneration.<sup>162</sup> To alleviate this situation, the state was to take a greater role for economic development and for the well-being of the whole national community.<sup>163</sup> Fabian and Liberal imperialists still managed to combine this celebration of the state with a pluralist vision in which intermediate institutions like the Church would have their role.<sup>164</sup> Conservatives praised the Britons' high sense of public duty, which was, however, to be fostered by the beneficial effects of conscription.<sup>165</sup>

The necessity for military reforms, including a well-trained citizen army, was stressed in all versions of social imperialism.<sup>166</sup> Another common plank was better education. Besides addressing vocational

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162. Scally, Origins, pp.42, 49-50; Semmel, Imperialism, pp.72-73.

163. Searle, Quest, pp.63, 97.

164. *Ibid.*, pp.98, 100-01.

165. Wolfgang Mock, "The Function of Race" in Imperialist Ideologies: The Example of Joseph Chamberlain, in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (eds.), Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany Before 1914, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981, pp.190-203, here pp.197-98; Scally, Origins, p.130.

166. Scally, Origins, pp.52, 130; Searle, Quest, pp.66-67; Semmel, Imperialism, p.72.

training, the social imperialists put specific emphasis upon elite education. They criticized the public schools and Oxford for concentrating too much on high culture and character training instead of practical matters.<sup>167</sup>

The Webbs in particular mooted plans for welfare measures like slum removal and housing reforms, sanitary improvements, public health services and actions against sweatshops. This was to achieve a 'National Minimum' standard of living, below which the individual was not allowed to fall. An elaborate bureaucratic system was to grade and control people, with job training for the unskilled, moral training for the lazy and semi-penal colonies for the recalcitrant.<sup>168</sup> Likewise, the Liberal imperialists wanted reform with respect to housing and temperance in order to turn the British into an 'imperial race'. However, they tended to neglect domestic issues over military reform.<sup>169</sup>

When he had been mayor of Birmingham during the 1880s, Chamberlain had enacted municipal 'socialism' (i.e. public ownership of utilities and transport) and had argued that the rich owed a 'ransom' to the poor. He made the Conservative government adopt a workmen's compensation scheme in 1897 and argued, less

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167. Scally, Origins, pp.65-66; Searle, Quest, pp.75-76, 78-80, 84.

168. Scally, Origins, pp.51-52; Searle, Quest, pp.235-43.

169. Scally, Origins, pp.55, 67; Searle, Quest, pp.245-46; Semmel, Imperialism, p.63.



successfully, for old-age pensions.<sup>170</sup> Chamberlain's followers adapted the Fabian and Liberal imperialist demands for temperance, for improvements in education, housing and sanitation, for fighting slums and sweated trades, and for a minimum wage, national insurance and public health. All this was to be paid for by the revenues arising from tariffs.<sup>171</sup> However, when the Liberal government enacted a very similar programme, although not one financed by tariffs, their reaction was less than enthusiastic. Milner set the priorities clear: Social reforms should not just have a humanitarian aspect but aim at the fostering of order and discipline. Most importantly, they should not be financed at the expense of funds for the army and the navy.<sup>172</sup>

Tariff Reformers also raised the spectre of 'red revolution' and spoke out against class conflict and internationalism. Some were critical of the trade unions, others like Milner propagated the nationalization of vital industries and a corporatist collaboration between management and organized labour, overseen by bureaucratic experts.<sup>173</sup> This was a consequent application of the state monopolist concept of control.

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170. Semmel, Imperialism, pp.90-91, 96-97.

171. Scally, Origins, pp.104, 147, 190, 223, 313; Semmel, Imperialism, pp.163, 174, 182-84.

172. Scally, Origins, p.138.

173. Scally, Origins, pp.206-07, 264, 313; Semmel, Imperialism, pp.180-85, 197-98, 210-14.

The social imperialists did not have a very high opinion of the masses the proposed reforms were to uplift. The Webbs and Shaw used words like `stupid`, `sottish` and `riff-raff` for them and looked for eugenic measures to increase the birthrate of the `abler` classes, decrease that of the `thrifless` and breed a future race of supermen.<sup>174</sup> The economist Cunningham, another prominent Tariff Reformer, deemed the British population at large `apathetic and ignorant`.<sup>175</sup>

Consequently, the social imperialists had a - to put it mildly - rather reserved attitude towards parliamentary democracy. While elder leaders of the movement like Rosebery and Chamberlain expressed their faith in the positive correlation between Empire and democracy,<sup>176</sup> others like Mackinder and Garvin were not so sure.<sup>177</sup> Others again, namely Beatrice Webb and Oliver, did not hide their dislike of the democratic system at all.<sup>178</sup>

While Fabian and Liberal imperialists were wont to criticize the `barrennes of the Parliamentary machine`<sup>179</sup> and the `evil` party system,<sup>180</sup> it was the Conservative social imperialists who were most outspoken in this respect. Lambasting against the

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174. Searle, Origins, p.95; Semmel, Imperialism, p.51.

175. Scally, Origins, pp.252-53.

176. Mock, `Function`, pp.193-95; Scally, Origins, p.29.

177. Scally, Origins, p.118, Semmel, Imperialism, pp.175-76.

178. Scally, Origins, pp.83, 252-53.

179. Ibid., p.247.

180. Ibid., p.56; Searle, Quest, p.93.

`Rotten Assembly` at Westminster, Milner faulted the `system` for giving power to an ignorant population, reducing politics to a meaningless struggle for office, producing an oversized cabinet consisting of mediocrities and treating all-important issues on the same level as banal ones. At one stage, he spoke about closing down the parliament for three years.<sup>181</sup>

Amery, too, bemoaned the politicians' obsession with keeping office and saw the danger that a determined bloc of MPs might force through policies at odds with `the general wish of the nation`.<sup>182</sup> Amery also favoured reducing the power of the Treasury (one of the hallmarks of `Gladstonianism`) and putting the House of Commons `in its proper place`.<sup>183</sup> For Maxse, the particular culprits were lawyer-politicians without any genuine convictions of their own, who saw politics as career only and who were good talkers but bad administrators.<sup>184</sup>

There were two kinds of way to change this state of affairs. One had a centralizing and elitist character and was embraced by Fabian and Liberal imperialists as well as the group of Tariff Reformers around Milner. In its tamer versions, it consisted of the strengthening of parliamentary committees and

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181. Scally, The Origins, pp.107-08; Searle, `Revolt`, p.27; Semmel, Imperialism, p.185.

182. Scally, The Origins, p.159.

183. *Ibid.*, p.111.

184. G.R. Searle, `Critics of Edwardian Society: the case of the Radical Right', in Alan O'Day (ed.), The Edwardian Age: Conflict and Stability 1900 - 1914, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979, pp.79-96, here p.88.

limiting the time of MPs speeches. More sweepingly, there were demands to empower the supposedly more efficient bureaucratic `experts` or big businessmen at the expense of parliament. This was to be done through the establishment of a special body responsible for imperial affairs or even by forming a `government of national efficiency` above party lines consisting of them. In one way or another, parliament's role was to be limited to choosing the experts who would then do the actual administration and to simply approve or reject measures initiated by them.<sup>185</sup>

The second solution was of a more populist and plebiscitary kind. Rosebery pointed out that people were not so much interested in parties but in particular leaders they trusted. And Tariff Reformers around Leo Maxse, a demagogic journalist, set their bets upon the imperialist instincts of the people rather than upon experts. They demanded the introduction of referenda.<sup>186</sup>

The Liberal and Conservative imperialists were opposed to Home Rule, although some like Milner were willing to contemplate the federalizing of Britain in return for tariffs as a compromise solution.<sup>187</sup>

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185. Scally, Origins, pp.53-54, 56, 125; Searle, Quest, pp.69, 83, 85, 87-89, 92, 219-21; Searle, `Critics`, pp.82-83; Searle, `Revolt`, pp.32-33.

186. Scally, Origins, p.45; `Critics`, pp.83-86; Searle, `Revolt`, p.33.

187. Peter Cain, `Political Economy in Edwardian England: The Tariff-Reform Controversy`, in Alan O'Day (ed.), The Edwardian Age: Conflict and Stability 1900-1914, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979, pp.34-59, here p.57; Scally, Origins, pp.34, 41, 55, 61, 67, 164, 201, 206, 236, 295; Searle, Quest, pp.136-37; Searle, `Revolt`, p.33; Semmel, Imperialism, p.85.

Some Tariff Reformers like Chamberlain and Maxse, but also Sidney Webb were not free from anti-semitic traits and wanted Jewish immigration to be restricted.<sup>188</sup> At the same time, Milner and Amery advocated fostering emigration from the British isles to the `white` Empire.<sup>189</sup>

The Empire was, of course, dear to the hearts of all social imperialists. This notion was most eloquently expressed in a Fabian Manifesto of 1900 edited by Shaw. It declared that the issue at stake was whether Great Britain would be the `nucleus of one of the world-empires of the future` or whether, by foolishly losing its overseas possessions, it would `be reduced to a tiny pair of islands in the North Sea`.<sup>190</sup> Imperialism was a new stage of international politics and small nations were anachronistic. The manifesto challenged the radical sections of the Liberal Party who persisted in clinging to the fixed-frontier ideals of individualist republicanism, non-interference, and nationalism, long since demonstrated both by experience and theory to be inapplicable to our present situation, and who did not see that the world had grown `far beyond the primitive political economy of the founders of the United States and the Anti-Corn Law League`. Likewise, the imperialist model upheld by the

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188. Mock, `Function`, p.199; Searle, `Critics`, p.92; Semmel, Imperialism, pp.51, 194; Anne Summers, `The Character of Edwardian Nationalism: Three Popular Leagues`, in Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls (eds.), Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981, pp.68-87, here pp.82-83.

189. Andrew S. Thompson, Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics c. 1880 - 1932, Harlow: Longman, 2000, pp.47-48, 183.

190. Cf. Scally, The Origins, p.37.

Conservatives also gave reason for criticism, in particular the lack of efficiency it entailed. It was held that the Fabians were not approaching the empire from any particularist standpoint, be it the workers or any other class, and that they were concerned with the effective social organization of the whole Empire, and its rescue from the strife of classes and private interest.<sup>191</sup>

As for the Liberal imperialists, Rosebery had been Chairman of the Imperial Federation League at one time during the 1880s, calling for a kind of political union between Great Britain and the self-governing parts of the Empire.<sup>192</sup> Likewise, the imperial enthusiasm of the Tariff Reformers focussed upon the Dominions rather than the tropical dependencies.<sup>193</sup>

With the exception of Rosebery, who was relatively more concerned with Britain's traditional rivals France and Russia, the social imperialists warned of the German menace, both in military and economic terms. At the same time, the efficiency of the Germans and, even more pronouncedly, the Japanese was admired. Not restricting their worries to the Hobbesian contenders, some Tariff Reformers like Oliver and Amery saw in President Wilson a dangerous schemer pursuing American hegemony by subtle means.<sup>194</sup>

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191. Cf. Semmel, Imperialism, p.71.

192. Helmut Reifeld, Zwischen Empire and Parlament: Zur Gedankenbildung und Politik Lord Roseberys (1880 - 1905), Göttingen and Zurich: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1987, pp.91-97.

193. Thompson, Imperial Britain, pp.68, 97-104.

194. Fest, 'Jingoism', p.184; Mock, 'Function', pp.195-96; Rohe, 'British Imperialist Intelligentsia', pp.133, 135; Scally, Origins, pp.45, 57-58, 106-07; Searle, Quest, pp.55-59, 95-96; Searle, 'Critics', p.98;

## Tariff Reform

In 1903, Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain divided not only the Conservative Party but also the social imperialist movements by coming out in favour of protectionism and imperial preferences and by founding the Tariff Reform League. His agenda was seemingly straightforward and referred to the establishment of customs duties: 25s per quarter on grain and flour; 5% on meat and dairy produce; c. 10% on manufactures; and the exemption of Empire products from all these charges.<sup>195</sup>

What was the purpose behind this attempted break with Britain's free trade tradition? Tariff reform could in fact have four very different aims. First, tariffs could simply be a retaliatory device against protectionist countries. Second, there was the protectionist motive to preserve the home market for the British. Third, tariffs could have the function of providing revenues which would be used to finance social reform. Fourth, if in combination with imperial preferences, Tariff Reform would turn the British Empire into one big economic bloc comparable to the United States.<sup>196</sup>

For sections of the British industry, especially hard-pressed iron, steel, electricity and engineering, the protectionist aspect was attractive. In contrast,

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Semmel, Imperialism, p.173; Thompson, Imperial Britain, p.67.

195. Semmel, Imperialism, p.92.

196. Cain, 'Political Economy' pp.41-44.

export-oriented textile and coal production, shipbuilding (receiving cheap German steel) and finance stuck to free trade.<sup>197</sup> Tariff Reformers, with only moderate success, tried to woo the working classes by arguing that the increased price for foodstuff would be offset by increased employment once foreign dumping was stopped.<sup>198</sup>

The imperialist wing of the Fabians was divided over the question of Tariff Reforms.<sup>199</sup> In contrast, the Liberal Imperialists remained faithful to free trade. Although they were not dogmatic on this issue, they clearly objected to the full-scale protectionist demands of the Tariff Reform League. As the Liberal imperialists argued, it was efficiency and not tariffs that were needed.<sup>200</sup> In fact, financial rather than industrial interests were heavily represented among the Liberal imperialists. Mackinder, when he was still a Liberal before later joining the Tariff Reformers, pointed out that British industry might be in for a relative decline but, more importantly, that London's position as world financial centre remained intact and was even bound to increase. The Liberal Imperialists had thus a more cosmopolitan outlook than their Conservative counterparts.<sup>201</sup> And, different to them,

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197. Semmel, Imperialism, pp.102-04, 146-50; Summers, 'Character', p.71.

198. Semmel, Imperialism, pp.93-96, 106-21, 146-48.

199. *Ibid.*, pp.129-31; Searle, Quest, pp.152-53.

200. Scally, The Origins, pp.61, 71, 73-74, 89; Searle, The Quest, pp.146-48; Semmel, Imperialism, p.62.

201. Scally, The Origins, pp.63-64; Semmel, Imperialism, pp.61-62, 168-69.



they did not break with an important ingredient of liberal internationalism.

That tariff reform was mainly a fiscal device has recently been argued by John M. Hobson. According to him, the support of tariff reform by the Unionists has happened because of their fear of a recasting of the societal hierarchy, occasioned through the fiscal policies of the Liberals from 1905. It was neither a genuine concern over the 'decline of Britain' nor over unemployment that spurred the Conservatives to give their ultimate support to tariff reform. Instead, it was their response to the increasing proportion of direct to indirect taxation from mid-nineteenth century onwards, a situation which reached its culmination through the fiscal exigencies that emerged during and after the Boer War. The free-trade Conservatives would either continue supporting free trade, which they saw as being in the long term interests of the economy, and have to take on board more direct taxation; or they would, against their own convictions, have to switch sides to the protectionist camp, in order to forestall any further increase in direct taxation.<sup>202</sup>

Now, a hegemonic ideology cannot just be built around the straightforward advance of specific economic interests. Rather, it needs to be expressed in terms that address the real or alleged needs of the whole community. This explains a fact neglected by Hobson's

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<sup>202</sup> . John M. Hobson, The Wealth of States: A Comparative Sociology of International Economic and Political Change, Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp.115-29.

fiscally-oriented analysis: Tariff Reform was presented as much as an imperial as a domestic strategy. Its preferential dimension assumed the most prominent role in the campaign. Even though the movement attracted many different groups, its leadership expressed itself mainly in terms of Empire unity.<sup>203</sup>

Nevertheless, in contrast to the Liberal imperialists the Tariff Reformers all considered manufacturing as more important for Britain's well-being than finance and services.<sup>204</sup> They were unambivalent propagandists of the productive-capital perspective. Chamberlain saw the increasing power of the finance and services with forebodings of doom and pointed out to City representatives that their prosperity rested ultimately upon the strength of British industry.<sup>205</sup>

After Chamberlain's premature retirement from politics in 1906, others like Amery carried on the flag. Amery's world was the insecure, competitive world of the realists. In such a world, the need for strong defence was apparent. This, in turn, required strong industries built upon the flourishing, secure markets that only vast economic units held together by organic bonds could provide. Such vast units would at the same

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203. Semmel, Imperialism, pp.121-27; Andrew Thompson, Thinking Imperially? Imperial Pressure Groups and the Idea of Empire in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain, Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, 1994, pp.237-38; Thompson, Imperial Britain, pp.85-89.

204. Semmel, Imperialism, pp.156-58.

205. Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation, pp.210-12, 216-18.

time allow population growth, stimulate and sustain a dynamic economy, and unite all the social classes.<sup>206</sup>

For Amery

the question of `decline` was relative to national resources and the will to exploit them effectively. The rise and fall of states would be determined not only by resources but also by skilled and inventive scientific management. He wished Britain to retain and increase her competitiveness and believed that her future as a world power would rest on industrial progress and colonial development.<sup>207</sup>

It was this focus on industrial strength on the one hand, and Anglo-Saxon imperial unity on the other, which determined the hostility of the Tariff Reformers to *laissez-faire*. Imperial unity was the basis of industrial viability in the modern world. The industrial strength of Britain and economic interests, and not abstract notions of culture, would in turn provide the locomotive drawing together the Anglo-Saxon Empire. Sapping away both her industrial and imperial strength, *laissez-faire* was the thorn on the flesh of Britain. As the Chairman of the Management of the Tariff Reform League, Amery in particular argued that by supporting only the financial bourgeoisie free trade policies directed the resources away from the manufacturing base of the country, undermining her overall strength.<sup>208</sup>

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206. Leo Amery, My Political Life, vol. 1, England Before the Storm: 1896 - 1914, London: Hutchinson, 1953, pp.15-16, 253-55, 306-08.

207. Wm. Roger Louis, `In the Name of God, Go!` Leo Amery and the British Empire in the Age of Churchill, London and New York: W.W. Norton, 1992, p.23.

208. According to Andrew S. Thompson, Amery argued that `the concentration of free traders on `exchange` rather than `production` was destroying the `national capital` of the country by eliminating skilled trades, bankrupting manufacturers, driving skilled labourers into the ranks of the unskilled and unemployed, and

Of Amery's views on the subject, Thompson says:

In 1907, Amery published a series of papers which presented preference not as an abstract economic theory but as a fundamental political principle. Supporters of preference, it was explained, took as their starting point the unity of the Empire, and then analysed economic policy from that viewpoint. They regarded free trade as indifferent to Empire, and inconsistent with the higher political objective of reconstructing relationships within the British world.<sup>209</sup>

Amery in other words was a modernizing and aggressive reformer, aware of the tensions between domestic commitments and overseas defence. At the same time, he believed in the proposition that Britain could afford both a welfare state and defence forces overseas.

#### **The Lloyd George Coalition**

Much of the social imperialists' thunder was stolen by the social reforms enacted under the Liberal government between 1908 and 1911: an eight-hour day for miners, old-age pensions, minimum wages in sweated trades, housing and town planning reforms, and unemployment and health insurance. What was more, these measures were financed not by tariffs but by higher direct taxation falling upon the wealthy. One might assume that the men largely behind these reforms, Lloyd George as the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Churchill as the President of the Board of Trade,<sup>210</sup> were the *bête-noires* of the social imperialists and particularly the Tariff Reformers.

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leaving valuable natural resources undeveloped. See Thompson, Imperial Britain, p.109.

<sup>209</sup>. Ibid., p.83.

<sup>210</sup>. Semmel, Imperialism, pp.138-39.

Instead, Lloyd George's apparent dynamism and his rejection of *laissez-faire* rather produced a more ambivalent, love-hate relationship between the Liberal Welshman and the Tory social imperialists. In 1910, during the deadlock over the House of Lords crisis, Lloyd George went as far as proposing a Liberal-Conservative great coalition - Milner's cherished national government on a programme that not only included a social reform agenda shared by both new liberals and social imperialists, but also addressed the wishes of the latter with respect to conscription, tariff reform and the dropping of home rule.<sup>211</sup>

The national coalition failed to materialize. Nevertheless, Lloyd George had risen in the esteem of the Tory social imperialists. During the war, Lloyd George's successes at the head of the Ministry of Munitions further recommended him to the social imperialists. The latter got increasingly angry with Prime Minister Asquith and the Liberal imperialists in his government for their perceived failure to break the stranglehold of 'Gladstonianism' even under wartime conditions. At the end of 1916, Lloyd George finally succeeded Asquith as Prime Minister, heading a coalition of the Conservatives with his faction of the Liberals.<sup>212</sup>

Having finally joined the social imperialist fold, Lloyd George gave members of the Fabians and of the

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211. Scally, The Origins, pp.187-97.

212. *Ibid.*, pp.172-87, 197-370.

Milner clique important positions at the Ministries of Reconstruction and Labour and as advisers for his new War Cabinet. Milner himself joined that body of five and thus became part of the inner decision-making circle.<sup>213</sup>

Lloyd George enacted much of the social imperialists' demands on administrative 'efficiency' by curbing the influence of the Parliament and of established bureaucracies in favour of the streamlined War Cabinet, to which a permanent Secretariat was added. He also appointed a number of 'specialists' and successful businessmen to the normal cabinet, fulfilling another part of the social imperialist agenda. Compulsory education and the old-age pension and unemployment insurance schemes were extended and a major housing programme launched. At the same time, there were experiments with a corporatist structure in the shape of industrial councils based on equal representation of employers and unions. Industrial unrest was dealt with by a combination of force and reconciliation.

The war brought unprecedented control of government over the economy, and there were voices which wanted to retain much of this apparatus under peacetime conditions. Well-placed under Lloyd George, the Tariff Reformers re-launched imperial preferences and added imperial settlement schemes. At the same time, the government tried to mollify Irish and Indian

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<sup>213</sup>. Ibid., pp. 347-49, 355.

nationalists - a process in which, as we have seen, Curtis was heavily involved. After having caved in to the demands of the jingoist press and come out in favour of heavy reparations to be imposed on Germany at the Versailles Conference, Lloyd George's foreign policy tried to prevent future German revanchism by revising the peace treaty. French desire for security was to be met by an Anglo-American security guarantee. Good relations with Washington were ensured by the acceptance of the mandate principle and by going at distance to Japan. Even Soviet Russia was to be brought back into the fold by starting trade relations again.

Lloyd George's unique combination of welfare corporatism at home and renewed liberal internationalism abroad failed to get off the ground. The postwar economic crisis enabled those class factions related to the money-capital perspective to start a counteroffensive using sound finance as their battle-cry. A qualified return to the 'normalcy' of Treasury control and *laissez-faire* followed. At the same time, America's return to isolationism prevented, for the time being, a closer cooperation among the heartland countries.<sup>214</sup>

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214. Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Crisis, pp.49-58; Cox, Production, pp.178-81; Martin Pugh, Lloyd George, London and New York: Longman, 1988, pp.100-05, 107-10, 119-22, 132-48.

## Conclusion

`Gladstonianism' was the hegemonic ideology with which Britain's ruling bloc bolstered its control domestically and internationally. On the domestic level, the embracement of *laisser-faire* and of cheap, good government allowed the dominant capital faction tied to the money-capital perspective to pose as antagonist of aristocratic corruption. While a minimal state was in its own interest, this anti-aristocratic rhetoric allowed the dominant faction to draw upon the support of the industrialists, the middle class and the workers. On the international level, the policy of free trade and peace and the relatively relaxed attitude towards the Empire was also in the best interest of Britain's ruling class. Given her lead in the financial and industrial realms during much of the 19th century, Britain could only profit from an open and peaceful world order. In both its domestic and international aspects, `Gladstonianism' was a fine specimen of liberal internationalism.

Once that hegemonic world order came apart and was replaced by inter-imperialist competition, the hegemonic ideology also got under siege inside Britain. While `Gladstonianism' no longer seemed to provide the goods it promised, the productive-capital perspective that was so successfully applied in Germany appeared as a more promising alternative. As a result of this disenchantment with liberal internationalism, there was an intellectual ferment during which a number of attempts to forge a new hegemonic ideology arose.

Movements aiming at a closer unity of the Empire predated the end of the *Pax Britannica*. Nevertheless,



the schemes for imperial unity which mushroomed in the last third of the 19th century were clearly connected with the onset of a new world order. If Britain's hegemonic position could no longer be upkept on a global scale, it was better at least to draw as much of the Lockean heartland as possible together. At the same time, by enlisting both Liberals like Rosebery and future Conservatives like Chamberlain and Milner into their ranks, groups like the Imperial Federation League provided a common ground for members of different political camps.

While Empire federalism did not challenge the basic tenets of liberal internationalism as such, new liberalism was a head-on attack on the latter's domestic aspects. With its rejection of *laissez-faire* and its propagation of a greater role for the state it can be counted as a version of the productive-capital perspective. Despite toying with nationalizations, new liberalism remained faithful to capitalism. With its emphasis on ethics and the provision of good life it had all the necessary ingredients for a new hegemonic ideology. While adhering to the state monopoly tendency domestically, however, new liberalism still retained the free trade and cosmopolitan elements of liberal internationalism. It was thus a hybrid movement.

The social imperialists were generally more clearly related to the state monopoly tendency, even though its Liberal component still stuck to free trade. Like the new liberals, the social imperialists called for greater state intervention. But, unlike them, they accepted the competitive character of the new non-hegemonic order on the international level.

Particularly the Tariff Reformers advanced the interests of Britain's 'B'-industries facing foreign competition. Furthermore, tariffs as revenue-raising devices could make higher taxation unnecessary. This was, of course, in the interest of the more propertied groups. But Tariff Reform and social imperialism in general qualified as hegemonic ideology by hiding these interests behind the call for national solidarity and efficiency in the face of a hostile world.

It was during the Lloyd George government that social imperialism came into its own, with representatives of the movement occupying important posts. Administrative changes aiming at greater efficiency, welfare measures and experiments with corporatism met the agenda of the state monopoly tendency. But in foreign affairs, Lloyd George aimed at cooperation among the heartland and at, wherever possible, integration of the Hobbesian contenders, thus pursuing liberal internationalism by new means. Despite the ultimate failure of its programme, the Lloyd George government foreshadowed the corporate-liberal synthesis of the post-WWI period.

My argument is that we can only adequately understand Curtis's thought if we interpret him in the context of the shift from one comprehensive concept of control to another in early 20th century Britain and of the search for hegemonic ideologies propping up this shift. Empire federalism, new liberalism and social imperialism were such attempts, and Curtis's work contains many elements similar to those of these movements.

## Chapter Seven

### Empire Federalism, New Liberalism and Social Imperialism in the Works of Curtis

#### Introduction

The discussion of the previous chapter will now be connected to the work of Curtis. The argument is that many - though not necessarily all - of the agendas raised by the different political movements just discussed can be found throughout Curtis's work. The intellectual ferment of the turn of the century had stamped him throughout his intellectual life and is still expressed in his publications as late as the 1940s.

Accordingly, after dealing with his criticism of Gladstonianism/the Manchester school we will see how Empire federalism was expressed in Curtis's specific schemes and, at the same time, transformed to the world level. Then, it is argued that many of the basics of his commonwealth principle hold elements also raised by new liberalism. And in his demands for political and social reform, numerous social imperialist elements pop up. Finally, Curtis's stance towards the question of protectionism, and the place of economic issues in general, is discussed.

This does not mean that he self-consciously understood himself as a follower of these movements. It is not clear whether he was aware that there has been a rich tradition of imperial federation schemes

in the 19th century. It is also questionable whether he read any of the new liberal writers. And while he moved closely in social imperialist cycles, his rhetoric was much softer and less outspoken than, say, that of Milner. In terms of substance, however, the similarities are quite striking.

### The `Manchester School`

Similar to all the groups discussed in the previous chapter, as well as to Carr,<sup>1</sup> Curtis rejects 19th century-style *laissez-faire*. His whipping-boy is not so much Gladstone but rather Cobden and the `Manchester School`. His stress on the need for the unlimited devotion of the members of a society to each other is expressively used to debunk that group. Curtis claims that, contrary to the tenets of the Manchester School, self interest cannot bind people together.<sup>2</sup> He also criticizes the Cobdenites' mistaken tendency to see trade as a country's ultimate goal.<sup>3</sup> On another occasion, probably making a pun at Norman Angell's expense, Curtis says that `the great illusion` that the profit motive was behind human action has been shattered by World War

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1. E.H. Carr, The Twenty Years' Crisis: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations, 2nd ed., London and Basingstoke: Papermac, (1939) 1995, pp.7, 43-46.

2. Lionel Curtis, World War: Its Cause and Cure, 2nd ed., New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946, pp.10-11.

3. L. Curtis, The Commonwealth of Nations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Citizenship in the British Empire, and into the Mutual Relations of the Several Dependencies Thereof, London: Macmillan, 1916, pp.307-08.

I. Instead, 'courage and patriotism' are restored to their rightful place.<sup>4</sup>

More specifically, according to Curtis, the Manchester School's persisting influence caused low taxation rates in both the UK and India. The money kept by the population was spent on wasteful expenditures, while education starved. Thus, both countries fell back in the race for industrial and general efficiency.<sup>5</sup> On another occasion, Curtis argues that the disunity of South Africa before union prevented the adequate dealing with the issue of native troubles. Again, the doctrines of the Manchester School are to be blamed for this.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Curtis puts the protectionist wing of social imperialism into the same compartment as the 'old orthodoxy' of Cobden, Russell, Gladstone and his former employer Courtney. Although these four were free traders, for Curtis they share with the Tariff Reformers the fault of being satisfied with a mere resemblance of imperial unity instead of the political bonds which Curtis prefers.<sup>7</sup>

In these 'anti-Manchester' paragraphs, we have the Curtisian vision of social imperialism in a

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4. Lionel Curtis, 'Windows of Freedom', in Round Table 8 (1918), pp.1-47, here p.4. See also Lionel Curtis, 'The Price of Liberty', in Round Table 10 (1919), pp.1-20, here pp.9-10.

5. L. Curtis, 'Land Revenue' in L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, Oxford: Clarendon, 1920, pp.239-90, here p.274.

6. Philip Kerr and Lionel Curtis, The Prevention of War, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923, p.84.

7. Lionel Curtis, The Green Memorandum, London and Bungay: Richard Clay and Sons, 1910, pp.78-79, 83.

nutshell: The concern with social integration, which - by implication - is to be achieved through a more interventionist state; the quest for efficiency; 'constructive imperialism'; worries about the threat coming from the 'dark races'; the realist favouring of security-related 'high politics' over economics-related 'low politics'; and, of course, imperial unity.

### **From Imperial Federation to World State**

In his earlier attempts at federal 'constitution-mongering' Curtis is in line with what Martin calls Empire federalism proper. His first work after leaving South Africa, *The Green Memorandum* (1910), contains a blueprint for a federation in which the UK is on formally equal terms with Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. (The fifth and smallest Dominion, Newfoundland, is seemingly overlooked.) Great Britain herself is to receive Dominion status, with control over defence and related matters transferred from her legislature to a two-tiered imperial parliament.

The Lower House of this imperial parliament is directly elected, with representatives distributed between the five component states according to their relative population strength. In other words, it will, for the time being, be dominated by representatives from Britain. In contrast, in the Upper House, which is to act as a brake on the other

chamber and to consist of elder statesmen, each component member state is given an equal number of deputies. They will be elected either by the people or by the state legislatures. The imperial parliament elects an imperial government responsible to it and seated in Westminster. The parliament itself is peripatetic and has its session interchangeably in the different major cities of the Empire.

The imperial parliament and government are responsible for three issues: First, defence against aggression, which for Curtis is the most basic need of society. In order to efficiently defend the British Empire against the different beasts of prey, major military efforts need to be centralized and the main striking force has to be under the control of the imperial government. Local defence can remain under the component states.

Second, foreign policy, since it affects decisions about war and peace. There will be an imperial Foreign Office and diplomatic corps. Component states remain at liberty to make separate treaties with foreign powers, but subject to ratification by the imperial Upper House.

Third, control of the tropical dependencies. There will be an imperial colonial service, and governors are appointed by the imperial government. All other issues, including tariffs, are left to the discretion of the member states.

To discharge its duties, the imperial parliament enjoys direct taxation power. An independent commission assesses the wealth of the different component states and calculates their respective contribution to the imperial purse accordingly. Component states can decide over their system of taxation but the state banks are obliged to pay out the revenues due to the imperial level in any case. As far as possible, the contributions of a member state will be spent on defence measures within its borders.<sup>8</sup>

Under pressure from other Round Table members, who - at this time - wanted to go even further than Curtis, he in the following year published a slightly different version, *The Form of an Organic Union of the Empire*. Instead of two houses, the new plan simply calls for a non-peripatetic single-chamber parliament, with the majority of deputies from the UK. In wartime, this imperial parliament will be given absolute power.<sup>9</sup>

Similar proposals are mooted in one more blueprint, *The Problem of the Commonwealth* (1916), where some additional details on the structure of the imperial administration are listed. There will be an imperial Foreign Office, an Admiralty, a War Office,

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8. Ibid., pp.99-125.

9. Cf. Alexander May, The Round Table, 1910-66, Ph. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1995, p.87.



an India Office and a Colonial Office - hitherto all reserved to Britain.<sup>10</sup>

All this is traditional Empire federalism, referring to an `organic` union between Britain and the (white) Dominions. It in effect means that the Dominions are given a voice in imperial foreign affairs, defence and colonial administration (hitherto issues decided upon by Britain alone). At the same time, however, they are also to participate in footing the bill for all that.

Already while he was busily drafting this pan-British federation, Curtis's mind worked into the direction of even more ambitious schemes. First, he came round to give non-white people a share in the imperial federation, too. As early as 1912, he suggested that `natives` from the tropical dependencies could be included in the imperial parliament - albeit only in an advisory, non-voting function.<sup>11</sup> In the following years, his opinions on the topic quickly advanced and he soon came round to accept the idea that, one day, a self-governing India could take its place within the Empire-Commonwealth in a position of equality with the white component states.<sup>12</sup> In 1917, he envisages Indian deputies elected to the imperial Lower House while the Upper

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10. Cf. Anon. and Lionel Curtis, A Canadian Criticism on `The Problem of the Commonwealth` and the Author's Reply Thereto, 1916, p.3.

11. Deborah Lavin, From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, p.116.

12. Ibid., p.127.

House will contain representatives of the Indian Princely States and the India Muslims.<sup>13</sup>

Curtis also made his first suggestion for a world state in order to end wars once and for all in a 1915 article. There, he already provides the basic outlines for his future, more elaborate blueprints. The world state will grow out of a union of the most democratic states. Other countries can join step by step. The union will pool control over colonies and semi-colonies and gradually train them for self-government and equal participation in the union. Curtis gives no details over the constitutional arrangements of this world state, except that world law is to be paramount and, if necessary, backed up by force. Curiously, he mentions the (unfederated) British Commonwealth as an example of how the world commonwealth might ultimately look like. This suggests that, at this stage, he still expects the world state to be rather loosely constructed.<sup>14</sup> Some years later, he reasserts that the British Commonwealth is a practical step in the direction of a world government.<sup>15</sup>

Compared to the detailed outlines for imperial federation, these suggestions for a world state have a tentative and sketchy character. This may have to

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13. L. Curtis, 'A Letter to the People of India', in L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, Oxford: Clarendon, 1920, pp.38-95, here pp.86-88.

14. Lionel Curtis, 'The End of War', in Round Table 5 (1915), pp.772-96, here pp.781-88.

15. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, p.157.

do with the fate of the earlier blueprints. Not only federation proper but any kind of organic union for the British Empire was unambiguously turned down by the Imperial Conference of Britain and the Dominions in 1921.<sup>16</sup> About this time, for all his federal enthusiasm, Curtis accepted the fact that imperial federation would take generations to materialize.<sup>17</sup> Under these circumstances, it did not make much sense to keep on producing blueprints. After *The Problem of the Commonwealth*, it took Curtis over twenty years before he resumed drafting international federations.

His first exercise after the long interval takes place in the third volume of *Civitas Dei* (1937) and still only provides rather broad outlines. Once more, there is a federal legislature and an executive with their own taxation power controlling federal foreign relations and the administration of dependencies.

A start will be made by a closer coming-together of countries of the British Commonwealth, although initially on a much more modest fashion than in the 1910-16 blueprints. Only Britain, Australia and/or New Zealand will merge their sovereignties at first. This rather limited union is made possible by the cultural and political similarities and the common security requirements connecting them (by which he probably refers to the fact that the Anzacs depend upon the Royal Navy for their defence).

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16. Lavin, From Empire, p.114.

17. May, Round Table, p.217.

With the principle of international commonwealth having become reality, other countries can be induced to join. Given their geostrategical position on the sea-route connecting Britain and the Antipodeans, Egypt and India are natural candidates. At the time of their joining the federation, both countries will not yet be fully self-governing. Thus, Curtis wants an (unspecified) special membership status for them. Having these two countries in the fold, the international commonwealth gets a multi-racial character.

Next to join are the Western European countries likewise interested in the road towards the East: The Netherlands (Curtis obviously has her colonial possession in present-day Indonesia in mind) as well as Belgium and the Scandinavian countries (where the connection to the East is less clear). After them, countries like France will follow. With these new entries, the federation has outgrown its British Empire origins.

Now, the remaining Dominions (Ireland, South Africa and Canada) will enter, followed by the USA. With American participation, the international commonwealth will be strong enough to secure global peace. It will now only be a matter of time until the remaining states as well as the dependencies, once they govern themselves, can enter the federation.<sup>18</sup>

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18. Lionel Curtis, Civitas Dei: The Commonwealth of God, London: Macmillan, 1938, pp.931-39.

Curtis's resumption of federal planning was timely, because in the late 1930s federal schemes mushroomed. As we have seen, Curtis warmly endorsed Streit's *Union Now*, which envisaged a super-state embracing Britain, Western Europe, the Dominions and the USA.<sup>19</sup> His support was largely tactical. Compared to Curtis's vision, Streit's union was more centralised, had also competence over economic matters, and neglected the question of the dependencies. Nevertheless, Curtis's enthusiasm was big enough that he rejected all plans for a purely European federation, as advanced by the Federal Union, in favour of Streit's Atlantic union.<sup>20</sup>

Another vision that seems to have grown out of expediency rather than complete conviction was Curtis's idea to extend the June 1940 British offer to France about an immediate union. Curtis wanted this offer also to be made to the Dominions, the Low Countries, Norway and (envisaging, however, a subordinate status for them) Poland and 'Bohemia'.<sup>21</sup> As Curtis was aware, the original plan for an Anglo-French union included not only a wartime joint cabinet and the 'association' of both parliaments but also joint organs for foreign policy, defence and economic and financial matters.<sup>22</sup> As in the case of

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19. Clarence K. Streit, *Union Now: A Proposal for a Federal Union of the Democracies of the North Atlantic*, London and Toronto: Jonathan Cape, 1939.

20. May, *Round Table*, pp.358-59.

21. *Ibid.*, pp.367-68.

22. Lionel Curtis, *Decision*, Oxford and London: Oxford University Press and Humphrey Milford, 1941, p.42.

Streit's book, Curtis jumped on the bandwagon of a project that went in some respects further than he liked.

It is in his publications of 1941-46 that Curtis comes back to his specific version of an international union. Since these works refer to each other and contain more or less the same proposals, they can be treated as a whole. Under the slogan 'a British initiative proposed', he wants the British government to pick up the courage telling the Dominions that the UK is no longer able to carry the peacetime defence burdens of the Commonwealth alone. Instead, a federal structure encompassing Great Britain and some or all of the Dominions is to be erected - imperial unity once more. However, it does not stop here.

After having been told that no guarantee of protection against renewed German aggression can be given to them if they stay outside, the Scandinavian and Low Countries, Switzerland and (provided that a democratic system has been restored) France will join the union. They may soon be followed by Britain's Eastern European allies, i.e. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Greece.

Once this truly international commonwealth has had a successful existence for a time, the United States can be convinced to enter the fold. And after that, time will be ripe for a reformed Germany and for countries like India and China to follow suit.

Instead of London or of a peripatetic arrangement, Curtis now proposes Quebec as the federal capital. He lists strategic and cultural reasons as well as the fact that the United States will be more willing to join if the federation has a North American capital.

In terms of constitutional arrangements, Curtis harks back to his 1910s plans. There is to be a federal executive, a two-chamber parliament and a Supreme Court. In the Upper house, which has only advisory function, each component state gets the same number of deputies. Concerning the more important Lower House, Curtis at first settles again for distribution of deputies to member states according to population size while granting some over-representation to the Dominions. In the later versions, he instead proposes that representation is to be tied to taxation capacities and thus to national wealth. In other words, the richer countries will be over-represented.

In the case that one country will send a number of deputies surpassing those of all the other countries combined (which will be the case with Britain vis-à-vis the Dominions in the earliest stage of the federation), Curtis does not expect them to vote en bloc but to divide according to political stances. This, however, is the reason why only democratic states are allowed to join.

The federal parliament has its own taxation powers. Again going back to the earlier imperial federation plans, an independent committee will assess the taxation capabilities of the member states, after which the state banks have to transfer the necessary sum to the federal bank.

The federal government and parliament will exert control over defence and matters inseparable thereof. Curtis lists foreign affairs and colonies (as in the old imperial federation blueprints) but now adds a federal merchant marine (to be used in wartime) and control over civil aviation between the component states. Furthermore, during a war the federal level will be given emergency powers. But, under normal conditions, its competences are limited to the issues just mentioned. Parting way with other federalists like Streit, Curtis is particularly adamant that control over economic issues (namely tariffs) and social composition (i.e. immigration laws) is to be left to each member country.<sup>23</sup>

Although not exactly a carbon copy of Curtis's imperial federation schemes, his 1941-46 proposals still follow the earlier blueprints quite closely. The main difference is that organic union will not

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<sup>23</sup>. Ibid., pp.45-69; Lionel Curtis, Action, Oxford and London: Oxford University Press and Humphrey Milford, 1942, pp.11-17, 38-56, 66-69; Lionel Curtis, The Way to Peace, Oxford and London: Oxford University Press and Humphrey Milford, 1944, pp.23-26, 29-32, 61-76; Curtis, World War, pp.77-88, 111-17, 134-48, 154-62, 167, 171-72, 179-83, 201-02, 222-33, 262-64; Lionel Curtis, War or Peace?, Oxford and London: Oxford University Press and Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1946, pp.42-54.



stop with the British Commonwealth but that Continental Europe, the USA and, at the end, the rest of the world will also come in. Nevertheless, the coming together of Britain and the Dominions, i.e. the good old imperial federation, will be the first step.

From 1946 onwards, there was a shift of emphasis in his federation plans as Curtis got involved in Churchill's United Europe movement. Already in late 1945, Curtis proposed to Foreign Secretary Bevin an international assembly of Europe to which the Dominions would join later. As a member of United Europe, he likewise came out in support of a Western European federation. Propagating a union of Britain with Western Europe rather than with the Dominions as the first step to a world state is seemingly a break with his previous tenets. However, as in the case of his endorsement of *Union Now*, this was probably tactical.

In any case, Curtis remained faithful enough to his old ideas to be concerned that the Dominions would not be left out of the federation. Using the argument that a European union controlling the bulk of Africa would concern them anyway, he in 1947-48 urged Southern Rhodesian politicians to send deputies to the planned European Assembly.<sup>24</sup>

In *World Revolution in the Cause of Peace* (1949), Curtis stresses that during the convention framing

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<sup>24</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, pp.301, 304-05, 308-11, 314.

the Western European union (which will also include West Germany) Dominion statesmen should be present. They can bring in their federal experience and shape the federation in a way that the Dominions can join it quickly. Curtis repeats his argument about the necessity to restrict federal competences to defence and related matters like colonies and about taxation and parliamentary representation according to national wealth. There are two new elements: Component states will also keep issuing their own passports. And there is to be a federal currency that will exist side by side with the national currencies and which may ultimately replace them. A Cold War aspect is provided by the vision of the Eastern Bloc collapsing and its states joining the union.<sup>25</sup>

His last exercise in federal blueprinting, *The Open Road to Freedom* (1950) similarly repeats most of the above points. Here, he simply writes of a general Western federation without going into details about which states will join and in which order. A new element is the idea of a floating capital that will visit all the major union port towns in turn. Here, Curtis goes back to his peripatetic imperial parliament of 1910. Otherwise, the book includes a draft constitution for the federation by a Professor Hanbury, endorsed by Curtis. In this version, there is a single-chamber parliament elected for two years

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25. Lionel Curtis, World Revolution in the Cause of Peace, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949, pp.132-43, 149-54, 158-62.

with representation apportioned among states according to national wealth. Furthermore, there will be a federal President elected for three years and an executive Council. The President and at least 2/3 of the Councillers will have to come from the ten richest member states. A Court of the Union is also provided.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Principles of Commonwealth and of the State**

Having similarly been influenced by the Idealism of T.H. Green, Curtis shared with the new liberals the faith in a rational humanity, in the importance of ideas and of free will, in altruism and self-sacrifice, and in the state as the prime agent for the collective good of the community. Furthermore, he like them discounts excessive individualism<sup>27</sup> in favour of the idea that the individual is an organic part of society. It is this idea that is behind his concept of the commonwealth, on which his political programmes are based.

As we have already seen, Curtis sketches an evolutionary development in which three concepts - the tribal one, theocratic despotism and the commonwealth - succeed each other. This development corresponds to a moral progress, with the commonwealth being on top.<sup>28</sup> A similar threefold division has also been advanced by new liberal thinking, as has the optimistic notion of mankind's

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26. Lionel Curtis, The Open Road to Freedom, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950, pp.26-28, 32-48, 59-64.

27. Curtis, 'End', p.780.

28. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.3-12.

ethical evolution. Curtis foresees an ultimate stage in which man's sense of unlimited duty to his fellow human beings will not stop at national borders but encompass the whole world.<sup>29</sup> This links with new liberalism's notion of ever widening and intense solidarity.

Like the new/left liberals, Curtis stresses that it is not force as such that holds states together (whether autocratic or democratic) but the moral ideas behind them.<sup>30</sup> While autocratic systems are based on the belief in man's duty to the Deity personified in the despotic ruler, the commonwealth in contrast is founded upon the citizens' recognition of their personal obligation to contribute to the common good. It is this infinite obligation of each to all, and not a social contract in the vein of Hobbes or Rousseau, which is the main principle holding society together. Founded on this sense of public duty, the commonwealth demands unlimited obedience from its citizens. Furthermore, these obligations create a responsibility for action, guided by reason and conscience.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, according to Curtis citizenship is based more upon obligations (including, if necessary, sacrificing one's life).<sup>32</sup> Political liberties are

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29. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.926-27.

30. Ibid., p.8; Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.7-8, 137-38.

31. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.23-24, 603-06; Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, pp.139-43; Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.160-65; Curtis, Decision, pp.7-8; Curtis, World War, p.62.

32. Curtis, Green Memorandum, p.76. See also Lionel Curtis, 'Untempered Mortar: The Case for Organic Union', in Round Table 38 (1948), pp.524-34, here p.530.

also, first of all, an obligation. Curtis mentions the need and the duty of men to govern themselves, and not ... their right to do so.<sup>33</sup> As shown in the previous chapter, new liberalism in a similar vein considered voting not just a right but also a duty. And the social reforms it advocated aimed not so much at private happiness but at making the individual better able to fulfill his public duties.

For Curtis, the authority which enables the commonwealth to appeal to its citizens' sense of duty is based upon the rule of written law. This law, in turn, is derived from a public opinion competent to establish and to change it.<sup>34</sup> In a commonwealth, most citizens recognize the common interest as being above their own and do not have to be coerced to obey the laws. However, there will always be those who fail to put the general interest before their own.

Unless they are constrained, the law will cease to operate at all, and the decisions upon which it rests lose their effect. If the commonwealth is to exist, it must call upon those who recognize their duty to obey it to enforce its decisions on those who do not. The basis of law is devotion, not force, but a commonwealth must use that devotion to enforce its law.<sup>35</sup>

In this context, Curtis likes to quote Mahan that the function of force is to give moral ideas time to take root.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, this assumption is characterized (and criticized) as a typically realist

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<sup>33</sup>. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, p.151.

<sup>34</sup>. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.23-24; Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, pp.117-19.

<sup>35</sup>. Curtis, Civitas Dei, pp.51-52. See also Curtis, World War, pp.12-16.

<sup>36</sup>. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.59; Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, p.142.

one by Carr.<sup>37</sup> In any case, this coercive aspect of Curtis's concept is in line with new liberalism's call for the state to constrain recalcitrant minorities trying to sabotage reforms and for the need of compulsion in the interest of the whole.

But despite the binding force of laws, the possibility of conscientious objection remains.

In the last resort, however, there is no external authority, not even that of a law made by general consent, which a man may accept as overriding his own conscience. The commonwealth rests on the principle that in the last resort each man must decide for himself between right and wrong. For its end and object is to render them fitter for such decisions.<sup>38</sup>

The power of the state ensuring the safety of life and property of its citizens is merely a means to an ultimate end: The continuous growth of the character and mind of the citizens, of their devotion to each other, and of their capacity to judge measures for the general welfare.<sup>39</sup> This echoes the new liberal idea that right political and social conditions, and in particular the state, contribute to an improvement of the character of the individual.

Curtis parts, however, with new liberalism on the question of voting rights. While thinkers of the latter movement criticized restrictions on the franchise, Curtis provides an apology for such practices. The principles of the commonwealth, despite being linked to those of democracy, do not completely overlap with them. The commonwealth rests upon mutual responsibility, which, however, is seldom distributed equally. The governing power in the

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37. Carr, Twenty Years' Crisis, p.93.

38. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.52.

39. Ibid., pp.52-53. See also pp.160-65, 219, 813-14.

commonwealth therefore has to rest with those who have more knowledge.<sup>40</sup> Commonwealth thus does not necessarily mean everyone having a vote.

The idea that the principle of commonwealth implies universal suffrage betrays an ignorance of its real nature. That principle simply means that government rests on the duty of the citizens to each other, and is to be vested in those who are capable of setting public interest before their own.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, progressing towards democracy is the ultimate goal of a commonwealth. A balance needs to be found that stays clear both of enfranchising too many people not fit to the task and of, by going too slow, preventing people from learning the art of self-government.<sup>42</sup> He explains:

The more the voters, the greater the difficulty of practical government. Where those who exercise power are few it is for the moment easier to govern and maintain order. So those who recognize the vital importance of order are disposed to limit power to the few. But in doing so they are apt to forget that they leave unexercised and undeveloped the sense of devotion in the many to the state as a whole. The wise democrat is one ready to risk immediate order to a certain degree in order to cultivate in a large number of citizens that loyalty and knowledge of public affairs upon which in the long run the structure of the state can alone rest in security.<sup>43</sup>

His elastic conception of voting rights leads Curtis to give some idiosyncratic examples of `democracy`. In 1919, just after a voting reform in Britain, he writes that `no important section of citizens are now debarred from casting a vote`,<sup>44</sup> even though women under 30 still were. Even more strikingly, in his 1940s tracts he counts the USA in

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40. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.154-55.

41. Ibid., p.181.

42. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.72; Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, pp.152-54.

43. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.72.

44. Curtis, Price, p.11.

1789, South Africa in 1910 and Southern Rhodesia in 1948 as democracies<sup>45</sup> - despite property-, race- or gender-related restrictions on voting in these cases. Conversely, he mentions the outcomes of the 1917 Russian and 1911 Chinese revolutions as warning examples of democracy without responsibility.<sup>46</sup>

Curtis's link between possessing voting rights and having the correct spirit of public devotion is a fine example of a hegemonic ideology that allows him (and the dominant bloc within Britain) to have their cake and eat it, too. In principle, one upholds democracy as a universal value. In practice, one can withhold democratic rights from the bulk of humanity (namely people in the colonial dependencies, but also certain groups within Britain and the Dominions) with the argument that they are not yet fit for it. The question of how this fitness is to be defined and who has the intrinsic right to define it is conveniently ignored. New liberalism, for all its elitist traits, never went that far.

On the other hand, Curtis is at one with the new liberals in giving prime importance to the state. His definitions vary: 'a community of human beings organized on the basis of mutual service',<sup>47</sup> 'an institution designed to adjust the relations of its component members of communities without (unnecessary) violence',<sup>48</sup> 'composed of the

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45. Curtis, Way, p.61; Curtis, World War, pp.262, 264; Curtis, 'Untempered Mortar', p.525.

46. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, p.151.

47. Curtis, 'End', p.775.

48. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.114-15.



people inhabiting definite areas ... who are all expected to obey one common direction<sup>49</sup> or `simply all the citizens who compose (it)'.<sup>50</sup> In line with most British writers dealing with the state at the turn of the century,<sup>51</sup> Curtis seems to understand it as the whole community and not just as specific institutions concerned with administration and coercion. He is indeed critical of the German understanding of the state, calling it an `obedient dedication to an impersonal abstraction misnamed the state'.<sup>52</sup>

Like new liberalism, Curtis expects from the state the provision of a good life for the population.<sup>53</sup> Statehood, not anarchy, is the road to freedom. A commonwealth can only be realized in a state.<sup>54</sup> Again, like new liberalism, Curtis stresses that the state and its claim for duty overrides all other kinds of association, like churches, corporations or unions.<sup>55</sup>

Aside from these rather abstract notions, Curtis uses the concept of the state and of the commonwealth in order to bring home the need for organic imperial unity: The British Empire secures the conditions that none of its component parts go to war with each other and protects them against attacks from the outside.

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49. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, p.135.

50. Curtis, World War, p.70.

51. James Meadowcroft, Conceptualizing the State: Innovation and Dispute in British Political Thought 1880-1914, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.

52. Curtis, `End', p.780.

53. Curtis, Open Road, p.36.

54. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.89.

55. Curtis, World War, p.15.

According to the second definition above, it qualifies as a state from the international point of view. Within the British Empire, governing power is restricted to citizens of European origin. This is an acceptable situation because the premature extension of representative institutions to the other racial components of the Empire would cause anarchy. But it is because of the exclusion of Dominion citizens from a share in the imperial responsibilities that the British Empire loses the character of a state from the domestic point of view. It also fails to realize the principles of the commonwealth.<sup>56</sup>

Curtis shows an awareness of the changing functions of the state. Looking back at the connection between science and the increasing authority of the state at the end of the 19th century, he asserts:

At the close of the eighteenth century the functions of government were thought of as limited to the maintenance of order. By the end of the nineteenth science had forced government to invade every department of human life. The state had become of greater importance to the life of each citizen. The demands which it made on him were also greater.<sup>57</sup>

This links to the issue of social reform, where Curtis draws upon both new liberalism and social imperialism, but especially upon the latter.

### **Social Reform**

As we have seen, Curtis already had an interest in social problems when he was a young man. For instance, he dressed up as a tramp in order to get

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<sup>56</sup>. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.14-17.

<sup>57</sup>. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.818.

first-hand experience of poverty and for a time was social worker in the East End.<sup>58</sup> With these activities, he aimed at

bridging the gulf between the classes and to lead some of the lower and middle classes to a sense of a higher purpose in life apart from the hard struggle for existence.<sup>59</sup>

What this higher purpose in life would be was, of course, to be decided by Oxbridge-educated members of the professional elite, including Curtis. The call for harmonious relations between the classes is a handy hegemonic device. By implicitly stamping class struggle as illegitimate, it bolsters the established social order. This is in the interest of the ruling classes, who are merely asked to give some minor material concessions to the underclasses in return. As we have seen in the previous chapter, class harmony was also an important issue to both the liberals (whether new or centrist) and the social imperialists.

The need for this became more urgent during World War I. In a 1915 article, Curtis bemoans the prevalence of class contradictions in pre-war Britain. The rich were not willing to share their privileges and the workers forgot the welfare of the nation as a whole.<sup>60</sup> Three years later, he goes as far as claiming that, had WW I not broken out, the Irish crisis might have turned into a civil war between the

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58. Lavin, From Empire, pp.11-12, 15-18.

59. Ibid., p.15.

60. Curtis, 'End', p.794.

classes in the whole UK.<sup>61</sup> He refers to 'the millions in these Islands who were under-fed, under-clothed and under-housed' but continues that '(t)he blame for these evils could not be located or assigned to any ... body of men'.<sup>62</sup>

This motif continues in the later works. In *Civitas Dei*, he asserts:

The worst feature of slums was ... the segregation of rich and poor in separate communities, where they lost sight of their duty one to another.<sup>63</sup>

One may assume that the 'duty' of the lower classes is acceptance of their subordinate position, and that of the ruling classes to buy this acquiescence with a few material benefits. Echoing Chamberlain's argument about the rich owing 'ransom' to the poor, after WW II Curtis demands the use of capital supplied by the prosperous classes for providing a decent standard of living to slum dwellers.<sup>64</sup>

Like the Webbs, Curtis combined the call for social reform with a despising attitude to the masses. Already at public school, he argued that only the morally fit are entitled to vote. Not yet using his flowery commonwealth rhetoric, we for once get Curtis's opinion expressed bluntly:

(L)iberty misused is no liberty, and all the liberty the poor gain by their votes is a power to starve or get drunk. ... (V)otes were given to the slum population, who, in turn, became the national rulers.<sup>65</sup>

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61. Lionel Curtis, 'The Better Government of the United Kingdom', in Round Table 8 (1918), pp.750-77, here p.763.

62. *Ibid.*, p.750.

63. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.891.

64. Curtis, War, p.53.

65. Lavin, From Empire, p.10.

In *The Green Memorandum*, he elaborates upon this. The growth of industry and commerce has negative effects on the efficiency (i.e. virility) of the British. The best people have emigrated. Curtis idealizes those living in rural areas as healthy and energetic. Particularly a tough landscape creates virile people. In contrast, he depicts those living in towns as physically and psychologically weak and as prone to fall prey to the yellow press. By now, most British immigrants to Canada are unfit townies, who constitute the human wastage of slums.<sup>66</sup>

In his subsequent works, such Social Darwinist lambasting is replaced by a more patronizing tone. Thus, we are assured that the 'qualities essential to a courteous gentleman are not limited to any one class' but - hear, hear - can also be found among railway guards and inspectors.<sup>67</sup> Referring to WW II, he points out that the humblest of the British have sacrificed themselves most freely.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, some kind of negative Social Darwinism lingers on in his thinking. Wars, through causing the deaths of the 'best people', trigger a process of moral decline.<sup>69</sup>

While it is obvious that Curtis writes as an organic intellectual supporting upper-class interests and values, it is more difficult to place him into a specific class faction and its concept of control.

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66. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.20-22, 31, 34-35.

67. L. Curtis, 'Introduction', in L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, Oxford: Clarendon, 1920, p.xlix.

68. Curtis, World War, p.106.

69. Ibid., pp.125-26.

Especially in his earlier works, he showed some hostility to the corporative elements of the state monopoly tendency, which was embraced by social imperialists like Milner. Although as Oxford student he had come out publicly in favour of mining workers' right to strike,<sup>70</sup> his opinion of Canadian unionism was quite circumspect. He calls it 'sinister' because it supports unreliable British workers. This, in turn, forces employers to take Italian labourers.<sup>71</sup> On another occasion, Curtis approvingly quotes a criticism of the British Trade Dispute Act of 1906 providing for legal immunities of employers and workmen, According to this criticism, this violates the rule of equal law.<sup>72</sup>

In a 1919 article, Curtis dwells upon the power of big business and organized labour from a different angle. The dependence of society upon industrial production, transportation, communication and utilities gives extraordinary degrees of power to certain groups. On the one hand, there are the captains of industry. (Significantly, City bankers are not mentioned.) On the other hand, the workers become increasingly aware that they can hold the rest of the population at ransom by striking. Curtis points at the spectre of the Russian Revolution but also praises British and American labour leaders for

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70. Lavin, From Empire, p.14.

71. Curtis, Green Memorandum, p.38.

72. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.121 n.1.

their moderation.<sup>73</sup> About the same time, left and centrist liberals got concerned about the power of what they considered labour's sectional interests.

Besides his rejection of corporatism, there are other elements of the money-capital perspective in his works. In the 1930s, he considered continued adherence to free trade in Britain's best interest.<sup>74</sup> In 1949, with Britain recovering from her postwar economic problems, he stresses the importance of a stable Pound and of the meeting of debts.<sup>75</sup> The Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer Dalton is subject to Curtis's criticism for his unsound finances while his successor Cripps gets praise for winning back 'the confidence of the City and of public opinion'.<sup>76</sup>

On the other hand, Curtis approves of the 'aid, guidance and authority of the State' in tackling poverty.<sup>77</sup> Initially, he hesitated a bit. In 1910, he deems the Liberal scheme for old-age pensions as one of these 'sensational measures' an inefficient government is forced to resort to.<sup>78</sup> This is in line with the social imperialist criticism of the Asquith government. As we have seen, they were not opposed to these welfare schemes as such but did not want them to be paid at the expense of defence.

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73. Curtis, 'Price', pp.7, 9.

74. May, Round Table, p.295.

75. Curtis, World Revolution, pp.144-45, 162.

76. *Ibid.*, p.171.

77. Curtis, 'Better Government', p.750.

78. Curtis, Green Memorandum, p.91.

Then, writing in 1917, Curtis supports Lloyd George's taxes on land, as in the infamous 'red budget' of 1909. Because certain rises in the value of land are due to the general efforts of the community and not of the landowner, the former has a just claim on the unearned income of the latter.<sup>79</sup> This is a kind of argument also used by the new liberals, although not just with respect to land but to property inequalities as such.

Curtis's most original contribution to the issue of social reform is his argument for the establishment of an imperial or, later, international parliament responsible for defence, foreign and colonial affairs. He stresses that the need to deal with such imperial matters prevents the Westminster parliament from tackling domestic problems adequately<sup>80</sup> and that the efforts to run a vast empire has had negative effects upon Britain's 'internal efficiency'.<sup>81</sup>

Conversely, domestic affairs also distract the politicians from conducting foreign affairs in an efficient way, specifically in the shape of a firm foreign policy, which would have prevented World War I.<sup>82</sup> Finally, voters are at a loss whether they should choose the party they prefer on social reform issues (the Liberals?) or the one which they trust more on

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79. Curtis, 'Land Revenue', pp.245-46.

80. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.92-94.

81. Curtis, 'Windows', p.30.

82. Anon. and Curtis, Canadian Criticism, pp.33-34, 36.



foreign affairs (the Conservatives?).<sup>83</sup> Separation of domestic and imperial affairs into two different parliaments, one responsible for the United Kingdom only and one for the Empire, is thus a way for greater efficiency.

There is also the financial aspect calling for imperial federation. As Curtis points out in 1917, especially due to the war debts it will be difficult for the United Kingdom to provide a navy and army capable of defending the whole Empire and, at the same time, to finance public education and other social measures at home. Revenues for defence now need to be raised from all inhabitants of the Empire. This, in turn, necessitates a separation between an imperial and a British parliament.<sup>84</sup>

Curtis repeats this reasoning some decades later, this time in the context of the international commonwealth. In 1945, he argues that for national governments to be able to deal with social reform, security issues have to be taken over by an international government.<sup>85</sup> Four years later, he comes back to his major themes of efficiency. Governments are overburdened, and what is required for effective social reform is the separation between national and international issues.<sup>86</sup>

In these 1940s writings Curtis also says that

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83. Ibid., p.27.

84. Curtis, 'Letter to the People of India', pp.83-84.

85. Curtis, World War, pp.167-72.

86. Curtis, World Revolution, pp.146-47.

the menace of war distracts from social reforms, particularly those concerning the tackling of unemployment, education, housing, and health.<sup>87</sup> This list shows that he has by now fully endorsed the concept of the welfare state attributed to the productive-capital perspective.

Curtis on one occasion even seems to come out in favour of radical change. In *Civitas Dei*, he goes as far as saying that the principle of commonwealth needs to be applied not only to politics but also to economics. The quest for personal gain cannot provide stable social relations and the dependence of firms on the control of a handful of directors is not to be sustained in the long term.<sup>88</sup> It is not clear what kind of economic arrangement Curtis favours instead. As we have seen, both left and centrist liberalism were also wont to talk of industrial democracy, but only the former had substantive changes and workers' participation in management in mind.

While Curtis criticizes those Labour politicians who only support European unity if it will contribute to a socialist Europe,<sup>89</sup> he is not hostile to their party as such. Thus he argues that, had national and international issues been separated in the 1945 British elections, the Labour Party could have gotten

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<sup>87</sup>. Curtis, *Decision*, pp.20, 55; Curtis, *Action*, pp.43-44, 47-48; Curtis, *Way*, pp.26-27; Curtis, *World War*; pp.44, 61, 79, 210, 228-29.

<sup>88</sup>. Curtis, *Civitas Dei*, pp.165-66.

<sup>89</sup>. Curtis, *World Revolution*, pp.86-88, 97-99, 127.

an even bigger majority.<sup>90</sup> This prospect does not seem to greatly upset him. He even says that in a federal union, capitalist and socialist states can exist side by side.<sup>91</sup>

But although he is quite tolerant or even favourably disposed to the Attlee government, Curtis strongly opposes the more radical alternatives to the existing hegemonic bloc. For him, thinkers like Marx have fostered the belief that social reforms can only be undertaken by a dictator.<sup>92</sup> Curtis goes as far as mentioning Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, the *Qur'an* and Marx's writings in one spell.<sup>93</sup> He considers Catholicism, Islam, Communism, and Nazism as equally authoritarian creeds<sup>94</sup> and argues that Fascism and Nazism are by-products of Marxism.<sup>95</sup>

In this respect, there is another overlap with Carr, who considers both Marx and Hitler as realists advocating the rights of the 'have-nots' (in Marx's case: classes, in Hitler's: states) against the 'haves'.<sup>96</sup> Curtis, of course, has other preoccupations. For him, there is a mortal combat between the principles of the British Commonwealth and those of Marx.<sup>97</sup>

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90. *Ibid.*, p.166.

91. Curtis, *Open Road*, pp.38-39.

92. Curtis, *Civitas Dei*, pp.715, 723, 889-90; Curtis, *Decision*, p.19; Curtis, *World War*, p.43.

93. Curtis, *Civitas Dei*, p.738.

94. *Ibid.*, p.862.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 890; Lionel Curtis, 'World Order', in *International Affairs* 18 (1939), pp.301-20, here p.311.

96. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p.77.

97. May, *Round Table*, p.259.

## Political Reform

As has already been shown earlier in this chapter, Curtis did not embrace the democratic system whole-heartedly but wanted the franchise to be limited to those with the right sense of public duty. Leaving aside his more abstract elaborations on the commonwealth (which Milner, who otherwise had a high opinion of Curtis, called 'flapdoodle'),<sup>98</sup> Curtis followed the social imperialists in their critique of the existing parliamentary arrangements.

In *The Green Memorandum*, Curtis argues that the British parliament is overburdened with trivial issues. The political business goes at the expense of administrative work. There is also lack of coordination between Cabinet members. An inefficient government and parliament are unable to address issues of social reform (by which Curtis understands eugenics and tackling poverty) systematically. Party discipline on imperial issues further stifles free discussion of domestic problems. Their declining influence on the course of legislation leads MPs to pursue unconstructive policies. Politics degenerate into a struggle for office and acquires an emotional character. As a result, reform measures cannot be discussed on their merits.<sup>99</sup>

In other contexts, he diagnosed the declining quality of MPs and the incapability of politicians to approach issues from the perspective of better

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<sup>98</sup>. Ibid., p.95.

<sup>99</sup>. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.86-94, 135-36.

government. Then, Churchill was for him a good example of an unprincipled politician.<sup>100</sup>

In 1918, using similar arguments in a memorandum to the Ministry of Reconstruction's Committee on the Machinery of Government and in a *Round Table* article, he bemoans the inability of the British parliament to meet an increasing number of complex issues. Despite its unwieldy oversize, the House of Commons has become congested with an immense number of parliamentary acts. There is no longer time available to debate all of them and, if necessary, to amend them properly. Consequently, demagogery and the treatment of issues on the basis of emotions are increasing. Given how precious parliamentary time is, the government does not dare to introduce acts likely to produce opposition but unlikely to create public sentiments. This enables vested interests to block unspectacular but necessary measures concerning local taxation, poor law or land-titles. Acts which prove faulty cannot be revised properly because a move for amendment might end up in raising opposition to the whole act.<sup>101</sup>

What, then, was to be done? As seen in the previous section, Curtis advocated ending parliamentary over-congestion by stripping Westminster of its competences to deal with foreign, defence and colonial matters in favour of an imperial parliament. Furthermore, in 1918-19 he uses the

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100. Lavin, From Empire, pp.112, 121.

101. Curtis, 'Better Government', pp.751-63; Robert Scally, The Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition: The Politics of Social Imperialism, 1900-1918, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, pp.350-51.

congestion argument to call for federalizing the United Kingdom itself by setting up provincial parliaments.<sup>102</sup> This is `home rule all round` once more, an issue on which the social imperialists had an open mind.

Curtis's stance on one of the pet schemes of some social imperialists - transfer of parliamentary powers to experts and committees - is contradictory. In his memorandum to the Reconstruction Ministry, Curtis wants important issues to be taken out of the hand of parliament and be given into that of experts and non-partisan committees.<sup>103</sup> And, two years later, he writes that `many of the evils of party government` can be avoided if parliament spends less time with debating and more with collecting evidence through select committees.<sup>104</sup>

Conversely, in 1916 he claims that the control over foreign policy by secret committees (the Committee for Imperial Defence?) prevented the British population from realizing the seriousness of international affairs before WWI.<sup>105</sup> More starkly, in a 1919 article he charges parliamentary committees as being ploys used by opponents of reform and of stifling public debate.<sup>106</sup> Here, the new liberal rather than the social imperialist in Curtis is expressing himself.

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102. Curtis, `Better Government`, pp.766-77; Curtis, `Price`, pp.12-13.

103. Scally, Origins, pp.350-51.

104. Curtis, `Introduction`, p.xliv.

105. Anon. and Curtis, Canadian Criticism, pp.33-34.

106. Curtis, `Price`, p.12.

One gets the impression that between 1916 and 1920 Curtis was undecisively wavering between two social imperialist recipes: The elitist one, represented by his cherished Milner, and the populist one, represented by Maxse, with whom Curtis was not in contact. The populist version of social imperialism wanted to cut the wings of parliament by the introduction of referenda (also, for different reasons, advocated by the new liberals), thus expressing a greater trust in the public than the Milner group. Although Curtis did not take up the referenda proposal, there is a populist element in his writing.

For example, in 1916 he opposes the idea of indirect elections to the future imperial parliament by claiming that people are to be trusted more than politicians. This is so because the latter's judgement is to a greater extent affected by personal interests.<sup>107</sup> Some years later, however, he contradicts this by arguing that a responsible government needs electorates who follow public interests. The efficiency question thus concerns the voters, not the politicians.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, in 1932, he expresses a stance critical of bureaucracies. They are unable to originate policies, tend to be opportunistic and try to evade publicity. Curtis particularly complains that since World War I Britain's overseas representatives no longer send dispatches to press and parliament. Such

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107. Anon. and Curtis, Canadian Criticism, pp.31-32.

108. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, pp.127-28.

dispatches would not only keep the people informed on imperial and international matters but also force the men on the spot to adapt a perspective wider than the local one. Curtis claims that Milner, when in South Africa, had been very keen to make the people of the UK understand his policies.<sup>109</sup> As if touched by a magical stick, the elitist Milner now appears as a man trusting the people.

Subsequently, Curtis develops his own version of plebicitary democracy. In *World War*, he no longer maintains that the quality of politicians is declining. On the contrary, as far as personal character is concerned, 'politicians as a class are ... much better than the average human being'.<sup>110</sup>

Nevertheless,

(t)he nature of their task denies them the time and also the detachment required for the thinking necessary to see what the wider issues are.<sup>111</sup>

Subsumed under the slogan 'democratic pathology' in his works from the mid-1940s, he diagnoses three problems with representative democracy. First, politicians usually tend to follow public opinion rather than leading it and tell people what they want to hear. Second, politicians consider the kind of political arrangements they are used to as almost sacred. Consequently, they instinctively oppose any structural change. Third, they fail to mention unpalatable facts.

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109. Lionel Curtis, The Capital Question of China, Port Washington (NY) and London: Kennikat. (1932) 1970, pp.275-81.

110. Curtis, World War, p.266.

111. Curtis, Civitas Dei, p.919.



However, the population is usually less conservative than the politicians. From time to time, there appear charismatic men who dare to say initially unpopular things. At the end, they convince the people over the head of the established political apparatus to get the right things done. As examples for such charismatic leaders Curtis lists Washington and Lincoln, a number of turn-of-the-century Australian and South African politicians who implemented union, and the once-despised Churchill.<sup>112</sup> In other words, there are two kinds of politicians: The mediocre ones preferred by people during normal times and the great leaders, whom they follow during crisis periods.<sup>113</sup>

This discounting of the normal parliamentary procedure in favour of trusted leaders resembles the attitude of Rosebery. That Curtis in the 1940s still sticks to the social imperialist criticism of parliamentary democracy becomes obvious when he bemoans 'the terrible strength of party machines'.<sup>114</sup>

#### **Tariff Reform and Immigration**

Curtis' assertion that farming, trade and manufacturing are public services as necessary to a state as fighting<sup>115</sup> resembles the neo-mercantilist

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<sup>112</sup>. Curtis, Decision, pp.73-75; Curtis, Action, pp.59-61; Curtis, Way, pp.45-53; Curtis, World War, pp.90-91; 93-94; 104-06, 246-53. See also Curtis, 'Introduction', p.lviii.

<sup>113</sup>. Lionel Curtis, 'South Africa since the Union', in Atlantic Monthly 140 (1927), pp.253-63, here p.258.

<sup>114</sup>. Lionel Curtis, The Political Future of the British Commonwealth and Empire, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945, p.8.

<sup>115</sup>. L. Curtis, 'The Structure of Government Continued', in L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the

ideology of the Tariff Reformers. However, Curtis was clearly divided from Chamberlain and Amery over the issue of imperial preference. In this respect, he also parted ways with Milner. As we have seen, he was inclined towards free trade.

In his plan for an imperial federation as outlined in *The Green Memorandum*, Curtis rejects the idea that the imperial parliament should also regulate the tariffs of the Empire. This will create the danger of overcentralization, bring no economic advantages to the Empire at large and not be acceptable to the Dominions.<sup>116</sup>

Curtis's version of imperial unity was thus quite different from that of the Tariff Reformers. Nevertheless, the gap was not as wide as it might in the first instance appear. Curtis is aware of the possibility that trade between a component state of the imperial federation and a foreign country could drive a wedge into the British Empire. In particular, he thinks of the economic lure the USA exerted towards Canada.<sup>117</sup> To offset dangers like this, he envisages a safeguard in the imperial constitution: The imperial Upper House will have the power to veto all tariff treaties between the component states and foreign powers.<sup>118</sup> In other words, Curtis sees tariff policy in the light of how it would affect the unity

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Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, Oxford: Clarendon, 1920, pp.291-325, here p.301.

116. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.115-17.

117. Ibid., pp.39-40.

118. Ibid., p.117.

of the British Empire as such rather than from a purely economic point of view.

In his 1940s proposals for an international commonwealth, Curtis again explicitly leaves the issue of tariffs to the component states,<sup>119</sup> giving a number of reasons for this: Protective tariffs as such are not a menace to peace but, rather, owe their existence to the fear of war. Due to the existence of the federal union diminishing that fear, its component states will voluntarily reduce their tariffs.<sup>120</sup> National governments need to retain control over taxation in order to be able to adjust the relations between the rich and the poor within their borders.<sup>121</sup> Federal control over the economic and social affairs of the component states would recreate the old problem of governmental overcongestion.<sup>122</sup> Finally, it would not be accepted by the member states.<sup>123</sup>

Instead of the by now moribund protectionists, Curtis singles out the economic functionalists like Mitrany for criticism. Aside from the claim that someone from the Balkans is not supposed to advise Anglo-Saxons,<sup>124</sup> the functionalists according to him put the cart before the horse. It is not the case

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119. Curtis, Decision, p.49; Curtis, Way, p.25; Curtis, World War, pp.80, 201-02, 228; Curtis, War, p. 51.

120. Curtis, Decision, p.52; Curtis, World War, p.82.

121. Curtis, World Revolution, p.137.

122. Curtis, Decision, pp.48-49; Curtis, World War, pp.79-80; Curtis, Open Road, p.37.

123. Curtis, World Revolution, p.138; Curtis, Open Road, pp.55-56.

124. Lavin, From Empire, p. 312.

that the solution of economic problems, for example a customs union, is the key for the solving of political ones. It is exactly the other way round. Like appeasement, functionalism tries to go the way of the least resistance.<sup>125</sup>

Another motif unifying Curtis's pre-WWI and post-WW II writings was the immigration issue. Emigration of people from the British Isles to the Empire had been another issue dear to the hearts of social imperialists like Milner and Amery. In *The Green Memorandum*, Curtis discusses the problems of English migration to Canada.<sup>126</sup> He expects that with population growth Canada will become as populous and wealthy as Great Britain in the not too far future and that hegemony in the imperial federation will ultimately pass from the United Kingdom to Canada.<sup>127</sup> Thirty-six years later, he again foresees that, once the fear of war is banned, people from the overcrowded United Kingdom and Western Europe would move to the Dominions. The latter will experience a vast growth of population and industries, making the 20th century 'Canada's Century'.<sup>128</sup>

However, not everyone would be allowed to enter the Dominions. As Assistant Colonial Secretary of the Transvaal Curtis, even though not without regrets, proposed to check Asiatic immigration to the country

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125. Curtis, World Revolution, pp.140-41.

126. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.32-39.

127. Ibid., pp.42, 124. See also Anon. and Curtis, Canadian Criticism, p.16.

128. Curtis, War, pp.52-64.

by the introduction of fingerprint passes.<sup>129</sup> In *The Green Memorandum*, Curtis expresses his opposition to the entry of coloured labour. Rather, the Dominions should only let in people of their own blood.<sup>130</sup> It was important for him that under imperial federation the Dominions would still be able to formulate their own immigration laws.<sup>131</sup> Free entry for coloured people would endanger the establishment of a European-style civilization in these countries<sup>132</sup> and 'social, moral and political evils' would follow.<sup>133</sup>

Thirty years later, Curtis sticks to his guns. In 1949-50, he asserts that the white-only immigration policies of the Dominions is acceptable because these countries would otherwise be swamped by Asians and Africans who are yet incapable of governing themselves.<sup>134</sup>

It is thus hardly surprising that Curtis is adamant that the free movement of people and the mixture of the races within the world federation is not aspirable. As a biological analogy shows, human diversity is a good thing because it ensures the performance of different functions and allows the existence of nations more distinguished than the others. The component states of the federal union thus have to retain control over their immigration

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129. Lavin, From Empire, p.60; May, Round Table, p.133.

130. Curtis, Green Memorandum, p.134.

131. May, Round Table, p.135.

132. Curtis, 'End', p.782.

133. May, Round Table, pp.135-36.

134. Curtis, World Revolution, pp.136-37; Curtis, Open Road, pp.39-40.

policy.<sup>135</sup> It is interesting to dwell for a moment upon the organic analogy Curtis uses:

(A) human society in which all the social elements have been mixed into one conglomerate ... would have acquired the uniformity of a jelly-fish ... the lowest form of physical life (...) The highest form of organism is made up of highly differentiated organs ... And so the supreme unity which human society should attain is one in which its component nations are highly differentiated in composition as well as in structure.<sup>136</sup>

As we have seen, the insistence that the cells of the social body must be different from each other was advanced by the new liberals in order to square their stress on individuality with the organic analogy borrowed from biology. Under the hands of Curtis, it becomes an argument in favour of racial segregation.

### Conclusion

Curtis's work can best be interpreted as a bid for hegemonic ideology to be used by the dominant classes in Britain. In this context, his writings particularly draw upon, or have close similarities to, three political movements: empire federalism, new liberalism and social imperialism.

In the case of empire federalism, the initial connection is pretty straightforward. Curtis's plan for imperial federation was just one among many such blueprints made since the 19th century. Curtis's originality comes from the fact that he did not stop there. In his later works, an organic imperial union

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<sup>135</sup>. Curtis, Decision, pp.47-48, 67-68; Curtis, World War, pp.78-9, 99-100, 180; Curtis, Open Road, pp.34-35.

<sup>136</sup>. Curtis, Decision, pp.47-48; Curtis, World War, pp.78-79.

is to be broadened to include Western Europe, the USA and, ultimately, the whole world. Curtis thus transforms Empire federalism into something more ambitious.

Coming to new liberalism, the connection is more indirect, going back to the influence of T.H. Green. On a first look, there seems to be little similarity between the new liberals, with their criticism of voting restrictions and colonial rule and their enthusiasm for international law, and Curtis, who wants to limit democratic rights, celebrates the educational mission of colonialism and discounts inter-state compacts.

Nevertheless, his concept of the commonwealth comes close to how new liberalism defines the individual's place in society. In both cases, the individual only realizes and perfects himself through the community. Political rights are at the same time duties. Furthermore, both Curtis and the new liberals put much emphasis upon the role of the state for the provision of a good living and for using force against anti-social elements. Curtis also embraces the new liberal argument that society has the right to tax 'unearned' wealth. Finally, Curtis even seems to be favourably disposed to something like industrial democracy.

In the case of social imperialism, the connection between it and Curtis is much more obvious. Indeed, many of the Round Tablers (including his mentor

Milner) were convinced adherents of that movement. Especially in his earlier writings, Curtis shares their Social Darwinist concern about the degeneration of the British. Like them, he calls for social reform and class harmony without expressing much genuine respect for the lower classes. He, however, draws the line when it comes to corporatism.

Curtis also embraces the efficiency-related criticism of parliamentarism and the party system as advanced by the social imperialists. While supporting the Milner clique's recipe of empowering experts and committees only in a half-hearted way, he like the populist faction wants to limit parliamentary rule by more direct democracy. He puts his trust to charismatic figures winning the trust of an otherwise passive population. Curtis is firmly opposed to the Tariff Reform wing of social imperialism. But, on the other hand, he enthusiastically joins them as far as British emigration to the Dominions and immigration restrictions on unwanted peoples are concerned.

In the terminology of van der Pijl, Curtis (like Streit) can be placed into the 'Atlantic Union' group which aimed to integrate the Lockean heartland under a version of corporate liberalism leaning more to the money-capital than to the productive-capital perspective.<sup>137</sup> His political and economic programme retain a number of elements belonging to liberal internationalism, namely free trade and sound money.

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<sup>137</sup>. Kees van der Pijl, The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class, London: Verso, 1984, pp.26-31.



He is unhappy with the power of big industrial businesses and of organized labour. Nevertheless, he fully accepts the expanded role for the state as also included in the state monopoly tendency. Labour government is well received by Curtis as long as it performs a foreign policy compatible with his federation plans.

Indeed, Curtis's contribution to an ideology bolstering Britain's hegemonic bloc of City financiers and attached industrialists was not only concerned with domestic class harmony but put the emphasis on the Lockean heartland and Britain's position within it. This is the topic of the next chapter.

## Chapter Eight

### The Lockean Heartland, the Hobbesian Contenders and the Prize Area

#### Introduction

In this chapter, Curtis's work is analysed according to the second major distinction of van der Pijl: between the Anglo-Saxon dominated heartland with its strong civil societies, the Hobbesian contenders with their dominant state, and the Prize area encompassing the bulk of the non-Western world.

On the face of it, Carr's criticism of an unreflexive version of idealism, advancing the interests of 'have'-countries behind their universal values, might not apply to Curtis. After all, we have seen that his federation projects involve a partial diminution of Britain's control over the Empire to the Dominions and that he embraced ultimate self-government for the coloured races. Despite all this, British power - and Britain's right to have power - remained centre stage for Curtis. This can be seen from both the way he writes about other countries or people and from a close look at the content of his federation proposals.

After summarizing van der Pijl's analysis of the Rhodes-Milner group to which Curtis belonged and briefly showing how he stresses Britain's benevolent role throughout world history, this chapter follows a threefold division: It deals with the heartland

countries other than Britain (the Dominions, Western Europe and the USA) and then comes to Curtis's treatment of the contender countries (mainly Germany, but also Japan and the Soviet Union). Finally, his attitude to the Prize area (India, the Middle East, China and Africa) and its people is discussed.

### **The Rhodes-Milner Group and the Round Table**

Van der Pijl has drawn attention to the existence of transnational ruling class networks providing for elite cooperation throughout the Lockean heartland and trying to integrate elements of the bourgeoisie in the Hobbesian contenders. Between the late 17th and the late 19th century, this role was performed by the Freemasons. With the impending demise of liberal internationalism, a new kind of network, the transnational planning group, made its appearance. These groups oversaw the shifts from one kind of capitalist accumulation to another and contributed to the transformation of Hobbesian contenders like Germany or the Soviet Union into parts of the Lockean heartland.

The Rhodes-Milner group and the Morgan network in the United States are cases from the time when liberal internationalism gave way to the state monopoly tendency. Bodies like the Bilderberg conferences and the Trilateral Commission belong to the phase of corporate liberalism. And the recent victory of neo-liberalism was sponsored by, for

example, the Mont Pèlerin Society and the World Economic Forum.<sup>1</sup>

Curtis's ideas on imperial, European, Atlantic and world federation have to be seen within the context of his membership in one of these planning bodies, the Rhodes-Milner group, which included the Round Table. The background to the formation of this group was the domestic and international challenges thrown up by the waning of liberal internationalism. The then most powerful part of the capitalist class, the international investment bankers, were on the lookout for new ways to advance their interests, now in the face of the rising state monopoly tendency. Freemasonry, having previously executed the (in Gramscian terms) 'intellectual' function of a planning institution on the international level was too loosely structured to respond to these new needs. With the Rhodes-Milner group there emerged a vehicle for behind-the-scenes organized policy-planning. As a new form of the conduct of class struggle on the part of the bourgeoisie it harmonized state monopolist and social imperialist tendencies with the continuing influence of the investment bankers.<sup>2</sup>

The origins of the Rhodes-Milner group go back to the Oxford lectures of John Ruskin, who told his upper-class students that their cherished values -

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<sup>1</sup>. Kees van der Pijl, Transnational Classes and International Relations, London and New York: Routledge, 1998, pp.98-135.

<sup>2</sup>. Ibid., pp.107-08.

rule of law, freedom, decency, self-discipline, etc., etc. - could only be saved if they were spread to those yet unenlightened by them: the lower classes in Britain, and the unfortunate non-English abroad.

Among those undergraduates spellbound by Ruskin were Cecil Rhodes and Alfred Milner. Having made a fortune with South African diamonds and gold, Rhodes together with Britain's leading journalist William T. Stead in 1891 established a secret 'Society of the Elect', whose membership also included Milner, Lord Esher (confidant of several British monarchs and unofficial chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defence) and a scion of the Rothschild banking dynasty. Outside this innermost cycle, there was to be the Association of Helpers, which later overlapped with the Kindergarten and the Round Table.<sup>3</sup>

We have so far discussed the Round Table with reference to the more narrow question of which shape the closer organic union of the Empire should take. In fact, imperial union was only one aspect of the Rhodes-Milner group's and its Round Table incarnation's agenda. The other aspects were: fostering ideological coherence among the ruling classes; gaining the acquiescence of the working classes (or at least of a privileged section thereof) for the existing domestic order by appealing to imperial sentiments; coordinating the activities and

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<sup>3</sup>. Ibid., pp.108-09; Carroll Quigley, Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time, New York and London: Macmillan and Collier-Macmillan, 1966.

outlooks of the whole English-speaking world, namely by `reclaiming` the USA in one way or another to the fold, and thus in effect integrating the heartland; spreading the vision of Britain's historical bloc for order and development to the non-Western world, particularly Britain's colonial dependencies; maintaining world peace; and offsetting challenges to the heartland on the part of Hobbesian contenders and colonial independence movements by finding compromise solutions.<sup>4</sup> This general agenda left room for disagreements over details, for example about full-fledged imperial federation, support for the League of Nations or the appeasement of Germany.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the deaths of Rhodes in 1902 and of Milner in 1925, the `Association of Helpers` aka the Round Table contained members extremely well-placed within the British political, economic and cultural institutions: Amery was a Tory MP, acted as assistant to Lloyd George's cabinet secretary and rose to the positions of Colonial Secretary (1924-29) and India Secretary (1940-45). Kerr/Lothian was Lloyd George's private secretary and died as ambassador in Washington (1939-40). Grigg was a maverick Liberal MP and, in the second half of the 1920s, Governor of Kenya. As far as the economic elite is concerned, the London moot had members in high-level managing positions: Brand, Horsfall and Marris of Lazard's, a

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4. Van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, pp.109-12, 118-19; Quigley, Tragedy, p.954.

5. Van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, p.111.

well established City bank; and Hichens of Cornell Laird, an industrial conglomerate. The press was represented by Dawson, between 1912 and 1919 and again between 1922 and 1941 editor of the prestigious *Times*. Academics included, besides Curtis, the Oxford historian Coupland, the Africanist Lord Hailey and the IR idealist Zimmern.<sup>6</sup> Even Carr is listed as a member of the wider Rhodes-Milner group,<sup>7</sup> although the exact connection is not quite clear. In the Dominions, landowners, financiers, businessmen, lawyers and academics dominated local Round Table branches.<sup>8</sup>

The group was financially well-supplied thanks to the Rhodes trust and a number of wealthy benefactors, particularly from the banking sector. However, as the presence of Hichens shows, the Rhodes-Milner group recognized that capital accumulation depended increasingly upon heavy industries and thus contained elements and adherents of both liberal internationalism and the state monopoly tendency.<sup>9</sup>

Thanks to the high positions of its members and financial supporters, the Round Table exerted influence over a number of media and academic institutions. Besides a number of other papers and journals there was, as mentioned, *The Times*. It was

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6. Alexander May, *The Round Table, 1910-66*, Ph. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1995, pp.52-62, 221-40, 249-51, 364-65.

7. Van der Pijl, *Transnational Classes*, p.111.

8. May, *Round Table*, pp.70-74.

9. *Ibid.*, pp.65-68; van der Pijl, *Transnational Classes*, pp.111-12.

owned by the Anglo-American Astor family, after whose country house the Round Tablers were sometimes also dubbed the 'Cliveden Set'. Within academia, the group was strongly represented at the Royal Institute of International Affairs and All Souls College in Oxford and held a number of chairs at London, Oxford and Aberystwyth.<sup>10</sup> Finally, there were connections with similar American networks centered around the Morgan bankers and the Council on Foreign Relations.<sup>11</sup>

Given all these first-class connections, which impact was the Rhodes-Milner group able to make? Van der Pijl, drawing upon the somewhat dated work by Quigley, almost gives the impression that the Rhodes-Milner group, displacing the loose family network of the so-called Cecil bloc, became Britain's real rulers until it was replaced by the corporatist-liberal Nuffield group in the 1950s.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, May, who has written what is now the standard monograph on the Round Table, characterizes the power of the group as marginal. He grants it (i.e. Curtis) influence over some aspects of Lloyd George's policies in India and Ireland but thinks that the Round Tablers were, all in all, interpreters rather than instigators.<sup>13</sup> He argues:

It is extremely difficult to evaluate the Round Table's influence on the level of 'public opinion'. ... (W)hen it came to the more easily quantifiable

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10. May, Round Table, pp.233-45; van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, p.110; Quigley, Tragedy, pp.132-33.

11. Van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, pp.112-14; Quigley, Tragedy, pp.952-54.

12. Van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, pp.110, 120.

13. May, Round Table, pp.448-49.



level of influence on 'men and measures', it is clear that the Round Table was altogether less successful.<sup>14</sup>

This is probably true. However, in looking for 'quantifiable' evidence of the group's influence May adopts a too restrictive perspective. The function of planning groups is not so much to formulate and instigate specific policies but to provide a forum where different programmes could be synthesized and intellectual ammunition for the historic bloc be prepared.

In the case of the Rhodes-Milner group and the Round Table, this intellectual ammunition was particularly used to prepare the integration of the heartland in a way that left Britain in an influential position. This was done by hammering home to the public, again and again, the intrinsic positive qualities of Anglo-Saxon political culture in general and of the British in particular. Rhodes's and Stead's claim that British supremacy would be in mankind's best interest has been observed and duly exposed to realist critique by Carr.<sup>15</sup>

Admittedly, it cannot be quantified how much the public in Great Britain, the USA and elsewhere really bought that message. But the fact that the heartland not only held together but also vastly expanded during the 20th century is at least an indication that their efforts were not in vain. Let us now look at Curtis's specific contribution to this feat.

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14. Ibid., p.114.

15. E.H. Carr, The Twenty Years' Crisis: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations, London and Basingstoke: Papermac, (1939) 1995, pp.71-72.

## A Benevolent Hegemon

To provide further legitimacy for this project, Curtis highlighted Britain's role as the eternal champion of freedom. In *The Commonwealth of Nations*, Curtis argues that in contrast to stagnating Asia, Europe has the capacity to change. Initially, however, the commonwealth principle has been realised only in England.<sup>16</sup> England has a specificity due to her insular isolation, which enabled democratic/commonwealth principles to flourish originally there.<sup>17</sup> With the partial exception of Switzerland and the Netherlands, the commonwealth principle was not established in Continental Europe until recently. Rather, theocratic and despotic traditions predominated and partially survive until today.<sup>18</sup>

The special place reserved for the British according to Curtis comes out clearly in quotations like this:

The British, American, Swiss, Dutch, Scandinavian and other self-governing nations are political expressions of the Sermon on the Mount, though imperfect expressions.<sup>19</sup>

With the partial exception of Switzerland, all countries named are Protestant. Indeed, the dichotomy Curtis paints between Anglo-Saxon freedom and Continental autocracy seems to partly correspond to a

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16. L. Curtis, *The Commonwealth of Nations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Citizenship in the British Empire, and into the Mutual Relations of the Several Dependencies Thereof*, London: Macmillan, 1916, p.124.

17. *Ibid.*, p.89.

18. *Ibid.*, pp.76-7. See also Curtis, *The Open Road to Freedom*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950, p.8.

19. Lionel Curtis, *World War: Its Cause and Cure*, 2nd. ed., New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946, p.9.

religious one. His opinion of Catholic peoples is certainly not high: Ireland has never been a part of the Roman Empire, with the result that tribalism persists until today.<sup>20</sup> The British mix much better with the Protestant Boers in South Africa than with the Catholic French in Canada.<sup>21</sup> And the leaders of the quasi-Fascist Vichy government are dubbed by Curtis as men whose religion combined with their naval and military training to dispose them in favour of authoritarian systems.<sup>22</sup>

This goes together with the appraisal of English imperialism as specifically benevolent as compared to other imperialisms, bringing the ideas of Curtis in line with the concept of 'England's Mission'. In Asia and Africa, the contact between the Europeans and other societies was disruptive for the latter, especially if they ended up being oppressed by European adventurers. It was thus necessary for Western countries to take over political control and to end the prevailing anarchy.<sup>23</sup> The British, in particular, only acquired their colonial possessions in Africa in response to Continental European actions and in order to control European adventurers.<sup>24</sup>

British and American rule over non-European races is more successful and also more readily accepted by the indigenous people than Continental European colonialism. The reason for this is the stronger sense

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20. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.60.

21. Lionel Curtis, 'South Africa Since the Union', in Atlantic Monthly 140 (1927), pp.253-63, here p.261.

22. Lionel Curtis, Decision, p.43; Curtis, World War, p.67.

23. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.157-63.

24. Curtis, World War, pp.185-88.

for the rule of law in these two countries, which also bring justice to the `natives`.<sup>25</sup> British success in colonial rule compared with that of the Continentals is, in other words, not due to racial but institutional differences.<sup>26</sup> Curtis admits, however, that compared to colonial rule by Continental Europeans, British control over non-European people has a more caste-like aspect.<sup>27</sup>

Curtis also vindicates British rule with respect to specific countries. Initially, the British have gone to India for material interests. But in the long run their good character prevailed and they committed themselves to the moral and material regeneration of the Indians.<sup>28</sup> As in Africa, British intervention was necessary because of the corruption in the native states and the activities of European adventurers. The Indian Mutiny was just the result of a too fast transition from the Medieval Ages to modern times.<sup>29</sup> Curtis grants that the British should have given the Indians doses of responsible self-government earlier on. Nevertheless, he still holds that the British rule in India fosters the cause of freedom in the East.<sup>30</sup>

In South Africa, the war against the Boers was inevitable because of the political divisions of that country and the German threat.<sup>31</sup> The notorious

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25. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.167-76.

26. Ibid., p.210.

27. L. Curtis, `Introduction`, in L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, Oxford: Clarendon, 1920, p.liii.

28. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.155-57.

29. Philip Kerr and Lionel Curtis, The Prevention of War, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923, pp.114-15.

30. Ibid., pp.149-51.

31. Ibid., pp.84-85, 91.

concentration camps into which the Boer civilians were put had the object to protect them from the 'natives'.<sup>32</sup> And in creating the South African Union, the British motivation was primarily to give good government to the country.<sup>33</sup>

Occasionally, Curtis mentions that there is also a seamy side in British history. He describes in some detail the cruelties of English rule over the Irish during the Early Modern period,<sup>34</sup> and concedes that Ireland was then held not for her own interest but for that of England/Britain.<sup>35</sup> Another example is Curtis's statement that the present chaos in China was ultimately caused by Britain's opening her up to foreign trade.<sup>36</sup>

However, these are the exceptions confirming the rule. For Curtis, both British seapower and colonial rule exist for the common benefit of mankind. Consequently, British seapower in the 19th century had saved Europe and North America from despotisms like Napoleon's as well as wars. Because this power did not pose a direct threat to other states, it was largely accepted.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the British navy was the 'driving force' in the fight against the slave trade.

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32. Curtis, 'South Africa', p.255; Curtis, Open Road, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950, p.28.

33. Lionel Curtis, The Way to Peace, Oxford and London: Oxford University Press and Humphrey Milford, 1944, p.87.

34. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.428-39.

35. Ibid., pp.518-21.

36. Lionel Curtis, The Capital Question of China, Port Washington (NY) and London: Kennikat, (1932) 1970, p.247.

37. Curtis, Decision, pp.15-17; Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.679, 695; Curtis, World War, pp.40-41.

Furthermore, Britain kept the ports of her Empire open to all foreign ships while accepting limitations on her own shipping by the exclusionary measures of other powers. True, during WW I Britain had exerted a naval blockade that prevented neutrals from trading with Germany. But this was justifiable given Germany's own exclusionary policies with regard to the parts of Europe occupied by her.<sup>38</sup>

Foreshadowing an interpretation of hegemonic stability theory,<sup>39</sup> Curtis portrays British actions in terms of self-sacrifice not appreciated by others. The American War of Independence broke out because the American colonists had been unwilling to take a share in paying for their defence.<sup>40</sup> Britain also met the expenses for her later rival Germany's liberation from Napoleon.<sup>41</sup> The granting of self-government to the Dominions was a `sacrifice` and a sign of `unselfish wisdom`.<sup>42</sup> Britain carried the burden of the Empire on her own<sup>43</sup> and met the expenses of the Boer War alone, although it was fought for the interests of the Dominions as well.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>. Lionel Curtis, `Windows of Freedom`, in Round Table 8 (1918), pp.1-47, p.7-10.

<sup>39</sup>. Isabelle Grunberg, `Exploring the „Myth“ of Hegemonic Stability`, in International Organization 44 (1990), 4, pp.431-77.

<sup>40</sup>. Lionel Curtis, World Revolution in the Cause of Peace, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949, pp.7-12.

<sup>41</sup>. Lionel Curtis, The Green Memorandum, London and Bungay: Richard Clay and Sons, 1910, p.23.

<sup>42</sup>. Ibid., pp.9-10.

<sup>43</sup>. Ibid., p.17.

<sup>44</sup>. Ibid., pp.24-25.

This ethical idea of England's mission also coloured his self-confident use of the term 'imperialism' in *The Green Memorandum*. Imperialism is the belief in good government by the British Empire, which materializes itself in self-government for the white people and trusteeship for the coloured.<sup>45</sup> In the later works, of course, 'imperialism' is dropped for the more innocent-sounding 'commonwealth'.

Curtis further highlights the importance of the British Empire. He admits that the British Empire was born as a result of the struggle for existence and for wealth. However, its character is shaped by a concern for the mutual good.<sup>46</sup> As he argues in *The Commonwealth of Nations*, because it is so vast and widely spread, its destruction will dislocate human society, indeed cause a 'cataclysm'.<sup>47</sup> The question whether Britain can in such a case of break-up maintain her responsibilities on her own is a question affecting the stability of the whole world.<sup>48</sup> Fortunately, the Empire holds together because it is run not according to British, but universal principles.<sup>49</sup>

He repeats this motif in *The Prevention of War*: The British Empire guarantees world peace because it brings together one quarter of mankind. However, it can only survive if turned into a commonwealth. Cosmopolitans dreaming of world government had better

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45. Ibid., p.126.

46. Ibid., pp.15-17.

47. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.2-3, 177.

48. Ibid., p.17.

49. Ibid., pp.686, 690-92.

not condemn it, but to see it as a practical step in that direction.<sup>50</sup>

Curtis comes back to this as late as 1945. He once more asserts that the British have protected the Dominions, and indeed the freedom of the whole world, in the first half of the 20th century.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the Dominions have supplied the margin without which the World Wars would have been lost to the Allies.<sup>52</sup> And, most grandiously, the question of whether peace will again be lost depends less upon a post-WWII peace conference, but upon the outcome of the first Imperial Conference after the war.<sup>53</sup>

In his 1949 book *World Revolution in the Cause of Peace*, Curtis's self-confident Greater Britishness remains as ebullient. The European people expect Britain's leadership because the British are already involved in the running of a commonwealth and, indeed, have carried the torch of freedom for nine centuries. Besides, the British experience in dealing with 'backward peoples' is necessary in order to frame the federal constitution in a way that these can join later. It was also important that the Dominions could participate in the international commonwealth due to their own experience with federalism.<sup>54</sup> He concludes in

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50. Kerr and Curtis, *Prevention*, pp.155-58. See also Lionel Curtis, 'The End of War', in *Round Table* 5 (1915), pp.772-96, here pp.787-88.

51. Curtis, *World War*, pp.47-59.

52. *Ibid.*, p.85.

53. Curtis, *World War*, pp.91-95. See also Curtis, *Way*, p.98.

54. Curtis, *World Revolution*, pp.131, 147-48, 158-59.



a rather dramatic way that the abstention of the United Kingdom and, particularly, the Dominions from the federation would be a disaster for the whole of mankind.<sup>55</sup>

#### **The Heartland: Canada and South Africa**

With the exception of Ireland (which, however, was a wayward case) Curtis wrote surprisingly little about the individual Dominions. This consists mainly of the passages on Canada in *The Green Memorandum*, where prime emphasis is given to the relations with the USA, and of a largely narrative article about 'South Africa Since the Union'. Despite this rather limited material some indications concerning their appropriate place in a world order according to Curtis can be got.

Observing the conditions of Canada in 1910, Curtis mentions rapid economic growth and accompanying chances for social climbing. A drawback to this happy state of affairs is the fact that the country's best brains go into business and not politics. As a result, there is a generally low quality of politics and public opinion, including widespread cases of corruption and a reckless increase of the public debt. Curtis holds that Canada can only afford these conditions because she is protected by Britain. An involvement in defence, foreign affairs and, particularly, in the white men's burden, would act as

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<sup>55</sup>. Ibid., p.161.

a corrective to these problems by forcing greater political maturity upon the Canadians.<sup>56</sup>

With these unflattering observations on Canadian politics Curtis does not mean that the Canadians are inferior to the British. After all, his comments on UK politics in the same book are much more scathing. Rather, as in the case of his remarks on Britain, these critical observations are made to bring home the point that imperial federation would improve domestic conditions.

According to Curtis, Canada owes her growth to the building of railroads, to US protective tariffs closing off the neighbouring market and thus involuntarily drawing the Canadian economy together, and to an effective banking system overseen by the federal government.<sup>57</sup> There is, however, a contradiction between the country's agricultural West geared to free trade and a manufacturing East preferring protectionism. Despite his general free trade leanings, Curtis in this case recommends the establishment of tariff preferences for Canadian wheat in Britain. Furthermore, the fostering of industries in the West of Canada is to make it more amenable to protectionism.<sup>58</sup> As usual with Curtis, economic issues are subordinated to political ones, in this case keeping Canada united and within the Empire.

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56. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.50-59.

57. Ibid., pp.30-31.

58. Ibid., pp.39-40.

In his overview of the first 17 years of the South African Union, Curtis celebrates the first two Prime Ministers - the Anglophile Botha and Smuts - as great statesmen.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, their successor, the Boer nationalist Hertzog, is in polite words portrayed as a mediocrity. Luckily, he has retreated from his 'fanaticism' and 'mischievous idea(s)' since he has been in office.<sup>60</sup> Some twenty years later, Curtis goes as far as drawing a parallel between the Boer self-image as master race and Nazi ideology.<sup>61</sup> However, we will see that he still stuck to the idea of South Africa as a white men's country.

Coming back to the situation in 1927, according to Curtis South Africa faces the problem of poor whites, who through their votes exert political power. Consequently, white workers have to be given public employment at rates much higher than if blacks would have been given the job. Furthermore, the question of employment for poor whites also leads to protectionism intended to shelter premature industrialization. Curtis warns of the economic problems that might be in store for the country, resulting from a combination of rising public expenditures and a future decline of gold exports.<sup>62</sup>

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59. Curtis, 'South Africa', pp.254-55.

60. Ibid., pp.260-61.

61. Lionel Curtis, War or Peace?, Oxford and London: Oxford University Press and Geoffrey Cumberlege, 1946, pp.13-14.

62. Curtis, 'South Africa', pp.262-63.

In both the case of Canada and South Africa, Curtis spells some ink on financial issues: the public debt and the banking system. He has good reason for that. After all, despite being able to shield their nascent industries with tariffs from foreign (including British) competition, the Dominions still remained economically tied to the mother country. Britain remained the most important market for their agricultural products and financed their economic development through the London banks.

The City tolerated Dominion industrialization because it contributed to the balance of payments and thus to the repayment of the national debts. At the same time, it forced financial orthodoxy upon them, including central banks modelled upon the Bank of England. Attempts by Dominion governments to pursue independent financial policies were seldom successful.<sup>63</sup>

If Curtis's plans for a federation between the UK and the Dominions had become reality it would have given the latter a say in the management of imperial defence and colonial affairs. But, together with this, there would also go an obligation to contribute financially to this management. At the same time, since Curtis's blueprints left economic matters to the component states, Britain (or, rather the City) would

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<sup>63</sup>. P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914, London and New York: Longman, 1993, pp.229-75; P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction 1914-1990, London and New York: Longman, 1993, pp.109-45.

still have remained *de facto* in charge of imperial financial policy. Retaining fiscal paramountcy over the Dominions while making them contribute to the running of the Empire - such a deal would not at all have been bad for Britain.

True, Curtis envisages already in 1910 that one day the population size of Britain may be surpassed by that of Canada, making the latter the most important state of the federation.<sup>64</sup> In 1946, within the context of 'Canada's century' and locating the federal capital at Quebec, he foresees a wave of immigration from Britain, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and Switzerland, (which) are overcrowded with men and women of the type that British Dominions need and desire.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore,

(i)n the Dominions, population and industry will grow at the expense of the mother country. But that is exactly what we need.<sup>66</sup>

Yes, as long as Britain remains the financial centre!

It is also significant that even with the joining of Western European countries to the international federation Britain would remain the dominant power. For example, the Scandinavian countries, which Curtis wants to include at an early stage, were in the 1930s anyway tied to the Sterling bloc.<sup>67</sup> Only the French might have provided a counterweight to British influence.

Thus, Curtis here develops a scheme advancing British hegemony under the cloak of a federation between equals. In this, he simply glosses over the

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64. Curtis, Green Memorandum, p.124.

65. Curtis, War, pp.54-55.

66. Ibid., p.59.

67. Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Crisis, p.80.

possibilities to use 'economic power as an instrument of policy' so vividly uncovered by Carr.<sup>68</sup>

### **The Heartland: The United States**

The different ways how Curtis approached the other great Anglo-Saxon 'commonwealth' illustrate the development of his thinking from imperial to world federation.

At the earlier stages of his writings and in line with the thinking of many social imperialists, Curtis still considers the USA as a potential antagonist to Britain. In *The Green Memorandum*, Curtis points out that the USA are an expanding empire rather than a state. Since their independence, they have contemplated the annexation of the whole of North America. In the 1890s, they erected tariff walls in an unsuccessful attempt to coerce Canada into the union. Now, the Americans pursue a possible annexation of their northern neighbour by more subtle means, for example, by the force of the economic pull and by the presence of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants, who act as Washington's fifth column. Curtis particularly warns of the danger that the agricultural West of Canada might split off and join the United States. This would spark off a British-American war.<sup>69</sup>

This motif is repeated in *The Commonwealth of Nations*, wherein he reminds his readers that there was a danger of war with the USA over Canada in 1895,

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<sup>68</sup>. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp.114-20.

<sup>69</sup>. Curtis, *Green Memorandum*, pp.30-31, 33, 38-40, 44-48.

which might have been exploited by France and Russia.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, Curtis regrets the American independence of 1776. This has weakened the British Commonwealth and thus been a blow to the cause of freedom. As in the case of the Dominions, the Americans are not willing to assume responsibility for backward people.<sup>71</sup>

In 1918, he sees a chance to remedy that defect. Curtis appeals to the Americans to take over a number of tropical territories as League of Nation mandates and to take responsibility for their order and good government. On the list are Liberia (since it was founded by American ex-slaves), German East Africa, the Dardanelles, Armenia, Palestine (given the USA's large Jewish minority), Arabia and Persia. Furthermore, the Americans should also assume the task of 'regenerating' Russia.

The reason for making the USA, rather than Britain, taking over the bulk of the Middle East is that the latter has neither the manpower nor the capital for such huge a task. Furthermore, their geographical distance from both Europe and India will ensure that control of the Middle East and its railway development by the United States will not be a geostrategical threat to Britain. France and Italy, which by treaty with the British have their own spheres of interest in the region, should somehow be eased out.<sup>72</sup>

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70. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.324-26.

71. Ibid., pp.688-89, 692, 696-701.

72. Curtis, 'Windows', pp.30-36.

In other words, given that Great Britain can neither take over the Middle Eastern mandates herself nor tolerate control by other European powers, an American presence there would be in her best interest. From a potential enemy, the USA have become Britain's partner in Curtis's mind.

In his later writings, Curtis envisages an international federation which will include the USA as well. This will bring the period of world wars to an end once and for all. The future world state will be shaped by joint Anglo-Saxon experience. The American contribution will be the lesson that there needs to be one government directly responsible to all citizens for defence. The British contribution will be the experience of having brought together different nations under one Commonwealth roof.<sup>73</sup>

Curtis claims that he would like the Americans to enter the federation from the onset but that he does not think they are willing to do so. It will take at least one generation. During that time, the Americans will see the successful working of the federation and give up their reservations about a merger of sovereignties. Echoing the analysis previously applied to Britain, Curtis diagnoses an overcongestion of issues to be dealt with at the level of the US government. In time, the US will see that transfer of foreign affairs and defence to the international union will allow concentration on domestic reform.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>. Curtis, Decision, pp.62-69; Curtis, World War, pp.96-101.

<sup>74</sup>. Curtis, Action, pp.38-49; Curtis, World War, pp. 154-62.



Once the United States would become a member of the international federation they would, given their vast population combined with economic power, have taken over leadership from Britain. Curtis seems to have resigned himself into accepting Britain's long term fate of playing second fiddle to her former colony. At least, it meant submission to a member of the Anglo-Saxon family. In any case, the fact that Britain would effectively dominate the federation for at least one generation would give her opportunities to be later placed into the second rank under conditions as favourable to her as possible.

Curtis does not say these things directly. However, in *World Revolution in the Cause of Peace* he passingly mentions that the federal government will have its own currency. This currency will probably supplant national currencies over time.<sup>75</sup> With America not participating in the initial federation it is not difficult to guess from where such an international currency would be managed. Once they would have joined, the USA would probably find it difficult to put the Dollar or gold into the dominant place. Probably only by coincidence, Curtis's idea reminds of an abortive attempt by Keynes at the Bretton Woods conference of 1942 to introduce a new currency replacing gold as global reserve.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, while Curtis accepts the political integration of the heartland under US hegemony he is still careful to ensure that Britain will not be

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<sup>75</sup>. Curtis, World Revolution, p.143.

<sup>76</sup>. Cain and Hopkins, British Imperialism: Crisis, pp.271-72.

completely displaced. In 1944, he dreams that the initial federation of the UK, the Dominions and Western Europe will be on equal terms with the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>77</sup> And as late as 1951 he responds to a critic who argues that any federal initiative has to come from the USA: 'He just abandons all idea of British leadership.'<sup>78</sup>

### **The Contenders: Germany**

Not surprisingly, given the political realities, Curtis puts specific emphasis on the threat posed by Germany. In *The Green Memorandum*, for instance, he argues that there is a geographically-determined historical contrast between the English spirit of liberty and the Continental autocratic one. The autocratic principle is now represented by Germany, which is unable to see that Britain is not like her an aggressive power.<sup>79</sup>

Like the social imperialists, Curtis sees in Germany a model as well as a threat for Britain. He refers to Germany's federal structure<sup>80</sup> and to her population's discipline and self-sacrifice. These qualities, misused by the Germans for aggressive purposes, should be adopted by the British for the nobler aim of defending liberty.<sup>81</sup> In other words, the heartland can also learn from the Hobbesian contenders.

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77. Curtis, *Way*, p.42.

78. Lionel Curtis, 'The 'Fifties as Seen Fifty Years Hence', in *International Affairs* 227 (1951), pp.273-84, here p.283.

79. Curtis, *Green Memorandum*, pp.5-8.

80. *Ibid.*, pp.22-3.

81. Curtis, 'End', pp.794-95.

Less admiringly, on another occasion the Germans are called 'industrious imitators ... rather than originators'.<sup>82</sup>

In *The Commonwealth of Nations* he repeats the motif of Germany as the contemporary hotbred of the autocratic principle. Although praising the Germans as 'the most intelligent, educated and virile people in Europe',<sup>83</sup> he is scathing of their political system. Public opinion, to the degree that it is not completely dicounted, is manipulated by the government. The Germans see might as the supreme right and project the imposition of cultural Germanization on the world. Thus indoctrinated by their rulers, the people of Germany are, for the time being, prevented from embracing the commonwealth principle.<sup>84</sup> Such an autocratic system, resting on the military prestige of the dynasty, has made war inevitable.<sup>85</sup>

In contrast to the Milner group's demand for the total defeat of Germany followed by a harsh peace, Curtis during the earlier stage of WW I adopts a rather conciliatory stance. Once the Germans themselves have overcome the spirit of autocracy and aggression, they can join the other powers on equal terms.<sup>86</sup>

In another article written around the time of the armistice, this is still held out as a promise, but

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82. Lionel Curtis, 'The Price of Liberty', in Round Table 10 (1919), pp.1-20, here p.6.

83. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.682.

84. Ibid., pp.681-6.

85. L. Curtis, 'Letters to the People of India on Responsible Government', in L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, Oxford: Clarendon, 1920, pp. 357-466, here pp.390-91.

86. Curtis, 'End', pp.789, 792-93.

there are some significant additions.<sup>87</sup> After first praising Germany's past achievements in culture and for the cause of liberty, Curtis castigated the present Germans for having `reverted to the creeds of ... Attila and Genghis'.<sup>88</sup> They are collectively guilty of supporting despotism.

Curtis quotes Milner that there should be no revenge against them. However, they will have to pay heavy reparations for the war damages. Curtis presents these reparations as a pedagogical device, teaching the Germans to change their ways: `In weariness, poverty, hunger, cold, and remorse a whole people must learn that lesson.'<sup>89</sup> Here we have revanchist demands put into Curtis's high-minded moralism. But then again, in 1920, he favours quick admission of Germany to the League and its Council.<sup>90</sup>

Twenty years later, Curtis takes the revanchist programme he at one stage himself propagated to task. In *Civitas Dei*, Curtis holds that military defeat first made the Germans renounce their failed autocratic system and to adopt the principle of self-government, thereby bringing forward able politicians. Unfortunately, the short-sighted policy of the victorious Allies - Curtis, however, blames France more than Britain - in enforcing reparations undermined the stability of the Weimar Republic. In the end, it

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87. Curtis, `Windows', pp.36-39.

88. Ibid., p.36.

89. Ibid., p.37.

90. Lionel Curtis, `The World in Conference', in Round Table 10 (1920), pp.721-55, here pp.748, 752.

contributed to the birth of an even more dangerous autocracy.<sup>91</sup>

On another occasion, Curtis blames the League of Nation's false promise of collective security and its clumsy decision-making mechanism for preventing Britain to see in time that the Weimar Republic needed to be strengthened.<sup>92</sup>

To put it into the terminology of van der Pijl, Curtis regrets a lost opportunity for integrating a contender country into the heartland. He, however, is unequivocal that this contender country first needs to be defeated. Grinding old social imperialist axes,<sup>93</sup> he argues in *Civitas Dei* against the traditional Conservative luminary Lansdowne. His wartime plan for a compromise leaving Germany's military capabilities in place would have meant disaster.<sup>94</sup>

In his wartime publications, the projected international federation is, in the first place, directed against another German war of conquest. Curtis, however, foresees that the strength of this federation will contribute to the Germans' renouncing their autocratic leanings. They will then be able to join, but only once the USA are already a member.<sup>95</sup> He

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91. Curtis, *Civitas Dei*, pp.897-99.

92. Lionel Curtis, 'World Order', in *International Affairs* 18 (1939), pp.301-20, here p.320.

93. Robert Scally, *The Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition: The Politics of Social Imperialism, 1900-1918*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, pp.16, 19.

94. Curtis, *Civitas Dei*, p.943.

95. Curtis, *Decision*, pp.58-59; Curtis, *Action*, p.48; Curtis, *World War*, pp.87-88, 161, 231-32.

rejects the idea of breaking up Germany into several states after victory.<sup>96</sup>

Some years later, slight variations on this issue are proposed. In a 1947 article written for a German readership, Curtis advocates membership for Germany once the federation embraces Britain, Western Europe and the Dominions. In other words, the Germans can join already before the US have. The different German provinces will become part of the federation as separate states, i.e. Germany will in effect be dismembered. Under this scheme Germans can learn the art of self-government.<sup>97</sup>

In the following year, Curtis elaborates upon this. He points to the danger of losing German goodwill by prolonging occupation. Since all armies and arms manufacturing will be under union control, Germany can no longer be a menace to peace. He now adds that Soviet-occupied Eastern Germany will at first have to remain outside. But seeing the luckier fate of their Western compatriots, the East Germans will probably be the first to break out of the Eastern Bloc.<sup>98</sup>

A similar solution for the German problem is sketched once more in *The Open Road to Freedom* of 1950. This time, because the Federal Republic of Germany has come into existence, the dismemberment idea is dropped again.<sup>99</sup>

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96. Curtis, Action, p.32; Curtis, World War, p.149.

97. Lionel Curtis, 'Vereintes Europa', in Merkur 1 (1947), 5, pp.641-49, here pp.647-48.

98. Curtis, World Revolution, pp.151-53.

99. Curtis, Open Road, p.27.

## **The Contenders: Japan and the Soviet Union**

Of the other Hobbesian states, Japan's treatment by Curtis is quite variable. Already in 1907 he identified, together with the German one, a Japanese naval threat to the British Empire.<sup>100</sup> In *The Green Memorandum*, he argues that the Anglo-Japanese defence treaty is unpopular in Canada and recommends not to renew it.<sup>101</sup> In the same book, he also refers vaguely to a future 'Asiatic menace' which might necessitate to concentrate the Royal Navy at Vancouver and Hongkong.<sup>102</sup>

During the inter-war period, the tune remarkably changes. In the vein of the social imperialists, Curtis now admires the patriotism of the Japanese, which had enabled them to rise to great power status and which he recommends as a model. He further credits the Japanese Emperor (and the Italian king) with having overseen the transition from paternalist to popular government.<sup>103</sup> On another occasion, he praises Japan's achievements for demonstrating how an Eastern nation can import Western knowledge without losing its own distinctive character. Japan is the proof that there is no base to Western assumptions of racial superiority.<sup>104</sup> The integration of another contender state into the heartland seemed to be well under way.

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100. Deborah Lavin, *From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1995, p.107.

101. Curtis, *Green Memorandum*, pp.37-38.

102. *Ibid.*, p.114.

103. L. Curtis, 'The Structure of Government Continued', in L. Curtis, *Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India*, pp.291-325, here p. 301; Curtis, 'Letters', pp.391, 397.

104. Curtis, *Capital Question*, pp.298-99.

In the 1940s, when Japan had turned into an enemy of Britain, Curtis explains this as reaction to Dominion protectionism and immigration law aiming to keep the population white. He also points to Japan's commercial success in building up a merchant marine at the expense of British shipping. During the war, this merchant marine was of decisive help for Japan's conquests.<sup>105</sup>

A final reference from 1949 is rather dismissive. Japan is now counted, together with China and the African countries as one of these 'backward nations'.<sup>106</sup> Defeated and occupied (and, in contrast to the equally defeated Germany, non-white) Japan no longer enjoys the respect of Curtis.

Before the 1940s, Curtis has little to say about Russia/the Soviet Union. While his commonwealth principle was directed against Marxism, he obviously did not yet see the Soviet Union as a major challenger. As we have seen, he at one stage wanted the Americans to step into the cauldron of the Russian civil war. In 1920, he advocates the early admission of Russia to the League of Nations - as soon as she possesses 'a government capable of admission'.<sup>107</sup> And Communist-inspired troubles in China during the mid-1920s are the

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105. Curtis, World War, pp.179-82; Curtis, World Revolution, pp.138-41.

106. Curtis, World Revolution, p.134. Curiously, in the German translation of this book, only China and Africa are mentioned in the list of the backward peoples. Did the German translators drop Japan out of consideration for a former wartime ally? See Durch Weltrevolution zum Frieden (transl. by Dr Juchhoff and J. Stocky), Cologne-Lindenthal: Liga, 1949, p.138.

107. Curtis, 'World', pp.748, 752.



result of the Soviet Union deliberately picking up a quarrel with Britain.<sup>108</sup>

During WWII, Curtis is in favour of continuing the alliance with Moscow for another generation.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, already in 1946 he warned of a policy of appeasement vis-à-vis the Soviets.<sup>110</sup> However, in the following year he spoke out in support of Bevin's efforts to establish mutual confidence between the British Commonwealth and the Soviet Union and criticized the opposition of the Dominions to these efforts.<sup>111</sup>

With the Cold War unfolding, Curtis finally takes up a belligerent stance. The Soviet Union cannot be trusted to cooperate with the West for peace and prosperity.<sup>112</sup> On the contrary, there is '(t)he Marxist obsession of the Russian Communists that war with capitalist States is inevitable.'<sup>113</sup>

In *World Revolution in the Cause of Peace* he makes a - in view of the real events of 40 years later - quite remarkable prophesy. Once the Western federation is in place, the process of undermining the Eastern Bloc will start. Beginning with Eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia, the populations of the USSR's satellite states will overthrow the Communist yoke. Then the

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108. Lionel Curtis, 'Shanghai', in Round Table 21 (1931), pp.738-68, here pp.755-56.

109. Curtis, Way, pp.21-22; Curtis, World War, p.225.

110. May, Round Table, p.379.

111. Lavin, From Empire, p.309.

112. Curtis, Open Road, p.20.

113. Curtis, World Revolution, p.156.

regime will also break down in Russia, making her also ready to join the federation.<sup>114</sup>

The integration of the last major contender power into the heartland is thus only a matter of time. But, until then, vigilance is necessary.

### **The Prize Area: The Coloured Races**

Curtis was not only concerned about the Dominions but also about Britain's tropical dependencies. In *The Green Memorandum*, he also deals with countries like India and Egypt. Foreshadowing Lord Lugard's *Dual Mandate*,<sup>115</sup> Curtis sees the British rule over them, which has the purpose to prevent disorder, as a duty both to the indigenous people and to the world at large. Unfortunately, the rise of nationalist movements has turned these countries into 'vulcanoes'.<sup>116</sup>

Already two years later Curtis's ideas about white rule over coloured people had matured. He now proposed as an interim measure the presence of non-voting Indian, Malay and West African 'natives' in the imperial parliament, where they would act as advisers. He also accepted that it would be a contradiction if his planned commonwealth would govern communities which were not included in citizenship.<sup>117</sup>

During World War I, Curtis considers the integration of people like the Turks and the Chinese

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114. Ibid., pp.153-54.

115. F.D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, Edinburgh and London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1922.

116. Curtis, *Green Memorandum*, pp.25-26. See also Curtis, 'Windows', p.28.

117. Lavin, *From Empire*, p.116.

into the future world state. They are not to be deprived of self-determination because they have already reached a higher stage than, for example, the Africans. But, at the same time, they are not civilized enough to join the world entity as equal members. His solution is to leave to these peoples control over their internal affairs but let the other members of the world state take over responsibility for their external relations.<sup>118</sup> In other words, the already existing semi-colonial status of countries like China and the Ottoman Empire is to be formalized and internationalized.

In *The Commonwealth of Nations*, Curtis dwells upon the dichotomy of the Orient and the Occident. Despite their lack of racial unity, all Asiatic peoples have similar characteristics, i.e. a strong religious conscience that stresses the duty to God but not to one's fellow men. In such societies, obedience to the limitless authority of the despotic state is likewise acknowledged as a religious duty, because the ruler is considered to be appointed by the gods. In contrast to Europe, Asia is stagnating because the Asians do not believe in free will and see customs and laws as divine and not subject to change. That Europeans were so different can be explained by the influence of Christianity, by climate, and by Europe's numerous coastlines.<sup>119</sup>

He argues that the project of the commonwealth, as far as the 'orientals' are concerned, involves bringing them to a higher order with representative

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118. Curtis, 'End', pp.786-87.

119. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.3-12.

institutions. This is the noblest enterprise yet conceived in the course of history.<sup>120</sup> In his writings on dyarchy, he clearly states that responsible government, although having first developed in the West, is a universal ideal.<sup>121</sup>

On the other hand, there is a flavour of a fear of race war in his agenda. Curtis claims that the age-old struggle between Europe and Asia continues in the contemporary day in the shape of Asian immigration to Africa and the Pacific.<sup>122</sup> The uprisings of coloured people in Asia, Africa and the USA against white supremacy are 'bursting into flames'. In addition, Islam turns out to be more successful than Christianity in converting Central Africans. In order not to fuel these threats, the whites' claim for domination must be dropped.<sup>123</sup> In *The Prevention of War* Curtis says that the ultimate world problem is the relationship between the European, Asiatic and African races. All of them need laws made by themselves as soon as they are able to exercise control over themselves.<sup>124</sup>

However, this is to be a long-term project. The inhabitants of Asia, Africa and the Pacific will for centuries remain incapable of self-government.<sup>125</sup> In *Civitas Dei*, he once more explains why: People living in temperate zones have a more vigorous physique, a higher sense of the value of time, and more capacity for sustained and methodological action than those

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120. Ibid., pp.176-7.

121. Curtis, 'Letters', p.431.

122. Curtis, Commonwealth, pp.13-14, 125.

123. Curtis, 'Introduction', p.liii.

124. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, pp.80, 148.

125. Curtis, Commonwealth, p.700.

living in a hot climate.<sup>126</sup> He modifies, however, the picture of the eternal European-Asian conflict. It is continuing, but now in a blurred version. 'Asian' autocracy is also to be found in Europe, while the commonwealth idea is spreading in Asia.<sup>127</sup>

In 1939, again, he argued that the world order that he proposed included all human beings. People who made laws against the Jews or the Coloured people would find that there was no clear-cut line between one race and another.<sup>128</sup> But, as we have seen in his later apologies for the racist immigration laws of the Dominions, Curtis remained himself quite willing to draw this line.

Let us now have a closer look at how Curtis's perception of Indians, Middle Easterners, Chinese and Africans developed over time.

#### **The Prize Area: India**

During his South African years, Curtis still thought that the Indians would be forever incapable of self-government.<sup>129</sup> As we have seen, he radically changed that view some years later and spoke out in favour of ultimately including the Indians into the Commonwealth.

However, this would take time. In *The Commonwealth of Nations*, Curtis asserts that the immediate extension of sovereignty to the Indians would cause anarchy.<sup>130</sup> He

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126. Curtis, *Civitas Dei*, p.2.

127. *Ibid.*, p.45.

128. Lavin, *From Empire*, p.286.

129. *Ibid.*, p.60.

130. Curtis, *Commonwealth*, p.155.

repeats this motif in *The Prevention of War*, albeit in connection with a moderate criticism of the British rule: The Indians are not ripe for the control of their external affairs, because they cannot yet govern themselves. This, however, is not their own fault. The British should have introduced measures of self-governmental responsibility much earlier.<sup>131</sup>

It is in his publications on dyarchy that Curtis's ideas of India's place in the future Commonwealth become more precise. He assures the Indians that they are on a different civilization plane than the Central Africans because there already exist small groups of people capable of formulating political questions among them.<sup>132</sup>

At the beginning, voting rights have to be restricted to these small groups. The qualifications for granting the franchise must be 'sound'. That this might mean a very small initial electorate is not a problem. Rather, it will stimulate efforts for social reforms ultimately leading to an expansion in the number of voters.<sup>133</sup>

As yet, Indian public opinion needs to improve both in terms of quality and quantity. Self-government, i.e. elected parliaments on both all-Indian and provincial levels with executives dependent upon a

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131. Kerr and Curtis, Prevention, pp.148-50.

132. L. Curtis, 'A Letter to the People of India', in L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, pp.38-95, here pp.53-54.

133. L. Curtis, 'A Letter to the Hon. Babu Bhupendra Nath Basu (an experiment in the application of the principle of Dyarchy to the government of the United Provinces)', in L. Curtis, Papers Relating to the Application of the Principle of Dyarchy to the Government of India, pp.96-200, here pp.112-13.

majority in these parliaments, should be the ultimate aim of British policy in India. Furthermore, India will also have a share in the running of the British Commonwealth as a whole.<sup>134</sup>

Curtis makes it clear that a self-governing India could claim the right to restrict immigration, whether of European colonists or of Africans.<sup>135</sup> The future all-Indian government will also have control over tariffs. Curtis also deems the existence of Indian nationalism necessary, if understood as ties of mutual esteem and affection between the people of the sub-continent. Out of this nationalism an additional adherence to the British Commonwealth will naturally develop.<sup>136</sup>

In sum, Curtis advocates the extension of self-government on the lines of the Dominions to India. This is to be done through a step-by-step approach of creating a responsible electorate.<sup>137</sup> The example of India will spread the idea of freedom throughout Asia and Africa.<sup>138</sup>

This is all very well. But there was also a catch for Britain. When advocating Indian representation in the imperial parliament in 1917, Curtis mentioned that Britain's war debt had to be divided between all members of the British Commonwealth. As May dryly comments: 'India's representation was necessary, because her money was needed.'<sup>139</sup>

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134. Curtis, 'A Letter to the People of India', pp.81-82.

135. Curtis, 'A Letter to the Hon. Babu Bhupendra Nath Basu', p.101.

136. Curtis, 'Letters', pp.396-97.

137. Curtis, 'Introduction', pp.xxii-xxiii.

138. Ibid., p.lxi.

139. May, Round Table, p.193.

Furthermore, it would also take a long time until India would reach a position of equality with the white Dominions. In a 1923 memorandum, Curtis expects even partial self-government without responsibility for external affairs and defence to take at least three or four generations.<sup>140</sup>

As we have seen, Curtis in *Civitas Dei* foresees that an only partially self-governing India will join the federation quite early on. He cryptically recommends 'admission on terms which would not endanger the stability of the international commonwealth'.<sup>141</sup> What these terms would be becomes clearer in his 1940s writings on China, to which we will turn later.

#### **The Prize Area: The Middle East**

As shown above, in 1915 Curtis proposes a kind of international protectorate for the Ottoman Empire. In a 1918 article, this idea is replaced by that of an American mandate for the bulk of the region. In the same article, he tells a tall tale about the effects of British rule over Egypt. It will take a long time before she is ready for self-government. But:

Less than forty years ago Egypt was one of the most miserable countries on earth. To-day she is one of the most prosperous.<sup>142</sup>

In the following year, he claims that, with the exception of (ungrateful) Egyptian nationalists most Middle Easterners want British or American tutelage. Curtis dramatizes the situation in the whole region in order to stress his point that the USA and the

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<sup>140</sup>. Ibid., p.269. See also 193.

<sup>141</sup>. Curtis, *Civitas Dei*, pp.935-36.

<sup>142</sup>. Curtis, 'Windows', pp.23-24.



Dominions must help Britain running it. Given its position at the intersection of two principal systems of human society<sup>143</sup> (read freedom/Europe and despotism/Asia), unsettled conditions in the Middle East provide a threat to the whole world - the more so since religious conflicts are involved. Thus:

Demoralized by ages of despotism, trampled by war, torn by internal conflicts over races, sects, and religions, they lack the primary condition in which alone free government can develop.<sup>144</sup>

Despite such alarmist assertions, for the following 30 years Curtis was no longer interested in the region. His only reference to it was the one in *Civitas Dei* about the special membership for Egypt in the international federation.

However, in his late work *The Open Road to Freedom*, the crucial importance of the Middle East is highlighted once again. This time, it is not so much its geographical position that raises Curtis's attention but its newly-achieved place as the centre of world oil exports. He warns that the Soviet Union wants to get hold over Middle Eastern oil and that only her failure to achieve this has so far prevented World War III. He presses the urgency for the West to pool its control over the Middle Eastern oil reserves.<sup>145</sup>

Finally, in one of his last statements on current affairs, Curtis in 1952 proposed the transfer of British troops from the Suez Canal Zone to Cyprus. This was to be a concession to Egyptian nationalism but, at the same time, involved keeping the British grip over

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143. Curtis, 'Price', p.18,

144. Ibid., pp.19-20.

145. Curtis, Open Road, pp.155-57.

the island, whose Greek nationalist movement ENOSIS he discounted.<sup>146</sup>

### **The Prize Area: China**

As we have seen, the putting of her foreign affairs under international tutelage was also proposed for China by Curtis during WWI. After this first passing reference, Curtis developed an intense interest in that country in the years around 1930, leading to a book and an article about her affairs.

Given China's vast population, Curtis now considers the political chaos prevailing there as the most serious threat to world peace.<sup>147</sup> British interests there are bound to the welfare of that country, of which the establishment of a stable government is most important. Rejecting the alternative possibilities of reaching this stability by colonial rule, by China's break-up into smaller states or by the coming to power of a new imperial dynasty, he settles for the establishment of self-government as the only solution.<sup>148</sup>

Once a stable government is in place, Britain should revise the unequal treaties between her and China - despite all the opposition of British residents in the treaty ports, who stick to an obsolete gunboat diplomacy. Putting his bets on the Kuomintang government under Chiang Kai-shek, Curtis also urges the transfer of the British Ministry from Peking to the new

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<sup>146</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, p.320; May, Round Table, p.414.

<sup>147</sup>. Curtis, Capital Question, pp.v-vi, 235, 245.

<sup>148</sup>. Ibid., pp.287-92.

capital Nanking. This would demonstrate Britain's trust in the Kuomintang government.<sup>149</sup>

But, for all his avowals of a new policy vis-à-vis China, Curtis does not completely break with his previous acceptance of the country's inferior position on the international level. First, he diagnoses an unwillingness in the Chinese mind to adhere strictly to laws, business contracts and international agreements. Britain should thus courteously but firmly insist upon the exact fulfillment of treaties.<sup>150</sup> In other words, the Chinese are not to be trusted completely and need to be handled kindly but firmly.

Second, the extraterritorial settlements, particularly the one in Shanghai, are 'on the whole the most promising instance of international co-operation which the world has yet produced'.<sup>151</sup> Thanks to the provision of legal security under Western rule, Shanghai has become the true economic centre upon which the rest of China depends.<sup>152</sup> Suitably reformed by extending the political rights of the Chinese residents there,<sup>153</sup> the International Settlements can have the function of teaching the Chinese the application of the rule of law and of self-government. Until China has achieved that stage herself, it is not in her interest that she regains sovereign control over these Western

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149. Ibid., pp.247-52.

150. Ibid., pp.264-72.

151. Curtis, 'Shanghai', p.750.

152. Ibid., pp.750-53.

153. Ibid., pp.758-61.

enclaves.<sup>154</sup> Extraterritoriality must remain in place for decades to come.<sup>155</sup>

Third, Curtis observes that the progressive members of the new government want foreign advisors while the reactionary wing opposes this. In his opinion, China is in particular need of political advice. The ministers of the great powers, namely of Great Britain, the USA and Japan, should have the function of giving sympathetic `advice` to their hosts, with the aim of fostering a strong central government. Such a central government, by providing stability and thus stimulating trade, was also in the best interest of these foreign powers.<sup>156</sup>

For Curtis, China in effect is to remain a state under the tutelage of Britain and others. As he admits with unusual candour, stable conditions in China will benefit the British Empire enormously.<sup>157</sup> In particular, vast sums of capital could be invested into the development of her industries.<sup>158</sup>

Curtis comes back to China in his writings from the second half of the 1940s. With decolonization in Asia under way, Curtis tackles the question of how the `backward` countries could join the federation without, however, controlling it with their large populations. His solution is elegantly simple. Representation in the federal parliament's Lower House will be in proportion not to population but to taxing capacity, i.e. national

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154. Curtis, Capital Question, pp.262-63.

155. May, Round Table, p.340.

156. Curtis, Capital Question, pp.254-58, 293-98.

157. May, Round Table, p.340.

158. Curtis, Capital Question, p.300.

wealth. Under this arrangement, the poor but populous states like India and China will be under-represented, thus allaying the problem.<sup>159</sup>

In a revealing passage, Curtis writes:

While we may hope and expect that in course of time politically backward peoples like the Chinese will learn to keep order amongst themselves, it is most unlikely that they will ever achieve the same taxable capacity per head as the nations of Western Europe, the United States, or the British Dominions.<sup>160</sup>

In other words, for all the progress they may make, the Chinese and the other Asians will luckily never reach a position of equality with the West.

#### **The Prize Area: Africa**

Curtis's writings about the Africans show similar intellectual acrobatics. In 1900, Curtis said that the presence of black labour made the whites indolent. The trade unions' policy of excluding the blacks was acceptable, and it would in fact be the best if they would die out.<sup>161</sup> In the following year, he was not hopeful for the future of South Africa if the present proportions between the whites and the blacks remained as they were. The blacks caused the whites to become incompetent.<sup>162</sup>

In 1906, he repeated that the South African federation had to be white.<sup>163</sup> In the same year, in his draft of the Selbourne Memorandum, he warned of a 'native' uprising. He added that the native franchise

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<sup>159</sup>. Curtis, World War, p.114; Curtis, World Revolution, p.134-35; Curtis, Open Road, pp.44-46.

<sup>160</sup>. Curtis, World Revolution, p.135.

<sup>161</sup>. Van der Pijl, Transnational Classes, pp.110-11.

<sup>162</sup>. Lavin, From Empire, pp.41-22.

<sup>163</sup>. Ibid., p.66.

of the Cape was not to be forced upon the Transvaal.<sup>164</sup> On the other hand, Curtis did not exclude voting rights for the blacks completely. In 1908 he recommended for the South African Union an Upper House elected via a colour-blind franchise, but through a high level educational test. He argued that the British government and the Cape province would not accept complete lack of representation for coloured people and consequently supported equal rights for all civilized men.<sup>165</sup>

At the same time, he repeated his concern about the need for white entry into the ranks of unskilled labour and the stopping of coloured labour immigration. There had to be no job reservations (at the same time, however, also no exclusion) of black workers.<sup>166</sup> He kept on stressing the importance of the building of a white labour force.<sup>167</sup> In *The Green Memorandum* he dramatically claims that the native question in South Africa is a problem of life and death.<sup>168</sup>

Leaving the special case of South Africa aside, Curtis developed a paternalist concern for Africans. In the 1920s, he wanted Kenya to be run for the benefit of the Africans rather than for the white settlers. He recommended the appointment and a future election of 'educated natives' as representatives for the colonial government. However, according to Lavin similar

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164. Ibid., p.71.

165. Ibid., p.88.

166. Ibid., p.100.

167. Ibid., pp.100-01.

168. Curtis, Green Memorandum, pp.52-53.

safeguards have been ineffective in South Africa and Rhodesia.<sup>169</sup>

As in the case of his concern with the working classes in Britain, Curtis combined his sympathy with a high-handed attitude. In *The Commonwealth of Nations* he claims that there is a natural superiority of the Europeans over the Africans.<sup>170</sup> The American blacks, according to Curtis, are the members of a backward civilization.<sup>171</sup> Misrule in Liberia, then one of the two only independent African states, is used as an example for the inability of the Africans to govern themselves.<sup>172</sup> And Central Africans are unable to form 'any valid opinion' on how they should be governed.<sup>173</sup> (Only the Pacific islanders fared worse in Curtis's writings of that time: slavers, head hunters and cannibals who, if left to themselves, are 'without hope of redemption'.)<sup>174</sup>

In *Civitas Dei*, the tune somewhat changes. The caste-like stratification based on colour in the US is now described as problematic.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, he now foresees that in a - perhaps remote future - there will be 'negro Dominions' in Africa.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, the 'natives' of Africa, New Guinea and Java are to be taught self-

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169. Lavin, *From Empire*, pp.230-34.

170. Curtis, *Commonwealth*, p.210.

171. *Ibid.*, p.697.

172. Curtis, 'Windows', pp.30-32.

173. Curtis, 'A Letter to the People of India', p.53.

174. Curtis, 'Windows', p.29.

175. Curtis, *Civitas Dei*, pp.375-76.

176. *Ibid.*, p.709.

government so that they can join the international commonwealth at some future time.<sup>177</sup>

In his writings of the late 1940s, Curtis further elaborates upon this theme. The federal union encompassing Britain, the Dominions and Western Europe will also control the bulk of tropical Africa, pooling Europe's colonies there. Under this system, an ultimately self-governing African Dominion should be sponsored.<sup>178</sup>

This scheme will also provide the solution for an old problem troubling Curtis. In contrast to South Africa, there will be no colour bar in the emerging 'Negro Dominion' north of the Zambesi. Consequently, Curtis expects the South African blacks to move over time into that Dominion, finally leaving South Africa as a white men's country. With black labour gone, the poor whites will have to work themselves and stop being idle.<sup>179</sup>

It is striking to compare Curtis's proposal of 1950 with what he wrote about the issue exactly half a century earlier. In both cases, the same problem was diagnosed (the availability of black labour making poor whites lazy) and in broad terms the same solution prescribed (the blacks must disappear from South Africa). The only difference was that in 1900 Curtis craved for their dying-out, while in 1950 he had found a much more benign way.

This specific case is symptomatic for the whole development of Curtis's thought from WWI onwards: He

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177. Ibid., pp.937-38.

178. Curtis, World Revolution, p.149.

179. Curtis, Open Road, pp.28-31.



skillfully managed to put old imperialist wine into new humanitarian and internationalist bottles.

### Conclusion

The Rhodes-Milner group, of which Curtis was a member, was a policy planning body that aimed at providing hegemonic ideology that would keep the Lockean heartland together, help to offset challenges from the Hobbesian contenders and provide justification for keeping the inhabitants of the Prize area in their proper place.

These efforts at ideology-construction happened within the context of the decline of liberal internationalism and of the *Pax Britannica*. The state monopoly tendency was ascendant and the international system became more competitive. Although there was much disagreement within the Rhodes-Milner group on specific issues, for example imperial federation vs. the much looser concept of cooperation, the group remained unified in its goal of creating ideological cohesion. The parochial interests of Britain (or, rather, of its ruling class and its transnational extensions) were to be sold as universal principles benefitting the whole of mankind.

Curtis's specific contribution is fourfold. First, he advocates federal means for the coming-together of the heartland. While stressing Britain's past achievements for the cause of freedom, especially during her 19th century heyday, Curtis appeals to the Dominions and the USA to take over more 'responsibility', using particularly shared control over the Prize area as a bait.

Second, Curtis wants Britain's position within the federally integrated heartland to remain strong. While formally based on the principle of equality, the initial imperial federation with its Western European adjunct would be dominated by Britain. Later on, leadership would pass to the USA, but only after Britain had shaped the federal structure. While Curtis spells much ink on constitutional questions, he conveniently ignores the financial power of the City of London over the Dominions and, to a lesser extent, over parts of Western Europe.

Third, military threats on the part of the Hobbesian contenders are to be resisted and the contending state, if possible by peaceful means, is to be integrated into the heartland by embracing the commonwealth principle. True to his assertion that economic issues are subordinate to political ones, Curtis does not see the challenge put by the contenders as part of a catching-up effort necessitating state dominance over civil society. Instead, he presents the contradiction between the British Commonwealth and the USA on the one hand and Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union on the other hand as expression of the age-old clash between freedom and autocracy.

Fourth, he holds out to the 'backward' peoples of the Prize area the promise to join, one day, the heartland in a position of equality. This assertion of racial equality is, however, heavily qualified. Although the coloured races will eventually rise to the stage of self-government this is to take an indefinite time. In the meanwhile, the colonial empire will remain in existence in an internationalized shape. And even

after joining the international federation the formally colour-blind principle of parliamentary representation in accordance to national wealth will ensure continued *de facto* dominance by Europe and North America. From the perspective of hegemony, the catch of this argument is that it allows one to pose as critic of old-style colonialism while leaving the substance of it intact.

Curtis's specific federation proposals failed to convince many. But the implicit (and often explicit) assumptions behind them - that Britain was due to her moral superiority entitled to her disproportionate share of heartland leadership and Prize area control - fell on more open ears. It was not that Curtis and his Rhodes-Milner fellows invented this assumption but their contribution was to modernize and reproduce it. The convenient replacement of the ebullient, but also honest, term 'British Empire' by 'British Commonwealth' in public usage is a case in point.

## Conclusion

Using Curtis as an example, this thesis has argued that the common conceptualization of interwar IR thought as a debate between idealism and realism muddles rather than clarifies the issue. Instead of this, a neo-Gramscian framework is proposed as a better way to conceptualize the rich and variable thought of the period. While conceding the realm of ideas their own dynamics, this framework nevertheless grounds them firmly within the process of capital accumulation. In particular, works of that time can be usefully analysed with recourse to the conceptual apparatus of Van der Pijl: his ideal-typical comprehensive concepts of control (liberal internationalism, the state monopoly tendency and their corporate-liberal synthesis) as well as his distinction between the Lockean heartland, Hobbesian contenders and the Prize area.

By referring to a number of secondary works, the mainstream version of the alleged 'First Debate' can be extraced. In that account, idealism and realism are presented as mutually incompatible schools of thought. Idealists believe in progress and universal ethics, assume the existence of a world community and hope to abolish war through international organization, collective security or a world state. Realists have a pessimistic image of human nature, embrace relativism, see competing states as the main units of the international system and discount the possibility of change for the better. Idealism was wishful thinking that owed its temporary strength to an emotional

reaction to WWI. It was then decisively defeated by level-headed realism, as represented by E.H. Carr.

Recently, this mainstream conceptualization has come in for a number of revisions or criticisms. First, there are those who want to give the terms idealism and realism an extended or completely different meaning or to drop them altogether. Such alternative conceptualizations remain, however, somewhat on the sidelines within the IR community. More in the limelight stands a second group, which wants to remove from the interwar idealists the stigma of being muddle-headed, points out to the diversity and originality of their thought and puts the whole image of a paradigm shift from idealism to realism into question. At the same time, this group tends to reproduce the image of an idealist-realist dichotomy, with Carr on the side of the latter position.

This image has been challenged by new approaches that adopt a revisionist reading of Carr. According to this interpretation, he did not use the terms utopianism and realism in a clear-cut way but as a rhetorical and dialectical device. Instead of being an idealist-baiting proponent of *realpolitik*, Carr in many respects laid the groundwork for a critical, non-positivist kind of IR that has worked as an inspiration for neo-Gramscians like Robert Cox. Carr drafted schemes for a more equal world order based upon a combination of justice and force, for a decoupling of national identity from vast geographical security and economic communities, and for an integrated Western Europe under British leadership. He could thus be frankly utopian himself. However, what arose his ire

was when projects for an improved world were used as smokescreen for particularist ruling group interests and taken out of their historical context.

Lionel Curtis clearly lays himself open to such a charge. He had a formidable career of more than half a century. He was social worker, colonial official, adviser to the India and Colonial Office and the driving force behind the foundation of Chatham House. His activities helped to shape the destinies of South Africa, India and Ireland. He was a founding member of the Round Table network, which gave him additional access to the corridors of power. Most importantly, he was a prolific writer propagating imperial, Atlantic, European and world federation.

Although the project of a world state is for the mainstream versions of the 'First Debate' a typical symptom of idealism, Curtis's writings cannot be so easily labelled. If the mainstream understandings of what idealism and realism are supposed to mean are used a puzzling picture emerges: Curtis believes in the possibility of boundless progress but sees it circumscribed by systemic constraints which have to be overcome by charismatic leaders. He propagates the principle of the commonwealth and the accompanying values of freedom and altruism as the goal for the whole of humanity but also stresses the necessity for cultural diversity and racial separation. He points out that democratic states are inherently peaceful, thus indicating the existence of a world community, but that the existence of the anarchic state system undermines the spread of democratic values and thus prevents world peace. He rejects the logics of the balance of power

but is even more scathing towards the idea of collective security. Indeed, he is so much of a 'realist' stressing the inevitably conflictual nature of the international system that he sees the only way out in a radically idealist solution: the world state. What can we make out of this, except from observing that he was both an idealist and a realist?

Since the mainstream accounts have their limits, it is more helpful to conceptualize Curtis's work within the framework of the neo-Gramscian approaches within IR. According to Gramsci's concept of hegemony, a specific class manages to permeate civil society with its own values by presenting them as transcending class divisions. This concept can also be used at the international level. As Cox has shown, we can speak of a hegemonic order if one state uses its own powerful position in a way that appears to be in the interest of humanity at large. Van der Pijl has further developed these insights by relating specific forms of accumulation with certain comprehensive concepts of control which supplant each other in what he calls the Lockean heartland. This heartland consists of those state/society complexes with an autonomous civil society. It is faced with the challenges emanating from the Hobbesian contender countries, where the state has swallowed up civil society. This distinction, in this thesis applied to the case of Curtis, is of course also of relevance for other IR writers. For example, it could be used to show that classical (Anglo-Saxon) realism is not the same as Continental *realpolitik*. The work of the classical realists is rather a synthesis of the ideological assumptions of the liberal heartland

with certain Hobbesian elements introduced from the contenders.

To come back to Curtis, in order to see how he relates to van der Pijl's framework we have, as a first step, to place him within the context of the political movements in Britain during the decades around the turn of the century. Three of them are of relevance here: First, empire federalism, which advocated a closer relationship between Britain and the white settlement colonies. Second, new liberalism, which rejected extreme individualism, stressed that one had to realize oneself within and through society and called for state actions to overcome poverty and inequality. Third, social imperialism, which wanted welfare measures to make the British fitter for the struggle for existence and which wanted to increase the efficiency of the political system through curbing parliamentary power. All these movements have to be seen within the context of the shift from extensive to intensive accumulation and from liberal internationalism to the state monopoly tendency, which particularly embraced state action and welfare. Since the state monopoly tendency was especially engrained within the Hobbesian contender state, this shift at the same time meant a heightened challenge to the heartland. Empire federalism responded to this challenge by trying to drum a section of the heartland together. New liberalism and social imperialism, in their different ways, attempted to adopt certain elements of the state monopoly tendency to the liberal state of Britain.

It was this agenda which also moved Curtis. He, too, vehemently rejected the extreme individualism and



*laissez-faire* connected with liberal internationalism and the money-capital perspective of the 19th century. He took over Empire federalism and transformed it into world federation. The concept of the commonwealth has many parallels with new liberal thinking, except for his reserved attitude towards mass democracy. In this respect, he followed social imperialist critique of parliamentary rule and called for a greater role of 'trusted leaders' instead. In economic and social terms, Curtis remained tied to elements of the money-capital perspective by putting stress on sound finances, rejecting corporatism and sticking to free trade. At the same time, he embraced the productive-capital perspective's call for welfare measures and class harmony. Curtis thus sketched his own version of a synthesis between liberal internationalism and the state monopoly tendency.

The main stress of his writings is, however, on the defence of the heartland and its Anglo-Saxon leading states. This was the general aim of the Rhodes-Milner group. Against the challenge of the Hobbesian states, the heartland had to integrate itself by federal means. To make the transition from British to American leadership more bearable for the UK's historical bloc of City bankers and attached industrialists, Britain had to take the initial lead in forming the federation. The USA would only come in later. Once caved in by the pooled strength of the Lockean state/society complexes, the Hobbesian contenders would be ready for internal transformation and integration into the heartland. As for the Prize area, for the peoples of India, the Middle East, China

and Africa there was the prospect of ultimate integration, but only in the future and on subordinate terms. In all this, Curtis had the interests of Britain in mind but framed them with a rhetoric of supposedly universal appeal. This is what a hegemonic ideology is supposed to do.

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