

FRENCH IDEALISM AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

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The League of Nations is not, as many people suppose, entirely an American idea. It needed, to be sure, the spiritual leadership of President Wilson and the moral influence of America to make of it a fact, but the conception itself had been in the air for many long years before ever Mr. Wilson himself took it up and with his compelling initiative brought it into the field of practical politics. Even in America it has a long tradition, for that great internationalist, William Penn conceived a project for a Hague Tribunal or League of Nations, and published it in 1693 in "An European Dyet, Parliament or Estates," three years before his plan for the union of the American colonies. Everywhere, the idea seems to have been continually suggesting itself to statesmen and to political thinkers after the horrors and devastation of long and costly wars. It was, then, as likely as not, born of the logic and compulsion of historical events themselves, and would seem in that sense to be the reaction of the reason of mankind to some of the most unreasonable things in human experience.

French thinkers have been working on plans of perpetual peace through a federation of peoples at any rate since the Middle Ages, when a state of universal peace was already conceived by men like Pierre Dubois. At the end of the XVIth Century, Henry IV of France was moved by the civil wars to cherish similar dreams, and in 1603 he sent his First Minister, Sully, to London to endeavor to work out a pact of peace between France, England, and various other European Powers. Henry's ultimate purposes were, however, more warlike than peaceable, since he wanted this coalition to resist the menace of Spain.

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The first pacifist plan of any importance was probably that of the celebrated Abbé de Saint-Pierre, who in the middle of the 18th century, a time when Europe was aflame with war, produced a "Project of Universal Peace between the Potentates of Europe", providing a pact of alliance between the Kings of Europe, and a sovereign Parliament to arbitrate their several grievances.

Shocked to think that a Continent brilliant in all the sciences and arts should remain a prey to the scourge of war, the abbé calls for the application among nations of the principles of common law and calls the attention of monarchs to the need for co-ordinating nations, as well as individuals, in a Society. He points out the ties of religion, of manners and customs which exist among all the peoples of the European Continent except Turkey, and says that these naturally make for solidarity and facilitate the task of making a lasting pact of peace. He proceeds to formulate the terms of his Confederation in five articles:

1. The contracting sovereigns shall establish among themselves a perpetual and irrevocable alliance, and appoint plenipotentiaries to hold, in a determined place, a permanent diet or congress in which all the differences of the contracting parties shall be settled by means of arbitration.

2. The number of those sovereigns whose plenipotentiaries shall have a vote in the diet shall be specified, together with the order, time and manner in which the presidency shall pass from one to the other by equal intervals, and the proportion of their contributions to the common expenditure and the manner of raising these.

3. The Confederation shall guarantee to each of its members the possession and government of all the states now belonging to them, together with the elective and hereditary succession in accordance with the fundamental laws of each country; and in order to eliminate the source of perpetually recurring quarrels, present possession and the most recent treaties will be taken as

a basis of all the mutual rights of the contracting powers, without it ever being permissible for them to take arms against each other on any pretext whatever.

4. Any ally infringing the treaty shall be outlawed by Europe and banished as a public enemy, in the following cases: refusing to execute the judgments of the Grand Alliance, or making warlike preparations, or negotiating treaties contrary to the Confederation and taking arms to resist it and attacking any of the allies.

The Powers will arm and act conjointly and at the common expense against any State outlawed by Europe until it lays down its arms, executes the judgments and rulings of the Diet, makes reparation for its misdeeds, reimburses the costs and pays penalty for the preparations of war contrary to the treaty.

5. The plenipotentiaries shall have the power of forming in the Diet, by plurality of votes, upon the instructions of their Courts, the regulations which they may judge important to procure for the European republic and each of its members all advantages possible; but it shall not be lawful to make any changes in these five articles except by the unanimous consent of the Confederates.

The contracting parties were to have been the Emperor of Austria, the Emperor of Russia, the King of France, the King of Spain, the King of England, the States General of Holland, the King of Denmark, Sweden, Poland, the King of Portugal, the King of Prussia, the Elector of Bavaria, the Elector Palatine, the Swiss, the ecclesiastical electors, the Republic of Venice, the King of Naples, and the King of Sardinia. Other sovereigns, such as the Dukes of Modena and Parma, might associate with secondary Powers in order to obtain a voting right similar to the ancient *votum curiatum* of the Counts of the Empire.

Another extremely interesting project for a League of Nations was produced in France, significantly enough, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The author of it

was Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon, one of the most striking personalities of his time and among the most original thinkers of the nineteenth century. Saint-Simon claimed direct descent from Charlemagne, and, it is interesting to note, served in the American War of Independence under Washington, by whom he was made a Colonel at the age of 23. Saint-Simon detested war, however, and the reason he engaged in the American Revolution was that he believed the emancipation of America would prove to be a mighty step in the progressive march of civilization. This extraordinary man, who at the age of 19 made plans for a Panama Canal and sent them to the Mexican Government, published, in 1814, a pamphlet, dedicated to the Parliaments of France and England, entitled "Of the Reorganization of European Society, or of the Necessity and the Means of Assembling the Peoples of Europe in a single Political Body, while preserving the National Independence of each.—By the Comte de Saint-Simon and his Pupil, A. Thierry."

It took a hundred years to put the theories of this little manifesto into execution, and it may be added that our present-day League of Nations, although wider in scope than Saint-Simon's Assembly which was only intended to cover Europe, is in detail not as bold a conception as his. He limits his view to Europe because he thinks that the reorganization of European Society a sufficient basis for the establishment of world peace.

He reasons in this book that the work of the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, in undermining the central authority of the Church of Rome, made war inevitable. The main cause of wars, he says, is to be found in peace treaties (Saint-Simon was no believer in the static virtue of political pacts, and used to point as an example of their futility to the Peace of Westphalia). The material stability which treaties can afford he represents to be necessarily transient, since they require constant revision in the light of changing forces and transformed circumstance. They can only serve as an

approach to moral settlement. Now Europe's just resistance to the hegemony of any given Power, which is the essence of the policy of the balance of power, makes for continual warfare. Logically, therefore, Saint-Simon says, in order to secure universal peace, it is requisite to establish an authority superior to each and every national authority.

This "New Power" will be obtained by the extension of the principle of parliamentary government (little known to Europe at that time) on the English model. Let France and England establish a common parliament, and use their influence to establish representative government in all countries, so that all nations, each governed by its own parliament, may come to recognize "the supremacy of a general Parliament placed above the national governments and invested with the power of judging their differences". A congress of delegates of different sovereigns would be too preoccupied with national interests to keep sufficiently in view the general welfare of Europe, according to Saint-Simon, who rejects the method of delegation now in practice for that specific reason. A true Parliament of Europe alone, he says, can serve the general interest well.

His plans, then, provide for the election by the people of a Chamber of Deputies, a Chamber of Peers, and a Prince. To elect the Deputies, each million of men in Europe able to read and write will elect one business man, one scientist, one magistrate, one administrator. Each of these men must possess the means necessary to preserve a detached attitude (Saint-Simon assesses these at \$5000 a year) and if they lack such means, they will be provided with them. The Chamber of Peers will be appointed by the King. Its members will be limited in number, and must possess at least \$100,000 a year. Twenty peers will be selected from prominent scientists, magistrates, and business men; the peerage will be hereditary. Saint-Simon postpones to a later time the choice of the King or Prince, only specifying that the office will be also hereditary. The duties of these several

powers will be: the Prince, to represent the general interest; the Deputies, to serve private or local interest; the Peers, to act as a moderating influence similar to the English House of Lords.

The Parliament of Europe will possess a city and territory of its own right, and have the power of levying on the Confederation all taxes deemed necessary, England, with its long experience in such matters, having two-thirds of all the votes on taxation. It will direct all great public utility enterprises, such as the construction of canals between the Danube and Rhine, the Rhine and the Baltic. Another enterprise which is continually to exercise the activity of the Parliament is "to populate the globe with the European race, which is superior to all other races, and to open it to travel and inhabitation." Finally, the supervision of public education throughout Europe will be in charge of the Parliament, in order that there may be conformity in the teaching of the principles of morality, in institutions and in fact in all educational matters throughout the Continent.

The entire plan hinges upon an Entente between England and France, who "have only to unite forces and bring them into action for Europe to reorganize France is free, as is England. United, they are stronger than the rest of Europe, they will be peaceful and contented and Europe can expect peace." A direct alliance between the two peoples must be the basis of the New Power.

The ideas of this work were not without exercising very considerable influence on the thought of Saint-Simon's contemporaries. The author himself was surrounded by a school of ardent followers, and the Saint-Simonian group, as it was called, set to work to develop further plans for the pacification of Europe and the organization of the world. We will name in particular Charles Fourier, who had visions of a pacified universe, Constantin Pecqueur, who in 1842 published his "Peace, its Principle and Realization", Proudhon, and, not least, Pierre Leroux, who first coined the term *Société des*

Nations (League of Nations). Leroux expresses, probably for the first time, the interesting idea which, as we have cause to know, has gained multitudinous supporters in France since 1919, that the League of Nations is subject to the political ascendancy which France is called upon to exercise for civilization.

The Simonian sect numbered also in fact among its adepts most of the French Romantics, and through them left a trace on French Literature. Saint-Simon himself proposed marriage to Mme. de Staël, author of the work on Germany which helped perhaps more than any other to open the eyes of Frenchmen to the fact that they were not alone in the world. George Sand, Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Lamartine, were all at one time or another attracted by the teachings of the prophet or his disciples, and Romantic literature is consequently full of the ideas of Saint-Simon. Victor Hugo, for example, many times in his writings expressed his belief in the necessity for a United States of Europe, as he called it.

Clearly then, so far from maintaining a guilty silence in the throes of the chronic disturbances of the peace of the world, French idealists have for long generations been actively engaged in devising some rational accommodation of the difficulties which beset nations and governments. It is a justice which we owe to France, the victim of so much popular calumny on the charge of militarism, distinctly to recognize that in this, as in so many other matters intimately affecting the life and progress of humanity, France has taken the initiative and shown herself consistently the *grande nation civilisatrice*.