Law Or Extinction

Editorial in the Greensboro Daily News, December 17, 1954

Why are so few intellectuals "fighting for the kind of peace that only world law can create"?

Henry Luce, editor of Life and Time, asked this question in a speech recently.

"The United States," said Mr. Luce, "cannot move forward in this, its historic mission to promote the rule of Law, unless the intellectuals have schooled themselves—and us—to know and to speak of the great concepts of Law as the necessary counterpart of Liberty and the actual basis of peace between men and nations."

The Saturday Review reminded Mr. Luce that a good many intellectuals had already enlisted in the fight for world law, among them Lewis Mumford, Grenville Clark, Robert Hutchins, William O. Douglas, Arnold Toynbee, Bertrand Russell, Robert T. Sherwood, Oscar Hammerstein, Thomas K. Finletter, Leo Cherne, Stuart Chase and Vernon Nash.

Recently in Greensboro Samuel Levering spoke out for world law with logic and eloquence. The logic is hard to evade. We are living in a world of sovereign powers armed with weapons of total destruction and so we are, in Churchillian phrase, "roaming and peering around on the rim of Hell." The answer to irresponsible power is law, whether in a village or a world. The way to save ourselves is to place nations under world law, which will disarm them and make it a criminal offense for individuals to engage in rearmament above certain limits. The general idea is not new. Hamilton expounded it in essence in the Federalist Papers. It is embedded in principle in the Constitution of the United States, and has worked well, with the exception of the Civil War period.

The concept is simple but practical in a government like that of the United States; it is to enforce the will of the federal government, not by applying force to a sovereign state, which would mean war, but by applying it to individuals in a court of law, which is justice.

Logically this principle should work on a world scale as well as on a national scale. But the difficulties of extending it to the present international situation are stupendous if not insuperable. The dangers of disarming probably seem to most of us as great as the dangers of atomic devastation. If we disarm we invite slavery; if we don't we invite extinction; such is the dilemma, which may explain why more intellectuals are not fighting more actively "for the kind of peace that only world law can create." There is no indication that the United States, the Soviet Union or any other great power will effectively disarm, or, if they do disarm, that they would submit to the jurisdiction of an international court which could punish their citizens for rearming.

But if the nations will not take that horn of dilemma they will have to grasp the other, which is a continuing atomic arms race with its inherent peril of extinction for all involved in it.

It takes life some time to catch up with logic, and we do not know how much time we have before cataclysm catches up with both of them.

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How To Do It

(Excerpts from Letter to Editor on above editorial, by David Andrews, Secretary, Community Peace Education, American Friends Service Committee, Greensboro, N. C.)

"If the nations can be brought to disarm together—step by step, under the protection of world law, with United Nations inspection and enforcement upon individuals—such action would not be an invitation to slavery.

"We would, of course, have to guard against creating an all-powerful and centralized super-state that could be a source of world tyranny. This could be avoided largely by the following means:

"(1) Give the U.N. legal power only in the field of administering and enforcing the world disarmament agreement, which agreement should be carefully detailed in an annex to the U.N. Charter. Do not give the U.N. legislative power to interfere with the internal affairs of nations.

"(2) Carefully limit the military and police forces of the U.N. itself, as well as limiting the forces allowed to each nation for maintaining internal order.

"With these and related precautions it would be quite possible safely to achieve world disarmament under United Nations supervision.

"There is always the possibility under any human system, no matter how well conceived, of misuse of power and resultant tyranny. That danger, however, can be reduced to a minimum—to a point where it is slight indeed when compared with the certain destruction that threatens the world through atomic war.

"As real as are the unavoidable problems involved in world disarmament, the great question is whether we have the vision and courage to press on toward that solution which is essential to the survival and future progress of mankind."

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Attack On U. N. Coming

The United Nations and the whole American concept of cooperation with other nations will very likely come under bitter attack during early March 1955. This attack is designed to ultimately withdraw the United States from the U.N. and to immediately discredit organizations which support the U.N. and efforts to improve it.

The U.N. has been attacked before, but this new assault will be even greater than the one launched in early 1950.

In early 1950, extremist groups in this country launched a coordinated major assault on organizations working to improve the U.N. and on the U.N. itself. Since this attack was originated by extremist and "hate" groups, the organizations who were under fire decided "not to honor the charges with a reply."

As the fire became heavier, elements within the besieged organizations who pressed for answers to the charges and even lawsuits, were silenced by the argument that it was almost impossible to win a suit against the "hate-mongers" and that money spent on such suits could best be used for education on the programs of the various organizations under fire.

As a result, the besieged organizations and the U.N. suffered heavily. The extremist propaganda crept into respectable organizations, such as patriotic and veterans' groups, and soon was adopted as part of the program of these unsuspecting groups.

These duped organizations reprinted and circulated mass quantities of anti-U.N. and anti-world cooperation literature.

The pro-U.N. organizations lost members and found doors slammed in their faces. Uninformed people who should have known better accepted the extremist propaganda without question and even helped spread it.

Over the next few years, the "anti" campaign gradually lost momentum, but damage had been done and the seeds it had planted continued to grow, as seen by the recent shameful retreat of the Girl Scout officials.

Now, the extremist groups are planning a "bigger and better" assault. This one will seem to originate with "respectable" sources, though actually it will be the result of carefully planted seeds of the "hate-mongers" themselves.

The recent House Un-American Affairs Committee report on two of these hate groups revealed to some people the true nature of the activities of these extremists, but it failed to connect these dangerous groups with the vast anti-U.N. and anti-world cooperation campaign.

One unfortunate thing about the new anti-U.N. campaign will be that all its spokesmen will not realize that their propaganda originated with the hate-mongers under investigation by the Congress, because over the last four years they have come to forget where their "source material" came from, or else they have gotten it from other duped "respectable" sources.

Watch your newspapers and magazines, and you will soon note the beginning of another insidious campaign of hate and misinformation aimed at completing the job of destroying the U.N. and discrediting all individuals and groups who support it.