

Post-War Problems

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THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT OF THE FUTURE

*Lessons from Experience by a
Group of Former Officials of the
League of Nations*

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THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT OF THE FUTURE

LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCE
BY A GROUP OF FORMER OFFICIALS
OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

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FOREWORD

As the victory of the United Nations draws nearer, problems connected with the establishment and functioning of international organizations will increasingly engage the attention of students of international affairs.

The Royal Institute of International Affairs has been happy to offer facilities for a study of what may be called the administrative problems of international organization. The study has been undertaken by a group of persons, who, as former officials of the League of Nations Secretariat, have direct experience of how international machinery works. Its object is to draw the practical lessons of that experience.

Though primarily concerned with administration, the authors of the study inevitably make certain assumptions regarding the broader issues of policy on which administrative action depends. For these, as for all the views expressed and proposals made, they alone are responsible. The part of the Institute, in publishing their report, is to help to crystallize and inform the public discussion of these questions. Whatever may be the nature or form of post-war international organizations, the men and women who will be called upon to serve them will be faced with problems closely similar to those examined in this report.

ASTOR

Chairman of the Council.

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January 1944.

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I. INTRODUCTION

THE maintenance of peace and of conditions permitting a decent life for the individual depends upon the policies of Governments. If the lessons of recent years have been learned, those policies will be governed by agreed principles of action in the fields of security and of social and economic progress. When we contemplate the vast scope of the agreements which Governments will have to make on these all-important matters, and the great movements of public opinion which must sustain them, the question of the machinery for carrying them out appears a minor matter. And so it is, but though it is a small arc in the circle—opinion, policy, machinery—it is an essential one. Without it the circle is broken, and action is inefficient or uncertain.

In domestic affairs even among the greatest States an inadequate or out-of-date civil service may lead to unwarranted reactions against desirable policies. In the field of international relations an adequate machine is not less necessary.

An international organization, taken as a whole, normally consists of three parts: (a) the policy-making organ or organs—conference, assembly, council, governing body, senate, or whatever else it may be called—composed of the representatives of the states which constitute the organization; (b) the committees which advise the policy-making organs, especially on matters requiring technical knowledge; and (c) the administrative machinery, that is to say the agents directly employed by the organization, especially its permanent secretariat,¹ which assists both the directing and the advisory organs and is responsible for the execution of all decisions. It is with the third organ that we are mainly concerned in this study, though one chapter (Chapter II) relates to wider aspects of the international framework.

Before discussing the nature of international machinery, the relations between these three parts, and especially the exact functions

¹ *Terminology*: "Secretariat" with a capital "S" refers throughout this report to the League of Nations Secretariat. Not capitalized "secretariat", unless otherwise qualified, refers to the administrative branch of the new international organization as an institution. "Service" refers to the working body of officials in the secretariat. Similarly, "head of the secretariat" and "head of the service" refer to the official whose position would be roughly analogous to that held by the Secretary General of the League.

of the advisory committees, should be clearly understood. In a system of co-operating States, representatives in the policy-making organ are, of necessity, selected primarily for their abilities as negotiators. Advice on the technical aspects of the various problems which arise must be procured through permanent or *ad hoc* committees or commissions. Their functions have two aspects. When the matter for consideration is purely technical, and national views are of minor importance, as in the case of many health problems, the committee is merely advisory to the policy-making body; but when national policies are integral to the problem, as in the case of international control of civil aviation, it must also serve as a preliminary clearing-house of national views. These advisory bodies may be regarded as a projection, on the one hand of governmental, on the other of secretariat, machinery. They are the field of interaction between the national and the international services. The efficiency of the latter depends greatly on its ability to serve and profit by the former. It cannot do their work itself, and if it tries to do so confusion and inefficiency will result.

There are certain important differences in the conditions under which official machinery for international and for national action, respectively, operates.

In the first place it is implicit in a system based on agreements between sovereign States that decisions by policy-making organs require the concurrence of all their members except where otherwise provided in the agreements themselves. It is true that such exceptions can be widely extended. It is true also that, where unanimity is required, conclusions endorsed by majority votes at the earlier stages of discussion are often accepted even by dissentient States when the stage of final decision is reached. Nevertheless, until a workable compromise in regard to the unanimity rule is achieved, international administrative machinery will continue to have the additional burden of trying to clear the ground for agreement in the policy-making organs.

Secondly, while a national executive is capable of carrying out by its own resources the work which the policy-making organ instructs it to do, an international service has at its disposal no direct means of action corresponding to the great body of national public ser-

vants, whose duty it is to give immediate effect to the decisions of their Government. For the decisions of international bodies to have a real effect on the lives of the peoples, national administrations must implement them. To provide an international organization with extensive direct means of action, e.g. a police force directly subordinate to it, raises administrative problems of a wholly different order from those for which any comparable experience has existed hitherto, though this does not mean that such problems could not be solved.

Thirdly, experts drawn from outside the ranks of the regular staff play a great part in the preparation of international decisions. The formulation and execution of policy on an international scale require, therefore, a machine of a highly elastic character, capable of being rapidly extended for special purposes, and of being reduced again, without weakening the machine as a whole, when the special activity is completed. A central and permanent secretariat provides the necessary continuity and accumulation of experience and knowledge; but the equally necessary power of expansion and contraction depends on the collaboration of Governments.

These comparisons may help to explain the kind of work which the official machine will be called on to perform, and the essential nature of its action. It must of course be understood that the extent and efficacy of that action depend on the existence of an adequate measure of agreement between Governments. In war-time we see international decisions of the most far-reaching character taken over a vast range of strategic, political and economic subjects. In peace-time action of this scope and diversity cannot be taken so quickly. Not only are the evil consequences of inaction much less obvious and immediate, but more countries have to be brought in. It is important to realize that the willingness to allow two or three great Powers to take decisions materially affecting the interests of other associated nations does not exist in anything like the same degree in peace as in war. However, it may be hoped that something of the impetus of co-operation achieved by the United Nations to meet the problems of war may be carried forward into the peace.

The work of an international secretariat may be said to have four main aspects: (a) secretarial assistance for international meetings.

This includes the preparation of meetings and the collection and presentation of facts on which decisions can be based, as well as the following up and supervision of the execution of such decisions; (b) the accumulation and use of technical and special knowledge for these and other purposes; (c) negotiation, or the smoothing away of difficulties with a view to promoting agreement; and (d) administration of the internal economy.

Secretarial assistance for international meetings: This involves not only the routine preparation and service for the meetings but also the preparation of pertinent documents and reports for the use of delegates, the presentation of information required for each meeting, and the secretarial execution of decisions during the next interim period. Described in such bare terms, these primary functions seem simple enough. But their importance may be extended to an almost indefinite degree. As an example, the phrase "preparation of reports for the use of delegates" would include such documents as the annual Reports presented to the League Assembly by the Secretary General and to the I.L.O. Conference by the Director. These provided the text of the chief debates in each body, and furnished delegates with all the material they required for the discussion of past and future policy.

Special knowledge: Much of the service's energy is devoted to the study of technical and political problems for the use of the policy-making organs, advisory committees, special conferences, governments, and the general public. As servant of many Governments, it has unique opportunities of securing material which is not easily, if at all, available elsewhere. It must develop to the full the technique of collecting, analysing and using such material.

Negotiation: Although this function may not officially be admitted to belong to an international secretariat, it is of the very essence of the work of the higher officials, and unless it is duly performed little progress in international business, whether in the political or technical sphere, is likely. Chairmen of committees, rapporteurs, and individual delegates are no doubt the most effective negotiators in the questions with which they are concerned. But they also require the help and advice of the secretariat, as the only continuously operative

element in the organization, and the only one which can be in touch with all the interests affected.

Administration of the internal economy needs no comment here except that it is more difficult for a secretariat composed of many nationalities than for a national administration.

Practical discussion of the problems of international administration will obviously centre round the experience of the League of Nations, including the International Labour Office and the Registry of the Permanent Court of International Justice as well as the Secretariat, since these alone were planned and operated on a scale of variety, importance and permanence in any way comparable to the organization which we have in mind. The close inspection to which every part of their machinery was exposed invests them, moreover, with a unique interest for this purpose.

The first question which must be asked—and the answer is fundamental to the whole of our study—is whether their twenty-year experience shows that efficient international action on the service plane is possible. *A priori* many people were inclined to doubt this and to believe that anything like an international civil service would be hopelessly handicapped by the lack of a sufficient *esprit de corps*, and that even if the necessary goodwill were present, the difficulty of mutual understanding, the clash of traditional systems, and the inequalities of administrative experience, would render the machine inefficient.

Without claiming perfection for the League's administrative machine, we submit that it has been decisively proved by experience that these fears were unjustified and that if there is agreement on policy an efficient international service can be organized to carry it out. It would be easy to illustrate this point by many quotations both from official statements of Governments and from unofficial publications. We take one example from a recent book which is not, generally speaking, particularly favourable to the League: "The permanent Secretariat at Geneva functioned admirably under a secretary general and an efficient civil service. . . The Secretariat believed in the League and served it with most efficient zeal."¹

¹ Hoover and Gibson, *Problems of a Lasting Peace*, New York, Doubleday, Doran, 1942, pp. 154, 156.

Though these declarations refer most specifically to the Secretariat they undoubtedly apply to the whole machine of which the Secretariat was the centre.

Dissension within the ranks of the responsible leaders will be reflected perhaps more quickly in an international than in a national service. Such tendencies must be counterbalanced by the maintenance of an *esprit de corps* inspired, firstly, by the knowledge that in serving loyally, and to the utmost of his ability, an international organization, the official is also making the best contribution he can to the ultimate happiness and progress of his own country; and, secondly, by the consciousness of doing a worth-while job. No civil service, international or national, can, however, function without a reasonably clear mandate from the policy-making organs. It cannot produce unity out of strife, though it can do a good deal to prevent strife over secondary questions. Finding agreement on a particular subject unobtainable, national delegates may be tempted to refer it to experts, nominally in the expectation that they will find a solution satisfying all points of view, but really in order to gain time and keep the real conflict in the background. Such a practice imposes on the experts, whether working as a committee or as part of the secretariat, a responsibility which they are not equipped to fulfil. But if an international service is properly instructed either to execute a particular decision or to study a particular question, or if it is performing a recognized routine of work, the fact of it being internationally staffed is no handicap to its complete efficiency.

It is submitted that this conclusion is of great importance for the peace-makers. It means that in all their planning they can take it for granted that an efficient international administration can be set up to carry out their plans, provided that in this field just as in the greater field of policy, they on their side are prepared to create and maintain the necessary conditions. What these conditions are, we shall try to consider in the present report. They may prove to involve something of what is sometimes called "sacrifice," i.e. some change in the prestige and power of the national civil services as compared with the international service. This "sacrifice" however would be amply repaid by the increased efficiency which the

national services can derive from making use of the international machine in appropriate ways. This fact was increasingly understood, in the case of the League Secretariat, by the national civil services, which consequently came to give it a high degree of approval and support.

II. THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK

Current discussion on future international organization abounds with references to universalism, regionalism, joint functional boards, the Four Powers, federations great and small, and to what would in effect be a return to nineteenth-century balance of power. Although the present study is concerned only with the relatively restricted subject of the future international secretariat and the administrative problems which will arise in that connection, some postulates must be laid down as to the nature of the organization which the secretariat is designed to serve. It is clear that the League of Nations Secretariat, for example, would have presented a fundamentally different picture had the League been nothing more than a co-ordinating body for several regionally organized blocs, or if it had been entrusted with only security and political functions, on the one hand, or, on the other, with only welfare and technical functions.

Our first postulate is that the future international organization will be based largely on the concept of sovereign States. Observation of the actual strength of the feeling for national independence compels us to recognize that sovereign States are likely to remain, for as long as we can plan now, the elements of international order or disorder. The Atlantic Charter rests on this assumption, and the Four Power Declaration of Moscow specifically affirms it. The actual number of sovereign States in the world and, therefore, any alleged dangers which may flow from the mere fact of their multiplicity will be reduced if the advice sometimes tendered to some smaller States to federate is accepted; but even so the general world picture would not be radically changed. The immediate international issue will consequently continue to be how to promote better co-operation

among sovereign entities, not how to abolish them. Success in voluntary co-operation may lead States gradually to transfer more aspects of their sovereignty to the international organization than they are at present prepared to do.

Secondly, the practical impossibility of separating the problems either of peace or of welfare into watertight regional compartments points to the need of a world-wide organization. At first sight it may seem "reasonable" and "workable" to base organization on geographical propinquity, which is supposed to lead to a community of outlook and interest; but the real reason for proposals for a North Atlantic Bloc, a Pacific Bloc, Western or Eastern European Blocs is admittedly, strategic; it is assumed that the bloc in question will have within it, and co-operate for defence purposes with, one or more of the Great Powers. It is difficult to see how a satisfactory settlement can rest on such arrangements. The world-wide nature of major strategic problems has been demonstrated by events, and there is no geographical bloc, however favourably situated, within which aggression would not be facilitated if great areas in other parts of the world had no obligation to join in preventing it. Unless the whole attempt to organize security were abandoned, Powers of world-wide interests could in no case remain unconcerned by a threat to peace, nor could they in practice be included in two or more different and unco-ordinated blocs. Nor could other States with perhaps a few exceptions, renounce all interest in the maintenance of peace outside their own area. These considerations apply with equal force to economic relations and to the problems of world communications. If however they prove, as we believe, that an effective system of security must be organized in a world-wide form, this by no means excludes the possibility of regional arrangements for defence within the framework of "a world institution embodying or representing the United Nations, and some day all nations."¹

It is sometimes argued that regional organization is a first step towards universal organization; but there is a danger of crystallization on regional lines which would create vested interests in regionalism, and thus obstruct further development. There are other and

¹ Winston Churchill, broadcast, 21 March 1943.

greater dangers. For isolationists, wherever found, regionalism is attractive because it affords a pretext for indifference to what happens outside the closed circle. Conversely it appeals to those who believe in the *Herrenvolk* idea and seek to impose their will on neighbouring States, since in this case too the closed circle favours the application of their philosophy.

For certain classes of problems such as overland communications and power projects, regional organization is desirable and inevitable; but even here complete dissociation from a world-wide plan would probably involve certain disadvantages. As regards political problems, any formal or permanent regionalization is to be avoided; but preliminary treatment of particular, local questions by an *ad hoc* delegation of authority from the central organ to a regional agency might on occasion be applied profitably. It would meet the indifference of small States to distant problems and their special interest in affairs nearer at hand. At the same time the ultimate authority of the central organ must be so clear that no opportunity is given for one party in a dispute to obstruct or drag out the settlement by playing upon a conflict of jurisdictions, as Italy utilized the imprecise position of the League's authority *vis-à-vis* the Council of Ambassadors during the Corfu affair in 1923, or as both parties in the Chaco dispute used the existence of regional machinery to hamper or paralyse League action. This does not mean that the consideration of a dispute by a regional body should be excluded any more than its consideration through ordinary diplomatic channels, if both parties prefer such procedure; but the right of either party to refer to the world organization should at all times remain intact.

A world-wide system is thus the only answer to the otherwise insoluble problem of overlapping regions and networks of regional memberships. It seems most probable that in actual fact post-war international organization will have this world-wide character, starting with the United Nations—themselves drawn from all parts of the world—and expanding rapidly to include neutral countries and ultimately the ex-enemy countries.

Thirdly, it is assumed that the international organization will cover both political and, for want of a better term, "welfare" questions, economic, health, transport, labour, and other "technical"

matters; in other words, that it will deal with all problems which possess an international aspect. It is impossible to draw a clear-cut line between political and security questions, on the one hand, and welfare questions on the other, just as the treatment of neither class of question, taken separately, can be divided into neat regional compartments. Whether Aristide Briand was correct in saying that "le politique domine l'économique" may be debatable. What is not debatable is that political questions and economic questions are inextricable and that most welfare questions are potentially political questions. President Roosevelt affirmed the necessary connection in his address to the delegates to the Hot Springs Conference. After noting the inter-relationship of various welfare problems, he continued:

In the political field these relationships are equally important. And they work both ways. A sound world agricultural program will depend upon world political security, while that security will, in turn, be greatly strengthened if each country can be assured of the food it needs. Freedom from want and freedom from fear go hand in hand.¹

A body of experts appointed by the League Council in 1938 to study economic depressions has recently come to a similar conclusion:

We have mentioned a number of international functions which will require to be performed by appropriate organs whether temporary or permanent. But . . . if we are to avoid international economic anarchism, an anarchism which would be rendered rather more than less dangerous by the existence of a number of high-powered but headless international organs, means must be found for co-ordinating their policies. Secondly, economic policy must be correlated with political. Economic issues form a major part of political life. All political action has economic effects. Military security cannot be devised in an economic vacuum, nor economic security in the face of the threat of war.²

The experience of the League confirms the importance of recognizing this connection. There were periods when only a small part of its energies and machinery was required for major political problems. Simultaneously, however, it was kept continuously occupied

¹ *Department of State Bulletin*, 12 June 1943.

² *The Transition from War to Peace Economy*, Report of the Delegation on Economic Depressions, Part I, League of Nations, May 1943, pp. 108-109.

by the vigorous and conscious development of its welfare functions. Had this not been so, political and security questions, when they did arise, would have found the machinery for their treatment rusty at best or even disintegrated, and the final breakdown should not cause us to forget the historical truth that this machinery was frequently used to good effect. Conversely, the agents of the League concerned with welfare problems derived strength from their association with a body which was political in character.

The considerable progress achieved by the League in its best days was indeed largely due to the fact that it was occupied with the whole gamut of international problems. It brought together for collaboration in Geneva and elsewhere experts and delegates from all over the world endowed with a great variety of experience. Representing different nationalities and having one common interest—the successful treatment of international problems—they helped to create an atmosphere conducive to practical co-operation both within and beyond the sphere of their immediate interests.

We are aware that this thesis of the organic connection between the political and the welfare aspects of international life is not universally accepted, and that there is a tendency in some quarters to treat as secondary the need for an organized system of security, while giving full support to the expansion of welfare organizations. But in our belief experience shows that unless the two interests mutually reinforce each other even more than did the political and the technical activities of the League itself and the I.L.O., each is likely to fail of its full effect.

This does not mean that, in our view, the only suitable method of organizing international life after the war is to create at once a unitary and highly integrated organization, complete in all its parts. Some persons propose that future international organization should be along the lines of joint agencies for particular problems, based on those set up during the war by the United Nations to deal with problems of raw materials, shipping, production and distribution of food, and so on. They envisage, perhaps correctly, an expansion of such *ad hoc* agencies both in their functions and in the number of participating Governments, and foresee their development into a pattern of international bodies

entrusted with the continuous treatment of specific problems and composed of representatives of the Governments interested in each problem.

Of this piecemeal method of approach without reference to an overall plan, we say only two things. First, for reasons already given, effective organizations for security and international justice must be linked to welfare organizations. Secondly, it would be clearly advantageous and economical to provide common legal, informational, translating and other services for the various agencies. Moreover it seems inevitable that an annual assembly would be needed to consider the past performance of the several agencies and to determine their budgets. It would be cumbersome and inefficient to review their work and determine their budgets separately. Thus although there may be in existence, soon after the war, more or less separate organizations dealing with such matters as labour, surface and air transport, raw materials, currency, commodity allocation, food, education, health, drug control, refugees, control of armaments and security, as well as a court of justice, most of these would in our view tend to become linked, sooner or later, in a general organization comprising at least a central secretariat and an annual assembly, in which all participating States would be represented.

A review of budgets almost inevitably involves a review of policy, and, given the wide range of subjects covered, an assembly for such a purpose would tend to become a political and not merely a budgetary or administrative body. Such a development seems to us not only inevitable but altogether desirable. We would point out with all the emphasis at our command that progress in welfare matters can ultimately be secured only if peace is assured, and that the primary and essential duty of any international organization must be to check any tendency towards aggression and to prevent aggression by force if need be.

III. SCOPE OF THE INQUIRY

We are not concerned with the everyday administrative problems which are usually covered by a handbook of office rules. They are familiar to every administrator and appear in international