

# Visions Beyond Empire



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# Visions Beyond Empire

British Federalism & Post-Imperial United Kingdom,  
1884–1945

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UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

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Cover: The cover shows a section from *The Menin Road*, depicting a battle scene  
from the First World War. A further analysis on its meaning can be found on page  
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## Abstract

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This study seeks to trace federalists' continuous effort to envision and plan for the end of the empire from 1884 to 1945. While British federalism changed a lot during this period, there was a constant concern with the post-imperial world order and this thesis studies the federalist texts based on the context of the contemporary reckoning with the shifts to the UK's geopolitical standing. Seen in this way, the British federalists were not only important in developing political theory, but also one of the earliest and most serious examples of attempting to pre-empt and influence the dissolution of the British Empire.

In order to do the tradition of British federalism justice, this thesis studies the central federalist organisations—Imperial Federation League (1884–1893), The Round Table (1909–today) & Federal Union (1939–today)—as well as the activity and careers of their members. Some of the key figures are Lord Lothian, Lionel Curtis, Leo Amery, W. T. Stead, F. A. Hayek, Harold Laski, William Beveridge, Barbara Wootton, and Lord Rosebery. As such, the thesis applies a close contextual reading of the federalist texts as a framework for understanding contemporary geopolitics, entwined with British public life, rather than as a series of isolated constitutional schemes.

I will argue that one can find an early British example of a discourse on post-imperial global order within the British federalist tradition. The federalists developed a number of narratives as to how and why the British Empire should end, principally informed by their relationship to history and the emplotment into which they inscribed themselves. This thesis surveys a transition from preservationist narratives—whose main aim was to preserve British cultural influence—to utilisationist narratives—aspiring to utilise British imperial institutions and the UK's

global standing in order to further the progress towards a global union. This text demonstrates how this aspect of federalist thinking is relevant to its contemporary political discourse, and how the fundamental elements of this transition were already in place following the First World War. It reframes the tradition of British federalism, not only as an important hub for the development of 'the federalist idea', but as a way of thinking about and discussing the post-imperial world order.

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# Introduction

In 1883, John Seeley famously suggested that the British Empire was won ‘in a fit of absence of mind’, to which David Cannadine later added, and ‘given away in a fit of collective indifference.’<sup>1</sup> While these quotes euphemistically disregard the fervour and doggedness of much of the colonial oppression, they strike at the persistent marginality of imperial issues within the British domestic debate. The long-term planning of colonial policy consistently competed for political attention with the inherent immediacy of domestic issues. This is a study of people who, contrary to popular sentiment, tirelessly scrutinised and planned for the future of the British Empire. People who grappled with the issue of how and when the Empire should be given away, projecting visions of a post-imperial world order. More specifically, this text concerns British federalists and their ambitions towards a federal future for the United Kingdom.

The federalists were not alone in planning for the Empire’s end but, uniquely, they represent a long-lived endeavour which, over the span of six decades, engaged numerous people on the issue of a post-imperial world order. The backbone of British federalism was composed of three core organisations: The Imperial Federation League (1884–1893), The Round Table (1910–), and Federal Union (1938–).<sup>2</sup> During the period studied, 1883–1945, they attracted a large number of prominent members for whom they would act as discussion forums and through which they ensured their continued relevance to British public debate. Many of the ideas that were developed within the federalist context would prove consequential for the understanding of the late British Empire and play a central role in the debate on the future world order.

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (1890) [1883] London: Macmillan & Co., p. 8; David Cannadine, ‘Apocalypse When? British Politicians and British “Decline” in the Twentieth Century’, in Peter Clarke and Clive Trebilcock (eds.), *Understanding Decline: Perceptions and Realities of British Economic Performance* (1997) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> Both of the latter organisations have lived on to the present day. The Round Table has veered from its federalist mission to Commonwealth promotion, most tangibly through its peer-reviewed journal *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*. Federal Union has maintained its federalist character and with most of its activity emanating from its think tank, Federal Trust, it has become a vehicle for promoting closer EU–UK ties.

In terms of their programs, all of the federalists studied in this text supported a centralising notion of federalism, aiming for an establishment of a supranational union in which the United Kingdom would become a member. From the 1880s until the end of the Second World War, this aim manifested in different ways, and what began as the ambition to federalise the colonies of the empire had by the end of the period transformed into an aspiration for international stability through world federation. What remained constant during this period was the fundamental issue with which these schemes grappled: what would the global order look like beyond the lifespan of the British Empire, and how could it be planned for? The answers to this question varied, certainly, but federalists were reliably serious in their consideration of the nature of a post-imperial global order. It was an intellectual endeavour of a temporal and spatial scale that allowed federalist organisations to offer forums and platforms for political discussion that attracted a wide range of British intellectuals and politicians. In the federalist context, they allowed themselves to envision a future in which the geopolitical issues of the day had been settled, and they contemplated the nature of the solutions that would prove adequate in scope. This is a study of those federalist visions.

## Previous Research

‘The conventional wisdom is that federalist ideas in Great Britain have always fallen on stony soil.’<sup>3</sup> British Federalism has long been considered an anomaly within the British political tradition and it was not until the late twentieth century that a small group of scholars found the movement worthy of serious academic attention.

During in the 1980s and 90s, the intellectual history of the late British Empire had become dominated by efforts to define and assess its decline. In *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role*—for example—David Sanders explores how the British establishment struggled to come to terms with the geopolitical transformation following World War II in a way that came to define the intellectual process of decolonisation.<sup>4</sup> Others approached decolonisation from a political perspective. In his article ‘The Figures of Descent’, Perry Anderson explores the political transformation that the United Kingdom underwent during the process of imperial

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Simeon, ‘The British Tradition of Federalism by Michael Burgess’ (1996) *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 26:3, p. 206.

<sup>4</sup> David Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role* (1990) London: Macmillan Education Ltd.



decline.<sup>5</sup> There were also significant efforts made to define the declinist discourse as such, both in terms of the historical as well as the historiographical understanding of the concept of decline. In this case, the obligatory reference is Jim Tomlinson's excellent *The Politics of Decline*.<sup>6</sup>

One branch within this research that is of particular interest to this study is the research on the early Commonwealth. The early Commonwealth is one aspect of British imperial history where the efforts of British federalists, The Round Table in particular, is so evident that texts such as Max Beloff's *Dream of Commonwealth 1921–1942* and David McIntyre's 'Commonwealth Legacy' acknowledge their importance.<sup>7</sup> They do not go so far as to pronounce federalism's relevance *per se*, but do view the work of people that prioritised closer imperial ties and constitutional flexibility as vital to this history.

Twenty-first century imperial history has tended to circumvent the concept of 'decline' as such and efforts have been focused more on late imperialism and the late Empire in certain periods or in relation to certain issues. Ashley Jackson's *The British Empire and the Second World War*, for example, provides a thorough and detailed survey of how the Empire was mobilised during World War II and how British imperial conditions were transformed in its aftermath.<sup>8</sup> Stuart Middleton's 'The Crisis of Democracy in Interwar Britain', offers a more targeted survey of how the British political machinery adapted to new democratic demands in the wake of World War I.<sup>9</sup> These can also be studies more of themes than issues, such as Bernhard Rieger's *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890–1945*.<sup>10</sup> Some of the most valuable of these have scrutinised imperialism itself, for example Cannadine's *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*.<sup>11</sup>

The United Kingdom's role in the twentieth century global order has also been addressed in a number of studies of a more bilateral nature, exploring the issue through the lens of a particular relationship. In his *Dreamworlds of Race*, Bell explores

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<sup>5</sup> Perry Anderson, 'The Figures of Descent' (January–February 1987) *New Left Review* I:161.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-War Britain* (2000) Harlow: Longman.

<sup>7</sup> Max Beloff, *Dream of Commonwealth 1921–1942* (1989) London: Macmillan; and David McIntyre, 'Commonwealth Legacy', in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis (eds.), *The Twentieth Century* (1999) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (2006) London: Hambledon Continuum.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Middleton, 'The Crisis of Democracy in Interwar Britain' (February 2023) *The Historical Journal* 66:1.

<sup>10</sup> Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890–1945* (2005) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>11</sup> David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (2001) London: Allen Lane.

the nuances of Anglo-American thinking on the countries' shared role in a new geopolitical hegemony.<sup>12</sup> Another example is Robert Gildea's *Empires of the Mind: The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present*, exploring the UK's relationship to Europe in the age of imperial decline.<sup>13</sup>

These texts, particularly prior to the twenty-first century, seldom touch upon the existence of British federalism and tend to view federalist elements as accidental or inconsequential. Federalism has long been seen as its own field of study. The earliest studies of federalism in the UK can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, when key periods and issues from British federalism began to be studied. Two names quickly came to dominate the field as a result of their significant productivity: historian John Kendle and political scientist Michael Burgess.<sup>14</sup> By the early 1990s, their cumulative efforts culminated in two comprehensive volumes, spanning the entirety of British federalist history. Burgess' *The British Tradition of Federalism* and Kendle's *Federal Britain* would redefine federalist research in that they managed to present a compelling case for a cohesive, federalist tradition which connected several disparate federalist expressions in a convincing and consistent manner. They claimed the existence not only of federalists in Britain, but of a British federalism.<sup>15</sup> The 1990s included important works by historian Andrea Bosco, who contributed with key insights on the connections between British and continental federalism.<sup>16</sup> Taken together, their efforts resulted in what can be described as federalist historiography's golden age, asserting itself as a relevant field of study.

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<sup>12</sup> Duncan Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race: Empire and the Utopian Destiny of Anglo-America* (2020) Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Gildea, *Empires of the Mind: The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present* (2019) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>14</sup> A notable work worth mentioning from this early period is Kendle's study of The Round Table's relationship to the concept of an imperial union and how this ought to be understood in terms of federalist convictions, see John Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (1975) Toronto; Buffalo. A representative example for Burgess is his study of Lord Rosebery's relationship to the IFL, demonstrating the relevance of British federalism as a political force in the 1880s and 1890s, Michael Burgess, 'Lord Rosebery and the Imperial Federation League, 1884–1893' (October 1979) *The New Zealand Journal of History* 13:2.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism* (1995) London: Leicester University Press; and John Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History* (1997) London: Routledge.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Andrea Bosco, 'Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union Movement (1938–40)' (1988) *Journal of Contemporary History* 23:3; and Andrea Bosco, 'Federal Union, Chatham House, the Foreign Office and Anglo-French Union in Spring 1940', in Andrea Bosco (ed.), *The Federal Idea: The History of Federalism from Enlightenment to 1945* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press.

Tangential to the field of British federalist history, but decidedly relevant to it, are several biographies about key federalist members. In the cases where the individual's involvement in the federalist movement was extensive, such as Deborah Lavin's *From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis*, or J. R. M. Butler's *Lord Lothian, 1886–1941*, their contributions to the field are obvious.<sup>17</sup> Some, such as Ann Oakley's *A Critical Woman: Barbara Wootton, Social Science and Public Policy in the Twentieth Century*, consider and mention the subject's federalist involvement but one would be hard-pressed to consider these contributions to federalist research in their own right.<sup>18</sup> A third category denies federalism's relevance completely, for example W. M. Roger Louis in his *In the Name of God, Go! Leo Amery and the British Empire in the Age of Churchill*.<sup>19</sup> The biographies can to varying degrees be considered a part of relevant previous research, and in this study's efforts to reframe the role of British federalism within the context of British political history, this will inform also how we ought to understand these individuals. As such, while this thesis is not a biographical study, the biographies of the main players involved in federalism ought to be considered part of the wider historiographical effort to understand late British imperialism and the contributions of this thesis ought to be just as informative for their outlooks—perhaps particularly in cases where the federalist connection has been previously downplayed.

Scholarly interest in federalism waned sharply with the advent of the twenty-first century, and it was not until the 2010s when new efforts emerged to prove its relevance, now in more immediate relation to the history of the late British Empire. One could argue that Rosenboim played a key role in this endeavour, looking at the wider relevance of Federal Union as a forum for intellectual debate in her article 'Barbara Wootton, Friedrich Hayek and the Debate on Democratic Federalism in the 1940s'.<sup>20</sup> Bosco made important contributions towards demonstrating the relevance of Federal Union's work to the early history of the European Union

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<sup>17</sup> See Deborah Lavin, *From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis* (2011) Oxford: Clarendon Press; and J. R. M. Butler, *Lord Lothian (Philip Kerr) 1882–1940* (1960) London: Macmillan.

<sup>18</sup> Ann Oakley, *A Critical Woman: Barbara Wootton, Social Science and Public Policy in the Twentieth Century* (2011) London: Bloomsbury Academic.

<sup>19</sup> W. M. Roger Louis, *In the Name of God, Go! Leo Amery and the British Empire in the Age of Churchill* (1992) London: W. W. Norton & co. This disregard for federalism can be contrasted with the more recent study, Yuhei Hazegawa, 'An Intellectual and Political Biography of Leopold Amery (1873-1955)', (University of Exeter, 2022) pp. 113–35.

<sup>20</sup> Or Rosenboim, 'Barbara Wootton, Friedrich Hayek and the Debate on Democratic Federalism in the 1940s' (2014) *The International History Review* 36:5.

in for example *June 1940, Great Britain and the First Attempt to Build a European Union*.<sup>21</sup>

During this period, federalist accounts were increasingly included in the intellectual historiography of the late British Empire. In his *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900*, for example, Duncan Bell considers several federalist ideas within the context of the Victorian discourse on ‘Greater Britain’.<sup>22</sup> Theodore Koditschek, likewise, examined a number of federalists as part of a liberal late-Victorian reckoning with history in his *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of Greater Britain*.<sup>23</sup> An example from the twentieth century is Or Rosenboim’s *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939–1950*, which contextualises federalist ideas within the wider scope of how the world order was viewed in the 1940s in both the UK and the US.<sup>24</sup>

While these studies, and many of the most recent accounts of the late British Empire more generally, tend to present federalism’s role in British political history in a measured and adequate way, they fail to consider federalism as a tradition. Although federalists and federalist ideas have been welcomed into the British political canon, British federalism as a diachronic phenomenon with specific characteristics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has not been considered a significant part of British political history. This study assumes a diachronic approach to British federalism—what Guldi and Armitage describe as one of the distinguishing features of historical analysis—exploring federalism’s long-term impact on British politics.<sup>25</sup> Utilising the basis of a post-imperial global order, this thesis will provide empirical groundwork and theoretical framework to conceive of the role played by federalist tradition in British political history.

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<sup>21</sup> Andrea Bosco, *June 1940, Great Britain and the First Attempt to Build a European Union* (2016) Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

<sup>22</sup> Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (2008) Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>23</sup> Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain* (2011) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939–1950* (2017) Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>25</sup> Jo Guldi & David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (2014) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## Aim & Questions

This thesis examines how the federalists envisioned the post-imperial world order. This requires understanding how the federalists thought and how they related to contemporary political discourse. My study is, thus, guided by two research questions. 1) What did the federalists see as the benefits of a federal constitution to the post-imperial world order? 2) How did the federalist ideas relate to the contemporary imperial discourse?

Regarding the first question, envisioning a federal order from a British perspective inherently entailed taking stock of the distinctly English or British qualities most beneficial to such an order. Planning for the end of the Empire also meant assessing which aspects would prove most valuable to any future arrangement. This required both looking back to the past—discerning what the United Kingdom had become and what distinguished its character—as well as looking forward to the future—determining its possible contributions to national and global prosperity.

Federalist concern for the geopolitical order was part of a broader British debate. As such, the first question underscores the fact that this study is concerned with federalism primarily as an intellectual framework for engaging with the question of post-imperial stability, rather than as a series of constitutional schemes. In this text, federalism is regarded as a way of making sense of and structuring geopolitical issues, as well as consolidating federalists through a shared frame of reference, terminology, and assessment of the contemporary political conditions.

The second question focuses on the relationship between federalist ideas and their discursive context in two ways, ideologically and sociologically. I examine how federalist ideas related to contemporary discourse ideologically by viewing federalism as a part of a society-wide effort to understand and theorise what we now accept as the late British Empire. This effort entailed identifying both the similarities, interpreting federalism as a part of British political thinking at the time, and the distinguishing features, recognising the particularly federalist strains of those debates.

This thesis will explore how federalists related to contemporary discourse sociologically by delving into how federalists organised themselves as a group, as well as how they engaged with other parts of British political life. Federalist ideas were discussed and developed within explicitly federalist circles, but they were also exported and applied to a great deal of political work outside of the exclusively federalist realm. In this text I aim to outline out how federalism, through the work

of its proponents, was entangled with the British political machinery of its day. To do this, we must first define federalism as an object of study. The following two sections will clarify how this thesis in particular approaches and delineates British federalism.

## Federalism's Organisational Core

In its conceptual history, 'federalism' is closely related to its cousin, 'sovereignty'. Soon after Bodin and Hobbes established the idea of sovereignty as a central political concept, the religious notion of *foedus*—that is covenant, alliance (same root as *fides*)—was translated into the secular *fédéral*.<sup>26</sup> John Locke later used the term in *Two Treatises* and federalism was offered as one of the options during the negotiations preceding the union between England and Scotland. However, its emergence as a realistic alternative within political discourse came with the American Revolution and the *Federalist Papers*.<sup>27</sup> When writing the American Constitution, federation was seen as the optimal compromise that allowed for partial state independence, while still incorporating the small member states into the 'tempered and cool' political framework of what they described as a national government.<sup>28</sup>

While the mentions of federalism from 1707 ought to be understood as a negotiation tactic rather than a serious possibility, the first appearance of what can be described as a sustained British federalist discourse can be found in the wake of the establishment of federal constitutions in Switzerland and Germany in 1848 and 1849, respectively. The notion had been discussed prior to that, but in 1853 a critical mass of proposals had finally emerged, leading Reverend William Arthur to coin the term 'imperial federation'.<sup>29</sup> While the term in itself is vague—even contradictory—several different schemes had been proposed based on the idea of

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<sup>26</sup> See Otto Brunner, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon Zur Politisch-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (1972) Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, pp. 103 & 07–11; and Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1985) [1651] Harmondsworth: Penguin.

<sup>27</sup> See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government: In the Former, the False Principles and Foundation of Sir Robert Filmer, and His Followers, Are Detected and Overthrown. The Latter Is an Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil-Government. By John Locke, Esq* (1796) Glasgow: D. Boag, p. 341; and James Hodges, 'The Rights and Interests of the Two British Monarchies, Inquir'd into, and Clear'd: With a Special Respect to an United or Separate State' (1703) London, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> John Jay, 'The Federalist No. 3', in Edward Mead Earle (ed.), *The Federalist: A Commentary on the Constitutions of the United States* (1941) New York: The Modern Library, pp. 14–22.

<sup>29</sup> Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, pp. 23–25.

a supranational union between former British colonies throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> By 1884, federalism had attracted enough interest and support that a movement was underway which would eventually form the basis for the first of the three British federalist organisations.

In his famous *Autobiography*, R. G. Collingwood asserts that a statement cannot be made eligible without a question to which it is an answer. Collingwood argues that because of this, various statements be seen as contributing to a certain idea, but in order to contextualise them with each other, one must consider certain fundamental questions—and sub-questions—which they attempt to answer.<sup>31</sup> The study of British federalism is complicated by the fact that its features and characteristics fluctuate during this period, and that the federalist answers provided in 1884 are virtually unrecognisable compared with those provided in 1945. Regarding its question, however, British federalists were consistent in their basic aspiration to tackle the challenges of a post-imperial global order.

Previous comprehensive studies of British federalism have tended to define it in analytical terms.<sup>32</sup> That is, federalism has been primarily understood as adherence to a set of beliefs that can be compared over time. This has not been completely at odds with a historical definition of federalism—as almost all the adherents were self-proclaimed federalists—but previous studies have attempted to identify the longevity, recurrence, and impact of the federal idea in British political thinking.

In contrast, this study adopts a historical perspective on the history of federalism, utilising a lens of ideas that were not limited to federal constitution and how they related to the British political thinking of the time. It studies federalism as a framework for answering the questions regarding a post-imperial global order. Federalism was a framework both as a set of interconnected ideas and as a number of organisations which allowed individuals to discuss and consolidate their views.

There are several features that unite these answers beyond their shared engagement in post-imperial planning. The overwhelming majority of those discussed herein are self-proclaimed federalists and those who are not are active members in the core organisations and their activities. What the federalists meant by ‘federal-

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<sup>30</sup> Ged Martin, 'Empire Federalism and Imperial Parliamentary Union, 1820-1870' (1973) *The Historical Journal* XVI:1.

<sup>31</sup> Robin George Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (1964) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 31–33.

<sup>32</sup> See Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History*; Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*; and John Pinder, 'The Federal Idea and the British Liberal Tradition', in Andrea Bosco (ed.), *The Federal Idea: The History of Federalism from Enlightenment to 1945* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press.

ism' varied, and at times could seem somewhat vague, but they shared the conviction that many of the most central issues of their ages needed to be tackled constitutionally and in a centralised effort—meaning, federalism not for increased local sovereignty (on the lines of devolution), but rather primarily as a means for closer and institutionalised international cooperation, focusing governmental resources to be able to tackle common issues. The composition of these proposed international communities varies quite a bit, but the two dominant models are an imperial federalism—uniting the inhabitants of the former empire—and a more continental, anti-nationalist, federalism—ultimately striving for a united world, but often via a European or Anglo-American union as a stepping stone. These constitute the two main modes of British federalism and offer us a sense of the nature of the ideas that they included.

Assuming an organisational approach to federalism, this thesis centres its definition on the three main organisations in United Kingdom history committed to a federalist program. The Imperial Federation League (IFL), The Round Table (RT), and Federal Union (FU) are significant first in that their mere existence speaks to a degree of popular interest in federalist ways of thinking; the fact that there is enough support for federalism to sustain an organisation confirms federalism's relevance to public opinion. Second, the organisations are vital to defining a shared body of ideas—a 'federalism'—that extends beyond the ideas of individual federalists. Some federalists have acted independently of these three organisations, but these are exceptions rather than a kind of concerted interest representative of a substantial mood shift of the time.<sup>33</sup> Several other organisations besides the three mentioned above could be called 'federalist', such as The British Empire League and The New Commonwealth Society. They dealt with similar issues, and in a few instances involved the same members, but refrained from committing fully to the federalist cause.

Together, these three constitute what I describe as the 'organisational core' of federalism. This study defines 'British federalism' as the totality of the activity committed in their names and the intellectual efforts that can be related to both the federalist individuals and ideas. These three organisations have a clear, ideological relationship with each other and although their answers might differ and they are not always—but most often—connected by direct ties, they share in an organised, focused commitment to understand and make way for the United

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<sup>33</sup> For the best accounts of federalist activity before the founding of the first federalist organisation in 1884, see Martin, 'Empire Federalism and Imperial Parliamentary Union'; and Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History*, pp. 1–36.



Kingdom to become a member state within a federation. In order to define the object of study, the remainder of this section will elaborate on the make-up of the three federalist organisations and some of the basic parameters that have informed my approach. This ‘core’ is complemented in the following section with the ‘margins’ of federalism’s entanglement with the rest of British society, together constituting the entirety of federalism as an object of study.

All three of the major British federalist organisations were political interest groups. That is, they acted almost exclusively within the realm of British politics—i.e. to alter public opinion and (consequently) establish policy—and did so to represent the federalist interest.<sup>34</sup> However, the field of research on political organisations has quite a thorny terminology and the following paragraphs are written with the intention to clarify some of the choices made in this description and some of the nuances with regards to the character of the British federalist organisations.

If one sought to emphasise the organisations’ wish to alter policy, it would be perfectly valid to describe these organisations as public pressure groups.<sup>35</sup> The altering of policy was certainly a central aim of these organisations, but they were also seriously engaged with the shaping of public opinion. There is an argument to be made for treating them like Bert Klanderman does, as ‘secondary pressure groups’—and The Round Table may even qualify as a primary pressure group—but even if political interest group is a vaguer choice, it better represents both of the two areas of the organisations’ activities.<sup>36</sup> For similar reasons, I have refrained

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<sup>34</sup> Historically, research has differentiated between public interest groups, which claim to represent the common interest on a certain issue, and interest groups in a narrower sense, advocating for a cause in the interest of a certain group. In contemporary usage, this distinction is seldom emphasised, but it may be worth noting that the federalist organisations certainly saw themselves as belonging to the first category. For a thorough definition of the categories, see Jeffrey M. Berry, *Lobbying for the People. The Political Behavior of Public Interest Groups* (1977) Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 6–11. For an example of the sometimes harsh criticism directed at the latter, see Michael J. Brenner, 'Functional Representation and Interest Group Theory: Some Notes on British Practice' (1969) *Comparative Politics* 2:1, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> See Wyn Grant, *Pressure Groups and British Politics* (2000) London: Macmillan Press Ltd, p. 7; and Bert Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* (1997) Hoboken: Wiley, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest*, pp. 15–17. It has also been argued that political interest groups and political parties are similar enough, particularly with regards to how they respond and adapt to challenges, that they would benefit from being lumped together as ‘political organisations’, see Bert Fraussen and Darren R. Halpin, 'Political Parties and Interest Organizations at the Crossroads: Perspectives on the Transformation of Political Organizations' (February 2016) *Political Studies Review* 16:1, pp. 10–17. In a similar vein, political scientist Lisa Mueller suggests that ‘advocacy groups’ is a more fruitful collective label, as these organisations advocate on behalf of their members, Lisa Mueller, 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall? How Signals of Activist Cohesion Affect Attraction to Advocacy Organizations' (Mars 2021) *Interest*

from using the term 'lobby group', even though at times the groups attempted to 'lobby through constituents' in that they organised public opinion towards policy makers.<sup>37</sup> Lastly, they could very well be described as NGOs, but that is a category widely regarded as inclusive to the extent that it is meaningless without further specification.<sup>38</sup>

Beyond just describing the activities of the organisations in question, the labelling as political interest groups is indicative of how these organisations structured themselves. They all, to varying degrees, adhered to what is often understood as the 'traditional' form of political interest groups. This means that they were, generally, funded primarily by a substantial membership and that the organisation was built largely to facilitate the cohesion and communication of its members. With nation-wide (in the case of IFL and RT, empire-wide) representational ambitions, they established local branches in order to reach members and to establish a far-reaching presence.<sup>39</sup> Within this framework, The Round Table and the Imperial Federation League distinguished themselves as being built on strong personal ties, primarily within the organisations' leaderships, while Federal Union could be characterised as based on a network of weaker ties.<sup>40</sup> The political interest group is an established part of modern politics and the federalist organisations employed methods approved by the political establishment which can be seen to represent the ambitions of political insiders, in a broad sense of the term.<sup>41</sup>

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*Groups & Advocacy* 10:1. In this case, both alternatives have been discarded because they are seen as diminishing the theoretical precision.

<sup>37</sup> Berry, *Lobbying for the People*, pp. 212–52. For an older but well-worded definition of a lobby group, see Lester W. Milbrath, *The Washington Lobbyists* (1976) Westport: Greenwood Press, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> See for example Heather Gautney, *Protest and Organization in the Alternative Globalization Era: Ngos, Social Movements, and Political Parties* (2010) New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 88–91; and Grant, *Pressure Groups and British Politics*, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the traditional interest group form, see Darren R. Halpin, *The Organization of Political Interest Groups: Designing Advocacy* (2014) London: Routledge, pp. 60–61.

<sup>40</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the meaning and consequences of the strength of organisational ties, see Mark S. Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties' (May 1973) *American Journal of Sociology* 78:6.

<sup>41</sup> The fact that they acted within the realm of established political practice differentiates them from traditional social movements, even if the federalist issue sometimes attracted something akin to a movement. Klandermans, for example, describes social movements as 'disruptive', which would not fit the federalist tradition at any stage, Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest*, p. 2. For more on the 'outsider' character of social movements, see David A. Snow et al., 'Introduction: Mapping and Opening up the Terrain', in David A. Snow et al. (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (2019) Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, p. 6.

To understand why interest groups act the way they do, political scientist Darren R. Halpin posits that the structure of an organisation can be explained as the product of three factors: its self-understood identity, its most commonly used strategies, and its technical resources. When any of these factors change, so do the conditions that determine the suitability of a certain organisational setup. Other factors, for example the ideas of the organisation's leaders, are primarily influential through their privileged position to shape the discussions surrounding any of these factors.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, Halpin, together with political scientist Bert Fraussen, claims that interest organisations base their pursued policy changes primarily on five factors. 1) Is it in the interest of the organisation's members and donors? 2) Does the organisation command the proper resources to influence the issue? 3) Is it an otherwise neglected issue? 4) Are the political conditions favourable? And 5) Is it an issue of great salience?<sup>43</sup> Lastly, like most organisations and institutions, political interest groups and their decisions must be understood as guided by the mechanisms of path dependency and isomorphism.<sup>44</sup>

These are the basic principles that governed the organisations which constituted the foundation of British federalism and ensured its cohesion. There were, however, other forces that continually reasserted the autonomy of the individual members.

## Federalism's Entangled Margins

Finding it difficult to define their ideologies in a stringent manner, British federalist organisations tended to assume positions of well-documented constructive amb-

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<sup>42</sup> Halpin, *The Organization of Political Interest Groups*, pp. 105–09.

<sup>43</sup> Darren R. Halpin and Bert Fraussen, 'Interest Group Policy Positions and Priorities', in Allan J. Cigler, Burdett A. Loomis, and Anthony J. Nownes (eds.), *Interest Group Politics* (2020) Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 218–26.

<sup>44</sup> Path dependency describes the tendency to stick with choices already made, even as they prove suboptimal. For a good overview of how path dependency is understood within the study of politics, see Perola Öberg and Kajsa Hallberg Adu, 'The Deceptive Juncture: The Temptation of Attractive Explanations and the Reality of Political Life', in Lars Magnusson and Jan Ottosson (eds.), *The Evolution of Path Dependence* (2009) Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd. Isomorphism is the urge of any organisation to model one's decisions on the decisions of similar surrounding organisations, even if they are not an optimal fit. A great introduction to organisational isomorphism can be found in Paul J. Dimaggio & Walter W. Powell, 'The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality', in Paul J. Dimaggio and Walter W. Powell (eds.), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (1991) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 63–82.

iguity.<sup>45</sup> This, in turn, allowed federalism to attract extensive interest but at the cost of cohesion, which in turn led to individual members both gaining traction within the movement as well as defining their own brands of federalism.

This split between an organisational core, acting centripetally to tie federalism together and the margins of individuals, centrifugally pushing their own agendas is essential to understanding the character of British federalism. To understand federalism's role in British society and its mode of existence, one must keep two parallel processes in mind: federalists acted persistently to consolidate themselves through their organisations and to entangle themselves with the rest of British political life through the merits of their individual achievements.

The theoretical concept of 'entanglement' was first introduced in post-colonial studies as a means to challenge a linear and unidirectional understanding of Western influence. In contrast to a smooth and coherent transfer of Western modernity to the rest of the world, the concept of entanglement allowed for a treatment that took into account the messy and at times contradictory processes of Western–Non-Western interaction, without submitting oneself to a model of causality or determinism.<sup>55F46</sup> The entanglement approach entails neither a complete concession of delineations nor hierarchies, rather it challenges their prominence in traditional narratives as they often extenuate the messy and incomplete state of processes of influence.<sup>47</sup>

With time, other fields of research have adopted the entanglement concept, at times stripping it of its emancipatory dimensions.<sup>48</sup> This study will look at the extent to which British federalism was entangled in the rest of contemporary British society. As federalist policy failed to gain traction in society at large, the federalist way of thinking made its biggest mark through its entanglement with different parts of British political life. Understanding federalism as entangled

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<sup>45</sup> See Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, p. 50 and my master's thesis (before I was married), Jens Ramberg, 'Vague but Simple to Grasp. A Study of the Intellectual Production of Federal Union 1938-1945', Master thesis (University of Gothenburg, 2016).

<sup>46</sup> Shalini Randeria, 'Entangled Histories of Uneven Modernities: Civil Society, Caste Solidarities and Legal Pluralism in Post-Colonial India', in Yehuda Elkana et al. (eds.), *Unraveling Ties - From Social Cohesion to New Practices of Connectedness* (2002) Frankfurt: Campus, pp. 284–92.

<sup>47</sup> Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, 'Einleitung: Geteilte Geschichten - Europa in Einer Postkolonialen Welt', in Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (eds.), *Jenseits Der Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in Den Geschichts- Und Kulturwissenschaften* (2002) Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, pp. 17–19.

<sup>48</sup> See for example Klas-Göran Karlsson, 'The Evil Twins of Modern History? Reflections on the Entangled History of Communism and National Socialism', in Klas-Göran Karlsson, Johan Stenfeldt, and Ulf Zander (eds.), *Perspectives on the Entangled History of Communism and Nazism: A Connaz Analysis* (2015) Lanham: Lexington Books, p. 12.

requires one to see it not as a ‘various and often contradictory’ set of ideas, which were ‘creatively used and deployed’ rather than ‘a single coherent idea’, which was ‘emerging fully formed’.<sup>49</sup> These entanglements constitute what I have been referring to as the extensive margins of British federalism and it is only through considering them that one can study the full impact of federalism on British public life.

In more straightforward terms, these margins are embodied by the individuals who had immediate connections to these three organisations but who married their federalist conviction with their other commitments. They even brought a federalist set of assumptions into their work which was not explicitly federalist. These accounts are important expressions of British federalism’s extension within British society. The way federalists approached and understood the question of post-imperial Britain had repercussions beyond the gatherings explicitly subscribed to the federalist agenda.

As a result, this thesis covers not only the activity of the three federalist organisations with regards to their perspectives on a post-imperial global order, but also the people with obvious ties to these organisations who had a significant influence in their own careers. In some of these cases—such as with the journalist W.T. Stead, political heavyweight L. S. Amery, colonial administrator Edward Grigg, civil servant William Beveridge, author Olaf Stapledon, and sociologist Barbara Wootton—the accounts are based on an analysis of the primary sources, gaining an in-depth understanding of how their federalist experience became interwoven with their ambitions outside of self-proclaimed federalism. In other cases—such as with historian E. A. Freeman, author John Buchan, political theorist Harold Laski, and economist F. A. Hayek—the accounts are briefer and based predominantly on secondary sources which have already explored the issue. My study seeks to map out all these expressions of federalism while also simultaneously presenting them in a proportionate manner that provides a representative picture of federalism’s impact on British society during that period of time. The individuals vary greatly with regards to their degree of influence on the federalist organisations they were connected to, their influence through their outside careers, and with regards to the extent they were influenced by a federalist frame of reference in their outside work. Finally, they vary significantly regarding the extent to which their federalism has already been explored in previous research. These factors have informed my approach to the margins of British Federalism,

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<sup>49</sup> Randeria, ‘Entangled Histories of Uneven Modernities’, p. 292.

giving an account that is honest, fair, and original. Having outlined the object of study, the next section will offer an in-depth overview of the available sources.

## Primary Sources

The heterogeneity of British federalism over time combined with the extensive period of study has resulted in a primary literature whose character does not allow itself to be defined in a concise manner. The following account will, however, detail the main categories of primary literature—together comprising the overwhelming majority of the sources consulted in this study—and comment on their character and quality as historical documents.

There have been certain principles guiding this study in its navigation among the federalist sources. A main one has been the priority of published sources over non-published ones. Published sources have been considered more illustrative of the author's contemplated worldview and more influential on British federalism at large. Unpublished sources have been employed to establish the frequency of an argument or to add nuance to its logic, but generally, they have not been studied in an exhaustive way and have only been used as the basis for two of the case studies. Apart from these, sources that pertain to an organisation have been prioritised based on their centrality to the organisation. Centrality has been assessed by factors such as the author's role within the organisation and how the organisation presented and advertised its publication.

It is worth noting that, to a large extent, the present study has been made possible by the digitised character of much of the relevant material. In many cases this has allowed for a targeted reading of large swaths of literature focused on the themes relevant to the aim. Bodies of work such as *The Round Table* and *Pall Mall Gazette* catalogues, as well as the Hansard records from the House of Commons, would have proven insurmountable if not well-organised and searchable.

Regarding different categories of material, the most important and abundant has been the organisations' journals. The monthly *Imperial Federation*, quarterly *The Round Table*, and weekly *Federal Union News* all constituted key aspects of the organisations' overall activity and collected and disseminated the outlines of a coherent, organisational position. There were certainly conflicts within these publications, but the large number of articles has permitted the identification of trends and a basis for assertions on the dominant views within the memberships on many specific issues.

Alongside reoccurring publications, the organisations have also published important standalone material. These include in-depth written material such as memorandums or official reports, as well as promotional and superficial material in the form of pamphlets and advertisements.<sup>50</sup> In addition to providing insight into the top-down view of the organisation, these publications also offer an important indication of the public image that the organisations wished to project.

Meeting minutes and organisation correspondence has played an important part in establishing the nature of the organisations' activity. In some cases, these unpublished sources have also helped reveal disunity on certain issues, mostly relevant to the case studies of individual federalists.

Monographs have been instrumental to studying individuals, with journal, periodical and newspaper articles providing a valuable complement. Letters, and in one case diary notes, have presented an avenue to a more personal and 'raw' insight on some of the issues and in one or two cases played a vital role in the study's approach. However, it must be said that type of material relevant to the different case studies has varied greatly. For example, in the case of W.T. Stead, the study analyses a few years of the *Review of Reviews* catalogue, during the period when he served as editor. When studying the ideas of Leo Amery, I have examined his government work during the war, and when studying Edward Griggs, the research was based largely on his annual speeches as governor. The variety of material, which corresponds to the heterogeneity of the federalist margins, has required methodological flexibility in the treatment of different categories of written material. Before continuing to the methodological discussion, however, it is necessary to comment on certain theoretical concerns. The first involves a narrative perspective on the structure of federalist thinking, and the second the geographical associations of federalism in the United Kingdom.

## Federalist Narratives

One of the most striking characteristics of British federalism and one of the key qualities driving change to its ideology is the federalists' relationship with history. A wider public support for federalism, in fact, first emerges in the wake of the publication of a history book, John Seeley's *The Expansion of England*. These assumptions on the nature of historical progress are later challenged several times

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<sup>50</sup> Some of these are not published in an official capacity but for the purpose of this study they are all carefully prepared to be read and studied by an intended readership.

by the dramatic events and transformational processes of the subsequent six decades, forcing the federalists to reconsider their axioms and adopt new narratives to make sense of the relationship between one's past, contemporary events, and one's imagined future. This section will further elaborate on the structure of narratives and how they can be studied.

The foundational tenets of narrative theory were established by G. R. Collingwood in the first half of the twentieth century. Collingwood believed that the historian faced a challenge with many similarities to that of the fictional writer, and in his seminal *The Idea of History*, he positions the narrativisation of history—incorporating historical events into a meaningful chain of proceedings—at the heart of the historical imagination.<sup>51</sup> In his 1924 article, 'The Nature and Aims of a Philosophy of History', he argued that the centrality of 'the plot' was necessary to understand historiography. Hayden White would later coin the term 'emplotment', in which events are 'identified as parts of an integral whole.'<sup>52</sup> Since Collingwood, scholarly attention has tended to focus on the narratives 'of history', rather than 'in history', that is how people in the past has seen themselves as part of a narrative. While a great deal of effort has gone into establishing the delineation between fact and fiction regarding our knowledge of the past, the play of plot and narrative within historical ideas themselves shows potential for further studies.<sup>53</sup>

In this study, 'narrative' is understood as its most rudimentary elements, derived from a certain emplotment. 'Emplotment' in this context should be understood simply as the basic notion that historical developments can be viewed in terms of 'plots', that is with a beginning, middle, and an end, bound together by a story arc. These story arcs are then fleshed out and imbued with significance by a narrative. The emplotment has a hierarchical function—prioritising certain historical events over others. the narrative derives both a sense of what drives historical progress and who constitutes its protagonists from these historical events. Throughout this thesis, I repeatedly describe the narratives in terms of '-isms' but

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<sup>51</sup> Robin George Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1946) Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 231–48. For a clear and concise introduction to Collingwood's narrative theory, see Jan Van Der Dussen, 'The Case for Historical Imagination: Defending the Human Factor and Narrative', in Nancy Partner and Sarah Foot (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Historical Theory* (2013) London: SAGE Publications, Ltd, pp. 61–63.

<sup>52</sup> Robin George Collingwood, *Essays in the Philosophy of History* (1965) Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 38–41. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987) Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Stefan Berger, Chris Lorenz, & Nicola Brauch, 'Narrativity and Historical Writing: Introductory Remarks', in Stefan Berger, Nicola Brauch, & Chris Lorenz (eds.), *Analysing Historical Narratives: On Academic, Popular and Educational Framings of the Past* (2021) New York: Berghan Books.



it is important to note that these are not collective identities and generalised entities in the same way as an ‘-ism proper’.<sup>54</sup> When I describe someone as adhering to ‘English preservationism’, for example, this is simply a statement identifying which narrative motivates his or her thinking. These ‘-isms’ are an example of Merton’s middle-range theory in that they are generalisable only within this context, describing a shared adherence to a common notion but saying nothing comprehensive about the thinking or the identity of these individuals beyond the context of their federalism.<sup>55</sup> The four analytical chapters of this thesis correspond, largely, to four different narratives and consequent understandings of Britain’s post-imperial outlook. The transitions between them stem from the emergence of new emplotments as a response to the changing context of the times. The narratives are, however, not mutually exclusive in the sense that multiple federalist narratives can coexist simultaneously. The titles of the chapters have been chosen to highlight the most significant historical development of the period, however their names do not necessarily reflect the dominant narrative of the periods.

## A British Federalism?

Before proceeding to the methodological framework, a few remarks should be made on how the term ‘British’ is understood in this thesis. The federalism studied in the thesis was British in the sense that its organisations were represented in branches spread all over the United Kingdom. In addition to this, their ambitions were closely associated with the British Empire, for the most part. However, their centres of gravity were always either London or Oxbridge, and more often than not, their members celebrated and furthered an English legacy rather than anything convincingly inclusive of the different national experiences of the United Kingdom. The picture is further complicated by the three relevant administrative areas from the period being studied: England, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (Northern Ireland after 1921), for which ‘English’ designates belonging to England, and ‘British’ to both ‘Britain’ and ‘the United Kingdom’.

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<sup>54</sup> See Jani Marjanen & Jussi Kurunmäki, ‘How Ideology Became Isms: A History of a Conceptual Coupling’ in H. Haara, K. Stapelbroek & M. Immanen (eds.) *Passions, Politics and the Limits of Society. Helsinki Yearbook of Intellectual History* (2020) Berlin: De Gruyter, vol. 1.

<sup>55</sup> For more on ‘theories of the middle range’, see Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968) New York: The Free Press, pp. 39–72.

When the author's intention is unclear, this study tends to label questions of culture, identity, and values as 'English', while reserving 'British' for geographical descriptions and issues of political constitution. The inclination to treat national traits as English more readily than British is supported by scholars like Krishan Kumar, who describes 'England' as 'a highly emotive word', which 'has served, in a way never attained by "Britain" or any of the British derivatives, to focus ideas and ideals.'<sup>56</sup> Historian Bernard Crick argues that "'British" is a political and legal concept best applied to the institutions of the United Kingdom state ... It is not a cultural term, nor does it correspond to any real sense of a nation.'<sup>57</sup> Labour politician David Willets describes Britishness as 'a political identity resting above all on a set of political institutions.'<sup>58</sup> Or, in the words of the authority on historical Britishness, Linda Colley, Great Britain is 'an artificial nation ... superimposed onto older alignments and loyalties.'<sup>59</sup>

It should also be noted that the federalism studied here is 'British' not only in the sense that it resides in the United Kingdom, but also that the federalism in Britain before 1945 was distinguished as a distinct British federalism. Both IFL and RT were proponents of federalist models based on the completely unique context of the British Empire, and while FU opened itself up to some continental influences, these were very limited before 1943. From that point onward, when the organisation committed itself to the project of a European federation, it can more readily be described as a British part of a European federalist movement.

Together, the primary sources as understood by the theoretical assertions mentioned above, define the object of study for this thesis. Having outlined its character and limitations, it is now time to elaborate on how this object will be studied.

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<sup>56</sup> Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (2003) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Bernard Crick, 'The English and the British', in Bernard Crick (ed.), *National Identities: The Constitution of the United Kingdom* (1991) Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 97.

<sup>58</sup> Willets, 'Britishness', p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument' (October 1992) *Journal of British Studies* 31:4, p. 316.

## Methodological Considerations

Before presenting the outline, I will set out the methodological considerations that have guided this study, both in terms of how to approach the study of historical texts and in the assertion of historical truth claims.

My study has been guided by my conviction in the merits of contextual historical analysis. Which is—in general terms—that the meaning of a text, as well as its explanatory power in relation to its period, is dependent on an understanding of the relevant contexts. Karl Mannheim calls this the ‘principal thesis of the sociology of knowledge’.<sup>60</sup> The contextual method has also been well-established as one of the key characteristics of the discipline of Intellectual History in Sweden.<sup>61</sup>

Contextual reading places an emphasis on the agency of the historian because the relevance of any given context is not given. Conceptual historian Pasi Ihalainen stresses that ‘the past is gone forever and that its intellectual world can never be recovered or fully reconstructed.’<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, as philosopher Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen has asserted, the historian is always dealing with a translation between mediums. Academic historical analysis is (of course) in its nature something different to history ‘itself’. For the writing of historical texts to be able to grapple with the flow of events that comprise the human experience, a representation of the historical past needs to be constructed. It is not possible to define or establish this representation based on an objective principle. Rather, it is the product of the historian’s judgement.<sup>63</sup> In their work, historians ‘endeavour to reconstruct at least such aspects of past political thought allowed by a contextual reading of the available textual sources.’<sup>64</sup> These aspects, then, inform the historian on the meaning of concepts and expressions, the author’s frame of reference and the intended illocutionary force of the text<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology & Utopia* (1936) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Henrik Björck, 'Till Frågorna Om Idéhistoriens Egenart Och Rötter' (1996) *Lychnos*, pp. 42–48.

<sup>62</sup> Pasi Ihalainen, 'Between Historical Semantics and Pragmatics: Reconstructing Past Political Thought through Conceptual History' (January 2006) *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 7:1, p. 118.

<sup>63</sup> Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* (2015) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 37–44. Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ihalainen, 'Between Historical Semantics and Pragmatics', p. 119. Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> For more on the concept of illocutionary force, see Keith Graham, 'How Do Illocutionary Descriptions Explain?', in James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (1988) Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. For the principal authority in the field, Quentin Skinner, in his own words, see Quentin Skinner, 'A Reply to My Critics', in *ibid.*

It should be mentioned here that my contextualisation has been guided by a conviction that a more varied material better reflects the multifaceted nature of any given context. A key aspect of this endeavour is the promotion of visual material, as ‘the material world’, Ludmilla Jordanova posits, ‘is a visual world, which impacts upon human beings through their eyes’. This realisation compels the historian ‘to consider what people looked at, how they looked and the roles of objects designed to be looked at.’<sup>66</sup> In line with this principle, I have relied on twenty-five figures in order to get a fuller, multi-dimensional, understanding of the contextual conditions of any given period. The figures have been chosen as to give a varied representation of significant visual elements from the relevant historical context. Most of the images were seen by a significant number of people and those that were not depict events that drew a large audience. As such, the collection contains caricatures, advertisements, paintings, and photo documentations that relate to events and phenomena that are significant to the history of British federalism. These have been selected because they best reflect the visual world of the federalists themselves and are thus more representative of a middle class or upper middle-class experience of British visual culture, as several of the images included were not readily available for a general audience.

There are six figures that have been included in order to represent the visual aspects of the primary sources. While the primary sources for the study are overwhelmingly textual, visual elements appear often enough to warrant their inclusion as they provide additional nuance for the descriptions of the federalist organisation. The images have been included to highlight some aspect of the organisation’s activity and to present it more completely to the reader, as it ‘is probably impossible to describe fully any given object’.<sup>67</sup> In this sense, they have been added to strengthen the analysis, but due to the predominantly textual nature of the sources, the images have not been made the object of historical analysis in their own right, and the descriptions of them are limited so as to give prominence to their relationship to the textual analysis.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past: Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice* (2012) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> For more on pictorial description as an historical method see Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (1985) New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 1–11; Jordanova, *The Look of the Past*, pp. 15–37.

Constructing a relevant contextual framework entails establishing a convincing historical narrative.<sup>69</sup> Not to be confused with the multitude of federalist narratives, based in various emplotments, that will be discussed in the analytical chapters, narration as a methodological concept is highlighted to draw attention to the fact that the historian, too, arranges a certain set of events as to give them significance. This significance is neither inherent nor self-evident but attributed through logical reasoning and considered argumentation. Narrative, as applied here, should not be seen as a concession to a relativist position—narrative as the sense-making within nonreferential language—but simply as a concession to the fact that there is no straightforward way to reach *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*. Narration is an argumentative way of making sense of an overwhelmingly multifaceted historical process, suggesting a connection between a certain series of events: not only to show that any given event occurs after another, but also because of another.<sup>70</sup> The employment of a narrative allows the historian to argue for the beginning and end of a process of meaningful and significant impact, even if it would be impossible to define either its ‘real’ beginning, end, or causality. The intention ‘is not to integrate all events ... but rather to link them together in a chain of provisional and restricted characterizations of finite provinces of manifestly “significant” occurrence.’<sup>71</sup>

As stated, I do not believe that this entails a concession to complete relativism and I would argue that it is misleading to characterise narrativist history in terms of ‘a conversation’ with the past rather than an examination of it.<sup>72</sup> There are those who would assert the relevance of a concept of historical truth, and I would argue that the rigor of academic routine and the transparency of the historical method allows for statements at least on the level of ‘warranted assertibility.’<sup>73</sup> Still, the

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<sup>69</sup> In this thesis, the concept of ‘narrative’ is employed on two different levels. Under ‘Federalist Narratives’, I explain its function as a concept of theory, illuminating how the federalists understood their history. In this section, ‘narrative’ is used as a concept of methodology, denoting my own understanding of historical change and of the possibility to make assertions about historical facts.

<sup>70</sup> Robert F. Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (1995) Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 37.

<sup>71</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1975) Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 19.

<sup>72</sup> See for example, David Harlan, *The Degradation of American History* (1997) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. xviii; or Dominick Lacapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (1983) Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 61–71.

<sup>73</sup> John Dewey, *Logic, the Theory of Inquiry* (1938) New York: Henry Holt & Company, pp. 1–22. For more on the validity of historical truth, see Frank Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* (2012) Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 102–25.

acknowledgment that there is no avenue to an objectively, or commonly, assertible account of historical events demands another basis for the evaluation and assessing of quality of historical analysis. In my work I have aimed for the five qualities that Kuukkanen suggests constitute epistemic value. These are exemplification, coherence, comprehensiveness, scope, and originality. Kuukkanen claims that the epistemic strength of an analysis depends first and foremost on 1) how well it exemplifies its data, that is, how well the analytical concepts and conclusions can be said to resonate with the historical records. Given reasonable exemplification, 2) one should seek maximal coherence in the data set, studying historical records that are related to each other in their own right. Another aspect of quality within the historical data studied is 3) comprehensiveness, as an analysis incorporating a larger sway of the available records should be understood to be more compelling than a more limited rival. Given the adherence to these three qualities pertaining to the data, Kuukkanen lastly sees it as desirable with an analysis of maximum 4) scope of applicability and 5) originality in its conclusions.<sup>74</sup>

I am not entirely at ease with Kuukkanen's reduction of historiographical practice to 'rational, argumentative speech acts', but my approach is certainly a concession to an evaluation-based framework that bases the probability and insight of any historical account on the institution of the peer review.<sup>75</sup>

In this introductory chapter, I have addressed the issue of exemplification through my research aim with its accompanying questions, explaining how these represent a valid approach towards the historical data at hand. This exemplification has been strengthened further by the inclusion of my key concepts, 'federalism', 'narrative', 'emplotment', 'entanglement', and 'English/British'. My study is coherent in that it relies on a structured understanding of federalism, based on the three federalist organisations and involving the ideas of people with immediate ties to those. Additionally, I have elaborated on the nature of the primary sources and the internal hierarchy of the different types of historical data, explaining how they relate to one another. The diachronic heft of this study is a testament to its comprehensiveness as well as the fact that the aim has been applied to as extensive a material as feasible within the limitations of a dissertation. Finally, the account of previous research has demonstrated that this study is original in its contribution and that it broadens the scope of previous research on British federalism. As such, this introductory chapter has delineated the parameters for a study design that

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<sup>74</sup> Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*, pp. 123–28.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

seeks to be both compelling and convincing. The next section will detail out how these parameters will be applied in practice.

## Outline

The introductory chapter is followed by **‘English Preservation: The Imperial Federation League & English Influence Beyond Empire**. This chapter focuses on the rather short-lived activity of the Imperial Federation League as it fought for the federalisation of the British Empire. The organisation was founded in 1884, which marked the beginning of organised federalism in the UK. The chapter looks at the early federalist narrative and how it was applied to contemporary issues up to the dissolution of the IFL in 1893 and the disparate expressions it took in the final years of the century.

The key issue that led to the organisation’s early collapse was its dependence on constructive ambiguity, which obscured the fact that there was never a policy position which could unite the organisation’s membership. The primary focus areas of the organisation were investing in imperial infrastructure, defence, and unity. This chapter complements the general views of the organisation with an additional analysis of the two sub-categories of preservationists. The civic preservationists, centred around Lord Archibald Rosebery and several colonial politicians, promoted a decentralised notion of federalism, emphasising the value of individual autonomy at a grassroots level. The constitutional preservationists on the other hand, included members like W. T. Stead, F. P. Labillière, and Edward Freeman. They preferred more centralised schemes, emphasising the transformative potential of an ambitious federal policy.

Chapter two, **‘Western Preservation: The Round Table & the Empire at War’**, begins with the Boer War and Alfred Milner’s work as the High Commissioner, while focusing on the 1910s and the first decade of The Round Table. Essentially, RT’s narrative shared all of its key tenets with the IFL narrative, but the organisation worked to adapt its ideas into a program with more political potential, suitable for a political climate that was more hostile towards overt imperialism. This period was also characterised by the organisation’s attempts to make sense of the experiences from the Great War and incorporate the rapidly changing assumptions of the time into their frame of reference. 1918 marks the end of the war, prior to the Paris Peace Conference and what can be seen as the beginning of the interwar period of WWI interpretations, when the experiences of

the war became so transformative as to cause many federalists to adopt a radically different narrative.

Beyond the work of *The Round Table*, this chapter covers the work of Lionel Curtis, Philip Kerr, and L.S. Amery. No one had more impact on the early thinking of *The Round Table* than Curtis and delving deeper into his organic preservationism allows for a better understanding of the conservative understanding of English unity that his concept of ‘Organic Union’ was based on. Philip Kerr can be seen as having the second largest impact, and while much of his efforts were administrative in nature, he took a leading role in adapting the organisation’s ideology to the changing contemporary political landscape through the narrative structure of institutional preservationism. Amery, on the other hand, did not play a central part in shaping *The Round Table*’s thinking at large. His work in the government offers us interesting insights into how elements of the federalist doctrine were incorporated into parts of the government machinery through his notion of geographical preservationism.

The third chapter, ‘**Organic Utilisation: *Pax Mundus***’, examines the beginning of the second phase of *The Round Table*’s war understanding and the gradual emergence of a post-WWI federalist worldview. Britain committed to significant concessions regarding Dominion sovereignty in the Balfour Declaration (1924) and the Statute of Westminster (1931). *The Round Table* adopted a similar program, but saw it as assertions of imperial influence rather than concessions to anti-imperialist opinion. With imperialism becoming marginalised in British political discourse, the organisation was forced to adapt in order to legitimise its outlook.

Philip Kerr and his conviction that federalism’s main mission was limiting narrow nationalism was a driving force behind the establishment of a new federalist worldview. Following the Paris Peace Conference, Kerr committed to the notions he had begun exploring during the war and began to champion a new, organic utilisationist narrative which would eventually dominate federalism in Britain. This chapter also follows up on the interwar efforts made by a number of preservationist members, such as Curtis’ writings, Alfred Zimmern’s work with the League of Nations, and Edward Grigg’s governorship of Kenya. These federalists managed in various ways to adapt much of their pre-war thinking to the conditions of the inter-war political climate.

Finally, this chapter looks at the rising political tensions of the 1930s and how they affected the established federalism in *The Round Table*, Kerr, and Curtis, but also regarding Harold Laski’s new influence on British federalism and his radical



utilitarianism. Laski held a more continental approach to rendering nationalism harmless, which would prove immensely influential on Federal Union and its activity during the Second World War.

**‘Radical Utilisation: Federal Union & the Second World War’** constitutes the fourth and final analytical chapter. It examines Federal Union’s heyday during the early years of the war. The advent of FU led to the establishment of organised radical utilitarian federalism in Britain and in its approach to the war carried many of the federalist impulses from the First World War out to their logical conclusions. The success of the organisation established a new face of British federalism that would continue to dominate even after the war.

The early Federal Union was a more inclusive institution than both of its predecessors. This chapter delves into a number of more focused themes in order to present FU’s many perspectives, but it also includes a discussion on the two sub-categories of utilitarianism, as opposed to transformational utilitarianism. The organisation was home to those who sought federation as the optimal constitutional solution to certain political issues, like William Beveridge, Lionel Robbins, and Wickham Steed—as well as to federalists like Barbara Wootton, Olaf Stapledon, and F. A. Hayek—who saw federation as a means for a subversive transformation of the political system. Late in the war public interest in radical political transformation had waned and the organisation consolidated its position by settling on a European program—focusing its efforts, but alienating many of its members.

The final chapter is a conclusion.



# English Preservation: The Imperial Federation League & English Influence Beyond Empire

History, 'while it should be scientific in its method, should pursue a practical object.' When Professor Sir John Robert Seeley decided to introduce his lecture series on the history of the British Empire with 'a favourite maxim', he had unwittingly shared with his students a portent that would span the coming decades. He spoke in a lecture hall at Cambridge University in the fall of 1881 and two years later, after repeated encouragement, the entire course had been published as a book. By 1885 it had sold 80,000 copies. When Seeley passed away in 1895, historian H. A. L. Fisher pondered if there had ever been a work of history that had had such a profound impact on 'the general political thinking of a nation'.<sup>76</sup>

While it could be argued that Seeley's lectures offered little new to the imperial debate, his comprehensive and compelling narrative struck Victorian Britain at just the right time.<sup>77</sup> During the final decades of the nineteenth century, British political discourse was characterised by both imperial expansion and the demands for Irish independence gaining ever wider traction. In the era of 'Home Rule all around' as well as 'the Scramble for Africa', Seeley offered up a narrative that seemed to tie it all together.

Economically, Britain faced a similar ambiguity. At Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887, one could boast of a 'prosperous and stable decade' with a huge upswing in retail, and significantly higher living standards for most Britons.<sup>78</sup> Simultaneously, there was a belief that the Imperial project had become a drain on the British economy, that both its industry and agriculture fell short in the arena of global free trade, and that British prospects—in a vague and general sense—were diminishing rather than improving.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in 'Editor's Introduction' in *Expansion of England* (1971), p. xii.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xvi–xvii.

<sup>78</sup> David Cannadine, *Victorious Century: The United Kingdom, 1800–1906* (2017) London: Allen Lane, pp. 388–92. The quote can be found on page 391.

<sup>79</sup> For the empire's profitability, see Patrick O'Brien, 'The Costs and Benefits of British Imperialism 1846-1914' (August 1988) *Past & Present* 120, pp. 63–64; and for its international

It is in this context of national and colonial hesitation that the Imperial Federation League (IFL) assumes a key role in an ongoing debate on the future of the Empire. By addressing some critical issues, the League attracted a significant number of intellectuals and people of influence which laid the ground for an organised, federalist discourse on the post-imperial international order. The organisation manifested some critical worries of its time and established an emplotment that made sense of the societal instability that many experienced at the time. It offered a narrative model for an imperial federation that could unite the visions of its members.

This chapter begins by surveying the ambiguity of the imperial outlook in 1880s Britain, and then continues with a short history and fundamental ideology of the Imperial Federation League. The third and fourth sections concern the ideas of some of the organisation's more influential members, critiquing the details of several federal schemes as well as looking at how the federalist ideas became entangled with British political life, in general. The fifth section summarises the findings of the chapter and draws conclusions regarding the study's aim.

## The Beginnings of the Downward Trajectory

In Britain, popular interest in federalism first emerged out of an era of imperial ambiguity. Economically, Britain had much in its favour, furthering its dominant position in the world economy. Its share of global manufacturing had risen to 23% in 1881.<sup>80</sup> This level would also prove somewhat stable and it was not until the end of the 1910s that the other major economies caught up.<sup>81</sup> To the attentive observer, however, the first worrying signs of the United Kingdom's eventual decline were beginning to reveal themselves.

Historian Patrick K. O'Brien argues that Britain suffered through an 'industrial sclerosis' as too much needed capital was sent out of the country, leaving behind an industry that lacked in innovation, investment and savings.<sup>82</sup> In the same vein, historians Peter J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins speak of how the relative inefficiencies of British agriculture within the global market led to many economic initiatives

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standing, see P. J. Cain & A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914* (1993b) London: Longman. Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-War Britain*, pp. 65–66.

<sup>80</sup> Cannadine, *Victorious Century*, p. 388.

<sup>81</sup> B. R. Tomlinson, 'The Contraction of England: National Decline and the Loss of Empire' (October 1982) *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 11:1, p. 62.

<sup>82</sup> O'Brien, 'The Costs and Benefits of British Imperialism', pp. 179–86.

being dogged by a ‘privatization of profits with a socialization of costs’.<sup>83</sup> The following decades saw a steadily growing trade imbalance as imports flooded in to satisfy the UK domestic market, severely undercutting Britain’s agricultural and industrial autonomy.<sup>84</sup> For the average citizen, the drawbacks of these short-term strategies were of course largely invisible and inconsequential. For more informed circles on the other hand, signs of this ‘hollowing out’ of the domestic economy were often noticed and commented on.<sup>85</sup>

Apart from the sense that their economy seemed to be running on fumes, there was a more general, but also palpable, sense of social and geopolitical flux, concerns that affected the imagination on a global scale. Social reform, such as the extension of the enfranchisement in 1867 and the Elementary Education Act in 1870, inspired many to contemplate what a future of continued reforms would entail, particularly with a population as diverse as that of the British Empire.<sup>86</sup> The increasing prominence of societal discord between the poor and the well-offs instilled the federalists and those in their surroundings with doubts as to the lack of social cohesion. The British colonies offered a blank canvas of possibilities:

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<sup>83</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (2014) [Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts] Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 456.

<sup>84</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *Innovation and Expansion*, pp. 110–11 & 221–24. By 1913, the UK imported half of its non-tropical food consumption and 90% of industrial raw materials, excluding coal, Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700–1914* (1969) London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., pp. 232–33. Even for traditional, everyday foodstuffs, such as eggs and cheese, Britain produced less than third of its consumption, E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (1987) London: Weidenfeld, p. 39.

<sup>85</sup> Cannadine, *Victorious Century*, pp. 392–94. Scholars have debated whether there is a mentality component that permitted this hollowing out to occur. Historians such as Paul Warwick, ‘Did Britain Change? An Inquiry into the Causes of National Decline’ (1985) *Journal of Contemporary History* 20:1. Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit: 1850–1980* (2004) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* have emphasised a mental shift during the period, arguing that an overrepresented landed gentry failed to display the flexibility needed to succeed in an increasingly globalised market. Disagreeing with this narrative, other scholars have emphasised for example the British interest in and fascination with technology, arguing the importance of the less reactionary sides of British life during the period. See Sean O’Connell, *The Car and British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring 1896–1939* (1998) Manchester: Manchester University Press; Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*; M. J. Daunton & Bernhard Rieger (eds.), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War I* (2001) Oxford: Berg; and Iwan Rhys Morus, *How the Victorians Took Us to the Moon: The Story of the Nineteenth-Century Innovators Who Forged the Future* (2022) London: Icon.

<sup>86</sup> Neil Evans, ‘“A World Empire, Sea-Girt”: The British Empire, State and Nations, 1780–1914’, in Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (eds.), *Nationalizing Empires* (2015) Budapest: CEU Press, p. 75.

‘spaces for moral regeneration and political desire; sites for the projection of imperial zeal.’<sup>87</sup>

Technological innovations ‘shrinking the world’, invoked a similar sense of societal subversion, often immediately associated with the empire.<sup>88</sup> The fact that *80 Days Around the World* was published ten years before the dawn of the IFL and that six years later journalist Nellie Bly made the actual trip in only seventy-three, speaks to a time when ‘psychic distance’ was increasingly disconnected from its ‘physical’ counterpart.<sup>89</sup> This development was considered crucial at the time because it meant that technology could transform nationalism from its insular, divisive character into an inclusive and unifying patriotism, which Maurice Charland called ‘technological nationalism’.<sup>90</sup> In practice, these new forms of communication were critical of the creation of intercolonial organisations such as the IFL and the establishment of what Bruce Robbins dubbed ‘actually existing cosmopolitanism’, which had moved beyond the status of a mere political ideal. Maurice Charland even goes so far as to describe ‘Briton’ as an ‘unbound seriality’—an identity marker that such a vast number of people could claim that it ought to be considered ‘unbound’ from any formal definition.<sup>91</sup> Technology

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<sup>87</sup> Duncan Bell, 'Empire and International Relations in Victorian Political Thought' (2006) *The Historical Journal* 49:1, p. 296. See also Duncan Bell, 'The Victorian Idea of a Global State', in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (2007) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 165. Nancy W. Ellenberg has also made the comment that the increased variety of politically relevant voices made political life more volatile. This led to a degree of uncertainty with the political elite; one could never know where the next blow would come from. Nancy W. Ellenberger, *Balfour's World: Aristocracy and Political Culture at the Fin De Siècle* (2015) Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, pp. 213–14.

<sup>88</sup> Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity*, pp. 233–43. The telegraph was imbued with immense symbolic meaning, both for its role in ‘shrinking’ distances but also because of its evocative similarities to the nervous system, Iwan Rhys Morus, 'The Nervous System of Britain: Space, Time and the Electric Telegraph in the Victorian Age' (December 2000) *British Journal for the History of Science* 33:119.

<sup>89</sup> Evans, "'A World Empire, Sea-Girt'", p. 61 & 82.

<sup>90</sup> Georgios Varouxakis, "'Great" Versus "Small" Nations: Size and National Greatness in Victorian Political Thought', in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (2007) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 147–48.

<sup>91</sup> Maurice Charland, 'Technological Nationalism' (1986) *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* X, N:1-2. For an introduction to the concept of ‘unbound seriality’, see Benedict Anderson, 'Nationalism, Identity, and the World-in-Motion: On the Logics of Seriality', in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds.), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

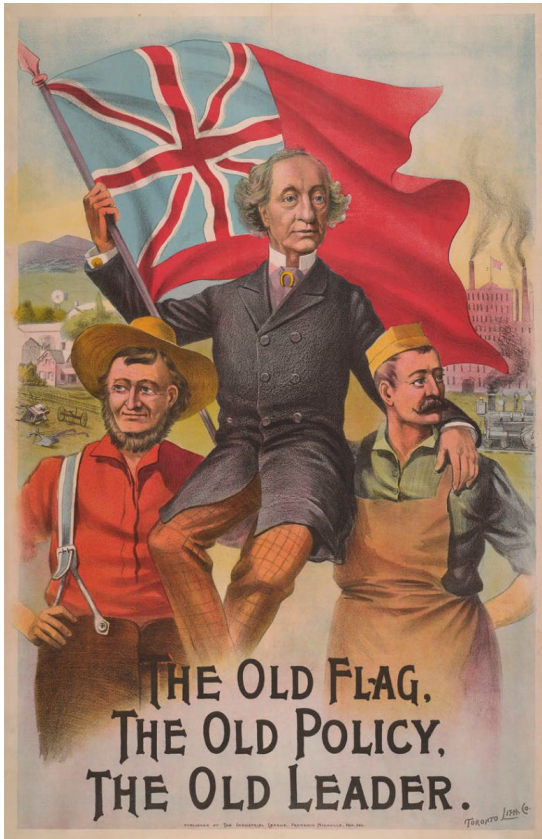


Figure 1 MacDonalD Election Poster

One of the leading factors spurring on the federalist imagination was the creation of a semi-independent federation in Canada in 1867. The following decade of Canadian politics would see a tug-of-war between the cultural and institutional ties to the UK, on one hand, and the economic allure combined with geographic proximity to the USA, on the other. In the federal election of 1891, conservative John A. MacDonalD appealed to people's desire for stability in maintaining close ties to Britain. He suffered severe losses to the pro-US liberal Wilfrid Laurier. For more on Canada's initial dilemma and how it was handled.<sup>92</sup>

Election poster for the Conservatives under John A MacDonalD in the 1891 Canadian Federal Election. Artist unknown, Public domain via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by Adam Cuerden.

<sup>92</sup> John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System 1830–1970* (2009) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 148–159.

facilitated the sharing of a British and Imperial dissemination of news, politics, and ideas—forming the basis of a British frame of reference.

As national identity grew stronger through the imperial project, so did the challenges from outside.<sup>93</sup> In the late nineteenth century, the creeping realisation of eventual American supersession, combined with Germany's new geopolitical aspirations, created what Mackinder described at the time as 'the end of the Columbian age'.<sup>94</sup> It was a new era 'of extreme global disruption', in which a new international power balance challenged the 'organizing principles of sociopolitical life' as they had come to be understood in the post-Napoleonic era.<sup>95</sup> Suffering from 'geopolitical panic', a generation of politicians and diplomats found themselves expending 'much of their energy devising strategies to cope with the apparently imminent collapse of their familiar world order.'<sup>96</sup>

In the British case, perhaps their situation cannot be summed up better than with two incidents. The first of the key events that came to define the late Victorian imperial discourse was the siege of Khartoum in 1886. After Britain declared control over Sudan in 1882, it soon became apparent that the political unrest in the region—the advances of the religious faction led by 'the Mahdi' in particular—were untenable and General Charles George Gordon was dispatched on an evacuation mission. It was, however, perceived as politically damaging to announce a complete British withdrawal from the region. The instructions given to Gordon were thus ambiguous enough to allow the government to adjust its position in case of a bad turnout. Gordon made full use of the vagueness of his instructions, and soon turned to secure the region's capital Khartoum. Without any plans for British reinforcements, the mission was doomed to fail and in 1886, the city was sieged, and Gordon was killed in the ensuing battle.<sup>97</sup>

Gordon was immediately celebrated by the press and would in the following decade become lauded as a paragon of imperialist values. In contrast with the

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<sup>93</sup> For more on imperialism's role in the strengthening of the nation-state, see Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller, 'Introduction: Building Nations in and with Empires—a Reassessment', in Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (eds.), *Nationalizing Empires* (2015) Budapest: Central European University Press.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Heffernan, 'Fin De Siècle, Fin Du Monde? On the Origins of European Geopolitics, 1890–1920', in Klaus Dodd & David Atkinson (eds.), *Geopolitical Traditions: A Century of Geopolitical Thought* (2000) London: Routledge, pp. 28–35.

<sup>95</sup> Regenia Gagnier, 'The Geopolitics of Decadence' (2021) *Victorian Literature and Culture* 49:4, p. 608; and Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race*, p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> Heffernan, 'Fin De Siècle, Fin Du Monde?', p. 29.

<sup>97</sup> See Michael Asher, *Khartoum: The Ultimate Imperial Adventure* (2005) London: Viking, pp. 91–95 & 263–67; and S. Monick, 'The Political Martyr: General Gordon and the Fall of Kartum' (1985) *Military History Journal* 6:6.



savagery of the forces that he faced, Gordon's actions played a key role in galvanising certain sections of the British electorate towards increasing their imperialist ambitions.<sup>98</sup>

Another key imperialist event was the general election of 1885, when Irish nationalist Charles Stewart Parnell and his Irish Parliamentary Party won eighty-five out of one hundred and five Irish seats—the culmination of decades of Irish nationalism.<sup>99</sup> Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone tried to appease the demands for Irish sovereignty with what would become known as the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, the debate over which would evoke questions on the nature and legitimacy of British rule, not just in Ireland, but in every part of the empire.<sup>100</sup>

Events such as these turned the focus of the contemporary imperial discourse away from British gains to centre on its costs. In the case of the Khartoum, the British administration's failure to protect its men on the ground put into question Britain's ability to maintain and defend an ever-growing empire.<sup>101</sup> In the case of Home Rule, colonial nationalism actualised the question regarding who benefitted from the imperial venture and how the success of the civilising mission would actually look like in practice. In generalised terms, Khartoum asked whether the British could maintain an empire, and Dublin whether it should.

The last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were an age of imperialism in flux. Pertaining to the cost-benefit equation of the British Empire, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw an rising imbalance between increasing 'responsibilities' and declining military and economic 'strength'.<sup>102</sup> This discrepancy was further exacerbated both domestically—by the British public's 'resounding

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<sup>98</sup> Cynthia F. Behrman, 'The After-Life of General Gordon' (1971) *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 3:2, pp. 49–53.

<sup>99</sup> For more on the various aspects of the Irish nationalist movement at the time, see James Loughlin, *Gladstone, Home Rule and the Ulster Question, 1882-1893* (1986) Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd., pp. 5–34 and Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History, 1800-2000* (2003) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 24–66.

<sup>100</sup> G. R. Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War 1886–1918* (2004) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 118–19 & 51. For a detailed account of the Home Rule debate, see Loughlin, *Gladstone, Home Rule and the Ulster Question, 1882-1893*, pp. 197–283.

<sup>101</sup> For a concise but balanced survey on imperial defence, see Searle, *A New England?*, pp. 252–53. A more detailed account on the factors that shaped the 1880s debate on the defence issue can be found in Peter Burroughs, 'Defence and Imperial Disunity', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (1999) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 334–38.

<sup>102</sup> Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, p. 120. For some of the critics pointing out the economic imbalance of the imperial machinery at the time, see Mira Matikkala, *Empire and Imperial Ambition: Liberty, Englishness and Anti-Imperialism in Late-Victorian Britain* (2011) London: I. B. Tauris, pp. 23–39.

lack of interest in colonial and imperial affairs’—and internationally—by the challenge to the established global order posed by Germany’s military ascension.<sup>103</sup> The mounting military tensions in the wake of Germany’s assertion of imperial status was intensified by an increased international interdependence due to growing global trade, technological efficiencies that facilitated imperial domination, and the introduction of Social Darwinism as an element of international political discourse. These in combination constituted the second age of global imperialism. The emergence of High Imperialism was characterised by the centralised, self-aware imperialist endeavours and inter-European competition.<sup>104</sup> Historian David Cannadine dubs it a ‘pivotal time’ in British imperial history, in which the country found itself torn between imperial expansion in order to satiate political ambitions at home, and imperial disintegration in the face of colonial nationalism overseas.<sup>105</sup> On a more societal level, the late Victorian era entailed a reassessment of Britain’s global position. Searle describes this period as the beginning of a ‘New England’, which saw a rapid transformation of English society combined with an accelerating globalisation, redefining the prerequisite of Britain’s national outlook.<sup>106</sup> The British national consciousness shared in a Europe-wide *fin-de-siècle* declinism, which in turned fuelled a ‘prophetic mode of enunciation’; the sense that society was threatened on many fronts motivated ‘the all-encompassing nature of many Victorian theoretical projects.’<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History*, p. 57. For a quantitative summary of Germany’s geopolitical elevation, see Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, pp. 307–09, 12–15.

<sup>104</sup> Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, pp. 432–33.

<sup>105</sup> Cannadine, *Victorious Century*, p. 421. More specifically, historian B. R. Tomlinson has argued that Britain’s economy grew increasingly resource hungry and that the imports from the imperial periphery highlighted the motherland’s dependency on colonies that now demanded increasing self-governance, see B. R. Tomlinson, ‘Economy and Empire: The Periphery and the Imperial Economy’, in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (1999) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>106</sup> Searle, *A New England?*, pp. 1–4.

<sup>107</sup> Duncan Bell, ‘Victorian Visions of Global Order: An Introduction’, in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (2007) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 3. For more on contemporary declinism, see Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, pp. 34–35; and for more on the understanding of decadence, see Gagnier, ‘The Geopolitics of Decadence’.

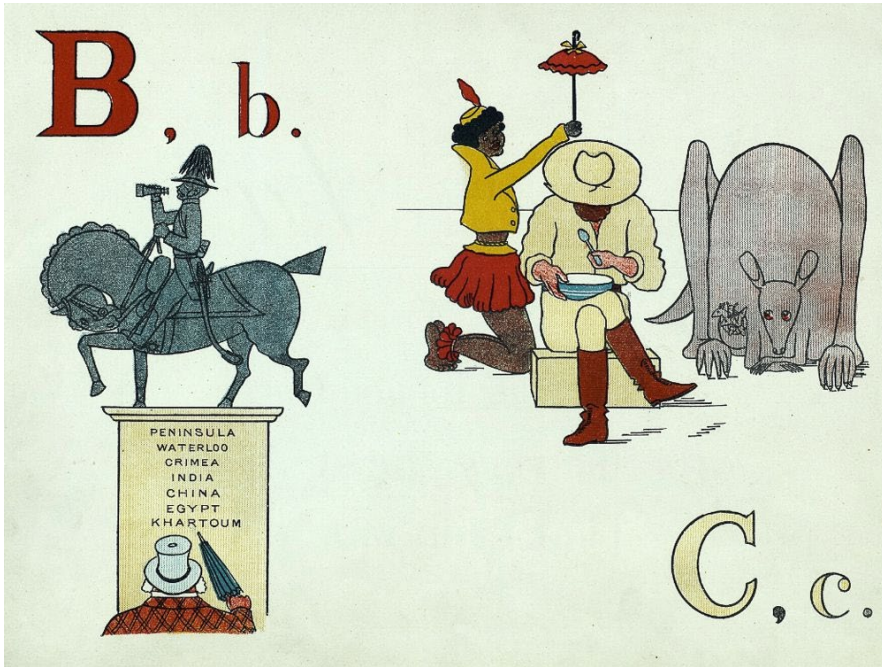


Figure 2 'B' is for 'Battle' & 'C' is for 'Colonies'

While the political prioritisation of imperial issues was a hard-fought battle, the Empire's influence on English culture and self-understanding was pervasive. The image above is the 'B' and 'C' page from the children's book *An ABC for Patriots* by Mary Ames (1899), published with the caption 'B stands for Battles, By which England's name; Has for ever been covered, With glory and fame. C is for Colonies, Rightly we boast; That of all the great nations, Great Britain has the most.' The book was a part of wide range of far-reaching initiatives meant to instil imperialism in the population from a young age, such as exhibited by the Boy Scouts and the Empire Day Festival. While Ames' book was much more nuanced in its message than it might first appear, it is indicative of the ubiquity of the empire in British life at the time.<sup>108</sup>

Illustration for the letters 'B' and 'C' by Mary Ames. From Mary Ames, *An ABC for Patriots* (1899) London: Dean & Son, p. 4.

It was an age of contradictions that challenged basic assumptions and tenets of the imperialist mindset. All the while, the imperial machinery marched forward

<sup>108</sup> For a more thorough analysis of Ames' book, see Megan A. Norcia, "'E' is for Empire?: Challenging the Imperial Legacy of an ABC for Baby Patriots (1899)" (2017) *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 42:2.

without significant impediment and the British imperial practice continued without hesitation. Britain would remain a 'great power' for decades to come, and the empire was still one of 'pomp, plumes, and vainglorious swagger.'<sup>109</sup> The late 19<sup>th</sup> century would not bring with it any serious reconsideration of the British imperial endeavour, but it did introduce an undeniable sense of vulnerability in the imperial consciousness. The presumed future greatness under which the imperial machinery had operated since 1815, had now become an issue of nuance, consideration, and debate.<sup>110</sup>

## The Rise and Fall of the Imperial Federation League

If one were to identify a starting point for a British federalist *movement* in any meaningful sense of the word, it would be the public meeting held at the Westminster Palace Hotel in 1871. The agenda was dedicated to the colonial question and the enthusiastic and imperially minded crowd jumped at the opportunity to delve into issues that they perceived to be politically neglected. Soon thereafter, Edward Jenkins, who had given the inaugural address at the meeting, published two articles: 'Imperial Federalism' and 'An Imperial Confederation'.<sup>111</sup> During the latter half of the 1870s, a number of articles in the same vein followed suit as the federalist case gathered traction.<sup>112</sup> These early texts included most of the building blocks of what would constitute Victorian federalism, but there was one key piece to the ideological jigsaw that was missing. The publication of Seeley's lectures in 1883 would prove immensely beneficial to the federalist case in that it brought these issues together within a coherent theoretical framework, grounded in historical insight, and gave it much needed public attention.<sup>113</sup> The Imperial Federation League was formed the year after, with Seeley as one of its members.

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<sup>109</sup> The quotes can be found in Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role*, p. 291; and Searle, *A New England?*, p. 250 respectively.

<sup>110</sup> Searle, *A New England?*, pp. 243–52; and Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (2006) London: Yale University Press, pp. 111–12.

<sup>111</sup> See Edward Jenkins, 'Imperial Federalism' (December 1870) *The Contemporary Review* XVI; and Edward Jenkins, 'An Imperial Confederation' (April 1871) *The Contemporary Review* 17. Both were published under the pseudonym 'the Author of "Ginx's baby"', referring to a satire he had published in early 1870.

<sup>112</sup> Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, pp. 23–29.

<sup>113</sup> See Seeley, *The Expansion of England*.

While British federalism had existed in some form or other since at least the 1820s, it now had the perfect conditions to flourish.<sup>114</sup> Aside from the challenges posed to established imperialist complacency by events in Sudan and Ireland, Canada also played an important role in understanding why the federalist movement emerged at this time and in this way. The foundation of the Canadian Confederation in 1867 had created a federation within the empire, with the promise of steadily increasing self-governance. So while the constitutional nature of the empire as a whole would remain essentially unchallenged, the late 1800s did see a viable example of constitutional measures meant to tackle imperial issues. The Canadian solution offered a new dimension of the imperial political discourse and would eventually serve as a blueprint for the later ‘constitutional experimentation’ of the Edwardians in India and South Africa.<sup>115</sup>

In response to diverging colonial experiences, the Imperial Federation League established itself as an organisation firmly grounded in the local experience of the colonies. The organisation was not the only one of its kind and other associations like the Fair Trade League pursued a largely overlapping program for imperial cohesion, albeit not committed to a federalist credo.<sup>116</sup> Predictably, a high proportion of the League’s members were invested in imperial issues through their line of work and had first-hand experience with colonial practice.<sup>117</sup> The organisation valued these first-hand perspectives and through an organisational structure built on local branches, it made an effort to present itself as available and equal to all members of the white empire.

That said, the IFL must be understood as a socio-politically elitist venture. Even among the initial members, a significant proportion came from both Par-

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<sup>114</sup> Martin, 'Empire Federalism and Imperial Parliamentary Union'.

<sup>115</sup> John Darwin, 'A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics', in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis (eds.), *The Twentieth Century* (1999) Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 66.

<sup>116</sup> Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, p. 37.

<sup>117</sup> While it technically covers a slightly later period, Elisabeth Buettner’s chapter provides a personal and thought-provoking perspective of Britons who returned from colonial life in India, many of whom organised themselves on imperial issues to cope with the challenges of life in the motherland. Elisabeth Buettner, 'From Somebodies to Nobodies: Britons Returning Home from India', in Martin Dauntun & Bernhard Rieger (eds.), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War I* (2001) Oxford: Berg. In more material terms, the 1880s marked a period when the substantial and systematic emigration of Britons to the colonies, which began in the 1810s, had resulted in a key demographic of colonists that simply had not existed on that scale before. See Marjory Harper, 'British Migration and the Peopling of the Empire', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (1999) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 76–83.

liament and the gentry.<sup>118</sup> When letters were sent out to encourage the establishment of colonial branches, recipients were targeted in both houses of Parliament, among newspaper editors, high-ranking colonial administrators as well as politicians, military commanders, and officers.<sup>119</sup> High-profile members included academics such as John Seeley, Edward Freeman, and Montagu Burrows; politicians such as William Edward Forster, W. H. Smith, and Viscount Ebrington; military men such as Sir Spencer Robinson and Sir John Colomb; and journalist W. T. Stead. Generally, the organisation attracted interest from both sides of the political divide, but it is worth mentioning that among the recruited politicians, many leaned conservative.<sup>120</sup> From its onset, federalism in Britain seemed to attract influential people and while not being politically potent on its own, it was composed of a significant number of people who shaped Britain in the 1880s and 1890s. This quality of mediating ideas would prove constant even in later iterations of British federalism.

By the end of 1886, the main branch contained about 800 members, distributed a monthly paper, and paid salaries that roughly amounted to a full-time position.<sup>121</sup> It was predominantly financed by donations, with a very small proportion of members contributing to the lion's share.<sup>122</sup> The monthly publication *Imperial Federation* had a circulation of about 10,000 and was steadily growing in popularity. Never, however, enough to become profitable in its own right.<sup>123</sup> Local branches could be found throughout the empire, as long as they could attract at least twenty people, with Canada hosting as many as twenty-six.<sup>124</sup> With time, however, many shrank to rather small gatherings and the total colonial membership, outside of the

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<sup>118</sup> Provisional Committee (29th July 1884) 'First meeting minutes', Manuscript collections Add. MS. 62778, fols. 4–5.

<sup>119</sup> F. P. Labilliere and H. O. Arnold-Forster (2th December 1884) *ibid.*, fols. 18–19.

<sup>120</sup> *The Liberal Imperialists*, p.163.

<sup>121</sup> Imperial Federation League (December 1886) 'Second Annual Report', Manuscripts collection Add. MS. 62779, fols. 14–15.

<sup>122</sup> See Imperial Federation League (31st December 1885) 'Balance Sheet', *ibid.* Add. MS. 62778, fols. 88–89; and Financial Committee (1892) 'Report', Manuscript collections Add. MS. 62780, fol. 39.

<sup>123</sup> Imperial Federation League, 'Second Annual Report', fols. 14–15; Imperial Federation League (31st December 1889) 'Annual balance', Manuscript collections Add. MS. 62779, fol. 167; Imperial Federation League (31st December 1891) 'Annual balance', Manuscript collections Add. MS. 62780, fol. 40; and Financial Committee, 'Report', fol. 39.

<sup>124</sup> IFL Secretary (20th February 1890) 'Secretary's report', Manuscripts collection Add. MS. 62779, fol. 161.

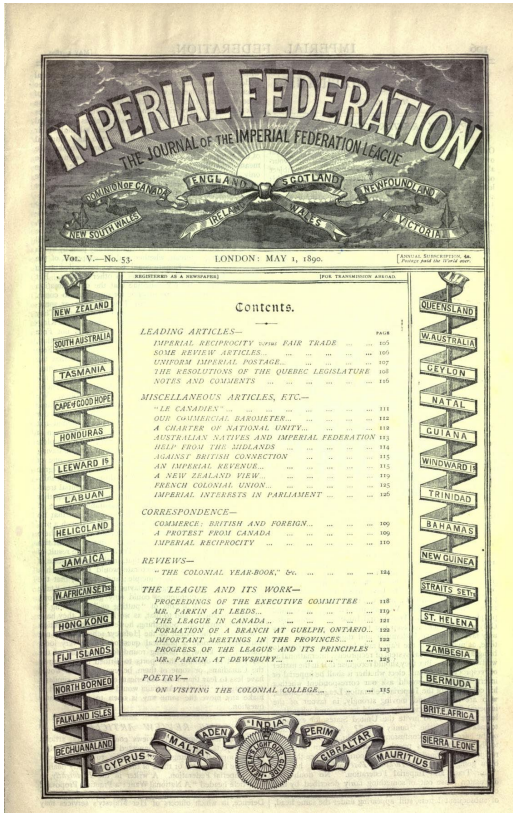


Figure 3 *Imperial Federation* Title Page

The ribbon elegantly binds together all of the empire's territories with the 'Star of India' included near the bottom. Its ambiguous and confessional message is: 'Heavens light our guide'. The organisation's aim to strengthen a shared national feeling among the colonies was a tricky endeavour, not least because of the complicated nature of the dominion's national sentiment. Expressions of dominion patriotism such as William Douw Lighthall's Canadian poems from 1889 demonstrate the intricate relationship between the various connection of his still dynamic perception of Canadian identity:

'The English honour, nerve, and pluck, —the Scotsman's love of right,—  
 The grace and courtesy of France, —the Irish fancy bright, —  
 The Saxon's faithful love of home, and home's affections blest;  
 And, chief of all, our holy faith, —of all our treasure best.'<sup>125</sup>

Title page of *Imperial Federation*, May 1890.

<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Jason R. Rudy, *Imagined Homelands: British Poetry in the Colonies* (2017) Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, p. 49.

main branch, seldom amounted to more than 400–600 members. Every branch with more than 50 members was awarded a seat on the general committee. While the organisation's main activities were local branch meetings and the journal publication, its members also promoted imperial unity in other ways. They were free to seek out and cooperate with other associations and organisations but formal associations, at least in the UK, required approval by the executive committee.<sup>126</sup> Branch activities included meetings between remote branches, student essay contests, drafting letters to policy makers, producing pamphlets, and the formation of a women's section called 'Britannia Roll'.<sup>127</sup>

The Imperial Federation League's primary political ambition was the preservation of what they perceived as the beneficial influence of the British Empire. Their vision was conservative in the sense that it valued status quo and opposed radical colonial emancipation, but it also acknowledged the dangers of stagnation and was never an ideology of imperial immortality.<sup>128</sup> Quite the contrary, imperial federalists were acutely aware of the eventual dissolution of the empire and their schemes never attempted to prevent it, but rather to lessen the damage it would cause; federation was seen as a measure to preserve the essence of the British Empire beyond its constitutional dissolution.

There is nothing unpatriotic or disloyal to the English race in the proposal to substitute a number of self-governing democracies for the present Empire, and the glory of England and her material prosperity might well be as great under one arrangement as under the other.<sup>129</sup>

In fact, one of the most influential members, Francis Peter de Labillière, was even quite annoyed with his contemporaries who refused to plan for the end of empire:

That cannot be called statesmanship which would only deal with the Colonial question of the moment. It is time to think what may be required twenty, thirty, fifty years hence, and shape our policy accordingly. We may wisely determine what direction to take, and steadily steer in it, even if the point for

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<sup>126</sup> UK Branch General Committee (April 16 1891) 'Notes & Comments', British Library, London, Manuscript Collection, fol. 16.

<sup>127</sup> Britannia Roll (March 20 1890) 'First General Meeting', British Library, London, Manuscript Collection, fol. 6.

<sup>128</sup> On a lot of short-term issues, most IFL members aligned with something akin to what Archibald Primrose brought with him, namely 'liberal imperialism' which became incorporated in liberal party policy a few decades later. For more on the liberal party's struggle with liberal imperialism, see Peter D. Jacobson, 'Rosebery and Liberal Imperialism, 1899–1903' (1973) *Journal of British Studies* XIII:1; and George L. Bernstein, 'Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and the Liberal Imperialists' (1983) *Journal of British Studies* XXIII:1, p. 105–124.

<sup>129</sup> John Merriman, 'The Closer Union of the Empire' (April 1887) *Nineteenth Century* 21, p. 511.



which we are bound be many long day distant from us. The only ultimate goal for us, if the union of our Empire is to be real and lasting, is Federation ... giving all its people a voice in whatever policy concerns them, and utilizing for their peace and security the great strength which, if solidified, they will be able to command.<sup>130</sup>

The imperial federalists sought to preserve the empire through constitutional transformation, exploring new political models to save the best of the old.<sup>131</sup> In this sense, while the contemporary notion of imperial ambivalence and uncertainty contributed to the prominence of imperial issues in public debate and convinced many IFL members of the need for imperial reform—the IFL message was not one of imperial defeatism nor hesitation. The federalists pursued the end of the empire as the culmination of the civilising mission, not its capitulation. They wanted to safeguard the essential aspects of the British Empire but conceded that this would require significant compromises with the colonial inhabitants. One of the organisation's most astute members, Professor of history Edward Freeman, even argued that the word 'imperial' was a misnomer all along. He pushed the organisation to adopt a more precise terminology, as he thought the term 'national union' much better captured what most members sought. The only argument in favour of using the term 'federal', he added glibly, would be that someone 'fancied more syllables'.<sup>132</sup>

The theoretical foundation for understanding this imperial essence came largely from Seeley. He believed that one of the reasons to publish *The Expansion of England* was that contemporary politics should be modelled more on what history has taught us. And one of the main history lessons he wished to teach his readers was that Britain's imperial expansion had been something almost accidental, famously won 'in a fit of absence of mind'. According to his history, Britain's imperial story first began with a rather recent smattering of entrepreneurial enterprises which only centuries later amounted to the great venture that he and his contemporaries knew it as.<sup>133</sup> The precarious beginning of Seeley's emplotment allowed him to underscore the uncertainty of his contemporary situation. He saw it as his 'ultimate object' to encourage his readers to translate these historical

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<sup>130</sup> Francis Peter Labilliere, *Federal Britain; or, Unity and Federation of the Empire* (1894) London: Sampson Low, Marston & co., p. 51.

<sup>131</sup> This clashes with some contemporary thinkers such as James Anthony Froude. Froude touched upon many of the federalists' themes, but his framing attempted to prevent decline rather than to transform the empire into its ultimate form. See James Anthony Froude, *Oceana, or England and Her Colonies* (1886) London: Longmans.

<sup>132</sup> Edward A. Freeman, 'Prospects of Home Rule' (1886a) *Fortnightly Review* 46, p. 319.

<sup>133</sup> *The Expansion of England*, pp. 7–166.

insights into political action.<sup>134</sup> Looking towards the future, Seeley offered his readers an expansive horizon, locating the end of his emplotment many decades later, upon the resolution of the ‘enormous, intricate, and at the same time ... momentous problem’ before them.<sup>135</sup>

From this emplotment, the IFL derived a narrative which emphasised the fact that British imperial success was neither preordained nor immune to challenge, but rather something that required long-term maintenance. They argued that English ingenuity and instinctive liberty, through a fortunate constellation of conditions, had spread throughout the empire and had come to exert its influence on a population of unprecedented scale. This was a narrative of English preservation because when the federalists looked to the future, they expected their contemporary uncertainty to be settled by the empire’s dissolution by means of colonial independence. They sought to preserve the best qualities of English influence within the imperial borders, beyond the point of colonial equality. The greatness of the English, argued IFL, lay in their cohesion, which ought to be assured through institutional support.

As in the colonies, so in England, then, the people are alive to the fact that they are still one people, bound by duty, qualified by strength, impelled by high philanthropy to play no secondary part in the unfolding drama of the world’s enlarging life.<sup>136</sup>

The federalists advocated for balancing an even-handed understanding of England’s historical achievements with their passionate belief in what Berny Sebé has identified as the emergence of a more explicit and prominent British exceptionalism.<sup>137</sup>

When examining Victorian federalism from the broader context of Victorian imperialism, there are three distinctive features that most starkly define the federalist way of thinking. The first is based on their Seeleyan understanding of what lessons and truths ought to be derived from history. British society at the time had a great sense of its historical importance and did not shy away from historical comparisons with the classical world to conceptualise its self-

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<sup>134</sup> Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, p. 166.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>136</sup> Forbes, *Imperial Federation*, p. 324.

<sup>137</sup> Berny Sèbe, "Showcasing Empire" Past & Present or a Brief History of Popular Imperialism, from Britannia to Brexit' (Spring 2021) *Cahiers Victoriens & Édouardiens (Online)* 93, pp. 7–8.

understanding and legitimise its military conquests.<sup>138</sup> A more unpleasant version of this could be seen in the rising number of attempts to trace the Anglo-Saxon lineage back to a golden age.<sup>139</sup> The League did stand out in its conviction that history and politics should have a direct correlation to each other; for the League, history was not just a reflection of one's character, but also a guide to one's future.<sup>140</sup> IFL writers, several of whom were historians by profession, repeatedly pointed out the lack of historical insight in contemporary debate and argued, conversely, that history ought to be the point of departure for one's political reasoning, 'the school of statesmanship'.<sup>141</sup> Another historian member, Edward Freeman, reportedly had a favourite motto, that history 'is past politics, politics are present history.'<sup>142</sup>

Qualifying the notion of political acumen as a product of historical insight leads to the second distinctive feature. It is critical to note that *The Expansion of England* presented its reader with an emplotment spanning only a couple of centuries, addressing the empire's current situation from the scope of economic and military expansion rather than the lofty heights of classical parallelism. On the contrary, Seeley offered a grounded record of the history of the British Empire, distinguishing himself from much of contemporary historiography by providing a fair representation of the imperial perspective, and not just the English.<sup>143</sup> For the

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<sup>138</sup> Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (1984) London: Yale University Press, pp. 1–14; Victoria Tietze Larson, 'Classics and the Acquisition and Validation of Power in Britain's "Imperial Century" (1815–1914)' (1999) *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 6:2, pp. 207–25; and Athena S. Leoussi, *Nationalism and Classicism: The Classical Body as National Symbol in Nineteenth-Century England and France* (1998) Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. xviii–xxiii. The Roman case, as Virginia Hoselitz has pointed out, was slightly more complicated. Roman parallels were heavily relied upon during the period. However, most Britons' immediate relationship to the Roman Empire was that it had been colonised. This, in combination with Gibbon's immensely influential account, meant that the Roman Empire was more associated with its fall than its rise, made it an uneasy comparison to make. Virginia Hoselitz, *Imagining Roman Britain: Victorian Responses to a Roman Past* (2007) Suffolk: The Boydell Press, pp. 38–41.

<sup>139</sup> Paul A. Kramer, 'Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880–1910' (Mars 2002) *The Journal of American History* 88:4, pp. 1320–35.

<sup>140</sup> The role of history in politics was particularly troubling for the Liberals. Theodore Koditschek has argued that the failure to establish a persuasive, liberal narrative on Britain's imperial history contributed to the failure of the party's imperial policy, Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination*, p. 318.

<sup>141</sup> Seeley, cited in Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (2016) Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 266.

<sup>142</sup> W. R. W. Stephens, *The Life and Letters of Edward A. Freeman* (1895) London: Macmillan & Co., p. 181.

<sup>143</sup> Evans, "'A World Empire, Sea-Girt'", pp. 50 & 91–92.

federalists, an imperial history that defined contemporary political conditions was in fact a history of the actual expansion of England; they saw imperial expansion as a dissemination of the English nation—an *imperium*—that needed to be matched historiographically, in terms of infrastructure and, not least, constitutionally.<sup>144</sup>

But if the State is the Nation (not the Country, observe, but the Nation), then we see sufficient ground for the universal usage of modern states, which had been to regard their emigrants not as going out of the State but as carrying the State with them. The notion was, Where [sic] Englishmen are there is England, where Frenchmen are there is France, and so the possessions of France in North America was called New France and one group at least of the English possessions New England.<sup>145</sup>

An imperialist like John Stuart Mill, on the contrary, saw the empire as a valuable resource and an expression of English greatness, but never as a prerequisite for it.<sup>146</sup> Likewise, Rhodes spoke of the empire in a more quantitative manner: ‘more territory simply means more of the Anglo-Saxon race’.<sup>147</sup> Federalism was, among other things, a constitutional strategy to overcome the centre–periphery understanding of Britain’s imperial enterprise. As five-time governor Sir George Ferguson Bowen lamented:

We must cease altogether to say that England is an island off the north-western coast of Europe, that it has an area of 120,000 square miles, and a population of thirty odd millions. We must cease to think that emigrants when they go to the Colonies, leave England, or are lost to England. We must cease to think that the history of England is the history of the Parliament that sits at Westminster, and that affairs which are not discussed there cannot belong to English history.<sup>148</sup>

The third distinctive feature of Victorian federalism was, unsurprisingly, its predisposition for constitutional measures. IFL was not alone in grappling with the implications of the United Kingdom’s extensive settler colonialism. The exact traits of the ‘English national character’ became a topic of debate in a way that had

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<sup>144</sup> Seeley and his *Uses of History*, p. 96.

<sup>145</sup> Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, p. 41.

<sup>146</sup> Georgios Varouxakis, *Liberty Abroad: J. S. Mill on International Relations* (2013) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 127–31.

<sup>147</sup> From 1877, cited in Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (2009) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 149.

<sup>148</sup> George Ferguson Bowen, ‘The Federation of the British Empire’ (1885–6) *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute* 17, p. 295.



**Figure 4 Queen Victoria's Jubilee**

In the 19th century, the monarchy and its jubilees were increasingly associated with the imperial mission and the ceremonies were designed to showcase Britain's imperial achievements.<sup>149</sup> Meanwhile, an informed observer could not ignore the questions that the ceremony raised. The poet and federalist Tennyson, for example, included some pertinent questions in his poetic account of the event: 'Are there thunders moaning in the distance? Are there spectres moving in the darkness?'<sup>150</sup> The federalists realised that the grandeur in its current form could not continue forever and they sought the solution that would best prolong its most essential aspects.

'Queen Victoria's Jubilee Service, Westminster Abbey, 21 June 1887' by William Ewart Lockhart. Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by Quibik.

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<sup>149</sup> Ashley Jackson and David Tomkins, 'Images of Empire' (2011) *BBC History Magazine* 12:7, p. 53.

<sup>150</sup> Alfred Tennyson, *The Poetical Works of Tennyson* (1974) Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, p. 527.

been previously redundant.<sup>151</sup> The state, however, was generally seen as an institution effective based on its geographical cohesion. Expanding its jurisdiction was seen as incompatible with many of its traditional aspects, such as the adaptiveness of its unwritten constitution.<sup>152</sup> To others, such as J. A. Froude—who even interacted with the IFL on occasion—the elaborate nature of a constitutional overhaul of the entire empire seemed naïve and impractical.<sup>153</sup> In sum, even though the federalists acknowledged many of the same issues as their contemporaries, regarding colonial nationalism, geopolitical uncertainty, and social disruption, they distinguished themselves in their assertion that these issues required a constitutional solution, derived from historical insight, and based on the shared nationhood found throughout the British Empire. These tenets would lay the foundation for the preservationist narrative that guided the imperial federalists in their pursuit of preserving the essential English qualities of the empire beyond its dissolution.

As to the nature of this English/imperial essence—which the federalists strove to preserve—one of the most central and ubiquitous themes found in the League's texts was that of the English as harbingers of civilisation. Historian Brett Bowden has argued that the traditional Western understanding of civilisation has been, in the words of R. G. Collingwood, 'the process of approximation to an ideal state'.<sup>154</sup> This approximation was a shared, global venture, with some further along than others. These nations distinguished themselves by having enough time and resources to develop a number of characteristics which marked their peoples' proximity to the ideal.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> A debate to which IFL members contributed substantially, Peter Mandler, 'The Consciousness of Modernity? Liberalism and the English 'National Character', 1870–1940', in Martin Daunt and Bernhard Rieger (eds.), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late Victorian Era to World War I* (2001) Oxford: Berg, pp. 119–32. For a comprehensive overview of the Victorian understanding of the English nation as having an imperial presence, see Bell, 'The Victorian Idea of a Global State', pp. 172–76. Another example of an imperial expression that appears in the contemporary debate is the extent to which the term 'British' was a proper denominator for the empire. See Richard Koebner & Helmut Dan Schmidt, *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840–1960* (1964) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 169–70.

<sup>152</sup> Bell, 'The Victorian Idea of a Global State', pp. 162–65. Probably the most ardent and prominent defender of the domestic limitations of the British constitution can be found in lawyer A. C. Dicey, see Searle, *A New England?*, pp. 118–19.

<sup>153</sup> James Anthony Froude, 'On Progress', in James Anthony Froude (ed.), *Short Studies on Great Subjects* (1872) New York: Charles Scribner and Company, p. 264.

<sup>154</sup> Cited in Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization*, p. 42.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40–46.

For the benefit of today's reader, it ought to be noted that the civilisation project was a fundamentally Christian endeavour. The IFL membership, and the concept of the white man's burden generally, were guided by Christian ethics and the conviction that religious labour formed 'the basis of the civilization'.<sup>156</sup> Britain's imperial ambition had always been steeped in a Christian worldview, but the second half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of a missionary zeal where many of the arenas for British imperial assertion—such as Africa and India—were intimately associated with the Christian mission.<sup>157</sup> Certain members advertised the religious aspects of their message more overtly than others, but in general, the organisation can be viewed as a political movement in line with the fundamental Christian ideas of the time. As such, one can assume that a key feature of the preservation of English civilising values was the expansion and affirmation of Christianity's presence—even in cases when it was not made explicit.<sup>158</sup>

Modernity was seen as a quality inherent to certain groups.<sup>159</sup> Many IFL members shared in a wider discourse that emphasised the European dimension of the progress of civilisation, while they also maintained the centrality of their own nations within that project, just like their continental counterpart François Guizot.<sup>160</sup> This duality of European unity and disunity was a mainstay of civilisation discourse at the time, as events such as the Berlin Conference became defined by both a hard-wired belief in European superiority and a pragmatic concern with European competition.<sup>161</sup>

To IFL members there was a 'cosmopolitan nationalism', a 'sentiment of patriotism that is common to Englishmen', that they saw as the foundation for any

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<sup>156</sup> The quote is by writer and theologian Joaquín Roca y Cornet: '*la base de la civilización*'. Cited in Mats André, *Thinking Europe. A History of the European Idea since 1800* (2023) New York: Berghen Books, p. 102. For more on the critical role played by Christianity in the concept of the white man's burden, see Michael Wintle, *Eurocentrism: History, Identity, White Man's Burden* (2021) London: Routledge, pp. 180–85.

<sup>157</sup> Interest in Indian colonial activity was reinvigorated when the colony was placed under state control in 1858, Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (1977) [1964] Middlesex: Penguin Books, pp. 322–96. For an introduction to the central role played by Christianity in British imperial self-understanding generally, see J. A. Mangan, 'Christ and the Imperial Playing Fields: Thomas Hughe's Ideological Heirs in Empire', in John J. Macaloon (ed.), *Muscular Christianity in Colonial and Post-Colonial Worlds* (2008) London: Routledge, pp. 77–80.

<sup>158</sup> In fact, eventually the opposite would demand an explanation.

<sup>159</sup> Martin Daunton & Bernhard Rieger, 'Introduction', in Martin Daunton & Bernhard Rieger (eds.), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War I* (2001b) Oxford: Berg, pp. 8–12.

<sup>160</sup> André, *Thinking Europe*, pp. 85–93.

<sup>161</sup> Wintle, *Eurocentrism*, p. 132.

federation..<sup>162</sup> The English were seen as ‘strong, courageous and generous’ and their efforts had benefitted ‘commerce and the common interest of mankind’.<sup>163</sup> Federalisation of the empire was seen as a means to preserve the United Kingdom’s capability to safeguard the values of liberty and civilisation, in place of ‘other peoples with less lofty aspirations, purposes and powers.’<sup>164</sup>

In this sense, federalism was seen as the culmination of the civilisation project, the fulfilment of the promises legitimising colonial rule. There were IFL members who, through Gibbon, approached the issue of the empire’s end as a portent of civilisation’s collapse. Yet while the federalist narrative generally acknowledged the political challenges to maintaining an imperial presence, it viewed federalisation as a triumph over those trials rather than a concession to them.<sup>165</sup> Federation was seen as the purest form of hegemonic influence, a civilised community of equals without the need for imperial coercion.

Apart from cultural qualities, the concept of ‘nationhood’ carried with it connotations of a sense of civic and social community. Commissioner, and creator of the scout movement, George Baden-Powell was ardent in making this point: ‘I say National and not Imperial, because I wish to approach the problem, not from the official or Governmental point of view, but from that of every individual citizen.’<sup>166</sup> These citizens shared a national bond which entailed certain characteristics as well as ‘national memories of the past, and our still more glorious hopes for the future.’<sup>167</sup> Seeley viewed national unity in terms of three essential categories: a community defined by race, religion, and interest.<sup>168</sup> However, it had been argued that political inequality strained these ties and to maintain good relations in the future, it was pertinent that the United Kingdom could show its

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<sup>162</sup> ‘Imperial Federation’, p. 322. The notion of ‘cosmopolitan’ nationalism comes from Bell’s description of Seeley, see Bell, *Reordering the World*, p. 279.

<sup>163</sup> Robert Stout, ‘A Colonial View of Imperial Federation’ (March 1887) *Nineteenth Century* 21, p. 352; and Charles Adderley, ‘Imperial Federation: Its Impossibility’ (September 1884) *Nineteenth Century* 16, p. 505 respectively.

<sup>164</sup> W. A. Forbes, ‘Imperial Federation’ (July 1885) *London Quarterly Review* LXIV, p. 322.

<sup>165</sup> See, for example, Lawrence Goldstein, *Ruins and Empire* (Pittsburgh, 1977); Julia Hell, ‘The Twin Towers of Anselm Kiefer and the Trope of Imperial Decline’, *Germanic Review* 84:1 (2009); and Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World*, pp. 121–132.

<sup>166</sup> George Baden-Powell, ‘National Unity’ (1884) *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute* 16, p. 47.

<sup>167</sup> Ferguson Bowen, ‘The Federation of the British Empire’, p. 285.

<sup>168</sup> Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, pp. 108–10. Here we see a lot of similarities with contemporary thinkers such as Thomas Arnold and F. D. Maurice, to whom English nationalism boiled down to unity through the values of liberal Anglicanism. See H. S. Jones, ‘The Idea of the National in Victorian Political Thought’ (2006) *European Journal of Political Theory* 5:1, pp. 15–18.



respect and love for the rest of the empire through sharing in its sovereignty. If not, Forbes warned, the same fate awaited as it would for any individual: 'He that saveth his life shall lose it.'<sup>169</sup>

Even if the exact meaning of nationhood varied among the organisation's members, the League's overarching objective—the ambition that united its membership—was a distillation of the English 'nation'. While the members differed in opinion on most issues, they shared a concern regarding the perpetuity of something specifically English, in which they found the impetus to organise.

It can be tempting for the contemporary reader to equate the IFL understanding of 'people' and 'nation' with a modern understanding of 'race', but as Searle has shown, the term 'race' was both under-theorised and confused before the very late nineteenth century. White superiority was seen as a notion so self-evident that it needed no closer specification nor scrutiny.<sup>170</sup> This was also true of terms like 'people' and 'nation' within the IFL discourse. These were also widely used and vaguely defined, continuously escaping the rigour which most of the organisation's members employed in other areas. This vagueness made it—intentionally—hard to work out exactly who could count on being represented in this federal democracy. The organisation managed two incompatible preoccupations with federation both as a tool of national unity and for civilisation, aimed at separate groups of people. There were other variants as well, such as one mentioned by the poet Sir Alfred Tennyson, who described the colonial nations as England's 'sons', even including the United States.<sup>171</sup>

In hindsight, it is obvious that the IFL aligned itself with contemporary 'wisdom' in that the organisation officially stood for colonial independence for all inhabitants of the empire. However, in practical terms it never acted for equality between whites and non-whites and often demonstrated outright resistance.<sup>172</sup> The 'unspoken consensus' was that in time civilisation would include every human

<sup>169</sup> Forbes, 'Imperial Federation', p. 332.

<sup>170</sup> Searle, *A New England?*, p. 32. See also Comparative Literature scholar Saree Makdisi's study of how issues that we today would interpret on the lines of class and socio-economy were instead often understood within a framework of race during the nineteenth century, Saree Makdisi, 'Race and Empire in the Nineteenth Century', in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century Thought* (2019) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Finally, as Bell points out, the most obvious evidence of a racial worldview among many of these imperialist thinkers was their systematic omission of a non-white perspective. The cruel reality of the imperial practices was systematically ignored along with perspectives from many of the indigenous people under British rule. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, pp. 115–16.

<sup>171</sup> Owen Clayton, 'We're All Anglo-Saxons Now: Alfred Tennyson and the United States' (Spring 2017) *Victorian Review* 43:1, pp. 100–01.

<sup>172</sup> Matikkala, *Empire and Imperial Ambition*, p. 152.

being. Yet, this step was understood as something so momentous—and so far into the future—that the political priority ought to be improved administration (and control), rather than emancipation.<sup>177</sup> This idea had roots in W. E. B. du Bois' concept of 'double consciousness' from 1903, where he described—movingly, from the other point of view—how the Black man is ascribed two identities: one civic and the other physical. His struggle for recognition is defined by the humanitarian rights that he is already entitled to, and the antagonism he faces in practice in reaction to his skin colour.<sup>174</sup> Burgess describes the federalist case most astutely, when he identifies that they simply wanted 'the best of both worlds'. Their narrative framework demanded them to seek out both national unity and civilising progress, even if nobody 'ever seriously contemplated a situation whereby all the English-speaking parts of the empire could be outvoted by Hindus'.<sup>175</sup> To the self-assured supremacist members of the IFL, coloured emancipation was not a prioritised issue.

Another reason for the IFL to downplay the urgency of coloured emancipation was the controversial issue of the two modes of Victorian imperialism. As was alluded to in the paragraph above, the Victorians found no straightforward framing to square the fact that their empire was the product of two parallel processes: settler emigration, often described at the time as colonialism, and military conquest, understood as imperialism. While very few Britons took issue with maintaining a relationship with Canada, the moral justifications for the imperial mandate in Africa was—even at the time—seen a much thornier issue.<sup>176</sup> The most problematic case was India, whose status with regards to civilisation both past and present was a source of endless debate in imperialist circles.<sup>177</sup> The League, in an effort to avoid unnecessary controversy, tended to ignore the Indian issue and others, focusing its efforts on the white settler colonies.<sup>178</sup>

There was, certainly, a group of Britons who condemned colonial expansion altogether: 'England is my country; I for one am proud of it, and find its memories

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<sup>173</sup> Duncan Bell, 'Republican Imperialism: J.A. Froude and the Virtue of Empire' (2009) *History of Political Thought* XXX:1, pp. 168–69.

<sup>174</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (2003) [1903] New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, pp. 143–45.

<sup>175</sup> Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, p. 57.

<sup>176</sup> Matikkala, *Empire and Imperial Ambition*, pp. 145–58.

<sup>177</sup> Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination*, pp. 258–62.

<sup>178</sup> Matikkala, *Empire and Imperial Ambition*, pp. 153–55; and Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, p. 57.

and its honours enough. I pity those who are not content with England'.<sup>179</sup> They were dubbed 'little Englanders' by their opponents, a term they themselves rejected. The earliest, and most enduring, source of explicit imperial criticism stemmed from Comtean positivists including Richard Congreve, Edward Spencer Beesly, Frederic Harrison, and John Henry Bridges. They argued for what many felt: that imperial practice often stood in stark contrast to the humanitarian values it was supposed to advance and that it detracted from critical domestic issues of greater urgency.<sup>180</sup> Socialists like Henry Mayers Hyndman, Ernest Belfort Bax, and William Morris, similarly, often denounced the great imperial narratives.<sup>181</sup> Even the most fierce imperial critics, however, tended to be strategic on colonial issues and direct criticism of colonial practice was rare during the Victorian era. Anti-imperialists were generally drawn into tangential work within organisations such as the Peace Society, the Anti-Aggression League, the Home Rule movement, or other humanitarian causes.<sup>182</sup> Finally, there were of course those who sought the end of the empire in a much more abrupt and absolute way through colonial resistance, most prominently in India.<sup>183</sup>

The IFL's strategy of addressing potential conflicts with constructive ambiguity was applied repeatedly by the organisation's leading members and it has been a recurrent target of criticism within previous research.<sup>184</sup> It is true that imperial federalism was 'a fantasy periodically entertained by many enthusiasts for empire' and that 'the cracks' in the federalist reasoning 'were papered over with rhetoric

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<sup>179</sup> Historian and jurist Frederic Harrison, cited in Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850–1920* (2012) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 113.

<sup>180</sup> A similar sentiment can also be found in the Manchester School, see Elisabeth Wallace, 'The Political Ideas of the Manchester School' (January 1960) *University of Toronto Quarterly* 29:2, pp. 129–31.

<sup>181</sup> Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, pp. 47–180. There was a traditional assumption that a similar predisposition towards domestic issues within British government at the time existed. This entailed a neglect of foreign strategy that resulted in an isolationist approach which laid the ground for World War I. John Charmley's excellent account from 1999, however, established the significant and deliberate foreign activity undertaken by British officials in the decades leading up to 1914. See John Charmley, *Splendid Isolation?: Britain, the Balance of Power and the Origins of the First World War* (1999) London: Hodder & Stoughton.

<sup>182</sup> Matikkala, *Empire and Imperial Ambition*, pp. 40–53; Paul Laity, *The British Peace Movement 1870–1914* (2002) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 88–144; Koebner & Schmidt, *Imperialism*, p. 168; and Andrew Porter, 'Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery and Humanitarianism', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (1999) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 216–20.

<sup>183</sup> S. R. Mehrotra, *A History of the Indian National Congress, Vol. 1, 1885–1918* (1995) New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT ltd., pp. 1–160.

<sup>184</sup> The most comprehensive accounts can be found in Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, p. 50; and Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History*, p. 48.

and sentiment', but it is also improbable that a more detailed proposal would have garnered the same kind of broad support as the League did.<sup>185</sup> To the extent that the sole purpose of the organisation was policy influence, federalism did not amount to much. To the extent that one strove to focus attention on long-term imperial issues and open up space within the public debate, the League made leading politicians, academics and journalists attempt to clarify their views on the long-term nature of the UK's imperial ambition and to design a constitutional model to facilitate it.

In the end, the federalists were out of step with their time. Even if there was widespread acceptance of the benefits of Britain's global influence, few approached those issues with a sense of political urgency. Similarly, while most accepted that there was a historic component in understanding these qualities. Some groups, such as the 'genetic' Classicists, imbued Britain's heritage with a lot more elaborate and consequential meaning—Seeley's emplotment distinguished itself in its challenge of political complacency and the UK's reluctance to compromise on issues of colonial sovereignty.<sup>186</sup> Groups such as the imperialist wing of the liberal party would pose similar questions a few decades later, but during the 1880s, their focus was still domestic.<sup>187</sup>

Within public opinion, the federalists' biggest obstacle was plain indifference. During the nineteenth century, there was no appetite for operating an extensive imperial machinery at the expense of domestic issues, and many politicians argued accordingly.<sup>188</sup> In the words of Robert Cecil, the federalist schemes 'lend themselves more readily to peroration than to argument'.<sup>189</sup> Against this, the imperial federalist logic believed that it was impossible to so cleanly separate domestic matters from imperial politics. Additionally, Seeley's account had demonstrated the accidental nature of British supremacy and the danger of complacency in the face of an ever-changing global order. In contrast to most of its contemporaries, the IFL narrative dared to look far into the future and engaged

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<sup>185</sup> Simon J. Potter, 'W. T. Stead, Imperial Federation and the South African War', in Laurel Brake et al. (eds.), *W. T. Stead Newspaper Revolutionary* (2012) London: The British Library, p. 117; and Evans, 'A World Empire, Sea-Girt', p. 82.

<sup>186</sup> *Nationalism & Classicism*, pp. 157–164. In fact, Seeley explicitly denounced histories of 'the English civilisation', arguing that proper history must deal with more tangible facts and that the history of England first and foremost is the history of the English state. Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, pp. 6–8.

<sup>187</sup> *The Liberal Imperialists*, pp. 3–23.

<sup>188</sup> See, for example, Gladstone in Commons 4/6 1886, fols. 1015–1016. See also HoC 14/4 1899, and HoC 15/5 1888. Searle, *A New England?*, pp. 250–52.

<sup>189</sup> HoC, 12/2 1891.



Figure 5 The Crossing Sweeper

The late Victorian public's ambiguous attitude towards their imperial commitments took many forms. Art historian Jane Lydon argues that variations on the Dickensian theme of the poor chimney sweep as in the painting above can be understood as part of the contested Victorian effort to define the disinherited. On one side, figures like Dickens proclaimed imperialism as a diversion from the genuine issues on the streets in the mother country, while others argued that the colonised were equally worthy of that sympathy.<sup>190</sup>

'The Crossing Sweeper' (1858) by William Powell Fritz. The original can be found in the collections of Museum of London and is part of the public domain via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by FA2010.

<sup>190</sup> Jane Lydon, "'The Colonial Children Cry': Jo the Crossing-Sweep Goes to the Colonies' (2015) *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20:3, pp. 320–321.

itself with existential issues on a scale most deemed as incompatible with everyday politics. Forbes held that the nation was in urgent need to define and protect its most valuable assets, or else the empire risked ‘*disintegration*, weakness, strife, the eventual domination in the world of other peoples with less lofty aspirations, purposes, and powers.’ Measures needed to be taken to safeguard the ‘chief link which binds its various parts together’.

While not gaining any serious political traction, the Imperial Federation League carried on its work with a wide array of initiatives to promote imperial issues.<sup>191</sup> As such, the organisation grew slowly but steadily until 1891. As mentioned, the organisation’s core message up to this point had been kept constructively ambiguous. History professor Cyril Ransome wrote of his own proposal in an open letter from 1890: ‘Though such a scheme admits of endless variety of detail, the broad lines are simple enough.’<sup>192</sup> Labillière even claimed that it was to the organisation’s credit that it had not bound itself to ‘some elaborate, and probably fantastic, constitution’.<sup>193</sup> By 1891, however, discord had been mounting within the organisation and a special committee was appointed in July to finally outline a cohesive and comprehensive proposal that the membership could unite behind. About fifteen months later, the committee presented its results in front of the League Council.<sup>194</sup>

The report was not quite a full federalist scheme but based ‘upon the fundamental premise that imperial unity remained a general desire’.<sup>195</sup> It presented ‘an arrangement which allowed for the introduction of a federal element into the governing of the empire’.<sup>196</sup> The report aimed to combine and harmonise the League’s different schemes, but—as many had already suspected—support for a single, concrete scheme of an imperial federation was simply lacking. Two criticisms in particular were levelled at the report, the first of which was the almost complete omission of economic imperial ties. The report was a big win for those

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<sup>191</sup> Among the more creative ideas was the push for cheaper imperial postage, designing badges where each colony was represented by their own animal, and even setting up a ‘Special Committee of Selection’ whose aim was to further improve these kinds of proposals. See IFL Secretary (Spring 1891) ‘Secretary’s Report’, British Library, London, Manuscript collections Add. Ms. 62780, fol. 3, Anonymous (Late Spring 1891) ‘Executive Committee Meeting’, *ibid.* Add. MS. 62779, fol. 196 and (1892) ‘Special Committee of Selection meeting’, *ibid.* Add. Ms. 62780 respectively.

<sup>192</sup> Cyril Ransome (30th October 1890) ‘Open letter’, *ibid.* Add. Ms. 62779, fol. 217.

<sup>193</sup> Labilliere, ‘Imperial Federation’, *PRCI*, p. 320.

<sup>194</sup> Michael Burgess, ‘The Imperial Federation Movement in Great Britain, 1869-1893’, Ph.D. thesis (University of Leicester, 1976), pp. 289–91.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

emphasising shared imperial defence as one of the core aspects of imperial unity, but a hard blow to the ‘commercial federalists’, who were keen on economic incentives (primarily tariff cuts) for unity. Secondly, many thought that the plans went too far compared to the theoretical work done by the organisation and its level of public support. In other words, it appeared lofty and unrealistic. Gladstone judged the report in a similar manner when it landed on his desk in April of the following year, concluding that ‘public opinion has yet to be exercised and matured’.<sup>197</sup>

In combination with the withdrawal of a number of key donors in late 1891 and the division within the organisation verified by the report, sent the League on a downwards trajectory from which it was unable to recover.<sup>198</sup> Some efforts were made to revitalise ideas from before the report but at that point the genie was out of the bottle. By May 1894 the membership had dispersed and the organisation had been financially dissolved.<sup>199</sup> Although it failed to mobilise in politically significant numbers, the League made crucial advances in the exploration of imperial federalism and the establishment of British federalism.<sup>200</sup> It also established a framework for a federalist vision of the end of the empire, argued for the preservation of Britain’s imperial connections, and postulated on the idea of an intra-imperial, shared English nationality. The rest of this chapter will explore how these notions were understood and applied by prominent members, both inside and outside of their IFL activity. The first section will look at the ‘civic’ branch of the IFL membership, emphasising the imperial bonds’ foundational role in the establishment of a UK sense of nationhood. As a prominent and prolific writer on this version of federalism, the section will focus on the ideas of Lord Rosebery—contrasted and nuanced by other ‘civic preservationists’, such as W. E. Forster and Robert Stout.

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<sup>197</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 304. *Ibid.*, pp. 289–304.

<sup>198</sup> Financial Committee, ‘Report’, fol. 39.

<sup>199</sup> Committee for Winding up Affairs (9th May 1894) ‘Committee Report’, British Library, London, Manuscripts collection Add. Ms. 62780, fol. 124.

<sup>200</sup> For a comprehensive assessment of the League’s legacy, see Michael Burgess, ‘The Federal Plan of the Imperial Federation League 1892: Milestone or Tombstone?’, in Andrea Bosco (ed.), *The Federal Idea: The History of Federalism from Enlightenment to 1945* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press. For more on British federalism as a ‘tradition’, see Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, pp. 5–20.

## Civic Preservationism: The ‘Broad Belt of British Populations’

While the vagueness of the Imperial Federation League was, all things considered, a necessary strategy, it did leave the organisation vulnerable to the full force of the ambiguity inherent to the concept of federalism. As mentioned previously, federalism is an ideology with both centralising and decentralising potential, which also aims to establish a shared aim holding that balance is a key aspect to the unity of any federalist movement. The vagueness of the League left it open to pursuing the coexistence of several different levels of centralisation, which in turn came to define political visions of different characters. This section will survey and contrast the most influential of the decentralised viewpoints, while the following, ‘Constitutional Preservationism: “England’s Mighty Heart”’, looks at the more centralised conceptions. This is not to say that these levels of centralisation are the only dimension on which the following ideas should be scrutinised, but it is a categorisation that demonstrates well how they relate to one another in broad strokes. This section focuses on the League’s perhaps most eccentric member, Lord Rosebery.

None joined the IFL with such high a profile as Sir Archibald Philip Primrose, commonly referred to as Lord Rosebery. When the League was established, Rosebery’s career was on the rise. He was born in 1847, and began his political life in 1868, when he inherited his grandfather’s position in the House of Lords, joining its liberal ranks. He played a vital part in Gladstone’s Midlothian campaign of 1879 and by the mid-1880s he had become a Liberal party heavyweight, serving as Foreign Secretary for Gladstone’s third ministry. The Liberals would spend most of IFL’s existence in opposition and parallel to his federalist activity, Rosebery’s main commitment was his chairing of the London County Council, formed in 1889.

Rosebery became IFL chairman in 1886 and while his general imperial enthusiasm initially seemed promising, it became evident almost immediately both that he would fail to prioritise his League responsibilities and that he found it difficult to square his rather modest federalist vision with the far-reaching ambitions of the rest of the organisation. He was absent from both the general meetings in 1886 and 1887 and he responded with defiance when the central organisation demanded that he take his role as chair more seriously.<sup>201</sup> When he

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<sup>201</sup> Leo Mckinstry, *Rosebery: Statesman in Turmoil* (2005) London: John Murray, pp. 126 & 163–64.



left the League in 1892, it was clear that Rosebery had neither played a consequential part in the ideological setup of the organisation nor aligned his ideas with the mainstream membership. As it pertains to this study, however, he does present a case of liberal–federalist entanglement, in contrast to the federalism of the organisational core presented above. We can gain insight into how a central figure to the organisation thought and acted. If we look past his lack of engagement and ideological nonconformity, we can see that his brand of civic preservationism did represent a decentralised understanding of the post-imperial order which attracted a certain faction of the membership. This period was formative to Rosebery and his imperial outlook, laying the groundwork for a brand of imperialism that would prove consequential for liberal circles two decades later.<sup>202</sup>

Rosebery had been convinced of the merits of imperialism long before the 1880s and his introduction to the Imperial Federation League. When he addressed the Social Science Congress in Glasgow in September 1874, he celebrated the fact that the UK swayed ‘so mightily the destinies of the universe’ and urged the British to ‘look to nurture the race of kings.’<sup>203</sup> This is not to say that he was naïve in his outlook or failed to acknowledge that national fortunes could wax and wane. He never shied away from the fact that a position of such geopolitical relevance required costly and serious upkeep and that one had no reason to assume that success would automatically lead to further triumphs. His handling of imperial issues at this stage was general, and his concerns were based on principles rather than on practical matters.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> It is worth briefly commenting on the nature of the material detailing Rosebery’s imperialism during this period. As empire and the IFL only constituted one of his interests and commitments during these decades and due to the nature of his political work, Rosebery’s imperialism must be studied through speeches and articles on other subjects. Michael Burgess describes the study of Rosebery’s time as IFL chairman as ‘something of a puzzle’ and the imperialism that is traceable is woven into a comprehensive ideology and entangled with a number of positions on different matters, rather than succinctly comprised and defined at a certain point in time. Burgess, ‘Lord Rosebery’, p. 168.

<sup>203</sup> Archibald Primrose, ‘The True Leverage of Empire’, *Lord Rosebery’s Speeches (1874-1896)* (1896d) London: Neville Beeman Limited, p. 36 and *ibid.*, p. 37 respectively.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38–41.



Figure 6 Rosebery as Napoleon

Rosebery's fame combined with his politically unconventional personality made him a lightning rod of ridicule and satire to the extent that he was himself a distinct aspect of Victorian visual culture. Here he is parodied as his political hero Napoleon—Historian John Darwin describes his indolence as 'legendary' and Winston Churchill described the conditions that allowed for Rosebery's success as 'an age of great men and small events.'<sup>205</sup> In a *Vanity Fair* cartoon from 1901, he was described as 'A statesman full of possibilities', which was an apt—albeit scathing—description of him throughout his career.

Satirical cartoon by Francis Carruthers Gould. The image is included in McKinstry, *Rosebery*.<sup>206</sup>

<sup>205</sup> John Darwin, 'The Rhodes Trust in the Age of Empire' in Anthony Kenny (ed.) *The History of the Rhodes Trust 1902–1999* (2001) Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 474; and Winston Churchill, *Great Contemporaries* (1937) London, p. 23.

<sup>206</sup> Illustration 2, in McKinstry, *Rosebery*, p. 210

Rosebery's imperialism transformed after a colonial visit to Southeast Asia and Oceania in 1883–1884. The exposure to colonial life and the colonial perspective invigorated Rosebery's imperialist zeal and gave his political calling a more precise, colonial focus.<sup>207</sup> In a series of speeches in the early months of 1884 he posited that imperial ties were in constant flux, always either increasing and decreasing in strength. He argued that imperial cooperation was a constant effort that must be tackled in a comprehensive manner, as even sacrifice in control over small areas could mark the beginning of a decline that could leave the empire 'to crumble exceedingly small.'<sup>208</sup> The main principle safeguarding against such an unravelling was 'the communion of races', which he likened to a core string in a rope, without which it would unravel completely.<sup>209</sup> He described the intra-imperial relationships as 'a marriage of affections, or it is nothing at all.'<sup>210</sup>

In his new imperialism, Rosebery was keen to strike a balance between the visionary and the pragmatic. He refused to allow his vision to be pinned down by any specific definition of what 'federation' entailed or even the exact meaning of British Empire, which he argued was 'beyond the minds of those who have endeavoured to define it.'<sup>211</sup> Consequently, he dismissed any detailed scheme outright and argued that lasting imperial unity could not be sketched out on the drawing board of intellectuals but would have to grow out of popular imperial sentiment. Once back in Great Britain, he even argued for an imperial constitution of 'the people'.<sup>212</sup> In this sense, while Rosebery maintained a reluctance to practical details, his coming into contact with colonial life had provided his imperialism not with precision but with clarity—that is, his vision may have lacked detail, but it was clear on the nature of its fundamental principles. By 1884–1885 Rosebery had settled on a bottom-up imperialism as the premise that he would be committed to throughout his career.

Rosebery's decentralised notion of federalism would become further clarified in 1890, in his acceptance speech for receiving 'The Freedom of Glasgow'. In it, he suggested that Scottish national sentiment was strengthened by imperialist notions and that the empire provided a canvas where local patriotism could be

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<sup>207</sup> Burgess, 'Lord Rosebery', p. 170.

<sup>208</sup> From a speech in Adelaide, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1884, cited in The Marquess Of Crewe, *Lord Rosebery* (1931) London: Harpers & Brothers Publishers, p. 150.

<sup>209</sup> From a speech in Melbourne, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1884, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 147–48.

<sup>210</sup> Same speech, *ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> Speech for the Trade Union Congress in Aberdeen, September 1884, cited in *ibid.*, p. 166.

played out.<sup>213</sup> This line of reasoning would develop into a central theme in his imperialism: the empire as the political framework for effective local government. In the speech, he goes on to argue the value of strong local politics, at the expense of Westminster dominance, which he believed provided the lifeblood of a healthy imperial community.<sup>214</sup> The ‘maintenance of this Empire depends, not on centralisation, but on decentralisation ... to relieve this groaning Imperial Parliament from the burden of legislation under which it labours.’<sup>215</sup>

Rosebery’s realisation was that local politics depended on a local sense of pride for one’s share in the national effort, of which there existed no more obvious manifestation than the empire. His reasoning is reminiscent of the contemporary cooperative movement and its promotion of ‘cooperative federalism’, spearheaded by Lady Beatrice Webb.<sup>216</sup> The movement falls outside of the parameters of this study as its focus on local organisation and federalism at the state level was only an implicit continuation of one’s efforts to promote organisation hierarchies on a federal model. Webb indicated that federalism seemed to be the governmental system best aligned with the democratic tendencies of the day, but she never addressed the concept in terms of a constitutional answer to geopolitical uncertainty or a vision for a post-imperial order.<sup>217</sup> The similarity to Rosebery is not completely accidental, as he would join with Webb’s Fabians for a brief period a decade later.<sup>218</sup>

In line with the generally accepted IFL narrative, Rosebery saw the UK’s imperial expansion as testament to the dissemination of the British nation and, as such, the common political project par excellence, which could unite local political efforts during a period which he believed was threatened by social unrest. Imperial federation, built from the bottom up, had the potential to become an inclusive political project that side-stepped the damaged relationship between local authorities and Westminster—centring political attention on ‘the girding of the world with a broad belt of British populations which shall ensure the maintenance of peace.’<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Archibald Primrose, ‘Social Problems’, *Lord Rosebery’s Speeches, 1874–1896* (1896) London: Neville Leeman limited, p. 65.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65–75. See also Primrose, ‘The Rule of England in Ireland’, p. 133; and Primrose, ‘The Partnership and Its Necessities’, p. 160.

<sup>215</sup> Primrose, ‘The Predominant Partner’, p. 156.

<sup>216</sup> Née Potter.

<sup>217</sup> Beatrice Potter, *The Cooperative Movement in Great Britain* (1930) [1891] London: George Allen & Unwin ltd., pp. 84–116.

<sup>218</sup> Mckinstry, *Rosebery*, pp. 429–31.

<sup>219</sup> Speech in Manchester 1<sup>st</sup> April 1885, cited in Crewe, *Lord Rosebery*, p. 190.

Following this reasoning, Rosebery argued that the immediate concern of IFL should not be the drafting of constitutional schemes, but the promotion of imperial sentiment far and wide. He had accepted the generally accepted IFL emplotment, but he leaned even further into Seeley's assertion of the 'absence-of-mind'-nature of British imperial success, arguing that it would prove folly to try to replicate or augment English expansion by design. Instead, Rosebery argued for an opaquer preservationist narrative, accepting a greater portion of uncertainty with regards to envisioning the future. It was a narrative of 'civic' preservationism, as it emphasised the personal and individual aspects of imperial cohesion, arguing that imperial stability ultimately was the product of popular endorsement of the central administration. Popular imperial support, Rosebery argued, would grow gradually with the establishment of sensible local government and the prominence of imperial issues in daily politics and could not be produced on command.

This insight is key not just to understanding Rosebery's non-committal committal approach to his chairmanship, but also to gaining a more nuanced understanding of the difference between Rosebery's conception of the essence of British imperial success and that of his fellow IFL members. Here, Rosebery aligned himself with a number of colonial politicians who were attracted to the concept of federalism as a promotion of the shared nature of the imperial endeavour.

There were a number of colonial politicians and high-ranking administrators who were drawn into the Imperial Federation League as a means to increase the traction of colonial issues. They were connected to all parts of the empire and their contributions manifested the truly imperial nature of the organisation's activity. They saw in the League an opportunity to promote imperial issues to the Westminster political machinery but also an opportunity to influence that promotion, making their mark on the design of IFL's political ambitions.

Colonial politics were, generally speaking, amicable towards their British connection and while these relationships underwent thorough revaluation in the period, few went so far as to seriously consider a future completely disconnected from the British sphere of influence.<sup>220</sup> The colonial politicians and administrators within IFL made an effort to support and welcome the increased attention directed towards imperial issues, while at the same time—in line with the civic narrative—they tried to scale down the constitutional ambitions and to minimise the bureaucratic and political demands associated with the federalist schemes. As such,

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<sup>220</sup> The Canadian case is insightfully covered in Graeme Thompson, 'Reframing Canada's Great War: Liberalism, Sovereignty, and the British Empire C. 1860s–1919' (March 2018) *International Journal* 73:1.

many sought to convince their readers of the benefits of *status quo* and to dissuade them from taxing the existing mode of cooperation with unnecessary superstructure. Premier of New Zealand, Sir Robert Stout, for example, stressed that 'the colonies have as strong a love for England as her own sons' and that there was a strong bond uniting the English throughout the world. This was a bond which needed to be strengthened and promoted.<sup>221</sup> Caribbean Commissioner Sir George Baden-Powell, argued against the terms 'Federation or Unification' and preferred instead 'Unity, because we are not endeavouring to create this unity, for we are dealing with an already existing unity.'<sup>222</sup> Alexander Stuart, Premier of New South Wales (Australia), described 'the preservation of the unity and glory of the Empire' as a 'common interest', in which 'lies the foundation of the truest and most lasting federation.'<sup>223</sup>

Simultaneously, many of these voices made sure to stress that the colonies did not seek further involvement in central administration and did not want to be burdened with increased bureaucracy. As Stout put it, the colonies did not really seek an institutional solution, but rather something 'wider and grander' than just a seat in federal parliament.<sup>224</sup> The Governor of South Australia and composer, William C. F. Robinson, argued, in the same vein, that the empire had little desire to be dragged into increased imperial administration.<sup>225</sup> Former South African cabinet minister John Xavier Merriman, while generally enamoured with the awesome potential of a federated empire, urged explicitly against a military union, as it would—invoking ancient Athens as precedent—introduce unnecessary discord.<sup>226</sup>

Essentially, the civic preservationist narrative was very persuasive to many settler colonialists as it validated their experiences of imperial practice and their understanding of British identity. In federalism's entanglement with colonial politics, federalism became a vehicle to push for a politically less committal strengthening of the cultural status of the colonies. Colonial politicians engaged actively with the League as a means of demonstrating their readiness to contribute to the 'broad belt of English populations', while simultaneously veering away from the federalist schemes that would entail governmental responsibilities, which they

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<sup>221</sup> Stout, 'A Colonial View of Imperial Federation', pp. 351–57. The quote can be found on p. 357.

<sup>222</sup> Baden-Powell, 'National Unity', p. 47.

<sup>223</sup> Alexander Stuart, 'One More View of Colonial Federation', *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 27 1885 p. 2.

<sup>224</sup> Robert Stout, 'The Proposed Colonial Board of Advice', *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 11 1885.

<sup>225</sup> William C. F. Robinson, *Pall Mall Gazette*, June 17 1885.

<sup>226</sup> Merriman, 'The Closer Union of the Empire', pp. 515–16.

perceived as restrictive. While the strategy may appear cynical in hindsight, it speaks to the precarity experienced by the colonies in relation to a motherland which seemed ever hesitant to commit to a reliable set of imperial responsibilities. To them, federalism became the promise of an imperial policy shielded from the whims of domestic political priorities.

The prominence of the names listed above is testament to the influence IFL had over the colonial leadership. Federation was a salient concept when presented correctly and it proved capable of stirring the imagination of commissioners, MPs, and governors alike. Many politicians were drawn to IFL's civic tendencies as they did not commit the colonies to constitutional reforms which could prove dead on arrival when put in front of parliament.

Liberal MP William Edward Forster, for example, joined the IFL late in his career, having already played a central role in the 1870 Education Act and as the Chief Secretary for Ireland, and was guided in his convictions by his experience of parliamentary strategy. He argued that an imperial union must be understood in terms of a multi-stage ambition and that the League must concentrate its efforts towards initial, attainable steps that would eventually strengthen imperial unity. Forster suggested adding a Board of Advice which could gather colonial expertise and allow for the creation of a centralised imperial institution, even if it lacked executive power. To him, the board's similarities to the Council of India would make it 'familiar' and thus 'feasible', neither burdening future federalists with detailed commitments nor putting potential supporters off with excessively subversive schemes.<sup>227</sup> Many of the League's political members saw a dynamic potential in the decentralising notions of federalism, viewing civic preservationism both as more palatable to the UK establishment and more adaptable to future challenges.

Rosebery's time in the IFL coincided with an early, encouraging, phase of his career but his subsequent premiership has by most commentators been deemed an exercise in ineptitude. When Gladstone resigned in 1894, Rosebery found himself in the position to replace him and after some back and forth he emerged as the last candidate standing. Unfortunately, the highest office would not prove a good fit for Rosebery's character, resulting in what Churchill describes as a period of 'endless vexation', revealing Rosebery's inability 'to subject himself to the mechanisms of modern democracy and to the exigencies of the party caucus.'<sup>228</sup> Author and Labour MP Dick Leonard even argues that Rosebery 'should never

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<sup>227</sup> Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, pp. 41–46. The quote can be found on page 42.

<sup>228</sup> Churchill, *Great Contemporaries*, p. 22 & 24.

have tried his hand at politics.<sup>229</sup> While perhaps this condemnation is too harsh, it is obvious that Rosebery's premiership in many ways was a failure. However, any account of his political contribution in its entirety would be remiss not to mention both his commendable work as Foreign Secretary and his central role within the Liberal Party faction called the 'Liberal Imperialists'.

The beginnings of the Liberal Imperialists can be traced back to the days of the IFL, as it was during the opposition years under Salisbury (1886–1892) that its key members began forming some closer ties.<sup>230</sup> As mentioned above, it would take a while before the group would shift its focus away from the domestic agenda. In fact, it was not until the turn of the century and the imperialist debate surrounding the Boer War that imperial ideology become one of the principal dividing lines within the Liberal party.<sup>231</sup> By that time, Rosebery had established himself as a liberal thinker with an early and consistent imperialist agenda, which would eventually become entangled with the manoeuvring of a party in reconfiguration. When the imperialist wing formally dubbed itself the Liberal League in 1902, Rosebery was elected its leader, making an implicit bid at the leadership of the entire party. In the end, the League failed to achieve anything substantial. Politically, it was largely outmanoeuvred both by the actions of its opposition and surrounding events. What it ultimately accomplished, was to bring together Liberals at odds with the party line, and to establish an alternative liberal imperialist position that was compelling enough to keep the party intact. A liberalism invested in an empire 'of affection and family feeling, of pride and hope and helpfulness'.<sup>232</sup> As Leo McKinstry has argued, this was probably one of Rosebery's most significant political achievements and most lasting impacts.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Dick Leonard, *Nineteenth Century Premiers: Pitt to Rosebery* (2008) London: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>230</sup> Such as Richard Haldane, Henry Asquith, Ronald Munro-Ferguson, Arthur Acland, and Sir Edward Grey.

<sup>231</sup> Matthew, *Liberal Imperialists*, pp. 22–26.

<sup>232</sup> From Rosebery's formative Chesterfield speech, published in *National Policy*, p. 3.

<sup>233</sup> McKinstry, *Rosebery*, pp. 535–536.



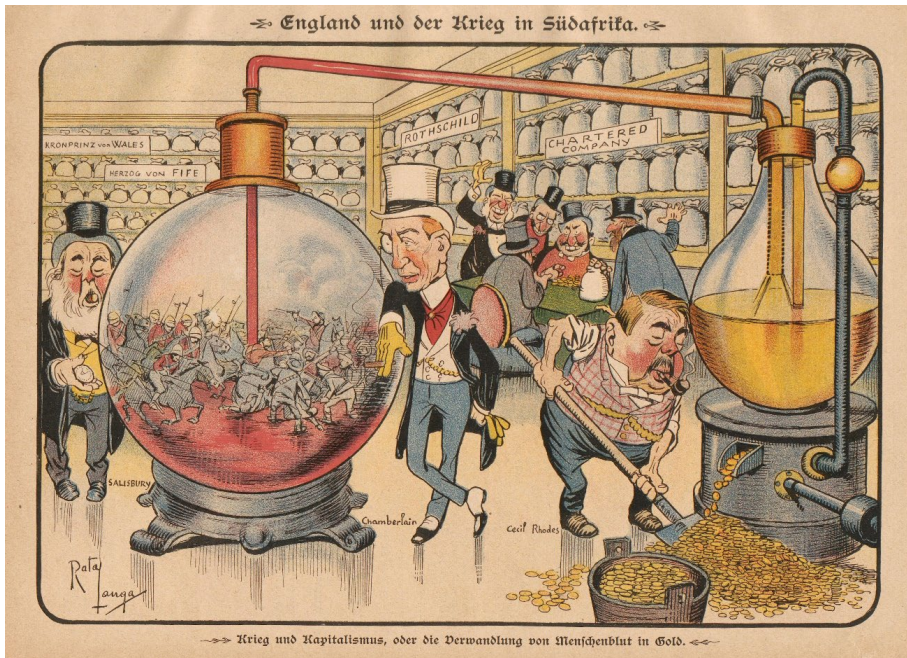


Figure 7 England und der Krieg in Südafrika

The caption reads: 'War and capitalism, or the transformation from human blood to gold.' The Second Anglo-Boer War was extremely divisive, not only in British domestic debate, but also because the conflict entailed two sides who both claimed to represent European civilisation. This caused controversy in mainland Europe, as well. Not an insignificant part of the late nineteenth century imperial propaganda war was fought through the satirical press, which reached a massive audience.<sup>234</sup> To understand the imperialist position, however, it is important to remember that the conflict was also an immense source of imperial pride. Australian poet Banjo Paterson wrote about the Dominion armies in 1902:

'Unknown, untried, those squadrons were, but proudly out they drew;  
Beside the English regiments that fought at Waterloo.  
From every coast, from every clime, they met in proud array;  
To go with French to Kimberley to drive the Boers away.'<sup>235</sup>

By Rata Langa and published in *Der wahre Jakob: Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Satire, Humor und Unterhaltung* (1899) nr 349, p. 3130. Public domain via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by Torana

<sup>234</sup> Maria Paula Diogo, Paula Urze, and Ana Simões, 'Cartoon Diplomacy: Visual Strategies, Imperial Rivalries and the 1890 British Ultimatum to Portugal' (2023) *The British Journal for the History of Science* 56:2.

<sup>235</sup> Cited in Rudy, *Imagined Homelands*, p. 88.

## Constitutional Preservationism: ‘England’s Mighty Heart’

Against the civic federalism of Rosebery and his likeminded, the IFL hosted a number of federalists who saw in federation a means to plan for and design a different kind of society. This section will cover their schemes and explore their differences through a presentation centred on three of the organisation’s most impactful members: Francis Peter Labillière, Edward Augustus Freeman, and William Temple Stead.

Stead was born in 1849 at Embleton in Northumberland. It was a household of comparatively modest background, characterised by a deep Christian faith, led by Stead’s father, Reverend William Stead. Venturing into journalism, Stead established himself as an ardent careerist and his active correspondence put him into contact with future IFL members, such as Edward Freeman and W. E. Forster, early in his career, during in the 1870s.<sup>236</sup> At the time of the founding of IFL, Stead was a year into his perhaps most defining undertaking: the editorship of the *Pall Mall Gazette* (PMG).

The PMG was a daily newspaper founded in 1865. It sought to combine the sophisticated and well-read eye of the review approach with the immediacy of the newspaper format. The paper was not afraid of taking a stance and with Stead at the helm, he would push it even further, embarking on a style later called ‘new journalism’. Stead was a dynamic thinker, both in terms of his contribution to several quite disparate fields and in terms of him allowing his to change his way of thinking in a major way in adaptation to the transformation of British society throughout his lifetime. Much has been written on Stead’s influence on British and global journalism and several historians have also looked at Stead’s imperialism and geopolitical visions, particularly with an emphasis on the later periods of his life.<sup>237</sup> This section is focussed on Stead’s output during his time in the IFL, studying primarily his early post-imperial outlook through his work with the PMG,

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<sup>236</sup> Raymond L. Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W.T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (1972) Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 1–20.

<sup>237</sup> For previous research on Stead’s role in British journalism, see *ibid.* or Roy Greenslade, ‘Why Stead Would Have Made the Right Call by Being a Phone Hacker’, in Laurel Brake et al. (eds.), *W. T. Stead: Newspaper Revolutionary* (2012) London: The British Library. For literature on Stead’s later views on geopolitics, see Potter, ‘Imperial Federation and the South African War’; Michael De Nie, ‘W.T. Stead, Liberal Imperialism, and Ireland’, in Karen Steele & Michael De Nie (eds.), *Ireland and the New Journalism* (2014) New York: Palgrave Macmillan; and Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race*, pp. 100–29.

the initial years of his subsequent venture *The Review of Reviews* (ROR), as well as his individual writing.<sup>238</sup>

Stead represents exactly the kind of member that the League could attract because of its non-committal stance on federal practicalities and details: while maintaining firm individual opinions on a number of key issues, he wholeheartedly agreed with the general benefits of the cultivation of imperial unity and its singular importance as a political issue. As a *PMG* article put it: ‘What domestic question can for a moment compare in urgency with the question whether or not the Empire has to exist?’<sup>239</sup> On several occasions he invited IFL members to write for the *PMG* and the paper expressed explicit support for Seeley and his ideas.<sup>240</sup>

Stead’s interest in empire was more honed towards its administrative perks rather than its implicit cultural aspects. As an administrative model, Stead saw the empire—and the federalisation of it—first and foremost as a roadmap leading to a strong federal government, exacting its policy on the proper level of centralisation. As global communications improved and the world seemed to shrink, he argued that the old *ad hoc* nature of the English constitution revealed its shortcomings.<sup>241</sup> While he argued that decentralisation was ‘the condition of efficiency’, he simultaneously envisioned a radical societal transformation based on an elaborate constitutional model.<sup>242</sup> In the end, Stead made sure not to disregard the potential of local government and the validity of the colonial perspect-

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<sup>238</sup> As a primary source, it has been widely acknowledged by previous research that the *PMG* can be understood to reflect the personal views of Stead. In his biography, Schults states that ‘Stead was not about to dilute the influence of his voice by sharing his pulpit. Seldom has the term *personal journalism* been more aptly used than to describe the *PMG* from 1883 to 1890’, Schults, *Cusader in Babylon*, p. 34. More specifically, I view the unsigned articles as consistently in line with Stead’s worldview. As it pertains to signed contributions, those that clearly correspond with the rest of the paper have been brought in when needed for additional examples or nuance, while I have been sorting out the articles that were obviously brought in as contrasting perspectives.

<sup>239</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Dethronement of England’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, February 5 1885 p. 1.

<sup>240</sup> See Anonymous, ‘The English Beyond the Sea’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, October 4 1883; and Frederick Young, ‘The Great English Question of the Future’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, October 17 1883. See also Edward Ellis Morris, ‘The Progress of the Federation Idea in the Colonies’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 19 1885, George Bowen, ‘Imperial Federation at the Royal Colonial Institute’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, June 16 1886; and Anonymous, ‘Imperial Federationists in the City’, *Pall Mall Gazette* November 16 1889.

<sup>241</sup> Anonymous, ‘An Imperial Reform Bill’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 12 1884. In a move that probably horrified many contemporary readers, he even likened it to the centralized ruling of the Vatican, William T. Stead, *The Pope and the New Era* (1890) London: Casell & Company, Limited, p. 194.

<sup>242</sup> Stead, *The Pope and the New Era*, p. 144.

ives, but the scope of his political program was clearly based on the confidence in the effectiveness of a centralised political machinery.<sup>243</sup>

It is evident that one of Victorian federalism's most attractive aspects was this sense of rational effectiveness. To many of the constitutional preservationists, 'imperial federation' simply entailed the combination of the world's most tenured political body (the British Empire) with the most rational constitutional model on offer. Federalism provided the tools to design a constitution which would ensure the ideal conditions for the preservation of English values.

Francis Peter Labillière, one of the most influential members of the league, saw the adoption of federalism—as cited above—as a straight-forward question of proper statesmanship. Born in 1840, he spent the first nineteen years of his life as a British immigrant in Melbourne, where his father worked as a territorial magistrate. Returning to England as a young adult gave him a degree of prominence regarding issues of imperial discrepancies and inefficiencies that would spur him on throughout his career. Zealous 'in various aspects of the imperial cause', Labillière would involve himself in several large-scale imperialist projects during the 1860s, 70s, and 80s, such as the Royal Colonial Institute, the IFL and conferences on colonial questions—in addition to being a colonial historian by training.<sup>244</sup> Federation, he argued, was 'the only known form' of government that matched the United Kingdom's imperial aspirations in scale, cohesion, and efficiency.<sup>245</sup>

Among academics, historians were particularly drawn to the League and its offer of a debate on the historical implications of constitutional design. Many seemed to have enjoyed the opportunity to translate their everyday analytical work into contemporary policy. Political theory derived from historical insight fit hand-in-glove with the intellectual context of the IFL. It did not hurt that the organisation enjoyed the whole-hearted backing of Seeley, 'the most prominent imperial thinker in late nineteenth-century Britain.'<sup>246</sup>

One of the less prominent historians to be drawn into the realm of federalism was Edward Augustus Freeman. Born in 1823, Freeman embarked on an unremarkable academic career in 1845. He was an active contributor to public debate but failed to distinguish himself academically until the publication of his *The History*

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<sup>243</sup> Anonymous, 'The Home Rule of the Future', *Pall Mall Gazette*, June 20 1889.

<sup>244</sup> B. R. Penny, 'Labilliere, Francis Peter (1840–1895)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (1974) Canberra: Australian National University.

<sup>245</sup> Labilliere, *Federal Britain*, p. 51.

<sup>246</sup> Bell, *Reordering the World*, p. 265.

of *the Norman Conquest* during the 1870s. The six volumes earned him some recognition and awards but failed to propel his career in a significant manner. Throughout his life, Freeman was ‘a singularly simple and truthful man’ and he entered the federalist debate as an experienced man, frustrated by the workings of academia, and—it is fair to assume—with a strong urge to prove his abilities.<sup>247</sup>

If both Stead and Labillière, in slightly different ways, emphasised the governmental rationality of federalism, Freeman’s approach was almost purely theoretical. As a ‘believer in terminological exactitude’, he revelled in the opportunity to dissect and scrutinise federalist terminology, and while he clearly had a good grasp of federalist theory, he never committed to a clear position.<sup>248</sup> As he explained in one of his lectures:

I am not arguing for or against federation or any other scheme; I simply point out what federation is, and what are the difficulties about it. I am trying to show what is the real meaning of that or any other word, and thereby to avoid the confusion of thought and often of action which follows when a name which has been long used to mean one thing is suddenly turned about to mean something else.<sup>249</sup>

This complete refusal to assume a position is, of course, due to the quote being lifted from an academic lecture but the passion for conceptual precision that shines through here is what made Freeman’s contribution to the federalist tradition so difficult to pin down. His drive to snuff out theoretical ambiguity wherever it appeared awarded him a ‘Janus-faced role’ within federalism, ‘cited as an authority by advocates and opponents alike.’<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Frank Barlow, ‘Freeman, Edward Augustus (1823–1892), Historian’, in David Cannadine (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2011) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>248</sup> Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, p. 53. For an assessment of Freeman’s grasp on federalism, see Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>249</sup> Edward A. Freeman, *Greater Greece and Greater Britain and George Washington the Expander of England: Two Lectures with an Appendix* (1886) London: Macmillan & Co., p. 58.

<sup>250</sup> Bell, *Reordering the World*, p. 332.



Figure 8 A Journey in Other Worlds

While the Victorians had an intimate relationship with their history, their thinking was in many ways more defined by the principle of ‘future-making’.<sup>251</sup> Historian Richard Jenkins posits that a ‘Victorian might try to imagine himself as an ancient Greek, but the Greek that he became tended to be one strangely obsessed with the future’.<sup>252</sup> The illustration depicts one of the imagined technological feats of the year 2000 from John Jacob Astor IV’s *A Journey in Other Worlds* (1894). With a metaphor that spoke to the mindset of the Victorian reader, the caption reads: ‘And the Callisto was going straight up’.

Illustration by Daniel Carter Beard from John Jacob Astor IV, *A Journey in Other Worlds: A Romance of the Future*, New York: D. Appleton & co., pp. 114–115. Digitised by Duke University Libraries. Public domain via Wikimedia Commons.

<sup>251</sup> Morus, *How the Victorians took us to the Moon*, p. 288.

<sup>252</sup> Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (1980) Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 53.

The constitutional preservationists found the most agreement in their understanding of the geopolitical role of the British Empire. Stead and the *Pall Mall Gazette* described the Briton as a harbinger of ‘liberty and law’, a ‘colonising genius’ and an heir to ‘a civilization reaching always higher and higher’.<sup>253</sup> Freeman saw the qualities of modernity, such as liberty and pragmatism, as hard-wired into the fabric of English peoples throughout the world, and as the defining trait of their national character.<sup>254</sup> The *PMG* repeatedly lamented the inability of most ordinary Britons to assess the monumentality of Britain’s current position using historical inquiry.<sup>255</sup> Within the framework of the IFL narrative, Stead emphasised the global benefits of British hegemony: arguing that Englishness was ‘a condition essential to the general progress of the Western world’, necessary to eventually achieving world peace, and holding ‘a great place ... in the arrangement of the world.’<sup>256</sup> Labillière described it as ‘carrying forward [the] civilization of the world’, a ‘Providence [which] seems to have destined the Anglo-Saxon race to accomplish.’<sup>257</sup>

Stead differed quite starkly from most of the IFL membership when he specified more precisely the nature of this civilised progress. In defining what sort of essence should be preserved, which Seeley dubbed as ‘nation’—and one *PMG* contributor as the English ‘manhood’—Stead was a stern critic of current imperial practice.<sup>258</sup> He regularly took the opportunity to champion a widening of the enfranchisement of the imperial ambitions to include both the working class and women.<sup>259</sup> Stead also admitted that many took advantage of the imperial infra-

<sup>253</sup> See Stead, *The Pope and the New Era*, p. 27; Anonymous, ‘The Charter and the Empire’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, November 1 1889 p. 1; and J. K. Hosmer, ‘Imperial Federation and the United States’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 2 1886 p. 2 respectively.

<sup>254</sup> For more on Freeman’s central role in establishing modernisation as a key aspect of the English national character, see Mandler, ‘The Consciousness of Modernity?’, pp. 119–32.

<sup>255</sup> See Anonymous, ‘Historical Teaching in England and America’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 4 1886; Anonymous, ‘Mr. Walpole’s History of England’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, February 7 1887; Anonymous, ‘Historical Teaching in England and America’; and Anonymous, ‘Mr. Walpole’s History of England’.

<sup>256</sup> See Emile De Laveleye, ‘A British Federation.’, *Pall Mall Gazette* May 6 1886 p. 1; Anonymous, ‘Lord Rosebery on Imperial Federation’, *Pall Mall Gazette* September 11 1885; and Anonymous, ‘Federation of Perish’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, December 23 1884 p. 1 respectively.

<sup>257</sup> Labillière, *Federal Britain*, p. 47.

<sup>258</sup> H. M. Stanley, ‘Mr. H. M. Stanley on the British Empire’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, July 30 1886.

<sup>259</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Imperial Side of the Dockers’ Strike’, *Pall Mall Gazette* September 12 1889. See also William T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago: A Plea for the Union of All Who Love in the Service of All Who Suffer* (1894) Chicago: Laird & Lee Publishers, pp. 341–47. For more on Stead’s feminism, see Alexis Easley, ‘W. T. Stead, Late Victorian Feminism, and the *Review of Reviews*’, in Laurel Brake et al. (eds.), *W. T. Stead: Newspaper Revolutionary* (2012) London: The British Library.

structure to commit atrocities that stained England's reputation, saying that the imperial administration needed to do more in policing its agents.<sup>260</sup> 'There are spots on the sun, no doubt'.<sup>261</sup> While he saw immense promise in the administrative capabilities of Britain's imperial infrastructure, he viewed the contemporary imperial administration as more than eventually becoming outdated, rather as an immediate liability.<sup>262</sup>

English preservation for Stead was about reclaiming England's 'mighty heart' from its body, now 'enormously extended all over the world'.<sup>263</sup> He argued that the 'body' of the British Empire had not only outsized its heart, but was also actively failing its purpose. The narrow outlook of Westminster politics and the colonial discord rendered the empire an 'imperial imposture' and 'an empire in little more than name'.<sup>264</sup> In envisioning the end of the empire, Stead went further than just seeking to ease the transition from imperial to post-imperial; he wanted to transform the basic character of the British Empire. Stead argued that successful English preservation would require a reconfiguration of the empire on two dimensions: function and form.

A successful post-imperial function, according to Stead, necessitated as its 'chief object', the ultimate aim of all its efforts, 'the amelioration of the condition of the disinherited'.<sup>265</sup> England, as the destined harbinger of progress, needed to realise that the moral imperative of the future—and hence part of the English character—was the creation of a state where no one was 'too insignificant to be overlooked' and where every individual was guaranteed 'the possibility of a human life'.<sup>266</sup> A similar sort of imperialism was driven by social liberals within the Fabian society at the time. They championed a set of liberal measures, assisted by imperial infrastructure, as a means to eliminate destructive income inequality.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Anonymous, 'The Old and the New', *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 1 1884 p. 1.

<sup>261</sup> Anonymous, 'The 'Living Presence' of England', *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 30 1889 p. 1.

<sup>262</sup> Anonymous, 'Is the Empire a Moloch?', *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 19 1887.

<sup>263</sup> Anonymous, 'The 'Living Presence' of England'.

<sup>264</sup> Anonymous, 'An Imperial Imposture?' *Pall Mall Gazette* March 22 1887; and Earl Grey, 'The Future of the British Empire', *Pall Mall Gazette* January 7 1885 p. 2.

<sup>265</sup> Anonymous, 'The Old and the New', p. 1. For a similar argument, see also Anonymous, 'The Politics of the Future', *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 17 1885; and Anonymous, 'Radicalism Old and New', *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 30 1885.

<sup>266</sup> Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, p. 345.

<sup>267</sup> For more on Fabian liberal imperialism, see Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought, 1895–1914* (1960) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 128–33. It is worth noting that this social liberalism went beyond what is sometimes described as the social liberalism of people such as Chamberlain and Disraeli, see *ibid.*, pp. 26–29 & 83–97.



Social ambitions such as these stood in stark contrast to how most federalists and figures such as Freeman and Labillière thought. They never considered the social stratification of UK society an issue worthy of political attention.

Regarding a successful post-imperial form, Stead argued that any federation of consequence would be incomplete without the addition of the US. His imperial federation was ‘imperial’ in that it built on the infrastructure provided by the contemporary administration, and it was ‘federal’ in the sense that he deemed local self-governance to be the most effective way of democratising its rule. Both of these were means to an end that would result in the unity of English-speaking people.<sup>268</sup> Stead and Freeman agreed that the mission to guide global progress was essentially a joint responsibility of the UK and the US, a ‘kindred friendship’ without which any sense of British unification would be meaningless and ineffective.<sup>269</sup> In this sense, Freeman distinguished between ‘Western’ and ‘European’ influence in that the former showed greater promise as a more direct expression of English resolve—a notion that would come to dominate federalism thirty years later.<sup>270</sup> He even described George Washington as the ‘Expander of England’.<sup>271</sup> Labillière tended to describe the Anglo-American relationship more in terms of a friendly rivalry, admitting the civilising impact of American influence while also deeming it inconsequential to the British civilising mission.<sup>272</sup> Furthermore, Stead argued that the United States had a constitutionally inspirational quality, demonstrating the ‘detriment of centralisation’ and that there could ‘be no doubt about the fact, that if we are not to break up the Empire, we must

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Whereas their social ambitions were concessions to election arithmetic, the Fabians were driven by conviction and were radical in the scope of their ambitions.

<sup>268</sup> In his conviction of the benefits of a united English-speaking people, Stead was not alone. Anglo-Saxonism was a widespread ideology at the time, represented on the one hand by those with a racial understanding of the relationship, Kramer, ‘Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons’, pp. 1320–35. On the other were those who had a more linguistic approach, see for example Edward A. Freeman, ‘Race and Language’ (December 1876) *The Contemporary Review* 29. Stead had a strong affinity with both perspectives, albeit with a certain inclination to the latter. For more on Stead’s early personal experience with America and how it shaped his work, see Helena Goodwyn, ‘A “New” Journalist: The Americanization of W. T. Stead’ (July 2018) *Journal of Victorian Culture* 23:3.

<sup>269</sup> Edward A. Freeman, ‘Imperial Federation’ (April 1885) *MacMillan Magazine* 51, p. 444.

<sup>270</sup> For more on Freeman’s role in British discourse to establish a conception of ‘the West’ as separate from something more generally ‘European’, see Georgios Varouxakis, ‘When Did Britain Join the Occident? On the Origins of the Idea of “the West” in English!’ (July 2020) *History of European Ideas* 46:5, pp. 572–75.

<sup>271</sup> See the title of his 1885 public lecture ‘George Washington the Expander of England’, transcribed in Freeman, *Two Lectures*.

<sup>272</sup> Labillière, *Federal Britain*, p. 47.

Americanise our Constitution.<sup>273</sup> The States offered Britain a way out of its imperial organisation, establishing democratic coexistence through federation.

Both Stead and Freeman were part of, and contributed to, an extensive Anglo-American discourse that rose to prominence in the last decades of the nineteenth century. An accelerating globalisation, the rapid emergence of transatlantic networks, and a growing UK appetite for American goods and culture all contributed to a sense that the States were increasingly relevant to the British frame of reference.<sup>274</sup> Stead later dubbed this the ‘Americanization of the world’.<sup>275</sup> Another straight-forward factor contributing to America’s sudden prevalence in UK political life was the simple fact that an increasing number of aristocratic and leading figures began to marry American women, tying the elites of the two countries intimately together.<sup>276</sup> While it would be excessive to assume that the late Victorians were able to foresee America’s pending ascendancy, the States were strikingly evocative to their mindset—both as a source for concern and potential competition, as well as for inspiration and a future ally.<sup>277</sup>

In order to consolidate his imperial and transatlantic visions of imperial federation, Stead’s understanding of the term ‘imperial’ shifted quite far from its traditional meaning. In the latter half of the 1880s, the *PMG* began to argue that the term ‘Empire’ had become a misnomer, as the stability of Greater Britain rested ‘on a Democratic basis’, and that ‘Imperialism has come to us to mean merely the irreducible minimum of Imperial control necessary’ to maintain colonial unity.<sup>278</sup> In response to the London Dock Strike of 1889, the paper stated oxymoronically: ‘Henceforth Imperialism will be democratic’.<sup>279</sup> This was quite at odds with Labillière, who generally agreed on the equal nature of the relationship to the white settler colonies, but had no qualms with the term ‘imperial’ as such. Freeman, on

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<sup>273</sup> W. T. Stead, ‘The General Election and After’ (July 1892) *The Contemporary Review* 62, p. 304. It is worth noting that while Stead was aware of the tragedies during the American Civil War, it had not really tarnished his belief in the American model. He was convinced that ‘Uncle Sam has no unwilling subjects’ and he even suggested that the conflict actually ultimately strengthened the bonds of the American people. See W. T. Stead, *The Americanization of the World; or the Trend of the Twentieth Century* (1901) London: Horace Markley, p. 30 & 93.

<sup>274</sup> Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and America, 1890–2010* (2012) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 10–13 & 21–42.

<sup>275</sup> See Stead, *The Americanization of the World*.

<sup>276</sup> Searle, *A New England?*, pp. 26–28.

<sup>277</sup> Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race*, pp. 6–18. For more on why the Victorians failed to predict American domination, see Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century*, pp. 10–51.

<sup>278</sup> Anonymous, ‘Imperial Insitute V. Colonial Cremorne’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 20 1886 p. 1; and Anonymous, ‘The New Popularity of Imperialism’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, May 25 1889 p. 1.

<sup>279</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Imperial Side of the Dockers’ Strike’, p. 1.

the other hand, took the logic to its extreme and argued repeatedly that references to the future union ought to be completely stripped of the label 'imperial'.<sup>280</sup> Freeman saw it as of the utmost importance that relations between the English peoples were cleansed of any notions of imperialism.<sup>281</sup>

All in all, what did the constitutional preservationists hope for as a result of their schemes? What would result from a prolonged English unity? This was of only secondary importance for Freeman. He believed that the unity of the English race was of the utmost importance and that nothing else—be it imperial power or any particular constitutional model—was worth risking 'a lasting friendly union of the English and English-speaking folk'.<sup>282</sup> For Labillière, the British Empire was, fundamentally, an expression of the nobler aspirations of politics. When confronted with the estimation of 'sophisters, economists, and calculators' that the empire weighed as a burden on the day-to-day budget, Labillière posited that the greatness of Britain was worth its upkeep.<sup>283</sup> He argued that geopolitical leverage was essential to optimising the United Kingdom's economic and political conditions and to ensuring the blessings of continued English influence for the good of civilisation and against the rise of German militarism.<sup>284</sup> That, Labillière believed, would entail the proper scope of statesmanship.

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<sup>280</sup> See Freeman, 'Prospects of Home Rule', p. 319; and Freeman, 'Imperial Federation', pp. 430–33.

<sup>281</sup> Freeman, *Two Lectures*, pp. 101–03.

<sup>282</sup> Freeman, 'Imperial Federation', p. 445.

<sup>283</sup> Labillière, *Federal Britain*.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41–51. While the British certainly noticed Germany's military ascendancy after its unification, Labillière was part of a very small minority that actually perceived it as a threat before the turn of the century, when it quickly became a dominant theme of imperial—and indeed federalist—discourse. It is also worth noting that the insistence of imperial federalists to take the concerns of colonies seriously contributed to raising the German issue on the British foreign agenda, as it was there the seriousness of Germany's challenge was first acknowledged. P. M. Kennedy, 'Idealists and Realists: British Views of Germany, 1864–1939' (December 1975) *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25, pp. 143–44.

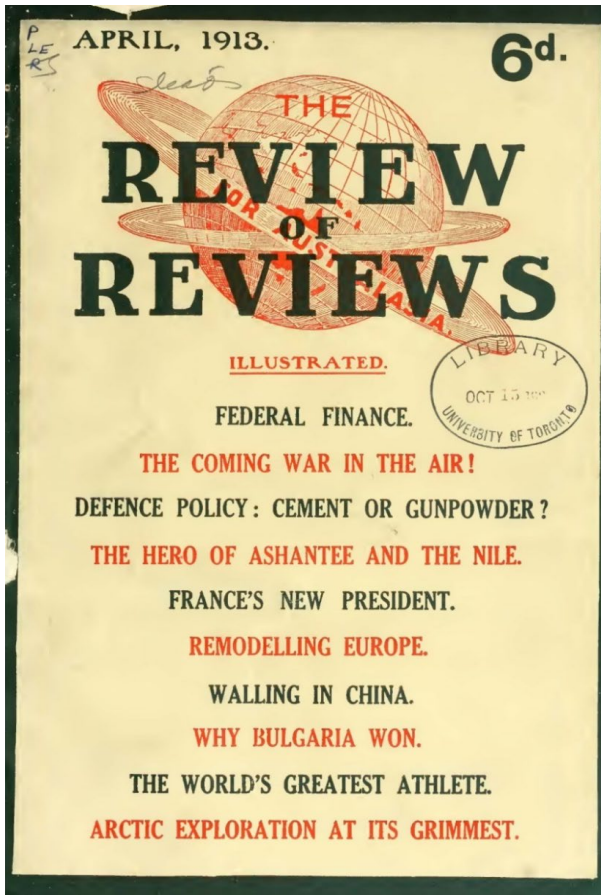


Figure 9 *The Review of Reviews*

Perhaps the most practical manifestation of Stead's Anglo-Americanism came in the form of the magazine that he founded: *The Review of Reviews*. Published simultaneously in three separate editions in the UK, North America, and Australasia, the magazine had as its explicit aim to create a common narrative and to add a sense of unity among English-speaking peoples.<sup>285</sup> This is the Australasian title page from the April 1913 issue. Over the years, the magazine had a variety of different designs but the globe was a recurring theme, in this case centred on Australia, but in the other versions with the Atlantic in focus. Several versions also included the Statue of Liberty's torch, emphasising Stead's commitment to American values.

Front piece of the Australasian edition of *Review of Reviews* April 1913

<sup>285</sup> Potter, 'Stead, Imperial Federation and the South African War', pp. 119–20.

As the 1880s drew to a close and throughout the early 1890s, Stead became increasingly explicit in his vision of the post-imperial world. During the early 1880s, the *PMG* had run a landmark story on London trafficking and prostitution called 'The Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon'. The way the story was published and the names it implicated led to the story having a cultural impact which was completely unparalleled in journalism. Stead's bold investigation strategies even resulted in a brief prison sentence, but the experience as a whole seems to have only further emboldened him in his belief in journalism's potential for societal transformation.<sup>286</sup> The *PMG* under Stead always made sure to represent a Christian perspective, but the year after his imprisonment he went a step further and allowed a correspondent to make the explicit link between the UK's imperial aspirations and religious duty. The article asserted that when 'Englishmen as members of the Church seek the highest ... the nation will indeed be the body of Christ.'<sup>287</sup>

This rather general sentiment was developed over the following years into a more precise amalgamation between church and federation.<sup>288</sup> It was until Stead's departure from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, however, that he fully developed the idea that he would describe as 'the civic Church'—a federation 'in God's providence'.<sup>289</sup> In his 1890 text entitled *The Pope and the New Era*, Stead drew inspiration from the Catholic Church for his vision of a post-imperial Britain. In Catholicism, he found a voluntary union, based on individual devotion, with the scope and longevity that he sought for England.<sup>290</sup> Four years later, in his *If Christ Came to Chicago*, Stead allowed the idea to run its full course:

The English-speaking race in America and elsewhere, is one of the chiefs of God's chosen agents for executing coming improvements in the lot of mankind. If all those who see that, could be brought into hearty union to help

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<sup>286</sup> Schults, *Cusader in Babylon*, pp. 187–211.

<sup>287</sup> S. A. Barnet, 'Home Rule for the Church', *Pall Mall Gazette*, December 14 1885 p. 1. Stead's imprisonment came as a result of the illegal activity he participated in while investigating the story that would eventually become his famous *Maiden Tribute of Babylon* campaign. For more on the religious views he developed while in prison, see Deborah Mutch, "Are We Christians?": W. T. Stead, Keir Hardie, and the Boer War', in Laurel Brake et al. (eds.), *W. T. Stead: Newspaper Revolutionary* (2012) London: The British Library, p. 140. For some examples of the representation of an explicitly Christian perspective in *PMG* before 1885, see for example Anonymous, 'Conversion or Immigration?', *Pall Mall Gazette* January 12 1883; and Moncure D. Conway, 'Moslem Christianity', *Pall Mall Gazette* July 18 1884.

<sup>288</sup> See for example the article on Lord Rosebery's speech, Anonymous, 'Lord Rosebery on Imperial Federation'. There were also articles that argued that loyalty to Christ was best shown through loyalty to England, Anonymous, 'The 'Living Presence' of England'.

<sup>289</sup> Anonymous, 'The Gordon Memorial in Melbourne', *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 22 1889 p. 7.

<sup>290</sup> Stead, *The Pope and the New Era*, pp. 11–19.

all that tends to make that race more fit to fulfil its providential mission, and to combat all that hinders or impairs its work, such an association or secular order would constitute a nucleus or a rallying point for all that is most vital in the English-speaking world, the ultimate influence of which it would be difficult to overrate.<sup>291</sup>

Stead was not the only IFL member to frame his federalist vision in religious terms, but he was undoubtedly the one who went the furthest.<sup>292</sup> He saw 'the likening of Christ' as the overarching goal of human activity and it encompassed every aspects of his ideology: the amelioration for the disinherited, the unity of the English-speaking people around the world, the tending to of England's legacy, and the decentralisation of democratic governance. He was adamant that these aims were in no way exclusively Christian and that the aspiration towards Christ was one found in all religions. As illustrated by the quote above, he even left the door open for the entire project to be secular, while still acknowledging that the nomenclature of a 'civic church' would need to change.<sup>293</sup> He heralded his late friend General Gordon as the personification of the ideals he proscribed, most strikingly demonstrated by Gordon's selfless, just, and empathetic military service.<sup>294</sup> According to Stead, Gordon personified England's connection to its Christian destiny:

As 'one in whom many of the grandest characteristics of our race were united ... [he was] a worthy representative of the many illustrious men who have in God's providence helped to build up our glorious empire.'<sup>295</sup>

In its failure to defend General Gordon and Khartoum, the current imperial administration had proven itself incapable of carrying out Britain's true imperial mission. It was through federation that England's 'mighty heart' could be salvaged, allowing English-speaking people to take their proper place in God's plan.

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<sup>291</sup> Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, p. 342. Stead would maintain his conviction throughout his career, and it would play an important role in his critique of the Boer War, for example, Mutch, "Are We Christians?", pp. 139–41.

<sup>292</sup> The Archbishop of Canterbury, most prominently, joined one of the organisation's gatherings to argue for aligning the works of imperial federation and the church's mission, see Anonymous, 'Notes and Comments' (August 1886) *Imperial Federation* I. Also, Rosebery's aforementioned speech attests to the fact that every federalist scheme was Christian to a certain extent and that the general IFL membership did not see these notions as particularly foreign. See Anonymous, 'Lord Rosebery on Imperial Federation'.

<sup>293</sup> Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago*, pp. 341–47.

<sup>294</sup> Anonymous, 'Under Gordon's Statue', *Pall Mall Gazette*, October 16 1888.

<sup>295</sup> Anonymous, 'The Gordon Memorial in Melbourne', p. 7.

## The Preservation of the English Nation

In hindsight, one struggles to comprehend that the proponents of imperial federation ever believed their dream could become reality. The fact that they trusted a political system of short-term electoral accountability to deliver changes on such an awe-inspiring scale speaks to the political ambivalence of the day. But while a league for imperial federation may have been doomed to political impotence from its onset, it did play a consequential role in establishing a theoretical framework for understanding and planning for the end of the empire. Either through the decentralising notion of civic preservationism or in the centralising plans of the constitutional preservationists, this period established a blueprint for a British federalism based on a commitment to English preservation.

The Imperial Federation League fought to establish non-imperial ties among the colonies, to maintain the unity of what they understood to be the English nation. They had inherited an emplotment of history from Seeley, suggesting that British imperial success was not planned for nor preordained, but rather the fortunate result of a multitude of independent processes. This inherent unpredictability, Seeley posited, was exacerbated by the instability of international politics. It required political vision to secure the longevity of English unity many decades into the future. This emplotment was translated into a narrative in which British settler colonialism was interpreted as the dissemination of the English nation: a bond and a set of values which the English carried with them, regardless which land they inhabited. Consequently, the League understood British imperial expansion as something rather accidental, something temporary, and something vital to English identity. Essentially, federalism was the acknowledgment that the imperial mode of government could be both inherently impermanent while remaining both valuable and worthwhile. They positioned themselves against the indifference of Little Englanders as well as against the complacency of imperialists who prioritised the day-to-day issue of improved administration. It is here, where the IFL insists on seriously evaluating this duality, that one finds its most pervasive impact.

The federalism of the IFL was based on the narrative of English preservation. Their vision for a post-imperial future was preservational in that they recognised certain qualities of the current British Empire as worth preserving beyond the dissolution of the imperial administration. They saw federation as the optimal constitutional model for that purpose. Their vision was English in the sense that it was an understanding of what constituted the English nation and English

national character that they sought to preserve. While different writers emphasised different qualities, the dominant themes remained an association with liberal imperialism and the somewhat opaque concept of ‘civilisation’. These were qualities that were seen as established by and emanating from British rule, and where federation could provide bureaucratic infrastructure to maintain British influence.

A key aspect of the fact that these qualities are understood as ‘English’ is the restricted access it puts on possible future members of a potential federation. English preservationism was, because of this, always restricted in its ambition to the people(s) who could reasonably be considered to be English. The League never explicitly ruled out the possibility of imperial expansion, but it is clear that the political conditions gave it low priority for IFL members and to a certain extent meant that it was at odds with the organisation’s aims. As a federation for the English, it was always a federation of the empire—with the possible inclusion of the US—that one had in mind. As such, the League never sought a dramatically different post-imperial role for the UK compared to the empire’s current role. Imperial federalism was, of course an attempt to largely maintain the UK’s status as the world’s foremost military power even following the dissolution of its empire. There were certainly remarks about the indirect global benefits of British rule—for example, Lord Rosebery’s ‘girding of the world’—but the benefits of the inhabitants of the empire and the framework for the IFL schemes were always prioritised and based on imperial geography.<sup>296</sup> The League fought for a federation of the former empire, which in turn would further British interests globally and help safeguard the international order.

Owing to the seriousness with which the IFL treated imperial issues, the League would come to play a distinct role in the political discourse of the time. Lord Rosebery and W. T. Stead are both examples of how the organisation was entangled with other spheres of contemporary public life—such as governmental politics and journalism—through contributing a framework for discussing questions that would have normally fallen outside the scope of these spheres and presenting them with a persuasive narrative model. In both cases, they accepted the League’s emplotment and assessment of *status quo*—while presenting their own takes, informed by their own contexts, on the path forward.

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<sup>296</sup> Crewe, *Lord Rosebery*, p. 190.





Figure 10 General Gordon's Last Stand

The IFL's promotion of the cultural values of the empire was in line with a society which increasingly saw the empire's function as a vehicle for disseminating English values rather than as a source of economic gain. Seen as embodying those values, General Gordon was heralded as one of the paragons of the empire and the interpretations of his death are representative of how the Victorians employed euphemistic framings to accentuate the moral dimensions of the imperial project. This painting portrays Gordon's death in terms of light versus dark, self-made versus mob-driven, and principled versus instinctive—elements of the English self-understanding that became increasingly central to the imperialist message of the time.<sup>297</sup> The result is a depiction clearly at odds with actual events.<sup>298</sup>

George W. Joy (1893). Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by Brianann MacAmhlaid

<sup>297</sup> Behrman, 'The After-Life of General Gordon', pp. 50–51.

<sup>298</sup> Michael Asher, *Khartoum: The Ultimate Imperial Adventure* (2005) London: Viking, pp. 263–67.

According to Rosebery, it was a fallacy to think that a post-imperial constitution could be established ‘from above’. He saw imperial federalism as requiring a vision of immense scope, trusting in the slow processes of civic national sentiment among the empire’s inhabitants. A future federation would need to be a serious commitment for local governments in order to safeguard the ties of the English nation and to further English influence. A future constitution could reflect the strength of those ties, but could never constitute the basis of it. Thus, Rosebery’s vision for the United Kingdom’s post-imperial role, playing a part in the English ‘girding of the world’, depended on colonial initiatives towards the same goal.<sup>299</sup> In meeting these initiatives, and facilitating their enactment, Rosebery saw federation as the most permissive and egalitarian constitutional model available; in it, he found a blueprint for a government more defined by its administrative flexibility than by any specific programmatic content. Such was his trust in the benefits of maintaining English hegemony.

One faction that took to the notion of federalism from the ‘bottom-up’ in particular were colonial politicians. As a framing device, civic preservationism entailed a set of themes and a certain way of envisioning the empire’s end which recurred in different constellations and interpretations among many IFL members. This should not be seen as belonging to any particular category of federalists. That being said, the colonial politicians shared several conditions that made them predisposed to the civic mindset and as a group their ideas are interesting because of the inner logic of the civic rationale.

It is worth reiterating the fact that individuals such as Robert Stout, George Baden-Powell, John Merriman, and Alexander Stuart were colonial heavyweights who played a significant part in defining British imperial presence in various parts of the world. Together with other prominent politician members, such as W. E. Forster, Sir Evelyn Baring, William Henry Smith, and Sir Charles Tupper, these names speak to the saliency of the civic preservationist framing of long-term political issues for contemporary politicians. The constructive ambiguity of the federalist message allowed even hardened parliamentarians to appreciate its political feasibility, compared to a well-defined and cemented proposal of the same scope. In this way, Victorian federalism became entangled with the political machinery. It served as a device for long-term political planning and the envisioning of a purpose for British imperial efforts that one could get behind, albeit in a non-committal way.

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid..

If Rosebery was sceptical of the constitutionally elaborative aspects of the federalist project, Stead showed weariness towards any schemes that were too unapologetically English. Any preservation worth its salt must, he reasoned, encompass a reckoning with the excessive bureaucracy and gratuitous expansionism that had tainted British imperial history, rediscovering the true principles of English-speaking peoples. In this enterprise, America would need to lead and transatlantic unity be reinstated. Together, the US and the UK could establish a proper balance among the constituting elements of English greatness. British experience of the global administration of civilising practice could be imbued on the American model with democratic principles and guided by Christian values. Federation was the ultimate solution that best enabled the tripartite entity, according to Stead.

A group that displayed a certain affinity for the narrative of constitutional preservationism were the IFL's academic members, particularly the historians. Scholars such as Freeman, Professor Montagu Burrows, Seeley, Labillière, and Sir John Lubbock found a political arena to enact the implications of the theoretical considerations that they were limited to in their professional roles within the IFL. The scope of the federalist narrative matched their professional instincts and its theoretical tenets their skillsets. In an era before large-scale statistical data, federalism's academic entanglement became one of the venues through which scholarly knowledge was translated into the language of political policy. It helped refine a theoretical framework that would be inherited by the subsequent generation of federalists.

The discrepancy between the different federalist models within the League was a product of its frequently noted ambiguity. Beyond acting as an impetus for growing a broad-church membership, the ambiguity allowed 'federalism' to become a kind of placeholder for any large-scale issue. It attracted colonial politicians who sought to ensure their long-term cultural relevance and to minimise their expected political commitments. It attracted historians who saw a constitutional issue that matched their professional insights in scope. A figure like Robert Baden-Powell, driven throughout his life by his belief in the role of civic service towards the inhabitants of the empire, found in federalism a constitutional debate that matched his frame of reference.<sup>300</sup> The Archbishop of Canterbury Edward

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<sup>300</sup> For how this sense of personal service to the inhabitants of the British Empire impacted the early scout movement, see Christopher Love, 'Swimming, Service to the Empire and Baden-Powell's Youth Movements' (May 2007) *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24:5. There were, of course, more direct imperial connotations of the early scouting movement as well, see

White Benson, in presenting the church's imperial work, described the federal structure of the imperial church organisation as 'ties of religious Federation upon which alone a real Federation could be built'.<sup>301</sup>

This variation is suggestive of the extensive spread of Labillière's frustration with the narrow outlook of contemporary party politics and fiscal policy. In a time of societal flux, IFL was able to attract people from a variety of spheres of public life, contributing schemes for federation centred on their particular concerns. While the organisation was a failure in terms of policy influence, it became relevant to contemporary imperialist debate by opening a forum to debate politics on a temporal scale that spoke to the people who lived in 'the shadow of geopolitical uncertainty'.<sup>302</sup>

As the United Kingdom entered an age of High Imperialism, consolidating imperial efforts towards national harmonisation and geopolitical assertion, the Imperial Federation League played a key role in the transformation of British imperialism and the broadening of its temporal parameters. As such, the emergence of wide support for the federalist cause in Britain is intrinsically tied to the temporal reconfiguration of imperialism and, ultimately, its end and purpose. In this capacity, the preservationist narrative became the prism through which a significant number of members of the British political elite came to approach the notions of Britain's imperial future and the aim of its geopolitical resources.

The dissolution of the League would put the British federalist movement into a fifteen-year coma, or at least a sort of light sedation. It was succeeded by the British Empire League, headed by botanist Sir John Lubbock, and included prominent members such as W. E. Forster, and Field Marshall Sir Frederick Sleigh Roberts. It played a 'social' role in organising the colonial conferences of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and a decisive role in initiating and planning for the British Empire Exhibition from 1917 onwards.<sup>303</sup> Yet, the organisation failed to attract as many members as the IFL had enjoyed, and it—crucially—backed down from its explicitly federalist commitments.<sup>304</sup> There were

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Robert H. Macdonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890–1918* (1993) Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 3–30.

<sup>301</sup> Benson spoke at a banquet hosted by Lord Mayor, briefly recounted in Anonymous, 'Notes and Comments'.

<sup>302</sup> Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race*, p. 7.

<sup>303</sup> Daniel Stephen, *The Empire of Progress: West Africans, Indians, and Britons at the British Empire Exhibition, 1924–25* (2013) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>304</sup> Anonymous, 'British Empire League', in Peter Barberis, John Mchugh, and Mike Tydesley (eds.), *Encyclopedia of British and Irish Political Organizations: Parties, Groups and Movements of the Twentieth Century* (London: Pinter, 2000), p. 94.

other, isolated, proposals which shared many similarities with the ideas proposed by the IFL, which spoke to the organisation's continued influence on British imperial thinking. The work of the IFL had made a strong enough impression on a critical mass of British imperialists as to maintain federalism's relevance to the British imperialist discourse for another decade. It is, as such, no coincidence that federalism presented itself as an option for the colonial administrators in South Africa when they pondered its future constitution. When they went on to establish the next British federalist organisation in 1910, they relied on the work of the League as their ideological point of departure.



# Western Preservation: The Round Table & The Empire at War

The French ambassador Jules Cambon ‘nearly fell over backwards’ in the summer of 1911, when—if we are to believe him—the head of German foreign policy Alfred von Kiderlen-Waechter gestured to a map, allowing his hand to sweep over the entirety of French Congo.<sup>305</sup> The gentlemen were in the process of initiating German–French negotiations to reduce tensions after Kiderlen had shocked the world by sending a gunboat into a Moroccan port a few months earlier. To appease German aspirations for military recognition, Cambon had indicated that the French would be ready to make smaller territorial concessions. Kiderlen’s response, gesticulating to an area of over 350,000 km<sup>2</sup>, was a blatant overreach for both gentlemen, but Cambon had little choice but to pass it on to Paris. While the initial uproar caused by Germany’s unprovoked advancement had died down relatively quickly, these negotiations marked the beginning of what historian Geoffrey Barraclough calls the second phase of the crisis, which would eventually escalate into one of the major contributing factors leading to the outbreak of war in 1914.<sup>306</sup> The carefree tactlessness of Kiderlen’s conduct is indicative of the German incredulity towards any diplomatic solution on offer and the deep ideological divisions that stoked international tensions. To many—not least the young teacher and aspiring author Oswald Spengler—the Agadir Crisis of 1911 marked the moment when the true stakes of contemporary political unrest had become apparent and when the trust in the stability of the post-Napoleonic global order had dissipated.<sup>307</sup> The Round Table, an organisation that the second generation of federalists had established the year before, found itself born into the prelude to war.

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<sup>305</sup> Cited in Geoffrey Barraclough, *From Agadir to Armageddon: Anatomy of a Crisis* (1982) London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 126. It is reasonable to believe, not least due to Kiderlen’s narrative style, that this is a slight exaggeration.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126–30.

<sup>307</sup> John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline: Spengler on World History and Politics* (2001) Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, pp. 12–13.

The drama of imperial politics caught Edwardian Britain in a tug-of-war between the forces for and against the imperialist project. With sporadic uprisings of imperial criticism in the 1890s, the anti-imperialist movement would become supercharged by the public outrage of the Second Anglo–Boer War, redefining the nature of the domestic imperial debate.<sup>308</sup> After its electoral victory in 1905, the Liberal Party would set into motion a series of acts leading to imperial withdrawal, effectively burying any overtly imperialist ambitions along the lines of an imperial federation or Greater Britain. Ronald Hyam describes this ‘watershed’ as the juncture when the fate of the British Empire became firmly cemented on the path toward a Commonwealth.<sup>309</sup>

The liberal policy reflected a public mood in which the notion of ‘imperialism’ had become distasteful. While the IFL had battled widespread indifference and complacency, their programme was seen as uncontroversial, and they found no difficulty in recruiting from a wide political spectrum. Within Edwardian politics, imperialism had become a voter deterrent, closely associated with greed and cruelty.<sup>310</sup> As Round Table member John Buchan would put it a few years later in one of his short stories: the ‘name of “Empire” stank in the nostrils of the electorate.’<sup>311</sup>

On the other hand, this period saw rising military tensions in Europe convincing many of the continued relevance of the British hegemony. As a matter of fact, Germany had since its unification been seen as Britain’s main competitor on the international stage. A recurring theme in the constitution of the British perspective was the ingrained aggressiveness of German rule, arguing that they sought imperial elevation for the wrong reasons.<sup>312</sup> When invoking national ideals on the international stage, British commentators often distinguished between British, tolerant, ‘patriotism’ and its more insular, self-serving, counterpart: German ‘nationalism’.<sup>313</sup> The detailed nature of the German naval strategy, however, continued to vex British politicians who struggled with cobbling together an actual

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<sup>308</sup> For some insight into anti-imperialism in the late 1890s, see Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, pp. 236–45.

<sup>309</sup> Ronald Hyam, *Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office 1905-1908: The Watershed of the Empire-Commonwealth* (1968) London: Macmillan, pp. 525–45.

<sup>310</sup> Terence H. O’Brien, *Milner: Viscount Milner of St James’s and Cape Town 1854–1925* (1979) London: Constable, p. 231.

<sup>311</sup> John Buchan, *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906) [1906] Edinburgh: William Blackwood and sons, p. 147.

<sup>312</sup> See Kenneth Mackenzie, ‘Some British Reactions to German Colonial Methods, 1885–1907’ (March 1974) *The Historical Journal* 17:1.

<sup>313</sup> Mandler, *The English National Character*, p. 130.



policy response well beyond the turn of the century.<sup>314</sup> At the founding of The Round Table, Germany—together with the US—had begun to pose a serious economic competition to the UK, and they remained the most threatening continental powers with which Britain had yet failed to strike a bilateral agreement.<sup>315</sup> As a result, the United Kingdom stood ready to mobilise both on moral and geopolitical grounds when events occurred, such as those in Agadir, which were seen as further signs of a looming conflict.<sup>316</sup>

The following chapter delves into The Round Table as it navigated the tensions between a moral climate defined by imperial scepticism and rising military pressures furthered by imperial conviction. It will cover the period from their ideological origins in the Second Anglo-Boer War and how the organisation institutionalised a continuation of those efforts on an empire-wide scale. The chapter will argue that the organisation responded to international tensions with a more extensive and wide-ranging narrative, promoting a program which did not, ultimately, limit itself to the United Kingdom but rather aimed to encompass all of humanity. The war acted in many ways to further entrench pre-war trends, highlighting some notable exceptions that would prove relevant after the war.

After a more thorough contextual outlook, the chapter will explore the relevant ideas of Lord Alfred Milner, who was considered the originator of the ideology that the organisation stood for. After that, it details The Round Table's history and composition, before two sections that scrutinise the ideas of the organisation's most influential individuals in more detail. The first of these covers Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr, as they developed an extensive plotment and organic preservationist narrative which would come to define the early Round Table. The second covers the organisation's entanglements with British society, centred around the geographical preservationism of Leo Amery. The final section summarises the chapter's findings and draws some further conclusions.

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<sup>314</sup> Williams, *Defending the Empire*, pp. 160–63.

<sup>315</sup> P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction 1914–1990* (1993) London: Longman. It would not take long before the USSR would become a serious competitor as well, E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain Since 1750* (1969) London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 294. For more on British negotiations in the runup to the Great War, see Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815–1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (1992) [1976] London: Macmillan, pp. 257–66.

<sup>316</sup> Margaret Macmillan, *The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (2014) New York: Random House, pp. 452–55.



Figure 11 The Coronation of King George V

The declining salience of imperialist themes in electoral politics was not reflected in most other aspects of British public life, where imperialism largely maintained its currency far into the twentieth century. The depiction above is from the coronation of George V in 1911, when the review of the fleet was made part of the coronation festivities. This ‘efflorescence of imperial dynastic celebratory pageantry’ had become a standing theme for coronations throughout Europe at the time.<sup>317</sup>

The Arrival of the Fleet for the Coronation Review’ (1912) by Alma Burlton Cull, Public domain via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by Fæ.

## A Great Power, Among Others

The period between the collapse of the Imperial Federation League in 1893 and the founding of The Round Table in 1910 saw increasing attention paid to the issue of imperial defence and its associated tax burden, which acted as lightning rods for anti-imperialist attacks.<sup>318</sup> At the start of the Great War, it had become

<sup>317</sup> Roy Strong, *Coronation: From the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2005) London: Harper Perennial, p.439.

<sup>318</sup> Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, pp. 101–02; and Patrick O’Brien, ‘Imperialism and the Rise and Decline of the British Economy, 1688–1989’ (November–December 1999) *New Left Review* I:238, pp. 73–75. For more on the issues with the UK economy in the early twentieth century, see for example comments on Britain’s trade imbalance by Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation*, pp. 232–33; and Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, p. 39. For more on the changing economic circumstances in Europe at the time see Ulrich Herbert’s concept of ‘High Modernity’, in Ulrich Herbert, ‘Europe in High Modernity. Reflections on a Theory of the 20th Century’ (2007) *Journal of Modern European History* 1:5, pp. 9–12; and Michael Heffernan’s survey of the

clear to many informed people that 'British responsibilities vastly exceeded British strength,' what Kipling described as 'State-defended defencelessness'.<sup>319</sup> Moreover, Britons had begun to ask themselves not only 'how?' the empire ought to be defended, but 'if?'

Few events contributed more to imperial scepticism in this regard than the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902). Historian Krishan Kumar postulates that it 'was the Boer War, more than any other event of its time, that destroyed the confidence that Englishmen of all classes and persuasions had had in their empire.'<sup>320</sup> The inefficacy of the British military in the face of guerrilla warfare in combination with the loud international criticism of the cruelty towards another European people, brought into question both the potency and justification of the British imperial machinery.<sup>321</sup> The detailed and critical media coverage contributed to a widespread distaste for the flagrant aspects of imperialism and a fundamental notion that the empire had lost its sense of 'invulnerability'.<sup>322</sup>

Imperialism was further dissociated from the notion of a unifying national project by J. A. Hobson's 1902 publication *Imperialism*, in which he tied imperialism to excessive militarism, fuelled by self-serving capitalist interests.<sup>323</sup> The Campbell-Bannerman government of 1905 introduced outspoken anti-imperialism to Whitehall and politicians such as Augustine Birell denounced 'false ideals of national greatness' and 'Caesarism'.<sup>324</sup> Practically, this shift was accompanied by the gradual endorsement of 'Dominion' as a political category that separated colonies dominated by a white settler class from the dependencies with almost exclusively coloured populations. While not validated as a formal category before 1926, colonies such as Canada, Australia, and late South Africa had begun enjoying increased authority due to what was perceived as their maturity for self-governance.

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geopolitical aspects in Michael Heffernan, *The Meaning of Europe: Geography and Geopolitics* (1998) London: Arnold, p. 53.

<sup>319</sup> Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, p. 120. Kipling is cited in A. Michael Matin, "'The Hun Is at the Gate!': Historicizing Kipling's Militaristic Rhetoric, from the Imperial Periphery to the National Center: Part Two, the French, Russian, and German Threats to Great Britain' (Winter 1999) *Studies in the Novel* 31:4, p. 461.

<sup>320</sup> Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, p. 198.

<sup>321</sup> Denis Judd and Keith Terrance Surridge, *The Boer War* (2003) New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 32–51 & 247–50.

<sup>322</sup> C.C. Eldridge, *Victorian Imperialism* (1978) London: Hodder and Stoughton, pp. 215–16.

<sup>323</sup> P. J. Marshall, '1870–1918: The Empire Under Threat', in P. J. Marshall (ed.), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* (1996) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 67–68.

<sup>324</sup> Cited in Eldridge, *Victorian Imperialism*, p. 216.

Against the grain of various challenges to British imperialism, the West simultaneously experienced an unsettling of the geopolitical order, particularly in relation to Germany. The first decade of twentieth century British foreign policy came to be defined by the tension between continental stability, securing European alliances, and global assertion, consolidating imperial resources globally.<sup>325</sup> As the realist, Germanophobic, school of thinking established its influence on British politics, the empire was mobilised on an unprecedented scale to safeguard the British sphere of influence.<sup>326</sup> A sense of heightened competition and the fact that the UK trailed in international standings made became known beyond the strategic considerations of those in the know. Reactions in public culture, such as the emergence of a genre of invasion literature—dramatising fictive scenarios of German infiltration to a far-reaching readership—speaks to how the existential dimensions of the Anglo-German rivalry were interwoven with the fabric of everyday British life.<sup>327</sup> As tensions heightened, the arguments for imperial restraint lost more and more of their bite, and were ultimately unable to overcome the pervasive sense of dread and vulnerability fuelled by the imperial project's newfound *raison d'être*.

For all we have and are. For all our children's fate,  
Stand up and take the war. The Hun is at the gate!  
[...]  
No easy hope or lies. Shall bring us to our goal,  
But iron sacrifice, Of body, will, and soul.  
There is but one task for all—One life for each to give.  
What stands if Freedom fall? Who dies if England live?<sup>328</sup>

While in many ways the war had provided the empire with a sense of purpose, and to a certain extent relief after years of military tension, it soon lay bare the transactional nature of many of the UK's imperial relations.<sup>329</sup> As historian Konrad Jarusch points out, the war brought with it impulses both of nationalisation and internationalisation; the war demonstrated both the need for closer and more

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<sup>325</sup> Andreas Rose, *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent: Britische Außenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (2011) München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, pp. 505–570.

<sup>326</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (2022) London: The Bodley Head, pp. 109–13. For more on the Germanophobia of the British realist school of thought, see Kennedy, 'Idealists and Realists', pp. 138–39 & 48–49.

<sup>327</sup> See Matin, "'The Hun Is at the Gate!'", pp. 434–52.

<sup>328</sup> Rudyard Kipling (1914) 'For All We Have and are'.

<sup>329</sup> Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916–1931* (2014) London: Allen Lane, pp. 374–93. For more on the sense of relief many Europeans experienced at the outbreak of the war, see Macmillan, *The War That Ended Peace*, p. 633.



Figure 12 Destroy this Mad Brute

Strong anti-German sentiments were not something unique to British society but rather spread and touted by all the propaganda machines of the Entente. The US saw one of the most aggressive campaigns, repeatedly drawing on the presumption that European civilisation had reverted, and that the German regime was a symptom of the continent's failure to keep up with the advancements of American society. In this poster, Hopps even draws on zoological imagery, suggesting an evolutionary degradation of the German people.<sup>330</sup>

American Propaganda Poster by Harry Ryle Hopps (1917). Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by Christoph Braun.

<sup>330</sup> Nicolleta F. Gullace, 'Barbaric Anti-Modernism: Representations of the "Hun" in Britain, North America, Australia, and Beyond' in Pearl James (ed.), *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture* (2009) London: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 68–69.

stable international cooperation, as well as the need to protect the sovereignty of smaller states.<sup>331</sup> While not immediately obvious to most British observers, the significant military efforts made by the Dominions were seen as proof of increased self-determination.<sup>332</sup> As a result, the later years of the war saw the popularisation of the concept of 'Commonwealth' as an alternative to 'Empire'.<sup>333</sup> 'The great age of High Tory Imperialism had passed', and in its wake followed a more voluntary, egalitarian imperial policy towards the white Dominions.<sup>334</sup>

The most palpable manifestation of colonial nationalism for the British public during the period was without a doubt Ireland. The issue of 'Home Rule' had waxed and waned since the 1880s but it came to the fore during the Easter Rising of 1916. The topic of Irish Home Rule almost immediately invoked the notion of 'Home Rule All Around' and while the concept of general Home Rule had traditionally been understood as at odds with imperialism, most federalists saw it as a necessary step towards federation.<sup>335</sup> The issue soon engulfed *The Round Table* and became a recurring theme in almost every issue of its journal. One writer even asserted that 'every political cause is now compelled to wait until the Irish drama is played out.'<sup>336</sup> As it pertains to this study, the Irish issue acts as a critical

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<sup>331</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, *Out of Ashes: A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (2015) Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 129–31. Another important intellectual influence during the later stages of the war came from Lenin and his success during the Russian Revolution. It did not take long before he and his anti-imperialism had asserted their influence on the British left. See Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire 1918–1964* (1993) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 38–40.

<sup>332</sup> Darwin, 'A Third British Empire?', pp. 66–67.

<sup>333</sup> McIntyre, 'Commonwealth Legacy', p. 693.

<sup>334</sup> Andrew Lycett, 'Rudyard Kipling', (London: Weidenfel & Nicolson, 2015), 698, p. 586. See also Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline?', pp. 659–63. The appetite for imperial expansion certainly was not helped by the massive costs associated with the war effort, see Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850–1970* (1975) London: Longman, pp. 259–61. It was, for example, during this period that the US shifted from being a UK debtor rather than a creditor, R. Palme Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire* (1957) [1953] London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., p. 119.

<sup>335</sup> Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*, p. 168. For examples of RT's positive view of home rule, see Anonymous, 'The Irish Crisis' (March 1914) *The Round Table* 4:14, p. 203; and Amery's letter to Curzon in April 1918, John Barnes & David Nicholson (eds.), *The Leo Amery Diaries: 1896–1929* (1980) 1/3 vols. London: Hutchinson, pp. 217–18. It should be noted that this support for the general idea of Home Rule in no way entailed a wholehearted support of its practice. While Round Table members applauded Irish patriotism and every man's right to the love of one's country, they were equally quick to denounce any criticism or hostility aimed towards the English. See Anonymous, 'Ireland and the Home Rule Act' (March 1921) *The Round Table* 11:42, pp. 237–38. The fact that they thought that one could have one without the other really speaks to their wholehearted conviction in English supremacy.

<sup>336</sup> Anonymous, 'The Irish Question' (December 1913) *The Round Table* 4:13, p. 1.

backdrop to understanding the contemporary relevance of The Round Table to public debate, but in substance it does not add much to the understanding of the organisation's views on a post-imperial order. For that, however, the study will now turn to the originator of this line of thought.

## Ceaseless Effort & Infinite Patience

If the Imperial Federation League had suffered from being an unwieldy organisation with loosely defined beliefs that ultimately succumbed thanks to the failure to consolidate the views of its members, then the founders of The Round Table could trace the roots of their most formative thinking back to one shared experience under the supervision of one man, Lord Alfred Milner.

When the League collapsed in 1893, Milner was well on the path to a promising administrative career. He had worked with W. T. Stead on the *Pall Mall Gazette* and written a book on his bureaucratic experiences in Egypt but what truly thrust him into 'an enduring place in the annals of the British commonwealth of nations' came a few years later, when he was appointed Governor over the Cape Colony and High Commissioner for Southern Africa.<sup>337</sup> Milner's arrival in South Africa coincided with a gold rush in the country, motivating a large number of *Uitlanders* ('foreigners', many of whom were British) to immigrate in search of new riches. Milner adopted a policy of uncompromising support for the interests of the *Uitlanders*, which contributed to the Second Anglo-Boer War, in conjunction with their conflicts with other groups. Stead claimed afterwards, hyperbolically, that Milner 'had willed war, and he had the war that he willed.'<sup>338</sup>

Apart from its dramatic impact on British imperial politics, the war proved an incredibly formative experience for Milner and those around him. Already in the first weeks of the war, he had become convinced that the conflict should be treated as a new beginning for the colony and that any credible plan for peace would have to involve a radical reconstruction of the South African constitution. In an effort to tackle this momentous plan, he required talent as well as impartiality. When he began his first recruitment in 1899, he was consistent in seeking international candidates with a particular eye towards young graduates from the Oxford colleges he himself had experience from: New College and Balliol.<sup>339</sup> Some of the earliest

<sup>337</sup> From a tribute after his death in 1925, Rudyard Kipling (June 1925) 'Tribute to Alfred Milner', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Milner dep. 464 Item 10.

<sup>338</sup> Cited in Eric Stokes, 'Milnerism' (1962) *The Historical Journal* 5:1, p. 53.

<sup>339</sup> Lionel Curtis would later argue that Milner simply sought the best and the brightest, but it is clear that personal associations with Milner and his network or the Colonial Office weighed

recruits were subsequent businessman J. F. Perry, Lionel Curtis, later Governor-General Patrick Duncan and future Times editor Geoffrey Robinson, with close associations to Leo Amery and future novelist John Buchan, for example. This group of young, impressionable, eager, and isolated men would form what soon became known as *Milner's Kindergarten* and settled in at 'Sunnyside', a grand villa just north of Johannesburg.<sup>340</sup> In the decade that followed, Sunnyside would become the base for this 'hard-working, intelligent, well-meaning and tactless' group of careerists, who clung to Milner's every word.<sup>341</sup>

Milner was a child of the age that had defined the IFL and during his first year at Oxford he attended a lecture by subsequent League member George R. Parkin, whom he later met up with.<sup>342</sup> The 'Milnerism' taught to the *Kindergarten* did, however, diverge from general IFL logic in two fundamental ways. First, Milner's thinking was based on a more precise and exclusionary concept of race. 'Race' to Milner was synonymous in many ways to how the IFL had viewed 'nation', indicating a relationship based on the shared qualities of culture, language, history, and tradition. However, the concept of race was based on a stricter sense of genealogical proximity, particularly manifest in the colour of one's skin. If pressed, many IFL members would probably have agreed with Milner's definition, but in practice many IFL texts included less stringent references to both the 'English',

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heavily when sorting through the vast number of applicants. See Walter Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men: The "Kindergarten" in Edwardian Imperial Affairs* (1968) Durham N. C.: Duke University Press, pp. 22–23. Historian Michael Bloch presents an alternative interpretation: few strategies would be more effective if one sought romantic male relations in a time when those required significant discretion. Bloch admits, however, that—apart from Kerr—there are almost no other indications that any of the Kindergarteners were gay, Michael Bloch, *Closest Queens: Some 20th Century British Politicians* (2015): Little, Brown Book Group, pp. 110–11.

<sup>340</sup> Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men*, pp. 17–53.

<sup>341</sup> Description given by a visitor, cited in Francis Patrick Fletcher-Vane, *Pax Britannica in South Africa* (1905) London: A. Constable & Company Limited, p. 277.

<sup>342</sup> John Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (1975) Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, p. 6.





Figure 13. Milner on HMS South Africa

Caricature of Milner as he steps from the ship 'South Africa' to 'Britannia' after a heavy storm still visible in the background. The isolating experience of administrating such a polemic war far from the political machinery of the mother country strengthened Milner and the Kindergarten both in their bonds and in their conviction. Visual representations of Milner often toyed with the idea of political incorruptibility. He himself abhorred party politics and described his opinions as 'too strong to fit well into any recognised programme.'<sup>343</sup> Stead, once again, described him as standing 'erect, alone, like a great monolith amid the arid sands of the desert, with no companion and no compeer'.<sup>344</sup>

'The Pilot who Weathered the Storm!' (undated) by unknown artist. Held in New College Archive, Oxford. Milner Papers 5593 12.

<sup>343</sup> Alfred Milner, *Constructive Imperialism* (1908) London: The National Review Office, p. 34.

<sup>344</sup> Stokes, 'Milnerism', p. 53.

‘Anglo-Saxon’, ‘English-speaking’, and even ‘European’ race.<sup>345</sup> Milner viewed the protagonists of the British imperial saga, related by ‘the only real and permanent tie of the Empire’, as descended from the motherland.<sup>346</sup> One of the Kindergarteners, Patrick Duncan, would later describe it as ‘a race of statesmen’.<sup>347</sup>

This was not a definition based in the scientific veneer of racial biology, but it was strict enough to redefine the parameters of the civilising mission. IFL never distinguished between the ‘education’ of coloured inhabitants to a white understanding of civilisation, and the establishment of effective political institutions for the white inhabitants. Both were—at least explicitly—under the umbrella of growing political maturity. Milner saw a stark distinction between settler colonialism and military-sanctioned imperialism, and even if he would concede that they ought to be understood as part of the same trajectory in the long run, he considered racial differences to run so deep that he treated the projects as qualitatively rather than quantitatively different in the short term. The gradually equal coexistence of humanity through the fulfilment of the civilising mission was still a key aspect of his post-imperial vision, but he focussed his political efforts on the maximal cohesion of the representatives of the English race.<sup>348</sup>

Second, Milner positioned his thinking in a more extensive emplotment than his IFL predecessors had done. As explored above, John Seeley and the Imperial Federation League had employed an emplotment that, while modest in scope, had anchored their argumentation to an historical framework to push contemporary policy to consider its long-term ramifications. Milner pushed this logic further, arguing that a proper historical framing was one of the key contributions of the imperialist mindset. Against the back-and-forth of party politics in what he called ‘the Age of Bustle’, Milner urged his imperialist apostles to denounce the short-

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<sup>345</sup> See Merriman, ‘The Closer Union of the Empire’, p. 511; and Bowen, ‘Imperial Federation at the Royal Colonial Institute’, p. 286. It is worth mentioning that this is unusual even in the context of contemporary continental racial discourse. The white races were often seen as natural allies but ultimately deemed distinct from one another. See Andr en, *Thinking Europe*, pp. 83–85.

<sup>346</sup> Alfred Milner (1st December 1908) ‘Milner to Curtis’, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Curtis Papers Curtis 1, fol. 231.

<sup>347</sup> Anonymous, ‘Dominion Secretary’s Tribute to Sir Patrick Duncan’, *The African World*, 20 February 1937b.

<sup>348</sup> Milner’s acute sense of race permeated almost every aspect of life and work, and manifested itself, for example, in the Johannesburg architecture, where Milner promoted buildings designed both as reminders of the presence of ‘Greater Britain’, as well as to facilitate legal or governmental practice based in the notion of white supremacy. See G. A. Bremner, *Building Greater Britain: Architecture, Imperialism, and the Edwardian Baroque Revival C.1885–1920* (2022) New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 90–93.

sighted prioritisation of the immediate, only seeing urgency in the loudest issues of the day.<sup>349</sup> On the contrary, the imperialist cause demanded of its champions the delicate combination of ‘ceaseless effort with infinite patience’; never complacent in the work to steer contemporary political discourse away from its here-and-now bias, but always assured in the direction of the long-term historical processes that ultimately would determine Britain’s prosperity.<sup>350</sup> According to Milner, history was a guide that could separate the consequential from the merely fleeting. As custodians of this insight, the imperialists could contribute to ‘the fulfilment of one of the noblest conceptions which have ever dawned on the political imagination of mankind’, the unification and equality of English-speaking peoples.<sup>351</sup>

Paradoxically, Milner narrowed the definition of the empire’s protagonists while simultaneously broadening the scale of their mission. The concept of race allowed Milner to speak more clearly regarding who could be considered ‘English’ and his extended emplotment on how the preservation would come to benefit the whole of mankind. It was a message that could have almost been included in the League’s writings, and while it was made more powerful through a clearer and more committed way of speaking, it also betrayed his indebtedness to Parkins’ and the other imperial federalists’ understanding of the United Kingdom’s post-imperial outlook.

Milner often stressed—probably strategically—his lack of interest in politics and described himself as not ‘an orator, but an administrator’.<sup>352</sup> Through his *Kindergarten*, however—and the lucid, resolute preservationist narrative that he presented them with—this ‘theoretician of British imperialism’ would prove vital to outlining a revitalised federalist ideology. The founding of The Round Table in 1910 would institutionalise this reinvigoration of the federalist tradition.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Alfred Milner (21st January 1897) ‘Bustle’, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Milner dep. 463 Item 6, fol. 5.

<sup>350</sup> Alfred Milner, *Speeches of Viscount Milner* (1905) London: Hugh Rees limited, p. 27.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> From a speech when he arrived for a Canadian tour, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1908 at The Canadian Club in Vancouver, Alfred Milner, *Imperial Unity: Speeches Delivered in Canada in the Autumn of 1908* (1909) London: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 1.

<sup>353</sup> Barnes and Nicholson (eds.), *The Leo Amery Diaries: 1896–1929* p. 11.

## The Round Table

The impetus of The Round Table movement should be understood as a continuation of the *Kindergarten's* experience in South Africa. In its simplest form, the guiding principle of the RT was to expand the South Africa model on an imperial scale, driven by the conviction that 'South Africa is a microcosm and much that we thought peculiar to it is equally true of the Empire itself'.<sup>354</sup> What the *Kindergarten* had confronted in South Africa in terms of a lack of infrastructure for imperial administration, ineffective machinery for imperial defence, and the sense that they were disconnected from the motherland, they saw as ills afflicting the entire British dominion. As a 'close-knit fraternity', they established an organisation that was part 'think tank, part research group, part secret social club, and part lobbying outfit'.<sup>355</sup> At its centre was 'the moot', a governing body whose name was chosen both for its association with England's Anglo-Saxon past, and as a self-conscious acknowledgment of the *Kindergarteners'* readiness to discuss and debate almost any issue, even long past the point it had proven productive.<sup>356</sup>

The Round Table might have grown out of a tight, South African-based, core, but the organisation took efforts from the get-go to establish an empire-wide presence. A few years after its founding in 1910, the organisation had established branches in Australia, Canada, Egypt, India, New Zealand, South Africa, and Ireland.<sup>357</sup> In fact, the first recorded time that any of the *Kindergarteners* referred to the concept of a 'round table' was in the fictional debate on the future of the empire that John Buchan depicted in his 1906 novel, *A Lodge in the Wilderness*. Here, one of the characters suggests that a federation that spans the empire would need an imperial council to gather colonial expertise and to debate issues of imperial reform on equal terms, to which another character responds: 'What a conception! An Imperial Round Table to which colonial statesmen should flit like halcyons over the water.'<sup>358</sup> While it cannot be confirmed that this was the association the

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<sup>354</sup> Curtis in a letter to Selborne in 1907, cited in Alexander May, 'The Round Table and Imperial Federation, 1910–17' (2010) *Round Table* 99:410, p. 549.

<sup>355</sup> Alex May, 'Milner's Kindergarten (Act. 1902–1910)', in David Cannadine (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2005); and Jeanne Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection* (2014) Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 100.

<sup>356</sup> May, 'Milner's Kindergarten (Act. 1902–1910)'.

<sup>357</sup> Anonymous (25th March 1912) 'Arrangements for Article Compensation', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Mss.eng.hist.c.844, fols. 106–10. Note, however, that there were no local British branches, and that all activity was conducted through the London branch.

<sup>358</sup> Buchan, *A Lodge in the Wilderness*, p. 100.

founders had in mind, it is indicative of how central the *Kindergarten* viewed the non-hierarchical transmission of local imperial knowledge to be for the future longevity of imperial unity. Grigg also refers to the organisation, albeit much later, as a ‘round-table for discussion’.<sup>359</sup>

Each Dominion hosted a handful of branches, with membership for each branch often ranging from ten to twenty. The organisation in its entirety was not massive in size and the total membership amounted to slightly fewer than five hundred members. Many members had professional ties to imperial administration, but membership lists also boasted a significant number of academics, politicians, ranked military, clergymen, and peers.<sup>360</sup> The local branches had three key functions: to disseminate the central message within local society, to register and report on local conditions, and to act as a forum for discussion and social discourse.

It is evident that the organisation took these tasks very seriously and, compared to its predecessor, the Table worked ardently to maintain organisational cohesion. For example, it established processes to collect local feedback on central work—which in turn was circulated—and collected information about significant or distinguished members to keep track of available expertise.<sup>361</sup> The organisation also worked actively to keep people in line and in its early days it urged members to refrain from discussing the organisation’s positions with anyone connected to journalism before every detail had been sorted out and every objection had been resolved. When push came to shove, the moot deemed it riskier to defend an incoherent case than to appear without one.<sup>362</sup> While the League tended to interpret their problems in terms of public education and the galvanising of public opinion, the Table was much more willing to also understand its challenges in terms of strategy and political influence. It had, for example, close ties to *The Times*, and used the paper to promote its message in more covert manners than public events and leaflets.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Edward Grigg, *The Greatest Experiment in History* (1924) New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 2.

<sup>360</sup> Anonymous (Undated) ‘Membership lists Australia & New Zealand’, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Mss.eng.hist.c.844, fols. 2–6.

<sup>361</sup> Anonymous (1911–1914) ‘Membership Summary Canada’, Bodleian, Oxford, Round Table Papers Mss.eng.hist.c.844, fols. 77–84. For more on the Table’s internal feedback treatment, see for example Anonymous (December 1911) ‘Group Notes no. 2’, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Mss.eng.hist.c.833.

<sup>362</sup> Anonymous (24th January 1911) ‘Private Circulation’, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Mss.eng.hist.c.776, fols. 38–41.

<sup>363</sup> Nimocks, *Milner’s Young Men*, pp. 202–05.



Figure 14. Brownwill New Plant

Photography had been used in British news reporting from the 1880s but it became increasingly common by the turn of the century. Images like this 1899 *Financial Times* report from a gold recovery location outside of the small town of Margaret River, Western Australia, helped give the reader a sense of a direct, unedited connection to a completely different part of The Empire—a bond shared with the rest of the readership. Historian Jennifer Green-Lewis has argued that the photography inspired an analytical approach to societal reform, being the purest expression of the nineteenth century's 'appetite for gathering, collecting, taking, and reading cultural signs'.<sup>364</sup> In the words of Jürgen Osterhammel, 'the technology afforded a novel kind of visual access to the world [and] created new concepts of truth and authenticity'.<sup>365</sup>

Photograph of the Brownhill New Plant in Western Australia (1899) by unknown photographer. Published in the *Financial Times* supplement *London & Hamburg Gold Recovery* on May 29th, p. 1.

The true lifeblood of the organisation was its journal, *The Round Table Journal: The Commonwealth Journal for International Affairs*. It was launched in 1910 with an aim 'to present a regular account of what is going on throughout the King's dominions, written with first-hand knowledge and entirely free from the bias of local political issues'.<sup>366</sup> The news media disconnect between the motherland and the colonies was a substantial obstacle for any intra-imperial cooperation at the time, as those living in one part of the empire were simply ignorant of what was happening in other parts.<sup>367</sup> *The Round Table* took its comprehensive mission seriously and each quarterly issue included a few thematic articles written on topical issues as well as reports from local correspondents on whatever they deemed most

<sup>364</sup> Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (1997) Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 3.

<sup>365</sup> Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, p. 41.

<sup>366</sup> Anonymous, 'The Round Table', p. 2.

<sup>367</sup> Marshall, 'The Empire under Threat', p. 64.

relevant. With a few exceptions, articles were published anonymously in order to discourage excessive positioning and to divert attention away from the individual authors, shifting it to the (allegedly disinterested) content.<sup>368</sup> This insistence on disinterest is also an echo of the contemporary predisposition for naturalised knowledge—that is, the tendency to formulate statements of fact in the language of the natural sciences or in terms of conformity to an objective law. One sought to distance knowledge production from an association with personal opinion, and to describe the world as defined by timeless laws rather than political preferences.<sup>369</sup>

While the organisation never boasted a huge membership, the journal had an impressive reach. In its first year, around two thousand copies of each issue were sold, which increased to around five thousand copies only a few years later.<sup>370</sup> Initially the members settled for an informed readership roughly equivalent to the size of the organisation, but when it became evident that a wide, almost popular readership was attainable, ambitions increased. Soon it was advertising in prominent British publications, such as *The Times* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*.<sup>371</sup> In time, it attracted the attention of such disparate personalities as General Smuts and the King of Norway.<sup>372</sup> By 1912, the operation had outgrown the organisation's capabilities and the publishing company Macmillan was brought in to manage its

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<sup>368</sup> There were writers who complained about this fact, to whom the editor needed to defend the journal's position, Anonymous (24th February 1916) 'From H. U. Irving to unknown', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Ms.eng.hist.c.792, fol. 7. For more details on the journal's editorial dynamics, particularly after WWII, see Jens Norrby, 'From Imperial Discussion to Transnational Debate. The Commonwealth Journal The Round Table and the Indo-Pakistani Partition, 1947–1957' (January 2020) *History of European Ideas* 46:1.

<sup>369</sup> See John Agnew, *Making Political Geography* (2002) London: Hodder Education, pp. 56–2.

<sup>370</sup> 'The Round Table (May 1913) 'A Chart Charting the Development of The Round Table from Nov 1910 to May 1913', Bodleian Library, Oxford, The Round Table Papers Mss.Eng.hist.c.844, fol. 210a.

<sup>371</sup> See Moot Member (July 1910) 'Letter to Craig Sellar', *ibid.* Mss.Eng.hist.c.776, fol. 23; and Anonymous, 'Advertising Estimates', fol. 140.

<sup>372</sup> See Anonymous (22nd December 1919) 'Leaflet', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Ms.eng.hist.c.850, fol. 229; and Anonymous (7th October 1914) 'From Norwegian Kabinetssekretariat to H. Handcock', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Ms.eng.hist.c.790, fol. 61. There was even at one time a request for a Swedish translation of an article, as well as the *Gothenburg Handelstidning* requesting permission for a republication. See Anonymous (26th November 1914) 'Helmut Montgomery to RT editor', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Mss.eng.hist.c.791, fols. 59–60; and Anonymous (15th August 1918) 'H. C. O'Neill to Coupland', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Ms.eng.hist.c.823, fol. 232.

distribution.<sup>373</sup> The price was half a crown per issue, which together with generous individual funding allowed the organisation to operate without any membership fees.<sup>374</sup> The organisation also attempted to attract funding through placing advertisements in the journal, including ads for all sorts of everyday wares.<sup>375</sup>

It is worth noting that my description of The Round Table lacks any illustration of the organisation's visual material. While this text includes visual material from the marketing efforts of the other federalist organisations, there are no suitable parallels from the RT. The archives do indeed hold some visual material, in the form of promotional issues in over- and undersized formats and occasional campaigns in papers such as *The Times*, for example.<sup>376</sup> By the end of the war the organisation had distributed a few leaflets and pamphlets, one of which at least included a logo—but the visual expression of the organisation was consistently temperate and professional, with the promotional content centring predominantly on programmatic descriptions of the organisation's aims coupled with positive quotes from prominent admirers.<sup>377</sup>

When commenting on the scale of the organisation's ambitions, Jeanne Morefield notes that The Round Table 'took itself very seriously.'<sup>378</sup> This was evident not only in the scope of their imagination, but also in the restraint of their expression. Imperialism in Victorian society was in most cases the default opinion. It allowed imperial federalists to attract the approval of a broad membership, many of whom had only a vague idea of what it entailed. Pronounced Edwardian imperialism, on the other hand, was a conscious and precise positioning in the battle between humanitarian anti-imperialism and military imperial zeal. The old *Kindergarten* knew that it was pertinent not to make themselves vulnerable to charges of jingoism or political idealism so they fine-tuned and targeted their

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<sup>373</sup> Anonymous (5th July 1912) 'Memorandum on Macmillan Undertaking Publication', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Ms.eng.hist.c.781, fols. 36–43.

<sup>374</sup> Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History*, p. 59. The single most important donor was Lord Selborne, who managed to relocate funds previously destined to his work in South Africa, and to whom the organisation turned with some regularity, see for example (15th October 1913) 'To Selborne', Bodleian Library, Oxford, Round Table Papers Mss.eng.hist.c.814, fol. 237. Half a crown would correspond to roughly £15 in today's value.

<sup>375</sup> Unnamed (7th November 1911) 'To Secretary of The Round Table', *ibid.* Mss.Eng.hist.c.844, fol. 67.

<sup>376</sup> Various examples of promotional material can be found in The Round Table Papers at Bodleian, under MS.Eng.hist.c.850, in particular.

<sup>377</sup> For the pamphlet, see The Round Table (Late 1917) 'Pamphlet', Bodleian Library, Oxford, The Round Table Papers Ms.eng.hist.c.850. The logo was the English lion, encircled by several heraldry symbols associated with the different colonies.

<sup>378</sup> Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, p. 104.



message rather than spreading it.<sup>379</sup> As such, the lack of visually evocative promotional material is telling of an organisation with a precise—socially elevated—aim for its message, diligent to present itself as a serious and deliberate policy option. Additionally, it is fair to assume that their promotion relied predominantly on word of mouth, and that the character of the organisation's network contributed to its lack of concern with public popularity.

Ideologically, The Round Table shared the IFL's ambition of English preservation. When it came to understanding the terms of post-imperialism, however, the Table relied on the much further-reaching employment of history that they had inherited from Milner. The organisation subscribed to both the teleological, Whig, version of history—seeing British history as an inevitable succession of advancements—but also to the continental trend of framing national histories as contributions to the progress of Western civilisation.<sup>380</sup> They saw the English as the current custodians of European heritage, tracing back the Romans and Greeks—what we would refer to as 'Plato to NATO'.<sup>381</sup> In this sense, their narrative of Western preservation drew on Milner's 'infinite patience' and trusted in the perennial progress of history.

The move from 'English' to 'Western' preservation initially signified a small shift in emphasis, but it resulted in a substantial change with regards to the ideologies of the two organisations. While the qualities the two organisations identified as worthy of preservation were essentially the same, the IFL always saw its mission as a fundamentally imperial one—aiming for an imperial federation. The Round Table on the other hand, took the empire as its point of departure and blueprint, but believed that global hegemony should be the final objective. It had become obvious to the RT that the British Empire alone could never guarantee global stability, especially with the rise of military competition. Thus, the organisation's message would need to be adapted to a wider, Western audience. The expanded employment, stretching back to European antiquity, allowed the organisation to frame UK ambitions as part of a European mission. While still focussed

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<sup>379</sup> Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, pp. 70–71.

<sup>380</sup> Jeremy Black, *Using History* (2010) [2005] London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 57–61; and André, *Thinking Europe*, pp. 85–90.

<sup>381</sup> Just as with the League, the basic principle was that each influential culture added something extra to the development of civilisation. The Jews had contributed 'the idealism of its religious belief', the Greeks 'the conception of liberty', the Romans 'the sanctity of law', the Teutons 'respect for personal rights', and the Anglo-Saxons 'the spirit of individualism'. Anonymous, 'Foreign Affairs: Anglo-German Rivalry' (November 1910) *The Round Table* 1:1, p. 8. For more on the concept of 'Plato-to-NATO' in the context of European self-understanding, see Wintle, *Eurocentrism*, pp. 102–07.

on its primary aim of an imperial federation, The Round Table saw this as a steppingstone to something more along the lines of a world union, steeped in Western values. There was, however, one key element that disrupted the ease of this narrative: the rising power of Germany.

As I mentioned above, a widespread awareness of Germany as a serious contender for global influence had taken hold in Britain. The rallying against this common threat was able to unite many groups with otherwise divergent interests. The RT was no exception in this, but while most contemporaries deemed Germany to be a generally brutish people, the RT's framing of history presented the German claim to dominance in another light.<sup>382</sup> Imperialist circles in particular tended to ascribe the Germans essential qualities of cruelty and selfishness, and there were those, like Rudyard Kipling, who refused, even after the war, to describe Germans using personal nouns. Instead, he referred to them only in terms of 'the Hun'—or even 'the German microbe'.<sup>383</sup> While Round Table members expressed similar sentiments on occasion, the organisation generally stressed the values of the German heritage and argued that the problem lay in the nation's newly adopted '*Weltpolitik*'.<sup>384</sup>

The most significant difference between the Table's emplotment compared to its successor was that RT, in conceptualising their role in history, added a point to their plot—or perhaps more precisely, they did not remove any from the League's.

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<sup>382</sup> Mackenzie, 'Some British Reactions'. Germany is, in fact, one of the most frequently recurring themes in the organisation's journal, for one of the earliest and one of the latest examples, see Anonymous, 'Britain, France and Germany' (December 1911) *The Round Table* 2:5; and Anonymous, 'The Internal Problem in Germany' (September 1917) *The Round Table* 7:28. In fact, the very first issue states that 'the central fact in the international situation to-day is the antagonism between England and Germany', Anonymous, 'Anglo-German Rivalry', p. 7.

<sup>383</sup> Lycett, 'Rudyard Kipling', p. 562. Kipling's quote on 'the German microbe' from 1917 can be found in Matin, "'The Hun Is at the Gate!'", p. 433. It is also worth noting that Kipling paired his Germanophobia with a similar antagonism towards the French, suggesting a general xenophobia rather than one based on geopolitics. See Lycett, 'Rudyard Kipling', pp. 522, 84 & 600–01. For more on the Germanophobia of the British imperialist class, see Kennedy, 'Idealists and Realists', pp. 148–49.

<sup>384</sup> For an example of Round Table Germanophobia, see Anonymous, 'Anglo-German Rivalry', pp. 9–11. Examples of Round Table praise for the German national heritage are *ibid.*, p. 8; and Leopold S. Amery, 'The Influence of Tactical Ideas on Warfare', in Julian S. Corbett and H. J. Edwards (eds.), *Naval and Military Essays: Being Papers Read at the Naval and Military Section at the International Congress of Historical Studies 1913* (1914) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 166–67. Criticism of German geopolitical aspirations can be found in Anonymous, 'The New Problem of Imperial Defence' (May 1911) *The Round Table* 1:3, p. 237; and Anonymous, 'Britain, France and Germany', p. 15. Some even argued that the truly expansionist ambitions of the German military were only a few years old, Anonymous, 'European Diplomacy: Bismarck to Sir Edward Grey' (December 1914) *The Round Table* 5:17, pp. 640–41.

Apart from extending the starting point of their employment to the age of antiquity, The Round Table agreed with the IFL that the 1880s marked a critical juncture in the history of global order. However, whereas the IFL had identified its period as one of geopolitical uncertainty, the League—with the benefit of hindsight—went further in distilling it into the era of rising ‘Prussianism’ under Bismarck. As a result, the Table employment was structured around four points: its antique beginnings, the birth of Prussianism derailing the steady progress of history, their own period of acting to neutralise the German threat, and eventually the establishment of a global order through federation. This employment allowed the RT to criticise current German politics without denouncing its national character. Several members even emphasised that ‘there will be no hatred between the British and the German if the country can find its way back to ‘the Germany of strenuous thought and great music’.<sup>385</sup> Essentially, the Table saw Germany’s crime as a misinterpretation of their role in Western progress. Germany’s reluctance to play its part in the unfolding of history had unsettled a predictable narrative and given the UK an even more important role to play. The organisation’s relative nuance with regards to Germany was also partly owed to Milner, who even at the end of the war continued to engage the organisation’s members in Anglo-German dialogue.<sup>386</sup>

As I hinted at before, the framing of the rising geopolitical imbalance centred The Round Table narrative on the present moment and the English people’s ability to guide the world back to the trajectory of progress which its empire embodied. The English was responsible for guiding the West to preserve the values of civilisation in a constitution fit for the technologies of the twentieth century, namely a supranational federation. The finalisation of this federation, particularly regarding the completion of the civilising mission, was deemed too far into the future as to warrant any evaluation. As mentioned, this was a message informed by Milner’s relationship with history. He encouraged acting with ceaseless effort

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<sup>385</sup> Anonymous, ‘Nietzsche and the “Culture-State”’ (December 1914) *The Round Table* 5:17-20, p. 412; and Anonymous, ‘The Schism of Europe’ (December 1914) *The Round Table* 5:17-20, p. 350 respectively.

<sup>386</sup> Milner and Kerr, for example, undertook detailed discussions with Anglo-German (and fascist adjacent) Bank of England Director Frank Cyril Tiarks. As the war ended, they were determined to seriously consider how to best build post-war Anglo-German relationships, see Alfred Milner (24th April 1909) ‘Milner to Kerr’, New College Archive, Oxford, Milner Papers 11344; and Alfred Milner (26th April 1919) ‘Milner to Tiarks’, New College Archive, Oxford, Milner Papers 11344.

to neutralise the current threats, while simultaneously planning with infinite patience in envisioning the future.

The Round Table members did not themselves describe these values as 'Western' and tended to treat them as separate qualities. In describing them as 'Western', my intention has been to highlight the fact that these traits were seen as derived from a predominantly Greek, Italian, French, British, and American heritage, and understood to be at odds with Russian and Prussian national identities. Additionally, these traits schematically aligned with the principles we would currently associate with our concept of 'the West'.

With the advent of war, The Round Table's discourse shifted slightly, The Round Table and its members increasingly stressed that it was 'the system which is at fault.'<sup>387</sup> That is not to say that one condoned 'Prussian militarism', but it became clear that Britain did not stand alone in the battle for liberal values, and that Europe had also been failed by an international order which needed a fundamental reconstitution.<sup>388</sup> For the members of The Round Table, there was no question that the war was essentially a conflict of principles:

If Germany wins, German ideals will hold sway throughout Western Europe, and Germany in dominating Western Europe will have gone far to dominate the world. If the Allies win, it will not be Russian ideals which will dominate the world, but the ideals of England and France, and principally those ideals of liberty and freedom enshrined in the great fabric of the British Empire. This is the real struggle of fundamental importance to the world, the struggle between democracy and liberty on the one side and autocracy and militarism on the other.<sup>389</sup>

Russia was consistently recognised for contributing its military might to the protection of Western heritage but simultaneously not seen as one of its heirs apparent. As such, the relationship with Russia was understood in terms of pragmatically postponed antagonism rather than sincere amicability. This fundamental distrust was cemented by the success of the Russian Revolution, which only strengthened the organisation's dedication to worldwide Western hegemony.<sup>390</sup> The experience of war had put into sharp relief some of the required

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<sup>387</sup> Anonymous, 'The Internal Problem in Germany', p. 692.

<sup>388</sup> Anonymous, 'After Three Years' (September 1917) *The Round Table* 7:28, p. 665. See also Anonymous, 'The Gathering of the Nations' (December 1917) *The Round Table* 8:29, pp. 6–11; and Anonymous, 'The Unity of Civilisation' (September 1918) *The Round Table* 8:32, pp. 679–84.

<sup>389</sup> Anonymous (c. 1914) 'Memorandum on Germany', Bodleian Library, Oxford, The Round Table Papers Mss.Eng.hist.c.803, fol. 68.

<sup>390</sup> Anonymous, 'Three Doctrines in Conflict' (March 1918) *The Round Table* 8:30, p. 287.

tenets of a lasting, liberal peace and as the war went on, the organisation strove to further define exactly how these were particularly Western.<sup>391</sup>

The Round Table's sense of the precariousness of traditional geopolitical dynamics was shared widely at the time in what historian John Agnew calls 'naturalised geopolitics'. Figures such as Rudolf Kjellén and Halford Mackinder promoted a Darwinist understanding of international politics, emphasising the naturalistic, nihilistic, and precarious nature of inter-state competition.<sup>392</sup> They thought it naïve to presume a common and predictable development of European civilisation and in its place they saw national principles of global order competing with each other in a struggle for dominance.<sup>393</sup> This period established many of the geopolitical assumptions that would guide both world wars, as well as international politics to this day. The Round Table narrative of Western preservation should be seen as a part of the contemporary consideration of these issues.

Within this ideological framework, The Round Table hosted a variety of different positions and priorities. To counteract excessive divergence, the aforementioned efforts to appear as a united entity led to several key members gaining disproportionate influence over the organisation's output. They were tasked with drafting memoranda, writing articles, and promoting the organisation's work. In this regard, none personally contributed more to the character of The Round Table than Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr. The following section will look at their narrative frameworks of organic and institutional preservationism, which together formed the basis for the RT ideology.

## Narrating 'the Ultimate Theme of History'

Perhaps the most important and extensive contributions to the imagination of a British imperial federalism have come from Lionel Curtis, who with his grandiose and prolific writing defined much of the early Round Table's vision. As the organisation's 'indefatigable peripatetic prophet and missionary', Curtis con-

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<sup>391</sup> Anonymous, 'Some Principles and Problems of the Settlement' (December 1918) *The Round Table* 9:33, pp. 112–13.

<sup>392</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Mackinder had personal ties to the federalist movement through Lord Milner, see Alfred Milner (January 1910) 'Speech to the Newcastle Geographical Society', New College Archive, Oxford, Milner Papers Ms.Milner dep. 465, fols. 106–07.

<sup>393</sup> John A. Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics* (2003) London: Routledge, pp. 93–101.

tributed with a historical framework that made sense of the grand ambitions of the Western preservationist narrative.<sup>394</sup>

Growing up in the sheltered hamlet of Coddington, Curtis inherited a conservatism from his mother Francis, a Primrose League activist, and a robust faith from his father George, a clergyman—both qualities that he would carry with him his entire career. He was raised middle class and then Curtis enrolled at New College, Oxford in 1891.<sup>395</sup> Studying theology followed by law, it was there that he met many of the ‘friends who were to influence the rest of his life.’<sup>396</sup> After graduation, he worked as a legal assistant before enlisting in the British military in the South African war, where he met with Milner and the *Kindergarten*.<sup>397</sup>

Even in the Round Table’s early activities, we can see that Curtis’ visionary ability played a critical role in the organisation. As a steppingstone to promoting ideological cohesion within the Table, Curtis was charged with producing a memorandum that gathered the opinions of the organisation’s overseas branches and consolidating them within the framework of a common aim. ‘The Green Memorandum’ became a critical first point of reference for an organisation aiming for global relevance coupled with a determination to sidestep the vagueness of its predecessor.<sup>398</sup>

In this preliminary work, Curtis established the historical scaffolding for the Round Table’s far-reaching emplotment, giving it substance and detail. Curtis posited that the particularly English character of the empire ultimately stemmed from its geographic circumstances, more specifically the relationship of the British Isles to the continent. The channel, he argued, had not removed England from Europe but distanced it, allowing her to import continental ideas while remaining safe from military invasion and cultural coercion—to adopt ‘European ideas and mould them into distinctive shapes of its own.’<sup>399</sup>

As it was with the League, Curtis understood imperialism as a desire to preserve and promote a historically manifest English essence. From the League, he had

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<sup>394</sup> Leopold S. Amery, *My Political Life I: England before the Storm, 1896–1914* (1953a) London: Hutchinson, p. 270.

<sup>395</sup> Lavin, *From Empire to International Commonwealth*, pp. 3–14.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–39.

<sup>398</sup> As an internal document, ‘The Egg’ was never published but produced for internal circulation only, see Lionel Curtis (1910) ‘The Green Memorandum’, Oxford, Special Collections Ms. Curtis 156–5. Preliminary versions were distributed to local branches, presenting a description of the Dominion’s relationship to the Commonwealth together with blank pages at the end for potential feedback. See Curtis, ‘The Original Memorandum, Canada’.

<sup>399</sup> Curtis, ‘The Original Memorandum, Canada’, fol. 5.

inherited a comprehension of Englishness as almost self-evidently desirable and as something to be pushed as the primary selling point for prospective branches. Contrary to the League, however, Curtis' narrative did not treat British imperial success as something accidental, but rather enshrined in its geography as an island nation. In an almost predestined manner, it was this island-hood that offered England the freedom to perfect Western civilisation.

While the memorandum's formal name was the 'green memorandum', it was almost exclusively referred to as 'The Egg'. The nickname played on one of Curtis' most central themes. He described British imperial practice using a biological terminology as something 'organic'.<sup>400</sup> By labelling imperial rule as organic, Curtis sought to—apart from its obvious euphemistic effect—highlight the cohesive and reliable aspects of British rule, framing imperial administration in terms of the cultivation of an evolving phenomenon rather than the implementation of a centrally designed scheme. Curtis believed that national traits such as the unwritten constitution gave the English political system an adaptability to avoid the 'period revolution' that burdened the 'cut-and-dried' constitutions of the continent.<sup>401</sup> Curtis argued that a future union would need to affirm these organic qualities to safeguard the preservation of Western values in the face of the constantly changing conditions of the future.<sup>402</sup> In his mind, this was the "Project of the Empire" ... carried to its conclusion'.<sup>403</sup> The fusion of an imperial project with a sense of English community, an organic sense of kinship that through Milner's conception of race motivated one's role in the unfolding of history, was something that characterised Round Table imperialism at the time. The organisation's ideology was an imperialism distinctly derived from the experiences of colonial administration and the sense of belonging based on imperial practice.<sup>404</sup>

While Curtis described the organic union as based on European values and ideas, he also claimed that those ideas had taken their truest form in the English context. Variations on this theme were nothing new, tracing back to Henry Thomas Buckle's amazingly thorough discussion on the subject from the 1850s.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> As additional versions were produced, they got nicknamed after the colour of their bindings: 'strawberry egg' and 'green egg', et cetera. Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism*, p. 99.

<sup>401</sup> Lionel Curtis, *The Problem of the Commonwealth* (1916) Melbourne, p. 226.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 223–29.

<sup>403</sup> Curtis, 'The Original Memorandum, Canada', fols. 127 & 223–29.

<sup>404</sup> For further elaboration on this reasoning, see Morefield, *Empires Without Imperialism*, p. 100. For more on imperialism's role in the creation of national identity, see Berger and Miller, 'Building Nations in and with Empires'.

<sup>405</sup> See Henry Thomas Buckle, *The History of Civilization in England, Vol. 1* (1857) London: Grant Richards.



**THE SURPRISE PACKET.**

*Canada: Rather large for him, is it not?*

*Australia: Oh, his head is swelling rapidly. The hat will soon fit.*

Figure 15. The Surprise Packet

Curtis was not alone in using the empire metaphor as something living, growing, and maturing. In this New Zealand Observer caricature from 1907, we see Joseph Ward, prime minister of the newly appointed Dominion of New Zealand, depicted as an overly ambitious child. In the captions, Canada exclaims 'Rather large for him, is it not?' to which Australia answers: 'Oh, his head is swelling rapidly. The hat will soon fit.'

William Blomfield (1907). Published in The New Zealand Observer on September 27. Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by McZusatz.



It was classicist Alfred Zimmern who brought the ‘commonwealth’ concept to the RT, introducing it in his 1911 book *The Greek Commonwealth*.<sup>406</sup> Zimmern was one of several classicist scholars among Table members, but there were others, for example Sir William Marris and Patrick Duncan, who translated *Phaedo*.<sup>407</sup> Similar to the IFL, the RT seems to have offered a political project with the character and scope that matched their professional contemplations.

In his book, Zimmern argued that the Greek city state was the birthplace of ‘the Commonwealth idea’, which the organisation understood as contrasting with ‘theocracy in Europe’.<sup>408</sup> Curtis believed that the Greek adherence to God must not be understood in terms of obedience under God-given rule, but as a belief in men’s solidarity towards each other. In Greek society, every man was seen as a limb belonging to the same body, which Curtis juxtaposed against what he saw as the hierarchical conception of society in Europe. In this sense, he argued that the English did Europe better than the Europeans.

Curtis saw such promise in the commonwealth concept that he allowed it to replace ‘empire’ almost completely. This was a way to appease Dominion nationalism and anti-imperialist sentiments, according to Curtis, while simultaneously stressing the empire’s non-imperial qualities—that is, the aspects worthy of preservation. It was, in the words of Morefield, a carefully managed positioning ‘that allowed them to speak two languages at once.’<sup>409</sup> To Round Table members, the commonwealth concept became synonymous with the principles of democracy, with the spirit of comradeship and brotherhood, and with ‘the narrow road of union and democracy’—falling neither to autocracy nor anarchy.<sup>410</sup> Regarding the organisation as a whole, the commonwealth concept failed to gain widespread usage until the later stages of the war. The Table was not alone in this

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<sup>406</sup> Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (2008) Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 76. For the book itself, see Alfred Zimmern, *The Greek Commonwealth: Politics and Economics in Fifth-Century Athens* (1977) [1911] Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>407</sup> Anonymous, ‘Governor-General Honoured’, *The African World*, April 15 1939. For more on the accomplishments of Marris, see his entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Harry Haig & Philip Woods, ‘Marris, Sir William Sinclair’, in David Cannadine (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

<sup>408</sup> Lionel Curtis, *The Project of a Commonwealth: An Inquiry into the Nature of Citizenship in the British Empire and into the Mutual Relations of the Several Communities Thereof* (1915) London: Macmillan, pp. 12 & 19–26

<sup>409</sup> Morefield, *Empires without Imperialism*, p. 131.

<sup>410</sup> See Anonymous, ‘Some Principles and Problems of the Settlement’, p. 91; Anonymous, ‘Three Doctrines in Conflict’, pp. 282–90; and Anonymous, ‘The Irish Crisis’ (June 1918) *The Round Table* 8:31, p. 522 respectively.

shift and 'commonwealth' soon became the preferred nomenclature in liberal circles throughout the United Kingdom, a transition in which Curtis, Zimmern, and the Table played a central part.<sup>411</sup>

Curtis was not, however, alone in paving the way and the organisation's thinking would have been something unrecognisable had it not been for the contributions of Philip Kerr. Born in 1882, Philip Henry Kerr grew up in the titled gentry, not far removed from the 7<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Lothian.<sup>412</sup> A decade younger than most *Kindergarteners*, Kerr arrived in South Africa in 1905, after he had completed his Oxford degree at New College. By the end of his *Kindergarten* work, Kerr had turned his attention to the Round Table, quickly establishing himself as one of the members central in shaping the organisation's character.

If Curtis was the Table's strategist, then Kerr was its tactician. Kerr distinguished himself within the RT through his well-informed, lucid, and pragmatic approach to contemporary international politics, even if he in no way distanced himself from the organisation's extensive emplotment and allowed his thinking to be guided by historical insight. He was warm and friendly, had an impressive work ethic, was incredibly well-informed on international affairs and geopolitical trends, and 'a great gentleman in every sense of the word.'<sup>413</sup> Until his death in 1940, he was the most prolific contributor of *Round Table* articles, and he would prove essential to defining of the Table's view on the United Kingdom's role in international politics.<sup>414</sup>

Kerr spared no time in asserting a Round Table position with regards to international relations. In an article from the journal's first issue, he stated that the 'central fact in the international situation to-day is the antagonism between Eng-

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<sup>411</sup> Two other notable early advocates of the commonwealth concept were J. A. Hobson and Leonard Hobhouse. For reference, see J. A. Hobson, *Towards International Government* (1915) London: George & Allen Unwin Ltd., pp. 135, 205 & 8; and Leonard Hobhouse, 'Science and Philosophy as Unifying Forces', in F. S. Marvin (ed.), *The Unity of Western Civilization: Essays Arranged and Edited* (1915) London: Oxford University Press, pp. 162–78. For more on RT's role in the ascension of the commonwealth concept, see McIntyre, 'Commonwealth Legacy', p. 693.

<sup>412</sup> A title he himself would inherit in 1930, and for which he is best known. I have, however, decided that for clarity's sake I will refer to 'Lord Lothian' with restraint and describe him as 'Kerr' throughout the entire study.

<sup>413</sup> From Lord Riddell, *Lord Riddell's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and after, 1918–1923* (1933) London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., p. 223.

<sup>414</sup> The analysis of Kerr's immense contributions to the Round Table ideology has been made possible by the systematic and meticulous archival work of Kerr's biographer J. R. M. Butler. While the articles were published anonymously, he has compiled a list of Kerr's contributions to the journal, upon which I have based my readings. See Butler, *Lord Lothian*, pp. 323–25.

land and Germany.<sup>415</sup> In doing this, Kerr focussed the organisation from the get-go on Curtis' notion of the 'struggle of principles' being 'the ultimate theme in history'.<sup>416</sup> Kerr repeatedly, however, emphasised that contemporary geopolitical unrest stemmed primarily from the clash between Germany's expansive ambitions and British imperial rule, not the principles of the German nation *per se*. Likewise, Curtis praised German culture as 'the greatest of national achievements' on one hand while discrediting German imperialism as a way of 'spreading its own culture over all the world' on the other. He argued that Germany failed to see that the governing principles of the British Empire was 'not British but human'.<sup>417</sup> While this inherent hierarchy of national principles as the driving force of history was more front-and-centre to Curtis' thinking, Kerr also identified the object of his criticism as specifically Napoleonic and Bismarckian imperialism, which he argued had corrupted the German spirit rather than furthering it.<sup>418</sup>

It should be noted that the distinction between the German, oppressive, imperial influence, and its English, liberating counterpart was not evident to everyone. Hobson, for example, criticised the Table for pursuing a project with the same ideological character that they criticised the Germans for.<sup>419</sup> In fact, the whole project of preservationism was, of course, much more connected to the exertion of *Kultur* than it was an expression of open-minded multiculturalism. Leonard Woolf had also worked within imperial administration near the turn of the century, but drew completely different conclusions from what he perceived as the horrors of imperial violence.<sup>420</sup> The fact that their time at Sunnyside had only strengthened the imperialist zeal of the *Kindergarten*, while Woolf's time in Sri Lanka transformed him into one of the empire's fiercest critics speaks to the polarising nature of the post-Boer War imperialist debate. This is why Kerr and Curtis made efforts to present a deliberate and unified position even on rather detailed issues.

Kerr centred his argument on the division between a nation's character and its mode of imperial expression. This distinction was surely present in Curtis' writing, but never featured prominently, and while many members—Curtis included—

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<sup>415</sup> Anonymous, 'Anglo-German Rivalry', p. 7.

<sup>416</sup> Curtis, *The Project of a Commonwealth*, p. 12.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 685–86.

<sup>418</sup> Anonymous, 'The New Problem', p. 235; and Anonymous, 'Britain, France and Germany', p. 57.

<sup>419</sup> Benjamin R. Y. Tan, 'Hobson on White Parasitism and Its Solutions' (2023) *Political Theory* 0:0, p. 12.

<sup>420</sup> Randi Koppen, 'The Work of the Witness: Leonard Woolf, Imperialism, and Totalitarianism' (June 2019) *Partial Answers* 17:2.

would on occasion fall into aiming more essentialist critique towards Germany, Kerr's articles took great pains to limit the Western preservationist message in terms of contemporary foreign policy.<sup>421</sup> When the shot was fired in Sarajevo on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1914, *The Round Table* had manoeuvred itself into a position to defend the United Kingdom's right to geopolitical hegemony, while simultaneously leaving the door open for Anglo-German reconciliation—given, of course, that Germany would stoop to humiliating concessions from their imperial ambitions.

The Great War would cause Kerr to modify many of the tenets vital to his way of thought, and in the long term it would come to define his entire outlook. Curtis, on the other hand, tended to emphasise the *longue durée* aspects of the organic preservationist narrative, which mitigated the severity of the war's impact on his thinking.<sup>422</sup> In the early years of the war, Kerr's contemporary-centred analysis underwent a distinct shift in focus from the Anglo-German rivalry to the state of international affairs. In a pair of articles from 1916, Kerr reframed his preservationism, shifting the focus from the Anglo-German rivalry to the lack of institutional support for international order. Here, he argued that stable peace must be grounded in the commonwealth principles of the respect for the individual, an established liberal legal order, and a democratic love for humanity.<sup>423</sup> Staying within the limits of Western preservationism, Kerr re-conceptualised competing English and German geopolitical claims in terms of institutional principles, and argued that the international order was incompatible with an 'over-weening militarist State', to which the only antidote was the gradual and systematic implementation of a 'free commonwealth'.<sup>424</sup> The signatories of a lasting peace agreement would be required, argued Kerr, to make a choice.

One significant aspect of this particular institutional preservationism was that it hinted at the possible disconnection between the principle of a commonwealth and 'the British', who had cultivated and exemplified it. Settling on defining commonwealth as a 'principle', Kerr sought to describe something that was essentially human in nature and could take hold anywhere. While still aimed at preserving the fruits of British ingenuity, this new proposal was of a global union, first, and imperial preservation, second. Kerr's lauding of imperial institutions and

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<sup>421</sup> Curtis had less interest in determining the exact nature of German antagonism than Kerr did.

<sup>422</sup> In fact, the attentive reader may have noticed that while I have based my analysis of Kerr solely on sources written before the war, Curtis' thinking did not alter in the same way, which has allowed me to use his sources more freely.

<sup>423</sup> Anonymous, 'The Principle of Peace' (June 1916) *The Round Table* 6:23, pp. 391–96.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

his advocacy of international stability made it clear that imperial longevity was implied, but what Kerr wanted was first and foremost international cooperation, not British hegemony. As he had not yet broken with the basic tenets of his argument, the essential preservationist message remained. However, Kerr's 1916 articles were consequential in that they marked a shift in priorities for a certain kind of federalist—those who argued that war, and not the uncivilised forces of the world, posed the most imminent threat to human prosperity. For many federalists, the war challenged their belief that preservation was ultimately aimed at preserving the civilising function of the imperial institutions, leading many of them to assume that maintaining peace should be the UK's ultimate aspiration beyond its empire. 1916 was also the year that Kerr's ties to the British political class, together with his South African merits, earned him the position of private secretary under Lloyd George, which required his full attention through the end of the war.

While Curtis' thinking was centred on the experience of the British Empire, he also conceived of the United Kingdom's ultimate post-imperial aim as a world federation. A key trait of the commonwealth concept, and its basis in the classic Greek heritage, was to extricate it from the current geographical limitations of the empire. The end goal of Curtis' organic preservationism was that an organically united British Empire would be fit to assume its leading role, spreading the commonwealth principle to every corner of the globe, confirming 'our purpose and [nerving] our will, as through the night we face the tempest which rages to overwhelm us.'<sup>425</sup>

Curtis argued that the United Kingdom—apart from cultivating the purest form of European heritage—also found itself in circumstances favourable to spreading its influence and ensuring its longevity. With an empire that encompassed a quarter of the world's population, the British were destined to carry out the mission of world commonwealth. Curtis argued that over the years, the British imperial administration had learnt how to govern a people representative of humanity's diversity and could boast an army (almost) capable of protecting it. Curtis saw preservation not simply as a conservative impulse to maintain the current state of things to the greatest possible extent, but also as a means of broadening the scope of English preservation to a global level. Whilst the IFL had imagined preservation as a means of maintaining English national qualities for all

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<sup>425</sup> Curtis, *The Project of a Commonwealth*, p. 706.

who shared in its national bonds, Curtis viewed these same qualities as propelled by the English nation far beyond the borders of the King's dominions.

In the end, Curtis' concept of 'the Commonwealth principle' was significant in two ways with regards to his Western preservationist narrative. First, it gave a well-defined and historically grounded argument as to why the English should be seen as having refined and subsumed guardianship over the Greco-Roman heritage. In his mind, a commonwealth would provide a tangible form to the values deemed worthy of post-imperial preservation, such as liberal democracy and civilisation. Second, a commonwealth could act as a testament to how proficiency in international governance needed to grow into maturity. The organic nature of the commonwealth cooperation meant that the UK had a great deal to contribute to American attempts to guide international politics. Curtis urged the UK to cultivate its experience of international governance, in order to be able to assume its mentoring role after the empire eventually dissolved. Curtis' visionary outlook allowed him to assume an influential role in shaping the conceptual framework of *The Round Table*. The next section examines conceptualisations of Western preservationism that were less concerned with narratives and more interested in pragmatic considerations. It is centred on the thinking of Leo Amery, but also includes many of the federalists who went on to apply their preservationism to other aspects of British society.

## 'The Comparatively Unimportant Difference of Bulk'

Leopold Stennet Amery wore many hats throughout his career, but self-proclaimed 'federalist' was one that proved an awkward fit. While he was a proud Milner disciple and a close friend to Curtis, later in life he would become convinced that the term 'federalism' signalled the wrong approach to the imperial issue. In his autobiography, he argued that federalism—echoing Rosebery—was based on 'the delusion that it is the constitutional machinery that creates unity, forgetting that the machinery itself can only come into being where the sense of unity is already dominant.'<sup>426</sup>

Amery was, however, seriously engaged with many of the individuals and issues of the federalist tradition and his work represents the deep entanglement of British federalism and the British political machinery. While not being a part of the

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<sup>426</sup> Amery, *My Political Life I*, p. 271.

*Kindergarten*, Amery was probably ‘Milner’s most ardent follower’. He contributed significantly to the early Round Table and he never abandoned the issue of imperial unity.<sup>427</sup> This section will detail how Amery, alongside a few other examples, made use of and developed the Western preservationist narrative in their work apart from the Round Table context, representing the entangled nature of the federalist tradition.

During his career, Amery was a hugely influential figure in British politics, active in four different cabinets and, during different points in his career, widely held as a potential prospective leader of the Conservative party.<sup>428</sup> He has been called the father of both ‘the Commonwealth’ and ‘the state of Israel’, as well as ‘the philosopher and leader of the imperial movement.’<sup>429</sup> When he lost his seat in 1945 he had been a towering figure within British politics for the previous twenty years at least, having exerted his influence over a number of critical issues in a variety of political spheres. While many aspects of Amery’s geopolitical thinking have already been explored, this chapter surveys his political ideas during the early 1900s in relation to the contemporary federalist movement, looking at how the two were entangled.<sup>430</sup>

Amery was born in 1873 and immediately thrust into imperial matters as his father was a colonial administrator stationed in India, where Amery would spend the first fifteen years of his life. After his education at Oxford, Amery turned to journalism and while covering the Second Anglo-Boer War for *The Times* he came in contact with Milner and the *Kindergarten*. After the war he resumed a domestic journalistic career until 1911, when he won the seat of Birmingham South for the Liberal Unionist Party.

Already at this stage in his life, Amery had shown himself to be an ardent proponent for imperial unity and had written several texts and speeches on imperial issues. While he sought to distance himself from the ‘idealistic and unrealistic’ pursuit of imperial federalisation, he still agreed with the same assumptions that guided federalist preservationism.<sup>431</sup> He sought an empire ‘per-

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<sup>427</sup> Louis, *In the Name of God, Go!*, p. 40. Amery was, for example, part of the original Moot. See The Round Table (1910) ‘List of Original Moot & Journal Committee Members’, Bodleian Library, Oxford, The Round Table Papers Mss.Eng.hist.c.776, fol. 149.

<sup>428</sup> Louis, *In the Name of God, Go!*, p. 18.

<sup>429</sup> See David Faber, *Speaking for England: Leo, Julian and John Amery—the Tragedy of a Political Family* (2005) London: Free Press, pp. 201–21; Louis, *In the Name of God, Go!*, p. 22.; and Julian Amery, ‘Introduction’, in John Barnes and David Nicholson (eds.), *The Leo Amery Diaries: 1896-1929* (1980) London: Hutchinson, p. 19 respectively.

<sup>430</sup> Louis, *In the Name of God, Go!*, pp. 54–55 & 68–73.

<sup>431</sup> Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 34.

manently and indissolubly bound together for the defence of their common interests, and for the development of a common civilisation', in the end requiring a 'true constitutional union.'<sup>432</sup> This union, argued Amery, was not only critical to the prosperity of the English speaking peoples, but it also had 'an objective justification'.<sup>433</sup>

Over a region far wider than the Empire of Rome, it stands for an ideal as sublime as the Roman ever was, but an ideal more real and more living because based on the vitality of free nations, and adapted more closely to the political needs and capacities of each part. There is nothing, indeed, in Imperial Union, when we consider the diversity of races, civilisations and interests under the British flag, to differentiate it from that union of all mankind of which some idealists have dreamed, except just the comparatively unimportant difference of bulk. The British Empire is a whole world in itself. Imperial Unity differs from the wildest dream of humanitarian idealism only in this—that it is actually and directly within our reach. The federation of the world may be a glorious aspiration for the dim future. Imperial Unity can be made a no less glorious reality in our own day.<sup>434</sup>

While Amery shared in the Western preservationist narrative of the empire as a civilising mission, he differed from most other RT members in his conviction of the fundamental soundness of the contemporary imperial cooperation. Whereas many took to federalism as a measure to address issues of discord within the British Empire, Amery argued that current imperial practice was not in need of tinkering and that its finalisation was an issue not of qualitative reform but of quantitative expansion, 'a difference of bulk'.

The quotation above reflects Amery's general view on federalism as being a commendable cause but too far removed from immediate policy considerations as to be deserving of anyone's efforts.<sup>435</sup> He consistently cautioned against getting

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<sup>432</sup> Leopold S. Amery, 'Imperial Unity', in Leopold S. Amery (ed.), *Union and Strength: A Series of Papers on Imperial Questions* (1912) London: Edward Arnold, p. 2. Here, a brief comment on the material is in order. Apart from the material that can be found in Amery's published speeches, articles, letters and diary excerpts, Amery wrote an autobiography in three volumes during the 1950s. For the purposes of this study, these books are not considered primary sources, even if they are considered to give slightly more insightful information into Amery's thinking during the period than other secondary sources.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>435</sup> It seems as though Amery's determination to appear pragmatic and grounded led him to denounce federalism very explicitly, in certain cases, while in practice (particularly in the earlier parts of his career) he agreed almost entirely with the federalist project. The exception was his ardent emphasis on the importance of building on the existing empire and carefully cultivating the ties therein.



swept up in constitutional thought experiments. In a Round Table memorandum he drafted in late 1910 and early 1911, he repeatedly stressed the importance of not imposing constitutional measures on the Dominions without their consent. He believed that a too rigid constitution would risk driving the Dominions further away, and that the strategic course forward was through a flexible, unwritten, 'British' constitution, which allowed for compromises and adaptation.<sup>436</sup> An American-style, written constitution, he likened to 'constitutional hara-kiri'.<sup>437</sup>

In this sense, Amery aligned himself with the IFL's brand of civic preservationism. According to Amery, any preservation that hoped to succeed would need its content and drive to be derived from the empire's inhabitants. Thus, the elaboration of constitutional schemes risked squashing the very democratic forces that a post-imperial commonwealth was intended to promote. Something that contributed to Amery's scepticism towards elaborate schemes was that he did not accept the extension of the organic preservationist employment. Particularly in drawing upon history to predict the future, Amery remained unconvinced by most predictions and allowed for a great degree of uncertainty in his considerations. In response to a commentator who claimed an Anglo-American union to be 'unthinkable', Amery asserted: 'Unthinkable! There is no such word in international politics.'<sup>438</sup> If Kerr was imperialism's 'visionary idealist', then Amery was its 'practical thinker'.<sup>439</sup> In a world of uncertainty, Amery argued that Britain and its empire could only remain globally relevant if their politics were guided by a pragmatic geopolitical outlook. He called this perspective on international politics 'military geography'.

Amery began dabbling with the concept of military geography during the Second Anglo-Boer War, but by the end of the decade he was able to present a more fully-fledged theory in an address to the Royal Scottish Geographical Society.<sup>440</sup> In his lecture, Amery surveyed the geographical situation, comparing the superpowers through data such as industrial output and length of land frontiers in order to assess their military standing. This allowed him to conclude that, at that

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<sup>436</sup> Leopold S. Amery (26 January 1911) 'Memorandum', Bodleian Library, Oxford, The Round Table Papers add. mss.eng.hist.s.776, fols. 89–91 & 115–23.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>438</sup> Amery, 'The Military Geography of the British Empire', p. 97.

<sup>439</sup> This was a distinction that Smuts made in 1917, cited in Barnes and Nicholson (eds.), *The Leo Amery Diaries: 1896–1929* pp. 160–61.

<sup>440</sup> The address was held on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 1908. For his earliest use of 'military geography' as a concept, see Leopold S. Amery, *The Problem of the Army* (1903) London: Edward Arnold, pp. 1–18.

moment, the world was principally ruled by three superpowers. The British were third, boasting a significant but scattered and vulnerable empire. The United States were second, with a similar national consciousness but vastly superior resources. The greatest military power he deemed to be Germany, combining the military resources of the British with a single-minded militant national consciousness.<sup>441</sup>

As a result, the British found themselves in a precarious position, increasingly hostile towards 'the whole modern shrinkage of the world'.<sup>442</sup> This statistical—and somewhat crude—assessment of the British position did not set Amery apart from his contemporaries and was a geographical perspective on global politics that was (with slight variations) commonplace in Whitehall.<sup>443</sup> Amery contributed by combining this widely-held perspective with a thorough preservationist narrative, representing the entanglement of the federalist and the administrative statistical outlook. Neither side had any aspects that were completely foreign to the other, but few individuals combined the two viewpoints in such an even-keeled way as Amery. I call this the narrative of geographic preservationism. He argued that the key to understanding the dynamic of international politics was to look at its geographical conditions, interpreting political action through the perspective that he himself described as military geography.

In a series of lectures and articles from the turn of the century to the beginning of the war, Amery elaborated on his concept of military geography. According to Amery, geography's influence was not limited to defining a nation's military parameters at any given moment, but it was also critical to understand its national character. An effective military strategy, such as the English longbow in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, had been successful only in so far that it had been based in the national mindset, the 'imperturbable coolness' of the English soldier.<sup>444</sup> Similarly, Frederick the Great had demonstrated his acumen by developing a military strategy suited to 'the steady Teutonic temperament.'<sup>445</sup> Amery concluded that military success in the coming decade would hinge on innovating with bold new strategies that incorporated the latest technology, whilst adapting them to their national character.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> Amery, 'Military Geography', pp. 88–92.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>443</sup> Williams, *Defending the Empire*, pp. 160–63.

<sup>444</sup> Leopold S. Amery, 'National Policy and National Strategy', in Leopold S. Amery (ed.), *Union and Strength: A Series of Papers on Imperial Questions* (1912) London: Edward Arnold, p. 220.

<sup>445</sup> Amery, 'The Influence of Tactical Ideas', p. 167.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172–73.

Furthermore, Amery understood that geography influenced national character—the widespread, naval English peoples versus the cramped, continental Germans—and that it provided insight into the political agendas based on each culture's their respective background. Hence, the Anglo-German arms race was no accident, but rather a geographical probability.<sup>447</sup> Amery matched the preservationist logic with a geographical scaffolding, steeping national positions in geographical experiences. This was not remarkable in itself from a federalist context, and one could even argue that Curtis' position could ultimately be inferred from the same reasoning. But Amery differed from Curtis, in that Amery followed his geographical reasoning to the conclusion that the collection of national characters was poised for conflict. Whereas Curtis understood *status quo* in terms of the harmonious progress of civilisation—each nation played its part—Amery aligned himself with contemporary geopolitical thinkers like Sir Halford Mackinder and Friedrich Ratzel, viewing international affairs as a zero-sum game with insufficient resources to go around.<sup>448</sup>

Amery's thinking differed from Curtis' and Kerr's fundamentally, in that he understood the Anglo-German rivalry to be geographically mandated. If the English were to assume their role in 'the greatest and noblest political vision that has yet dawned upon any people', they would need to defeat Germany, not convert it.<sup>449</sup> Amery's emplotment made no significant distinction between the time before and after Bismarck and envisioned not a return to a peaceful past, but rather preservation by breaking the cycle of geographically warranted scarcity. In his post-imperial vision, Amery emphasised the United Kingdom's call to assert its values globally, even if he certainly acknowledged that this would depend on the consent of the international community. The rigidity of Amery's geographical framework meant that he preferred military deterrents over diplomatic assurances, as he understood much of national politics to be geographically hard-wired. By 'the very fact [of] geographical distribution ... no other Power can do so much for the maintenance of the general peace ... [and] the progress of human development'.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Amery, 'National Policy and National Strategy', p. 213. Amery described the British Empire as a 'world state', not in the sense of literally governing the entire planet, but in the sense of representing such a variety of the human experience as to constitute a microcosmos within a single state. See Amery, 'Imperial Defence and National Policy', p. 68 & 84.

<sup>448</sup> During this period, a similar, nihilistic outlook based on statistical comparisons was increasingly evident in Whitehall, as well, Williams, *Defending the Empire*, pp. 160–63.

<sup>449</sup> Amery, 'Military Geography', p. 107.

<sup>450</sup> Amery, 'National Policy and National Strategy', pp. 215–16.



Figure 16. HMS Kent

While the historical and imperial mindset of the federalists set them apart, there was a well-established view in Britain that the conflict with Germany was one of principle. Even individual war machines became household symbols for the collective imperial effort to safeguard civilisation. HMS Kent, for example, became well-known after its victory at the Battle of Coronel in 1914. A few years later, it was featured in newsreels as a centrepiece in the commemoration of the battle. Even into the 1960s, it would be honoured on postage stamps, together with other ships involved in the conflict.<sup>451</sup> The image here is from c. 1930, but the ship is indistinguishable from the images that were circulated during the war.

Photography of The Royal Navy Heavy Cruiser HMS Kent (c. 1930) by the US navy. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by Cobatfor.

In December 1916, as a part of the newly appointed Lloyd George government, Amery became an Assistant secretary to the war cabinet, a role of which he ‘made the most’.<sup>452</sup> While many of the issues he confronted were limited and well-defined

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<sup>451</sup> Mark Connelly, ‘Propaganda, Memory and Identity: The Battle of the Falkland Islands, December 1914’ in David Welch (ed.) *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion: From World War I to WikiLeaks* (2014) London: I. B. Tauris, pp. 21–23.

<sup>452</sup> Amery, ‘Introduction’, p. 13.

in nature, his work was often guided by the federalist imperialist principles explored above.

As a politician, Amery distinguished himself through his imperialism. He repeatedly attempted to shift the focus of the war effort away from what he called ‘the Western obsession’ and towards a military strategy more evenly distributed throughout the empire.<sup>453</sup> He regularly pushed his colleagues to acknowledge the Dominion perspective on issues and warned against taking their support for granted. He sided with Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes in expressing outrage over the Dominions’ exclusion from the peace terms negotiations, for example.<sup>454</sup> In general, however, Amery argued that the UK was not a part of Europe and that an excessive interest in the “‘little side show’ in the west’ only exacerbated the imperial neglect that had forced the British to become dependent on continental peace. Diametrically opposed to the later government line, he argued that Britain must maintain its role as a global power, as ‘a sufficiently strong and united’ empire would ‘be able to disregard the European balance.’<sup>455</sup>

It was clear to Amery that British war aims would need to focus on the United Kingdom’s global influence in order to ensure the best possible footing for the UK’s post-imperial mission.<sup>456</sup> This mission, he was certain, could not be shared with Germany. In one of his earliest assignments in his role as assistant secretary, Amery pressured his colleagues to recognise that Germany’s perennial expansionism was at odds with the maintenance of international order.<sup>457</sup> Germany, Amery argued, could not be treated as a fellow custodian of the civilising project but ought to be stripped of its means of military expansion and have its international influence restricted.<sup>458</sup> In a letter addressed to Australian Prime

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<sup>453</sup> He uses this expression in a diary entry from December 1917, expressing his frustration with what he sees as the Cabinet’s neglect of issues such as Mesopotamia and Palestine, Barnes & Nicholson (eds.), *The Leo Amery Diaries: 1896–1929* pp. 188–89.

<sup>454</sup> From a description of an entry in his diary dated November 1918, *ibid.*, p. 242. He was also critical of Curzon’s earlier suggestion that a Dominion spokesperson be appointed, arguing that the Dominions would not appreciate being treated as one and the same. See *ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>455</sup> From a letter addressed to Milner a few years before his cabinet duties, May 1915. *Ibid.*, p. 116. For more on the British war cabinet’s focus on European stability, see B. J. C. Mckercher, ‘The Quest for Stability: British War Aims and Germany, 1914–1918’ (April 2019) *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 30:2.

<sup>456</sup> Leo Amery (16th August 1918) ‘United States and British War Aims’, London, Parliamentary Archives, The Lloyd George Papers LG-F/2/1, fol. 29.

<sup>457</sup> He summarised the content of this memorandum in his autobiography, see Leopold S. Amery, *My Political Life II: War and Peace, 1914–1929* (1953b) London: Hutchinson, pp. 104–05.

<sup>458</sup> From a letter to Robert Cecil, December 1916, Barnes and Nicholson (eds.), *The Leo Amery Diaries: 1896–1929* pp. 133–34. With regards to Germany, there were many who argued that the principles of free trade and cooperation should be upheld for as long as possible, but Amery

Minister Billy Hughes in October 1917, Amery lamented the fact that he believed the Foreign Office had put too much stock in ‘artificial’ solutions that would please the Germans after the war, while the tried and true guarantor of global stability was ‘the British Imperial system.’<sup>459</sup> In a similar vein, he warned Smuts in August 1918 against overextending imperial resources in the hopes of a ‘complete victory’ on the continent (for example by attempting to prioritise expelling all German troops from France), since priority ought to be given to safeguarding international law throughout the world.<sup>460</sup>

From his historical frame of reference, Amery saw it as critical that imperial issues remained at the forefront, and he argued that the British imperial infrastructure should be seen as a key asset in Britain’s contribution to the post-war order. His argument was that the war effort should be designed to best preserve British values and institutions, for them to be disseminated in the name of liberal democracy. Whilst not an explicitly federalist agenda, Amery’s work is an example of how a federalist framing of contemporary issues was entangled with the British political machinery.

Amery was not the only member of The Round Table to contribute to the British war effort. For example, Robert Henry Brand—who finalised the *Kindergarten’s* work in South Africa with *The Union of South Africa*—contributed to the Anglo-Canadian efforts surrounding war finances. Brand had already acknowledged Canada’s particular geopolitical dependency on the British Empire before the war—disregarding the US as contributing to Canadian security. He became the Canadian Representative of the Imperial Munitions Board (IMB) in 1915, which he later combined with the deputy chairmanship of the British war mission in the US.<sup>461</sup> He used these roles to strengthen cooperation between Canada and the United Kingdom, contributing to the effectiveness of the IMB and Canadian financial aid. He was passionate about treating Canada as an imperial issue of strengthening British ties, rather than as an aspect of the American situation—something equally important to that of Anglo-American balance.<sup>462</sup> In

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distinguished himself as one of the sternest critics of the free-market position. For him and his sympathisers, Germany’s influence ought to be restricted on all fronts. See Steiner, *Origins of the First World War*, p. 67.

<sup>459</sup> Barnes and Nicholson (eds.), *The Leo Amery Diaries: 1896–1929* p. 174.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 233–34.

<sup>461</sup> Brand’s observation on Canadian precarity can be found in R. H. Brand, *The Union of South Africa* (1909) Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 131.

<sup>462</sup> Keith Neilson, ‘R. H. Brand, the Empire and Munitions from Canada’ (2011) *The English Historical Review* 126:523, pp. 1436–55.

these efforts, Brand was part of a Round Table network of members and former Kindergarteners, such as the IMB chairman, Joseph Flavelle, its financial expert, J. F. Perry, and Lionel Hitchens, who in 1915 had been appointed by Lloyd George to set up the munitions cooperation with Canada. As the war ended, former Canadian prime minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier lamented—hyperbolically—that Canada was ‘governed by a junta sitting at London, known as “The Round Table”’.<sup>463</sup>

This ‘junta’, as well as Amery’s governmental efforts, are examples of how through their careers, Round Table members were able to entangle the federalist tradition with various aspects of British society. In most cases, such as with Perry’s or Flavelle’s business ventures, it is reasonable to assume that they were aided by their imperial insight and network of contacts, but we lack the historical documentation to deduce anything about how it shaped their thinking. Others, such as Geoffrey Robinson (later Dawson) would exert a substantial influence on British public debate, completely in line with Round Table thinking, even if he did little to contribute to the content of federalist ideas. From 1912 to 1919, Robinson would use his role as editor of *The Times* to push a social imperialist agenda and to further various RT causes.<sup>464</sup> Likewise, the author John Buchan promoted issues at the heart of Round Table thinking through some of his imperialist themes, most notably in *A Lodge in the Wilderness*. Members such as Patrick Duncan, as well as Robert Brand, and later Edward Grigg would assume key positions within the British colonial administration, and George Parkin became the chairman of the Geographical Association in 1912. Finally, it should be noted that this period saw the meteoric rise of the cultural status of Robert Baden-Powell thanks to the burgeoning scout movement.<sup>465</sup> Although not an RT member in his own right, he had worked closely with Milner and remained an example of federalism’s indirect impact on British society.

The considerable extent of the influence of ‘Milner’s young men’ on various aspects of British society is certainly a product of the network- and class-based

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<sup>463</sup> From a letter to Sir Allen Aylesforth on May 15, 1917. Quoted in Oscar Douglas Skelton, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier Vol. Ii* (1922) Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 510.

<sup>464</sup> N. C. Fleming, ‘The Press, Empire and Historical Time: *The Times* and Indian Self-Government, C. 1911–47’ (May 2010) *Media History* 16:2, pp. 186–92; and Michael Heffernan, ‘The Cartography of the Fourth Estate: Mapping the New Imperialism in British and French Newspapers, 1875–1925’, in James R. Akerman (ed.), *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire* (2009) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 286–87.

<sup>465</sup> For a brief introduction to the early years of the scout movement, see Macdonald, *Sons of the Empire*, pp. 3–28.

nature of early twentieth-century British ‘meritocracy’, more than of the power of their ideas. Yet, these examples are testaments to the disproportional influence that *religio milneriana* had on British society. Whilst we cannot equate all *Kindergarten* activity with federalism, the intimate relationship between the worldview that they developed in South Africa and the federalist project ought not to be disregarded either.<sup>466</sup> In other words, one of federalism’s most powerful expressions during the 1910s, 20s, and 30s, was the fundamental role it played to the thinking of a small group of people with extraordinarily illustrious careers.

Returning to Amery’s ideology, he subscribed to the ambition of Western preservationism, arguing that qualities associated with the Greco-Roman heritage must be preserved even after the dissolution of the empire. His particular geographical perspective of preservationism, however, shifted the emphasis of his efforts from internal to external threats. Whereas most federalists saw their biggest challenges as imperial disunity and indifference, Amery viewed English cohesion as strong—or at least something that was better left to sort itself out than subjected to heavy-handed constitutional interventions. Amery saw the true threat to the UK’s post-imperial outlook in the threat posed by rival military powers. He believed that the United Kingdom should assume a central role in upholding Western values against forces driven by different worldviews. Amery envisioned the stability of the future global order in terms of the armed dominance of the Western powers, facilitating the dissemination of liberal democratic principles ‘in bulk’.

## Federalism in War

In many ways, the federalist message remained remarkably consistent from 1884 to 1918. The Round Table shared in the Imperial Federation League’s ambition to preserve a certain set of English qualities beyond the dissolution of the British Empire, and they both argued that it was the empire’s Englishness that made it particularly well suited to carrying out this task. As a response to the Great War and its preceding threat, however, the RT shifted its rhetoric away from expanding its emplotment, emphasising the global gains of a Western preservationism that did not limit itself to peoples with claims to Englishness. This change was prompted by German expansionism, but it certainly grew in strength and was expressed more frequently as the war had demonstrated that ‘[t]he world is one

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<sup>466</sup> *Religio milneriana* is Caroline Elkin’s term to address Milner’s prevalent influence on Round Table thinking. Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, p. 587.



whole, and what goes on in one part is bound sooner or later to react on every other part.<sup>467</sup> The organisation needed to present a narrative which included the Western powers in a natural and credible way, even if most Table members realised that their message would be incredibly unlikely to galvanise people from outside of the British Empire.

The transition that took place from the League to the Table demonstrates the first of many steps in shifts that would separate the two organisations. Milner had been an admirer of the imperial federalists, and his ideas were based on their blueprint, while more strictly defining its parameters and further extending the scope of its claims. In his understanding of imperial administration, Milner established the tenets that would later become Western preservationism within The Round Table. He emphasised the racial understanding of nationhood, delineating more strictly between the improvement of colonial relationships between English settler communities and imperial supervision of those he did not deem worthy of self-government. He also extended the reach of the emplotment, arguing that the British Empire should be seen as a continuation of Greek and Roman civilisations. This assertion stemmed from a teleological assuredness that warranted what Milner called 'infinite patience', which he combined with 'ceaseless efforts' in the improvement of administrative practice.

The notion that the United Kingdom's imperial mission was based on a shared European civilisation pushed the organisation to acknowledge a higher degree of global interdependence and to formulate a message that had the potential to speak to an international readership, as well. What is interesting about this expansion of preservationist ambition is that it simultaneously urged its proponent to define the qualities of Englishness in more specific details, while more explicitly binding them to a common set of European values. To make the global benefits of English qualities credible, the RT put more effort into defining and explaining the nature of those qualities than the IFL tended to do. At the same time, the English qualities needed to be presented in such a way as to appear credibly salient to an international audience. They needed to compete with the German message in the battle for the hearts and minds of Europe.

The most important example of this effort was the shift that was made in terms of the ultimate goal of post-imperial preservation. The League believed that the United Kingdom's post-imperial mission should be aimed at ensuring the civilisation of the world, presenting federation as the institutionalisation of the

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<sup>467</sup> Anonymous, 'The Schism of Europe', p. 409.

fight to drive out barbarism. The Table saw the primary aim of the British transition from empire as global peace. Federation was seen as the institutionalisation of the battle against international conflict, meaning the establishment of a rule-based international order. While it was easy to accommodate a shift at this point within the established framework of Round Table thinking, it did contribute to a drastic realignment of post-war federalist thinking.

Another key example of the effort to define the preservationist project as internationally inclusive was the RT treatment of Germany. Generally, the organisation did not fall for the most aggressive or essentialist Germanophobia and the recurrent criticism lobbed at 'Prussian militarism' was that it failed to accept Germany's historically ordained role and thus challenged the international stability guaranteeing peace. At face value, RT writing is not vindictive in its description of German policy and it repeatedly stresses that the nation would be a welcome addition to any future federation with its rich heritage and high culture. There were certainly members, like Amery, who held a more hostile stance on the German question, but the organisation's general position was comparatively nuanced, albeit uncompromising in its dismissal of German territorial claims.

The starkest contrasts between the League and the Table were organisational. The Round Table differed significantly from its predecessor in that it was an organisation based on a small number of close personal ties and a shared experience. The members took pains to develop their ideas and disseminate them to relevant people, but saw public opinion, ultimately, as a secondary concern. The members' strong personal ties and social status pushed the organisation's most important activity to its margins, with a number of incredibly influential individuals promoting imperial causes informed by federalist thinking. However, their informal and unofficial mode of conduct does present a study of ideas such as this with certain challenges, but the centrality of federalism to their political outlook and endeavour ought not to be understated. Federation was at the heart of their theory and practice in a way that would define the *Kindergarteners* throughout their careers.

The member who helped to define the organisation's narrative the most was Lionel Curtis. In his organic preservationism, he conceptualised the emplotment of the European civilising mission using the term 'commonwealth'. He presented the commonwealth cooperation as a manifestation of an English interpretation of European heritage, embodying the qualities worthy of post-imperial preservation. As such, the idea of a 'commonwealth' associated British imperial administration with the continental heritage, while also distinguishing a specifically English

version of that heritage. The British experience of colonial rule, according to Curtis, had developed a maturity in international governance that put the United Kingdom into position to assume a central, leading role in the establishment of a post-imperial order. Proficiency in international cooperation, Curtis argued, could not be rushed and it now fell to the seasoned colonial powers—the UK chief among them—to lead the way towards international order.

The member with the most profound influence on the organisation's viewpoints, Philip Kerr, adhered to the same organic preservationist narrative as his close friend Curtis. Both included a juncture in their emplotments, arguing that the trajectory of German history had been radically altered by its unification and that its newfound imperial ambitions had set it on a collision course with the British. Kerr in particular took efforts to stress repeatedly that this was not an expression of Germany's true character, and that it had a central role to play in establishing the global, post-imperial order.

Kerr's careful attention to contemporary events made his thinking more influenced by the Great War. While the war made Curtis double down on the centrality of the United Kingdom to the progress of Western civilisation, the experience of war pushed Kerr to reconsider some of his key assumptions. After 1914, Kerr—together with several other RT members—became convinced that the foremost priority of a post-imperial constitution ought to be the prevention of global conflict, with the furthering of a civilising mission taking second priority. While important in its own right, this shift in priority was not perceived as subversive at the time since it did not drastically affect which values should be preserved. In the end, the values and traits of Western civilisation were seen as both beneficial to the civilising mission and guarantors of international order. After the war, however, this shift would prove an important step in the transformative realignment of the federalist ideology.

Kerr's immediate response to this shift was to reframe the federalist message in a narrative of institutional preservationism. The striking inability of the pre-war international order to counteract military escalation had convinced Kerr of the thoroughly institutional nature of any stable, post-imperial order. Maintaining his confidence in the centrality of the commonwealth principle, he stressed that it required institutional support to be implemented effectively. While not necessarily consequential taken on its own, reframing the preservationist narrative suggested that 'British' and 'Commonwealth' were being dissociated from one another, moving the latter closer to international institutions than to the British imperial experience.

If Kerr was The Round Table's tactician, Amery was its general. He identified the immediate threats to the empire and its future federation. Amery agreed with the organic preservationists in that post-imperial preservation ought to ultimately aim for a worldwide union and that British imperial unity would play a crucial part in that endeavour. He did not, however, see the English cohesion as either threatened or as a policy priority. While many Round Table members feared the strength of colonial nationalism, Amery argued in line with civic preservationists, that a sense of deeply felt unity could be supported but never conjured by political means, and that the more immediate threat to the well-being of the empire was the geopolitical challenges from other European powers, foremost Germany.

Amery believed that the key aspect of military success was coming to terms with one's geographical reality. This meant assessing the military capabilities compatible with one's geographical location, but also discerning the impact of geography on one's national character, as well as being ready to act for the greater good when geographically predisposed. Within the narrative of geographical preservationism, Amery viewed geography as a hugely consequential factor in determining national outlook, both in terms of what one could do, what one wanted to do, and what one ought to do. In defining the United Kingdom's post-imperial role as a product of geography, Amery proposed a preservationist framework that was more rigid than the organisation's general position—stressing the perennial qualities of the Anglo-German rivalry.

The experience of war would in time prove truly subversive to the federalist ideology and while it initially provided any imperialist cause with a sense of purpose and aim leading to a straightforward legitimisation of the imperial machinery, it would eventually leave many to question assumptions that made imperialism a valid political alternative. It was with relatively superficial adjustments that The Round Table managed to continuously navigate the task of understanding what federalism meant in the context of military conflict. Grappling with how to establish peace, however, would prove a much more divisive exercise.

## Organic Utilisation: *Pax Mundi*

The first draft of James Thomson Shotwell's scheme of a procedural legal framework for international conflicts was scribbled onto a menu from the Columbia University Club. The historian had invited his most illustrious legal colleagues there in the spring of 1923 to discuss the idea of defining *bellum iustum* by a procedural mandate, requested from an international court in advance, rather than through vindication by common consent in hindsight. Turning the issue of the legality of war on its head in this manner is reported to have stirred up palpable excitement in the room. In Shotwell's later account, the lawyer David Hunter Miller was so eager to commit this notion to paper that he just grabbed the menu standing next to him.

The febrile mood of that spring meeting reflects the plethora of legal attempts made to prevent international conflicts in the wake of the Great War. The early 1920s saw a deep questioning of European superiority and particularly 'the world of empires', which in turn fuelled a radical search to define international relations and the course of European history.<sup>468</sup> In tandem with this radical reconceptualisation of international relations, the British Empire underwent a similar transformation. The 1920s would see the ushering in of what historian John Darwin calls the third phase of the British Empire, as British imperial policy acknowledged its dependency on Dominion goodwill and gradually readjusted its aspirations from political control to cultural influence.<sup>469</sup> In the 1926 Balfour declaration, central aspects of this new mode of imperialism were enshrined in law, realising many of the principles that The Round Table had been discussing since 1910.<sup>470</sup> Leo Amery played a vital role in the writing of the initial report and

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<sup>468</sup> Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (2018) Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, p. 27. For a comprehensive survey of the legal schemes for outlawing war in the *interbellum* period, see Oona Anne Hathaway, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (2017) New York: Simon & Schuster. For a nuanced account of the multi-faceted intellectual mood of early inter-war Europe, see Jarusch, *Out of Ashes: A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 128–54.

<sup>469</sup> Darwin, 'A Third British Empire?'

<sup>470</sup> Not to be confused with the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the British government expressed its support for a 'nation for the Jewish people' in Palestine. The 1926 declaration instead stated autonomy and equality in status of the Dominions as it pertained to the United

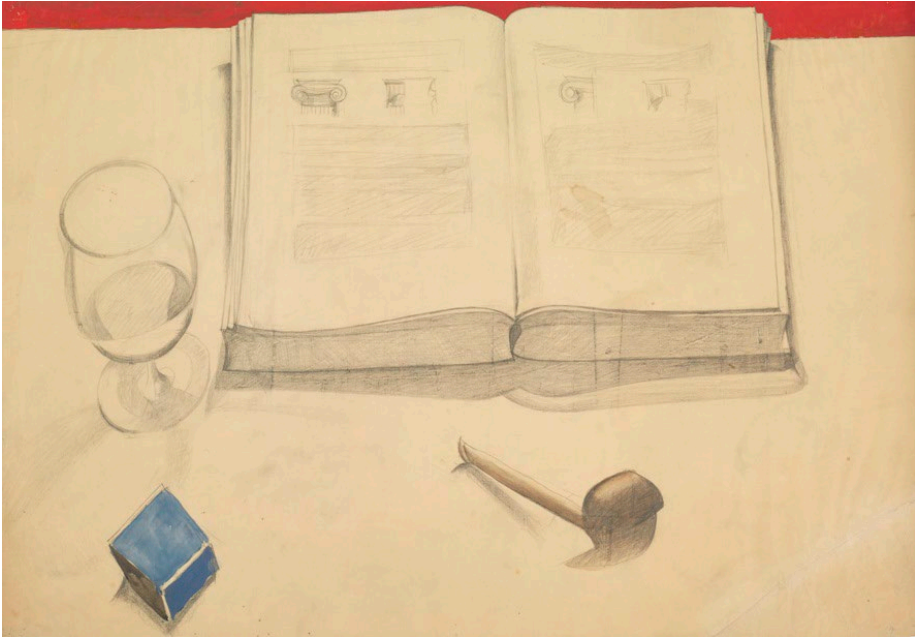
through him the federalist doctrines of colonial equality, cultural integration, and local autonomy became cornerstones of the British imperial strategy. This acted as an acknowledgement that Britain lacked the financial and military might to maintain an empire by force and that its future instead lay in the soft power derived from the allure of British markets and culture.

This chapter explores the federalist response to this new intellectual landscape. As the straightforward preservationism of the earlier Round Table lost much of its validity, I will argue that 1920s federalism saw the development of a new kind of post-imperial theory; alongside the adaption of the Western preservationist framework to the post-war political discourse, some members developed a reluctant utilitarian understanding of Britain's post-imperial role. While many federalists maintained that the key to British post-imperial relevance lay in maintaining the influence of British culture and ideals, utilitarianism stood for the notion that Britain's most significant contribution to the world post-empire was not its culture or nationality, but rather its institutions and readiness to act to further international organisation. The preservationist and utilitarian narratives co-existed throughout this period and this chapter will explore the range of positions that were adopted by Round Table members, most prominently Sir Edward Grigg, Philip Kerr, Lionel Curtis, Alfred Zimmern, and Harold Laski.<sup>471</sup> First, however, a short survey of the British post-war political landscape is required.

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Kingdom. With its implementation by the Statute of Westminster in 1931, the United Kingdom's formal influence over its Dominions was reduced to the limited jurisdiction that George V had as monarch. For the complete transcript (there is also a scanned version of the original), see Inter-Imperial Relations Committee, 'Imperial Conference 1926', *Documenting a Democracy: Australia's Story* (Museum of Australian Democracy at old Parliament House, 1926). For more on the impact of the Balfour Declaration, see Peter Marshall, 'The Balfour Formula and the Evolution of the Commonwealth' (September 2001) *The Round Table* 90:361, pp. 549–50.

<sup>471</sup> In 1930, Kerr adopted the title 'Lord Lothian', by which he is generally referred to in the literature. For the sake of continuity, however, I have chosen to refer to him as 'Kerr' throughout my study.



**Figure 17. Still Life with an Open Book, Pipe, Glass and Matchbox**

The project of intellectual reconstruction after the war was much more of a mosaic than a uniform process. Almost every aspect of European life was altered, but in radically different ways. The purist movement based in Paris, for example, employed a restrained expression, without excess. The image by Charles Édouard Jeanneret combines these ‘pure’ aesthetics with a slight nod to Europe’s classical heritage, depicting a book on different types of ancient Greek columns.<sup>472</sup>

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (c. 1918). The image can be found in Carol S. Eliel, ‘Purism in Paris, 1918-1925’, in Carol S. Eliel (ed.), *L’Esprit Nouveau: Purism in Paris, 1918-1925* (2001) Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, p. 24.

## The Sun Dipping Below the Horizon

Journalist Hugo Young describes his book about the views of British Prime Ministers on Europe as a story about when ‘Britain struggled to reconcile the past she

<sup>472</sup> Carol S. Eliel, ‘Purism in Paris, 1918–1925’, in Carol S. Eliel (ed.), *L’Esprit Nouveau: Purism in Paris, 1918–1925* (2001) Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, p. 19–24.

could not forget with the future she could not avoid.<sup>473</sup> While his book covers the period following the Second World War, the struggle he describes is very much a borne of the interwar era. While the British imperial experience during the 1920s was nuanced, and can at times seem contradictory, it was the period when the British imperial endeavour became a struggle in the sense that its success could no longer be considered self-evident. By the end of the decade, even the most naïve imperial enthusiasts had been compelled to acknowledge that the end of the British Empire could be near.

This is not to say that the period should be described in any straightforward terms of decline. In fact, Britain emerged from the 1919 peace conference at its largest, encompassing over 35,000,000 km<sup>2</sup> and with around 450,000,000 people spread over six continents.<sup>474</sup> Simultaneously, while Britain had serious international competition from the US, USSR, and Germany, this was considered to be a manageable rivalry prior to World War II.<sup>475</sup> The United States, the top contender, had a leadership hesitant to assume the role as *the* post-war global hegemon. To a certain extent, Britain managed to maintain its leading role in the economic and legal order even as its financial dominance was challenged.<sup>476</sup> Historian Anthony Clayton describes the *interbellum* empire as experiencing its ‘swansong’: threatened and fragile, but by no means weak or insignificant.<sup>477</sup>

Geographical might notwithstanding, the British imperial structure faced the 1920s with fundamental weaknesses that could no longer be ignored. The US dominated the post-war peace negotiations. It became evident that at times, the British displayed global presence rather than global power. The empire’s associated economic requirements helped frame it increasingly in terms of a responsibility rather than a strategy.<sup>478</sup> The practical challenges of imperial defence combined with the political impact of the Great War to establish both the principle of national self-determination and alongside it, the economic incentives pushing for

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<sup>473</sup> Hugo Young, *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair* (1998) London: Macmillan, p. 1.

<sup>474</sup> Anthony Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower, 1919-1939* (1986) Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 1-2.

<sup>475</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *Crisis and Deconstruction*.

<sup>476</sup> For more on the United Kingdom’s international standing in comparison to the US, see David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937-41: A Study in Competitive Co-Operation* (1981) London: Europa, pp. 280–82. For more on the UK’s economic standing, see Tomlinson, ‘The Contraction of England: National Decline and the Loss of Empire’, pp. 63–66.

<sup>477</sup> Clayton, *The British Empire as a Superpower*, p. 2.

<sup>478</sup> Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, pp. 111–120.



global integration and a public outcry for international peace.<sup>479</sup> With a new international order centred around the newly formed League of Nations, as well



Figure 18. World Map 1922.

The British Empire was usually coloured either in red or pink (sometimes pink was reserved for the Commonwealth) and this map displays its largest extent ever, about 24% of the world's landmass. These large swathes of red were of course an immense source of pride among British imperialists and the attentive reader will note that in line with frequent practice, the parts furthest towards the edges are repeated, as to allow the area to reach both ends of the map.<sup>480</sup> Maps of trade routes and infrastructure played a significant role in shifting the focus of the imperial gaze after the Great War—while the previous predominance of imperial borders and hinterland, maps like this emphasised imperial interconnectedness rather than expansion.<sup>481</sup>

The map was published as educational material in Ontario Department of Education, Ontario Public School Geography (1922) Toronto: W. J. Gage & co., p. 250.

<sup>479</sup> Jarausch, *Out of Ashes*, pp. 129–31. Historian Frank Ninkovich designated Woodrow Wilson as a ‘crisis’ internationalist during the war, something that was equally true for many of the Round Table utilitarianists. See Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900* (1999) London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 48–77.

<sup>480</sup> Linda Colley, ‘“This Small Island”: Britain, Size and Empire’, (2003) *Proceedings of the British Academy* 121, p. 171.

<sup>481</sup> Heffernan, ‘The Cartography of the Fourth Estate’, pp. 284–96.

as the geopolitical ambitions of the United States, the former ideal of assertive, untethered, British imperial ambitions increasingly appeared to be an anomaly.<sup>482</sup> The true extent of the frailty of the British model was able to be concealed for some time following the war, but with the arrival of the Depression came a reckoning that even the most hard-headed patriot had difficulty discounting. The 'Victorian economy of Britain crashed in ruins between the two world wars. The sun which, as every schoolboy knew, never set on British territory and British trade, went down below the horizon.'<sup>483</sup>

The war also challenged the social integrity of the empire, which became obvious in the dramatically changing relationships within The British Empire. British imperial ambition—which only seemed to grow stronger during the 19<sup>th</sup> century—took a nosedive during the early 1920s, challenged by both the urge to distance oneself from what was seen as German militarism and the astronomical costs of imperial defence in global conflict. Imperial expansion had become completely unpalatable as a domestic political argument and was further side-lined by the rise of a domestically focused Labour Party.<sup>484</sup> The growing awareness of some of the brutality experienced by the empire's inhabitants both during the war and in its administration clashed with any political attempt to promote its strategic value or increased funding.<sup>485</sup>

Conversely, the Dominions lost significant parts of their imperial appetite as well, with a growing list of colonial nationalist claims for further autonomy following their wartime contributions.<sup>486</sup> These requests were met with reforms for further independence from the motherland, as well as policies aimed at strengthening the bonds of the empire, most notably the Empire Settlement Bill.<sup>487</sup> Policies such as this are an important reminder that while imperialism as a political project was losing saliency, the extent to which the empire was apparent in the lives of ordinary Britons remained. While intra-imperial migration—aided by the

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<sup>482</sup> Tooze, *The Deluge*, pp. 374–93.

<sup>483</sup> Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain since 1750*, p. 174.

<sup>484</sup> Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline?', pp. 659–60. For more on Labour's entrance on to the main political stage, see Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867–1939* (1982) Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 223–40; and Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*, pp. 44–52.

<sup>485</sup> Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, p. 124.

<sup>486</sup> Beloff, *Dream of Commonwealth*, pp. 20–22.

<sup>487</sup> Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline?', pp. 661–63. For a thorough survey of life during empire settlement, see Ian M. Drummond, *Imperial Economic Policy 1917–1939: Studies in Expansion and Protection* (1974) London: Allen & Unwin Ltd., pp. 43–144.

settlement bill—dominated British migration patterns, to most people it had become a matter of convenience rather than ideological conviction.<sup>488</sup>

The First World War changed not only Great Britain's relationship with the colonies but more or less every aspect of British society. This book's front piece, 'The Menin Road', can be seen in its entirety in fig.19. Documenting an actual battlefield, the artist Paul Nash was determined to have the image reflect the sense of pointless chaos and the lack of national glory he himself had experienced.



Figure 19 The Menin Road

Nash chose a battlefield along the road between Ypres and Menin in Northern Belgium for his commission at the planned Hall of Remembrance. The British War Memorial Committee, who commissioned the piece, was not very pleased by the anti-hierarchical composition, completely devoid of any sense of Western mission or cause. The deep divisions in how the war effort came to be understood are apparent. Nash clarified that his intention was to 'bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on forever. Feeble, inarticulate will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth and may it burn their lousy souls'.<sup>489</sup>

Paul Nash (1919). Digitised by the Imperial War Museum, media license IWM ART 2242

<sup>488</sup> For an insightful comparison on post WWI and post WWII British migration patterns, see Marjory Harper, "'Abroad Was Where It All Happened': Inter-War and Post-War Sponsored Migration to the Commonwealth' (March 2022) *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 50:2.

<sup>489</sup> Cited in Claudia Massie, 'A Soldier's-eye View' (2018) *The Spectator* 22 September.

The soldiers in the centre of the composition are symbolic and of particular interest, attempting to orient themselves along a barely discernible road in the destruction and rubble. Searchlights dance across the ashen sky, but a patch of blue opens itself up in the corner towards which they are headed. These accounts of the immense physical destruction of the war were soon seen as paralleled by an equal devastation of the intellectual. French poet Paul Valéry wrote in 1919 that ‘the Persepolis of the spirit is no less ravaged than the Susa of material fact. Everything has not been lost, but everything has sensed that it might perish.’<sup>490</sup> This ‘collapse of European self-confidence’ stemmed from the loss of Europe’s self-evident nature as a superior continent, which ‘collectively was no longer the center of the world.’<sup>491</sup>

## Federalism & the War I: Nothing New Under the Sun

The political landscape of the interwar era would challenge The Round Table in a slightly contradictory way. At first glance, the organisation would appear marginalised because imperial issues were forced to the sidelines of British politics, and the organisation lost substantial parts of its journal’s readership, as well as a quarter of its revenue.<sup>492</sup> On the other hand, perhaps the most important reason that the Table lost prominence as a lobbying body was that many of its members had moved on to positions of real political influence. That, combined with a new, commonwealth-esque, imperial policy meant the implementation of many of the concessions for which the organisation had been advocating for years.

The most notable expression of the organisation’s real political influence was Leo Amery’s time serving as Colonial Secretary from 1924 to 1929. He did not have complete independence in this role, nor were the policies he adopted understood to be anything other than an expression of popular opinion. Amery was, however, determined to improve Dominion relationships based on the demands

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<sup>490</sup> *Ainsi la Persépolis spirituelle n'est pas oins ravagée que la Susse matérielle. Tout ne s'est pas perdu, mais tout s'est senti périr.* Paul Valéry, ‘The Crisis of the Mind’, in James R. Lawler (ed.), *Paul Valéry: An Anthology* (1977) London: Routledge, p. 95. Susa, for reference, is an Iranian city in ruins, dating back to 4400 BC.

<sup>491</sup> Wintle, *Eurocentrism*, p. 203; and Macmillan, *The War That Ended Peace*, p. 639 respectively. See also Jarausch, *Out of Ashes*, p. 483. The perhaps most blatant domestic expression of this shift is the subsequent downfall of the Liberal Party in British politics. See Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination*, pp. 341–45.

<sup>492</sup> For more on the marginalisation of imperial issues during interwar British politics, see Beloff, *Dream of Commonwealth*, pp. 20–21.

made at the 1926 imperial conference. The following year, he personally toured the Dominions to further strengthen the bonds that had been established.<sup>493</sup>

The outcome of the 1926 imperial conference and the publishing of the Balfour Declaration was celebrated in *The Round Table*. One member hailed it as 'the Magna Carta for Commonwealth Liberties' and another declared the commonwealth to be 'the Sermon on the Mount reduced to political terms'.<sup>494</sup> While critical voices remained—for example seeing partial concessions as a fragmentation of British imperial policy—it is no surprise that the organisation experienced a sense of vindication with a *Kindergarten* at the helm of colonial policy.<sup>495</sup>

There was a sense that the organisation's network had become so influential as to cause its message to lose some of its bite. In 1921, Lloyd George described the organisation as 'a very powerful combination—in its way perhaps the most powerful in the country.'<sup>496</sup> While many key political figures remained explicitly opposed to any formal union, the widespread adoption of the commonwealth terminology is a testament to the organisation's and the *Kindergarten's* reach into the political machinery.<sup>497</sup> Short of the actual establishment of a federation, this influence began chipping away at the organisation's relevance as a lobbying body. The Round Table began losing members because it no longer needed them. The organisation's activity became even less about galvanising public opinion and increasingly focussed on detailed insight aimed at an informed sub-section of the population. With regards to studying the organisation's thought process during this period, this shift meant there was less of a concerted 'Round Table position' and the organisation's activity was characterised more by individual views in debate.

In its writings, the organisation tended to focus on the mechanics of imperial practice, contributing to the notion that imperial administration was, essentially, business as usual.<sup>498</sup> As John Darwin has shown, the increased sovereignty of the

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<sup>493</sup> Faber, *Speaking for England*, pp. 201–21.

<sup>494</sup> See Anonymous, 'The Imperial Conference' (March 1927c) *The Round Table* 17:66, p. 225; and Anonymous, 'The Commonwealth' (December 1927) *The Round Table* 18:69, p. 5 respectively.

<sup>495</sup> Anonymous, 'A Frenchman on the British Empire' (September 1928) *The Round Table* 18:72.

<sup>496</sup> Riddell, *Intimate Diary*, p. 330.

<sup>497</sup> Lord Curzon, Arthur Balfour, and Winston Churchill were among the most outspoken opponents to any form of union. Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 41.

<sup>498</sup> See for example Anonymous, 'Problems of Europe' (June 1921) *The Round Table* 11:43, 'From a South African Pen', 'The Colour Question in Politics' (December 1922) *The Round Table* 13:49; and Anonymous, 'The Economic Future of Great Britain' (June 1927) *The Round Table* 17:67. For a more theoretically slanted contribution in the same vein, see Anonymous, 'The Commonwealth'.

Dominions was not seen at the time as a concession of Britain's imperial ambition.<sup>499</sup> A significant part of *The Round Table* shared in this optimistic outlook of Britain's imperial future and betrayed no indication that they believed they were going against the grain. As late as 1939, the journal still declared that the 'unity of the Commonwealth ... has not been weakened, it has been strengthened by the culmination of its growth to equal freedom in the Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster.'<sup>500</sup>

This optimism was based on a selective worldview common to the British imperial class, where—in Mark Mazower's words—'few, if any, African or Asian nationalist claims to independence seriously registered.'<sup>501</sup> While events such as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, in the second month of the Paris Peace Conference, were etched into the forming Indian national conscience—and gave rise to what became known as the 'Non-cooperation Movement'—they were dismissed by the British administrators as unruly, spontaneous, and ultimately insignificant riots.<sup>502</sup> Even dissatisfaction among the Dominions, such as the imminent secession of West Australia, was awarded only a brief report, hidden away from the editorial spotlight and explained in terms of an understandable—albeit slightly misguided—demonstration of unhappiness with domestic economic policy.<sup>503</sup> On an imperial level, these acts of defiance were met with brutal measures that were concealed under the veneer of normalcy through a new approach to colonial policing, dubbed by historian Caroline Elkins as 'legalized lawlessness'.<sup>504</sup> While most *Round Table* members suffered from this blind spot, there was a growing utilitarian wing of

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<sup>499</sup> Darwin, 'Imperialism in Decline?', pp. 678–79.

<sup>500</sup> Anonymous, 'War and Peace' (December 1939) *The Round Table* 30:117, p. 13.

<sup>501</sup> Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 23.

<sup>502</sup> For more on the anti-colonialism that occurred in the wake of the massacre, see Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Intellectuals Who Remade Asia* (2012) New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, pp. 198–204. For an in-depth survey on some of the intricacies of the massacre's historiography, see Kim A. Wagner, 'Seeing Like a Soldier: The Amritsar Massacre and the Politics of Military History', in Martin Thomas and Gareth Curless (eds.), *Decolonization and Conflict: Colonial Comparisons and Legacies* (2017) London: Bloomsbury. For more on the Non-Cooperation Movement, see Shashi Taroor, *Nehru: The Invention of India* (2003) New York: Arcade Publishing, pp. 26–36.

<sup>503</sup> Anonymous, 'Australia' (September 1933) *The Round Table* 23:92, pp. 905–06.

<sup>504</sup> Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, pp. 129–62. It is important to keep in mind that interwar colonial politics cannot be reduced to a straightforward conflict between two incompatible sides, but that many on the ground assumed intermediate positions, hesitant about the validity of the United Kingdom's uncompromising policy. A great case study of practitioners' various understandings of colonial ethics can be found in Michael Silvestri, "'A Fanatical Reverence for Gandhi': Nationalism and Police Militancy in Bengal During the Non-Cooperation Movement' (November 2017) *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45:6.

the organisation who were much less comfortable with 'business as usual', arguing that the United Kingdom's imperial outlook had changed fundamentally. These are covered in 'Federalism & the War II' and the rest of this section will examine how individual preservationists made sense of the war experience.

One of the most outspoken preservationists at the time was Edward William Macleay Grigg.<sup>505</sup> He was born into the heart of Britain's imperial adventure as the son of Indian civil servant Henry Bidewell Grigg and Elisabeth Louisa Grigg, daughter of the colonial secretary for New South Wales. After his childhood years in Madras, he studied at New College, Oxford, where he became interested in journalism. He befriended Alfred Milner and soon found his way into The Round Table, which he began to co-edit in 1913. Through his war experiences he came into contact with the Prince of Wales, which would launch the second phase of his career, first as the private secretary to Lloyd George after the war and the MP for Oldham after 1922. He left this post for the governorship of Kenya in 1925.<sup>506</sup> It was this role, and the insight he had gained as secretary of the Rhodes Trust (1923–1925), which formed the basis for his federalist position. This section explores how he came to understand the conditions for an interwar Commonwealth, always with a keen awareness of the nature of imperial administrative practice.

In imperial matters, Grigg was a practitioner first. Like Rosebery and Amery, he was wary of federalism as a constitutional injunction and thought that the model for post-imperial Britain should take begin with the experience and loyalty of its inhabitants.<sup>507</sup> It is, of course, crucial to keep in mind that the 'inhabitants' of Kenya included both black natives and white settlers, and it was clear that Grigg was referring to the latter.<sup>508</sup> Grigg, however, went further than Rosebery and Amery in stressing the need that federalism remain grounded and pragmatic. Grigg interacted with British imperialism in his occupation through the lens of con-

<sup>505</sup> Mainly referred to as 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Altrincham, a title he was awarded after the Second World War.

<sup>506</sup> Kenneth Rose, 'Grigg, Edward William Macleay, First Baron Altrincham (1879–1955)', in David Cannadine (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2011) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>507</sup> See for example, Edward Grigg (2nd May 1927) 'Memorandum on Federation', Churchill Archive Centre, Oxford, GBR-0014-AMEJ 2-4-14, fol. 6. It is worth mentioning here that Grigg saw policy adherence as a practical necessity rather than a moral one. As governor, he did not distinguish himself in terms of leniency, flexibility or sensitivity to a native point of view. In fact, on issues such as female circumcision, his approach led to dire consequences, see Jessica Cammaert, *Undesirable Practices: Women, Children, and the Politics of the Body in Northern Ghana, 1930–1972* (2016) Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 99–100.

<sup>508</sup> R Mugo Gatheru, *Kenya: From Colonization to Independence, 1888–1970* (2005) North Carolina: McFarland & Company, p. 107.

temporary colonial issues. He viewed federalism as the placeholder for a British society where these issues had been tackled and the imperial framework had been rendered gradually obsolete. In this sense, Grigg had not adopted the ceaseless efforts and endless patience of his idol Milner, and to the extent that his thinking relied on an emplotment at all, it was very limited. He did not denounce the relevance of historical insight, but the character of his imperialism was centred around issues such as a productive relationship between what he described as civilised and uncivilised, ‘the native African problem’, and how colonised people could access the global market.<sup>509</sup> These were large and complex issues, no doubt, but they were tangible and immediate in a sense that demanded policy rather than theory.<sup>510</sup>

When Grigg allowed his thinking to veer into the more theoretical, he inserted his preservationist vision within the narrative of a great experiment. In the early months of his time at The Rhodes Trust, he gave a series of lectures arguing that ‘The British ‘Empire’ was a misnomer, as it was the ties of a commonwealth that really defined the unity of its people. A ‘commonwealth’, in its nature, represented post-imperial cooperation between several nations that had ‘reached complete self-government’ and were bound together by neither ‘despotic power’ nor ‘military force’.<sup>511</sup> Grigg believed that the core characteristic of this rather conventional commonwealth concept—which he shared with the rest of The Round Table—was that it was experimental.

When Grigg described the Commonwealth, and consequently his vision for a post-imperial union, as an experiment, it was done to highlight two of its key aspects. First, Grigg argued that the British imperial project must be seen as something constantly evolving. He was weary of any notion of a fixed plan and thought that a proper commonwealth would be the result of a trial-and-error process rather

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<sup>509</sup> See Edward Grigg (30th November 1926) ‘Governor’s Speech, The Caledonian Dinner’, Churchill Archive Centre, Oxford, GBR-0014-AMEJ 2-4-14, fol. 8; Edward Grigg (12th June 1926) ‘To Amery’, Churchill Archive Centre, Oxford, GBR-0014-AMEJ 2-4-14, fol. 5.; and Edward Grigg (25th October 1926) ‘Governor’s Speech at Convention of Associations’, Churchill Archive Center, Oxford, GBR-0014-AMEJ, fols. 14–15 respectively. Regarding his relationship to history, he mentioned his indebtedness to George Macaulay Trevelyan’s *British History in the 19th Century and After* from 1922, Grigg, *The Greatest Experiment*, p. vii. Trevelyan’s book is a thorough account of a comparatively short period of time, far from the epic thinking of Lionel Curtis, for example. George Macaulay Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After (1782–1919)* (1921) London: Longmans, Green & Co..

<sup>510</sup> One of his major endeavours was establishing a Kenyan federation, bringing the colony closer to the UK. However, this initiative was seen as no benefit to the native population nor advantageous enough to the settler population to get off the ground, Gatheru, *Kenya*, pp. 59–61.

<sup>511</sup> Grigg, *The Greatest Experiment*, p. 3.



than ivory-tower theory. In an ever-changing world, he argued that imperialism should be understood as a practical endeavour, tackling issues as they arose. This is not to say that Grigg believed in any kind of flexible pragmatism in terms of how to conceptualise the end goal of the federalist endeavour; he knew where he wanted to go even if he did not know exactly how to get there.<sup>512</sup> ‘Ramshackle as our wagon is, it is hitched to three great stars, the star of Justice, the star of Freedom, the star of Peace.’<sup>513</sup>

When Grigg lamented over the use of ‘despotic power’, he was not criticising the employment of a power monopoly in its own right, but rather what he considered to be the political immaturity that believed legitimised British governance by force. The preservationist axiom of Western superiority is a key aspect to understanding what Grigg envisioned as harmonious coexistence; to him, democratic participation on equal terms depended on an assimilation to Western principles and a Western way of life. His experimentation allowed for various paths to reach that society but was never intended to put the terms of that society into question. To put them in context, these ideas were simultaneously presented as the British administration in Kenya enacted an active, and often punitive, program to support settler agriculture in order to compensate for lacking experience when compared with their native counterparts.<sup>514</sup> In other words, while the quote from the previous paragraph sound familiar for a reader from today, one must remember the preservationist postulates to fully grasp its meaning.

Second, Grigg believed that imperialism must be understood as something fundamentally instinctive, rather than premeditated. For example Britain’s actions in Egypt or its entry into the Great War, argued Grigg, should both be seen as results of ‘fundamental instincts and beliefs.’<sup>515</sup> These instincts were also constitutional to what united the peoples of the empire: ‘some inalienable element in our national code.’<sup>516</sup> It was, to a degree, the lack of a structured emplotment and a predictable narrative that Grigg believed gave validity to the trends he identified. The fact that there were discernibly English traits that appeared from the disorganised process of experimentation, testified to their saliency. He argued that many of the day’s trends would result in less imperial unity but insisted that the united war effort had proven the inherent will of the people of the empire to

<sup>512</sup> Ibid., pp. 12–18 and Grigg, ‘Memorandum on Federation’, fols. 6–9.

<sup>513</sup> Grigg, *The Greatest Experiment*, p. 28.

<sup>514</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya* (2005) New York: Henry Holt, pp. 12–18.

<sup>515</sup> Grigg, *The Greatest Experiment*, pp. 61–101. This quote can be found on page 99.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

stand up for the principles of liberal democracy. The experience of war had given imperialists a renewed mandate, not to simply continue tradition, but to experiment so as to preserve the prevalence and impact of the English national instinct, disseminating Western values.<sup>517</sup>

Perhaps the most striking feature of Grigg's thinking at this time is his unwavering imperial confidence. While the imperial discourse was significantly restricted in the wake of the Great War, imperial administration often continued without much alteration.<sup>518</sup> Grigg saw this as proof of the increased relevance of an imperial mode of conduct as globalisation bound the world ever tighter together. He saw great responsibilities that befell the British going forward, most prominently guiding every people to submit themselves to the global economy, as well as championing Western values.<sup>519</sup> As the interwar era continued, with the expansion of German geopolitical ambitions, this latter commitment to Western values would, for Grigg, become increasingly distilled into a vigilant attention to the counteracting of German interests. In his mind, the rise of the Nazi party and the radicalisation of German foreign policy became the focal point for any credible opposition to the Western hegemony.<sup>520</sup> He saw imperialism as crucial to shaping the new world order, combining 'the force and inspiration of national need' with 'a code of international conduct, aiming at the spread of law and the maintenance of peace.'<sup>521</sup>

In his post-imperial vision, Grigg believed that the United Kingdom should continue to inspire its subjects' curious exploration and awareness of human rights, as well as protecting them from nefarious influence.<sup>522</sup> In a world increasingly defined by the tightening of international ties, Britain had a key role to play in preserving the experience of international cooperation, built up over centuries of imperial practice. Grigg conceded that in its ultimate form, global interactions ought to be conducted under the umbrella of a world state, but while he admits that many of the Western powers were beginning to assume a sense of global responsibility, he concluded that the international community had not yet matured

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid., pp. 21–26.

<sup>518</sup> Some of the most shameless examples can be found in India and the Middle East, see Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, pp. 129–92.

<sup>519</sup> Grigg, *The Greatest Experiment*, pp. 139–40, 67 & 97–99; Grigg, 'Governor's Speech at Convention of Associations', fols. 7–8 & 14–15; and Grigg, 'Memorandum on Federation', fol. 9.

<sup>520</sup> Edward Grigg, *Britain Looks at Germany* (1938) London: Nicholson and Watson Ltd.

<sup>521</sup> Grigg, *The Greatest Experiment*, p. 171.

<sup>522</sup> Grigg, 'Governor's Speech at Convention of Associations', fol. 9; Grigg, 'To Amery'; and Grigg, *The Greatest Experiment*, pp. 61–98 respectively.



### Figure 20 A Spreading of a Banyan Tree

One of the metaphors which Grigg employed to describe the empire was the banyan tree, whose branches drop down as they grow and create their own roots, in time subsuming themselves as part of the trunk. While Grigg denounced the theoretical rigor of Curtis' vision, they shared the conviction that British imperialism at its best should draw inspiration from the natural world and strive to be organic in its modus operandi. This image is from a collection of 18th century landscape illustrations made by James Forbes during his seventeen years in India, is in itself part of a shared process among British settlers throughout the centuries to try to understand, systematise, and make sense of the world they encountered.<sup>523</sup>

'A Spreading Banyan Tree (*Ficus benghalis* L.) Growing on a Wellcome' (1774). Drawn by landscape artist James Forbes and engraved by John Greig. CC by 4.0

enough for global institutions.<sup>524</sup> As the British progressively shed their imperial responsibilities, they ought to strive to preserve the influence of the British insights gleaned from their imperial experiment, guiding other nations towards harmonious and ordered coexistence.

Curtis was another inter-war preservationist, although he oriented himself more towards the theoretical perspective. The First World War would usher in a new phase in Curtis' career. By the late stages of the war, his ideas on Indian 'dyarchy' would become influential in the shaping of the Government of India Act in 1919. During the Paris Peace Conference he initiated a meeting between the British and American delegates which would eventually evolve into the beginning of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House.<sup>525</sup> In the coming decades, the institute would come to act as an extension of The Round Table sphere of influence, closely affiliated to those who were involved.<sup>526</sup> Curtis had been a well-established figure in British public discourse since his appointment as Beit Lecturer in 1912, but it was after World War I that what he said began to carry considerable weight.

Curtis, like Grigg, did not allow the war to fundamentally challenge his understanding of international politics and the tenets of his inter-war thinking can by and large be traced back to his 1916 book *The Project of the Commonwealth*. He saw the war as, ultimately, caused by *kaiserism* and as reaffirmation of the need for British influence in global politics.<sup>527</sup> However, the experience of war did convince Curtis that any scheme for geopolitical stability must be global in scope; that 'World wars are the fruit of neglect in free nations throughout the world. No field of anarchy is so remote that their vigilance can safely ignore it.'<sup>528</sup> While Curtis had already advocated for the strategic value of promoting British ideals in the international community during

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<sup>524</sup> Grigg, *The Greatest Experiment*, p. 201.

<sup>525</sup> Stephen King-Hall, *Chatham House: A Brief Account of the Origins, Purposes, and Methods of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* (1937) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 10–11. For more on how Curtis' used of the concept of 'dyarchy', see Deborah Lavin, 'Lionel Curtis and Indian Dyarchy', in Andrea Bosco (ed.), *The Federal Idea: The History of Federalism from the Enlightenment to 1945* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press.

<sup>526</sup> Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, 'Christianity, Statecraft and Chatham House: Lionel Curtis and World Order' (July 1995) *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 6:2, p. 470. There are many accounts of the early Chatham House and its intellectual activity, one of the more recent and important ones is by Inderjeet Parmar, 'Anglo-American Elites in the Interwar Years: Idealism and Power in the Intellectual Roots of Chatham House and the Council for Foreign Relations' (April 2002) *International Relations* xvi:1.

<sup>527</sup> Anonymous, 'The Price of Liberty' (December 1919b) *The Round Table* 10:37, pp. 4–6.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

the early years of the war, he now saw it as vital to establishing international order and Englishness as ‘destined in time to embrace all human society.’<sup>529</sup>

The acknowledgment that international order would need to ultimately be based on a global union was one Curtis shared with all of British federalism after World War I, even if their ideas of how to get there differed. Curtis’ programme was preservationist—just like Grigg’s—in that it stressed the centrality of Western values through British propagation. A key value for Curtis among Western values was that a future global order be based on democratic principles, liberating itself from the ‘stagnation and decay’ associated with autocratic rule and allowing itself to be guided by democracy’s propensity for ‘indefinite growth destined in time to embrace all human society. The least of all grains, it grows till its branches cover the whole earth, and the fowls of the air lodge therein.’<sup>530</sup>

According to Curtis, the United Kingdom had an important role to play in this new era of international politics. He understood ‘commonwealth’ to be democracy in its purest and most vigorous form. He argued that the problems with democracy should be blamed on a desire for quantity, aiming to maximise—without principle—the number of voices included in decision making. Commonwealth, on the other hand, strove for something qualitative in that it embraced the voices that were well-intentioned and mature enough to put the common good ahead of individual gain. ‘Mature’ should, certainly, in this context be understood as a placeholder for a racially hierarchical understanding of human progress. Ancient Greece and England under Cromwell were both ruled by only a fraction of their inhabitants, but—Curtis argued—they represented the correct principles of the common advancement of civilisation and mankind. Herein lay the British Empire’s crucial task. Together with their English-speaking brethren across the pond (who shared the same instinct for a commonwealth), the British should guide the international community towards order and civilisation.<sup>531</sup>

Another preservationist scheme for a global union can be found in the work of Alfred Zimmern. After having ascended considerably through his academic career since his early Round Table days, Zimmern was recruited by the Foreign Office in 1918 to work on the potential League of Nations. In his influential contributions to shaping the League, Zimmern advocated for a rather progressive form of preservationism, in many ways orienting himself in the hinterland between

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<sup>529</sup> Lionel Curtis, ‘A Criterion of Values in International Affairs’, in Lionel Curtis & Philip Kerr (eds.), *The Prevention of War* (1923) New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 140.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151–53& 56–59.

preservationism and utilisationism, but always maintaining a distinct preservationist predisposition. While acknowledging the issues of the pre-war international order, he was adamant in his conviction that a stable framework for peace should be based on—and stem from—the geopolitical conditions of the day.<sup>532</sup> His idealism was, in this sense, ‘cautious’.<sup>533</sup>

For Zimmern, the Commonwealth represented a critical starting point for a system of international peace based on the old-world order. As was commonplace within The Round Table, Zimmern viewed the Commonwealth as one of the few successful examples of international cooperation in practice. He essentially sought to replicate that sense of kinship on a global scale.<sup>534</sup> Whilst Curtis stressed its civilising function, Zimmern sought to identify the most stable elements of the *status quo* which this new cooperation could be built upon. He ‘was wary of condemning outright the whole edifice of European power politics’ after the war. His work which was submitted to Woodrow Wilson was ‘more of an institutionalization of the nineteenth-century notion of the Concert of Europe.’<sup>535</sup> Zimmern did not reject the hierarchical conception of geopolitics that was evident in Curtis thinking, but this was not a central element to his argument, allowing for a ‘reconciliation between progressivism and hierarchism’.<sup>536</sup> The centrality of the Commonwealth concept to Zimmern’s thinking—no doubt reinforced and developed through his Round Table activity—was evident in his political efforts as well, perhaps most blatantly in his Foreign Office memorandum from 1919, one of the drafts most consequential to outlining the British position at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>537</sup>

With regards to the narrative dichotomy of preservationism and utilisationism, Zimmern is of interest. He identified the greatest threat to international stability as excessive nationalism, rather than the lack of British cultural and political influence, as Curtis had done. Zimmern does identify Prussianism, however, as the most egregious example of nationalism, best counteracted by an increase in British

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<sup>532</sup> Paul Rich, ‘Reinventing Peace: David Davies, Alfred Zimmern and Liberal Internationalism in Interwar Britain’ (2002) *International Relations* 16:1, p. 123.

<sup>533</sup> Paul Rich, ‘Alfred Zimmern’s Cautious Idealism: The League of Nations, International Education, and the Commonwealth’, in David Long & Peter Wilson (eds.), *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed* (1995) Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 82–84.

<sup>534</sup> Tomohito Baji, *The International Thought of Alfred Zimmern: Classicism, Zionism and the Shadow of Commonwealth* (2021) Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 136–43.

<sup>535</sup> Rich, ‘Alfred Zimmern’s Cautious Idealism: The League of Nations, International Education, and the Commonwealth’, p. 82 & 84.

<sup>536</sup> Baji, *The International Thought of Alfred Zimmern*, p. 127. For more on Zimmern’s conceptualisation of race, see *ibid.*, pp. 104–11.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127–35.

influence.<sup>538</sup> As several historians have explored, Zimmern combined progressive language with a consistent effort to strengthen British hegemony, and while he challenged the self-serving imperialism from the previous century, he was ultimately at ease with a system of international cooperation that allowed for Western supremacy.<sup>539</sup> While working to establish the framework for non-hierarchical international coexistence, he essentially saw participation in the international community as exclusive to those ‘under the sway of Western civilization.’<sup>540</sup> His efforts were based on the preservationist conviction that the stability of that framework ultimately derived from ‘Christianity, international law and “our own English standard of behaviour”’.<sup>541</sup>

Alongside these three theoretical assertions of a preservationist interpretation based on lessons learned in ‘the Great War’, there were more limited, practical projects that were associated with the organisation, as well. Geoffrey Robinson’s was one of the most influential of these. His continuous, decade-defining editorship of *The Times* from 1923 to 1941 was one such project, and the publication of Ramsay Muir’s *Short History of the British Commonwealth* was another.<sup>542</sup> Muir had already been involved with the original Round Table in 1910 and had then enjoyed a successful academic career, including a professorship in modern history at the University of Manchester. His academic career culminated in the publishing of two volumes of his Commonwealth history in 1920 and 1922, before he began a political career within the Liberal Party. The books quickly became widely read and allowed Muir to present a history of the British Empire which culminated in the fight against Prussian militarism and the challenges the Commonwealth ‘triumphantly’ faced in the Great War.<sup>543</sup> One of his conclusions read that if

civilisation is to be saved from ruin in a catastrophe yet more terrible than that of yesterday, it would seem that there must be organised means of bringing home to all peoples a sense of their common responsibility. The British Commonwealth—the League of British Nations—by the part which

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<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132–33.

<sup>539</sup> The most in-depth and far-reaching of these can be found in Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, pp. 66–103.

<sup>540</sup> Baji, *The International Thought of Alfred Zimmern*, p. 142.

<sup>541</sup> Rich, ‘Reinventing Peace’, p. 125.

<sup>542</sup> Robinson became known as Geoffrey Dawson after his name change in 1917. The influence his Round Table association had on his particular brand of editorship is explored in the previous chapter.

<sup>543</sup> Ramsay Muir, *A Short History of the British Commonwealth I: The Modern Commonwealth* (1922) London: George Philip & Son Ltd., pp. 608–12 & 785.

it played in the Great War, pointed the way. And that was perhaps its greatest contribution.<sup>544</sup>

The preservationists agreed in the 1920s that the First World War had essentially been a conflict instigated by Germany's over-extended geopolitical ambitions. While the preservationist narrative did not necessarily reach back to the ancient Greeks, they did base their thinking on an emplotment that traced current geopolitical instability back to the 1871 unification of Germany. Not everyone was on the same page about Germany's role. Their views diverged regarding the extent to which they believed that Germany should be central to any effort to establish a new global order. Regardless, they did agree that stability in international politics would stem from the preservation of liberal Western values and that the Commonwealth played a critical role as the primary manifestation of those values in an international setting.

As such, the preservationist interpretation of the war did not treat it as a subversion, but rather as a reinforcement of the assumptions made by The Round Table in the early 1910s. They supported the League of Nation as an extension and institutionalisation of what they perceived to be the Commonwealth ambition. They were all for radical reform of international relations as long as it aligned with their hierarchical assumptions on international development. The preservationists were committed to the state as the standard unit of international politics and they saw no inherent contradiction between lasting peace and enlightened nationalism organised on the principles of the nation-state. As Curtis concluded, civilisation 'is society organized in states.'<sup>545</sup> Just as they had done before the war, The Round Table continued to argue that a federation would allow the United Kingdom to preserve Western values and principles beyond the dissolution of the British Empire. They understood the League as contributing to this effort, essentially mimicking the workings of the Commonwealth, attempting to artificially reproduce the comradery and shared sense of purpose of its inhabitants. Although they did it in a new way, the preservationists essentially longed for a return to the pre-1871 *Pax Britannica*, the model for international stability which they found most persuasive. The next section will look at the utilisationist understanding of 'the Great War', drawing completely different conclusions from the same chain of events.

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<sup>544</sup> Ibid., p. 782.

<sup>545</sup> Curtis, 'A Criterion of Values', p. 135.



## Federalism & the War II: Nothing Will Ever be the Same

There is no doubt that federalism involved a predisposition to a preservationist interpretation of the World War I experience. Since its inception, federalism had been intimately associated with imperialism and it is no surprise that the impulse of its advocates in the 1920s was to veer towards interpretations that put the continued influence of the Commonwealth centre stage. There was, however, an alternative—much more radical—interpretation of the WWI experience that understood the conflicts in terms of a systematic failure of the international community to guarantee peace rather than a failure of individual states to adhere to the principles of civilisation. While this interpretation was incompatible with many tenets of traditional federalism, it held an appeal for anyone who was seriously engaged in matters concerning geopolitical stability. As a result, the radical interpretation had a limited impact on the British federalist tradition in the war's immediate aftermath, even if it would later grow to dominate federalists' way of thinking. It was introduced to The Round Table in 1919 by none other than Philip Kerr.

Kerr's career skyrocketed in 1916 following his articles on peace. Later that year, he was recruited to join the close circle of advisors for the newly elected Lloyd George, dubbed his 'Garden Suburb'. At the war's end, Kerr was enjoying the political peak of his career. At 37, he would remain in his government position for three more years. He left the administration a year before its electoral defeat in 1922. Kerr's access to the Prime Minister during these years caused Winston Churchill to complain that no one 'who did not hold a leading position in the state should be allowed to exercise so much influence as Philip Kerr'.<sup>546</sup>

Kerr had freed himself at this point of the administrative duties of The Round Table, but he still attended meetings of the Moot and before World War II he had contributed about sixty articles to the journal.<sup>547</sup> Many of these distinguished themselves within the context of the *Table* as theoretically precise and thematically

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<sup>546</sup> Cited in James Fox, *Five Sisters: The Langhornes of Virginia* (2001) New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 434. Commander Joseph Kenworthy described the driving force behind the government at the time as 'that strange machine consisting of the Prime Minister and Mr. Philip Kerr', Joseph Kenworthy (19th April 1920) 'Power of His Majesty's Government', House of Commons, Hansard. There was even an instance when Kerr's salary was brought up for parliamentary debate, Earl Winterton (15th April 1920) 'The Secretariat of the Prime Minister', House of Commons, Hansard.

<sup>547</sup> Butler, *Lord Lothian*, p. 102.

abstract, often reflecting not only on the events themselves but their context and the conditions that had allowed them to happen. Within an organisation that was primarily interested in practical solutions to strengthen Anglo-Dominions ties, Kerr—complemented by Curtis—stood out in their efforts to establish a theoretical foundation for the organisation's political aims. This section will explore the narrative derived from this effort, as Kerr in his post-war work took the first steps towards a new form of British federalist understanding of Britain's post-imperial ambitions. Kerr believed that the main goal of post-imperial federation was no longer preservation, but utilisation.

Kerr's experiences at the Paris Peace Conference would come to define the rest of his life. As the last man standing from the Garden Suburb, he was in charge of putting together the Prime Minister's briefings on foreign policy.<sup>548</sup> He shared in the widespread disappointment as it became evident that the covenant would not enjoy American support, which in turn severely hampered the outlook for the League's political relevance. Kerr—who had displayed a consistent sympathy for the American point of view throughout his career—argued that the League had gone too far too fast.<sup>549</sup> It should have settled for the goodwill of President Wilson, but should have forced the senate's hand involving matters of defence. For Kerr, this kind of ignorance of the basic mechanics of the world's primary superpower was simply inexcusable in any serious attempt at world peace.<sup>550</sup>

Kerr's reaction to the outcome of the peace negotiations reveals a key trait of his thinking at the time, which consisted of a 'mixture of case-hardened realism with convinced and imperturbable idealism'.<sup>551</sup> Between the wars, Kerr's saw no contradiction between grand visions of an emplotment reaching far into the future and the meticulous and incremental process of governmental politics. He had

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<sup>548</sup> For a thorough study on Kerr's contribution to the British efforts at the Paris Peace Conference, see D. B. Kaufman, "A House of Cards Which Would Not Stand": James Headlam-Morley, the Role of Experts, and the Danzig Question at the Paris Peace Conference' (April 2019) *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 30:2. Perhaps most notably, Kerr is reported to have contributed the infamous reference of 'the aggression of Germany', often cited as a contributor to the Second World War. See Butler, *Lord Lothian*, pp. 71–74.

<sup>549</sup> Indeed, Kerr distinguished himself within the government at the time as one of rather few 'Atlanticists', Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government, 1918–1922* (1979) Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 318.

<sup>550</sup> Anonymous, 'The British Empire, the League of Nations and the United States' (March 1920) *The Round Table* 10:38. See also, although it was written a few years later, Anonymous, 'The British Commonwealth, the Protocol and the League' (December 1924) *The Round Table* 15:57, pp. 17–21.

<sup>551</sup> Edward Grigg, 'Philip Kerr, Marquess of Lothian', in Lord Halifax (ed.), *The American Speeches of Lord Lothian: July 1939 to December 1940* (1941) London: Oxford University Press, p. xxxi.

adopted Milner's ceaseless effort and infinite patience from South Africa and refined the principle during his time serving under Lloyd George. Experiencing the subdued endeavour of political practice had taught him that the implementation of ideas did not necessarily have to look anything like the ideas themselves.<sup>552</sup> As he would put it a few years later:

If you think I am going to give you a nice, clear-cut, neatly docketed proposal for preventing war, all tied up with a string, and embodied in a draft treaty or convention, I'm afraid you will be disappointed. The people who begin that way, in my experience, end nowhere.<sup>553</sup>

A League of Nations based on the rule of law and not national voluntarism would need to imitate its predecessor—The British Commonwealth, 'a league without a covenant'—and take its time in nurturing a sense of shared culture.<sup>554</sup> Kerr's immediate reaction to the peace negotiations tell us that he was convinced that the experiences from the British Empire had to be the starting point for any successful institutionalisation of world peace. He believed that international order would essentially be a product of cultivation and expansion of what already worked, rather than a fundamental reconfiguration. Jan Smuts had made the same observation, claiming that the British Empire would be 'the only successful experiment in international government.'<sup>555</sup> When corresponding with Harry Forbes Witherby, Milner expressed something similar. He stressed the importance of not endangering the efforts that he and others had made to build the Commonwealth into what it was: 'we must try to extend the pax Britannica into pax mundi. But even if pax mundi is unattainable, we must at any rate make sure of the pax Britannica.'<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> He had, for example, played an important part in Lloyd George's strategy during the Egyptian Revolution of 1919, been one of a handful that had drafted the blueprint for the government's postwar policy in 1918, and taken part in secret negotiations with the Greek leadership during the Turkish war of independence, Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity*, pp. 25, 122& 318–20.

<sup>553</sup> Philip Kerr, 'The Only Road to International Peace', in Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr (eds.), *The Prevention of War* (1923) New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 57.

<sup>554</sup> Anonymous, 'The British Empire, the League of Nations and the United States', p. 236.

<sup>555</sup> Quoted in Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 37.

<sup>556</sup> Alfred Milner (14th August 1919) 'Milner to Witherby', Bodleian Library, Oxford, The Round Table Papers Ms.eng.c.hist 854, fol. 88.



Figure 21 Overweighted

Contrary to later criticism, Kerr was not alone in thinking that the plans for the League of Nations were overly ambitious in their zeal to establish a new world order. This cartoon was published in the satirical magazine *Puck* in 1919 and included the caption: 'President Wilson: Here's your olive branch. Now get busy! Dove of Peace: Of course I want to please everyone, but isn't this a bit thick?'

Bernard Partridge (1919). Published in *Puck* on the 26th March, p. 243. Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by Marshall46.

Three years later, in 1922, Kerr would hold a series of lectures together with his close friend Curtis. The lectures were on 'A British view of International Problems' at the Institute of Politics in Williamstown, Massachusetts.<sup>557</sup> Here, Kerr saw an opportunity to further develop and cement his geopolitical thinking.

In 1916, when Kerr first dealt with the issue of international peace in a systematic manner, his argument had been—as discussed in the previous chapter—primarily focused on the principle of Commonwealth. In 1922, Kerr seemed to have reevaluated the universal salience of the term 'commonwealth'. He did not mention commonwealth at all in his first lecture, then only three times in his second lecture, and only ten in his final one.<sup>558</sup> It is a stark contrast when we compare this to his 1916 article, in which 'commonwealth' was mentioned fifty-two times.<sup>559</sup> The way he used the concept changed, as well. In 1922, he had largely moved away from referring to 'commonwealth' as an abstract principle and had begun to use it as something synonymous with 'state' or 'society', as in 'the commonwealth of Massachusetts'.<sup>560</sup>

What captured Kerr's attention in the 1922 lectures was instead the concept of national sovereignty. Global war, Kerr explained, was nothing new. Rather, Europe had experienced conflicts on a large international scale for almost half a millennium—with examples such as the War of the Spanish Succession, the Thirty Years War and the Napoleonic War. People had tried to prevent it, but from Charles-Irénée Castel de Saint-Pierre's *Projet pour Rendre la Paix Perpetuelle en Europe* to Immanuel Kant's *Zum ewigen Frieden*, these schemes had failed. Kerr set out to find the reason why.<sup>561</sup>

What is the fundamental cause of war? I do not say the only cause of war, but the most active and constant cause. It is not race, or religion, or color, or nationality, or despotism, or commercial rivalry, or any of the causes usually

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<sup>557</sup> These were published the following year as Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr, *The Prevention of War* (1923) New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>558</sup> See Kerr, 'The Mechanical Reason for War'; Kerr, 'The Psychological Reason for War'; and Kerr, 'The Only Road to International Peace'.

<sup>559</sup> Anonymous, 'The Principle of Peace'. It is worth noting that another article he wrote shortly thereafter, 'The Making of Peace', did not contain any mentions of 'commonwealth' either. This was, however, a shorter article, concerned with the actual war at hand and the practical implementation of the principles presented in the former. See Anonymous, 'The Making of Peace' (December 1916) *The Round Table* 7:25.

<sup>560</sup> Massachusetts is referred to in Kerr, 'The Psychological Reason for War', p. 33; and Kerr, 'The Only Road to International Peace', pp. 50 & 66. The American commonwealth can be found in *ibid.*, p. 64. For the two remaining examples of 'general commonwealths', see Kerr, 'The Psychological Reason for War', p. 48; and Kerr, 'The Only Road to International Peace', p. 66.

<sup>561</sup> Kerr, 'The Mechanical Reason for War', pp. 9–11.

cited. It is the division of humanity into absolutely separate sovereign states.<sup>562</sup>

Kerr saw the sovereign state primarily as a legal problem, or more precisely: as a problem of legal immaturity. In a version of Curtis' emplotment, Kerr saw the British Empire as built on a rich heritage, harkening back to Moses' Israeli self-government through Greek democracy, Roman law, English representative government, and American federalism.<sup>563</sup> This succession represented the slow process from chaos to order, as individuals were gradually incorporated into a system that outlawed violence and guarded commonly agreed upon values.<sup>564</sup> This order, however, limited itself to individuals, as there was no system to guarantee the rule of law between nations.<sup>565</sup>

I can reach no other conclusion, whether from a study of the past, from experience of the present, or from consideration of theory itself, than that war between states will continue until we apply to the world as a whole the same fundamental ideas as are universally applied within the state.<sup>566</sup>

As with individuals, Kerr argued that the lawless chaos of international politics caused countries to revert to their most basic and selfish instincts.<sup>567</sup> As such, patriotism—a sense of goodwill towards one's fellow countrymen—was flipped on its head as soon as it crossed national borders. Love deteriorated into 'jealousy, suspicion and fear' when looking at those 'on the other side of that geographical line.'<sup>568</sup> Kerr argued that a proper framework of international law would rid national patriotism of its ugliness and protect its valuable core, allowing the peaceful coexistence of a multitude of national patriotisms, living within the scope of a global sense of kinship.<sup>569</sup>

In crude terms, Kerr saw the primary cause of the Great War as a lack of international legislature, framing the conflict along the lines of a mafia war or family blood feud but on a global scale. He was certainly not alone in this belief

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<sup>562</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>563</sup> Kerr, 'The Only Road to International Peace', pp. 62–63.

<sup>564</sup> This line of thought was not anything new in itself and had played an important part in internationalist and European peace movements for decades. A prominent discussion of this was sociologist Jacques Novicov's *Les Luttes entre sociétés humaines et leurs phases successives*, see Sandi E. Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism: Waging War on War in Europe 1815–1914* (1991) Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 143.

<sup>565</sup> Kerr, 'The Mechanical Reason for War', pp. 17–28.

<sup>566</sup> Kerr, 'The Only Road to International Peace', pp. 51–52.

<sup>567</sup> Kerr, 'The Mechanical Reason for War', pp. 17–28.

<sup>568</sup> Kerr, 'The Psychological Reason for War', p. 35.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., pp. 36–37.

during the 1920s. In fact, Oona A. Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro argue that one of the most prominent legacies of the early post-war era was the emergence of a new international order, a monumental shift from hegemonic interventionism to internationalism. Within this transition from interventionists—seeing war as the primary, legal measure for resolving international conflict—to internationalists—seeking to outlaw war as a means of state action—Kerr definitely aligned himself with the latter.<sup>570</sup> In this sense, he represents the entanglement between British federalism and the surge of legalist war prevention that occurred in the interwar era. After the Second World War, much effort would go into less principled solutions, such as financial aid or transactionalism, both of which would be successful in their own right.<sup>571</sup>

As the historical emplotment of individual law alluded to, Kerr saw this as an almost deterministic culmination of historic development. The nation-states were on the cusp of an immense transformation of international politics, one for which the British Commonwealth could act as a blueprint. The success of the Commonwealth, Kerr argued, demonstrated that an international union was not an impossibility. It also showed how national independence could flourish within the framework of international law.<sup>572</sup> Kerr's relationship to the Commonwealth was noteworthy as he clearly demonstrated his inclusion in the idealist and utopian tradition of international relations through these ideas. He based his visions on the realisation of principles rather than the limitations of contemporary politics. He was always committed to anchoring his loftier ideas in the Commonwealth as a current, practical example—an expression of his realist conviction.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Hathaway, *The Internationalists*, pp. xx–xxii.

<sup>571</sup> The primary example of aid was of course the Marshall Plan, see for example Günter Bischof and Hans Petschar, *The Marshall Plan: Saving Europe, Rebuilding Austria* (2017) New Orleans: University of New Orleans Publishing. For an illuminating introduction to transactionalism, see Ben Rosamond, *Theories of European Integration* (2000) Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., pp. 42–49. This is not to say that the legal measures of the 1920s were a failure, just that a large array of different kinds of war prevention schemes following the Second World War are indicative of other ways of interpreting the problem of interstate armed conflict and its causes.

<sup>572</sup> Kerr, 'The Only Road to International Peace', pp. 70–71.

<sup>573</sup> For a good introduction to British, interwar idealism in international relations, see Peter Wilson, 'Introduction: *The Twenty Years' Crisis* and the Category of "Idealism" in International Relations', in David Long & Peter Wilson (eds.), *Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Reassessed* (1995) Oxford: Clarendon Press. For a somewhat older, but very functional definition of 'utopian' contra 'realist' thinking in IR, see James E. Dougherty & Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations* (1971) Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, pp. 65–66.

It is crucial to note that while the British Empire had an important part to play in the path to Kerr's world union, it did not necessarily have a place in its completion. The 'British Commonwealth cannot indefinitely last in its present form. If the world progresses towards unity and peace, it will be replaced by a greater thing.'<sup>574</sup> Much as with the civilising mission, the imperial endeavour carried with it the blueprint for its own dissolution, the only difference was that Kerr focussed on global anarchy as the ultimate threat to humanity, rather than the backwardness of the colonised.

One of the most striking changes that emerged from this shift of focus was the issue of timing the end of empire. The preservationist approach was fundamentally a strategy of 'how' rather than 'when', as it set out the most favourable terms for imperial dissolution, whenever that might happen. The preservationist narrative depended on the civilising of imperial subjects, a process that could not be rushed. Utilitarianism, on the other hand, had already ruled out national sovereignty as an effective constitutional model and the process of its dismantling was not really seen as dependant on the progress of the civilising mission.

Put another way: the planning for The Empire's end has always taken two aspects of the process into account, one of civilisation—fulfilling The Empire's purpose of forming its inhabitants into citizens—and one constitutional—transforming the imperial institutions to serve democratic co-governance. Within preservationism, these two were seen as intimately linked. Constitutional transformation was seen as gradually following after civilising progress. In Kerr's utilitarian logic, these two were made independent of each other, hastening the constitutional dismantling of The Empire and allowing the civilising dismantling to happen afterwards. All in all, it meant that Kerr perceived the threat he was addressing as more urgent than his preservationist counterparts and while he stressed the importance of permitting federalisation to take its time, he saw it as a process with no inherent delays.

This was something radically new to British federalist thinking. In practice, the theory of a global commonwealth would have always entailed a concession of national sovereignty, but to shift the focus from the benefits of a shared Western culture and political alignment to the detriment of national state power represented a profound change in British federalist theory. It made the theory more abstract—disconnecting it from the specific British experience—and more concrete—centred not on the general gains of the member states, but on the specific sacrifice

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<sup>574</sup> Kerr, 'The Only Road to International Peace', p. 71.



expected from the nation-states (a sacrifice they evidently were very reluctant to make).

In this sense, it was no longer a theory of preservationism, as its primary goal was no longer to preserve something essentially English or Western for the post-imperial world. What Kerr argued for was utilisation, that Britain should aim to utilise its institutions and administrative experience upon its transition to post-imperial state. It should place them at the disposal of global values and priorities and subsequently become one among other members of a world state. To distinguish it among later versions of utilisationism, I have called Kerr's thinking 'organic utilisationism', highlighting the fact that his ideas—while utopian in nature—were derived from the contemporary example of the Commonwealth and thus understood growing organically. Kerr's ideas were fundamentally based on experience rather than theory and he saw world union as a result of reform rather than revolution. Although Kerr never used the word himself, the term has been chosen to bring attention to—the organic understanding of political kinship that he had inherited from Curtis: an essentially conservative conviction that political unity stemmed from cultivation rather than institutionalisation.

Here, it is worth returning to the relationship between Kerr the pragmatic and Kerr the visionary. He grounded his historical determinism in his grand visions—basing his utilisationist narrative on an emplotment stretching back to Moses. To a certain extent, it was this determinism that allowed him to remain confident in his pragmatism, as he already felt certain about where the world was heading. Pragmatism, in Kerr's case, was not a nihilistic concession to materialism, but rather a patient and level-headed pursuit of the ideals derived from his visionary reasoning.<sup>575</sup> This interaction between determinism and pragmatism became very clear in 1919 as Kerr was not concerned—as many others were—about getting the maximum mileage out of the peace negotiations.

Several factors influenced Kerr's change in rhetorical emphasis. The most obvious one is that a lot had changed since 1916 and Kerr himself pointed out that the horrors of the war together with the creation of the League of Nations had created an even higher purpose for the empire to rally behind.<sup>576</sup> The nature of

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<sup>575</sup> The self-proclaimed idealism of the imperialists was as widespread as it was deeply rooted. In many ways, the federalists can be seen as part of a more general British imperial aspiration to model itself on Roman ideals. Historian Corelli Barnett has described the persistence of this ideal, even in the face of continually decreasing economic prospects. See Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, pp. 126–28.

<sup>576</sup> See for example an interview in the *Toronto Daily Star* in 1922, Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century*, p. 217.

the British Empire had, as previously mentioned, changed dramatically and increasing independence of the Dominions seems to have spurred Kerr on even further. In an article published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1922 he took this as proof of the soundness of the British civilising mission, which inspired him to envision a British Empire not only serving its subjects, but all of mankind.<sup>577</sup> Echoing his old mentor, but using different connotations, Kerr now advocated for the expansion of *Pax Britannia* into *Pax Mundi*.<sup>578</sup>

Kerr himself was also frustrated by the failure of the European powers to challenge the primacy of national sovereignty at the peace negotiations, something that would explain the radicalisation of his thought.<sup>579</sup> On a general level, it is not so far-fetched to imagine that five years of experiencing high politics from the inside changed his outlook. In a sense, his frustration with the 1919 negotiations were rooted in his newfound knowledge of the actual mechanics of international politics—knowledge which allowed him to refine his arguments and focus his message.<sup>580</sup> One last, but not irrelevant factor that probably exacerbated to Kerr's abrupt shift in thinking were the lectures he gave to American audiences. As a proficient orator, Kerr understood he should avoid appearing to be a self-congratulatory former coloniser. On the contrary, he took every opportunity to praise American federalism as the remedy for the world's troubles. However, it would be too cynical to consider this a significant contributing factor to Kerr's change of mind.

Hence, several circumstances coincided to push Kerr to reformulate central parts of his commonwealth principle. It is important not to underestimate the importance of these three lectures, as Kerr took the opportunity to reevaluate many of the fundamental assumptions of his theory, planting the seeds for a complete reformulation of the British federalist tradition in the decades to come. This re-evaluation did not dramatically alter every aspect of Kerr's ideology

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<sup>577</sup> Anonymous, 'A Programme for the British Commonwealth' (March 1922a) *The Round Table* 12:46, pp. 97–98.

<sup>578</sup> Philip Kerr, 'The Outlawry of War' (1928) *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 7:6, p. 362. It must be noted that Kerr himself does not use the term *Pax Mundi*, he simply argues that the principles of *Pax Romana* and *Pax Britannica* are the living embodiments of practical peace. However, Milner argued in 1919 that Britons 'must try to extend the *pax Britannica* into a *pax Mundi*', cited in Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, p. 125.

<sup>579</sup> Anonymous, 'The British Empire, the League of Nations and the United States', pp. 21–27.

<sup>580</sup> One point made by D. B. Kaufmann is that during his time under Lloyd George, Kerr got to experience the lack of first-hand knowledge and the diplomatic ineptitude of a number of world leaders, see Kaufman, "A House of Cards Which Would Not Stand", p. 231.

immediately, which one can see after studying the practical implementation of his ideas.

## Organic Utilisation in Context

Fully understanding the relationship between the Round Table organisation and the organic utilisationist narrative is not a completely straightforward task. This section will cover Kerr's continued work on the issue of organic utilisation throughout the 1920s and contrast this with corresponding work from other members at the time, clarifying how his ideas should be understood in the context of The Round Table's early interwar period. This contextualisation is then followed by looking at Kerr's ideas in relation to international attempts at establishing global order.

It is impossible to talk of a Round Table ideology in this period as something separate from Kerr and his ideas. During the 1920s, he would publish two to three articles a year on related subjects. Kerr continued to distinguish himself as a theorist of empire and with the number of articles he wrote, his writing featured in almost every issue. As a result, if one is to talk of a shared Round Table narrative for British imperial dissolution in the 1920s, Kerr played a major role in shaping it.

In these articles, Kerr would clarify and offer examples of his notion of utilisationism as it related to contemporary issues. As he had returned to a context perhaps more Commonwealth-friendly than any other, he allowed himself to be a bit more focused on the concept, arguing that commonwealth had 'led the world along the road to individual freedom'.<sup>581</sup> Kerr, however, is very clear in that even if the Commonwealth could provide the blueprint and an inspiration in the campaign for international order, it was no longer the driving force in global politics. Kerr emphasised the role of the US in the establishment of an international order, arguing that it was 'the one indispensable factor'.<sup>582</sup> Kerr was not blind to the criticism that many of his fellow Table members levelled at American isolationism, but he tended to view the American case sympathetically, as something regrettable, albeit understandable and profoundly reversible.<sup>583</sup> In

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<sup>581</sup> Anonymous, 'The New Imperial Problem' (June 1923) *The Round Table* 13:51, p. 493. The most programmatic summary of Kerr's vision for the Commonwealth can be found in Anonymous, 'A Programme for the British Commonwealth', pp. 245–46.

<sup>582</sup> Anonymous, 'Towards Peace or War?' (June 1930) *The Round Table* 20:79, pp. 466–67.

<sup>583</sup> The best examples of which are Anonymous, 'The British Empire, the League of Nations and the United States', pp. 238–39; and Anonymous, 'Anglo-American Relations' (December 1926)

Kerr's mind, the Commonwealth played second fiddle and should try to contribute with institutional experience and guidance, rather than decisive action.

In a similar vein, Kerr described the League of Nation as the driving force in European stability. He criticised the organisation regularly for its failing to realise its proper role in international politics, and while the British Commonwealth—as 'a microcosm of the world'—could help guide the League on the right path, he realised that the global saliency of the League made its eventual success crucial.<sup>584</sup> Kerr continued to promote the Commonwealth's selling point as 'a league without a covenant', but accepted its essentially supporting role in the establishment of a new world order.<sup>585</sup> Its higher calling, Kerr thought, was as an asset to the League of Nations, as 'The British Commonwealth cannot live for itself.'<sup>586</sup> He even admitted that the United Kingdom was one of the European powers that had 'played with foreign adventures as a useful distraction' in face of the escalating military tensions before 1914.<sup>587</sup>

The Table owed a lot of its thinking on these issues to Kerr's work, and it is simultaneously clear that other members did not fully agree with his ideas. First and foremost, there was a general reluctance towards grand theory, with many prioritising the issues of the day, such as the imperial conferences, or Ireland.<sup>588</sup> When others commented on the same issues as Kerr, most shared his views. Members agreed on the importance of the League of Nations' mission, ack-

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ibid.17:65, pp. 10–17. Some examples where Kerr acknowledged the downsides of American isolationism can be found in Anonymous, 'America and the International Problem' (September 1922) *ibid.*12:48, pp. 719–20; and Anonymous, 'The New Imperial Problem', p. 468.

<sup>584</sup> See Anonymous, 'The New Imperial Problem', p. 482; Anonymous, 'The British Commonwealth, the Protocol and the League', pp. 17–21; and Anonymous, 'Europe, the Covenant and the Protocol' (March 1925a) *The Round Table* 15:58, p. 235. The quote can be found in Anonymous, 'America and the International Problem', p. 729. For some of Kerr's criticism of the League, see Anonymous, 'The British Empire, the League of Nations and the United States'; Anonymous, 'A Programme for the British Commonwealth', p. 242; and Anonymous, 'Europe, the Covenant and the Protocol', pp. 220–30.

<sup>585</sup> Anonymous, 'The British Empire, the League of Nations and the United States', p. 236.

<sup>586</sup> Philip Kerr (2nd July 1923) Bodleian Library, Oxford, The Round Table Papers Ms.Eng.c.6556, fol. 217. He made this point even more explicitly outside of the *Round Table*, see Philip Kerr (7th November 1922) 'Article in Toronto Daily Star', Bodleian Library, Oxford, The Round Table Papers Ms.Eng.c.6556.

<sup>587</sup> Anonymous, 'Towards Peace or War?', p. 464.

<sup>588</sup> See for example Anonymous, 'The Imperial Conference' (September 1921) *The Round Table* 11:44; Anonymous, 'Afterthoughts on the Imperial Conference' (March 1924) *The Round Table* 14:54; Anonymous, 'Ireland and the Home Rule Act'; and The Editor, 'Editor's Note: The Irish Boundary Question' (June 1924) *The Round Table* 14:55.

nowledging its struggle.<sup>589</sup> Fellow *Kindergartener* John Buchan described it later as though the League's 'foundations were on sand and that the first storm would overthrow it.'<sup>590</sup>

There was, however, a distinct difference in that the other Table authors consistently sought to frame the British Empire in more exceptionalist terms. Their accounts varied, from describing the Great War as being won by 'the puritan spirit', the United Kingdom providing 'education of a wiser and better kind' for Europe, and claiming that 'as the modern world owes to Israel the conception that God is one, so it owes to England the principle of the commonwealth.'<sup>591</sup> All of them aimed to promote something particularly English as the key to international harmony, framing the English as something 'unique', which 'defies classification'.<sup>592</sup> The role of the US in any future international order was also generally ignored by the rest of the organisation.<sup>593</sup>

The differences are subtle but undeniable. Although Kerr maintained much of the same ambitions and pursued many of the same policy measures as the rest of the organisation after the war, he had adopted a new narrative in the sense that he no longer assumed the English to be history's obvious protagonists. As the interwar period developed, and the inability of the international community to guarantee peace became increasingly evident, utilisationism would also eventually dominate the organisation and completely define Federal Union, the next incarnation of British federalism. Away of the United Kingdom, however, the tenets of the utilisationist narrative were already gaining wide support.

Throughout Europe, the end of the First World War brought with it an avalanche of rather radical proposals to reform international relations. The most famous and influential of these peace proposals was Woodrow Wilson's fourteen points, presented ahead of the 1919 peace conference.<sup>594</sup> These ideas shared many similarities with Kerr's, and he largely agreed with them (apart from Wilson's anti-

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<sup>589</sup> Anonymous, 'The League of Nations and the British Commonwealth' (June 1919) *The Round Table* 9:35; and Anonymous, 'The League of Nations' (March 1923) *The Round Table* 13:50.

<sup>590</sup> John Buchan, *Memory Hold-the-Door* (1940) London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., p. 219.

<sup>591</sup> Anonymous, 'The World in Conference' (September 1920) *The Round Table* 10:40, pp. 721–23; Anonymous, 'America and the International Problem', p. 726; and Anonymous, 'The Commonwealth', p. 1 respectively.

<sup>592</sup> Anonymous, 'The Imperial Conference', p. 226.

<sup>593</sup> I have found one example, see Anonymous, 'A Basis for Imperial Foreign Policy' (March 1924) *The Round Table* 14:54, p. 286.

<sup>594</sup> Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars. Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (1992) New York: Oxford University Press.

imperialism), even though Kerr criticised their implementation.<sup>595</sup> The French Prime Minister, Raymond Poincaré, proposed an Anglo-French union as a boon to European stability in 1922. This proposal was based on the existing nation-state order to a much larger extent than what Kerr imagined, however.<sup>596</sup> There was Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi's famous and hugely influential *Pan-Europa* in 1923, which focussed much more on Central Europe than Kerr. Yet Coudenhove-Kalergi still based his reasoning on the same internationalist logic.<sup>597</sup> There was also the global pact concocted by US Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg and the French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand. The Kellogg-Briand Pact aimed at outlawing war, and although Kerr acknowledged that this was not the final solution, he still hailed it as 'opening the door to lasting international peace.'<sup>598</sup>

Kerr should be regarded as one of the many peace theorists of the early *interbellum* period. He added a distinctly imperialist outlook to the group: he had a vision of international peace based on the British imperial experience. Kerr is also one of few British examples, and the first in Britain to frame a transformative international order in federalist terms. Kerr believed that a new international order would require an extensive institutional framework as well as a shared sense of allegiance to a common project, neither of which he thought could be conjured from thin air. The United Kingdom had a role to play in utilising its institutions and administrative experience to help jumpstart a process. On its own, the process would take decades and run a great risk of failure. The problem with the League of Nations was that it had tried to move too quickly, disregarding the lessons learned from successful projects that had come before.

While Kerr's 1922 lectures are significant in that they represent such an important juncture in the tradition of British federalism, it is important to keep in mind that they in no way signified that Kerr had given up on British imperial ambitions. Kerr's intellectual activity during the rest of the 1920s can—broadly speaking—be divided into two categories. First, his comments on and evaluations of other peace proposals, looking at their merits and practicality.<sup>599</sup> Second, his

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<sup>595</sup> Anonymous, 'The British Empire, the League of Nations and the United States'.

<sup>596</sup> Tooze, *The Deluge*, p. 431 & 53. For more on Kerr's critique of the proposal, see Anonymous, 'A Programme for the British Commonwealth', pp. 234–36.

<sup>597</sup> See, for example, Rosamond, *Theories of European Integration*, pp. 21–22.

<sup>598</sup> Kerr, 'The Outlawry of War', p. 365. For more on the pact and the history that led up to it, see Hathaway, *The Internationalists*, pp. 101–30.

<sup>599</sup> See for example Anonymous, 'Cologne, the Security Pact and the League' (June 1925) *The Round Table* 15:59, Anonymous, 'The Locarno Treaties' (December 1925) *The Round Table* 16:61; and Anonymous, 'The Peace Pact' (September 1928) *The Round Table* 18:72.

comments on the status of the British commonwealth—criticising its flaws and proposing measures to strengthen its unity.<sup>600</sup> In addition to that, there is what could be described as a third, more sporadic category, which is Kerr's steadfast interest in the US—in relation to both of the categories above. Kerr was adamant that lasting peace needed to be based on American support and that Britain needed to take its role seriously in what would later be termed the 'special relationship'.<sup>601</sup>

This diversified approach speaks to the fact that Kerr saw imperial dissolution as a long, organic, and multifaceted process. One of the key traits of organic utilisationism was that it condemned national sovereignty but did not completely rid itself of a notion of English exceptionalism. Kerr's vision was a global union where national sovereignty had been replaced with constitutional equality, based on an international agreement that had matured into a non-hierarchical community of international politics, with no dominant influence from any particular nation. His understanding of the process leading there, however, was heavily modelled on his understanding of the British example. While his utilisationist logic had separated the constitutional dissolution of empire from the civilisational, it had rid itself of neither.

As a result, while the utilisationist logic put no stock in the preservation of English culture, Kerr was unwavering in his belief of the proficiency of British institutions—maintaining a sense of English exceptionalism through its unique potential when utilised. Kerr never specified exactly how central that role should be, probably well aware that it would be completely reliant on American approval. It is clear, however, that while Kerr's vision on an explicit level relegated the United Kingdom to mediocrity—becoming one among many inconsequential member-states—the narrative still contained a pivotal role for the British to play in the realisation of that vision.

One of the expressions of Kerr's maintained imperialism was that, unlike some of his contemporaries, he never considered the end of the First World War to be a moment of imperial reckoning. Figures such as Commissioner of the Civil Service Commission, Sir Stanley Leathes, could lamented in 1920 about 'all the blood and tears that [the empire] has cost'.<sup>602</sup> The satirical pamphlet *1920 Dips into the Near Future*, ridiculed the government's double standards regarding British

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<sup>600</sup> See for example Anonymous, 'Imperial Diplomacy' (September 1924) *The Round Table* 14:56, Anonymous, 'The Next Imperial Conference' (March 1926) *The Round Table* 16:62; and Anonymous, 'Where Are We Going?' (March 1930) *The Round Table* 20:78.

<sup>601</sup> The most explicit example of this can be found in Anonymous, 'Anglo-American Relations'.

<sup>602</sup> From his book *The People of England*, cited in Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, p. 124.

and German dependencies, suggesting that self-serving imperial policy had been an important contributor to the conflict's escalation.<sup>603</sup> The Labour Party even reached similar conclusions as the imperial federalists, arguing for the British Empire to transform itself into 'not an Empire in the old sense, but a Britannic Alliance' of equal members. They did so, however, as a safeguard against exploitation 'for the benefits of a "White Empire"' and the threat of 'the landlords and financiers of the Mother Country' interfering in the 'absolute autonomy of each self-governing part of the Empire'.<sup>604</sup>

Kerr still saw the British Empire as the centre of global progress. The empire's significance lay both in its responsibility as a leading global power, in its lived experience of the principle of commonwealth, and in its remaining importance as a civilising authority. Even if the empire no longer possessed a prominent role at the end point of his narrative, it was still fundamental in that Kerr saw no diminishing in the urgency of its traditional functions. He would never see a contradiction between the conservative defence of imperial values and the promotion of a radical subversion of international order. He would maintain these as two aspects of an organic narrative, even as the 1930s would introduce challenges to the stability of international politics that would lead many to come around to the need of a radical reconfiguration of the international order.

While Kerr acted in many ways as a trailblazer within The Round Table, he was not alone in seeing sovereign nationalism as the root cause of the Great War, and federalism as its solution. When the fateful shot in Sarajevo was fired, Harold Joseph Laski had been twenty-one years old and fresh out of New College, Oxford. His history degree was heavily influenced by both neo-Hegelian British Idealism, characterised by the contributions of the likes of T. H. Green and Francis Herbert Bradley, as well as—the more immediately consequential—pluralism of historians Frederic William Maitland and John Neville Figgis.<sup>605</sup> While these influences shared many similarities with the ideological context of the *Kindergarten*—Laski had even dabbled in eugenics—his influences represented a world defined not by the experiences of empire.<sup>606</sup> In fact, when he wrote 'a book on sovereignty' in 1925—an issue he believed 'to lie at the root of the war'—it was the first example of what I call the radical utilisationist narrative.

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<sup>603</sup> 'Lucian', *1920 Dips into the Near Future* (1918) London: Headley Bros Publisher, pp. 81–83.

<sup>604</sup> The Labour Party, 'Labour and the New Social Order: A Report on Reconstruction' (1918) *Labour Party*, p. 20.

<sup>605</sup> Michael Newman, *Harold Laski: A Political Biography* (1993) Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp. 37–41.

<sup>606</sup> For a discussion on Laski's relationship with eugenics, see *ibid.*, pp. 16–22.





Figure 22 The Game of British Empire

While explicit imperialism was increasingly eradicated from political discourse after the First World War, sociologist Krishan Kumar argues that the empire's real influence on the English national psyche remained in the 'banal nationalism' of everyday things and rituals. While many were, as Kerr, ambivalent to imperialism's exact role in contemporary society, popular culture was rife with reminders of English superiority through imperial cues.<sup>607</sup> Seen here is a 1925 reissue of 'The Game of the British Empire' from 1905. It is worth noting that the marketing became more overtly patriotic between the two editions, as the original did not feature Britannia, but instead depicted a rather mundane scenario of actual trade with colonised people. The description reads 'Each Player starts with a cargo from LONDON & has to deliver same and take up from the COLONIES what they export.' The public appetite for these expressions of almost outright jingoism became evident during events such as the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924, reported in newspapers as 'Wembley Fever'.<sup>608</sup>

Frontpiece to 'The Game of British Empire or Trading with the Colonies' (1925, orig. 1905) by Gleezum Games

It was after he established himself as a lecturer on government at the London School of Economics (LSE), which followed several years as a history lecturer at Harvard, that Laski published his magnum opus, *A Grammar of Politics* in 1925.

<sup>607</sup> Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, pp.193–97.

<sup>608</sup> Stephen, *The Empire of Progress*, p. 109.

While written from a domestic perspective, the argument of the *Grammar* is based on several assumptions made on the state of international politics, which parallel many of Kerr's views. In 1955, Herbert Deane claimed that the book marked the ushering in of a new phase in Laski's thinking. In it, Deane argues, Laski distances himself from his previous, categorical, treatment of sovereignty in lieu of a more nuanced approach towards societal power.<sup>609</sup> Laski maintained the pluralistic conception of federalism that had defined the early years of his career—arguing that sovereignty should be represented at the local level of organisations and associations which represented people's aspirations to improve their lives. However, *Grammar* is a more nuanced and unconditional attempt to understand the modern state.

Laski viewed domestic prosperity and justice as ultimately dependant on international order and many of the comments he makes on the subject are essentially synonymous with the conclusions drawn by Kerr a few years earlier, although they can at times seem to be dressed in completely different ideological garb. *Grammar* states, quite forcefully, that 'International government is, therefore, axiomatic in any plan for international well-being' and that the 'experience of what world-conflict has involved seems to have convinced the best of this generation that the effective outlawry of war is the only reasonable alternative to suicide.'<sup>610</sup> While the analysis of the book is generally performed at a rather abstract level, Laski makes a more direct inference on contemporary politics in the preface to the 1934 edition, arguing that nationalistic foreign policy and economic exploitation have rendered 'impossible the effective operation of international institutions; it is, therefore, fatal to the creative functioning of the League of Nations.'<sup>611</sup>

While there are several factions in the period's British federalist accounts that are reminiscent of each other, the projects of Laski and Kerr were diametrically opposed in terms of their starting points. Laski was a historian by training, and his theoretical insights undoubtedly had their roots in historical knowledge, but as an intellectual endeavour, *Grammar* was a fundamentally deductive rather than inductive project. In *Grammar*, Laski sets out to establish a theoretical framework for contemplating ideal governance and while it is not purely theoretical, the references to contemporary politics are few, far between, and they illuminate the

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<sup>609</sup> Herbert Andrew Deane, *The Political Ideas of Harold J. Laski* (1955) New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 77–99.

<sup>610</sup> Harold J. Laski, *A Grammar of Politics* (1934) [1925] London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., p. 65 & 587.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

argument with additional nuance rather than underpinning its reasoning. As such, Laski works with a minimal—if any—emplotment, not attempting to explain the historical development which permitted the changes he proposes, and only vaguely sketching the future course of history that would follow upon their implementation.

In this sense, Laski's utilisationism is 'radical', as it does not view the emergence of a future world order as beginning with and growing out of the experiences of the current one, but as fundamentally driven on by theoretical insight. In fact, the 'utilisation' aspect of his argument is almost incidental: he sees the future international order as ensured by a global government in which the British Empire would be incorporated and to which the United Kingdom would—of course—contribute its resources. Yet, in its essence, this is not a book about the pragmatic politics of real-world examples. In fact, Laski draws on the British imperial experience twice to provide blueprints for the future global order, but apart from this, his concern is not policy—regardless of it being English, French or German—but rather the theory of governance in its own right.<sup>612</sup>

It is important to note that while Laski does not treat the future of the British Empire as a central concern, he is not opposed to the civilising mission as such. He sees the colonial approach of the League as the way forward.<sup>613</sup> In this sense, federalist utilisationism maintained an adherence to the overarching understanding of the nature of political progress which had underpinned imperial expansion. Utilisationism was not in itself a rejection of the Western concept of civilisation such as it had been practiced, which still played a key part in their visions for a post-imperial global order. Utilisationism was, as Mark Mazower puts it, 'articulated in a world that took the durability of empire for granted'.<sup>614</sup>

There were even contemporary visions of a post-imperial future that broke with the assumption of Western superiority, such as George Padmore's condemnation of the 'czarist methods of police terrorism' which he argued kept black South African 'enslaved within their own country'.<sup>615</sup> In his powerful account from 1931, Padmore further extended the meaning of colonialism, asserting that all black workers suffered under the same white hegemony. In direct opposition to *The Round Table* and its like-minded, he also emphasised instances of colonial

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<sup>612</sup> For his examples drawn from the British Empire, see *ibid.*, p. 632 & 45.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 596–98.

<sup>614</sup> Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, p. 23.

<sup>615</sup> George Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (1931) London: Red International of Labour Unions Magazine, p. 13.

resistance which revealed the discontented nature of the colonised–coloniser relationship.<sup>616</sup>

## New Strains on the International Order

While the experiences of the Great War redefined the intellectual framework for British federalism in the 1920s, the rise of Nazism would push many federalists to further strengthen their positions in the 1930s. One of the most ambitious approaches to assessing the state of the interwar political order came from Lionel Curtis.

If Curtis' early interwar work was more precise and limited in its scope, the true extent of his ambitions would become evident with the publishing of the three volumes of *Civitas Dei* during the 1930s.<sup>617</sup> In his epic work on the 'Commonwealth of God', he gave an account of what he deemed to be the consequential events and processes of human history, from the agrarian revolution to his own time. He sought 'to show how the past has led to the present position in world affairs.'<sup>618</sup> In doing so, he established the federalist tradition's most expansive and detailed emplotment, emphatically putting history at the centre of his argument.

From this emplotment, Curtis derives a narrative of what he calls 'constructive religion' or 'the principle of the infinite duty of each to all'.<sup>619</sup> It is essentially the same message as he had promoted during the war, but with a more pronounced emphasis on the ultimate aim being a world union as well as the fundamentally Christian nature of the project. Curtis believed that a world union was the ultimate weapon against excessive nationalism, which 'imprisons' the mind.<sup>620</sup> He promoted the opposite of Lord Rosebery and Leo Amery's bottom-up federalism. In his top-down federalism, the constitutional shift would prompt a cultural re-examination as part of the national discourses and within two or three generations, the member-states would have produced fully-fledged world inhabitants.<sup>621</sup>

With regards to the United States, Curtis was much more reluctant in ascribing them an essential role in the future international order. Curtis shared Kerr's vision for a reunion of English-speaking peoples, but he described the US in more re-

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<sup>616</sup> Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire* (2015) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 36–37.

<sup>617</sup> The three volumes were published in 1934, 1937, and 1938.

<sup>618</sup> Lionel Curtis, *Civitas Dei: Commonwealth of God* (1938) London: Macmillan & co., p. 289.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 952.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 902.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 902–07.

ductionist terms, essentially seeing the federation as a successful, but flawed, expression of the Commonwealth principle. As such, there was really nothing for the UK to learn from the American example and Curtis' wish was to reverse what he saw as the mistakes made during the revolution, made by what he described as 'a small but active minority' within the American social elite.<sup>622</sup> There was no doubt that it was the British example which would provide the blueprint for a future world union, according to Curtis. One which could guide the rest of the world based on the principle of Commonwealth.

Concerning Nazism, Curtis clearly took the threat seriously and he dedicated about twenty pages to a detailed account of Hitler's rise to power—similar in scope to how he treated the Greek Empire or the Napoleonic wars. He did not see Hitler's success as a challenge to his overarching narrative, however, instead seeing Hitler as the continuation of a Bismarckian militarism that refused to recognise the outcome of World War I.<sup>623</sup> According to Curtis, Nazism was just another manifestation of principles that rivalled the Commonwealth, further proving the need for its preservation.

Another preservationist understanding of the rise of Nazism can be found in Grigg's project, *The Faith of an Englishman*. Grigg saw Hitler not as representative of the ultimate form of Prussian militarism, but rather as an excessive and disproportionate version, out of balance due to the country's economic hardships. Like Curtis, Grigg maintained that international instability came from the failure of individual countries to promote healthy patriotism. This had led them, in turn, to succumb to unreasonable and volatile nationalism. As a result, Grigg saw no need for supranational intervention in the name of peace, arguing that the goalpost should not be the realisation of the principles of Versailles in 1919, but of Vienna in 1815.<sup>624</sup>

Kerr saw Nazism as a confirmation of the international relation principles that he had advocated for throughout the 1920s. With increased instability and discord within European international politics, Kerr grew increasingly single-minded in his support for the League of Nations. The League represented the only tangible, realistic roadmap for anything akin to the post-imperial order he envisioned. While critical of 'blind optimism', he saw the League's fundamental ideals as 'entirely

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<sup>622</sup> Ibid., p. 408.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., pp. 730–51.

<sup>624</sup> Edward Grigg, *The Faith of an Englishman* (1936) London: Macmillan & co., pp. 27–31, 37–50 & 64–69.

sound' and its political ambition as 'the beginning of a world constitution'.<sup>625</sup> While acknowledging many of its flaws, Kerr saw the League as the only pragmatic alternative for the UK to focus its efforts on when furthering international stability: 'The future of the Empire is now, of course, inseparable from that of the League of Nations.'<sup>626</sup> With regards to their visions of a future world order, Curtis and Kerr were almost completely aligned, but they differed in their understanding of how to get there. Curtis saw rising geopolitical tensions as an essentially ideological conflict—solved by the increasing influence of Western values. Kerr saw them as a symptom of a systematic failure—requiring the United Kingdom to support an institutional solution. Nothing would lay the conflict between preserving English values and utilising the imperial machinery barer than the Nazis' blatant refusal to abide by the international order established in Paris in 1919 and Locarno in 1925.

As I touched on earlier, it is a more or less meaningless exercise to try to determine a 'Round Table position' independent of Curtis and Kerr. The latter continued to write a piece for nearly every *The Round Table* issue throughout the 1930s. Other members contributed with views on specific issues that related to the United Kingdom's role in a future world order and published reports from places that differed in their outlook, but the comprehensive geopolitical analysis was predominantly left up to Kerr.<sup>627</sup>

There were some small indications that Kerr differed from the rest of the organisation. *The Round Table* contributions which were not attributed to Kerr seemed to host a range of opinions whereas Kerr is positioned at the extreme end of utilisationism. Other members agreed that the European powers found themselves in a systematic failure of international politics and that the only solution would be a supra-national framework for international law.<sup>628</sup> On the other hand, certain contributions placed the blame for rising international tensions on the

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<sup>625</sup> Anonymous, 'Towards Peace or War?', p. 461; and Anonymous, 'The Foundation for Disarmament' (December 1932) *The Round Table* 23:89, pp. 3 & 16.

<sup>626</sup> Anonymous, 'Where Are We Going?', p. 226.

<sup>627</sup> See for example Anonymous, 'The Task of the Imperial Conference' (September 1930) *The Round Table* 20:80; Anonymous, 'The Crisis and Its Background' (September 1931) *The Round Table* 21:84; Anonymous, 'Washington, the West and the World' (June 1935) *The Round Table* 25:99; Anonymous, 'The Pulse of America' (March 1936) *The Round Table* 26:102; Anonymous, 'The German Situation' (June 1920) *The Round Table* 10:39; and Anonymous, 'Crown, Constitution and Commonwealth' (March 1937) *The Round Table* 27:106.

<sup>628</sup> Anonymous, 'Germany in the Storm' (December 1931) *The Round Table* 22:85, pp. 71–88; Anonymous, 'Where Is Europe Going?' (December 1930) *The Round Table* 21:81, pp. 13–15; and Anonymous, 'Twenty-Five Years' (September 1935) *The Round Table* 25:100, p. 657.

German mindset and instead emphasised the British Empire's role as a military guarantor for international stability and an ideological yardstick for democratic values.<sup>629</sup>

As military tensions rose, and particularly by the second half of the 1930s, this balance shifted increasingly towards utilisationism, and as another global conflict seemed imminent, no one claimed that its character was primarily ideological. Kerr maintains a consistently extreme position with regards to the rest of the organisation. The clearest example of this is his recurrent theme of 'international anarchy', which he sees as the biggest threat to continued peace. Among the other members, this concept is only used once during the period, which is indicative of a theoretical stringency in Kerr's thinking which led him to a 'purer' utilisationism than his peers.<sup>630</sup> Apart from this, the membership generally agreed with his principles and the League of Nations as the ideal focus for British foreign efforts, even if it never completely rid itself of German antipathy.<sup>631</sup> All in all, if the organisation as a whole began the *interbellum* period firmly in Curtis' preservationist camp, during the 1920s and 1930s, it moved much closer to Kerr's utilisationism and we should take Kerr at his words when he writes that the following:

The Round Table takes the view of the latter school. It has for years expressed the opinion that no league of sovereign States could discharge the functions laid upon the League in the Covenant, because its central foundation, the full national sovereignty of its members, makes it incapable of establishing the reign of law in the world.<sup>632</sup>

The utilisationism that Kerr championed after the First World War had spread itself through the organisation by the beginning of the Second World War. This occurred organically, in that it did not stem from a theoretical conclusion first and foremost, but from practical experience. It was also seen as the culmination of a long and gradual process, 'far beyond the horizon', as Kerr noted.<sup>633</sup> Both of these 'organic' factors contributed to the fact that Round Table utilisationism maintained

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<sup>629</sup> Anonymous, 'France and Germany' (June 1931) *The Round Table* 21:83, pp. 500–07; Anonymous, 'The Third League of Nations' (December 1934) *The Round Table* 25:97, pp. 122–25; Anonymous, 'Great Britain and Europe' (December 1935) *The Round Table* 26:101, p. 18; and Anonymous, 'The Crisis and the Future' (December 1938) *The Round Table* 29:113, p. 9.

<sup>630</sup> The example can be found in Anonymous, 'Twenty-Five Years', p. 655.

<sup>631</sup> One was, for example, not ready to entirely dismiss the ideological dimensions of the British war effort, see Anonymous, 'Freedom Stands Fast' (September 1939) *The Round Table* 29:116.

<sup>632</sup> Anonymous, 'The Commonwealth and the League' (September 1936) *The Round Table* 26:104, p. 656.

<sup>633</sup> Anonymous, 'The Commonwealth and the Dictatorships' (June 1938) *The Round Table* 28:111, p. 451.

a certain ‘impurity’, meaning that members could hold on to aspects of the preservationist way of thinking even if they were predominantly committed to a utilisationist program. The organic nature of Round Table utilisationism allowed it to maintain the character of spectrum or range, rather than a more well-defined position. It also allowed The Round Table, including Kerr, to distance itself from the outright anti-imperialism of similar movements for international reorganisation in pursuit of peace, such as the League Against Imperialism.<sup>634</sup> While the 1930s pushed the RT to take critical steps away from imperialism and Western superiority, it did not subscribe to the radical subversion of those who approached the same issues from an anti-colonialist point of view.

As I have hinted at, a key aspect of Kerr’s utilisationism was his refusal to demonise the German perspective. He consistently made sense of and explained the German point of view as a strategy to reinforce his argument that the failure of international politics was of a systematic nature.<sup>635</sup> In fact, Kerr played a key role in the UK’s appeasement efforts, deemed in hindsight to be its ‘most skilful and dedicated publicist’.<sup>636</sup> The Round Table membership displayed a general affinity with the reasoning of appeasement. Many of them had suffered personal losses during World War I and as an organisation that had been committed to the cause of geopolitical stability for twenty-five years, they saw another global conflict as a personal failure of their lives’ work.<sup>637</sup> The most consequential expression of this affinity was probably Round Table member and former *Kindergartener* George Robinson’s efforts as editor of *The Times* to ensure that the paper represented German interests in a not too hostile manner.<sup>638</sup> Even a person like Amery, whose uncompromising stance towards any concessions of British territory led to a now

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<sup>634</sup> For a range of perspectives on LAI, see Michele L. Louro et al., *The League against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives* (2020) Leiden: Leiden University Press.

<sup>635</sup> The extent to which Kerr really believed that this strategy reflected the true nature of German politics is unclear. In hindsight, it is clear that Kerr misjudged the character and intentions of the German leadership, but also that he was quite ready to criticise them privately. See Butler, *Lord Lothian*, pp. 197, 212–17 & 36–37. Ultimately, Kerr’s dilemma reflects that of appeasement in general.

<sup>636</sup> Fox, *Five Sisters*, p. 434.

<sup>637</sup> H. V. Hodson, ‘The Round Table 1910–1981’ (October 1981) *The Round Table* 71:284, pp. 324–25. Another big contributor to the Round Table’s propensity for appeasement was its high proportion of alumni from All Souls College at Oxford, which was one of the British institutions most closely associated with appeasement. For a nuanced perspective on All Soul’s relationship with appeasement, see Sidney Aster (ed.), *Appeasement and All Souls: A Portrait with Documents* (2004) Cambridge: The Press Syndicate, p. 252.

<sup>638</sup> For more on Robinson’s appeasement work in *The Times*, see Bruce T. Riggs, ‘Geoffrey Dawson, Editor of *the Times* (London), and His Contribution to the Appeasement Movement’, (1993) University of North Texas.



famous conflict with Chamberlain—which resulted in one of parliament’s most well-known speeches—assumed a rather lenient position towards German expansion eastwards.<sup>639</sup>

Kerr acquired an outsized role for an unelected representative within the appeasement efforts, much like he had serving under Lloyd George, and he participated in direct diplomatic dealings with Hitler, himself.<sup>640</sup> This became noteworthy, as the journalist Claud Cockburn from *The Week* launched a story about what he called ‘The Cliveden Set’, accusing Kerr’s close friend Nancy Astor of hosting a cabalesque gathering of Nazi sympathisers at her estate Cliveden. The story was predominantly conjecture, but was hugely damaging to the people implicated, Kerr among them.<sup>641</sup> The story is indicative of the large swath of British society who found it questionable at the time to reduce the Nazis’ political atrocities to a failure of international governance, while it also speaks to Kerr’s renown in British public debate on issues of international politics.<sup>642</sup>

Kerr had been involved with the League of Nation since its inception and even if he never hesitated to criticise what he perceived as mistakes, his dedication to its mission never wavered. The repeated incapacity of the League to deescalate international tensions during the 1930s would, however, eventually break his conviction. There is a clear shift in his language following Italy’s attack on Ethiopia—at the time labelled ‘the Abyssinian Crisis’—and from late 1935 onwards, Kerr returns frequently to the concept of an international ‘crisis’. Whilst he had shown obvious concern for the state of international politics since the late 1920s, he had maintained an intrinsic optimism and deemed the risk for another global conflict small.<sup>643</sup> In other words, he was concerned with the inherent instability of the

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<sup>639</sup> Louis, *In the Name of God, Go!*, pp. 111–21.

<sup>640</sup> For the details of Kerr’s trip to Germany in 1935, see Butler, *Lord Lothian*, pp. 202–04.

<sup>641</sup> Another Round Table member, Robert Henry Brand, was associated as well, due to his marriage to Lady Astor’s sister. For more on the Cliveden Set Saga, see Fox, *Five Sisters*, pp. 421–39; Natalie Livingstone, *The Mistresses of Cliveden: Three Centuries of Scandal, Power and Intrigue* (2015) London: Hutchinsons, pp. 391–401; Adrian Fort, *Nancy: The Story of Lady Astor* (2012) London: Vintage Books, pp. 243–47; and Butler, *Lord Lothian*, pp. 250–51.

<sup>642</sup> The negative connotations to the concept of ‘appeasement’ are largely a product of the post-Munich period. The general instinct of preventing war at any cost was met with sympathy up to 1938. Excessive sympathy with the German cause however, bordering on what could be labelled ‘Nazi sympathy’, was not equally accepted and with rising political tensions came rising public agitation over issues like shifting loyalties and treason. For more on the intricate political conditions of anti-appeasement, see Neville Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s* (1971) Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 7–52.

<sup>643</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Future of the League?’ (December 1933) *The Round Table* 24:93, p. 1.

international order based on sovereign nation-states that had been established after 1919, but he did not fear its imminent collapse.

Another indication of this new outlook was that Kerr moved to a much shorter emplotment. Fundamentally, his thinking was still based in the far-reaching emplotment sketched out above, where contemporary geopolitical instability was seen as a symptom of the intrinsic inability to achieve international order among sovereign nation-states. By the beginning of the 1930s, Kerr had begun to increasingly stress the relevance of a more immediate emplotment, seeing the Great War as the moment when all previous models for international order were rendered outdated.<sup>644</sup> By 1935, Kerr's narrative focus had diminished even further and he described the 1930s as a new era of 'power politics', a time when international agreements were impossible.<sup>645</sup> As another *The Round Table* contributor put it: 'Haggling over the past does not solve our dangerous problems of the present.'<sup>646</sup>

After the League's failure to dissuade Italian military aggression in Ethiopia, Kerr's optimism vanished and in the following months he renounced the League as fundamentally incapable of contributing to international order.<sup>647</sup> Abandoning his hope for continental stability, Kerr—as Alfred Zimmern had also done—orientated himself towards the US, as he believed a transatlantic union or alliance would be the only realistic option for the Commonwealth to contain a pending European conflict.<sup>648</sup> While this meant momentarily giving upon his ambitions for a world union, this shift came only from changes in the circumstances, not in his utilisationist framework. He maintained that the empire's primary purpose was to further international order, even if rising global hostilities made it possible only 'on the high seas'.<sup>649</sup> Kerr's disillusionment with the League helped him to develop the Americanophilia he had first shown back in 1919 into the single-minded mission that made him 'more nearly in touch with American thought than any

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<sup>644</sup> Anonymous, 'The Political Foundation for Disarmament' (September 1931) *The Round Table* 21:84, pp. 714–18.

<sup>645</sup> Anonymous, 'Power Politics and the Imperial Conference' (March 1937) *The Round Table* 27:106, pp. 263–66.

<sup>646</sup> Anonymous, 'Freedom Stands Fast', pp. 670–71.

<sup>647</sup> Anonymous, 'Europe, the League and Abyssinia' (September 1935) *The Round Table* 25:100, p. 669; Anonymous, 'The League in Crisis' (December 1935) *The Round Table* 26:101, p. 16; and 'World Crisis' (June 1936) *The Round Table* 26:103, pp. 456–60. For Zimmern's ideological shift, see Baji, *The International Thought of Alfred Zimmern*, pp. 143–64.

<sup>648</sup> Anonymous, 'The Commonwealth and the Dictatorships', pp. 442–44.

<sup>649</sup> Anonymous, 'Power and Opinion in World Affairs' (December 1937) *The Round Table* 28:109, p. 18.

other man in British public life'. He was offered the ambassadorship in 1938.<sup>650</sup> Kerr found 'the ultimate balancing factor in the world' in the US, a conduit through which the imperial machinery could be utilised for increased geopolitical stability.<sup>651</sup>

## Federalism at a Crossroads

One of the most subversive aspects of the experience of the First World War was that it did not lend its survivors a straightforward narrative for its interpretation. Federalists, like other political groupings, found themselves pulled in two different directions. The magnitude of the war's symbolic significance meant that the power of the centrifugal forces set in motion in its aftermath would prove almost insurmountable for the federalist tradition. Initially their differences were minimal, but it soon became obvious that the two sides differed enough in their fundamental assumptions regarding the nature of international politics as to be advancing two separate political endeavours.

The object at the centre of the federalist split was the League of Nations. The League so obviously defined the terms for international relations that it rallied the support of federalists from all factions, even for completely different reasons. For preservationists such as Zimmern and Curtis, the League was seen as an institutionalisation of the traditional, state-based world order and a validation of the model of international cooperation that could be derived from the Commonwealth. Even if they acknowledged that the League may eventually lead to a world union, the prospect was seen as both distant enough and supplementary enough as to entail that the League was momentarily treated as a project parallel to the Commonwealth and compatible with continued British imperial assertion.

Likewise, the utilisationist perspective saw in the League the source of a world federation but understood this to be one of its critical and urgent functions. Of course, Kerr and Laski realised that a global union was no imminent prospect, but they saw the League as largely inconsequential if it did not take meaningful steps towards supranational power. While preservationists supported the League because it legitimised the *status quo*, utilisationists pinned their hopes to the League because of its potential to overthrow the same.

In hindsight, one of the most striking features of preservationists' thinking is how little the experience of war altered their fundamental assumptions. With

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<sup>650</sup> Butler, *Lord Lothian*, p. 258.

<sup>651</sup> Anonymous, 'Power Politics and the Imperial Conference', p. 273.

regards to the basic tenets of their arguments, they were able to largely maintain the preservationist outlook under which they had operated before the war. Though Grigg, Curtis, and Muir were able to resist the more dogmatic Germanophobia of someone like Kipling, they did remain convinced that the war had essentially been a conflict of values. While they could recognise the mistakes and wrongdoings of individuals on both sides, they were steadfast in their understanding of the war as ultimately a showdown between the value systems of liberal democracy and autocracy. They maintained this frame of reference throughout the 1930s, even as it began breaking down for the rest of the Round Table membership.

Approaching geopolitics as essentially a clash of values led Grigg and his like-minded to interpret the empire as a weapon in that conflict. Through the logic of the civilising mission, which Chakrabarty describes as ‘denial of coeval-ness’, Britain and Britishness were made to represent the most ideal form of liberal values on the world stage.<sup>652</sup> In the end, the value-driven interpretation of ‘the Great War’ did little but reinforce the preservationism that The Round Table had promoted before the war. The preservationists maintained that the most valuable qualities of the British Empire were the Western values inherent in English culture. They believed that the United Kingdom had a vital role to play in disseminating those values as a key member of the federation that would take the place of its empire.

What did change for preservationists was the message’s packaging. While they maintained that British democratic values were the empire’s most valuable asset and that Britain’s role beyond empire was an expansive preservationism where its principles were disseminated globally, they were keen to frame these ideas as a practical, adaptive task, and unwilling to define what that post-imperial state would look like in more detail. While the war of values did little to alter the preservationist narrative, it was obvious that the post-World War I international community could find no straightforward uncontested vision of global order to unite behind. If the former colonisers were to absorb the indignation of colonial nationalism, ambiguity would need to become a key strategy.

To the utilisationists, the First World War was not primarily a conflict between different positions, but fundamentally a breakdown of international relations. Their understanding of war as a collapse of order rather than a clash of values led their thinking beyond the national incentives for fighting to the underlying incentive structure. This attack on the ‘system’, however, meant that individual

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<sup>652</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000) Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp. 6–11.

nations were deprioritised, and English perspective was marginalised. The empire, as a result, was no longer primarily seen as a vehicle for English or Western values which ought to be preserved, but rather as a wellspring of institutional experience which ought to be utilised. Its greatest asset was not cultural but constitutional, as a blueprint for future incentive structures. Through its geopolitical elevation, Britain was seen as having an opportunity to play a critical role in world history after its transition from empire. It could disseminate its institutional maturity and usher in a new phase in international politics.

The utilisationism is described as ‘organic’ because its principles were derived from political experience and its objective was seen as the result of a long, organic process of reform. According to Kerr, such a subversion of *status quo* was not a simple policy decision but grew out of a response to the surrounding conditions and depended on the establishment of several necessary qualities—such as political maturity, bureaucratic infrastructure, and a shared sense of kinship. This contrasted with the radical utilisationism of Harold Laski, derived from abstract reasoning and championed as the optimal constitutional model in theory.

Organic utilisationism was utilisationist in that it depicted the British Empire in a new light—as the curator of international institutions rather than Western values. Still, it was based on essentially the same emplotment as Curtis had drawn up in 1910, understanding the present as the culmination of a stagist development of gradual improvement that harkened back to the ten commandments. Within the preservationist narrative this was interpreted as the evolution of civilisation, while the utilisationist narrative emphasised it as the evolution of political constitution.

It is somewhat counterintuitive that Kerr bases his radical program on a more traditional and extensive emplotment than Grigg. Kerr interpreted the war as a failure of the international order, the culmination of sovereign nation-states repeatedly failing to protect peace. Grigg, on the other hand, saw the Great War as an anomaly, attesting the invalidity of historical patterns as a source of insight. Grigg responded with decoupling his thinking from the throws of history and assuming an anti-theoretical, conservative position which only superficially altered his pre-war thinking. Kerr saw the First World War as a vindication of far-reaching emplotments and argued that the historical magnitude of the moment demanded a similar magnitude in action. His conviction on the trajectory of history gave him the confidence to stand by a program of such subversive change.

One aspect of the aforementioned story which should be addressed is the saliency of the utilisationist argument to the federalist mindset. The interwar

adoption of utilisationist tenets within The Round Table has often gone unappreciated. While The Round Table has generally been compared to its successor, Federal Union, as an unequivocally imperialist federalist organisation, this account reveals just how many members renounced many of the tenets of preservationism even in the interwar period. In some sense, this set the stage for the distinctly utilisationist Federal Union. While the organisations differed greatly in terms of the contexts of their inception, they shared in their initial understandings of the Second World War, blaming the inability of the international community to guarantee peace.

Utilisationists and preservationists during the interwar period shared the sense that the establishment of an international order would prove both long and arduous. As one Round Table member put it: the 'building up of an international mind is a slow, painful and terribly disappointing process.'<sup>653</sup> Milner's persistent influence on his *Kindergarten* made itself known as federalists still based their beliefs on an emplotment extending far into the future. Both preservationists and utilisationists embodied the combination of long-term planning and immediate labour, convinced of the gradual rather than revolutionary progress of history. This conviction would prove distinctive in the interwar period as federalists continued to stress that the establishment of a new international order ought to be a slow and considered process.

Upon studying the interwar Round Table, it becomes evident that it had an immense influence on contemporary imperial discourse. The fact that Kerr briefed the Prime Minister on foreign news, that Robinson left his mark on *The Times*, that Zimmern contributed key pieces to the League of Nation Charter, and that Leo Amery acted as colonial secretary speaks to the degree that interwar federalism had become entangled with British imperial policy and outlook. Additionally, the fact that Grigg governed Kenya, Muir was published history books, and Curtis founded Chatham House, while finishing his *Civitas Dei*, speaks to the impressive reach and pervasiveness of the ideological framework developed under Milner together with his *Kindergarten*. Milner's contribution to British imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century was central.

A final note that must be mentioned has to do with the shifting power dynamics of the time. Two of the key instances where these theories were explored most unconditionally were in front of American audiences. Both Grigg's *The Greatest Experiment in History* and *The Prevention of War* were lecture series delivered

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<sup>653</sup> Anonymous, 'The League of Nations', p. 324.

in the United States and defined by the caveats of federalists translating the British domestic experience to an international audience. The immediate reason for this was that the US had taken its place among the other intellectual powers of the Western world after the Great War. Together with the improved ease of international travel, this led to an upswing in fruitful, transatlantic, intellectual exchanges.<sup>654</sup> On a more fundamental level, this convergence is symbolic of the period's geopolitical shifts and how both Grigg and Kerr saw it as valuable to win the American audience over. Their downplaying of Britain's imperial pride and their concessions to American political interests are both signs of a time when true British autonomy had passed. The litmus test of any scheme for international order required American backing from this point onwards. It became clear to certain federalists that from now on, American benevolence, more than anything else, would determine the feasibility of any federalist project.

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<sup>654</sup> For more on the development of an Anglo-American academic discourse at the time, see Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century*, pp. 52–103. For another case of transatlantic idealism in the interwar period, see Bruno Hammell, *Two Quests for Unity: John Denny, R. G. Collingwood, and the Persistence of Idealism* (2021) Lund: Lund University.





# Radical Utilisation: Federal Union & the Second World War

Winston Churchill allegedly wept as the sun broke through the dark skies and the congregation sang the hopeful tones of ‘Onwards Christian Soldier’. It was a service held on Sunday 11 August 1941, on the third day of negotiations between Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt in Placentia Bay, Canada, where Churchill had travelled to secure American approval for the British war effort.<sup>655</sup> The day after, the two men signed what would become known as the Atlantic Charter, combining the American and British war aims as well as staking out common ground for the post-war international order.

While it is impossible to summarise the profound symbolic significance of the charter in the space allotted here, two aspects were particularly pertinent at the time of its announcement. First, it marked Britain’s definite and public acceptance of its geopolitical subordination to the US. By subscribing to principles of anti-colonialism such as the right to self-determination and the rejection of aggrandisement, the British conceded officially to a position of US supremacy, something that had been unofficially recognised for a long time. It was the moment when the British acknowledged that the baton had been passed, that the process that began during World War I had now resulted in the United States as the arbiter of international rule.<sup>656</sup> Secondly, the powerful image of Churchill compromising on his imperial ambitions in pursuit of something even more valuable: the defeat of the Third Reich. The British mission to civilise the world had become of secondary importance.<sup>657</sup>

For federalists, this period of renewed global conflict and imperial uncertainty led to a reinvigoration of their efforts. The repeated failure of the European powers to prevent global conflict caused the public interest in issues of in-

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<sup>655</sup> Harry Gratwick, *Penobscot Bay: People, Ports & Pastimes* (2009) Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, pp. 87–89.

<sup>656</sup> See Ernest Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*. (1976) London: H.M.S.O., pp. 5–6; and Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, pp. 280–82.

<sup>657</sup> See William Roger Louis, *Imperialism at Bay, 1941–1945: The United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire* (1977) Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 121–288.

ternational order to soar. The period also saw the subversion of the nature of British federalism through the establishment of a new federalist organisation: Federal Union. Through its radical program and immense popular support, FU would come to dominate the public perception of what it meant to be a British federalist.

The following chapter will begin by surveying the impact of the war on political thinking and will also cover the organisation, context, and foundational elements of the radical utilisationism of the early Federal Union. The rest of the chapter is structured around five thematic sections. The first looks at FU's role in the British war aims debate and the second at how the organisation understood the issue of war prevention. The third and fourth sections study different sorts of federalists, scrutinising the narratives of technocratic utilisationism and transformative utilisationism, respectively. The fifth thematic section examines Federal Union's understanding of the post-war global order and the final section summarises and suggests comprehensive conclusions.

## Mobilising an Empire in Decline

As soon as Britain entered into conflict with Germany on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939, the war's initial effect was to turn the tide for a British imperialism that had been on the decline for years. John Gallagher describes it as a 'revival' of the British Empire, as mother country, Dominions and dependencies suddenly rallied behind a common cause.<sup>658</sup> A military machinery that had previously been perceived as costly and ineffective, suddenly found a fitting purpose.<sup>659</sup> In the words of historian Ashley Jackson: 'Empire was most imperial when Britain engaged in global conflicts'.<sup>660</sup> Simultaneously, the beginning of the war sparked a debate on war aims, and many argued in favour of establishing an international order that could provide more security than the League of Nations.<sup>661</sup> The image of Hitler became a double-edged sword. For many, he simply represented the ultimate evil, the perfect legitimisation for an imperial army apparatus. On the other hand, others (particularly in the US) saw the idea of the Third Reich as the epitome of expansionism, additional proof that greed and imperialism were to blame for the

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<sup>658</sup> It is worth noting that not all Dominions joined in on the enthusiasm. Ireland did not support the British cause and stayed neutral, as was its right per the Westminster Declaration of 1931.

<sup>659</sup> John Gallagher, 'The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire', in Anil Seal (ed.), *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* (1982) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>660</sup> Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, p. 21.

<sup>661</sup> Bosco, *The First Attempt to Build a European Union*, pp. 135–39.

second global war in a generation. The imperial sceptics saw, globalism as a strategy to distance oneself from the imperialist tradition and allowed weakening imperial powers, such as Britain, to refocus its energy and at times even express hostility towards the existing empires.<sup>662</sup>



Figure 23. The British Commonwealth Together

The sharp contrast between mounting imperial criticism during the interwar period and the unapologetic and bombastic nature of the military advertisement during the war illustrates the Janus-faced position of the British Empire in the national and imperial self-understanding of the time. This print is from a series aimed at promoting Commonwealth solidarity that ran from 1942 to 1945.

‘The British Commonwealth of Nations ‘Together’ (1942). Held by the National Archive at College Park, USA, and part of the public domain via Wikimedia on the principle of the expiry of Crown copyright.

The fall of France on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1940 drastically redrew the map of the imperial debate. As the Battle of Britain ensued, proposals for international unions (many of them based on an Anglo-French core) quickly diminished and the British focus turned to their own war effort and to securing further support from the United

<sup>662</sup> Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939–1950*, pp. 6–8.

States. A clear problem for the British was the American disapproval of imperial practice and its adherence to the concept of national self-determination, which could be traced back to Woodrow Wilson.<sup>663</sup> The Atlantic Charter represented the painful compromises that Britain was forced to accept in order to secure American military support.

The charter would prove immensely influential, both for the future establishment of the United Nations, as well as for British imperial policy.<sup>664</sup> In the case of the latter, one of the most pertinent articles was no. III, which stated that all people had the right to self-determination. After its publication, Churchill insisted that he had agreed upon the article believing that it only pertained to Europe, while Roosevelt and many colonies immediately ascribed it global application. It is of course impossible to determine if His Majesty's Government (HMG) realised the extent of the compromise they had agreed upon, but the mere existence of article III is indicative of the weakness of the British position at the time.<sup>665</sup>

Consequently, the charter was an important step in the establishment of the United States as one of the post-war superpowers, and the guarantor of continued Western hegemony. Most people 'in the know' had had a sense of this since the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, but it was not until the beginning of 1942—about five months after the publication of the charter—that this hierarchy was acknowledged by the British Foreign Office.<sup>666</sup> In addition, while few people questioned the military dominance of the United States after the First World War, one could argue that the US did not assume the role of *the* leading military and economic power until after the Second World War. Historian David Reynolds has argued that while Britain can be considered the leader of the global order from the mid-1800s until the end of World War I, that position should be considered vacant during the *interbellum* period. It was not until after 1945 that the US seriously took it upon itself to guarantee both political stability, global access to a free market, and the availability of investment and crisis capital.<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> For more on Wilson's complex relationship to the concept, see Michla Pomerance, 'The United States and Self-Determination: Perspectives on the Wilsonian Conception' (1976) *American Journal of International Law* 70:1.

<sup>664</sup> Townsend Hoopes, *FDR and the Creation of the U.N.* (1997) New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, pp. 26–54.

<sup>665</sup> Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, pp. 121–33 & 47–58. For more on the actual negotiations surrounding article III, see Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 259.

<sup>666</sup> Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 5–6. The FO actually considered Britain number three in the world, after both the US and the USSR.

<sup>667</sup> Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, pp. 280–82.

During the third year of the war, the imperial enthusiasm outside of the mother country began to wane. By March 1942, Japan had invaded large parts of South-Eastern Asia, perhaps most significantly British Malaya and Singapore. Jackson called it ‘the most dramatic loss in British imperial history since Yorktown in 1782’.<sup>668</sup> The failure of the British army to defend these colonies, its many times brutal methods in attempting to do so, and the fact that these remained under Japanese control until the end of the war, all fuelled anti-imperialist sentiments throughout the British Empire. Mid-war UK, for example, saw a substantial, public debate on trusteeships.<sup>669</sup> The Dominions also took part in this debate and secured, as they had during World War I, assurances towards increased autonomy.<sup>670</sup> Thus, what had begun as a promising injection of enthusiasm into the imperial project, drastically reverted with military setbacks and war aim compromises. What had been perceived as a threat that could prove the relevance of the imperial military had instead revealed its incapacity to maintain international order by its own accord

## Federal Union

If the Imperial Federation League and The Round Table were products of gradual experiences, built up over years, then Federal Union was born in the uproar of a moment. That moment took place on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1938, when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain ensured the British people that he had secured ‘peace in our time’ after returning from Munich. Among the huge number of disappointed critics was Derek Rawnsley, a London print shop owner who saw the Munich conference an exercise in British passivity and proof of the politicians’ aversion to addressing the true causes of war.<sup>671</sup> He and a couple of friends had been meeting regularly for the previous few months, discussing the prevention of war in more general terms, but after September 30<sup>th</sup>, their discussions changed in character. Together with one of these friends, Charles Kimber, Rawnsley plotted for a more

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<sup>668</sup> Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, p. 406.

<sup>669</sup> Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, pp. 134–46.

<sup>670</sup> Keith Jeffrey, ‘The Second World War’, in Judith M. Brown & W. M. Roger Louis (eds.), *The Twentieth Century* (1999) Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 322.

<sup>671</sup> Derek Rawnsley was the grandson of Canon Rawnsley—who had founded the National Trust together with Octavia Hill—and from Eton to Oxford he was always known for his ‘can-do’ attitude. In 1938, he was working with his print shop business in Gordon Square, London, but accounts from the time suggest that the business failed to make use of his ‘abounding energy’, leaving him restless and in search of new opportunities. Richard Mayne & John Pinder, *Federal Union: The Pioneers: A History of Federal Union* (1990) New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 6.

practical application of their ideas.<sup>672</sup> He soon came up with the name Pax Union, which would eventually grow into Federal Union.<sup>673</sup>

Early on, Rawnsley and his friends had identified that the lack of jurisdiction to discourage nation-states from acting solely in their own interests was the greatest threat to international order. It was Patrick Ransome—a barrister and a former student of Harold Laski's—who would refine their argument into something recognisably federalist.<sup>674</sup> They produced a manifesto, simply called *Federal Union*, in January 1939. With the help of *Who's Who?*, they sent out hundreds of letters to influential people within politics and academia, an effort that resulted in laying crucial groundwork for the organisation's initial growth.<sup>675</sup>

Rawnsley's friends—except for the more well-off Kimber—came from the lower middle class, so they represented something in stark contrast to their federalist predecessors. Federalist organisations in Britain up to that point had been firmly cemented in the upper classes, established by well-connected people who together with their socially elevated surroundings formed the core of the organisation. Federal Union's founders did not have that luxury and the bold and straightforward marketing through these letters proved invaluable in connecting the organisation to people of serious influence. Both Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr (who had now taken up the position as US ambassador) quickly expressed interest and aided 'the three young men' with much advice.<sup>676</sup> Other notable recruitments

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<sup>672</sup> Kimber came from a conservative background and was heir to his father's title as baron. However, he decided to break with his background and when Rawnsley approached him he was 26 years old, a conscientious objector and described himself as a 'Macmillanite' (Harold Macmillan openly opposed the Tory whip and had just published his book *The Middle Way*), *ibid.*. See also Harold Macmillan, *The Middle Way* (1938) London: Macmillan. Later, Kimber's revolt would even take him into Labour politics, Barbara Wootton, *In a World I Never Made: Autobiographical Reflections* (1967) London: Allen & Unwin, p. 98.

<sup>673</sup> According to historians Richard Mayne and John Pinder, the name was proposed by Rawnsley as a way of really pressing the two most important, and least divisive issues of a possible movement: peace and unity. Latin was thought to give the name a more global, less British, touch. Mayne & Pinder, *The Pioneers*, p. 7.

<sup>674</sup> Ransome was at the time in his thirties, having studied both international law at Cambridge and under Harold Laski at LSE. He used a wheelchair and had since he was a child but had developed 'a fine brain and was a delightful conversationalist', Kimber recalls. Charles Kimber, 'Foreword', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Towards the United States of Europe* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press, p. 2. Wootton describes him as 'the most intellectually sophisticated, a natural academic with an inexhaustible capacity for discussion and argument.' Wootton, *In a World I Never Made*, p. 97.

<sup>675</sup> Kimber, 'Foreword', pp. 2–4.

<sup>676</sup> Bosco, 'Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union Movement (1938–40)'. Kimber and Rawnsley, avid appeasement critics, definitely knew of the story, and even if it was mostly

included the economist William Beveridge, sociologist Barbara Wootton, journalist Wickham Steed, the Archbishop of York William Temple, economist Lionel Robbins, philosopher C. E. M. Joad, Professor of international relations Norman Bentwich, prominent biologist and later UNESCO-founder Julian Huxley, professor of international history Arnold J. Toynbee, novelist and broadcaster J. B. Priestley, science-fiction author Olaf Stapledon, and economist F. A. Hayek.<sup>677</sup> The striking prominence of these names, and their sheer volume, speaks to the widespread appetite for supranational politics at the time. It also attests to the extensive entanglement of British federalism with many different areas of British society.

As such, in its early days, the organisation was of a radically different character than its predecessors. While the Imperial Federation League had also represented a broad church, it was still held together by a common imperialist conviction, and The Round Table was characterised by its close-knit, intellectually aligned core. FU's above-mentioned names of prominence were not only colourful and opinionated individuals—they represented almost the entire political spectrum and they had vastly different ideas on the character of the future union. In this sense, the union lacked some of the ideological common ground that its predecessors had enjoyed. The central organisation managed the ideological diversity through a strategy of constructive ambiguity, careful to phrase its statements to include rather than exclude potential federalists on the fringe.<sup>678</sup>

In the organisation's guidelines, published in February 1940, it declared that it sought 'the federation of free people under common government', which entailed a number of nations surrendering their jurisdiction at least within foreign policy, defence, communication, migration, and currency. A future federation was argued to secure peace, economic stability, and civil rights within the area and was seen as the first step towards a world federation.<sup>679</sup> To Federal Unions members, the outbreak of a second world war had demonstrated the ineffectiveness and volatility of international cooperation, and the need for supranational organisation to guarantee global stability.

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fiction, there is no denying Kerr's avid support for appeasement. Overall, the fact that Kimber still approached him tells us of the tremendous respect he enjoyed within federalist circles.

<sup>677</sup> Mayne & Pinder, *The Pioneers*, pp. 11, 20.

<sup>678</sup> I conducted a more systematic study of the vagueness of the early Federal Union in my master's thesis, see Ramberg, *Vague but Simple to Grasp. A Study of the Intellectual Production of Federal Union 1938–1945* (2015) University of Gothenburg: Master's Thesis.

<sup>679</sup> Cited in Mayne & Pinder, *The Pioneers*, p. 24.

The central emplotment of Federal Union thinking was structured around the continued failure of the nation-state to match the advancement in domestic governance on the international stage. Philosopher C. E. M. Joad stated explicitly what many members believed implicitly when he concluded that the ‘process which we know as evolution advances by increasing the size, not of the cell or the individual, but by the *unit of organisation*.’<sup>680</sup> The organisation had broken with most of the civilising mission’s hierarchical assumptions of Western superiority but maintained teleological support as to not submit to complete relativism. While not as front-and-centre as it was for its predecessors, the Federal Union emplotment presented history as a process of ever-growing units of organisations through the constantly refined principles of coexistence, as inevitably ‘men’s lives were bound to be more and more regulated by authority.’<sup>681</sup> Politics, law, and science were seen as incrementally more efficient, more purposeful, and thus more permissive of fairer organisation of a growing number of individuals.

In this expansive emplotment—its exact extent was not perceived as relevant—the two world wars were seen as confirmation that the realm of international politics had been exempt from this general trend. Without exploring the exact mechanisms of why, Federal Union members identified the nation-state as having maintained a self-serving mode of conduct in international affairs. The failure to establish international institutions corresponding to the legal and governmental bureaucracy of the domestic nation-state had allowed nationalist interests to cause the international community great hardship, best exemplified by the outbreak of two world wars. Individual nation-states internationally, much like individual citizens domestically, needed a governmental and legal framework to protect them from other each other as well as their own worst impulses. Most members saw the establishment of this framework through an international federation as the obvious next step in the constitutional history of mankind.

The organisation guidelines included no reference to the British Empire nor the British experience and represented the first organisational manifestation of what I call the radical utilisationist narrative, as it argued (by extension) that the United Kingdom could contribute meaningfully to a future world federation solely in the form of institutions and infrastructure, and not with any values specific to national culture. Kerr’s 1920s utilisationism had been organic through its basis in the experience of conducting international politics, leading him to envision a re-

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<sup>680</sup> Cyril Joad, ‘The Philosophy of Federal Union’, in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Studies in Federal Planning* (1943) London: Macmillan & Co., p. 48.

<sup>681</sup> Olaf Stapledon, *Darkness and the Light* (1942) Westport: Hyperion Press, Inc., p. 6.



formative process of transformation. Federal Union based its radical notion of utilisationism on a theoretical understanding of the ideal society, which led them to adopt a narrative of revolutionary transformation. In this sense, their thinking was modelled on the radical utilisationist Harold Laski, under whom Ransome had studied before the war.

The number of consequential decisions made by national governments mobilised for war and the seemingly unending funds suddenly made available for their implementation infused many FU members with the hope that if the government could only be persuaded, federalisation would prove rather straightforward. Looking towards the present and future, the Union broke completely with Milner's infinite patience, arguing that the moment demanded urgency, capitalising on the desperation of public opinion before the inevitable return of post-war complacency.

This break with the forward-looking aspects of the organic utilisationist emplotment was radical in the sense that it was an unconditional rejection of the pre-war world order, and consequently also of the United Kingdom's contributions to it. Since English exceptionalism in federalist thought had always been based on the nation's historic achievements, this reckoning with *Pax Britannica* and the failure of the British Empire as a force for geopolitical stability, meant a dismissal of the values that previous federalists believed had set the English apart. According to Federal Union members, the United Kingdom had no central role to play in the establishment of a global union aside from being an instigator, setting the wheels in motion.

Federal Union proposed a federation with an international character, without any ambition to preserve any particular elements of English culture. In fact, the organisation's baseline showed no indication of which countries the first steps toward federation should include or what political character the result should strive for. There was of course good reason for this. The leadership did not wish to commit to a vision that would exclude other possible avenues, but the deliberate vagueness of the guidelines was also telling of a fundamental diversity of opinions within the core of the organisation.<sup>682</sup> Central members of the organisation contested this 'vagueness strategy' early on, but there was no single position that could attract a healthy majority of the movement, which was a recurring trait of

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<sup>682</sup> For more on the organisation's usage of deliberate vagueness, see Ramberg, *Vague but Simple to Grasp*.

British federalism.<sup>683</sup> Federal Union established itself as an organisation of experienced, influential, and opinionated individuals who were recruited early. This ensured the competence of the organisation's work, but also its divergence. However, certain common themes can be identified.

Paradoxically, accounts of Federal Union's ideas often begin with a book not written by any of its members. In 1939, the American journalist Clarence K. Streit published his *Union Now: A Proposal for an Atlantic Federal Union of the Free*, a massive bestseller and an almost instant classic within British federalist literature.<sup>684</sup> In it, Streit proposed a union of fifteen nations, chosen for their political and economic affinity: the US, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Belgium, Finland, Denmark, Canada, Ireland, Holland, New Zealand, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, and the Union of South Africa.

Streit's main argument was that the precursory nucleus of a global federation ought to be based on democracies. He believed that democracies represented the politically advanced while autocracies lacked the political infrastructure to take part in a project of this scale, as peoples 'that accept dictatorships must be classified, politically, among the immature, or retarded.'<sup>685</sup> Furthermore, he argued that these fifteen democracies in particular had a lot in common—a claim that he strengthened by looking at everything from population to international trade patterns to domestic nickel production—which would serve as the optimal fertile ground for unity. Finally, he pointed out the shared power such a common core would wield, arguing that they would constitute the global hegemon even before a true world union had time to be established.<sup>686</sup>

Union Now attracted substantial attention in Britain and many of Federal Union's earliest recruits sought out the organisation believing it was synonymous with Streit's vision. Several central members sympathised with his ideas. The first published work immediately connected to the organisation, *The Case for Federal*

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<sup>683</sup> This contention became apparent as early as September 1939, at a conference held at South Leigh College, Oxford. Prominent members such as Kimber and Beveridge supported the notion of adopting not only aims, but also a policy for the organisation, 'to place the "now" in "Union now" precisely.' Others, such as Wickham Steed and Principal of South Leigh College Melville Channing-Pearce, argued that it was too risky considering the divided nature of the membership, Anonymous (23–24 September 1939) 'Report of the Conference held at the College, South Leigh', Federal Trust B/1/1.

<sup>684</sup> Mayne & Pinder, *The Pioneers*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>685</sup> Clarence K. Streit, *Union Now: A Proposal for an Atlantic Federal Union for the Free* (1949) [1938] New York: Harper & Brothers, pp. 63–64.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62–84. For more on the impact of *Union Now* in America, see Hoopes, *Fdr and the Creation of the Un*, p. 20.

Union, for instance, was incredibly indebted to Streit's book. Its author, William B. Curry, borrowed several of Streit's graphs to strengthen his argument and he even proposed Streit's fifteen nations as the union's starting point.<sup>687</sup> Kerr was also a big supporter of Streit's book and urged the organisation's founders to gather inspiration from it.<sup>688</sup> As such, Streit's ideas almost immediately became part of Federal Union canon. Summaries of his book were sent out to potential members, and he was often referred to at public and internal meetings.<sup>689</sup>

One of Streit's most important contributions to the federalist movement was his indebtedness to the Democratic Peace Theory (DPT). Based on ideas attributed to Immanuel Kant and his *Zum ewigen Freiden (Perpetual Peace)*, the DPT posits that democracies, for a number of reasons, should be much less prone to wage war than their autocratic counterparts.<sup>690</sup> Of particular importance to this study, Kant expressed the hope that federation could serve as a constitutional model.<sup>691</sup> While most Federal Union members seemed to accept this notion, and several scholars acknowledge Kant's influence on the federalist tradition, Federal Union members themselves never commented on this connection.<sup>692</sup> The reason for this omission is probably that FU was an organisation supremely concerned with the present and the future, rather than the past. In the rare cases when they did reflect on their own history, they preferred a genealogy of historic rather than theoretical federations.<sup>693</sup>

Streit's proposal of fifteen states was not the only proposed area for a future federation within Federal Union. Many members, for example, favoured an Anglo-American union as the ideal starting point for the organisation, an opportunity that even Federal Union Research Institute (FURI) deemed increasingly likely in

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<sup>687</sup> William Burnlee Curry, *The Case for Federal Union* (1940) Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd..

<sup>688</sup> Bosco, 'Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union Movement (1938–40)', pp. 478–79.

<sup>689</sup> Anonymous (29 September 1939) 'Inter-democracy Federal Union', Federal Trust B/1/1. See Kimber's contributions to Anonymous, 'Report of the Conference held at the College, South Leigh'.

<sup>690</sup> For an introduction to Democratic Peace Theory, see Steven W. Hook (ed.), *Democratic Peace in Theory and Practice* (2010) Kent: Kent State University Press.

<sup>691</sup> Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500–c. 1800* (1995) New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 178–200.

<sup>692</sup> See James Tully, 'The Kantian Idea of Europe: Critical and Cosmopolitan Perspectives', in Anthony Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (2002) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Joseph Preston Baratta, *The Politics of World Federation: United Nations, Un Reform, Atomic Control* (2004) Connecticut: Praeger, pp. 32–33.

<sup>693</sup> See Duncan Wilson, 'The History of Federalism', in Melville Channing-Pearce (ed.), *Federal Union: A Symposium* (1940) London: Jonathan Cape.

1941.<sup>694</sup> George Catlin (not to be confused with the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century painter) argued that the union must begin with the UK and the US, but then quickly recruit other powerful military powers, principally China and the USSR. <sup>695</sup> Labour politician Konni Zilliacus Jr. suggested a similar idea, arguing that any successful union must include the same Big Four, and should have its cooperation facilitated by a future UN.<sup>696</sup> This position was also reiterated in the organisation's peace aim report of 1942.<sup>697</sup> Worth noting is that 'The 'Four Power Plan' was nothing unique to FU, and was in fact the strategy promoted by the Foreign Office as soon as American sympathy had been ensured through the Atlantic Charter—although they naturally envisioned an international cooperation rather than a supranational union.<sup>698</sup>

Amidst this striking variety, however, there was almost complete consensus within the organisation that the Commonwealth did not present itself as a basis upon which to build a future union. That is not to say that Federal Union argued for the immediate dissolution of the empire. Colonial administrator Frederick Lugard, for example, repeatedly wrote about this issue and argued that Britain must maintain control over its dependencies, even within the framework of a federal union.<sup>699</sup> Beveridge argued strongly that the people of the dependencies could not

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<sup>694</sup> Anonymous, 'Report of a Conference on Anglo-American Relations', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Towards the United States of Europe: Studies on the Making of the European Constitution* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press. Among the most notable examples of transatlanticism were Lyndia Grier, 'Union with USA, a Necessity: Let Us Burn Our Boats' (1939) *Federal Union News*: 7; and Barbara Wootton, 'Anglo-American Union?' (19 July 1941) *Federal Union News*: 69, pp. 1–2. Kerr should also be mentioned as one of transatlanticism's most ardent champions, even if he did not find much time to write during this period.

<sup>695</sup> George Catlin, 'Anglo-American Union as the Nucleus for World Federation', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Studies in Federal Planning* (1943) London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., pp. 303–11.

<sup>696</sup> Konni Zilliacus, 'World Government and World Peace', in *ibid.*, pp. 337–55. Even if the United Nations was not founded until 1945, the term was used frequently as soon as the Allied Forces had signed the Declaration of the United Nations in 1942, stating their shared vision for the international post-war order. For more on the significance of the 1942 declaration for the future UN, see Hoopes, *FDR and the Creation of the UN*, pp. 45–51.

<sup>697</sup> Charles Kimber, 'Peace Aim—War Weapon' (June 1942) *Federal Union News*: 88, pp. 6–9.

<sup>698</sup> Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 1–17.

<sup>699</sup> See Lord Lugard, 'Federal Union and the Colonies', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Studies in Federal Planning* (1943) London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd.; Lord Lugard, 'The Relations of Federal Union to the Colonies', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Towards the United States of Europe* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press; and Lord Lugard, 'Memorandum on the Relations of a Federal Union with the Non-Self-Governing Dependencies', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Towards the United States of Europe* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press.



Figure 24. Top Hat

While Europe was geographically closer to the United Kingdom than the US, the States had a massive cultural influence over 1940s Britain. In order to understand Federal Union members' hesitation when it came to deciding between a European and an Anglo-American union, a contributing factor was that American music, for example, had dominated the British popular charts throughout the interwar era. The music was further pro-moted by musical films such as 1935's *Top Hat*, which familiarised the British public with a visual and musical mode of expression that was distinctly American.<sup>700</sup>

Movie poster for *Top Hat* (1935) by RKO Radio Pictures. Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by MonkeyBBGB.

<sup>700</sup> James J. Nott, *Music for the People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain* (2002) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 207–16.

be transferred from their current colonial control without their consent.<sup>701</sup> There were also those, like Norman Bentwich, who argued that a federation must at least be open to rethink the concept of national colonial control, '[w]e cannot have a federal omelette without breaking a few national eggs.'<sup>702</sup> The general position, however, was that this was an issue of secondary importance. It should not be allowed to derail the organisation's main mission, and the organisation tended to assume a conventional stance on colonial issues.<sup>703</sup> As such, the organisation distanced itself from imperialist enthusiasm, but refrained from questioning colonial practice as such. Likewise, most of its members assumed a global outlook without the language of Western superiority, even if its approach to global politics was limited to the 'self-referential character' of the European international order.<sup>704</sup> Whereas the United Kingdom's involvement in European colonialism had played an integral part in federalism up to this point, Federal Union represents the turning point when the empire became seen as an issue rather than an asset.<sup>705</sup>

In this regard, Federal Union truly marked 'the end of imperial federalism', bringing federalism 'from a system to preserve the imperial order to a tool of socioeconomic reform.'<sup>706</sup> This shift marked the logical endpoint of the utilitarian narrative that Kerr had begun exploring in 1923. The conviction that the greatest threat to human welfare was the risk of global conflict rather than the tyranny of uncivilised government had grown into a majority position with The Round Table during the interwar period. From 1938, the position was adopted and radicalised by Federal Union. The incremental nature of this transition explains how individuals such as Curtis and Kerr—whose previous careers had been so intimately associated with the British imperial project—could contribute so significantly to an ideology hostile to the tenets of imperialism.<sup>707</sup>

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<sup>701</sup> William Beveridge, 'Peace by Federation' (1940) London, pp. 16–19.

<sup>702</sup> Norman Bentwich, 'The Colonial Problem and the Federal Solution', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Studies in Federal Planning* (1943) London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd.

<sup>703</sup> See, for example, the discussion of the two Colonial Conferences arranged by FURI, in January and May 1940, in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Towards the United States of Europe: Studies on the Making of the European Constitution* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press, p. 174–92.

<sup>704</sup> Howard Leroy Malchow, *History and International Relations: From the Ancient World to the 21st Century* (2016) London: Bloomsbury, p. 232.

<sup>705</sup> Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, p. 121.

<sup>706</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101. The quote at the end of imperial federation comes from one of the chapter titles in the same book, *ibid.*, pp. 100–29.

<sup>707</sup> An argument could be made that a more consequential division within the organisation would be between Europeanists and Transatlanticists. See Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History*, p. 107. The organisation could also be understood in terms of a radical break with the federalism of its

Regardless of the federalist ideology's exact compound that the individual member saw as the FU program, its strategy clearly worked. In July 1939, Federal Union boasted over 2000 members; by 1941 this number had increased to over 10 000 members and 253 local branches.<sup>708</sup> The organisation's explosive growth was owed to attracting a large swath of the general public, something previous organisations had demonstrated little interest in. This was, of course, largely due to changes in the public understanding of democratic participation during the Edwardian and interwar periods, but also due to the immediacy of the war and the fact that the organisation addressed an issue of direct relevance to most of the British public.<sup>709</sup> This also captivated the interest of the mass media, with which Federal Union had considerable success, peaking at 191 press appearances in a single week.<sup>710</sup>

The democratisation of British politics in the interwar period led the organisation to assume quite a different character from its predecessors. While still being a proper pressure group—'which seeks as one of its functions to influence the formulation and implementation of public policy'—it shared many characteristics with a social movement as well: 'populated by individuals sharing collective goals and collective identity who engage in disruptive collective action.'<sup>711</sup> One can question how disruptive, or indeed collective, the organisation's actions were, but its foundation as a collective with the common enemy in nationalism—and hence a collective identity of internationalism—definitely helped radicalise its claims. Federal Union would end up exponentially larger than any of its predecessors, representing a proper progressive movement.

Much of Federal Union activity can be summed up as 'proto think-tank', with knowledgeable members producing a significant number of tracts on federalist issues related to their expertise.<sup>712</sup> Most of these were later published in *Studies in Federal Planning*, as well as the slightly more speculative *Federal Union: A Symp-*

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predecessors, see Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, pp. 139–48; and Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History*, pp. 105–22.

<sup>708</sup> Mayne & Pinder, *The Pioneers*, pp. 15–16, 25.

<sup>709</sup> For an overview of the transformation of British party politics in the interwar era, see Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change, 1900–1967* (1970) Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 192–208.

<sup>710</sup> Anonymous (8 December 1939) 'Press and Publicity Material', Federal Trust B/5/1.

<sup>711</sup> Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest*, p. 2 & 14.

<sup>712</sup> The notion of a proto-think tank was coined by Rosenboim in 'Barbara Wootton, Friedrich Hayek and the Debate on Democratic Federalism in the 1940s', p. 895.

*asium*.<sup>713</sup> Federal Union also ran two clubs for discussion and debate, as well as a small bookshop. It also organised many public lectures all over England, some of which



Figure 24 & 25 A New Logo & Federal Union Stamps

The radicalism of the Federal Union's utilitarianism is also evident in how the organisation presented itself outwardly. While both of its predecessors had used visual opportunities to further stress their imperial association, the FU took every opportunity to present itself as a continental or global organisation. To the left is a logo which was never finalised, and to the right are stamps that came in seven different colours, created in 1939. The logo's striking similarity to the *Sonnenkreuz* used as the symbol for the Paneuropean Union seems very unlikely to have been a coincidence. At the same time, the added words suggest an attempt to emphasise the political nature of the union, in contrast with the Paneuropean symbol, which sought to be the ultimate representation of European culture: 'Christian ethics and heathen beauty; inter-national humanity and modern enlightenment; heart and spirit; Man and cosmos.'<sup>714</sup> The stamps are designed to reflect the global scale of the organisation's ambitions and it is of course noteworthy that the maps, unlike the default, are not centred on the United Kingdom.

The logo which was circulated in 1939 but never finalised. It can be found in a letter from Melville Channing Pearce to Lionel Curtis on November 1, held at London School of Economics, Federal Trust papers, B/1/1. The Stamps are from 8 December 1939 and part of the organisation's promotional material held at London School of Economics,, Federal Trust Papers, B/5/1.

<sup>713</sup> Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Studies in Federal Planning* (1943) London: Lothian Foundation; and Melville Channing-Pearce (ed.), *Federal Union: A Symposium* (1940) London: Jonathan Cape. The latter volume seems to have been slightly controversial within the organisation, as Beveridge declined to contribute, for example, see Anonymous (14 November 1939) 'Channing-Pearce to Beveridge', Federal Trust B/1/1.

<sup>714</sup> Original: *christliche Ethik und heidnische Schönheit; internationale Humanität und modern Aufklärung; Herz und Geist; Mensch und Kosmos*, from Richard Nicholas Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Kampf um Panuropa: Aus dem 1. Jahrgang von Panuropa* (1925) Vienna: Panuropa-Verlag, p. 36.





Figure 27. FUN 37

One of the first FUN front pieces that attempted to imitate an ordinary newspaper. Many early issues were truly ‘news sheets’, meaning pocket-sized and included only a single article, some reports from the branches, and ads for their events and books. From issue 36 onward they were more often printed with as broadsheets (c. A3) and included 1–3 articles, reports from the branches, ads and a few letters to the editor.<sup>715</sup>

Federal Union News Front Piece (8 June 1940). The issue can be found at the London School of Economics, Federal Trust Papers, F/8/1

attracted media attention.<sup>716</sup> From 29 September 1939, the organisation published a newspaper every Friday called *Federal Union News (FUN)*, which was edited by Kimber and printed to a circulation of about 3000. A month later, Federal Union Research Institute was established to research and discuss federal matters in a more scientific context.<sup>717</sup>

It is not clear where the idea of an associated research centre originated from. Previous federalist organisations lacked this component, as did other similar organisations from the time period, such as the League of Nations Union and the Peace Pledge Union.<sup>718</sup> Perhaps Curtis' interwar project, the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House), was the organisation that was most similar to FURI, as it was also a research centre and forum for international ideas. It was not open to public membership and had close ties to HMG.<sup>719</sup> It seems like the idea of a research institute came from William Beveridge and his time spent at the London School of Economics (LSE).<sup>720</sup> This notion is reinforced by the fact that the FURI would eventually cooperate and align itself with academic institutions such as LSE, the Institute of International Relations in Geneva, and the Centre d'Études de Politique Étrangère in Paris, rather than with political associations.<sup>721</sup>

FURI acted as an academic wing of FU, lending the organisation a sense of evidence-based and impartial legitimacy. Historian Ann Oakley describes FURI as something that gave 'force and conviction' to the ideas of the organisation.<sup>722</sup> In many ways, FURI acted as the public arm of the organisation, aiming its research and lectures directly at the public. While the Union should be understood as a

<sup>716</sup> For example, a meeting held at Queen's Hall, London on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 1940, was covered in the Daily Sketch with a piece on Kimber, see Anonymous (25 February 1940) 'This Young Man Plans World United States', Federal Trust B/5/2.

<sup>717</sup> Andrea Bosco, 'Introduction', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Towards the United States of Europe* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press, p. 35. The first two years of FURI activity was described in a publication from 1991 under this somewhat biased title *Towards the United States of Europe*. Ransome's editing from August 1940 was preserved, with only a preface added by Kimber and an introduction by Bosco.

<sup>718</sup> See Chris Cook, *A Guide to the Archives of Selected Organisations and Societies* (1975) London: Macmillan, p. 144; and Roger S. Powers & William B. Vogeley, *Protest, Power, and Change: An Encyclopedia of Nonviolent Action from Act-up to Women's Suffrage* (1997) London: Routledge, pp. 406–07 respectively.

<sup>719</sup> Some members saw this as a perk for Federal Union, rendering its members free to speak their mind. Agriculturalist Robert Greig, for example, accused Chatham House of having 'sold itself for filthy lucre to the Government', Robert Greig (7 January 1940) 'Greig to Beveridge', Federal Trust B/1/1, fol. 2.

<sup>720</sup> See Patrick Ransome, 'Editorial Note', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Towards the United States of Europe* (1991) London: Lothian Foundation Press, p. 47; and Kimber, 'Foreword', p. 4.

<sup>721</sup> Bosco, 'Introduction', p. 35.

<sup>722</sup> Oakley, *A Critical Woman*, p. 150.

secondary pressure group, spending most of its efforts on clubs, its bookshop, and newspaper, which were meant to spark internal discussions, FURI acted as a primary pressure ‘phalanx’, mainly seeking to influence public opinion and political policy.<sup>723</sup> Additionally, the resources of FURI must have been an important factor in attracting the efforts and time of intellectuals such as Beveridge, Wootton, and Hayek.

As the organisation lacked personal funding its predecessors had possessed, most of FU funding came from membership fees, book and newspaper revenue, a few loans from particularly well-off members, and at times of crisis, some more innovative means—such as a small ice cream business in the summer of 1942.<sup>724</sup>

Having given an account both of the WWII political context and Federal Union’s organisational structure, the following section will examine how the organisation acted within, and came to alter, the context of the British war objectives debate in the early years of the war.

## The Aims of War

Viewed within their context, it is clear that Federal Union distinguished itself by the in-depth and precise nature of its arguments, even if the essence of their ideas was nothing new. As the 1930s drew to a close and the threat of war in Europe became imminent, a plethora of ideas emerged as to how society should be reformed. The goal was not only to avoid the impending war, but to eradicate the possibility of war completely.<sup>725</sup> Rosenboim has noted that the usage of the concept ‘World order’ skyrocketed during the 1940s, and as early as 1937, author Aldous Huxley complained that a ‘flood of literature on social planning pours continually from the presses’.<sup>726</sup> For several years, the debate on war aims dominated British political discourse and many pushed for a drastic reconfiguration of the British and European societies in light of the second global conflict within a generation.

The debate on war aims underwent two stages. For the first ten months of the war, a discussion was held about the aims of international politics, primarily as an

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<sup>723</sup> Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest*, pp. 15–17.

<sup>724</sup> Mayne & Pinder, *The Pioneers*, pp. 15–18 & 29–32.

<sup>725</sup> See, for example, Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (1975) London: Jonathan Cape, pp. 123–25; and Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (1992) London: Routledge, p. 27.

<sup>726</sup> Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (1938) London: Chatto & Windus, p. 31. Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, p. 2.

attempt to find a practical replacement for the League of Nations. One of the most prominent proposals, which was brought up in the House of Commons several times, was the idea of an Anglo-French Union.<sup>727</sup> When the Blitz began, however, the debate entered its second stage, focussing more on the domestic war aim: remaking Britain into a fair and prosperous society worth fighting for.<sup>728</sup>

Opponents of the war aims debate—predominantly conservatives—lamented the debate, arguing that the focus should remain on the simple task of defeating Germany, and blaming the other side for using the war for their own political gain. Churchill, for example, argued that his only war objective was victory.<sup>729</sup> Tory MP for Norwich, Henry Strauss, asked provocatively if anyone would also consider stopping a police officer or a firefighter in action to force him or her to reflect on the possibility of reforming the conditions of their respective missions.<sup>730</sup>

Federal Union, however, persevered in their effort to reduce focus on the war at hand, and to instead address the concept of war in general. FU argued that in 1919, the problem was that too much attention had been focussed on Germany's wrongdoings and the details of that conflict, whereas self-scrutiny on the general mechanics of war could have helped prevent the next global conflict. In a letter to agriculturalist Robert Greig in 1940, Beveridge urged Federal Union to work towards 'a General Election run on federalism at the end of the war', doing everything to avoid a 'khaki election'.<sup>731</sup>

Among the proposals on war aims, the idea of a world union or a global federation was quite common—particularly in the early stages of the war aims debate— supported by people from all over the political spectrum (but predominantly socialist and liberal).<sup>732</sup> The highest profile of these suggestions came from the Labour Party, as their initial war aim stated that 'Europe must federate

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<sup>727</sup> Bosco, *The First Attempt to Build a European Union*, pp. 135–39. For the debates in HC, see for example Anonymous, 'Debate on the Address', *House of Commons* (Hansard, 1939), pp. 320–21; and Anonymous, 'The War', (Hansard: House of Commons, 1939), pp. 609–13.

<sup>728</sup> Addison, *The Road to 1945*, pp. 123–25.

<sup>729</sup> From Colville, *Fringes of Power* (1940), cited in Kevin Jeffreys (ed.), *War and Reform: British Politics During the Second World War* (1994) Manchester: Manchester University Press p. 90.

<sup>730</sup> Anonymous, 'Debate on the Address', p. 359.

<sup>731</sup> William Beveridge (10 January 1940) 'Beveridge to Greig', Federal Trust B/1/1, fol. 1. A 'Khaki election' refers to an election campaign completely dominated by an ongoing or recently-ended war.

<sup>732</sup> Bosco, *The First Attempt to Build a European Union*, pp. 170–72.

or perish'.<sup>733</sup> Several members of the liberal party also subscribed to this view and argued for both European and worldwide unions in the House of Commons.<sup>734</sup>

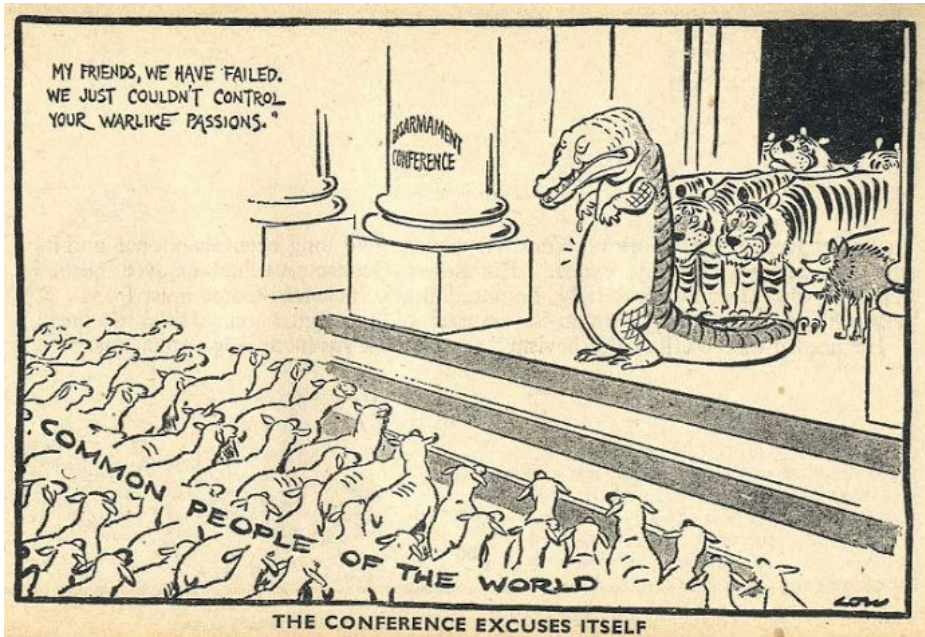


Figure 28 The Conference Excuses Itself

The debate on war aims was fuelled by the widespread frustration with the apparent impotence of the League of Nations and the international order, despite the promises made after the Great War. As a world war broke out a second time, many believed that the resolution of the war would have to address the underlying causes behind military conflict and a determination to make this an actual 'war that will end war'. It was a recurrent target for satirists, such as in David Low's 'The Conference Excuses itself', where a disarmament conference of predators explains to the sheep: 'My friends, we have failed, we just couldn't control your warlike passions.'

David Low (1934). Can be found in David Low, *Years of Wrath: A Cartoon History: 1931–1945* (1946) New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 18

<sup>733</sup> Clement Attlee, 'Peace Aims of Labour', *The Times*, November 9 1939 p. 9.

<sup>734</sup> Geoffrey Mander (Wolverhampton East), for instance, argued for the virtues of a European federation, Anonymous, 'Debate on the Address', pp. 317–20. Lord Josiah Wedgwood (Newcastle-under-Lyme) argued that the failure of the League of Nations demanded a world federation, not after the war but right then, Anonymous, 'The War', pp. 609–13.

The idea flourished in the media as well.<sup>735</sup> One of the most enthusiastic publications was the *Manchester Guardian*, whose headline on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1939 stated that Britain's choice stood between 'Caesarism and Federalism'.<sup>736</sup> The idea also gained a lot of traction in socialist circles; for example when Hilde Meisel campaigned for a European socialist union.<sup>737</sup> After the war, George Orwell concluded that 'a Socialist United States of Europe seems to me the only worthwhile political objective today.'<sup>738</sup>

Thus, the fundamental aspects of Federal Union message—rendering war between states obsolete by the abolition of the nation-state—was a message of its time. FU managed to distinguish itself within the debate, however, and when the issue was brought up in parliament it was not uncommon to see the organisation referred to as a symbol of the phenomenon.<sup>739</sup> It even went so far as one MP asking if *The Case for Federal Union* could be banned due to its 'bad effect on public morale', and another if the Prime Minister would consider banning the organisation's activity as it was 'inimical to our war effort'.<sup>740</sup>

The debate on war aims and the rejection of nation-state sovereignty appeared beyond the British context, as well. *Union Now* was American and in its wake followed both the American Federal Union and the World Federalists.<sup>741</sup> In 1944, Walter Lippman launched his essentially federalist concept of 'Universal Society' and many colonies hosted a similar debate on societal reconstruction.<sup>742</sup> Italy had Altiero Spinelli and his Movimento Federalista Europeo.<sup>743</sup> In France, federalist tendencies could be seen even among the political elite and Prime Ministers. Both Léon Blum (1936–1937 & 1946–1947) and Payl Reynaud (March–June 1940) supported the idea of a European federation and Édouard Daladier (1938–1940) expressed in late 1939 that it would 'be necessary ... perhaps to envisage federal

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<sup>735</sup> Bosco, *The First Attempt to Build a European Union*, pp. 139–72.

<sup>736</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>737</sup> Andrén, *Thinking Europe*, pp. 213–15.

<sup>738</sup> George Orwell, *In Front of Your Nose* (1968) London: Secker & Warburg, p. 372.

<sup>739</sup> See, for example, Anonymous, 'Debate on the Adress', p. 363; and Anonymous, 'War Aims', (Hansard: House of Commons, 1940), p. 661.

<sup>740</sup> Anonymous, 'Federal Union, Limited', *House of Commons* (Hansard, 1941); and Anonymous, 'Federal Union', *House of Commons* (Hansard, 1941).

<sup>741</sup> Baratta, *The Politics of World Federation*, pp. 56–60.

<sup>742</sup> Walter Lippmann, *U.S. War Aims* (1944) London: Hamish Hamilton, pp. 96–122; and Jeffrey, 'The Second World War', pp. 322–23.

<sup>743</sup> Walter Lippgens, *Continental Plans for European Union 1939–1945* (1985) Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 660–62.

ties between the various States of Europe.<sup>744</sup> Additionally, historians have pointed out schemes for a reconfiguration of the global order that, while not explicitly federal, must be seen as part of the same ideological context: among them the Chicago Committee and their World Constitution, and the United States' preliminary work on the United Nations.<sup>745</sup>

Even if the war kept Federal Union in the dark regarding many of the details of international ideas from the continent, it actively cooperated with those contacts that could be established. The organisation had close ties to Altiero Spinelli (who even translated some of its texts), and several of its core members (including Beveridge) were friends with philosopher and sociologist Raymond Aron during his time in London 1940–1944.<sup>746</sup> Federal Union members also met, and sometimes co-wrote, with counterparts from France, Switzerland, the US, Hungary, Germany, Austria and Norway, for example.<sup>747</sup> After the war, Federal Union actively participated in the surge of federalist activity on the continent, not least within the framework of The European Union of Federalists.<sup>748</sup>

The first period of the war aims debate, the one more focussed on international order, culminated with the British Foreign Office proposing a federation with France on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1940, six days before the country signed its armistice with Germany. Many federalist historians have emphasised this proposal's importance, arguing that it proves the influence Federal Union exerted over public opinion.<sup>749</sup> I would caution not to read too much into this proposal, particularly as it pertains to understanding British foreign policy in the long term. The war aims debate is an indication of how open-minded the British public debate was on the issue of international order at this time. The tentative search for global security paired with a sense of desperation during the early summer of 1940 in the face of the seemingly unstoppable Blitzkrieg, created the perfect conditions for this kind of proposal. As soon as the Battle of Britain commenced, however, the debate quickly reverted to

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<sup>744</sup> Cited in David Thomson, *The Proposal for Anglo-French Union in 1940* (1966) Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 10–11.

<sup>745</sup> See Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, pp. 168–208; and Baratta, *The Politics of World Federation*, pp. 95–104 respectively.

<sup>746</sup> Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, p. 26. For more on Spinelli's relationship to the FU, see John Pinder, *Altiero Spinelli and the British Federalists: Writings by Beveridge, Robbins and Spinelli, 1937–1943* (1998) London: Federal Trust.

<sup>747</sup> Mayne & Pinder, *The Pioneers*, pp. 82–83.

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88–92.

<sup>749</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 26–29; and Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History*. The most in-depth look at this episode is without a doubt by Andrea Bosco in Bosco, *The First Attempt to Build a European Union*.

its traditional division lines.<sup>750</sup> On this matter, I agree with historian Avi Shlaim in that the British proposal was ‘no more than a last and desperate effort to keep France in the war against the common enemy ... it was not conceived as part of any long-term political objective but dictated by the strategic imperatives of winning the war.’<sup>751</sup>

Within the context of those first ten months, however, Federal Union undoubtedly played a central role in what was a fascinating caesura for a century otherwise characterised by British anti-supranationalism. Regarding the causation in the relationship between Federal Union and the early war aims debate, it is, of course, impossible to deliver a definite verdict. There are those who have suggested, or at least hinted, that Federal Union should be seen as one of the main forces behind the June 1940 proposal, that it ‘helped create the climate of opinion in which the war cabinet could confidently make its historic offer of union to France.’<sup>752</sup> I argue for the opposite: that the proposal was the culmination of the war aims debate, which also fuelled the popular interest in Federal Union. This debate was not fuelled or directed by FU—Attlee’s call to federate Europe was completely independent of FU activity, for example—but FU represented the most refined and prominent versions of the schemes discussed.

After Dunkirk and the passing of the most feverish desperation in response to the initial charge of the Nazi war machine, the battle lines settled into a more predictable pattern. As the conflict became increasingly framed as an Anglo-German conflict in the UK, the war aims debate turned domestic. If its initial phase had been an effort to render the repetition of global conflict impossible, its second phase became a search to justify the increasing toll of a conflict that come uncomfortably close to home. Historian Paul Addison identified the debate’s shift to domestic reorganisation after 1940, alongside a sudden surge in support for traditional socialist values as a way of guaranteeing the fairness and inclusiveness of the society which the war effort strove to defend.<sup>753</sup>

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<sup>750</sup> A great study of the vacillating nature of foreign policy during the war is Talbot Imlay’s article on Labour’s view of France, Talbot Imlay, ‘From Villian to Partner: British Labour Party Leaders, France and International Policy During the Phoney War 1939–1940’ (October 2003) *Journal of Contemporary History* 38:4.

<sup>751</sup> Avi Shlaim, ‘Prelude to Downfall: The British Offer of Union to France, June 1940’ (July 1974) *Journal of Contemporary History* 9:3, pp. 27–28. Historian David Thomson famously called the episode ‘a historical mayfly’, see Thomson, *The Proposal for Anglo-French Union*, p. 4.

<sup>752</sup> Mayne and Pinder, *The Pioneers*, p. 33. See also Bosco, ‘Lothian, Curtis, Kimber and the Federal Union Movement (1938–40)’, pp. 494–96.

<sup>753</sup> Addison, *The Road to 1945*, pp. 127–63.



The principle of ‘equality of sacrifice’, which first appeared as a taxation concept in the writings of John Stuart Mill, became instead a wartime battle cry for the working class, demanding more substantial contributions from the rich in aid of the British war effort.<sup>754</sup> Whereas WWI had been a war fought by the duty to the King—in which conscientious objectors and drunkards were villainised, Addison claims that WWII was seen as fought for the common man—who in turn had reason to suspect that those better off did not contribute to the best of their ability. The debate focussed public attention to the UK’s social gaps and infused public consciousness with upper-class antipathy.<sup>755</sup> This ‘turn to the left’ of British public debate was further exacerbated when the Soviets joined the Allied forces in the summer of 1941, as most notably demonstrated in the suddenly commonplace phrase, ‘Thank God for Russia!’<sup>756</sup> Federal Union played a much less significant role in this second phase of the war aims debate, even if many of its members were deeply affected by it.

Federal Union’s immense popularity and its centrality to the public debate did drain the rest of federalist United Kingdom of some of its initiative and talent, which was unavoidable. As those most interested in the idea of federation were drawn into Federal Union—not least Philip Kerr—The Round Table reverted to a more comfortable preservationist position. As had been the case with the First World War, the organisation centred its interpretation of the Second on Germany and its character. Not every depiction was outright hostile, and the organisation did allow for some rather detailed analyses of the German situation, but it never wavered in its assertion that Germany and Nazism were to blame for the war.<sup>757</sup> The Nazi provocation that initiated the war was repeatedly compared to the stabilising and inclusive character of the Commonwealth, rather than taken as a symptom of the systematic failure of international diplomacy.<sup>758</sup> There were articles that maintained the need for a global federation to ensure post-war stability, while others deferred to the military hegemony of Western powers. Yet,

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<sup>754</sup> H. Peyton Young, ‘Progressive Taxation and Equal Sacrifice’ (1990) *The American Economic Review* 80:1.

<sup>755</sup> Addison, *The Road to 1945*, pp. 127–63.

<sup>756</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134. Another fascinating example of the cultural caesura experienced in Britain during the Second World War is the brief but radical liberation with regards to gender expressions, see Luke Turner, *Men at War: Loving, Lusting, Fighting, Remembering 1939–1945* (2023) London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

<sup>757</sup> Anonymous, ‘War and Peace’, pp. 5–11. For a nuanced and thorough account, see Anonymous, ‘Inside Germany’ (March 1940) *The Round Table* 30:118.

<sup>758</sup> Anonymous, ‘The British Commonwealth at War’ (September 1940c) *The Round Table* 30:120, p. 838.

they all agreed that a peaceful and prosperous post-war order should be built to perpetuate values that were deemed essentially Western and British.<sup>759</sup>

The 1940s would prove a challenging decade for The Round Table. The war effort did indeed boost imperial morale, but with that came a profound sense of colonial nationalism, and it would prove increasingly difficult to convince the local branches that a proper union was a worthwhile goal. The decline in support for a full Commonwealth union coincided with the organisation's transition from something similar to the *Kindergarten*, essentially ruled by the people who had come to know each other in South Africa, to an organisation of Commonwealth supporters with various experiences. The departure of some key individuals left only a few of Milner's original disciples. As they lost their grip of the moot, the fundamental aims of the organisation were up for debate. By the end of the war The Round Table was no longer a federalist organisation, although it would be 1950 before this was declared explicitly. It sought to further and encourage Commonwealth cooperation but not to establish a formal union.<sup>760</sup>

Perhaps the member most affected by The Round Table's distancing from its Milnerian heritage was Curtis, who soon 'found himself in a minority of one.'<sup>761</sup> In fact, Curtis was increasingly outdated and rooted in tradition. This combined with his intellectual independence led him into an ideological no-man's land which he would inhabit for the rest of his life. He regarded Federal Union as the continuation of his and Kerr's interwar efforts towards an international union. Both Arnold Toynbee, Beveridge, and the post-war foreign minister Ernest Bevin expressed their indebtedness to Curtis' later federalist contributions.<sup>762</sup> While Curtis remained central to the federalist cause, his thinking was demonstrably at odds with the rest of the organisation in several key regards.<sup>763</sup>

In her work on 1940s global theory, Rosenboim identifies four strands to Curtis' thinking: 'the idea of the Christian Commonwealth, the British Empire,

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<sup>759</sup> For an example of a plea for federalism, see Anonymous, 'War and Peace', pp. 24–26. For an example of stability based on military dominance, see Anonymous, 'Anglo-American Co-Operation' (June 1941) *The Round Table* 32:125, pp. 14–16.

<sup>760</sup> Alexander May, 'The Round Table and the Post-War Commonwealth, 1945–1966' (January 1997) *The Round Table* 86:341, pp. 95–98.

<sup>761</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>762</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *Experiences* (1969) New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 84–85; William Beveridge, *The Price of Peace* (1945b) London: Pilot Press, p. 67; and Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, p. 125. Bevin, it should be noted, was not a Federal Union member and did not express any federalist support beyond the Labour manifesto.

<sup>763</sup> Curtis' sense of a continuation between Federal Union and his earlier work is discussed in Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, p. 107.

American federalism, and democracy.<sup>764</sup> The first two were the ones that led him into conflict with the rest of the Federal Union membership. While he agreed with the radical utilisationist denouncement of ‘any system based on compacts between the sovereign states’, he never allowed that conviction to approach the relativist assumption of every state’s equal claim to political insight. He never wavered in his hierarchical approach to global cooperation and designed various schemes to skew his democratic models in ways that disproportionately favoured its Western and white citizens.<sup>765</sup>

As the rest of British federalism moved on from Curtis’ unyielding racism and he gradually turned into the ‘Ancient Mariner of All Souls’ in his later years, ‘meandering from the organic union of Empire to the organic union of the world’, he became a living reminder of a Milnerian age long gone.<sup>766</sup> It should, however, be noted that almost no FU member would disagree with the notion that different communities had different capacities for political reasoning, and that Curtis was one of the very few who seriously engaged in the consequences of that assertion.

Apart from Federal Union’s organisational output, the organisation also had a serious impact on British society through its influential members. The next two sections will scrutinise the ideas of some of the most prominent individuals and look at two competing branches of utilisationism that coexisted within the organisation: optimising and transformational.

## Optimising Utilisation & Institutional Evolution

As previous sections have outlined, the Second World War presented the international community with a challenge to rethink the principles of international coexistence and in the United Kingdom, Federal Union became one of the organisations spearheading the efforts. As covered above, the scale of this challenge soon caused in a domestic debate on the fairness and purpose of UK politics. As a result, the radical utilisationist narrative became divided in terms of what kind of political project federalists imagined. This section and the next will scrutinise the two comprehensive modes of radical utilisationism that coexisted

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<sup>764</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>765</sup> One of the more developed of these set out to relate the democratic influence of any individual to the level of their taxation, see Parmar, ‘Anglo-American Elites in the Interwar Years’, pp. 62–63.

<sup>766</sup> Richard Symonds, *Oxford and Empire: The Last Lost Cause?* (1986) Hampshire: Macmillan, p. 72.

among FU members: optimising and transformational utilisationism. This section will touch upon the ideas of several federalists, but the presentation centres on the most prolific, elaborate, and influential of the optimising utilisationists, William Beveridge.

Sir William Henry Beveridge began his career as a lawyer, then was hired in 1903 by the settlement house Toynbee Hall, where he would become well versed in unemployment law. During World War I, he was invited to implement this knowledge as part of the Government's Board of Trade, services for which he received both a knighthood and a position as permanent secretary to the Ministry of Food after the war. In 1919, he became the director of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), a position which he retained until 1937, when he was appointed Master of University College at Oxford. In September 1940, Ernest Bevin offered him the position of Chairman of the Production Council's Manpower Requirements Committee. Working closely with G.D.H. Cole and secretary of the committee Harold Wilson, he offered substantial theoretical insight, but due to his own ineptitude in party politics he never got the opportunity to implement any of it himself. Wilson described Beveridge as 'probably the greatest administrative genius of this century' but 'almost certain the worst administrator'.<sup>767</sup> Beveridge was moved from Manpower Requirements by the summer of 1941, and transferred to the Social Insurance Committee. Decades later he would describe the move as a 'kicking upstairs'.<sup>768</sup> Beveridge's claim to fame was in the Committee's upcoming report. He had finally obtained enough resources to explore the extent of his talent for bureaucratic vision.<sup>769</sup>

The 1942 *Report on Social Insurances and Allied Services*, commonly referred to as *The Beveridge Report*, became a public phenomenon and sold over a hundred thousand copies in its first month, together with the ordering of a cheaper edition aimed at the armed services.<sup>770</sup> As its nickname suggests, the report brought Beveridge considerable domestic fame and in many ways he was seen as the ideal brave technocrat, hailed as the new Bentham and 'a much-feted national hero'.<sup>771</sup> The report gained an enduring legacy when large portions of it were adopted as Labour policy after the election win in 1945. James Griffiths, the Minister of

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<sup>767</sup> From Beveridge's memorial lecture in 1966, cited in José Harris, *William Beveridge: A Biography* (1977) Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 4.

<sup>768</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>769</sup> For a more thorough overview of Beveridge's biography, see *ibid.*

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 426.

National Insurance for that government, described it as ‘one of the great documents of British history’.<sup>772</sup>

Beveridge himself presented the report as a strategy to slay the ‘Giant of Want’ and ‘Giant of Disease’, ending their damaging hold on British society. In his later work, he went on to combat further ‘giants’—Idleness, Ignorance, and Squalor—which resulted in two additional reports, one on unemployment and one on mutual aid and philanthropy.<sup>773</sup> Together, the reports constituted what Beveridge considered his ‘wartime trilogy’. Considerable fame notwithstanding, Beveridge was never invited to implement any of his ideas and he continued his career as a liberal MP, first in the House of Commons and later in the House of Lords. In 1952, he also became the president of the National Association of Leagues of Hospital Friends, a post he held until the year before his death in 1963.<sup>774</sup>

It was no coincidence that Beveridge ended up in Federal Union. In fact, he is even reported to have told Ransome himself a few years earlier: ‘if there’s a war, come and see me.’<sup>775</sup> During the 1930s, Beveridge had undergone the same kind of radicalisation as so many other Britons of the time. He began the decade as a rather uncompromising liberal, for example arguing that central planning was incompatible with individual freedom. But in the following years, he was swayed by the apparent impotence of Chamberlain’s appeasement strategy and the call for equality of sacrifice. These challenges to traditional British political thinking conspired to make Federal Union and its radical visions of reform the perfect home for Beveridge to develop his contribution to a new model for British society in 1939.<sup>776</sup>

Beveridge’s role as an academic allowed him to contribute to the Federal Union movement in two ways. First, his position and networks allowed FU members access to places and individuals that would have otherwise been out of reach. For example, he provided FURI with their premises in Oxford and facilitated the institute’s contact with the LSE. In many ways, Beveridge was the most obvious example of how important members with networks were to Federal Union (as well as its predecessors), and his contacts allowed him to ‘trade’ his social capital for resources that the organisation needed, primarily in the form of access to venues

<sup>772</sup> Cited in Janet Beveridge, *Beveridge and His Plan* (1954) London: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 225.

<sup>773</sup> William Beveridge, *Full Employment in a Free Society: A Report* (1944) London: Allen & Unwin; and William Beveridge, *Voluntary Action: A Report on Methods of Social Advance* (2015) [1948] Abingdon: Routledge.

<sup>774</sup> The association still exists, but under the name Attend.

<sup>775</sup> Cited in Oakley, *A Critical Woman*, p. 148.

<sup>776</sup> Harris, *William Beveridge*, pp. 364–69.

and people.<sup>777</sup> Secondly, he contributed an analytical approach to the cause of federalism and with it a perspective on the issue of war prevention that few matched in its detail and pragmatism. In his mind, the prevention of war was not an abstract question of unity, but rather a well-defined issue in dealing with the animosity at the heart of Europe. As such, he argued that a union composed entirely of democracies should institutionalise and make permanent the battle lines of the war and that a successful union for peace ought to contain Germany.<sup>778</sup>

This is not to say that Beveridge assumed that Germany would adopt democratic practices as soon as the war had ended. On the contrary, he believed that a federation allowed the Allies to keep their enemies closer, until they could be trusted: 'peace must be won by going into the house of one's enemy and turning them into a friend.'<sup>779</sup> Germany, he claimed, must be stripped of its military capabilities and be politically overseen by the federation. This notion was developed further at a FURI conference called 'The Re-Education of the German Mind', where it was suggested that Germany must be kept militarily impotent while being economically revived. Cultural incorporation into the federation should also be encouraged, for example by subsidising travel between states and marriages beyond borders.<sup>780</sup> Effectively, Germany was to 'be treated as a Territory of the Federation.'<sup>781</sup>

To acknowledge that Beveridge's ideas were analytical and pragmatic is not to say that they were limited in scope. Beveridge believed that the subduing of Germany was but a minor detail within a global process. In an employment reminiscent of the stagist historiographies of Curtis and Kerr, Beveridge claimed that the nation-state must pass through four steps of security, just as domestic society had done. He argued that people had gone from self-defence, to alliances, to communities, which reached the fourth and final stage as they became governed by communal authority and ensured its internal security through a police force.

<sup>777</sup> For more on network theory and the trading of social capital, see Ylva Hasselberg & Tom Petersson, 'Företag, Nätverk Och Innovation', in Ylva Hasselberg & Tom Petersson (eds.), *"Bäste Bröder!" Nätverk, Entreprenörskap Och Innovation I Svenskt Näringsliv* (2006) Möklinta: Gidlunds Förlag, pp. 52–56.

<sup>778</sup> Beveridge, 'Peace by Federation', pp. 10–15. He expressed the same sentiment at a FURI conference in Paris April 13, 1940, see Ransome (ed.), *Towards the United States of Europe: Studies on the Making of the European Constitution* p. 98.

<sup>779</sup> Beveridge, 'Peace by Federation', p. 22.

<sup>780</sup> Ransome (ed.), *Towards the United States of Europe: Studies on the Making of the European Constitution* pp. 244–45. Beveridge was present at the conference. It is easy to spot his influence on the discussion, even if he was only one of seven in attendance.

<sup>781</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244. It is worth noting that not everyone in attendance agreed upon the suitability of the term 'territory', as it risked unnecessary humiliation of the German people.

The two world wars were symptomatic of the nation-state's ongoing struggle to go beyond the second step of international security.<sup>782</sup> Federation was the next logical step, the rational future of society.

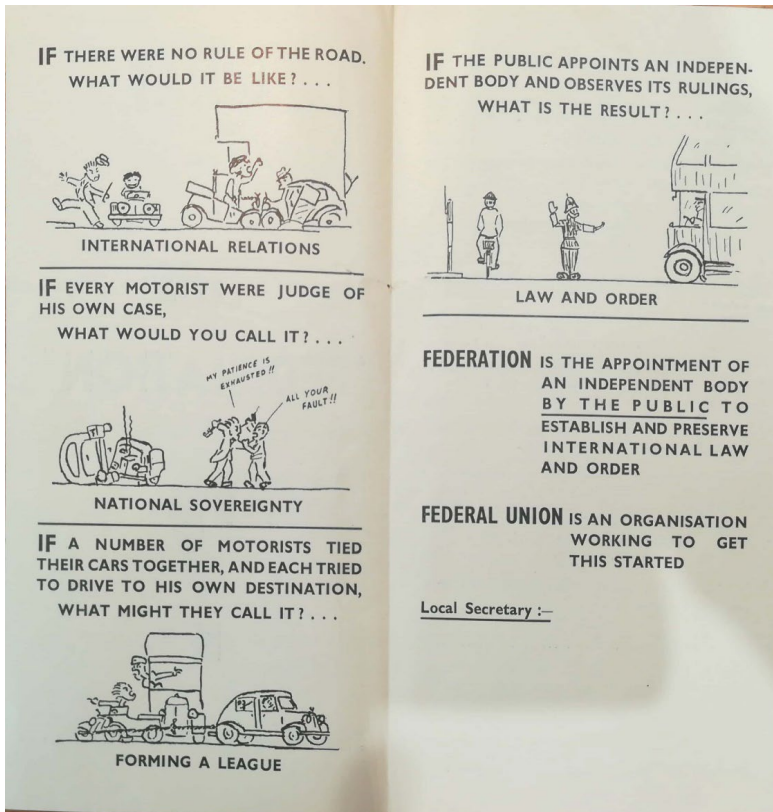


Figure 29 Speaking as a Motorist..

A ubiquitous metaphor within Federal Union discourse was that of the state as an individual. Internally, states were often ascribed tempers and characters. Externally, the metaphor was used to present the organisation's message in a common-sense, plain, and self-evident manner. This pamphlet was circulated with a form for membership application on the back.

'What is this Fedeation? Speaking as a Motorist...' (1939–1940) by Federal Union. Held at London School of Economics, Federal Trust Papers, B/8/2

<sup>782</sup> Beveridge, 'Peace by Federation', pp. 23–25. A very similar argument was also put forward by the philosopher Cyril Joad, see Joad, 'The Philosophy of Federal Union'.

Even if Beveridge himself did not employ the concept of a 'state of nature' explicitly, his basic line of argument owed a lot to, or at least can easily be traced back to, Thomas Hobbes. In an anarchic state of nature, people—and in this case states—need to be protected from themselves.<sup>783</sup> Other, perhaps less obvious, influences are the theorists of evolution. During his time as a student, Beveridge showed a keen interest in the ideas of both T.H. Huxley (a.k.a. 'Darwin's Bulldog') and the Social Darwinist Herbert Spencer.<sup>784</sup> While he did not subscribe to a biological dimension of politics, he clearly did believe in the notion of societal evolution and the importance of cultivating protection against man's most destructive instincts.

It was, however, the nuts-and-bolts nature of his arguments that made Beveridge influential among FU members, where he distinguished himself among those with an optimising understanding of utilisationism. Beveridge's understanding of post-imperial Britain was optimising in the sense that his argument was based on political and administrative expediency; he, and many with him, argued for federalism because of its ideal performance as a system. Based on the radical utilisationist plotment, the optimising narrative argued that the instability of the international order was caused by its institutional inefficiency, in which was based on political arrangements not fit for purpose. Pushing back against political ineptitude, the optimising utilisationists proposed federation as the most refined and precise way to address the political issues of the day. Their arguments were disciplined, but not necessarily restricted in their ambition. Many of them had grand plans, but their belief in federalism was something they saw as the correct response to a well-defined problem.

Another optimising utilisationist that addressed the issue of international stability was journalist Wickham Steed, editor of *The Times* 1919–1922 and *Review of Reviews* 1923–1930. In his *Our War Aims* from 1939, he took a slightly different position from Beveridge, emphasising military victory as the primary war aim. Without victory every other aim—however worthy—would be rendered meaningless. Steed certainly acknowledged the need for a reform of international politics to prevent further war, but he was also quick to reinterpret this aim in terms of a 'moral asset', as mechanical, 'technical and human means of overcoming the enemy in battle are hardly more important than the spirit of the people, their willingness to bear mishap and hardship, their faith in the final victory.'<sup>785</sup> Even

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<sup>783</sup> See Hobbes, *Leviathan*.

<sup>784</sup> Harris, *William Beveridge*, p. 2.

<sup>785</sup> Wickham Steed, *Our War Aims* (1939) London: Secker and Warburg, p. 39.



when discussing the propagandistic qualities of federalism, how people will rally behind its promise for a brighter future, Steed stressed how this enthusiasm would contribute to the resolve of the war effort.<sup>786</sup>

Guided by their various competencies, the optimising utilisationists identified several aspects of political life that could be improved by federalisation. As a collective effort, Federal Union members identified federation as the optimal constitutional system for transport,<sup>787</sup> defence,<sup>788</sup> education,<sup>789</sup> and science.<sup>790</sup> In line with the radical utilisationist emplotment that posited the gradual improvement of political administration, the optimising utilisationists saw federalism as the newest governmental technology available, as the epitome of bureaucratic efficiency made available by new advances in communication; federation was a mode of governance that could be tailored to the global issues of the day.

While there was a tendency among optimising utilisationists to focus on 'hard' issues of administrative efficiency, examples such as Steed's acknowledgement of the importance of 'moral capital' remind us that optimisation involved 'soft' issues like morale, unity, and identity as well. For example, 'soft' optimisation played a key role in Beveridge's thinking as he understood the war against Germany and the struggle for more rational domestic policy to be inseparable issues. In one of the last sentences of the Beveridge Plan, he ties its aims to the war effort:

If the united democracies today can show strength and courage and imagination equal to their manifest desire, can plan for a better peace even while waging total war, they will win together two victories which in truth are indivisible.<sup>791</sup>

This is also seen in a Federal Union statement from June 1940 entitled 'The World Beyond Hitler'. It is unclear when 'Britain alone fights on', if this is against Hitler

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<sup>786</sup> Ibid., pp. 206–13.

<sup>787</sup> Gilbert Walker, 'Transport and Communications in a Federation', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Studies in Federal Planning* (1943) London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd.

<sup>788</sup> Henry Thuillier, 'Federation and Defence', in Melville Channing-Pearce (ed.), *Federal Union: A Symposium* (1940) London: Jonatan Cape.

<sup>789</sup> See the results from the Federal Union's Conference on Federal Powers of Education, Ransome (ed.), *Towards the United States of Europe: Studies on the Making of the European Constitution*, pp. 271–88.

<sup>790</sup> Even if it was never finished, zoologist Lancelot Thomas Hogben and Beveridge worked together to draft a Federal Union manifesto for British scientists, see Lancelot Thomas Hogben (11 September 1939) 'Manifesto for Federal Union by British Men of Science', Federal Trust B/1/1. In his letters, Hogben makes clear that he intended to distribute it among his fellows in the Royal Society, Lancelot Thomas Hogben (7 September 1939) 'Hogben to Beveridge', Federal Trust B/1/1.

<sup>791</sup> William Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services: Report* (1942) London: London, p. 172.

or against international anarchy.<sup>792</sup> Offering a positive message to rally behind, the federalists proposed that Britain could defeat Hitler *and* lead the world into a peaceful future at the same time.

In this sense, the description of ‘optimising’ is not meant to signify anything in terms of the content of a proposed union, but rather how it was motivated. Another optimising utilisationist whose thinking encompassed various ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ aspects of constitutional planning was economics professor Sir Lionel Charles Robbins. Wounded during the First World War, Robbins left his aspiring military career for a brief period in the Labour party campaign before venturing into economics at LSE. His meteoric rise through academia brought him into close contact with both Laski, Beveridge, and Hayek—and by the summer of 1940 he had joined the Central Economic Information Service as a respected professor. One year later he became director of the service’s economic section. His academic network meant that he had encountered federalism long before Munich and when he sent his newly published *The Economic Causes for War* to Curtis in 1939, the old *Kindergartener* responded that he was ‘simply astounded’ of the similarities to his own federalist conclusions.<sup>793</sup>

Approaching federalism from an economist’s perspective, Robbins agreed with Beveridge and Steed that the ending and prevention of war should be given top priority for federalism to ‘solve’. In line with the established FU emplotment, Robbins argued that the old international order had outlived its usefulness and as feudalism had been rendered obsolete by gunpowder, so had the order of sovereign European states by aircraft. Upon transitioning into a new era of geopolitical stability, he argued that federation needed to establish the legal order required to hold states responsible on the international stage, and that international stability required some measure of domestic stabilities.<sup>794</sup>

Robbins believed that federation’s great strength was its adaptability, and his optimising mindset was most obvious when he insisted on federation as an ‘architectonic’ measure. He was interested in federation as an efficient constitutional framework that was unburdened by any substantial ideological commitment, acting instead as a structure for sound, modern, and rational government—regardless of how its political program would end up.<sup>795</sup> According to

<sup>792</sup> Federal Union (20 June 1940) ‘The World Beyond Hitler’, Federal Trust B/1/10.

<sup>793</sup> Cited in Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, p. 132.

<sup>794</sup> Lionel Robbins, *The Economic Causes of War* (1939) London: Jonathan Cape, pp. 60–85 & 106–07.

<sup>795</sup> Lionel Robbins, ‘Economic Aspects of Federation’, in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Studies in Federal Planning* (1943) London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., p. 88.

Robbins, federation was particularly suited to this task due to what Rosenboim deems its 'heterarchical' quality. He believed that federalism promised a constitutional system which best could address and tackle issues both locally and centrally, combining centralised, large-scale production with local checks and balances.<sup>796</sup> Even if Robbins' scheme was comprehensive, he consistently defended it as the optimal solution to issues faced by the post-imperial world order. The United Kingdom was presented with an opportunity to contribute to a more rational international government, equipped with the technologies of the day.

After June 1940, when the Federal Union's momentum had slowed, Beveridge channelled his optimising utilisationism into governmental politics and the civil service. While his work during the period focused on domestic issues, he copied his Federal Union work almost without alteration to his foreign policy as an aspiring liberal MP. Due to the pragmatism of party politics, he dropped all references to 'federation', but he continued praising Kerr and Curtis, pushed for the concept of 'Sovereignty under law', and insisted on 'International Anarchy' being 'the soil of war'.<sup>797</sup> Many years later, when writing his memoirs, he would describe himself as 'a Federal Unionist for life'.<sup>798</sup> However, much of his domestic work was guided by utilisationist principles. The administrative expediency which had been praised in his Federal Union years was now applied to his work on the Wartime Trilogy, which he saw as an extension of the Atlantic Charter.<sup>799</sup> If Britain could seize this moment, he argued, to slay its five giants domestically, it could assume a leading role in the international fight against them. Britain, as liberalism's 'natural home', should lead global politics.

by making it plain beyond questioning that we desire peace with justice for all nations, that we know the price of peace and are prepared to pay it, that we will accept impartial justice in our cause and will to the full measure of our strength contribute to ensuring for others. If we make that plain, we shall rally to our purpose the conscience of humanity.<sup>800</sup>

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<sup>796</sup> Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, pp. 137–38.

<sup>797</sup> Beveridge, *The Price of Peace*, p. 11. For his defence of 'sovereignty under law', see William Beveridge, *Why I Am a Liberal* (1945) London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, pp. 38–41. For his praising of Curtis and Kerr, see Beveridge, *The Price of Peace*, pp. 52, 65 & 67. His public denouncement of federalism can be found in *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>798</sup> Cited in Baratta, *The Politics of World Federation*, p. 80.

<sup>799</sup> Beveridge, *Social Insurance and Allied Services: Report*, p. 171; and Beveridge, *Why I Am a Liberal*, p. 22. This was also one of the reoccurring themes on his North America tour in May–July 1943, see Harris, *William Beveridge*, p. 427.

<sup>800</sup> Beveridge, *The Price of Peace*, p. 88. He described the UK as liberalism's natural home in Beveridge, *Why I Am a Liberal*, p. 41.

Beveridge's meticulous and discerning approach to federalism also allowed for the entanglement of his more visionary aspects with the work of British civil service. In arguing that federalism was the epitome of constitutional effectiveness, Beveridge became one of the most persuasive representatives of a certain section of optimising utilisationists. Alongside the optimising utilisationists, there was another subcategory of radical utilisationism: those who sought federalism as a means to transform the axioms of contemporary politics. This narrative included many members who had a variety of perspectives. The following section examines them through the lens of their most significant member, Lady Barbara Wootton.

## Transformational Utilisationism & Moral Evolution

While there were numerous federalists who sought optimisation, the predominant mode of utilisationism within Federal Union did not understand the emplotment as such a linear development of human government. The majority of FU members perceived the utilisationist narrative as promising a quick change going forward, as a federation would not only address particular issues but also transform the conditions for politics and government altogether. Transformational utilisationism was not utopian by default and while some of its devotees clearly took to federation as a cure-all, its more serious proponents saw it as an acknowledgment that a subversive political change like a worldwide union would not contain itself to politics, but would eventually bleed into other aspects of the human experience.

Twenty years younger than Beveridge, Barbara Wootton (then Adams) was born in Cambridge in 1897.<sup>801</sup> Both of her parents were scholars at the university, and she would go on to study classics and economics at Girton College from 1915 to 1919. Upon graduating, Wootton pursued an academic career that took her to, among other places, the London School of Economics, the Trade Union Congress (TUC), and then back to Girton. Reoccurring themes in her work were social justice and workers' rights, addressed from a socialist framework. On the eve of the war, she published one of her seminal works, *Lament for Economics* (1938), in which she defended sociology's relevance to a number of societal issues, warning against the limits of pure economics.<sup>802</sup> *Lament for Economics* was followed by *End*

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<sup>801</sup> For biographical information on Wootton, it is best to consult Oakley, *A Critical Woman*. For a complementary resource, see her autobiography, Wootton, *In a World I Never Made*.

<sup>802</sup> Barbara Wootton, *Lament for Economics* (1938) London: G. Allen & Unwin.

*Social Inequality* in 1941 and *Freedom Under Planning* in 1945, together forming the most political period of her career.<sup>803</sup>

Just as it had for Beveridge, Federal Union appeared at the seemingly perfect time for Wootton. She had just given up on 'pure' economics to explore the possibilities of sociology, she had gained a lot of training and experience, and she was not too burdened by other commitments. This allowed her to immerse herself in the organisation and engage with all aspects of its activity. She was a leading speaker at the first FU rally in London, she was part of the organisation's very first Executive Committee, she represented Federal Union in a high stakes debate against the famous socialist Edward Hardy, while also publishing tracts, material for FURI, and articles for FUN.<sup>804</sup> Apart from its three founders, she was one of the members who most influenced the character and course of the early Federal Union. This section will explore her federalism within the framework of transformational utilisationism, exemplifying a more subversive approach towards the question of the United Kingdom's post-imperial outlook, as well as the primary avenue for British federalism's entanglement with socialism.

Wootton's contribution to Federal Union was primarily defined by her socialist values. Her socialist predisposition directed her own commitment to federalist ideas, but it also put her on a collision course with several of the other members, most notably Friedrich Hayek.<sup>805</sup> Wootton was not interested in federalism in its own right—as Beveridge was, for example—but rather as a means to an end. A 'piece of machinery, just as when we go to a place by train we need an engine on the train, but the engine is not the place to which we want to go.'<sup>806</sup> Wootton sought the establishment of a global federation to transform the conditions of contemporary politics and make way for the inauguration of a socialist world order.

Wootton was pragmatic in her socialism, hesitant to quote Marx and reluctant to attribute too much of the world's misery to the failures of capitalism. She saw capitalism not as the only, but as one among many, causes for war. In her pamphlet *End Social Inequality*, she distanced herself from socialism's more dogmatic expressions:

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<sup>803</sup> See Barbara Wootton, *End Social Inequality: A Programme for Ordinary People* (1941) London: Kegan Paul; and Barbara Wootton, *Freedom under Planning* (1945) London: Allen & Unwin.

<sup>804</sup> Oakley comments on the speech, Oakley, *A Critical Woman*, p. 147. For her debate with Hardy, see Barbara Wootton (6 May 1940) 'Should Socialists Support Federal Union?', LSE Archive, London, Federal Trust B/8/3.

<sup>805</sup> For more on the Wootton–Hayek conflict, see Rosenboim, 'Barbara Wootton, Friedrich Hayek and the Debate on Democratic Federalism in the 1940s'.

<sup>806</sup> Wootton, 'Should Socialists Support Federal Union?', fols. 11–12.

If socialism means equal respect for every human personality, what I have written here is socialism. If socialism means the indiscriminate nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, then its reference to the programme of the pamphlet is, at most, quite incidental.<sup>807</sup>

Wootton's thinking during the 1940s was based on a socialist outlook but allowed for many other perspectives as well. Her four guidelines stipulated that a socialist should (1) wish to use available resources to improve living standards, (2) with a particular focus on social and economic equality, (3) through the collective ownership and planning of said resources, (4) and against this endeavour see the existing class system as one of the major obstacles.<sup>808</sup> This was the fundamental goal that she devoted her energy to achieving, ready to apply whatever means possible.

Wootton's views, much like those of Federal Union, came at the right time and place. The widespread sympathy within the organisation for the principle of 'equality of sacrifice', furthered even more by the country's subsequent 'turn to the left', meant that Wootton's thinking was a natural fit within the early Federal Union. She aligned herself on the left of the organisation but her moderate interpretation of socialist ideology, combined with her reasonable mindset and inquisitive nature, put her at the heart of the organisation's intellectual activity.

Others in Federal Union, Wootton included, were more concerned about the possibilities that a global federation implied, rather than a global federation per se. William Olaf Stapledon was born in 1886 and became a tutor for the Workers' Education Association (WEA) after receiving his history degree from Oxford in 1913. He was a conscientious objector and supported the war effort by driving an ambulance in France and Belgium, for which he was awarded the Croix de Guerre. After the war, he resumed his tutorship while simultaneously pursuing a PhD. The PhD would eventually lead to an academic career, something he combined with sci-fi writing beginning in the 1930s. By the time the Second World War began, he had given up on his pacifist beliefs, and supported the war effort as a step towards a post-war socialist reform.<sup>809</sup>

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<sup>807</sup> Wootton, *End Social Inequality*, p. 61.

<sup>808</sup> Barbara Wootton, 'Socialism and Federation', in Patrick Ransome (ed.), *Studies in Federal Planning* (1943) London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., p. 270. She repeated these guidelines in Wootton, 'Should Socialists Support Federal Union?', fols. 4–5.

<sup>809</sup> Biographical publications on Stapledon's life are few and far between and the authority to consult is still Robert Crossley, *Olaf Stapledon: Speaking for the Future* (1994) New York: Syracuse University Press.

Stapledon saw the experience of war as—apart from an agonising tragedy—a possible catalyst for a new form of global patriotism, institutionalised in the founding of a worldwide federation. He saw the inability to prevent two global conflicts as proof of humanity’s lack of empathy and sense of purpose and made it clear even before the UK entered the conflict that the discord that fuelled international tensions was needed ‘...not only for federation, but for that new spirit of world unity. Everything depends on that.’<sup>810</sup> When speaking on the subject, Stapledon indicated an existential revolution of the human experience, where such a major political change—all of humanity united under one constitution—made itself felt in almost every aspect of the human experience. Federation would entail systematic change in international law, a reduction in social gaps, and a more humane governing of dependencies—but also cultural change as its educational facilities should be employed to elevate the status of motherhood, and to promote a lifestyle less dependent on the latest technologies.<sup>811</sup>

Stapledon never claimed to be superior in terms of analytical rigor, and the ambitious list mentioned above must be understood in terms of suggestions and indications rather than policy promises. However, the list’s comprehensive nature is telling of how he framed global federation as a vital step toward a fundamental reconsideration of the organisation of human society rather than a measure targeting a certain issue. While he acknowledged the importance of establishing the practical rule of international law, he believed that the main issue was that people lacked a sense of belonging on a global scale. For him, the subversive potential of federations were rooted in their ability to present a tangible expression of the connection between the global and the local:

Our new patriotism, then, if it comes into being, must be simply a local expression and variant of a world-wide recovery of faith in the essential ideal of civilization. This world-wide movement we must of necessity foster first among ourselves, giving it a characteristic local application. But your patriotism is worthless unless it is subordinated to the will for world-wide community. And this will, to be passionate and effective, must be rooted in the experience of personal friendship, and in the conviction that mutual respect and co-operation are the way of life, on earth and throughout the universe.<sup>812</sup>

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<sup>810</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>811</sup> Olaf Stapledon, *A New Hope for Britain* (1939) London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., pp. 163–90.

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

The established international system based on sovereign states and imperial assertions had failed to appreciate this mutual interdependence between local friendship and global belonging, and Stapledon saw federation as the constitutional model that the UK should turn to when searching for ‘a happier, and a more fully human mankind.’<sup>813</sup>

While Stapledon’s awesome capacity for visionary contemplation is renowned, it is equally striking just how many federalists saw federation as the constitutional puzzle piece missing in a more fundamental societal reorganisation. One branch within the Federal Union membership adhered to a pronounced Christian federalism.<sup>814</sup> Peter Thompson, for example, likened Federal Union to a spiritual community, which he described as ‘Christian Communism’.<sup>815</sup> Oxford Professor of the Philosophy of Christian Religion, Lawrence W. Grensted, drew parallels between federation and the surrendering of inner sovereignty before God. The Archbishop of York, William Temple, described the organisation as ‘the political counterpart of universal love’.<sup>816</sup> Christina Dowson, from the FU Churches’ Committee, claimed federation to be ‘the only solution of contemporary international problems which is truly compatible with Christianity’.<sup>817</sup>

A perhaps less intuitive subscriber to transformational utilitarianism was one of the twentieth century’s most prominent economists, Friedrich August Hayek.<sup>818</sup> Born 1899 in Austria, Hayek had a complicated first encounter with education, characterised by his ‘combination of obvious ability and laziness and lack of

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<sup>813</sup> Olaf Stapledon, ‘Federalism and Socialism’, in Melville Channing-Pearce (ed.), *Federal Union: A Symposium* (1940) London: Jonathan Cape, p. 129.

<sup>814</sup> Stapledon ought to be counted among them.

<sup>815</sup> Peter Thompson, ‘Federal Union and Christian Communism’ (13 July 1940) *Federal Union News* 34.

<sup>816</sup> Laurence W. Grensted, ‘Federalism and Religion’, in Melville Channing-Pearce (ed.), *Federal Union: A Symposium* (1940) London: Jonathan Cape, pp. 77–78; and William Temple, ‘A Christmas Message’ (23 December 1939) *Federal Union News* 14, p. 1.

<sup>817</sup> Christina Dowson, ‘Federal Union and the Churches’ (16 December 1939) *Federal Union News* 13, p. 5.

<sup>818</sup> While titles interbellum Austria had abandoned titles, the stubborn ‘von’ nowadays associated with his name is a holdover of an administrative blunder that occurred during his British naturalisation process in 1938. The name was copied from his birth certificate and the error proved too cumbersome to correct.





Figure 29 The Adventures of Colonel Blimp

The popularity of David Low's character Colonel Blimp was testament to British politics' 'turn to the left' during the first years of the 1940s. The character was a general who had begun his career in the Boer War and then retained his position on privilege alone, beginning every statement with his signature, 'Gad, sir'. With his hopelessly outdated ideas, the reader had a hard time telling if he was more concerned with winning the war or just maintaining social hierarchies.<sup>819</sup> He became incredibly popular during the late 1930s, and was translated into twenty-four languages. The character was included in the Universal English Dictionary, together with the feature-length film above from 1943.<sup>820</sup>

Movie poster for *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) by Archers Film Production. Permission by ITV Studios.

<sup>819</sup> Addison, *The Road to 1945*, pp. 131–133.

<sup>820</sup> Jim Schoff and Colin Seymour-Ure, *David Low* (1985) London: Secker & Warburg, p. 93.

interest'.<sup>821</sup> When he joined the armed services, he experienced the same fate as Robbins and ventured into academia after being seriously wounded in 1917. After an education characterised by encouraged disciplinary eclecticism, Hayek had a promising academic career, homing in on the subject of economics—particularly under the guidance of his tutor Ludwig von Mises. It was his work here that was picked up by Robbins, who was able to understand German. He recruited Hayek to LSE in 1931, where he stayed until he moved to Chicago in 1950.<sup>822</sup> When Federal Union was founded, he had spent almost a decade at the 'Robbins seminar', together with John Hicks, Nicholas Kaldor, and Karl Popper.<sup>823</sup> He later described this period as the 'intellectually most active and satisfying of my life'.<sup>824</sup>

Hayek and Robbins shared many of the same optimising utilisationist tenets. He, too, emphasised that one of federalism's best traits was its ability to adjust the degree of centralisation to different kinds of political decisions. Yet, while Robbins approached the different levels of centralisation neutrally, Hayek demonstrated a clear preference towards decentralisation. There were a few key functions of international stability that needed to be guaranteed centrally, according to Hayek, while political governance should be oriented towards the most local level possible. In fact, Hayek saw federation as pulling double duty: both establishing local levels of governance and easing the strains on its member-states to centralise power in geopolitical arms races. This allowed for the further decentralisation of a government focussed on individual prosperity and freedom.<sup>825</sup>

The transformational character of Hayek's utilisationism becomes apparent when we consider the agenda of liberalist decentralisation which was essential to his federalism. This agenda brought him into repeated ideological conflicts with Wootton, a relationship that Rosenboim believes showed significant similarities in the structures of their arguments. Both were deeply concerned with the issue of effective democracy, and both saw federation as an opportunity to involve the grassroots in the government process. They did disagree entirely on the limitations of human perception and reasoning. Wootton believed in the value of central planning and understood democracy in terms of a dialogue between the local and

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<sup>821</sup> Friedrich A. Hayek, *Hayek on Hayek: An Autobiographical Dialogue* (1994) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 42.

<sup>822</sup> Samuel Brittan, 'Hayek, Friedrich August', in David Cannadine (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>823</sup> Susan Howson, 'Robbins, Lionel Charles, Baron Robbins', in *ibid.*

<sup>824</sup> Hayek, *Hayek on Hayek*, p. 81.

<sup>825</sup> Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 173–74.

the central, while Hayek distrusted large-scale politics and saw the local grassroots as the true expression of the public interest.<sup>826</sup>

Hayek believed that federation's ultimate purpose was the nurturing of these local grassroots and the cultivation of their political maturity as the foundation for sound democratic rule. A decentralised federation would present political issues to its citizens in a tangible and lucid form, framed in terms of the local impact through which their outcomes would be felt.

It is only where responsibility can be learnt and practiced in affairs with which most people are familiar, where it is the awareness of one's neighbour rather than some theoretical knowledge of the needs of other people which guides action, that the ordinary man can take real part in public affairs because they concern the world he knows. ... We shall all be the gainers if we can create a world fit for small states to live in.<sup>827</sup>

Hayek's vision may have been less utopian and more limited in scope than many of his fellow federalists, but he shared the transformational belief that the UK should seek a post-imperial federation as a means to reform not only its politics, but its citizens. Edward Mousley was perhaps the member who framed it most clearly, formulating the established FU plotment in terms of an evolution of man rather than of constitutional refinement. He argued that federation would produce not only better political outcomes but better citizens with a more democratic mindset.<sup>828</sup>

It goes without saying that this view was not easily accepted by the organisation's optimising members. In an article published by Federal Union's travelling organiser Freda Gurling, every member was urged to consider their own disposition between 'Federalism-Pure-and-Simple' and 'Federation Plus'. The former was politically interested in the federation as such and sought a quantitative reform of society, i.e. a larger state more apt to dealing with the issues of the time. The latter was at least equally interested in the people of that federation, thus demanding qualitative reform, i.e. both a larger and a more moral state.<sup>829</sup>

Gurling's article highlights the fact that the transformational utilisationists saw the war as an opportunity for the United Kingdom to change its political course, to take the lead globally with its socialist/Christian/international consciousness.

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<sup>826</sup> Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism*, pp. 163–64.

<sup>827</sup> Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, p. 175.

<sup>828</sup> Edward Mousley, 'The Meaning of Federalism', in Melville Channing-Pearce (ed.), *Federal Union: A Symposium* (1940) London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., pp. 32–38.

<sup>829</sup> Freda Gurling, 'Federation: Superstructure or "Super" Structure?' (18 May 1940) *Federal Union news* 34.

Gurling's article actually argues that 'Federation Plus' is for those who 'want to lead ... people out of the wilderness'.<sup>830</sup> That is not to say that these federalists disregarded practical issues or political reality. Wootton stressed that federation was 'nothing grand, nothing full of romance or idealism, but a very practical piece of machinery'.<sup>831</sup> The appeal of that 'piece of machinery' however, was not considered to be its practicality as such, but rather its potential for facilitating ideological reform.

Wootton saw the outbreak of the Second World War as a failure of both the League of Nations to guarantee international stability, and of contemporary socialism to offer its followers an alternative that was more persuasive than rallying 'behind the Maginot line and the Siegfried Line'.<sup>832</sup> Federalism, according to Wootton, represented an alternative and more direct way of tackling the predominant issues of the day.

As Rosenboim has pointed out, Wootton distinguished herself within Federal Union as someone who saw the war as first and foremost obstructing the pursuit of social justice and equality, and only secondarily as a threat to the long-term well-being of humanity in its own right.<sup>833</sup> Wootton argued that international stability had become of primary political importance since the outbreak of war laid claim to the resources of domestic politics, rendering long-term strategies to tackle political issues impossible.<sup>834</sup> In this sense, she saw 'social progress [as] contingent upon international order'.<sup>835</sup> Freeing up the resources needed to properly deal with inequality in a serious manner constituted what Wootton considered to be the foremost priority of contemporary politics. She criticised those who concealed the suffering of the poor with the vague language of 'freedom of want', failing to stoke the sense of urgency that this suffering justified.<sup>836</sup> She saw those content with the contemporary state of the distribution of society's resources as 'quite out of touch with realities'.<sup>837</sup>

Wootton admitted that the war also brought with it certain opportunities. The grave and profound nature of the threat it represented had, as mentioned above,

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<sup>830</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>831</sup> Wootton, 'Should Socialists Support Federal Union?', fol. 25.

<sup>832</sup> Ibid., pp. 6 & 25–26.

<sup>833</sup> Rosenboim, 'Barbara Wootton, Friedrich Hayek and the Debate on Democratic Federalism in the 1940s', p. 895.

<sup>834</sup> Wootton, 'Socialism and Federation', pp. 278–80.

<sup>835</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>836</sup> Wootton, *Freedom under Planning*, p. 11.

<sup>837</sup> Wootton, *End Social Inequality*, p. 48.

freed up unprecedented societal resources for the British war effort. Wootton—and many of her contemporaries—saw this as proof of the true potential of governmental action when push came to shove. The ‘altogether fantastic’ contrast between the concerted war effort and ‘the sleepy indifference of peace’ inspired Wootton to think big in how she envisioned the post-imperial United Kingdom.<sup>838</sup> She also had the foresight to suggest that the immediate post-war relief would require humanitarian aid on a massive scale and that those who believed in social reform would need to act to extend those measures into lasting change. The result, she ventured ‘might be little short of miraculous’ and would allow the UK to assume a leading role in a new international order, based on priorities that used the experience of war and suffering.<sup>839</sup>

In Germany, Hitler used bludgeons to spread his ideas among the German people. Mussolini used castor oil. In the free countries we have to depend on reason plus the force of example to spread knowledge of the means by which we can preserve and extend our ideals of freedom.<sup>840</sup>

Writing to Beveridge in 1940, Ransome accused Wootton of belonging to the organisation’s interventionist faction, seeking not only federalisation but also social reform.<sup>841</sup> ‘Faction’ may, in hindsight, have been an understatement as it probably was a majority of the membership that was drawn to the interventionism of the federalist project. While few of them addressed morals or ethics in a systematic way, they shared a sense that federation would play a part in the advent of a new age, not only in terms of institutional practice, but in the citizens’ relations to those institutions and to each other. They saw their efforts as contributing to a moral evolution in the sense that each stage facilitated further reaching empathy and a deeper sense of political responsibility.

## The Post-War Order

When the Japanese Instrument of Surrender was signed at Tokyo Bay on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1945, British confidence in its imperial ability was higher than it had

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<sup>838</sup> Barbara Wootton, ‘Plan for Plenty (2)’ (15 March 1941a) *Federal Union News* 61, p. 1. For other times she made this point, see Wootton, ‘Socialism and Federation’, pp. 277–79; and Wootton, *Freedom under Planning*, pp. 110–13.

<sup>839</sup> Barbara Wootton, ‘Do the British Need Their Empire?’ (1941b) *Common Sense* 12:10, p. 371.

<sup>840</sup> Anonymous (30 October 1939) ‘List of New Zealand members’, Federal Trust B/1/1.

<sup>841</sup> Rosenboim, ‘Barbara Wootton, Friedrich Hayek and the Debate on Democratic Federalism in the 1940s’, p. 908.

been for decades.<sup>842</sup> The successful war effort was seen as proof that British policymakers could adapt the imperial machinery to the demands of modern times.<sup>843</sup> In the words of Historian L. J. Butler, 'Empire, it seemed, had acquired a new sense of purpose and direction.'<sup>844</sup> What had previously been criticised as unwieldy and costly, had suddenly found a properly sized task; what had previously been deemed morally questionable now stood in contrast to the Nazis. The country's political and naval position was still strong, even though the defeats in Southeast Asia showed that the empire needed to scale back its global ambitions.<sup>845</sup> Later that same year in London, Churchill declared that 'the British Commonwealth and Empire stands more united and more effectively powerful than at any time in its long romantic history'.<sup>846</sup>

The structural integrity of the empire was, on the other hand, severely damaged. The British State was on the verge of bankruptcy due to its war expenditures and it only escaped disaster thanks to a US loan of the unprecedented amount of \$3,5 billion.<sup>847</sup> Britain had also lost a large share of its world trade, decreasing to a position below 12 %, which was lower than it had been since 1750.<sup>848</sup> Additionally, the empire was not economically suited for the conditions of the time. Historian Patrick O'Brien argues that with all relevant factors taken into account, this point showed the British economy as nothing but a liability.<sup>849</sup> Of course, the empire could have survived these tests, but a series of crises in the war's immediate aftermath rendered the situation even more dire. The most significant crises were sterling and dollar shortages (1947), extensive devaluation (1949), and consequences of the country's rearmament (1950–1951).<sup>850</sup> As Historian Keith Jeffrey puts it: 'Paradoxically, the ultimate cost of defending the British Empire during the Second World War was the Empire itself.'<sup>851</sup> In this sense the Second World War did indeed give the British Empire a direction, just not in a way they imagined in 1939.

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<sup>842</sup> Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>843</sup> Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, pp. 525–30.

<sup>844</sup> L. J. Butler, 'British Decolonization', in Bob Moore, Martin Thomas, and L. J. Butler (eds.), *Crisis of Empire: Decolonization and Europe's Imperial States, 1918–1975* (2008) London: Bloomsbury Academic, p. 42.

<sup>845</sup> For an estimate of the post-war strength of the British military, see Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role*, pp. 291–94.

<sup>846</sup> Cited in Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, p. 22.

<sup>847</sup> William Roger Louis, 'The Dissolution of the British Empire', in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis (eds.), *The Twentieth Century* (1998) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 331–32.

<sup>848</sup> Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain since 1750*, p. 297.

<sup>849</sup> O'Brien, 'The Costs and Benefits of British Imperialism', p. 199.

<sup>850</sup> Butler, 'British Decolonization', pp. 47–49.

<sup>851</sup> Jeffrey, 'The Second World War', p. 327.

During the later years of the war, interest in Federal Union waned dramatically. After having narrowly escaped bankruptcy in 1942, the organisation had been forced to focus on stability and consistency rather than expansion. By extension, this also meant ideological homogenisation and in 1944 it was clear that the organisation needed to root out troubling dissidence. The leadership decided that the organisation should focus its efforts on a European federation, further developing its proposals, and that it should disregard what was perceived as less strategic options. While this meant a more coherent organisation, it also meant that many of the organisation's less-conformist members would depart. What Federal Union gained was the consistency and stability to continue its activity through the post-war era. What it lost was the dynamic debate that had contributed to its success during the early war, which—in truth—probably would have been lost by 1945 anyways. Federal Union, as well as The Round Table, would go on to pursue their respective goals after the war, but British federalism has not succeeded in attracting such prominent figures since.

While the post-war reconstruction saw the emergence of schemes for closer international ties (many of which Britain actively engaged in), the solutions presented to the issues addressed by the war aims debate were, as historian Alan Milward noted, almost never of a supranationalist nature.<sup>852</sup> Likewise, Britain's foreign presence remained 'decidedly colonial'.<sup>853</sup> For Federal Union, the focus on Europe would become more intense in the post-war period and based even more in a shared belief. The Round Table pursued less formal forms of Commonwealth cooperation. The major belief that the sovereign nation-state had been the root cause of war and the importance of maintaining imperial ties with non-imperial means, had now been established as status quo.

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<sup>852</sup> Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, p. 27. For good overviews of the post-war politics of international cooperation, see Martin J. Dedman, *The Origins and Development of the European Union 1945–95: A History of European Integration* (1996) London: Routledge, pp. 34–56; and Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (2007) London: Pimlico, pp. 226–40.

<sup>853</sup> Aiyaz Husain, *Mapping the End of Empire: American and British Strategic Visions in the Postwar World* (2014) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 2.



Figure 31 VE Day Celebrations

Among ordinary people, there was nothing but relief as they shared in the celebrations when the war ended. The general public seems to have been rather unconcerned with the future of the empire and it was an issue that in no way would be allowed to jeopardise peace or improved living standards. Historian David Cannadine has remarked that ‘The British Empire may (or may not) have been won “in a fit of absence of mind”, but as far as the majority of the population seems to have been concerned, it was given away in a fit of collective indifference.’<sup>854</sup>)

The picture is from Whitehall on Victory in Europe Day (8th May 1945). Published by the Ministry for Information Photo Division Photographer in the Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons, uploaded by Lockyear.

While the end of the war did not bring with it the end of European imperial efforts, it did mark the last dynamic moment in the history of federalist ideas for post-imperial Britain. This was a process connected to the contemporary decline and reshaping of British imperialism, but its direction and drive was defined overwhelmingly by the two world wars. By 1945, both The Round Table and Federal

<sup>854</sup> Cannadine, ‘Apocalypse When?’, pp- 261–62.



Union had crystallised in their positions *vis à vis* public opinion and the arc from English preservationism to radical utilisationism had reached its end. The process of decolonisation was in its infancy, but the federalist conceptualisation of a post-imperial world order had been set on its course.

## Federalism in War, Again

The dissolution of the British Empire was discussed and argued about in a way similar to the Second World War—that these events did not fundamentally change but only accelerated the course of British federalism.<sup>855</sup> This chapter has explored how the organic utilisationism that Kerr introduced after the end of the First World War was radicalised with the advent of the Second. Where Kerr had deemphasised the preservation of English cultural values as a post-imperial asset, Federal Union denounced it completely. Where Kerr had decoupled the constitutional dissolution of empire from the civilising, Federal Union rid itself of the latter almost entirely. The utilisationism that would develop into one of the dominant branches of British federalism seemed, at first glance, like the polar opposite of preservationism, but it was essentially an answer to the same question, only in a different context.

According to Federal Union members, the only quality from the British Empire that was seen as valuable after its dissolution was its institutional framework. It was seen as a source of immense experience in terms of practical international administration—something that would be in high demand in case of global federalisation—but first and foremost as a source of international status for the United Kingdom, a platform which would motivate the international community. While this realisation had been hinted at within the organic utilisationist narrative even as early as 1922, it was Federal Union's forward-looking employment that radicalised these notions and developed them into their logical conclusion. The empire played no intrinsic role in Federal Union's thinking—even if they did not go so far as to advocate for immediate colonial self-governance.

For the federalists for whom the empire did play an intrinsic role, the early 1940s would prove a challenge. The Round Table underwent a generational shift. 1945 was the first year it was not controlled by former *Kindergarteners*. This transition, however, veered the organisation away from its ambitions for a Commonwealth union and towards a program more general and less explicitly in

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<sup>855</sup> Jeffrey, 'The Second World War', p. 320.

support of Commonwealth cooperation. The organisation's decreased interest in federalism as such, combined with several of its more progressive members leaving for Federal Union, caused it to revert to a more unanimous preservationist narrative. The Round Table continued to blame German aggression for the war, and saw an increase in British influence as the key to preventing future wars.

Imperial federalism's most prominent representative, Lionel Curtis, found himself increasingly isolated intellectually as his combination of utilisationist scepticism towards nation-state sovereignty and preservationist hierarchism towards democracy alienated both ends of the federalist spectrum. He would continue to contribute to the federalist cause and maintained the respect of his peers as 'the most distinguished living advocate of federal principles in Britain', but with the passing of Milnerism he would never again be at the centre of a movement.<sup>856</sup>

When FU relegated the United Kingdom's imperial legacy to the side lines, the United Kingdom's cultural assets met the same fate. According to FU, the UK was seen as a potential member-state without any distinguishing qualities. It was seen as a country among others and the Table prescribed no distinctive role for the UK to play in the running of a future global union, even if it was presented as a last chance opportunity to make a real difference, instigating the transformation of the international order. The Table's response to the otherwise recurring ambition within federalism to ensure continued geopolitical elevation for the United Kingdom, was to abolish national geopolitical elevation altogether.

The experience of a second world war in combination with a stark decline in British imperial sentiment drastically altered the conditions for British foreign policy. Federalists had a tradition of considering Britain's long-term geopolitical outlook, and in many ways they were conditioned to present one of the most immediate and analytical responses to the war aims debate of the late 1930s and early 1940s. As such, Federal Union's popularity represented federalism's last time to shine in British political debate and the culmination of the preservationist–utilisationist dynamic which I have studied.

This chapter identified two strands of radical utilisationism in order to better understand the inner dynamics of the Federal Union membership. Optimising utilisationism, presented through the prism of William Beveridge's thinking, signifies an approach to federalism as the most efficient and modern political model to tackle contemporary issues. Its adherents—Wickham Steed, Lionel Robbins, and Gilbert Walker among others—interpreted the Federal Union emplotment of

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<sup>856</sup> Beveridge, *The Price of Peace*, p. 67.

a gradual evolution of human government in terms of institutional technology, proposing global federalism as the next stage of political administrative practice, made possible by the improved communications of the age. Beveridge argued that well-researched and well-resourced administration would allow Britain to tackle its most pressing problems and subsequently, through federation, lead the charge against these vices internationally. The optimising utilisationists saw a post-imperial global order defined by politics, designed by scientific standards, and aided by the technologies of the day, a cornerstone of which was the sub-summation of the world's population under a global administrative system through federation.

For transformational utilisationists, the war constituted not only a lack of administrative effectiveness, but also the failure of the moral fabric that connected established politics. The gravity of the situation presented Britain with the opportunity to radically transform its ideological outlook and constitutional tenets. For Wootton, the ideology which was best equipped to address the issues raised by the war was socialism, and federalism was the vehicle which could ensure its global application. While she accepted that federalism's strength lay in its administrative expediency, she argued that federalisation without reconsidering one's own political principles would ultimately do little to tackle the issue of global conflict. Here, the transformational utilisationists—such as Olaf Stapledon, Friedrich Hayek, and William Temple—agreed that the political evolution sketched out in the organisation's employment would need to include a 'moral' element, an improvement in the citizens' capacity to relate to politics and each other. As such, they considered federation as a steppingstone towards a primary political project, which in turn acted as the crucial motivation for the federalist project much more than the immediate benefits of a federal constitution. The transformational utilisationists argued that the United Kingdom ought to seize the moment to revolutionise the system of global politics, redefining its ideological character in a way that would trickle down to other aspects of the human experience.

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from the survey of these two strands is that the radical utilisationist narrative was flexible. By highlighting the optimising and transformational approaches towards federalism, we can see an important divide in how different federalists made sense of their efforts and understood the nature of the post-imperial global order. However, this does obscure the fact that these categories hosted a wide range of sub-categories, where labels such as bureaucratic, military, economic, libertarian, socialist, and theological utilisationism all represented distinct variations on the same narrative. Among the

members who devoted substantial time to the federalist cause, there were almost as many federalisms as federalists.

Collectively, this wide range of variations on the utilisationist narrative speaks to the power of the organisation's constructive ambiguity. Federal Union was born at a moment when society had failed in one of its most rudimentary functions and there was widespread desperation—or at least a determined search—for long-term solutions. Federal Union was able to cater to this search and thanks to the vagueness of its message, it was able to welcome members from widely different political and social backgrounds, united under the umbrella of federalism.

These ideas were aimed at subverting the conditions for traditional international politics and represented visions for international British conduct utilising non-imperial means. Whatever the exact status of the future empire and the relationship between Britain and its colonies, they were radical utilisationist approaches in the sense that they completely disregarded the imperial mode of global leadership. Regardless of their position on self-determination, they had stopped using the British Empire as a yardstick to measure political proficiency or a means for British geopolitical influence. Their thinking was in this sense post-imperial—that is, without explicit approval of imperial values or practices—even if it contained colonialist elements.

Finally, this chapter has offered some insight into the widespread entanglement of British federalism with other parts of British society during the Second World War. As mentioned above, Federal Union shared the Imperial Federation League's strategy of constructive ambiguity, which allowed it to reach further with its entanglements and be more dispersed than its predecessors. Through Philip Kerr it intermingled with Anglo-American diplomacy, through Wootton with a central professorial chair in sociology, and through Beveridge with the heart of Britain's post-war social reform. In William Temple we see federalism combined with the responsibilities of the Archduchy, through Lionel Robbins and Beveridge with the workings of LSE, through Lancelot Hogben to the Royal Society, and through Hayek and Julian Huxley to some of academia's most influential individuals. Through Channing-Pearce, Beveridge, and Lawrence W. Grensted it reached into the colleges of Oxford and through Laski, Wootton, and Zilliakus up the ranks of Labour. Works such as *The Road to Serfdom*, *Our War Aims*, and the 'Beveridge Report' are not part of the federalist canon but indicative of how Federal Union's utilisationism reached further and wider than its explicitly federalist program ever could. This is not to say that any straightforward causation or direction of influence can be established, nor to really attest to the level of federalist commitment from

any of these individuals. It is, however, an expression of how the organisation constituted a key part of the British response to the Second World War and its immediate, unconditional attempt to address a fundamental failure of Western society.



## Concluding Remarks

This thesis has shown how the British federalist understanding of the post-imperial order changed and branched out during the six decades from the beginning of organised federalism to the end of the Second World War. Focus and attention have been directed towards describing what shaped the federalists' thinking and attracted people to the federalist framing of contemporary politics. The main question which this study has sought to answer is: how did the federalists envision the post-imperial global order? While the answers to this question have varied substantially over time, and there are dimensions when one could argue that it would be more accurate to speak of British federalisms rather than a cohesive entity, the ambition to answer this question constitutionally—through the means of an international union—united the federalists in a shared endeavour.

With regards to the question's answers, this thesis has identified four major narratives within the material. The transitions between the different narratives are the result of contextual influence as the federalists responded to the changing world they lived in. I have argued that these responses are best understood as adopting new emplotments; certain contextual changes forced the federalists to reconsider the starting and ending points of the narrative in which they inserted themselves, consequently transforming the narrative into something with a new meaning and new lessons to learn. In this sense, the narratives have been defined first and foremost by 'events, my dear boy, events'.<sup>857</sup> In between the four narratives we find the start of the First World War, the end of the First World War and the start of the Second World War, three events—or junctures—which are crucial to understanding the history of British federalism. While the United Kingdom's declining ability to maintain global imperial presence remains an important backdrop to the historical process presented in this thesis, the two world wars ultimately defined both the domestic and international discourse on geopolitical order.

The initial organised federalism was guided by a narrative of *English preservation*, placing Britain's cultural influence at the centre of world history, as something vital

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<sup>857</sup> This quote is usually attributed to Harold Macmillan, see for example Harold Macmillan, being interviewed in Adam Raphael, 'Mrs T Looks out of Touch', *The Observer*, 11th March 1984 p. 4.

to be *preserved* beyond the empire's dissolution. During the late Victorian period, the Imperial Federation League became increasingly aware of the imperialist venture, in which imperialists, colonialists, and Little Englanders all demanded a more consolidated and coherent imperial policy. The IFL, spurred onwards by a historic mandate that they derived from the emplotment they had inherited from John Seeley, argued that the empire's contemporary status was a result of well-played opportunities and skilfully managed fortuitous conditions during a few preceding centuries and not something to be taken for granted. As such, the organisation contributed to the debate with a demand for a more committed and long-term approach to imperial issues. The organisation argued that the empire was the political manifestation of central English cultural attributes and as the imperial mode of government was seen as inherently temporary, the IFL advocated for a constitutional model that could preserve those key cultural characteristics beyond the empire's dissolution.

The IFL was generous in its consideration of what constituted 'English' culture and the most common traits mentioned were sweeping statements on liberalism, Christianity, civilisation, and a sense of constitutional 'maturity'. "Delving a little deeper, these qualities were, broadly, conceptualised within two distinct versions of the preservationist narrative: civic contra constitutional preservationism. Through proponents like *Lord Rosebery*, *Robert Stout*, and *W. E. Forster*, *civic preservationism*, envisioned federation as an expression of a shared sense of cohesion and political mission among the empire's inhabitants. As such, it was a constitutional model that needed to be built to reflect the ideas, aspirations, and Englishness of civic society, without submitting it to onerous bureaucracy. The strength of a future union was determined by the cultural ties of its inhabitants, which it was designed to facilitate.

*Constitutional preservationists* saw the cohesion of the English nation as something inherently fragile, and they proposed constitutional designs both to guarantee its stability as well as influence its character. For federalists such as *W. T. Stead*, *Francis Labillière*, and *Edward Freeman*, federation presented a constitutional model that matched the scale of the United Kingdom's imperial project and the challenges it faced. The establishment of a properly designed constitution would allow the UK to consolidate its imperial resources, guarantee non-hierarchical cooperation between the homeland and its self-governing colonies, as well as safeguard against some of the troubling expressions of imperial practice. The constitutional preservationists were not in agreement regarding how to define the post-imperial



union, but they shared a belief that the institutional expression of Englishness should be curated centrally.

The organised interest in a federalist cause went dormant with the collapse of IFL, but the seeds of what would become its successor emerged in Alfred Milner's South African administration only a few years later. In his recruitment of personnel, Milner prioritised young, gifted men who together would come to constitute his *Kindergarten*. Through Milner, they became accustomed to seeing the empire both as guided and legitimised by an emplotment reaching back to antiquity, while they simultaneously emphasised the crucial nature of the day-to-day administration.

After lying dormant for fifteen years, organised British federalism was awoken with by the establishment of The Round Table in 1910. The RT was defined by *Western preservationism*. It inherited most of the core tenets of the IFL's way of thinking but was reinvigorated in its zeal by the build-up and outbreak of the First World War. Just as their predecessors had done, the Western preservationists subscribed to the view that Britain's greatest asset was its culture and civilisation. Yet, they understood their history in terms of a different emplotment and whereas the IFL had outlined a history based on an uncoordinated and coincidental imperial expansion beginning in the 1500s, challenged by increasing geopolitical unrest in the second half of the nineteenth century, the RT envisioned something more epic. Their emplotment harkened back to the birth of a shared European heritage in ancient Greece and depicted a European civilising mission of constant improvement, over which England would eventually assume a leading role. This smooth development was interrupted, the organisation argued, with the emergence of German imperial ambitions following its unification. By 1910 it saw itself as battling a geopolitical rival in order to restore the harmony of historical progress, where everyone acted their assigned role.

As such, The Round Table perceived themselves as acting under a more immediate threat than their predecessors and they saw their success in securing the British sphere of influence as inversely related to German military expansion. Their preservationism was expansive in that they argued that England's cultural influence was an expression of a shared European heritage and that its preservation would be best guaranteed in a global union, guided by Europe. Because of its change of emplotment, it understood the empire's most pertinent threat as external, rather than internal discord; federation was seen as the constitutional model which was not only best suited to preserve English cultural cohesion, but one which could

guarantee geopolitical stability. The federalists had begun to approach foreign policy at the global level.

In terms of assets, the expansive federalists widened the scope of their emplotment and saw British culture and government as the most sophisticated expression of the classical European heritage, dating back to antiquity. They argued that Britain was the current torchbearer of civilisation and that the empire, as a commonwealth, represented the practical implementation of the government principles established during antiquity. In this ‘denial of coeval-ness’, Britain was seen as having come the furthest. It was clear that a federation could establish the institutional framework for Britain to assume an international role where it could guide its allies towards increased civilisation.<sup>858</sup> The challenge of the German as a hegemonic alternative forced the federalists to defend British influence in ways that were more salient for potential partners outside of the British Empire. This is not to say that these arguments were received with much enthusiasm by their European counterparts; much as with the promotion of federation aimed at British colonial subjects, the federalists constructed their argumentation so as to carry validity with the federation’s proposed members, even if they often failed to actually engage the targeted parties.

Among the three federalist organisations, The Round Table was the most centrally controlled and ideologically homogenous. Consequentially, the organisation did not suffer from factions like its counterparts, but there were undoubtedly several variations on the Western preservationist theme. No member influenced the organisation’s ideological framework more than *Lionel Curtis* and his understanding of preservationism can be described as ‘organic’, in that he situated the ultimate expression of the civilising mission squarely in the experience of imperial practice. He saw a future federation resulting from an organic process that emulated the growth of the British Commonwealth. Another immensely influential member, *Philip Kerr*, agreed with most of what Curtis outlined but put more emphasis on the considerations of contemporary politics and the need for institutional support to ensure Western preservation. Political heavyweight *Leo Amery*, conversely, emphasised the need for military backing in safeguarding Western values. Through the prism of *geographic preservationism*, he saw the contemporary conflict lines of international politics as geographically mandated, and thus no reason that a post-war order could ever rely on German goodwill.

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<sup>858</sup> For more on Dipesh Chakrabarty’s analysis of Europe’s relationship to coevalness, see Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, pp. 6–11.

These responses came during a time of increased military tensions in the late Edwardian era and for Curtis and Amery, the first years of the war would only accentuate the lessons already learnt. Kerr, however, had already by 1916 begun to seriously reconsider some of the assumptions from Western preservationism—allowing for a narrative of *institutional preservationism*, where the prevention of war, and not the civilising mission, would be considered the United Kingdom's primary post-imperial priority.

After the end of World War I, the organisation found itself split over how to interpret the conflict and its place in history. Most members saw the conflict as confirmation of a German militarism that the organisation had warned of since its foundation. Some federalists however, Philip Kerr most prominently, began to explore a narrative of *organic utilisationism*. Kerr became increasingly convinced that the ultimate goal of a post-imperial federation should be to utilise imperial institutions and the United Kingdom's global standing to establish a union that could guarantee lasting peace. Following an emplotment defined by the war, the United Kingdom's primary asset was deemed to be its experience and presence as a global governmental entity and federation was seen as the means to put this governmental potency into action for international interests.

Kerr outlined an organic transition, incrementally adopting new steps towards a system that would no longer rely on nation-state sovereignty. He argued that the process ought to be guided by historical insight and while its ultimate goal was a non-hierarchical order decoupled from any particular national culture, the British commonwealth would be used as an outstanding blueprint from which the constitutional design could draw inspiration. Kerr remained indebted to Curtis' organic understanding of political progress. This was testament to how the immediate post-war utilisationism still shared several hierarchical assumptions with preservationism and how, at that point, Kerr hesitated to acknowledge the full subversive potential of the utilisationist line of reasoning. This was, however, the British federalists' first unequivocal denouncement of the post-1815 international order of *Pax Britannica*.

While the emergence of utilisationism carried with it a promise of radical change, its immediate impact was small and federalists such as *Edward Grigg*, *Alfred Zimmern*, Amery, and Curtis carried on the cause of Western preservationism from increasingly influential positions. The war had confirmed their conviction in the need for a liberal imperialist hegemony and the preservation of the democratic values of civilised co-existence which they associated with the British imperial project. In terms of political impact, this period marked federalism's heyday; much

of the preservationist conceptualisation of peaceful global order and transition from imperial rule to Commonwealth cooperation guided both the United Kingdom's reconfiguration of imperial policy, as well as the outlining of the liberal global order that would serve as a roadmap for the post-war reconstruction of international politics.

As the interwar efforts to establish international stability appeared increasingly inept, the centre of Round Table thinking shifted to align itself gradually with Kerr. Much was still written by him, but as members began to distrust the ability of any international order that based itself on sovereign nation-states to safeguard peace, the organisation moved to an output that by the late 1930s was predominantly utilitarianist. The failure of the League of Nations to involve the relevant parties and to establish a more substantial and enforceable set of international rules would push The Round Table to reconsider the limitations of the traditional mode of international politics and to scale back the prominence of its civilising mission as the challenge to address the risk of another intra-European conflict grew dire.

Alongside this development, *Harold Laski's* parallel strand of federalism emerged. Influenced both by the Marxist tradition of local government and continental calls for supranational federation, Laski developed the first *utilitarianist* arguments that were *radical* rather than organic in structure. Laski's thinking was not based on history lessons nor on the experience of Commonwealth administration. He arrived at his utilitarianism after theoretical reasoning, designing the optimal constitution from abstract principles. This alternative framing of the issue of the United Kingdom's post-imperial future would later prove significant, as it was picked up by the subsequent force in British federalist history, Federal Union.

Federal Union was founded in 1938 and from the very beginning, it was significantly less dependent on the imperial conceptualisation of world order. The organisation's ideas were based on an emplotment that envisioned an evolution of human government, where nations had proven themselves to be gradually more adept at providing security and equality to their citizens, but international politics had been left to anarchy. Federal Unionists saw the two world wars as confirmation of this perennial failure and turned their attention to the future aspects of their emplotment, as history had little to offer. They proposed a narrative of *radical utilitarianism*, designing constitutional models to utilise British imperial institutions and its international reputation based on abstract reasoning over historical precedent. Their conclusions disregarded the value of particularly English values and the organisation ultimately aimed for a world federation,

eliminating undivided national sovereignty and securing peace by the intra-federal rule of law.

Federal Union denounced the supremacy of English culture and the imperial mode of government as a blueprint for a future union. However, it did not commit to immediate decolonisation nor challenge global material and political injustice head-on. Generally, the organisation was more un-imperial than anti-imperial. There were those, like Wootton, who at times addressed the issue explicitly, but the general trend was to ignore imperial concerns for what were perceived as more urgent threats. Overall, the organisation was not particularly distraught about the nature of contemporary colonialist practice.

Within this general framework, Federal Union was a broad-church organisation, and this study has presented a number of different, and at times contradictory, views on the nature of federalism. The organisation's members were essentially divided along the lines of two overarching sub-narratives—optimising contra transformational utilisationism. *Optimising utilisationists* argued for federation as the optimal constitutional model to tackle key issues of the day. Many of them had ambitious visions, but they consistently championed them on account of their administrative expediency. While the narrative's representatives—such as *William Beveridge*, *Lionel Robbins*, and *Wickham Steed*—often focussed their attention on particular political issues and aspects of federalism, they agreed with the general assertion that federation would play a key role in the transition towards the next stage of human institutional evolution, as part of the implementation of an institutional framework based on the most updated technology and the most precise scientific analysis.

*Transformational utilisationists* like *Barbara Wootton*, *Olaf Stapledon*, and *Friedrich Hayek*, understood federation as a key step towards a more fundamental transformation of the conditions for democratic rule. This would define the next stage of a moral evolution of man, in line with the gradual improvement of citizens' capacity to empathise with each other and to take political responsibility. They argued that federation played a crucial part in establishing international order but motivated its application citing the benefits it would bring to the larger project. The transformational utilisationists argued for the urgency of the current moment as the war had created the appetite and facilitated the resources for subversive societal change.

Under these two approaches to motivate federalisation, the organisation hosted a slew of takes and variations on the radical utilisationist model. Some notable examples were Archbishop of Canterbury *William Temple* who saw federation as a

Christian endeavour, educator *Lyndia Grier*, who argued that the US should be the cornerstone of any successful federation, and Curtis, who represented a commonwealth-esque approach. Together, these and the other examples mentioned above offer a sense of the spectrum of views within the organisation, which utilised its constructive ambiguity to allow everyone to imbue the federalist message with their own ideological content.

By the end of the war, the federalist movement had lost much of its momentum. For The Round Table, the war coincided with a generational shift as the old *Kindergarten* no longer had a dominant hold over the moot. The Dominions resisted any scheme resulting in a formalised union, and Federal Union drained the organisation of some of its most enthusiastic federalists. Eventually, the RT relinquished its federalist ambitions to focus its efforts on Commonwealth promotion on a smaller scale.

The immediacy of the war experience had been a crucial factor driving Federal Union's popularity and as the political debate returned to a more pragmatic *status quo* and Federal Union struggled with unifying a substantial portion of the membership behind a single, coherent proposal, the organisation became a shadow of its former self. The organisation continued to be relevant and federalism in Britain would continue to attract, mobilise, and educate people who were interested in constitutional measures for the issues of the day. But it was no longer central to disputed issues within dynamic debate, inhabiting instead a marginal, and predictable, role in a debate where the lines of conflict were rather established. Federalism's most dynamic and consequential period—as well as its transition from English preservationism to radical utilisationism—had ended by 1945.

Studying the history of British federalism through the lens of its narrative transition from English and Western preservationism to organic and radical utilisationism reveals several important qualities. Looking at the issue of how federalists understood the post-imperial order and the path they took to get there has clarified the substantial perpetuity of this history. Even when contexts changed, the fundamental question remained the same and continued to attract like-minded people throughout this period, even if they ultimately arrived at dramatically different conclusions.

This framing of federalist history has, simultaneously, illuminated a key juncture in the emergence of utilisationism at the end of World War I. While Kerr's initial ideas would need time to take root within British federalism at large, and there was much that distinguished his organic ideas from the radical narrative of Federal Union. The comparison of these two narratives of post-imperial order

focusses the story on the experience of the two world wars. The experience of their horrors and the fundamental nature of the questions they put to Western society led them to redefine the conditions for British federalist thinking.

If the wars defined the course of federalist history, this study has also shown that geopolitical uncertainty was also definitive because of its relevance. The transition from preservationism to utilisationism positions federalism's most influential period in the interim between the British and the American global hegemony. Organised federalism first emerged at the beginning of the late empire, still in a dominant position, but with increasing indications of both German and American challenges to British superiority. These were not substantial nor pressing threats, yet, but the questions were inevitably raised; the imagination was inevitably stirred.

The interwar era has often been described as a hiatus of hegemonic power, with the extent of US interventionism still up for debate. By 1945, however, the US had settled into its role as one of the dominant superpowers of global politics and definitely usurped the United Kingdom, which was relegated to a much more marginal role as the battlelines of the Cold War were drawn. While the UK attempted to play a supporting role, it had become a hard-sell to argue that the next scheme for a global order would spring from the British domestic debate. The fact that these extreme analytical interpretations were even possible and are intelligible in their conclusions, also speaks to the coherence of the study's sources and treatment of them.

A final observation which the diachronic perspective made possible is the outsized impact of certain individuals and their ideas. Surveying a longer period of time has revealed the longevity of certain ideas as they were passed down from one generation of federalists to the next. The immense impact that Seeley and Milner had on British imperialism has been acknowledged by previous research manifold, and their dominant British influence is no surprise. Kerr, however, was a more unexpected candidate from this group, but the clarity, independence, and quantity of his writings coloured the second half of the period studied here and constituted perhaps the single most influential contribution to what British federalism came to be. A contemporary and thoroughly researched biography of his life and work is long overdue.

Historical arguments that span an extensive period of time are, of course, made possible by the diachronic nature of this study. It would be foolish not to admit that I was forced to make disciplined omissions as this study spans a period of six decades. The narrative presented here can be further nuanced significantly. There

are also many lines of reasoning and implied correlations that future research will have an opportunity to scrutinise. However, this study is a testament to the relevance of complementing perspectives and how diachronic and synchronic studies can enrich one another, leading to a more complex understanding. This study is profoundly indebted to the many insightful and thorough synchronic studies that have made it possible to compare federalism's various contexts. Diachronic history contributes the continuities and repetitions throughout history that reveal themselves only outside of the well-defined and readily manageable constraints of a more limited synchronic study. It also adds depth to historical insight, testing the assumptions of more focussed studies on a broader sample of material.

The narrative approach has also demonstrated history's central role in federalist thinking. The understanding of the history of contemporary politics—its emplotment—and the subsequent way this history was imbued with meaning and direction through the establishment of a narrative, guided federalism through the twists and turns between 1884 and 1945. The precision and scale of its historico-political approach distinguished federalism from many other forms of political activity. A key aspect of many federalists' messages was to contextualise their political ambitions within an extensive historical understanding.

Shifting the focus away from the constitutional details of the federalist programs and to the more salient issue of post-imperial order has also revealed the most important mode of federalism's impact on British politics. The number of cabinet members, newspaper editors, political advisors, academic professors, colonial politicians, and well-read authors who became involved in the federalist cause during the six decades this thesis has covered speaks to the ideology's relevance in British political history. While the organisations have naturally focused their attention on their own programs and the composition of the federal constitution, these considerations were always based on an assessment of the current and future state of global politics, one of many ideological puzzle pieces that together constituted what it meant to become a federalist. In understanding British federalism's place in British political history, these intellectual exchanges must be considered alongside any ensuing policy impact. The bountiful instances from the federalist narratives—both within and without the core tradition—also speak to the exemplification quality of the study and its theoretical concepts.

A key aspect to understand federalism's role in British politics beyond its policy impact has been this study's consideration of sources outside of the federalist canon. Taking into account federalism's extensive entanglement with the rest of



British society allows for the reading of a number of sources that do not explicitly address federalism. These sources perpetuate its narrative framing of contemporary politics. This has allowed the study to move beyond the British federalist organisations and ‘explore the multifaceted and fissiparous contours’ of federalism.<sup>859</sup> Designating these interactions as ‘entanglements’ highlights the fact that they were rarely of a one-way nature and that the intellectual causality is both irretrievable and, in many ways, irrelevant. What these sources attest to is a federalism that should be understood as something entrenched in British political life and the activity of its intelligentsia, rather than something separate or isolated. Taken together, the results that I have discussed above demonstrate both the originality of the study’s conclusions and their great degree of applicability.

Federalism’s entrenchment was, to a large extent, made possible by its greatest strength and most significant weakness. Defined by constructive ambiguity, the tradition would continuously attract new members with lofty aspirations and radical solutions to society’s ills, even if their programs were often mutually exclusive. Studying federalism through the lens of its societal immersion reveals how intellectuals from disparate persuasions were drawn to the federalist organisations as forums to contemplate and discuss political issues during a time when these were most often ignored in the mainstream political discourse. People such as Beveridge, Rosebery, Amery, Milner, and Grigg associated themselves with the federalist tradition in an effort to engage with political issues in a distant future. Even if they rarely expressed any explicitly federalist support in their careers, federalist discourse played a crucial role in providing a framework for dealing with political issues in the long term. Academics, equally—such as Freeman, Zimmern, Laski, Hayek, Wootton, and Seeley—found a forum to express their scholarly insights and to translate their knowledge from the restrictive requirements of academic standards to actionable politics.

Here, the involvement of several influential academics has indicated the importance of networks to understanding British intellectual history. A significant part of federalism’s impact on British society was connected to its interest from disproportionately influential networks such as the *Kindergarten*, the Robbins seminar, and the LSE circle surrounding Beveridge (as well as, tangentially, the liberal imperialists). While the vital role these networks played as part of British intelligentsia has often been acknowledged, updated and focused research on these groups would provide great insight into the nuances of British intellectual history.

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<sup>859</sup> Bell, ‘Empire and International Relations’, p. 282.

The constructive ambiguity that accompanied federalism to varying degrees during the period studied here would prove detrimental to the force and resolve of federalist policy proposals, but also equally beneficial to the width and breadth of federalism's spread. It was, in this sense, as an 'architectonic' concept—to borrow Robbin's phrase—that federalism expressed itself in British politics; federalism proved to be a historico-political framework with a great number of applications. This speaks to both the adaptability the federalist concept, but also to its inspirational qualities. One would be wise to consider that the scale of the historico-political mindset inherent in the federalist concept also inspired many of its adherents to confront the issues they faced with bold solutions.

The wide array of sources considered for comparisons of this nature owes a lot to the great efforts put into digitisation. This study would not have been possible within the constraints of a four-year project if not for the arduous work of librarians and enthusiasts across the globe to make many of the sources available online. The ability to read large selections of literature in a targeted way the assistance of text search has proven crucial to certain parts of the analysis, but the real value has been its sheer availability. I hope that the accessibility and manageability of such a vast body of work will facilitate more large-scale studies and, hopefully, allow the historian to encounter more unexpected sources in unlikely places.

The great variation within the federalist ranks is also a further testament to the relevance of contextualising federalism. The federalists acted to address issues in their lives and to interpret topics of the day, not to theorise in the abstract. Applying a contextual reading has also allowed this study to consider federalist proposals within their entanglements, understanding federalist activity alongside other attempts to address the same issues. Approaching context with an open mind has allowed the study to rely on several unexpected sources of crucial influence regarding how federalists came to understand their world. Contextual clues such as children's books and photographic journalism have broadened the understanding of the federalist experience as well as providing consequential insight into certain aspects of their thinking.

The contextualisation of this study also owes a lot of its breadth to the inclusion of illustrations. Simply put, there is information that can be communicated visually by images which text cannot match. Despite the analytical value of the image description, it is striking how much more of the contextual detail an image can provide. While the most relevant aspects of any given context were most often intellectual, this study is a reminder that the context is always something exp-

erience by all five senses. If feasible, I would have included elements of them all in my description.

The story presented in this study is in the end, I believe, about interconnectedness. The ambition to trace an intellectual tradition across several organisations, and several decades has, despite it being theoretically illuminating, in many ways proven to be nonsensical in practice. Federalism's deep entanglement with parallel intellectual endeavours such as the imperialism of the late empire, the search for an interwar global order, the struggle to prevent global conflict, and the curation of a national identity has made its delineation virtually impossible. Several of these processes have been recurrent themes throughout the text while some of them would be fascinating to explore further. Many federalists' close association to the new generation of geographers surrounding Mackinder and Rudolf Kjellén, for example, promises to be a great area of future study on how a new geographical framework for international politics informed and inspired constitutional considerations, and vice versa. Another such area is federalism's apparent affinity to a more pronounced Christian outlook and how during this period several devout Christians and two archbishops deemed federalism to be the constitution most suited to God's mission.

The fact that federalism is a part of British political history also makes it inextricable from it. Describing it as 'entangled' with these endeavours is a pedagogical tactic that suggests a delineated, pre-entangled entity which of course never existed. Federalists, federalist texts, and federalist organisations are certainly more delineated, but no individual was solely federalist and no organisation recruited members with a single cause in mind. What is striking, rather, is that throughout these momentous processes, references and associations to federalism keep popping up. Federalism's strongest claim to relevance from accounts of British history may very well be its presence. Throughout the intellectual processes that would come to define British self-understanding in the twentieth century, federalism was simply 'there'.



# Sammanfattning

*Visioner bortom imperium. Brittiska federalister och Storbritannien efter imperiet, 1884–1945*

Den här avhandlingen undersöker hur brittiska federalister föreställde sig den världsordning som skulle råda efter upplösningen av det brittiska imperiet. De ville grunda en federation som kunde tackla de hot man såg inom den internationella politiken. Federalismen som idé väckte på detta vis frågor om den framtida världsordningen och vilken geopolitisk roll Storbritannien skulle kunna spela efter imperiets slut.

Den brittiska federalismen har traditionellt studerats som en politisk idé som är intressant i sig men utan större framgång i den brittiska politiken. Federalismen har helt enkelt setts som ett intressant men slutligen irrelevant inslag i den brittiska politikens historia. Den här studien skiftar fokuset bort från de federalistiska idéernas detaljer och undersöker istället vilka problem det var federalisterna ville lösa och hur federalismen hjälpte dem att närma sig dessa. Även om federation som en politisk lösning inte fått något större genomslag i brittisk politik visar den här avhandlingen att federalismen som rörelse spelade en avgörande roll inom det samhällsövergripande arbete som var att tolka, förstå och anpassa sig till imperiets nedgång och fall. Federalisternas konstitutionella lösningar må ha fått minimalt gehör, men det faktum att det fanns organisationer som tidigt och på ett systematiskt vis funderade på vilken roll Storbritannien skulle komma att spela internationellt efter imperiets upplösning visade sig mycket attraktivt för en mängd individer inom den brittiska politiken.

Studien sträcker sig över en period som börjar med grundandet av den första federalistiska organisationen i Storbritannien 1884 och sträcker sig till det andra världskrigets slut 1945. Den följer aktiviteten hos tre organisationer: Imperial Federation League (IFL) [1884–1893], The Round Table (RT) [1910–idag] och Federal Union (FU) [1938–idag]. Även om de alla brottades med den grundläggande frågan om Storbritanniens roll efter imperiets upplösning så förändras det politiska sammanhanget – kontexten – mycket under perioden och federalister i olika tider drar olika slutsatser om varför federation är en bra idé. De tidiga federalisterna såg federation som ett sätt att cementera imperiets fördelar genom ett demokratiskt samarbete som skulle bygga vidare på den politiska gemenskap som fanns inom det brittiska imperiet – vad som brukar kallas imperiefederalism. Efter

första världskriget börjar dock fler och fler federalister gradvis att se federation som ett sätt att bryta upp de gamla imperierna och att etablera en radikalt ny världsordning för att säkerställa fred.

För att beskriva denna övergång tittar denna avhandling på hur federalisterna såg på sitt förgångna och sin framtid som en handling [emplotment], med en början, en mitt och ett slut. När federalisterna försökte förklara vad som lett till att världen såg ut så som den gjorde tog de helt enkelt fasta på vissa händelser och processer som relevanta och byggde utifrån dessa en sammanhängande handling som förklarade den historiska utvecklingen bakåt, men också vad man föreställde sig skulle hända framåt. Denna beskrivning av den historiska utvecklingen som en handling fylldes sen med mening av det jag kallar en berättelse [narrative], där handlingen utvecklas till ett politiskt program med subjektiva mål. De tidiga federalistiska berättelserna hade som mål att konservera [preserve] imperiets bästa kvalitéer medan de senare berättelserna istället ville nyttja [utilise] de institutioner och det inflytande det brittiska imperiet hade, utan att bevara något av dess kulturella "innehåll".

Även om federationen som idé hade begränsad framgång inom brittisk politik så visar min studie på att dessa berättelser var med och påverkade många centrala processer i det som brukar kallas det sena brittiska imperiet. På detta vis kan man beskriva federalismen som intrasslad [entangled] med övriga brittiska samhället. Uttryckt annorlunda så var också många av de som inte direkt förespråkade etablerandet av en federation också mycket inspirerade av de federalistiska berättelserna och deras sätt att närma sig den samtida politiken. Federalismen var på detta vis inte ett marginellt och isolerat system, utan intrasslat i brittisk politik på det vis att det är svårt att dra gränsen för vad det ena slutade och det andra började, samt avgöra vilken sida som påverkade den andra. En av avhandlingens nyckelpoänger är att denna åtskillnad inte heller är nödvändig, utan att det är intressant i sig att konstatera den intima sammankopplingen mellan den brittiska federalismen och den politiska utvecklingen i övrigt.

Det första analyskapitlet studerar den första federalistiska organisationen i Storbritannien, Imperial Federation League och hur de förespråkade engelsk konservering [English Preservation]. IFL var mycket inspirerade av den samtida historikern (och medlemmen) John Seeley, som bara några år innan organisationen grundades hade argumenterat för att imperiet hade kommit mer eller mindre av en slump och att det inte var någon självklarhet att det skulle överleva framåt. Med en handling som sträckte sig endast några sekel tillbaka, till då imperiets utvidgning började, argumenterade IFLs medlemmar för att den samtida politiken behövde lägga om

kurs och göra långsiktiga planer för att federalisera imperiet och hålla det samman, även efter att kolonierna gradvis gavs självständighet.

Med en berättelse om engelsk konservering menade organisationen att federationens huvudsyfte skulle vara att upprätthålla den engelska kulturens inflytande för imperiets invånare. Det var särskilt det man såg som Storbritanniens uppdrag att civilisera världen som man ville bevara och federation sågs som ett sätt att tillåta att kolonier gradvis nådde full "politisk mogenhet" utan att bryta upp den brittiska inflytelsesfären. Bland medlemmarna bör premiärministern Lord Rosebery nämnas, som hävdade att detta måste göras genom medborgerlig konservering [civic preservation], alltså pådrivet av gräsrotsstöd snarare än påtvingat centralt ifrån. Vård att nämna är också journalisten W. T. Stead som förespråkade en variant på konstitutionell konservering [constitutional preservation] (båda dessa är underkategorier av engelsk konservering), där han hävdade att denna förvandling just måste planeras och styras centralt, för att kunna frambringa de omvälvande förändringar han såg framför sig.

Kapitel tre börjar med tiden efter IFLs kollaps 1893 och den sydafrikanske byråkraten Alfred Milner. När han arbetade i Sydafrika under andra boerkriget (1899–1901) så hade han anställt en grupp med unga karriärister som snart fick smeknamnet "Milners dagis" [Milner's Kindergarten]. Ett decennium senare skulle dessa federalister grunda organisationen The Round Table för att sprida sina lärdomar från Sydafrika till hela imperiet.

RT byggde sitt tänkande på en mycket längre handling än IFL. RT's medlemmar menade att man kunde spåra imperiet ända tillbaka till antika Grekland och att det är det civilisationsarvet man nu förvaltade. Civiliserandet av världen såg de som en linjär process fram till slutet av 1800-talet, då Tysklands nyfunna imperieambitioner utmanade Storbritanniens ledande roll. Utifrån denna handling förespråkade man en berättelse om västerländsk konservering [Western preservation], där det engelska inflytandet skulle säkerställas inte bara för imperiets invånare, utan för hela världen inom ramen för en global federation.

Organisationens mest inflytelserika medlemmar var tjänstemannen och författaren Lionel Curtis samt tjänstemannen Philip Kerr (senare Lord Lothian). Curtis såg det brittiska imperiet som något som växt fram mycket långsamt och argumenterade med sin organiska konservering [organic preservation] att man framåt måste bygga vidare försiktigt på denna politiska gemenskap för att inga centrala värden skulle gå förlorade. Kerrs tänkande var mer riktat mot deras samtid och han förespråkade en institutionell konservering [institutional preservation], där

han betonade vikten av att se federation som ett institutionellt projekt och ett sätt att etablera internationella lagar.

Det första världskriget skulle, särskilt med tiden, innebära en enorm förändring för den brittiska federalismen. Kapitel fyra analyserar mellankrigstiden och hur den initiala västerländska konservismen mer och mer övergår i en berättelse om nyttjande. Med tiden blev det tydligt för ett ökande antal federalister att den gamla världsordningen inte kunde garantera hindrandet av nästa globala konflikt och de såg federalismen mer och mer som en strategi för att nyttja de resurser och den ställning som det brittiska imperiet hade för att skapa en världsordning som var radikalt ny.

Till de som höll fast vid en konserverande berättelse hörde Alfred Zimmern, som spelade en nyckelroll i arbetet med Nationernas Förbund, vilket senare skulle ligga till grund för FN. Bland ”nyttjarna” återkommer Kerr men också vänsterakademikern Harold Laski. Kerr förespråkade ett organiskt nyttjande [organic utilisationism], vilket skulle växa fram långsamt, medan Laski argumenterade för ett radikalt nyttjande [radical utilisationism], grundat i teoretiska antaganden.

Det sista analyskapitlet rör perioden för andra världskriget och fokuserar på den yngsta federalistiska organisationen, Federal Union. FU blev enormt populära i början av kriget och anammade det radikala nyttjandet helt i en vision om en världsunion fri från brittisk särställning. Mot slutet av kriget hade dock organisationen svårare att få gehör för sina idéer och man lyckades inte mobilisera medlemmarna runt en tydlig väg framåt. RT kämpade på med sitt konservistiska tänkande, men tvingades till slut att överge federationstanken.

FU hade en mängd framstående briter som medlemmar men mest centrala för den här studien var den liberale ekonomen William Beveridge och sociologen Barbara Wootton. Beveridge representerar en falang inom organisationen som förespråkade optimerande nyttjande [optimising utilisationism], vilket innebar att man såg federation som den modernaste och mest gynnsamma regeringsformen. För Beveridge spelade detta tänkande en central roll i hans program för en välfärdspolitisk reform, vilket skulle komma att ligga till grund för inrättandet av allmän statlig sjukvård (NHS). Wootton var den främste förespråkaren för den berättelse som jag kallar för omdanande nyttjande [transformational utilisationism], där federalisering sågs som en öppning för en mer omfattande samhällsförändring, i Woottons fall en socialistisk världsstat.

Det sista kapitlet sammanfattar de resultat jag här skisserat och pekar på den mycket centrala roll som det första världskrigets erfarenheter kom att spela för federalismens utveckling. Särskilt intressant här är att tidigare forskning ofta utgått



från att övergången från konservering till nyttjande skedde i och med andra världskriget, medan jag kunnat visa att nyttjandet går att spåra hela vägen tillbaka till åren direkt efter det första. Jag gör också en poäng av värdet med studier som undersöker en så pass lång period och som kan titta på de långtgående processernas förändring över tid.



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