

“How Lord Davies believed he could end all War,”

By Dr Grant Dawson

Western Mail, Tuesday 1 September 2009: 19

The 12th of September marks the end of World War Two in Asia. With Japan’s surrender in 1945, the world could at last emerge, battered and bruised, from history’s most costly and destructive war. It had lasted five years (longer if you count the Japanese invasion of China in 1937). The reputation of the League of Nations, the ancestor of the United Nations, was in tatters. Much of Europe and Asia was a smoking ruin. The Holocaust. Atomic bombs. Sixty million dead.

September 1945 had all this, but it was also a time of unique promise for international justice and a peaceful world. I know of someone who, though optimistic by nature, would say we’ve squandered that opportunity.

He would have had a clear recommendation for ending the global war on terror and the conflict raging in Afghanistan. The problem is: you won’t like it.

He was the first David, Lord Davies. Profoundly affected by World War Two’s prequel, also known as the Great War, he wrote a prescription to cure the world of inter-state war. He believed war should be conceived as a police activity, to seal breaches in the international peace, and not as a means of protecting and furthering state interests.

He believed that war could gradually be eliminated if a new international organization was created. It would rule on disputes between states using judicial machinery and base its decisions on justice. The international arbitrator would be able to rise above politics, confident that the award would be enforced, because it would be backed by power.

Military power would be pooled into a standing multi-nation force. Its primary purpose would be to deter, but it would have to be strong enough to quell aggression by one state or any group of states. It would also symbolize the compelling authority of the international dispute resolution mechanism.

He predicted that not all states would want to pool those elements of military power that could be most easily internationalized – such as aircraft. But some would. And, when more states joined the collective security system, the international police force could be reduced. Eventually disarmament would be achieved.

Lord Davies wrote books and articles, gave speeches and founded institutions to study international relations to try to convince people. Some, such as The Temple of Peace, Cardiff, and David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies and Department of International Politics, both in Aberystwyth University, are still working. He poured his considerable energy and resources into this project and never stopped. He was the visionary or prophet who was listened to but not heard: a twentieth century Jean de Bloch.

Before Lord Davies died, in 1944, he was looking ahead to the post-war era. He hoped that after the war, with rubble from the “new Armageddon” he had warned of all about them, people would be receptive to his views. This was particularly important now, for improvements in military and communications technology (the power of the “microphone”) had made the world more interconnected, Lord David said. A quarrel between rivals can rapidly develop into a “universal bombing match.”

Lord Davis did not specify how power would be transferred to an international organization in the first place, so the process of re-learning could begin. He would have been strongly encouraged by the United Nations at its founding, which included a Military Staff Committee and plans for a vast United Nations commanded force supplied by the great powers that would stamp out conflicts that threatened world order.

But the Cold War put paid to those proposals. It was international politics as usual, as far as Lord Davies was concerned, throughout the Cold War and up to present times. This brings us to the war on terror and the fighting in Afghanistan.

Lord Davies' recommendation might be strategically and politically unpalatable, but it would also be morally right and just, and led to the peace and security we say we want in the long run.

Lord Davies was familiar with terrorism – he surely would have been aware of the anarchist assassination campaign of state leaders (including a United States president) at the turn of the twentieth century. But he would have disagreed with the method chosen to address the problem.

For Lord Davies, the solution could never come from more war or the imposition of an unjust peace. The problem for him was the 'sanctity' of the sovereign state and the lack of a higher power in the international system of states that can impose justice.

He might have argued that western foreign policies have not brought peoples in the Middle East or the west justice, security and peace. Lord Davies might also have argued that the terrorist attacks were a response, an emphatic rejection, of those policies. He would urge us to withdraw from Afghanistan, and invest an international organization with the legal machinery and power to permit justice to thrive and peace to prevail for all.

So there you go. I knew you wouldn't like it.

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