

# Selling the Super - State

By PAUL E. MUELLER

In the spring of 1939 Clarence Streit published a book called "Union Now." This book was a proposal that the fifteen democracies then existing—the United States, the Five Nations of the British Commonwealth, Eire, the four Scandinavian countries, the Low Countries, France, and Switzerland — should band together in an international federal government which should bear to the individual nations a relationship similar to that of the Federal Government of the United States to the individual states. Since Mr. Streit's book appeared, the number of democratic nations free to join such a federation has been considerably diminished, but the idea has attracted many supporters. The present proposal is that those nations who are able to join—for practical purposes, the United States and the British Commonwealth — should do so, with a view to inviting others into the group when circumstances are more propitious.

It causes us no surprise when individuals preoccupied with one pursuit come to believe that the subject of their attention is the most important in the world. Without anything like a thorough analysis, they incline to feel that if they can only find solutions for their own problems, all other problems will solve themselves as a consequence.

Thus, in the eighteenth century men's minds were focussed upon the subject of political reform. To the social and economic abuses against which they rebelled, they ascribed political causes; they reasoned that if they suffered from the king's exercise of power, relief must be sought by means of a transfer of power to a Congress or Parliament. They were not prepared to do away with the State; indeed, they were not even prepared to question their need for a State. Essentially legislative in their philosophy, they felt that any wrong could be remedied by suitable legislative methods, and naturally sought their escape from the tyranny of a Royal State in a

Parliamentary State which should, presumably, assure them the liberty they desired.

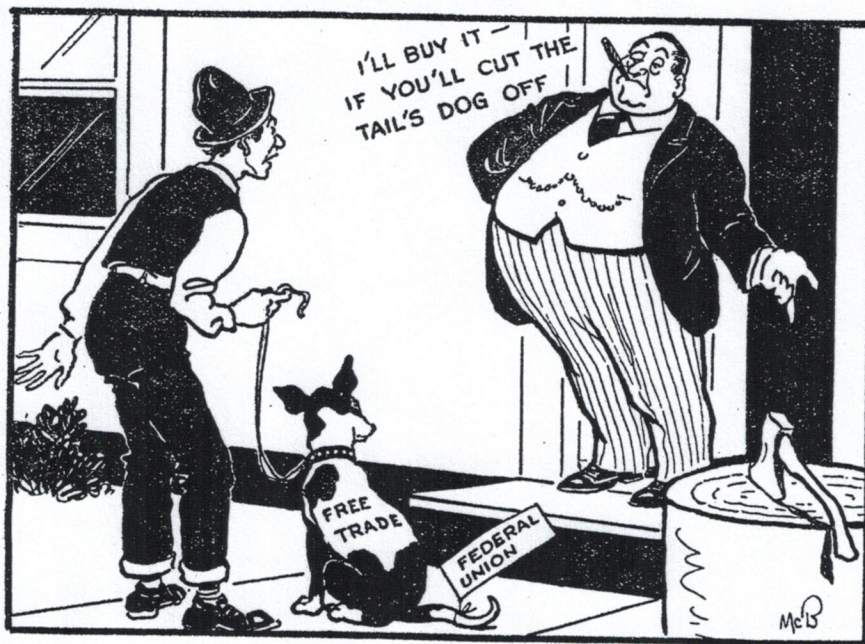
A similar view was held by many people in the Nineteenth Century with respect to economic evils. According to Malthus, mankind was forever condemned to poverty simply because of the surplus population. With the advances of science and technology which marked their age, many hoped to circumvent the Malthusian law: enough machines, enough production, and poverty must surely disappear merely from an excess of good things. Just as it never occurred to them that even a Parliamentary State might fail to conserve human rights, so they never dreamed that there could be poverty in the midst of plenty. O sweet illusion! O bitter disappointment!

Despite our republican form of government, despite our technological gains, the sufferings of mankind continue, and the tendency of the present time seems to be irresistibly toward some catastrophe. Men continue to try to halt this suicidal rush by solving immediate problems, essentially superficial, without probing

into fundamentals for clues to first causes. Such an attempt is the proposal for Federal Union.

Mr. Streit is a newspaper man, and was formerly correspondent at Geneva during the life of the League of Nations. In its early days Mr. Streit had great faith in the League as an institution which would bring international strife to an end. With warfare abolished, he hoped that the internal problems of the various nations would clear themselves up more or less automatically.

But the League failed. Mr. Streit's faith never wavered; that is, he still retained his confidence in the efficacy of international agreement to rid the world of conflict. Of course, he had had ocular demonstration of the futility of an organization such as the League. At this point in his reasoning, he remembered the League of Friends, the organization of the original Thirteen Colonies under the Articles of Confederation, which was as complete a failure as the Wilsonian League. An obvious analogy suggested itself. The Colonies had found a solution; it worked once, and would work again.





When the weaknesses of the colonial League of Friends became so apparent as to defeat all attempts to conceal them, Union saved the day. Thirteen independent colonies became one nation. Money was standardized, interstate commerce brought under Federal control, the army was nationalized, tariffs between the states were outlawed. And, as far as Mr. Streit can perceive, Union has been a success right up to the present day.

In the meantime, however, the world has become smaller. Just as the thirteen colonies could not get along together within the narrow limits of their world, even though they had formed a League, so, and within as narrow limits, do the nations today generate friction which leads eventually to eruption. They challenge and burden one another with different currency systems, tariffs, citizenship and immigration restrictions, and huge hostile armies. Union ended the strife in 1789, and it will do so again if we give it the chance. And with international strife forever banished, internal troubles should either disappear or yield more readily to attempts at reform.

Accordingly, Mr. Streit advanced his proposal for a Federal Union among the democratic nations of the world, and submitted a tentative constitution incorporating what he felt were the best features of the British and the American systems. He realized, of course, that the dictator countries would have no part of any such plan, and reasoned that in any case "the best nucleus will be composed of those peoples who already have strong natural bonds drawing them together and enough material power to provide them, as soon as they unite, with overwhelming world power in every important field."

From this latter statement we infer that Mr. Streit continually thinks of our ills as being international. They exist in every nation, therefore they must have an international origin. That there could exist something fundamentally wrong within and common to each nation never occurs to the author of this worldwide plan, for he states that "the

Union promises to reduce unemployment to where it would be no grave problem, where it could be handled like other predictable accidents through normal insurance methods. The Union would do this by freeing trade, stabilizing money, eliminating the war danger, diverting into healthy channels the billions now being wasted, cheapening and speeding communications and making the worker and his product far more mobile, restoring confidence and opening vast new enterprises. **If the problem of unemployment cannot be solved along these lines, it would seem indeed insoluble.**" (Emphasis ours.)

Here in a nutshell are the powers which it is proposed to delegate to the Federal Government. First, it is felt that there must be a uniform international money. Mr. Streit realizes that in troubled times money is manipulated by national governments in order to obtain some financial advantage over other nations. It therefore seems to him that stable money should bring about stable conditions. What he does not realize is that, in a large degree, it is the unstable conditions which result in unstable money. Monetary disequilibrium is an effect rather than a cause.

A similar line of reasoning may be followed with respect to communications. Impediments to communications are characteristic of periods of stress, not of normalcy. Indeed, men tend naturally to disregard national boundaries, and remember them only when forcibly reminded by the police. Censorship, the last impediment to communication short of complete strangulation, is always associated with a period of war or economic unrest.

Mr. Streit's proposal for free trade among the members of the new Federal Union is the most important detail of his work. Unfortunately, it is this very aspect which is being

presently soft-pedaled by Federal Unionists. The movement needs to attract supporters — in particular, supporters who can and will finance expensive publicity campaigns. Unqualified endorsement of the principle of free trade is not a tactic calculated to win support in those regions where the population has been educated to look upon a tariff as the very staff of their lives. Nevertheless, though his followers may compromise on this vital principle, Mr. Streit in "Union Now" recognizes the necessity for free trade and incorporates it into his plan for a World Union.

But once again Mr. Streit overlooks something. He believes in free trade, but does not realize that free trade alone would accomplish nearly all the reforms he proposes, and render most of his plan superfluous. Free trade might not immediately induce nations to accept a uniform currency system, but it would give them powerful inducements for doing so. Free trade might not cause nations to abandon war, but it would remove one of the chief causes of international friction. Free trade would make comparatively unimportant the differences of citizenship and sovereignty which Mr. Streit hopes to correct by Union. And if transportation and communications are to be unshackled, what more likely to advance their cause than free trade? And for free trade we need no Federal Union, no International Parliament, no Super-State. We need only a clear understanding of economic fundamentals and the courage to act according to our own reason. But stay: we need one thing more—the courage to do what Mr. Streit's followers have been afraid to do: to oppose protectionism, to beard privilege openly, and defy it, and overcome it.

Mr. Streit believes with Thoreau that "that government is best which governs least" and that "government is at best but an expedient" and yet he proposes to create more government. He asserts, "We create Union to free ourselves from some fourteen governmental barriers to our selling dear and buying cheap, to reduce the expense of booming bureau-





cracy and monstrous armaments, to cut our way out of government gone jungle." With the creation of a new government on top of those already existing he insists that government will decrease. This will happen because there will be needed less taxes and less bureaucracy for a Union army than for fifteen armies, and less also for a centralized Post Office. He blithely ignores all the lessons history teaches us about the appetites of congressmen and their families, and the dangers of tremendous centralized power in the hands of an executive. (Mr. Streit's suggestion of a five-man executive board, rather than a single President or Prime Minister, may well remind us that both Caesar and Napoleon were at first but members of a triumvirate.) Indeed, it is by the historical standard that we may finally reject Federal Union: the example which inspired Mr. Streit will not bear examination. The experience of the Thirteen Colonies does not support the Federal Unionist's argument; instead, it refutes it.

If Federal Union could succeed at all, it could do so when it had fewest obstacles in its path. Differences in race, in language, in traditions, in culture—all these are obstacles to association: not indeed insurmountable obstacles, but merely difficulties which must be overcome. Federal Union among the world's nations must overcome them. But no such necessity existed among the Thirteen Colonies; on the contrary, the colonists enjoyed a common language and a common heritage. Even with such advantages, Federal Union could not compose the economic disagreements which arose from slavery; it could not maintain internal peace (witness the Civil War); it could not assure economic democracy; its governmental machinery was more often used to exploit the people than to protect them; and though during the existence of the American Union there has been some extension of democratic liberties, this extension has been in spite of the State and not because of it. Freedom of trade among the states was maintained until the economic strain became too great, and

then the best lawyers of forty-eight states set about the task of evading the spirit of the constitution and conforming to the letter—a task in which they have met with considerable success. How can you force free trade down the throats of a protection-minded people?

Although Mr. Streit's plan cannot do for the world what its author hopes, it carries a powerful emotional appeal. The movement has gained a wide following, in spite of the fact that most of the original democracies have slipped down the Nazi gullet. Instead of less effort, Mr. Streit and his followers are putting forth more. In January, 1940, a Gallup poll reported that at least 2,000,000 American favored Federal Union. In July, 1940, full-page advertisements "paid for out of the funds contributed by many American citizens" appeared in the New York Times and Herald Tribune, advocating the formation at once of "a Federal Union among at least the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Eire, Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa." The late Lord Lothian, British Ambassador to the United States, gave his support to the plan. In January, 1941, the movement sponsored a dinner at the Waldorf, which was attended by many notables. There is even a weekly radio program. Some of the present support of the movement comes from those who wish to involve us in the war, and see in Federal Union a ready instrument fit for their purpose; but most of the Federal Unionists are unquestionably sincere in their belief that Mr. Streit's plan is meritorious and practical.

It is not probable that their theories will be put to the test. Indeed, the Streit proposals in their pure form are at present politically impossible; no legislature exists which would delegate any of its power to an international Parliament, and no major electorate would

approve such action. That some emasculated version of the proposals may be adopted, perhaps after the war, is possible. If Mr. Streit has not yet learned what happens to movements which accept compromises of principle, he will then. In the meantime, he may yet come to realize that only that remedy which seeks out the individual and ennobles and dignifies him can suffice in the end. Manhood is from God. The State cannot confer it; the State can only take it away. Even an international Super-State can do no more than that.

