

'Pacifism is not enough' The Life of Philip Kerr

PHILIP KERR, THE 11th Lord Lothian, devoted his life to the pursuit of peace and played important roles in the two world wars of the twentieth century. His ideals were high, some would say utopian, but his place in public affairs was also high and he was well versed in the minutiae of politics. Whilst closely involved in the problems of war and its consequences, his lifelong preoccupation was how to build a peaceful world. Despite his influential involvement in war and peace in Europe, he was not himself a campaigner for European federation; but his many writings and speeches on federalism have been held to inspire many who campaigned and still campaign for just that. He began as a Unionist and an imperialist and ended a Liberal and a world federalist. His path from minor aristocrat to British ambassador in Washington never strayed far from centres of power.

The Kindergarten

Kerr was born on 18 April 1882 into an aristocratic family, the son of Major General Lord Ralph Kerr, the third son of the 7th Marquess of Lothian, and of Lady Anne Kerr, the daughter of the Duke of Norfolk. He was brought up a Roman Catholic and sent to the Oratory School in Birmingham whence he matriculated to New College, Oxford, obtaining a first in Modern History. He took the examination for All Souls but did not get in. At the age of 22 he took up a post in the Transvaal and then in Lord Milner's coterie of bright young men in South Africa. Having defeated the two Boer territories – the Transvaal and the Orange Free State – in 1902, the British were running them as colonies alongside Natal and the Cape Colony. Milner had been high commissioner since 1897 and recruited a group of young, mainly Oxford, graduates to advise him. Afrikaners, resentful of these young administrators

running their country, dubbed them the 'Kindergarten'. Kerr joined this group in January 1905 and they lived, ate, rode and hunted together; but, above all, under the influence of Milner, they worked to unite the colonies and to keep South Africa within the British Empire. Kerr read the Federalist Papers and a new biography of Alexander Hamilton that showed how the American federalists had successfully campaigned in 1787 for the new constitution of the USA. This was his introduction to federalism. The Kindergarten advocated a federal union and this became the preferred option in the memorandum approved by Milner's successor, Lord Selborne. To promote their ideas the Kindergarten prepared two books and started a journal, edited by Kerr and published in English and Afrikaans, *The State/De Staat*. However, General Smuts of the Transvaal convinced a national convention that a unitary government would be better, because he expected that Afrikaners would dominate it and it would be free from government in Whitehall.

The Round Table

Kerr returned to England in 1909. He and his Kindergarten colleagues had become convinced that the British Empire itself should become a federation. They planned to recruit supporters in each of the dominions: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the new one to be formed when the South Africa Act 1909 came into effect the following year. They set up the Round Table Movement and established an office in London with Kerr and Lionel Curtis on salaries of £1,000 each. Curtis saw them as influencing elites behind the scenes, but Kerr felt they should educate and convert more openly. He established and edited '*The Round Table, a Quarterly Review of the Politics of the British Empire*' which first came out in November 1910. The journal

...; nor patriotism either' Kerr, Lord Lothian



Philip Kerr, 11th Lord
Lothian (1882–1940)

still exists today but has lost its original federalist objective.

Kerr wrote many of the articles himself but suffered a nervous collapse in the autumn of 1911, which he described as affecting his nerves and his ability to read and write rather than his body. It took him three years to recover. Despite his poor health Kerr travelled to Egypt, India, China and Japan. He wanted India in the imperial federation, and the Round Table Movement supported the aim of India's progress toward becoming a dominion. In 1912 Kerr went on to Canada and the United States, where he attended the convention of the Progressive Party which nominated Theodore Roosevelt for president. Now and in later travels, Kerr visited nearly every state and met many influential Americans. His conviction grew that an imperial federation would have to be closely involved with the United States. In 1913, on medical advice, he took a six-month rest cure which included staying in St Moritz with his friends Nancy and Waldorf Astor. Nancy became his closest friend for the rest of his life. He had always been thoughtful and anxious about religion and had come to doubt Roman Catholicism. In 1914 Nancy introduced him to Christian Science, which he followed for the rest of his life and which indeed played a part in his death.

It soon appeared that the Round Table Movement would not find agreement on imperial federation. Although groups in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa supported the idea, those in Canada, the oldest dominion, urged caution. This was perhaps unsurprising given that the first three had only become self-governing dominions in 1901, 1907 and 1910 respectively, whereas Canada's status dated back to 1867. At the Imperial Conference in May 1911, the prime minister of New Zealand, Sir Joseph Ward, called for an imperial federation but was voted down by his colleagues from Great Britain, Canada and South Africa. Clearly the moment was too soon, but would the right moment ever come?

At this stage Kerr was still a Unionist and had met with Unionist leaders to discuss the possibility of becoming a member of parliament, but he took no position on Milner's proposal for Imperial Preference. The *Round Table* had Liberal readers and was welcomed by Churchill himself in 1910. Whilst Milner opposed Irish home rule, Kerr and the Round Table Movement stuck to their principles and proposed a federal Britain with devolved governments in Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The First World War and Lloyd George

When war came, Kerr tried unsuccessfully to enlist and was determined to support the war effort. He returned to writing and editing the *Round Table*, in which he set out his view of Britain's war aims as liberty and democracy. In an

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article in 1915 on 'The Foundation of Peace' he showed great foresight in arguing that '... the peace must not be vindictive'.¹ He also continued to campaign for an imperial federation, arguing for an imperial legislature to deal with external affairs and defence. He was beginning to move toward world federalism, which might start with the British Empire and the United States: 'The cure for war is not to weaken the principle of the state, but to carry it to its logical conclusion, by the creation of a world state'.² In 1916, foreshadowing his role in the Second World War, he urged the United States to take part in the conflict. As usual he saw a moral dimension, with the war as a struggle between right and wrong, and he rejected the notion of neutrality in such a struggle.

Kerr joined Milner in a group critical of Asquith's handling of the war. In the summer of 1915 Milner campaigned for conscription, and in January 1916 Asquith introduced it. Kerr himself was liable under the Military Service Act, but now he applied for and obtained exemption arguing that editing the *Round Table* was civilian work of national interest. In December 1916, Lloyd George became prime minister and formed a war cabinet of five – including Milner, who arranged for Kerr to join the No. 10 secretariat, which became known as 'The Garden Suburb' because of the huts in the garden in Downing Street where they worked. This was a great concentration of power in Lloyd George's hands and foreshadowed later development of the cabinet secretariat. Traditional civil servants disliked the new system and Asquithians were even less complimentary, describing Kerr and his colleagues as *illuminati*, 'a class of travelling empirics in Empire'.³

At the age of 34, Kerr was now 'almost as close to the centre of world affairs as it was possible for a man to be',⁴ as he himself put it. On taking office, he had to resign from editing the *Round Table*. Now his views would influence government decisions much more closely than when written in a low-circulation journal.⁵ Nevertheless, the *Round Table*'s efforts to influence its two hundred American subscribers were perhaps rewarded when the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917. The Imperial War Conference also met in London that spring, and dominion prime ministers were enrolled into a new Imperial War Cabinet. Milner, Kerr and their friends took the opportunity over dinner to promote imperial federation to the visiting premiers, but the conference itself only resolved on voluntary cooperation after the war.

Kerr also advised on Palestine, supporting the demand for a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. The Round Table Movement believed this would hasten the advance of democracy in the Middle East. In addition, it was also felt in Downing Street that the United States and Russia would look positively on the initiative. Kerr also welcomed the first Russian revolution in

March 1917, as the tsarist monarchy had been a flaw in his argument that Britain was fighting for democracy. His formulation of the war's aims as being the democratising of Europe came to figure more and more in Lloyd George's speeches. Achieving peace and, above all, a settlement that would maintain that peace was the higher priority, but Kerr was certain that peace would be more likely to last between democracies. Nevertheless, Lloyd George sent him to Switzerland twice in late 1917 and early 1918 for secret negotiations with Austro-Hungarian diplomats, in which Kerr promised to preserve the Habsburg Empire. When the war finally ended, Kerr was to play a very different role at the peace conference in Paris.

The peace conference

When the Allied Powers gathered in 1919 to negotiate peace, the Round Table Movement was well represented not only by Milner, Curtis and Kerr but also by supporters and friends from the United States, Canada and Australia. As well as arguing for particular British interests, as was his job, Kerr had a persistent vision of the United States and the British Empire guaranteeing world peace – a vision which ran up against entrenched isolationism in the United States. President Wilson himself had proposed the formation of the League of Nations, but Kerr was sure the league could not guarantee peace because it rested upon the idea of national sovereignty, which he had already identified as the main cause of war.

Winston Churchill, now secretary of state for war, wanted Britain and the allies to step up military intervention in Russia to fight the Bolsheviks. Kerr was equally anti-Bolshevik but advised against direct intervention, preferring that Britain should only provide arms to the white Russians, and his view prevailed. Churchill and many others began to complain that Kerr had too much power for an unelected bureaucrat. Not only did he control access to Lloyd George, but he also read all the papers and memoranda that the prime minister could not be bothered with and he stood in for him in negotiations. Lord Curzon said he constituted a second Foreign Office and condemned him as 'a most unsafe and insidious intermediary being full of ability and guile'.⁶

The peace conference faced the critical issue of what terms to impose on defeated Germany. Georges Clemenceau, the French prime minister, was determined that Germany should pay heavily; but Woodrow Wilson wanted Germany to take its place in the international community on terms of equality with other nations. Lloyd George vacillated both at home and abroad, taking a different line at different junctures. On some occasions he called for heavy reparations to be paid by Germany and on others he warned of the dangers. Kerr's view was that,

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although sanctions on Germany could be justified, it would be foolish to push the country into an impossible position. Over the weekend of 22 and 23 March 1919, Lloyd George took his closest advisors, including Kerr, to spend the weekend in Fontainebleau to try to resolve the issue. He allocated each of them roles, such as German officer or French widow, and they acted out the rival viewpoints. Lloyd George concluded from the exercise that the peace terms must not destroy Germany. Kerr had the unenviable job of writing up the discussion and by Monday morning had produced what became known as the Fontainebleau Memorandum. Lloyd George presented this to the other members of the Council of Four – Wilson, Clemenceau, and Vittorio Orlando the Italian prime minister – recommending moderate terms that would guarantee a lasting peace and, with great prescience, warning that in the end, if Germany felt unjustly treated, 'she will find means of exacting retribution from her conquerors'.⁷ The Treaty of Versailles eventually included both Article 231, the 'war guilt clause', declaring Germany's responsibility for the war, and Article 232 restricting her liability because of her limited resources. Lloyd George may have been satisfied, having compromised, as he put it, between Jesus Christ (the idealist Wilson) and Napoleon (the crusty Clemenceau), but the same could not be said for either Wilson or Clemenceau. Kerr had the task of drafting those articles; and when the Germans objected to much of the draft treaty, but especially Article 231, it was Kerr who had to reply setting out why they were guilty and why reparations followed from their guilt. He later came to regret these articles, as he saw the consequences for Germany even before the rise of Hitler, and he repeatedly called for revision of the treaty.

Federalism

In November 1919, the American Senate's rejection of the League of Nations Treaty showed that the real world was still a long way from '[a] settlement based on ideal principles', by which Kerr meant a settlement which '... can be permanently applied and maintained only by a world government to which all nations will submit their private interests'.⁸ He continued in Downing Street until 1921, when he left to become a director of the *News Chronicle* effectively appointed by Lloyd George; but at the end of the year he returned to private life to devote himself to Christian Science and the study of international relations. In 1922 and again in 1923, he spent time at the Institute of Political Studies in Williamstown, Massachusetts, where he gave three lectures, later printed as 'The Prevention of War'. He now recognised that imperial federation was a dead letter but instead he sought a world government. He identified the consistent

cause of war as being the division of the world into separate states, each claiming absolute sovereignty. Violence within states was outlawed and prevented by the power of the state, but simultaneously states reserved the right to use violence against each other. Drawing on his American audience's history, he compared relations between states with life in the Wild West in the nineteenth century, where disputes were settled by bluff or the gun. The lectures considered the psychological effects of national sovereignty: 'It is this worship of the national self which causes the inhabitants of every state to be content with limiting their loyalty to their own fellow-citizens ...'⁹ Just as nationalism had extended family loyalty to fellow-citizens, world patriotism would be needed to extend it to all humanity before a world government would be possible. Modern opponents of federalism condemn it as centralism, but Kerr knew better. He identified centralism as the enemy of democracy and argued that only the federal system could guarantee a high level of popular participation. Today's divisions over Brexit echo this old dispute.

In 1925 Kerr became secretary of the Rhodes Trust which Cecil Rhodes had established with the aim of extending the British Empire but Kerr's objective in selecting Rhodes scholars was to identify and train people who would become leaders devoted to English standards of public service and to a united and peaceful world. Thus he continued his old policy of educating the ruling classes to work for federation.

Lothian the Liberal in opposition and in government

Kerr's work with Lloyd George had converted him from Unionism to Liberalism just as Liberals started to fight amongst themselves and the future of the Liberal Party was becoming doubtful. Kerr helped to set up the Liberal Industrial Inquiry, which produced the famous Yellow Book. In the decade of the General Strike he became interested in industrial relations and proposed 'self-government for industry' through the establishment of boards involving management and trade unions in each industry and an overall board at national level. Keynes wrote to Kerr disagreeing and criticising '... the impracticality, or uselessness, of inscribing pious ideals on a political banner of a kind which could not possibly be embodied in legislation'. It would be better if everyone were sensible, he continued, 'But a political programme, I think, must go rather beyond this.'¹⁰ Kerr's ideas were not unlike the development in 1962 of the National Economic Development Council, known as Neddy, and the little Neddies in each industry. At Lloyd George's request, Kerr also produced a 114-page draft Liberal manifesto for the 1929 election, but Lloyd George chose to fight on the

shorter and more punchy appeal of 'We Can Conquer Unemployment'.

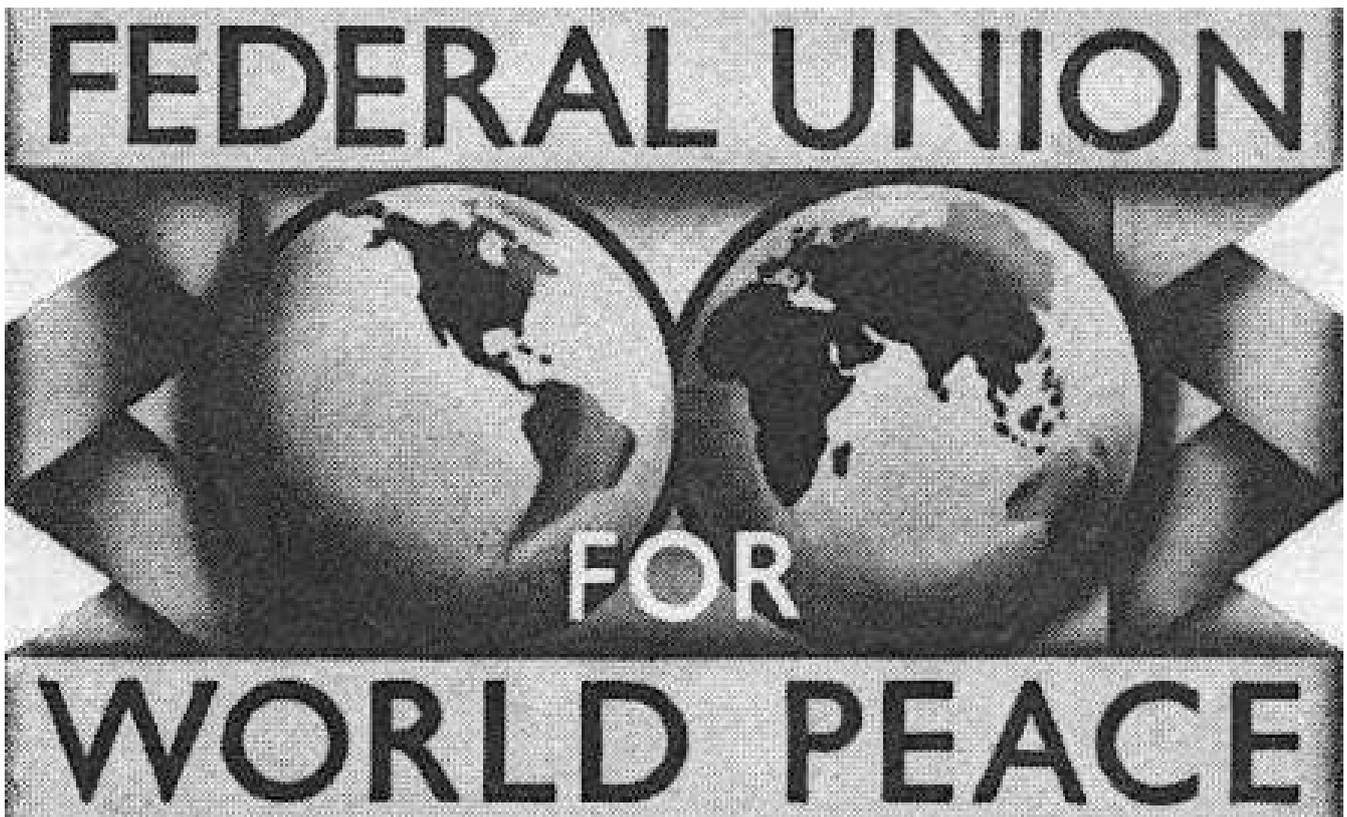
In 1930 Kerr inherited the title of 11th Marquess of Lothian together with the estates and the money. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald invited Kerr, Lloyd George and Seeböhm Rowntree to propose an economic recovery programme. They also conducted negotiations with MacDonald to explore the possibilities of governing in coalition with the Labour Party, but nothing came of this. Kerr felt that party leaders might like a permanent arrangement between Liberals and Labour but their memberships would never stand for it. He visited Russia with the Astors and George Bernard Shaw and met Stalin. Although Shaw returned entranced and virtually said 'I have seen the future and it works',¹¹ Kerr contented himself with telling the Liberal Summer School that Russian revolutionary ideas would have a great impact on the world. When MacDonald formed the National Government in August 1931, Kerr became Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a cabinet-level post, although Lloyd George refused to take part.

Following the general election of October 1931, which returned a much more Conservative National Government, Kerr became under-secretary of state for India. It was now British policy for India to become a self-governing dominion, but not yet as Gandhi wanted. In 1932 Kerr and Secretary of State Sir Samuel Hoare visited India to report on widening the franchise for local and national elections. Kerr wanted both central and local government to be responsible to much wider Indian electorates but Hoare did not. In the end, they recommended increasing the Indian electorate from 7 million to 36 million, with property and education qualifications, and extending the vote to more women and to some untouchables. Churchill was furious and declared, 'Lord Lothian is misleading the country again.'¹² Following the Ottawa Conference, which fixed imperial tariffs, Kerr and other Liberals resigned from the National Government in September. Kerr continued to speak in the House of Lords, and the India Bill embodying his proposed reforms passed into law in 1935.

Pacifism is not enough

Kerr continued to write and speak against national sovereignty as the cause of war; in 1933 he even blamed the economic depression on national sovereignty. But his most enduring contribution was the Burge Memorial Lecture given at Lincoln's Inn in May 1935. There was widespread fear of another war and pacifism had widespread appeal. Not only had the Cambridge and Oxford Unions passed pacifist motions (1927 and 1933), but in the wider world 135,000 people had joined the Peace Pledge Union founded by Dick Shepherd and supported by Bertrand Russell, Donald Soper and Siegfried Sassoon among

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others. Kerr began by pointing out that the peace movement had found no way to stop war. He asked, 'What is peace?', and answered that it was not merely the negative absence of war but the positive state of society 'in which political, economic and social issues are settled by constitutional means under the reign of law' and violence is forbidden even between nations. Peace could not just happen. Within countries it was created by the state. He went on to analyse the changing role of the state; but whatever form the state took it retained the right to use violence against other states, so that within states there was law but between states anarchy. He reviewed the popular ideas of the cause of war such as injustice, economic competition, capitalism and nationalism and dismissed them all. Capitalists compete peacefully within countries and socialism could not prevent war. There were also many states containing different nationalities. He discussed the history of warfare and peacemaking, particularly the experience of 1919. He did not deny that nations are loath to surrender their sovereignty but declared that we cannot prevent war as long as we build our international structures like the League of Nations on the principle of that sovereignty. He then reviewed the performance and failures of the league.

He explored how a federation of nations might come about. He recalled that the central idea at the peace conference in 1919 was that Britain, France and the United States would together provide the power to enforce peace, as Britain had previously done within its empire. As these three were liberal democracies, there was nothing to

fear from their power. (Perhaps it would be fair to say that this was Kerr's central idea rather than a view widespread amongst the negotiators.) He still hoped for such a combination of democracies but he feared the alternative was a system of competing alliances such as led to war in 1914. He regarded it as inconceivable that the world could continue with the anarchy of twenty-six states in Europe and over sixty states in the world, each armed with tariffs and bombers. The peace movement of the future would combine the democratic virtues with self-sacrifice and discipline. Its members would 'see all men and nations as one brotherhood and recognise that the troubles of the world are due not to the malignity of their neighbours but to the anarchy which perverts the policies of all nations'¹³.

Appeasement

Kerr's lifelong obsession with peace may help explain why he was an appeaser in the 1930s. He did not welcome Hitler's rise to power, commenting that while a national resurgence in Germany was a healthy response to the defeat of 1918 and the depression which followed, 'dictatorship based on racialism and violence'¹⁴ would lead to inner decay and corruption. In 1935 the Nazis had taken control of the German Rhodes Committee and Kerr visited Berlin to support the embattled trustees. He obtained a meeting with Hitler who ranted about the communist menace and asked that Britain, France and Germany be treated as equals. Kerr asked Hitler for a ten-year guarantee of peace and the Führer agreed that there would

'Pacifism is not enough, nor patriotism either' – The life of Philip Kerr, Lord Lothian

be no use of force over boundaries with France or the Austrian question. Kerr believed that Hitler wanted peace, and not only advised Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon as much, but also wrote in *The Times* predicting peace if Germany were treated as an equal.

Kerr also corresponded with von Ribbentrop about cooperation on limiting armaments, received him at his home (Blickling Hall near Norwich), and protested to him about Nazi brutality. He raised the cases of individuals persecuted by the German government. Ribbentrop was non-committal and Kerr regarded him as a lightweight. Much has been made of this visit, but Kerr was in the habit of receiving many visitors, including Nehru who refused to cooperate with the new India Act as Kerr urged. Kerr also frequently visited Clivedon, the Astors' home. They became known as the Clivedon set of appeasers although Kerr always maintained that they had no collective policy, unlike his old Round Table friends. At bottom he was driven by his own guilt and regret about the Versailles Treaty and hoped that treating Germany better would moderate the Nazis' worst policies. Kerr's view was that if the Germans believed they would be treated fairly, but also that force would be met with force, peace could be maintained and the internal repression reduced. When Germany reoccupied the Rhineland, his response was 'it was no more than Germans walking into their own back yard'.¹⁵ His focus remained on hopes of a world pacified by Anglo-American power.

In 1937 Kerr again met Hitler and pointed out to him that Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had recently confirmed that Britain would fight to defend the empire, France and the Low Countries but had not mentioned Eastern Europe. He suggested to Hitler that Germany should guarantee the independence of those countries and form a relationship with them akin to Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth. His meeting seemed to have one small effect, but an encouraging one for Kerr. He had protested about Nazi harassment of Christian Scientists, so Hitler lifted a ban on their activity. Kerr did admire the energy and unity that Hitler had brought to Germany, but his comment after visiting labour camps in Germany harked back to his view of Germany before the First World War. Although he could see the healthy cheerfulness of the young Germans, he complained that 'they are not taught to think for themselves'.¹⁶

When Chamberlain's Munich Agreement, in 1938, avoided war by allowing Germany to occupy the Sudetenland, Kerr welcomed it as the population was largely German; but he did warn that the future depended upon whether the democracies were prepared to stop further expansion. When Hitler occupied the Czech Republic in March 1939, Kerr finally abandoned any faith in the dictator's intentions. He wrote to a friend, 'Up until then it was possible to believe that Germany

was only concerned with recovery of what might be called the normal rights of a great power, but it now seems clear that Hitler is in effect a fanatical gangster who will stop at nothing to beat down all possibility of resistance anywhere to his will'.¹⁷

Union Now and Federal Union

That same month in 1939, a Rhodes scholar, Clarence Streit of the *New York Times*, published *Union Now*, calling for a federal union of the democracies. Streit had sent drafts to Kerr who publicly endorsed the idea along with the Round Table. Oxford now produced another set of young graduates not unlike the Round Table in their idealism and search for peace. In reaction to Munich, Patrick Ramsey, Derek Rawnsley and Charles Kimber had set up a group known as Federal Union which also sought a federation of democracies. Kerr endorsed and advised them and on their behalf invited prominent people to join them. By 1940, this group had grown to over 10,000 members organised in 283 groups around Britain, with the support of *The Times* newspaper and 100 members of parliament, including Clement Atlee, as well as the Archbishop of York, Julian Huxley, Ramsay Muir, Lionel Robbins, Seebohm Rowntree and many others. This was a febrile time as war approached and many realised the truth of Kerr's words, 'Pacifism is not enough nor patriotism either'.

Federal Union published many pamphlets and books starting with *The Ending of Armageddon*¹⁸ by Kerr himself. Their impact dissipated as the crisis of 1940 deepened but their work had an unforeseen but important effect on post-war Europe. On the Italian island of Ventotene, Mussolini had imprisoned some of his opponents including Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi. They had leisure on that cold and windy island to discuss what to do after the war. Another redrawing of the map of nations, as in 1919, seemed doomed to failure. Rossi contacted his old friend Luigi Einaudi (president of Italy after the war) who sent him a selection of Federal Union's writings. I have seen the actual editions in a glass case on the island, but Kerr's work was not amongst them. In any case Spinelli was aware of Kerr's influence and in his autobiography, *Come ho tentato di diventare saggio*¹⁹ ('How I tried to become wise'), he wrote, 'I was not attracted by the foggy and contorted ideological federalism of a Proudhon or a Mazzini, but by the clean, precise thinking of these English federalists'. Thus inspired, Spinelli and Rossi secretly published *The Ventotene Manifesto*,²⁰ the founding document of the European Federalist Movement which played a considerable role in the development of what became the European Union. The federal idea had travelled from Hamilton, Madison and Jay's *Federalist Papers* in the America of the 1780s to Milner's Kindergarten in South Africa in the 1900s, to Kerr's Round Table in the first four decades of the twentieth century, and on to Italy

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and then Europe in the second half of that century. The states to be federated had been British colonies, then the whole British Empire, then the Anglo-Saxon democracies, and finally the centuries-old antagonists within Europe.

British ambassador in Washington

Throughout his life Kerr had frequently travelled to and around the United States. He had always hoped that the Americans would share with the British Empire the burden of keeping the peace. As secretary to the Rhodes Trust he had visited no fewer than forty-four of the forty-eight states. He once said, 'I always feel fifteen years younger when I land in New York'.²¹ In 1938 the foreign secretary, Halifax, persuaded Kerr to accept the post of British ambassador in Washington against strong opposition from the Foreign Office. Not only did the officials dislike the appointment of an amateur, but many had opposed his policy of appeasement, which they considered made him unsuitable for the post. Kerr's old Kindergarten friend, John Buchan, now Lord Tweedsmuir, was governor general of Canada and encouraged Kerr at all costs to accept the post but counselled him against making pro-war propaganda in office. Kerr took up his post on 30 August 1939, four days

'Britain's Ambassador to the US'



before the start of the Second World War. His task was a delicate one: to persuade the Americans that Britain needed their support but not to give the impression that we would lose the war, which was what the American ambassador in London, Joseph Kennedy, was advising. After visiting London in 1940, Kerr spoke to the press on his return to the States describing the situation in the UK and the spirit of the British people thus, 'They mean to beat Hitler and are confident in the end they will do it'.²² Kerr broke new ground as an ambassador, travelling and speaking well beyond the Washington diplomatic circuit and charming the press. He had to overcome American suspicion of his aristocratic background and began by presenting his credentials to Franklin Roosevelt in his usual rather shabby suit and not in the traditional top hat and striped trousers. One journalist reported that he looked like a professor at a teachers' college. He also removed the guardsmen from the embassy entrance.

One of Kerr's Rhodes scholars, Adam von Trott zu Solz, managed to escape from Germany and met secretly with him in a Washington hotel to ask him to persuade Roosevelt to suggest peace terms to Hitler. Trott's idea was to alienate the German people from Hitler, but Kerr was doubtful that the Germans would overthrow their leader. In July 1944, Trott would be involved in the plot to kill Hitler and would be executed.

Kerr also tried to overcome the American fear of propaganda, saying that he was only telling the truth. He saw his role as educating the Americans about the United Kingdom as well as educating the British about the United States. Kerr's judgment of American public opinion was accurate and useful to Halifax and later to Churchill. His initial assessment of American public opinion in December 1939 was that the vast majority of Americans were anti-Hitler and anti-Stalin but also strongly opposed to going to war. When Churchill became prime minister in May 1940 he confirmed Kerr's appointment despite previous disagreements, notably over appeasement and India. Following the collapse of France in May 1940, and during the Battle of Britain, on 19 July Hitler offered to make peace with Britain. Halifax and Kerr were willing to hear the terms but Churchill instructed that they were to make no reply.

Kerr continued to believe in his long-term plan of the United States abandoning its stance of neutrality to work with the British Commonwealth in maintaining world peace. In the short term, moreover, success in the war depended upon American involvement soon. He argued that the British fleet protected the interests of the United States as well and, if it fell into the hands of a victorious Germany, the Atlantic would become the front line. He made this argument not only to build the case for the States to enter the war but also to promote Britain's urgent need for ships. In July 1940, Kerr explained to Roosevelt that

Britain had entered the war with 176 destroyers of which only 70 were still afloat. He asked him to supply 40 to 100 destroyers and 100 flying boats. In the end there was a deal whereby the Americans provided fifty obsolete destroyers in return for the leases on bases in the Caribbean and for a British promise never to sink or surrender their fleet, which Kerr himself delivered. Kerr was undoubtedly the main conduit for these negotiations and crucial in persuading Churchill and the war cabinet what needed to be agreed. Churchill avoided the American ambassador Joseph Kennedy, but Kerr himself was friendly with him and inspired his son John F. Kennedy to write a book in 1940 called *Why England Slept*, calling for American rearmament.

There remained a financial problem. American neutrality legislation required the British to pay cash for the destroyers. Visiting Britain in October 1940, Kerr learned that the country's dollar reserves were almost exhausted and he persuaded a reluctant Churchill to write to Roosevelt outlining the position. By then Churchill had come to appreciate Kerr noting that he had become 'an earnest, deeply-stirred man ... primed with every aspect and detail of the American attitude'²³ and was willing to follow his advice. He was however shocked when Kerr, returning to New York on 23 November 1940, announced to the astonished press, 'Well, boys, Britain's broke; it's your money we want'.²⁴ Britain's parlous finances were supposed to be a secret and a drop in sterling followed that announcement. Over the next few months Roosevelt and Churchill, with Kerr's help, worked out the system of lend-lease which overcame the financial and legal problems.

In December Kerr suffered a kidney infection but because of his Christian Science beliefs refused medical help. In bed he worked on his address to the American Farm Bureau Federation, which was read out on his behalf in Baltimore on 11 December. The speech rehearsed the disasters of the previous seven months and warned of the danger to the United States if Britain fell. He concluded that 'the only nucleus around which a stable, peaceful, democratic world can be built after this war is if the United States and Great Britain ...'²⁵ possessed sufficient military power together to overcome any totalitarians. Thus his final public pronouncement echoed the long theme of his life, the need for Britain, its Commonwealth and the United States to guarantee peace, although on this occasion the federation of democracies was not mentioned. He died the following day and the Americans gave him a state funeral in Arlington National Cemetery, a film of which you can find today on YouTube.²⁶

Conclusion – a life for peace

It is trivial to note that Philip Kerr was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, that he followed in many ways a traditional career path for one of his

class and era through Oxford, imperial service, government and diplomacy. Yet this is to ignore his unusual views and real achievements which others of that background did not share. He was certainly handsome and charming – attributes not unhelpful in public life. He travelled, spoke and wrote widely but no one has suggested that his oratorical skills or his prose style were out of the ordinary. It was the content of what he said and wrote that distinguished him. Beatrice Webb may have dismissed him as an 'ultra-refined aristocratic dreamer, with sentimentally revolutionary views'.²⁷ Many on the right also thought him unsound because of his advocacy of world government. Career civil servants tended to envy and even despise his role. Robert Vansittart, permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office called him 'an incurable superficial Johnny know-it-all'.²⁸ Some career politicians shared that view. Yet he won over and influenced key people in Britain and across the British Empire and, above all, in the United States. His idealism did not prevent him from being an effective negotiator and solving practical problems.

Whilst Kerr's own focus was the empire, the world and the Atlantic, his writings did influence European federalists, as Spinelli himself acknowledged. He did explicitly support a European federation in an article in 1938²⁹ but, like Churchill after him, when he said Europe he did not always mean to include the United Kingdom. Although his many articles and speeches did not break new ground in political theory, they certainly transmitted the federalist arguments inherited from Madison, Hamilton and Jay, and indeed Immanuel Kant, to a wider world of British and European politicians, civil servants and activists. This was not political science but polemic with a strong ethical basis. Many found it irritating, idealistic and impractical. Yet as Kerr warned in 1922, the prevention of war depends upon the creation of a supranational state because mere benevolence will never keep the peace among nations any more than it does between individuals. Federalists have always been regarded as utopian but nothing in the history of the twentieth century has disproved the central idea that Kerr never stopped proclaiming – that national sovereignty is the root cause of war. Surely the experience of the twenty-first century with its echoes of the 1930s, financial crashes and revived, aggressive nationalism shows that what is utopian is to believe that war can be avoided without federation.

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