

BOOKS

UNION NOW, by Clarence K. Streit,
Harper & Brothers, 1938.

Reviewed by GRAHAM A. LAING,
Professor of Economics and Business Administration.

The propagation of ideas is generally a slow process, but there are times when what we may call the adolescence of an idea suddenly ceases and the idea comes into full manhood. The times become ripe for change and the full grown idea provides the form of the change. For many years a few men here and there have urged the necessity of our political world catching up with the economic world-unity, but it is only in the last two or three years that the general public has begun to be interested.

This is in part, of course, due to the nature of the history of the past two and a half decades. The world has passed through a great war that was to end all wars, but instead of peace we have had first an armed truce and then a recurrent series of crises successively more and more acute and now culminating in a new outbreak which promises to make or break our civilization. But it is also in part due to the publication of a book which has caught the interest of the more intelligent part of the citizens, not of the United States alone, but of the world.

Mr. Streit, in his book *Union Now*, has made an analysis of the essential problems of world organization, a criticism of the past attempts at solution, and has propounded a scheme for a new solution which he suggests will avoid the mistakes of the older methods and also their failures.

It is not possible, in a brief review to give a full account of a book containing three hundred pages of closely packed reasoning and abundant supporting quotations and citations. We shall here merely outline the principal ideas. Mr. Streit argues that the main difficulties that face us are due to the fact that our political development has stopped at the age of nationality. We assume that there is no further development possible and that, for some unexplained reason, the nation is the ultimate form of human union. Hence in the past we have tried to find a solution for the problem of national differences in various forms of agreements, treaties, conferences and leagues. These have all more or less failed because underlying all of them was the claim of individual sovereignty. As long as that claim persists there can be no real peace, for each party to disputes retains the right to the positions of judge, jury, prosecuting counsel and executioner.

UNION OF PEOPLES

He declares that the only real way out is to have not a league of nations, but a union of peoples and he makes great use of the analogy of the development of the United States of America. After the successful outcome of the revolutionary war, the country was faced with two possibilities. Either the individual colonies could retain their private sovereignties and

amalgamate as a confederation of states, or they could abrogate part of those sovereignties and become a single union.

History shows that the former alternative was a hopeless failure and that the second has produced a sound and working system. Instead of the abrogation of sovereignty producing a reduction in freedom, it has, in fact, increased the freedom of the peoples enormously. It has made possible a broad freedom of trade between all of the states, a uniform citizenship, a uniform currency, a single defense force and a free communication system. And this has been done, not by forcing upon the citizens a restricted and controlled life, but rather by securing to all the privileges of free speech and free assembly, of the right to petition for the redress of grievances, to worship according to the dictates of conscience, in short, to all those freedoms which do not interfere with the equal freedoms of others.

Mr. Streit's proposal is that the idea which generated the United States of America should be used to propagate the Union of Democratic Peoples. He suggests, therefore, that the principal democracies of the world unite in a sort of super-state on lines similar to those upon which our Nation was formed. Mr. Streit's idea of democracy is not a rigid one. His definition is simple enough and provides merely for a form of representative government with a constitution which includes, as an absolute, a bill of rights similar to the United States Constitution. There can, he says, be no freedom of the type we regard as vital to a full life, where this bill of rights is not basic. Hence, the totalitarian regimes must be excluded until their peoples are ready for the understanding and practice of freedom as we understand it. This does not, of course, mean that all of the democracies should be exactly alike in every respect, any more than the forty-eight states of the American union are alike. Cultures, traditions, literatures, and history may be and indeed should be, different. But all matters that affect the relations of the larger groups should be in control of the larger unit. Hence the powers of this Democratic Union would include, and be confined to five, i.e., the regulation of interstate trade, of citizenship, of communication, of money, and of defense.

And Mr. Streit suggests that all of this is possible now. He points out that all the obvious difficulties and apparent impossibilities were present in the American case in 1787. But that, in the course of only two years the difficulties were essentially ironed out and the impossibilities became actualities. All that was required was a period of crisis sufficiently acute to force people to weigh the dangers of the status quo against the risks of the future. And here we have a similar situation.

This review must be regarded as a brief exposition, and not a criticism. To criticise would require a long article. Yet the present reviewer must record his belief that some such system — possibly with changed details, but in all essence the same — is the only possible hope for our survival as a free people.