

A Federation of Free and Equal Nations

Léon Blum

Editor's Note: Léon Blum (1872-1950), a socialist and a Jew, was Prime Minister of France from 1936-7, in 1938, and from 1946-7. He refused to leave France in 1940, preferring to be a fierce opponent of the Vichy regime. He wrote this article in July 1941, in Paris. He was deported to Germany and imprisoned in Buchenwald from 1943-5, where he wrote the essay *À l'échelle Humaine* ('For all mankind'). René Blum, his brother, was murdered in Auschwitz.

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When Hitler and Goebbels talk of organising Europe, when the French 'collaborators' echo their words, we know what they mean and what they want. In present realities their European Order is nothing but the utilisation of all European resources, the extraction and extortion of all we have, for the benefit of the Axis, and their so-called organisation of Europe is no more than the future total enslavement of Europe by the Nazi regime. Thus the same words are used with diametrically opposed meanings. When we talk of a European Order, we are thinking not of war but of peace; when we talk of European organisation, we are thinking not of a common subjection to the domination of a tyrant, but of the federation of free and equal nations, of a League of Nations! Let us not be afraid to admit that the ideal of 1919 was a fine one. It is cheap and easy today to mock at the League, but if we have the courage to ignore the mockery, we must agree that we shall yet have to return to the same inspiration.

As it was conceived at the end of the last war by all the great democrats of both hemispheres, the League of Nations was a noble and magnificent creation. I believe this to be true despite its failure, which I do not seek in any way to minimise or excuse. I remain convinced, despite its failure, that it would still be sufficient and able to impose respect for international order among those political societies that gave it birth. Its failure, moreover, was something from which the world will have to learn its lesson. The League of Nations, created by the Treaties of Versailles, failed because great powers like Russia and the United States, whose support was essential, were outside it from the start. It failed because its founders, trying to disarm suspicions here and fears there, did not dare give it the instruments and

the living strength that it needed to function properly. It failed because it was not itself a great sovereign power, distinct from national sovereign powers and greater than they; because it had neither the political authority nor the material force to enable it to carry out its decisions and impose its will on national states; because its powers were too restricted and too intermittent to allow it to cover the same fields of activity as national sovereign states.

It would be easy to quote arguments and facts in support of each of these reasons. If we take the antithesis of each of them, we shall have outlined the principles which must be applied this time in order to have a living and effective international organisation. All the powers, and particularly America and Russia, must be parties to the new covenant.

The international body must have the institutions and powers it needs to do what it is created to do; in other words it must be boldly and openly set up as a super-state on a level above the national sovereignties, and that, in turn, means that the Member States must have accepted in advance as much limitation and subordination of their particular sovereignties as this superior sovereign power requires.