TO SAFEGUARD THE PEACE OF THE WORLD

An Important Speech by Lord Cecil

At the Opening Meeting of the General Council of the INTERNATIONAL PEACE CAMPAIGN, held at Geneva on March 15, 1937, at 3 p.m. Lord Cecil delivered an important speech.

Lord Cecil said:

I remember some years ago hearing someone say in the Assembly of the League of Nations that the governments would never force peace upon the people, but that the peoples might force peace upon the governments. It is an illustration of that maxim that the International Peace Campaign - the Rassemblement pour la Paix - has been founded. Although it is little more than a year since the organisation came into existence, twenty-seven countries are represented at this meeting together with some twenty-two international organisations, many of them with very large membership. It would be no exaggeration to say that there are persons here who may be said to represent hundreds of millions of human beings, and they are here to demand peace and to work for it, and to see whether they cannot establish it in the world whatever the governments may do.

During the period it has been in existence, this organisation has done an immense amount of work. We are profoundly indebted to some of our friends on the Secretariat who have worked with marvellous devotion and skill to establish this great experiment in peace. I am not going to describe all that has been done, because other speakers will follow me who knew far more about the details of the work than I do; moreover, we shall hope to hear from the representatives of the different countries what each of their own countries has done in this cause. I think, however, that you will agree with me that, even on a general view, the progress of our idea has been very striking. It has evidently, in the cant phrase, "met a long-felt want". The movement has been almost spontaneous. Most of you were at the great meeting at Brussels last August, and those who were will agree with me that the feeling of that meeting was very remarkable, showing a depth and enthusiasm which was a very striking phenomenon in political affairs, all the more because then, even more than now, the conception of internationally organised peace was by no means in the ascendant.
Further, a great many things have shown that it was by no means an exceptional phenomenon, a solitary unique expression of opinion. It was, on the contrary, the beginning of a great movement, and we have had many proofs of that since then. I shall only mention three great events, all of which were in my view extremely striking and important. I cannot avoid mentioning as the first last September's reception by the Assembly of the League of Nations of the deputation from Brussels. That was the only time anything of the kind has ever occurred, and though the attendant circumstances were not conducive to enthusiasm, it was yet a very impressive occasion. I am sure the Ministers and leaders of those countries represented at the Assembly recognised even then the importance of the movement which was taking place.

Then, at the beginning of this year, a declaration was issued which was signed by important persons in a number of different countries. In my own country, where it began, it was signed by twelve persons, three belonging to the Government parties, led by Mr. Winston Churchill, who has occupied very high office, assisted by the Duchess of Atholl and Lord Lytton, who have also occupied high office. Consider that Ministers were not able to sign this declaration, which was approximately on the lines of our Four Points; I think the representation of the ministerial parties was very satisfactory. Then, the leading party of the Opposition was represented by three of its most eminent members, including its present leader Mr. Attlee, accompanied by Mr. Dalton - who was Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the Labour Government - and my friend Mr. Noel Baker who is amongst us to-day. The Liberals were represented by three of their most eminent personages, including Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Archibald Sinclair, the present leader of the Liberal party in the House of Commons, and finally three others, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Professor Gilbert Murray and myself. I think those names form twelve as representative of important political opinion as could be found in my country. The declaration was then signed in Paris under the auspices of the R.U.P., the signatories being men of importance and influence, and it has also been signed in a number of other countries. All those facts seem to me to be most striking and important because they seem to show that leaders of opinion in all countries are, broadly speaking, in favour of the policy which we recommend.

Finally, there was that very interesting and important incident, the grant by the Nobel Institute of a considerable sum - £2,000 - in favour of the funds of the International Peace Campaign. Many of you know, even better than I do, how carefully the decisions of the Nobel Institute are formed, and that they are destitute of any kind of prejudice or partiality, being dictated only by the conviction that the beneficiary was a person or institute of importance for peace.
These three incidents mark very plainly the strength, importance and depth of the movement in which we are engaged. I am impelled to ask, what is it that has made this great impression on the world? What are the features of our movement which have attracted such great attention?

First of all I put the fact that we advocate a definite programme, our Four Points, and not a mere aspiration towards peace. In the latter sense, everybody is in favour of peace. There is not a human being who has the use of his senses who is not at this moment in favour of peace. Perhaps, however, it is rash to say that about the human race, but still there are scarcely any sane human beings who are not in favour of peace. They may be in favour of peace in a dozen different ways, and some of those who say they are in favour of peace act as if they are in favour of war. We, at any rate, have a perfectly definite and precise programme, and that, I am sure, is of enormous importance, not only because it will ultimately make our movement of great use, but also because without a definite programme one cannot expect much popular support. One might persuade large gatherings to come and cheer some well-turned sentiment in favour of peace and justice, but if an organisation is wanted which is really going to be effective, it must be based on definite principles. I believe it is of the utmost possible importance in our movement that we stick to our Four Points. I believe that not only because I profoundly agree with the Four Points, but also because I am sure that there will be no really forcible movement in favour of peace unless it is based upon some such definite principles. While we must be ready to accept anyone who is honestly in favour of peace and is prepared to assist us - even if he does not agree upon every point - I am quite certain we must never whittle down our principles in the hope of attracting additional support. We must stick to our principles; that is the only way in which we shall gain effective support.

On the other hand, and this brings me to my second point, we must be ready to accept any honest and genuine support, from whatever quarter it comes. We do not advocate any political principles, nor any specific religious principles, nor, in fact, any principles apart from our Four Points. We are quite ready to receive support and assistance from anyone who is genuinely in favour of those Four Points. That is essential. The French name for our movement expresses that even more clearly than the English one - "Rassemblement Universel" - that is the essential part of our movement. There is only one condition we make, and that is a very essential one, that in no circumstances must this movement be used for any political purpose. It is to be used for the promulgation of our Four Points only, and not for reaction or Communism, or revolution or progress. It is to be used for peace and peace only.
I have had the opportunity of watching those who have been engaged in different capacities in the organisation of this movement, and I think it right to tell you very definitely that I have not found a single person making any attempt to pervert this movement to some political purpose of his own. I say that with some definiteness because, in my country, there still persists in quarters which really ought to know better an impression which has no kind of foundation: that the R.U.P. is a device of one political party - since I think it is better to be perfectly clear, that party is said to be the Communist party. It is said that they, with devilish ingenuity, have seized upon the world's desire for peace and are trying to utilise it for the benefit of their own political doctrines. I am not a Communist and do not pretend to be, but I must say that I have seen not the smallest sign of anything of the kind. I am inclined to add that there seems to be a number of people who are quite mad on this subject, and who see a Communist under every chair. If I may venture to give an illustration, there are in my country people with very strong views on the controversy between Protestantism and Catholicism. When I was young there were quite a number of people who, being Protestant, seemed to be terrified lest they should wake up one morning and find that they had become Roman Catholics. It never occurred to them that they would have to decide that point for themselves. That kind of obsession seems to have seized a certain number of people in my country and in others, but all I can tell them is that they are mad; they are doing no good even to their own cause and one might reply in any case that the Communists, however wicked and unprincipled they may be, cannot do anything better than advocate peace. That, after all, cannot do much harm.

I have ventured to make this little digression to explain the situation, because for a long time I have had a great desire to say in public how unsound this fear appears to me to be. I do not wish to say anything uncivil to the Communists, nor do I wish to say that I have the slightest belief in their doctrines; that is not the point. The point is that this is a matter on which their doctrines and my doctrines do not conflict. We want peace, they want peace. Maybe it is for one reason or for another, but we can work together for peace and why, in heaven's name, should we not do so?

These, therefore, are the two points: a definite programme and an all-embracing propaganda. There is another point, not perhaps of the same importance, but which it is very desirable that we should keep in mind. That is that our movement is not in competition with any other peace society. As you know, we do not seek to enrol individual members. We avoid that; we say quite definitely that it ought not to be done by the International Peace Campaign. On the contrary, our object is to strength, by every way we can, all the reasonable peace societies which agree with our Four Points. The stronger they are, the better we are pleased and the stronger we
shall be. We wish to see the League of Nations Societies and others of that kind as strong and vigorous and all-embracing as possible. They can collect as many members as they wish, and the more they collect the better we shall be pleased. The only thing we care about is not the success of this or that organisation, but the success of the principles of our Four Points, because on them we believe that the peace of the world depends.

For those points, we do care, and very profoundly. Further, we must work; there is a lot for us to do. We must work to complete and strengthen our organisation in support of those Four Points; there is a great deal to be done in regard to our international organisation. According to our agenda we have to consider such things as future organisation, the development of the movement, international conferences, and so on. We have much to do in that direction. Then, in our national organisations, we must work very hard on a number of special points, special methods of popularising our ideas.

You have no doubt heard of such schemes as that of the "Peace Penny". We are just on the point of starting such a scheme in my country which will give you an illustration. We have had cards printed to be sold at a penny each and bearing a message to the purchaser: "You have contributed to the cause of peace". Of the penny paid, one-half will go to the British National Committee and the other to the local committee which issues the cards. The actual method is extremely simple; the National Committee has the cards printed in very large numbers and sells them to the local committees for a half-penny each, the local committee in turn selling them for a penny. I do not know whether this is the best plan, but it is a plan which has the merit of great simplicity.

In my country we also propose to hold "Peace Weeks", that is to say, to have in as many localities as possible a week devoted to the advocacy of peace, with all sorts of attractive features. Pageants, processions, meetings, conferences, exhibitions, all sorts of things of that kind are proposed and are described in a book we have published. I have no doubt these things have been advocated in other countries as well. In addition, of course, we shall have the ordinary weapons of propaganda, and we hope for assistance from the press. That is a matter of vital importance in such work and we even hope to get something out of Parliament, though that will probably be more difficult. That is the kind of work we have to do, and we are here to-day to take counsel with one another and see how that work can best be organised and encouraged. It is, believe me, a very great work, a laborious work done for a very great object.

Undoubtedly, the object is a great one. The world, for some mysterious reason, is apparently moving towards war. It seems insane to those of us who can remember what war really was a few years
ago; how useless it proved to be, how it settled nothing, but left everything in a confusion from which the world has not yet recovered. And it will unquestionably be even more terrible than it was then if it comes again. That we should again be drifting towards this whirlpool of madness does seem insane, but it appears to be threatening. At least, there seems to be a tendency that way. But, I am convinced, it is not among the peoples. Perhaps it is among certain of the governments or certain of the interests which I will not further describe. But we see great dangers threatening peace in various parts of the world.

There is the case of Spain. Here, quite recently, a very formidable charge was made by the Spanish Government that a new technique of aggression has been devised by which a government outside Spain has in fact done something very like an invasion of Spanish territory. I take no part in the Spanish conflict, which is a matter for the Spanish people, but I do say that if it is true, if that charge can be made out, it is a matter which affects every country of the world. The same technique may be applied in other countries as has been applied in Spain. It is a matter which I cannot help hoping will be the subject of a very earnest and careful enquiry. I should like to see an enquiry by the League of Nations, if necessary sending commissions to all parts of Spain to find out the exact facts. I do not know whether this is practicable or not, but it seems to me that something of the kind ought to be done. I do not think a charge of this description can be left without any reply.

There is, besides that local threat to peace, the threat involved in the vast increase in armaments throughout the world. I am not one of those people who deplore the action of my own Government in reference to armaments. I believe it was inevitable. I am not going into the details, but that some increase in armaments was essential is, I am afraid, true. I do not say that armaments will lead to peace, but I do not see how, if other countries are armed, one country can expect to remain unarmed or insufficiently armed.

In a properly organised society no individual carries a pistol or a sword, but where society is not properly organised, and where one set of people begins to carry weapons, the inevitable result is that the rest of the people do the same. That indeed is not conducive to public peace; far from it, but it does give some measure of protection, or at any rate a confidence, to those who have the arms.

But in this case we cannot be satisfied with mere increase of armaments. That is no remedy for the situation. We must strive, with all our strength, for the second of our Four Points, which recommends the reduction and limitation of armaments by international agreement. Increase of armaments can only be justified as an
entirely temporary measure, in order to enable countries to come together on equal terms and discuss disarmament. I am delighted to hear that the Committee of the Disarmament Conference is to meet again at a date early in May. I earnestly hope that before we separate we shall agree to go back and recommend our National Committees to bring real pressure upon the government of each country in favour of this new effort towards the reduction and limitation of armaments. We must do that, for after all, we are here to support our Four Points, which are not just points of academic interest but which must be made real, definite and conducive to the peace of the world. We want not only a mere truce, but a permanent peace and we must be prepared to take whatever measures are necessary to secure that peace.

I believe that peace is certain to come sooner or later. I cannot believe that human beings can permanently be so destitute of all common sense, kindness, consideration, and all the best qualities of human beings as to permit this vile system of settling differences by trying to kill as many as possible of another nation. That seems to me an incredible state of things which cannot last. Sooner or later, I am sure we shall see established a new international order in which violence will be as discreditable among nations as it is now among individuals. It will have to come, but the terrible doubt is whether it will come before or after another war. It is the business of this great organisation to strain every nerve, muscle and energy to try and prevent another devastating war which will only leave worse difficulties, even worse senses of injustice than the last war left in 1918.