

The Anatomy of Peace by Emery Reves
(New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945; 275 pages)
Reviewed by David Oughton

This classic book on democratic world federation was written at the end of the Second World War. Reves' purpose in writing this book was to demonstrate how the United Nations confederation that was being created then would not prevent future wars. Only by creating a democratic system of world law could all wars be eliminated.

Reves argues that most people's approach to political, economic, and social problems is "utterly ridiculous and out-of-date" (p. 29) because they hold on to an antiquated view of sovereign nation-states. What is needed in our modern world that is highly integrated and industrialized is a dramatic shift away from nations that see themselves as the center of the world to seeing the world united by a democratic world federal government that would create world law and order.

In capitalist, fascist, and communist countries, "the people of each nation have been forced to centralize more and more power in their national governments" because of constant threats from other nations. (p. 36) The constant preparation for the possibility of war has meant less political, economic, and social freedom for individuals in every nation, regardless of its political or economic system. The main problem of our modern world is therefore nationalism as a result of many nation-states that are "independent, sovereign units whose relationship is unregulated." (p. 65)

The ethical teachings of the world's religions have been inadequate to prevent humans from slaughtering millions of their fellow humans in numerous wars. Christianity, Islam, and the other religions of the world have neglected their basic insight of universalism and the unity of the human family. The world's religions have become "completely absorbed and dominated by neo-pagan nationalism." (p. 82) But humanity can be saved only by universalism.

According to Reves, the only method that can make humans accept moral principles and standards of social conduct is law. He argues that a civilized global society and peace between nations can be achieved "only within a legal order equipped with institutions to give effect to principles and norms in the form of law, with adequate power to apply those laws and to enforce them with equal vigor against all who violate them." (p. 76) Security and freedom are the products of law on the local and national levels, and this would also be true on the global level.

Reves disagrees with those who believe that war can never be abolished because it is part of human nature. He argues that wars between social units always take place when these units (tribes, dynasties, religions, cities, or nations) exercise unrestricted sovereign power. But "wars between these social units cease the moment sovereign power is transferred from them to a larger or higher unit." (p. 121) Just as there is one and only one cause for wars, peace between social groups that have fought each other has always been established in only one way.

There have been two opposite mistakes in thinking about the cause of war. After the First World War, many believed that the necessary condition for world peace was disarmament. During the Second World War, many believed that only powerful armaments and strategic military bases

spread around the world could prevent aggression and maintain peace. For Reves, the problem of war and the attainment of peace between nations is a social and political problem, not a technical problem about armaments.

Reves argues that “the fundamental problem of peace is the problem of sovereignty.” (p. 126) In previous centuries, chiefs, kings, and emperors were considered to have absolute sovereignty. In the modern world, unlimited sovereignty resides in national governments. We are currently living in global anarchy because there is no higher source of law above the national governments. The Second World War has demonstrated that in our industrialized world, the concept of ‘the sovereign equality of all nations’ is obsolete.

The question is not about surrendering national sovereignty but creating something that we currently lack but need---institutions with universal sovereign power that can extend law and order above the national governments and thereby eliminate the current global situation of unregulated anarchy. Sovereign power resides in communities. People have delegated part of their sovereignty to local governments in order to solve local problems and they have delegated part of their sovereignty to national governments to solve national problems. Reves maintains that it is now time for people to delegate part of their sovereignty to a democratic world federal government in order to solve global problems.

Under the current international system, national governments enter into unenforceable treaties with each other but disregard them whenever they no longer support what they consider their national interests. But “we can never arrive at a legal order by means of treaties.” (p. 150) After any war, a peace treaty is signed. But no matter what kind of treaty is signed, the next war is inevitable in a world that lacks world law. For Reves, “peace is order based on law. There is no other imaginable definition. Any other conception of peace is sheer utopia.” (p. 147)

Wars that are the result of the system of sovereign nation-states are extremely expensive in human life, environmental destruction, and material wealth. The war system restricts individual rights and lowers living standards. Solving the war problem will foster human rights as well as free up huge amounts of money for solving national and global problems. Through a democratic world federation, “a unified world currency is the indispensable condition for further development of world economy from the present stage on.” (p. 170)

After the First World War, the League of Nations was formed but it was unable to prevent later wars because it was a league or confederation of sovereign national governments. Reves wanted the world to avoid the same problem at the end of the Second World War. But even though the United Nations Organization was an improvement over the League of Nations, it was just another international confederation. Reves’ thesis is that both the League of Nations and the United Nations are based on the “fallacy of internationalism” (the title of Chapter 11) and the “fallacy of collective security” (the title of Chapter 13). Under the inter-national system of sovereign nation-states, “all great powers behave like gangsters. And all small nations behave like prostitutes.” (p. 222)

Reves is not advocating that people first become united in the areas of religion, culture, political philosophy, or economic system before they can be united under a democratic world federation.

He says that differences in religion, culture, art, language, politics, and economics would not be eliminated but would actually be protected and flourish under a global legal system. A world federation must be democratic, based on constitutional principles, and protective of human rights.

After the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, journalists asked Albert Einstein for his ideas on world peace. Einstein replied, "We need a world government." He then urged the journalists to read Reves' book. In a postscript to a second edition, Reves said that there is only one method that can create security against destruction by atomic bombs. That method is democratic world federation. He said that the San Francisco Charter that created the United Nations Organization is simply a multilateral treaty whose members are nation-states. "Each party to it can withdraw the moment it desires, and war alone can force the member-states to fulfill their obligations under the treaty. Law and only law can bring peace among people; treaties never can."

The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said that all of Western philosophy is a footnote to Plato. A similar saying can be applied to this book. Reves developed the fundamental principles for analyzing the cause of war and the solution of world law created by a democratic world federation. Ever since Reves' book appeared at the end of the Second World War, other authors of books on democratic world federation have basically been expanding his central argument.