

European subordination of Asia was not merely economic and political and military," he writes. "It was also intellectual and moral and spiritual: a completely different kind of conquest than had been witnessed before, which left its victims resentful but also envious of their conquerors and, ultimately, eager to be initiated into the mysteries of their seemingly near-magical power." This is not quite right. Yes, the utter defeat of Asia provoked these feelings in Asian peoples. But the fact that they never came to see themselves as part of the West—that they never exhibited the Stockholm syndrome one British Raj official hoped for when he called for the creation of "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect" in part because racist elements in the West would never fully accept even Westernized Asians—is precisely what created the intellectual tradition Mishra chronicles. Mishra notes that it was al-Afghani who first formulated the dichotomy between "Islam" and "the West," but he does not see that the dichotomy was created by the West's insistent racial exclusivity. By contrast, the Chinese empire crammed an enormous range of peoples under a single ethnic rubric—the

Han Chinese—that came to see itself as one people. Similarly, the Islamic armies that poured out of the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century subdued a diverse swath of the world from Morocco to Iraq, imposed a new faith and a new language, and convinced the varied peoples (many the descendants of Roman citizens) that they were "Arabs" despite their obvious physical differences from their conquerors. Though Mishra approvingly quotes Muslim poet Akbar Allahabadi's line that "We of the East break our opponents' heads / They of the West change their opponents' nature," in the broad scope of world history, the West's ability to change the nature of the peoples it conquered pales in comparison with that of the Chinese emperors or Arabian armies. It would be a delicious irony indeed if the racist rejection that undermined the universalist claims of Western liberalism ultimately blossomed into a more humane and sustainable modernity. It would truly be an ambiguous—and welcome—revenge if Asia saved the West from itself.

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## Charting the Road to Davos: The Rise and Fall of Internationalism

DANIEL IMMERWAHR

*Governing the World: The History of an Idea*  
by Mark Mazower  
Penguin, 2012, 416 pp.

"*La tot' homoze in familje konunigare so debá,*" sang Ludwig Zamenhof in 1877, in celebration of his nineteenth birthday. The language of the song, Esperanto, was of his own invention, but the sentiment was not: *All mankind must*

*unite in one family.* Within fifty years, that same idea could have found expression in any number of international languages—from Solresol, in which every phoneme is sung, to Volapük, an improbably popular, vaguely Germanic tongue that attracted tens of thousands of speakers before collapsing under the weight of its own unwieldy grammar. For the slightly less ambitious, there was the spelling reform movement, which attempted to turn English into a sort of universal language by dramatically simplifying its orthography. It was under the influence of spelling reform

that Melville Dewey, author of the Dewey decimal system, changed his name to Melvil Dui and that Theodore Roosevelt ordered all

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government publications to be issued only in the simplified spelling. In what must be counted as a regrettable loss for posterity, Dui changed his name back to its original spelling, and Congress quickly reversed (or, as Roosevelt would have had it, *revert*) the president's order.

Setbacks aside, proponents believed that such linguistic innovations would eventually bind the world together, as H. G. Wells put it, in "a common resonance of thought." That didn't turn out to be the most accurate of Wells's predictions, which included suburbanization, aerial warfare, and the atom bomb. But it captured a deeply felt desire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Mark Mazower shows in *Governing the World: The History of an Idea*, a startling number of thinkers and activists in those centuries either expected or fervently hoped that international affairs would be, if not placed under the supervision of a world government, as Wells desired, then at least transformed according to universal principles, laws, and reason. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in other words, were the age of internationalism.

*The word international* was coined surprisingly late, in 1780, by the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Nations, of course, had long been locked into rivalries marked by the pulsing alternation of warfare and negotiated peace. But before the nineteenth century few thought that those nations could make up an international society that might be governed. War and peace were the affairs of princes and their representatives,

held in check only by the alliances that each was able to summon against the others. The first hint of something different came after Napoleon's revolutionary army cut a gash through Europe. In response, the conservative monarchs formed the Concert of Europe, a grand counterrevolutionary system for maintaining stability, preserving the privileges of rulers over the claims of their subjects, and, above all, preventing another Napoleon from marching through their provinces.

Looking back on the Concert system, historians who lived through the blood-soaked twentieth century have admired its ability to prevent a general war in Europe for nearly a century. But, in its own time, it summoned little but scorn from the rising European middle and working classes. To them, the military alliance among conservative regimes throughout Europe meant that reform in one country would require reform in them all. Internationalism, the movement to govern the relations between states in the name of the public rather than the princes, came as a reaction to the Concert of Europe. And it quickly took its place as one of the highest aspirations of the age. The countless proposals to reconfigure European society that filled the libraries of the nineteenth century were of nearly endless variety, but the need for some alternative arrangement of international affairs was a constant refrain. Internationalism was not a side dish served alongside the many great causes of the age: peace, the abolition of slavery, capitalism, communism, nationalism, the rise of science. It was, as Mazower shows, a chief ingredient in them all.

It is easy, in passing through the canon of social theory in the past quarter of a millennium, to see all of the great thinkers as attempting to answer the question of how to govern a polity. What Mazower suggests is that, for many of them, an equally pressing question was how to govern *polities*. This was abundantly evident in one of the most powerful campaigns of the nineteenth century: free trade. When Richard Cobden, author of Britain's historic adoption of *laissez-faire*, justified his system, his argument was less that trade would increase the wealth of nations than that it would "snatch the power from governments to plunge their people

into wars." Free trade was, then, "the best human means for securing a universal and permanent peace." That phrase, "a universal and permanent peace," had been ricocheting around Enlightenment thought for some time, most notably in Immanuel Kant's essay "Perpetual Peace." But Cobden's contribution was to channel the Enlightenment's inchoate hopes into an economic agenda.

*Other thinkers, however,* had different ideas about where to direct this new internationalist impulse. Giuseppe Mazzini, the world's foremost prophet of nationalism, cared little for Cobden's cosmopolitan circumvention of governments. A man of the Romantic Age more than of the Enlightenment, he sought to partition the globe into ethnically rooted states. And yet his vision, too, was animated by internationalism. Driven into exile by the Concert of Europe, Mazzini insisted that only national democratic states, not territory-hungry empires or borderless markets, could secure Kant's longed-for peace.

Free traders were internationalists, republicans were internationalists, nationalists were internationalists—the list goes on. One of Mazower's most remarkable insights in this regard is to place Karl Marx alongside Cobden and Mazzini in the pantheon of internationalism. In the famed first sentence of their manifesto, Marx and Engels wrote that the specter of communism was haunting Europe. In the less-noted next sentence, they complained of the "holy alliance" that European rulers had formed to exorcise that specter. Tellingly, the first name to appear in the manifesto is that of Metternich, the architect of the Concert of Europe.

Marx rose to fame as the leader of the International Working Men's Association—known in the liturgy of communism as the First International. But whereas the First International is usually understood as an important episode within the history of socialism, Mazower reminds us that it was an equally important episode in the history of internationalism. Marx joined the organization in a fit of pique. The followers of Mazzini had dominated the group and written a platform of principles featuring, Marx told

Engels, "an appallingly wordy, badly written and utterly undigested preamble . . . in which Mazzini could be detected everywhere." Marx seized control and replaced it with his own text, substituting references to nationalities with references to countries and capping the document off with a plea for an international union of workers. We usually regard such calls for worldwide solidarity as an indication that Marx advocated an internationalist variety of socialism. What Mazower proposes is that we might just as easily understand Marx as offering a socialist variety of internationalism.

Marx drove the Mazzinians from the temple, but, like the money changers, they eventually came back. When Woodrow Wilson paraded through Genoa in 1919 on his way to the peace conference in Paris, he laid a wreath before the monument to Mazzini. "It is with a spirit of veneration," he explained, "and with a spirit I hope of emulation, that I stand in the presence of this monument and bring my greetings and the greetings of America with our homage to the great Mazzini." The notion that ethnically partitioned and democratically governed nations might join together within a capitalist frame to preserve the peace, which Wilson pressed on the world through the League of Nations, was profoundly Mazzinian. Moreover, Wilson formulated it in reaction to the internationalism propagated by Marx's heir, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, founder of the Third International. Marx's confrontation with Mazzini, Lenin's with Wilson, and later the Soviet Union's with the United States, can all be seen as a rivalry for the soul of internationalism playing out on ever larger stages.

*Of course, these were* not the only subspecies of internationalism. Working outside the realm of geopolitics entirely, scientists and engineers began meeting regularly in international conferences to share research and standardize practices. It is to their quiet efforts that we are in debt for a single standard for telling time, a near-universal standard for measuring length and mass, and an international mechanism for the dissemination of research. Anarchists created their own international networks, and provoked the police who were chasing them to create their own

network as well. Lawyers proposed international law to govern warring states. Visions of worldwide confederation and international solidarity were a constant trope of science fiction writers, cropping up in the works of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, Edward Bellamy, Robert Heinlein, and Isaac Asimov. In fact, writers founded their own international organization, PEN International (Wells was a charter member). Few people bothered to learn Esperanto, but socialists, capitalists, reformers, professionals, romantics, feminists, and countless others knew its central message by heart.

*What happened to internationalism?* One answer is that it succeeded. Although internationalists' highest ambitions remained out of reach, evidence of their lasting achievements abounds: the Geneva Conventions, the Red Cross, the League of Nations, the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union, the International Criminal Court, and the countless nongovernmental organizations that range from Doctors without Borders to the World Alliance of YMCAs. Whether and how such institutions matter, however, is the subject of endless debate among political scientists. Do they compel deference to international society or are they simply arenas for well-intentioned empty talk?

Gentle tugs on the sleeves of power can make a difference. The advent of arbitration in international affairs—one of the major achievements of the internationalist movement—resolved numerous disputes that might have otherwise led to war. When trade ministers negotiate tariffs or U.S. Supreme Court justices travel overseas, as they regularly do, to visit foreign courts, the mere fact that they speak with their foreign counterparts creates an international conversation to which they are at least somewhat responsive. Even when they have not yielded binding laws, international institutions have created networks of expertise that have bound specialists to those in other countries. And yet, although Mazower acknowledges such triumphs of internationalism, he does not dwell on them. His main concern is not what

internationalism has done to powerful states. It is, rather, what powerful states have done to internationalism.

The plight of internationalism can best be seen in the trajectory of the peace movement. In the middle of the nineteenth century, pacifism was a radical cause, drawing under its banner free traders, Quakers, and temperance advocates. The violent upheavals throughout Europe in 1848, on the Crimean peninsula in 1853, and in the United States in the 1860s, however, forced radicals to decide whether they wanted peace more than they wanted social transformation. They turned away from peace per se and started speaking instead of the need to “humanize” the conduct of war, which they pushed in the Geneva and Hague conventions. Power, they insisted, must fit itself to the frame of morality. But the fitting distorted the frame. Peace advocates seeking to abolish war turned their posts over to international lawyers codifying rules for it. In an age of empire, Mazower notes, this was a disastrous turn. International law, in time, came to look like nothing so much as “a rationalization of plunder, a world made free for the mighty to rob while claiming that justice was on their side.” In this fashion, a movement that had begun with the purpose of constraining states in the name of peace ended by serving them in the name of “just” war.

The more internationalism succeeded in creating institutions, the more it was forced to accommodate the realities of a global politics pursued through and defined by the most powerful nation-states on the planet. The League of Nations, established after the First World War, foundered in part because it failed to gain the participation of many of the major powers: the United States, Germany, and the Soviet Union (Lenin had deemed it a “stinking corpse”). The United Nations, established after the Second World War, avoided that danger by placing its real power in the hands of the Security Council, a small decision-making body composed of the most powerful nations, in which the veto of any one would prevent the UN from taking action. Of course, there was still the General Assembly, a large congress in which every nation had an equal vote. But as it became clear that the decolonizing world would dominate the Assembly,

it turned into a discussion chamber, a place where grievances could be aired but no action would be taken. Internationalists, in other words, now served an organization that, with its deference to great power politics, bore a growing resemblance to the Concert of Europe.

Another nail in the coffin of internationalism, although Mazower does not discuss it in these terms, was surely the ascent of the United States. It is not an accident that the center of internationalism in Mazower's book is Europe, thickly planted with rivalrous empires and tormented by Concert diplomacy, where political dissidents took refuge in neighboring countries and where the relevance of international questions to nearly every social movement was obvious. Things were different in the continent-sized, ocean-buffered United States. There, internationalism tended to be the ideology of the cosmopolitan elite rather than of the insurgent masses or middle-class reformers. Wilson, popular throughout the world as the standard-bearer of international cooperation, failed to convince his own compatriots of the value of the League of Nations. Franklin Delano Roosevelt faced a similar burden as he cajoled a reluctant nation into rescuing liberal Europe. Even as the United States took control of the international system after 1945, average citizens displayed little interest in worldly matters. Internationalism smacked to them of communism, and the few serious internationalists who persisted into the postwar era—men such as Albert Einstein—were hounded mercilessly by red-baiters. Shockingly, in the early 1960s, at the height of the Cold War and on the eve of the Cuban missile crisis, Gallup Poll respondents ranked “international affairs” fourteenth on a list of problems facing their country.

The international, for the people of the United States, was a realm best left to the experts. And no expert played the role with more relish, or with more popularity, than Henry Kissinger, *Time's* “Man of the Year” for 1972, Nobel Peace Laureate, and the first honorary member of the Harlem Globetrotters. Kissinger openly admired the old European system of Concert diplomacy, which had been the subject of his doctoral dissertation

at Harvard. He believed, with the architects of that system, that global affairs ought to be managed behind closed doors by the representatives of powerful states—democracy, the United Nations, and human rights be damned. What is remarkable is that most of his country, for a time, appeared perfectly happy with that arrangement. Realpolitik was once again eclipsing internationalism and, for the first time in a century and a half, the people were silent about it.

*Kissinger's dreams of* reviving the Concert system were, however, only a last gasp, for the Age of Kissinger was also the twilight of the state-anchored international system. After the 1970s, capital, goods, ideas, and people moved across borders with such rapidity that the very idea of state sovereignty was called into question. Globalization, one might think, could lead to a new wave of internationalist spirit. Never before had humans been able to speak, act, and move across vast distances with such ease. Indeed, the early growth of the human rights movement drew fuel from the newfound ability of journalists to transmit images of the victims of political violence to activists and donors far away. And as the state has lost its monopoly of authority, nongovernmental organizations have emerged to provide aid, protect rights, and perform many tasks left undone by states. Global government failed, but might global governance, marked by private actors and soft power, succeed?

Not likely, says Mazower, and with some justification. The retraction of state power has not been met with the growth of any sort of capable or responsible alternative institutions. Rather, globalization has generally meant a reversion to the market. The largest nongovernmental actors with aspirations to serve the public interest are not the products of social movements but rather of corporate accumulation: the Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and free-range billionaires such as Warren Buffett and Oprah Winfrey. International humanitarianism is now more the province of rock stars and actors than it is of political visionaries. Worse, its principles prove just as easily adaptable to the cause

of “humanitarian interventions”—known in plainer language as “wars”—as they do to the meager charitable giving that our celebrities ask of us. And the international institutions that came to serve powerful states now just as often serve the interests of multinational firms.

*The real surprise* for a reader of Mazower’s book is not how much internationalism there was in the past. It is how little of the stuff there is today. We face an unambiguous environmental crisis and daily deaths in large numbers from poverty-related causes that are embarrassingly easy to prevent. These problems and others like them, we all acknowledge, cannot be solved on the basis of national politics. And we have better instruments of communication than H. G. Wells ever imagined. But despite all of that, there is no coordinated movement of any substance whose end is the public management of global affairs. Our science fiction more frequently predicts apocalypse than it does confederation, and the invented language du jour is no longer Esperanto but Klingon.

Could there be another internationalist movement today? Mazower does not say, but his book offers little hope. For Marx’s generation, social movements and internationalism were one and the same, mainly because it was the same collection of men, identifiable men (Metternich!), who put down revolutions at home and who held the reins of foreign policy. To the degree that our world is shaped by economic forces rather than by an international conspiracy of aristocrats, it lacks a central locus for resistance. If “globalization” is understood as an authorless process—something that just happens to us, like the weather—our only options are symbolic resistance or surrender.

But neither the economy nor, we now know, the weather is entirely a force of nature. The internationalists of the 1940s understood this. That is why they built, alongside the UN, public institutions to tame international markets. Like the UN, the World Bank and

the International Monetary Fund have more reliably served powerful nations than they ought to have. But they have also created both a space and a mechanism for implementing economic policy in the service of a world public.

Activists now do not speak much of using the World Bank and IMF to shape the economy. More often, they speak of abolishing them. And that illustrates a final impediment. Many of the social movements that might take on a serious internationalist cast today are instead profoundly particularistic. The local, rather than the international, is the new domain of action, with omnidirectional “participation” a sine qua non. The origins of this new politics are multiple—disenchantment with communism, a postmodern fracturing of identities, and an ever keener sensitivity to the many forms domination takes—but the effect is clear enough. Whereas formerly activists sought to construct large edifices to achieve their ends, they now retreat into increasingly smaller “bubbles of freedom.” A suspicion of all elite and global mechanisms of control pervades the entire left side of the dance floor.

That lack of cosmopolitan spirit is lamentable, but it is in and of itself not dire. What *is* dire is that, while activists and reformers have busied themselves in the underbrush, a small group of private actors has scaled and captured the commanding heights of the economy. The urge to govern the world, curiously absent among social movements, can be found in annual abundance at the World Economic Forum at Davos. That is the challenge that today’s activists face. There are, to be sure, dangers in centralized coordination and difficulties in managing a global market. But those do not suffice as excuses. For if we leave the management of the world to the denizens of Davos, we will be, as an Esperantist might put it, royally *fkita*.

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