

**Middle East conflict -  
correspondence with  
participating countries:  
Middle ...**

*HS L 179:107*



Dag Hammarskjölds saml.

Middle East / Australia

7 Aug. 57

Boyer, R. J. F. (Chairman, Australian  
Broadcasting Commission)

- 1 letter to Editor of London Times

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR  
(London Times, 7 August 1957)

CASE FOR ONE NATION, ONE VOTE IN THE U.N.

Sir, -- It is no secret that the action of the United Nations Assembly in respect of the Anglo-French intervention in Suez has left behind it, in many quarters of Britain and the Commonwealth, a certain feeling of hostility to the whole conception of collective security under the United Nations Charter.

In particular, this hostility has gathered principally around the character of the United Nations Organization itself. Your United Nations Correspondent, in a recent dispatch, has expressed very succinctly one of the major grounds of this hostility when he writes: "The inequity, and even absurdity, of equating the United States with Luxembourg, and Britain with Yemen, and India with Iceland is only too obvious. In practice it has meant that an irresponsible majority of small States has managed to sway Assembly decisions against the larger and more responsible States."

Admittedly, all of us of the western world (which includes much of the Commonwealth) recognize the weaknesses of the United Nations as the organ to achieve not only our survival but also the principles which we cherish as fundamental to freedom and human dignity. Much of this weakness can be found in the general fear of world responsibility passing from the historic Great Powers to a number of new and immature member States, as set out very dramatically by your Correspondent. No one would deny the realism behind regional security pacts as a safeguard against the interim dangers of world convulsion. On the other hand I do feel that the charge of inequitable influence in the United Nations Assembly confronts us with a dilemma in respect of our accepted principles of democratic procedure.

Down the years of our British history we have gradually moved ultimate sovereignty from the King, to the barons, to a restricted electorate, through votes for women, and finally to our present system of adult franchise. In effect, the alleged absurdity of the small member States of the United Nations exercising votes in the Assembly equivalent in value to the Great Powers is no greater than similar inequities in our internal democratic system. Sir Winston Churchill's vote as to who should govern Britain is of no more consequence than that of the humblest of those who serve his kitchen or his garden. A professor of political science can be overwhelmed by a multitude of folk who have never given the theory of government the slightest thought. The fact remains, however, that through our history we have come to the conclusion that our destiny is safer in the hands of the whole people than of its élite, either in scholarship or in wealth or in birth.

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This is the faith with which we face the totalitarian world and it seems strange that we should feel so hostile when the principle is enshrined in our latter-day attempts to secure international law and order. Admittedly, there are distinctions between our universal electoral system internally and the constitution of the United Nations, with its 81 member States. A true parallel would, of course, be an organization of elected members on the basis of population, a hazard which your Correspondent rightly describes as even more embarrassing. If any States to-day have a right to be disgruntled they are surely China, with its 600 million people, and India, with its 380 million, one having no vote at all and the other a single vote only.

It does seem, therefore, that our attitude to the United Nations finally becomes a challenge to the validity of our belief in the spread of ultimate sovereignty over the wise and the foolish, the great and the small, the lettered and the unlettered in world affairs as we have accepted it in our own internal life. In our British history our move to universal suffrage has been gradual, and most of us would hope that gradualism might be the wise answer to the development of the United Nations. Unfortunately, time is short and the issues of war and peace are very urgent. At least, however, we should surely set our long-term sights in accordance with our traditional wisdom, with the courage of our convictions on world order based on the same principles which we uphold to the world as desirable for a free society.

In the last resort these are based on an adventurous flight of faith that the good estate of humanity is best promoted and safeguarded by our belief that fundamental good sense and moral decency is to be found in all the sons of men. Indeed, this political belief has its roots in Christian ethics -- that all of God's children are made, in some sense, in his own image, and have therefore, out of this lineage, an inherent dignity. By this conviction our whole political philosophy stands or falls. It is surely the moral prestige and the political liberalism of Britain based on these things, which are our real claims to greatness in the eyes of the world, and not our cleverness in Realpolitik.

It seems on reflection, Sir, that what I have written to you has unconsciously been related to the status of my own country. Here in Australia we rate nine and a half million souls -- and our neighbour, New Zealand, barely a quarter of that number. As the division of the human family goes, we are both very small beer. Yet in the United Nations we score a vote equivalent to the greatest as well as the least of its member States. Maybe we may think ourselves on a higher level than the Yemen and Luxembourg of your Correspondent, but in respect of the Great Powers we are still the gardeners and milkmen of international society, if numbers and power are the yardstick of political significance.

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I realize, of course, that the quick answer will be that we belong to the Commonwealth block and therefore have a corporate voice. As I remember it, however, on my recent visit to Britain, it was precisely the complaint that the member States of the United Nations were coming together in religious, racial, and geographic blocks which was quoted as the final score of United Nations damnation. Of course the United Nations has block votes. What democracy, British, American, or Australian, has not?

What is important, however, Sir, is surely the realization that however wide the electorate, national or international, public opinion (that simple estimation of moral issues) is more vital and determinative to-day than ever before in history. That is the outstanding lesson of Suez and Hungary. And in what manner does public opinion work? It does not result in government by the least competent or wise. Winston Churchill still becomes Prime Minister and the professor of political science still wields influence through thousands of students. And in the United Nations wisdom, integrity, and moral persuasion are still winning their way in spite of ideological and national cynicism.

Granted all the reasons for regional security pacts as interim expedients, the great hope for British influence in world affairs rests fundamentally on the proven principles of our Christian democracy. We are now at the point of decision. We have either to apply the brakes to United Nations development or affirm our faith and take vital leadership on the basis of our hard-won and well-authenticated democratic principles. To those of us in the Commonwealth who look to Britain to take the lead in international morality, law, and democratic principle, this issue is of prodigious import.

I am, Sir, yours sincerely,

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