MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT

OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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No. 17 (January 31th, 2023)

WRITINGS ON THE EMPIRES IN WORLD HISTORY, XIII

1950

Arnold Joseph Toynbee, *The Western Community. Sovereignty and the Cold War*, in «The Times», June 21, 1950, p. 5. Letter to the Editor. Dated June 19 (cp. https://www.academia.edu/71362709/Arnold_Joseph_Toynbee_Sovereignty_and_the_Cold_War).

SOVEREIGNTY AND THE COLD WAR

Sir,

in the first of your leading articles last Friday morning you refer to those passages in the Labour Party's statement which argue that this country's method of cooperation with other countries must be by mutual agreement between Governments freely consenting to determine their actions and their policies according to common and agreed purposes, and you suggest that, in drawing this line beyond which a *rapprochement* must not go, those passages reflect «both British opinion and the facts of British life in the world»[1].

You may be right about British opinion. At many critical moments in the past «The Times» has divined the national feeling below the surface of party politics. But, assuming that British Opinion is on the whole as you describe it, I question whether the facts of British life in a world that has now been turned upside down any longer correspond to our traditional British outlook and policy. The cold war, perhaps even more conclusively than the atom bomb, has cancelled the former privileges both of the western community in the world and of Great Britain and the oversea countries in the western community. In the straits in which the whole western community finds itself to-day the will of an electorate in either our own or any other single western country, in Europe or oversea, might have no more effect in arresting the western community's forced march towards reunion than the insistence of the Court of King Canute had in arresting the advance of the rising tide.

The national sovereignties that we have all come to take for granted may prove to have been a luxury in which the people of western Christendom, oversea and in Europe, have been able to indulge during a brief "modern age" – now ancient history – in which we were enjoying an exceptional spell of freedom from external pressure. At any rate, to-day we are once again engaged in the usual struggle for the preservation of our western way of life. The

[1] *Britain and Europe*, in «The Times», June 16, 1950, p. 7.

freedoms in which this consists are applications of Christian principles, and national sovereignty is not one of these. If the people of western Christendom do not subordinate their national sovereignties now with one accord we may lose the cold war. Our choice may lie between winning the cold war by subordinating national sovereignties and forfeiting national sovereignties by losing the cold war. We members of the western community who are citizens of the United Kingdom might be wise to take to heart Cleanthes's admission to God and destiny: «And if I wince and rebel, I know I shall have to follow your marching-orders just the same».