

Governing the World – A Book On How International Organisations were Formed*

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Mark Mazower:

Governing the World – The History of an Idea

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The book is a political history that describes the formation and impacts of international institutions from the Napoleonic Wars to the present. The author presents the story through the political visions of various historical figures, and as the manifestation of the interests of contemporary leading powers. Mazower gradually illuminates the factors that led to the formation of the early international institutions, the ideologies characteristic of the age that influenced this process, and the leading figures who promoted these ideologies. The book is divided into two main parts that deal with the period before and after World War II, respectively.

The first part begins with the creation of the Concert of Europe, the alliance of victorious powers after the Napoleonic Wars. The main goal of the Concert was to preserve the status quo and to quell the upheavals modelled on the French revolution. The notion of internationalism, which was represented by numerous political streams, was born in reaction to this. The most notable such groups were the following: the peace movement motivated by Christian sentiments, the group advocating free trade, nationalism – that initially championed international cooperation – and communism. The thinking of internationalists was heavily influenced by the legal strand of the movement that called for the drafting of international treaties and the establishment of international institutions. Their thoughts were also shaped by natural sciences, where international cooperation was the most intense. An important milestone after World War I was the founding of the League of Nations, which was called into being to avoid wars and was the first comprehensive international organisation. Its creation was largely the work of Woodrow Wilson, the US President, and it was set up as a fundamentally political organisation despite the endeavours of the legal strand of internationalism. From

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a diplomatic viewpoint, the League of Nations eventually proved to be a major failure, but in other respects it was of considerable importance, especially in humanitarian cooperation. In its subsidiary bodies, an entire generation of experts grew up who later played critical roles in the UN.

The second part of the book basically depicts the UN's development, its international role and its relationship to great powers. Then the discussion turns to the changes in the global economic system, as well as the reasons and the political setting behind these shifts. Initially, the primary reason for creating the UN was to maintain, in peacetime, the coalition of the great powers established during World War II. The formal framework of the League of Nations was by and large preserved. The UN's bodies, for example the WHO and the FAO, however, were better funded and thus more effective than their predecessor in the League of Nations. It was also a significant difference that putting topics on the agenda could not be vetoed, which was progress compared to the League of Nations. The relationship of great powers with the UN has been shifting over the years. In the beginning, until the 1960s, the US dominated the institution which proved to be a convenient tool for implementing American foreign policy. Later, after the dissolution of the colonial system, Third World countries outweighed others in the General Assembly of the UN, and at the same time the influence of the USSR increased while the USA's influence diminished. Third World countries started to push for the development of a new international economic system, which on the one hand would have protected the economies of these countries against mightier Western ones, and on the other hand was intended to enable easier access to the markets of more developed countries. At the end of the 1970s, a new international economic system did in fact start to emerge, but it was markedly different from the original concept of the developing countries. In reaction to the slowdown in growth in developed countries, the era of neoliberal economic policy started. This meant cuts in public sector spending, the liberalisation of trade, the free flow of capital across borders, deregulation and privatisation. As a result, the IMF gained ground, since it played a crucial role in handling the exchange rate crises, sovereign debt crises and bank crises that became increasingly prevalent with free capital flows. The book states that the IMF's economic recipes have been principally detrimental, which became obvious after the mismanagement of the Asian crisis. The author also decries the institutions of the European economic integration and their operation in general. He believes the global financial crisis will end the new economic order which has been developing since the end of the 1970s and is based on the free movement of capital and the deregulation of markets. Dwelling on this point, Mazower concludes the book by writing about the failure of the concept of global governance.