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## TRAINING FOR COSMOPOLITAN CITIZENSHIP IN THE 1930S: THE PROJECT OF DIMITRIJE MITRINOVIĆ

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Generations of peace seekers have sought an alternative modeling of the world beyond the Westphalian system of separate sovereign states. Recent global trends have raised the possibility of new institutional frameworks and processes for promoting world peace, including that of “cosmopolitan democracy.” If the utopian vision of cosmopolitan democracy is to become real, then the development of new political structures must be accompanied by a growing consciousness of what it means to be a cosmopolitan citizen. This paper examines the methods developed by one “utopian” to prepare his coworkers and followers for cosmopolitan citizenship in London during the years prior to the Second World War.

### INTRODUCTION

There is a tradition of thinking in which it is argued that world peace can never be achieved so long as the world is divided up into separate sovereign states.<sup>1</sup> Certainly it would appear that central to the establishment of the modern state system was the growth in capacity

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the history of Western political philosophers who have advocated a “cosmopolis,” a world state composed of world citizens, see Derek Heater, *World Citizenship and Government: The Cosmopolitan Idea in the History of Western Political Thought* (London: MacMillan, 1996).

to organize the means of violence and to use this capability within the territorial boundaries of the emergent state and in competition with other states.<sup>2</sup> Of course, this conviction that a world without war must be a world without states is most closely associated with the anarchist tradition. Thus, two centuries ago William Godwin argued that war is “the inseparable ally of political institutions.”<sup>3</sup> This view was echoed several generations later by the American Randolph Bourne, who was convinced by the barbarism of the First World War that “war is the health of the state,” for it is when engaged in its key function of organizing its subjects into a herd to fight another herd and extracting the resources necessary for war that a state reveals itself at its most coercive and “state-like.”<sup>4</sup> More recently, observers and analysts far removed from the anarchist camp have voiced similar views, albeit less provocatively than Bourne. Thus, the military historian Michael Howard has suggested that “war is inherent in the very structure of the state and so long as the international community consists of sovereign states, war between them remains a possibility.”<sup>5</sup>

For generations, utopians and peace seekers have envisaged an alternative ordering of the world, beyond the divisions of nation-states, a cosmopolitan world order. Over recent years certain trends have become apparent that can be read as opening up the possibilities for the realization of such an alternative. Under the impact of global capitalism we have witnessed the undermining of state-based economic autonomy with the “free” flow of goods and capital to and fro around the world. At the cultural level we have seen the growth of global media and communication networks that encompass the world and enable us all to watch the same soap operas and be exposed to the same advertising campaigns, while also giving us a sense of belonging to a shared world. Politically we have seen the emergence of a host of international governmental organizations and agencies that cut across nation-state boundaries and impinge on state autonomy, alongside the growth of regional suprastate groupings such as the European

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<sup>2</sup> See Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> Peter Marshall, ed., *The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin* (London: Freedom Press, 1986), 55.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Brian Martin, *Uprooting War* (London: Freedom Press, 1984), 115.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Howard, *The Causes of War* (Hemel Hempstead, U.K.: Unwin Paperbacks, 1984), 25.

Union. As a consequence of all these developments, there has been a radical erosion of state sovereignty, and state boundaries have become increasingly porous.

For the skeptic all this marks the victorious march of global capitalism embracing the whole world within its corporate grip. Viewed in a more positive light, however, these trends of regional and global interconnectedness can be seen as pointing the way towards new possibilities, including emergent forms of global governance and the transcendence of the Westphalian model of separate political powers pursuing their own interests, if necessary by resort to force and violence.<sup>6</sup> It becomes possible to imagine new institutional frameworks for promoting world peace, accompanied by global demilitarization, a more equitable distribution of the world's resources, concern for environmental sustainability, and mechanisms for nonviolent dispute resolution.<sup>7</sup> A more balanced view of current trends, however, would acknowledge another source of the erosion of state sovereignty: the growth of what might be termed substate nationalisms, separatist movements appealing to their shared identity as a "people" in order to justify their struggle for national liberation, a struggle which invariably involves the demand for their own separate nation-state. The reasons for such centrifugal political movements are various, but one factor at least would appear to be common: the emerging collective conviction that the interests of the "people" are not and cannot be adequately represented within the framework of the existing state.

The issue that this raises for those who seek world peace through a new global order is clear: How can one deal with the challenges to democracy posed by globalization? How can one develop and expand vertical and horizontal accountability so that people can influence not just the decisions made in their own states but also those made in power centers beyond their state boundary which directly affect them?

It is in response to such questions that theorists (and dreamers) have begun to adumbrate a cosmopolitan model of democracy. David Held has described the core features of such a vision: "a cosmopolitan democracy describes a world where citizens must come to enjoy

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<sup>6</sup> See David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 90–91.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, R. C. Johansen, "A Policy Framework for World Security," in *World Security: Trends and Challenges at Century's End*, ed. M. Klare and E. Thomas (New York: St. Martins, 1991), 441–44.

multiple citizenships. They are citizens of their own communities, of the wider regions where they live, and of a cosmopolitan global community. We must develop institutions that reflect multiple issues, questions and problems that link people together regardless of their particular nation-state.”<sup>8</sup>

But what does it mean to be a cosmopolitan citizen, a citizen of the world? Citizenship involves “a collection of rights and obligations which give individuals a formal legal identity,” which are invariably anchored within a particular, bounded political community or state.<sup>9</sup> To be a citizen is to have concrete rights and duties vis-à-vis that state. Citizenship consequently involves a degree of “social closure”; the rules relating to citizenship indicate the criteria for inclusion in, and exclusion from, a particular political community. By contrast, the claim to world citizenship involves no formal legal status, but rather invokes some vague sense of responsibility for the well - being of the rest of humanity, an obligation that rests uneasily with the narrow commitments owed to one’s fellow citizens within a particular state. This was the sentiment expressed by Socrates when he affirmed that “I am a citizen, not of Athens or Greece, but of the world.” It was echoed by Virginia Woolf when she wrote, in the context of the militaristic nationalism of the 1930s, “as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman I am a citizen of the whole world.”<sup>10</sup>

Some people have sought to go beyond moral exhortation and have tried to concretize their status as world citizens. The American socialist Eugene Debs justified his antimilitarism and opposition to the First World War by observing that “I have no country to fight for; my country is the earth, and I am a citizen of the world.”<sup>11</sup> Debs went to prison for his beliefs, as have thousands of other conscientious objectors to war throughout history who have placed their commitment to humanity above and beyond their duties as a citizen of a particular state. After the Second World War, the American Garry Davis burned his passport, declared himself “World Citizen Number One,” and

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<sup>8</sup> D. Held, “Globalisation and Cosmopolitan Democracy,” *Peace Review*, 9 (1997): 309–14, 310.

<sup>9</sup> See B. S. Turner, “Citizenship Studies: A General Theory,” *Citizenship Studies*, 1 (1997): 5–18; 5.

<sup>10</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1938).

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in R. Cooney and H. Michalowski, eds., *The Power of the People* (Philadelphia, Pa.: New Society, 1987), 52.

began issuing world passports that he had designed and produced himself.<sup>12</sup> Certain spies have justified their “treachery” by reference to their sense of loyalty and commitment to a political community far wider than the state of which they held formal citizenship,<sup>13</sup> while in recent years there has been a growth in transnational social movements as networks through which individuals can translate their cosmopolitan commitments into action.<sup>14</sup>

A repeated refrain of such transnational movements, especially those concerned with environmental, peace, and social justice issues, has been that we should “act locally, think globally.” At the core of such prompting is the belief that there is a causal relationship between the micro and the macro level, between how we live our personal and collective lives in our local settings and global phenomena. But how is this relationship to be comprehended? How can one think globally? It would seem clear that the ability to grasp this relationship between the local and the global, the particular and the universal, would be a central feature of what we might call a cosmopolitan consciousness.

If the vision of a cosmopolitan democracy is to become real, then the development of new institutions and centers of political power and decision-making must be accompanied, indeed preceded, by a growing awareness of ourselves as members of a common humanity, as cosmopolitan citizens. For this to happen, new paradigms are required which enable us to envisage and make sense of the dynamic relationship between our own lives and the well-being of humanity as a whole. But of equal importance is the development of new ways of concretizing such worldviews. This is the utopian project.

In the remainder of this essay I propose to examine the worldview of one such utopian, and explore the methods he used to prepare his associates for cosmopolitan citizenship.

## THE WORLDVIEW OF DIMITRIJE MITRINOVIC

Dimitrije Mitrinovic lived in England from 1914 until his death in August 1953. He had been born in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1887 and in

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<sup>12</sup> See Garry Davis, *My Country Is the World* (London: MacDonald, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> See Phillip Knightley, *The Second Oldest Profession* (London: Guild, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> See J. Smith et al., eds., *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity Beyond the State* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

his youth had become a key figure in the “Young Bosnian” movement, a nationalist grouping of south Slavs who sought a cultural and moral renaissance as part of the struggle against the yoke of the Austro-Hungarian empire.<sup>15</sup>

By 1914 Mitrinovic had moved to Munich, where he became associated with circles around Wassily Kandinsky intent on trying to establish a network of world figures from the arts, humanities, and sciences who, it was felt, would be able to exercise a positive influence on the course of history through their cultural and spiritual leadership. At the outbreak of the First World War Mitrinovic made his way to London, where he continued with his efforts to recruit “big names” for the proposed network, and in the process was introduced to Alfred Orage, the editor of *The New Age*, a leading weekly of that period with a political orientation toward guild socialism and financial reform along social credit lines.

Commencing in August 1920, Mitrinovic contributed a series of articles to *The New Age* under the collective title of “World Affairs.” The overall theme was the portrayal of the world as a complex evolving organism, whose organs were constituted by the different races and nations, each having its own character relating to its proper function in the context of the world as a whole. The individual was likened to a single cell within the organism, each a constituent part of a common humanity sharing a single world. He affirmed that history was evolving in the direction of the conscious realization by individuals of their membership of this unified whole. In other words, the world as an organism was evolving in the direction of self-consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Once that was achieved, then the utopian dream of a world without war would be realizable, for, as Edward Carpenter had observed in 1917:

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<sup>15</sup> A fuller overview of Mitrinovic’s life and ideas can be found in Andrew Rigby, *Initiation and Initiative: An Exploration of the Life and Ideas of Dimitrije Mitrinovic* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 1984). See also H. Rutherford, ed., *Certainly Future: Selected Writings of Dimitrije Mitrinovic* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> In this emphasis on the nature of cosmic evolution Mitrinovic was drawing upon a long tradition, but he was particularly influenced by the ideas of Vladimir Solovyov. See J. Sutton, *The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov* (London: MacMillan, 1988), esp. 67–70.

A healthy body is the most perfect society conceivable. What does the hand say when a piece of work is demanded of it? Does it bargain first for what reward it is to receive... or the foot decline to take us on a journey till it knows what special gain is to accrue to it thereby? Not so; but each limb and cell does the work which is before it to do, and (such is the utopian law) the fact of its doing the work causes the circulation to flow to it, and it is nourished and fed in proportion to its service. And we have to ask whether the same may not be the law of a healthy human society?<sup>17</sup>

Like Carpenter and others of his generation, long before the emergence of the contemporary ecology movements, Mitrinovic was advocating the model of the organism as the only paradigm which could embrace the dynamic tensions of unity in and through diversity. As he wrote in *The New Age*:

Nothing less than such a psychological view of the world can possibly enable us to form correct judgements, since, in its absence, no other criterion of value can ever be adopted than that of self-preservation or self-extension by means of force Unless there is and can consciously be conceived a non-arbitrary common world-responsibility, resting equally according to their respective genius, situation, and history, upon every race and nation, nothing remains but to abandon every issue to mere force. That then would be right that succeeded in establishing itself; and every effort to survive and to dominate would become justified.<sup>18</sup>

Here Mitrinovic was advocating the organic analogy as a paradigm, which could encompass all the diversity of humanity, and yet locate this within an overarching conception of the unity of the whole. But throughout his life Mitrinovic talked, wrote, and acted as if humanity actually was an organism, and that the world really was one great mind in the process of becoming self-conscious. This was not

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Carpenter, "Non-Governmental Society," reprinted in *Freedom: Anarchist Review*, 42, no. 4 (February 27, 1981): 13.

<sup>18</sup> *The New Age*, September 9, 1920, 279.

because he had some esoteric insight into the ground of all being, the realm of Absolute Truth/Reality underpinning the epiphenomena of everyday life, of which only the mystics of all religious traditions have direct experience. His reasons were more pragmatic. At one level, the notion of humanity as a developing organism was a “creative fiction,” a source of insight into the interrelatedness of all humanity.<sup>19</sup> But, if the immanent potential within this conception of humanity was to be realized, then it was necessary for people to act as if it were real and realizable. Only then was there a possibility of humanity creating a world that would serve as a common household for us all. Reality, truth, was what one created and, as William James observed, “there are cases... where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming.”<sup>20</sup>

While he was developing these ideas, Mitrinovic was widening and deepening his circle of friends and associates in London.<sup>21</sup> Although at one level his concern was with sketching out a dynamic model of the world as a single whole, much of his daily life was focused on working with individuals, helping them to develop their awareness of their potential role in this creative process. For, if humanity is an organism, and individuals are its constitutive cells, then it is only through the self-consciousness of individuals that humanity itself can become a self-conscious organic entity. Therefore, true self-consciousness entailed awareness of oneself as a unique individual within the whole of humanity, past, present and future. Hence, if the world was to change, individuals must change. “Self-change for world change” was the maxim.

Like many others before and since, Mitrinovic believed that the competitive individualism and egotism of the contemporary age had reached its limit. It had to be transcended. The key transformative process was the assumption by individuals of responsibility to live

<sup>19</sup> Mitrinovic was influenced in his approach to “creative fictions” by Hans Vaihinger. See H. Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of As If* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952).

<sup>20</sup> William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919), 255.

<sup>21</sup> The main sources for Mitrinovic’s worldview can be gauged by the books and authors that he classed as “ultimate” in discussions with friends and followers. The list of those sources that he considered to constitute the bedrock of his ideas included the basic texts of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other Eastern religions, the Kaballa, Christian “dogmatics of the Greek and Roman churches,” Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, and Leibnitz.

their lives in association with others, in full consciousness of their commitments as fellow members of a common humanity. Just as an organism grows from a seed, so the organic growth of “Universal Humanity” had to start with individuals prepared freely to pledge themselves to one another in open and equal alliance. The important task was to plant the seed. In any organism, whatever happens in any one part affects the whole. Therefore, as humanity constitutes an organic whole, a change in consciousness anywhere, if sufficiently significant, could have a profound effect on the rest of the organism.

This was to become the dominant motif in Mitrinovic’s life: the preparation of groups of individuals for a new world-transforming initiative, to which he gave the name Senate. Their function would be to work in and through all levels of society, helping people and groups to relate to each other as constituent members of a common humanity. Their key resource would be the ability to view all human problems from the perspective of the world as a whole. His vision was of a world permeated by alliances of individuals who were committed to humanity and to one another, who were equipped with what we might now call a global or cosmopolitan consciousness, who had the capacity to facilitate the integration of all the different parts, interests, and groupings within the world, and so help create and sustain a human household on a global scale.

It was in the 1920s that Mitrinovic began to experiment with others on the ways to promote this new consciousness. His main vehicle during this period was the British section of the International Society for Individual Psychology, commonly known as the Adler Society, which Mitrinovic founded in 1927. If one looked toward a new age when humanity would take conscious control of global evolution, then it was vital that those seeking to play a seminal role in this process should themselves develop their self-knowledge and capacity for self-direction. As part of this quest, Mitrinovic found the ideas of Alfred Adler particularly fruitful, with his emphasis on the responsibility of individuals for their actions and feelings, and his belief in the innate potentiality of human beings for cooperation and mutual aid.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Lewis Way, *Alfred Adler: An Introduction to His Psychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), esp. 201–10.

The Adler Society in London became a center for lectures, seminars, and workshops exploring different dimensions of the relationship between the individual and the macro-level of global transformation. One of the initiatives to emerge was a society called the New Europe Group. Launched in 1931 with Patrick Geddes as its first president, its proclaimed aim was to promote European federation from below, as a step toward world federation.

Throughout all the different schemes and blueprints for European and world federation that emerged out of the New Europe Group, the dominant theme was the pivotal role to be played by individuals in developing an awareness of their identity as members of a global human community. Moreover, this awareness was not something that could be developed purely at the level of intellectual discourse; it needed to be practiced and made manifest in daily life through the creation of new types of relationships with those with whom one lived and worked.

It seems clear that whatever the proclaimed aim of Mitrinovic's public initiatives, such as the Adler Society and the New Europe Group, one of their prime functions was to create settings within which potential recruits to his inner circle(s) might be identified, and where those belonging to such core networks might develop their understanding and their practice of cosmopolitan citizenship. Nowhere was this made more clear than during the mid-1930s when he found himself as the directing power behind what became, for a brief period, a burgeoning political movement: the New Britain Movement.

The original New Britain Group had emerged out of the New Europe Group. Its main activity was the publication of a journal, the *New Britain Quarterly*, which first appeared in October 1932.<sup>23</sup> Mitrinovic's thesis was that as the 1930s unfolded, individual liberty was increasingly threatened by the "block state," the overcentralization of power and control as manifested by communism and fascism. The need was for a "revolution of order," an alternative "above and between" the communist and fascist revolutions. The vision was of a conscious, "voluntary revolution" guided by the twin principles of devolution and federation. Each of these principles represented one

<sup>23</sup> The first issue of *New Europe Quarterly* was published in October 1932. The fourth issue of October 1933 appeared under the title of *The New Atlantis*. After two issues of *New Atlantis*, the issue of April 1934 appeared under the title *New Albion*, which became in turn *New Britain* in the autumn of 1934.

of the two dominant forces that drove human life: that of diversity, which tended to preserve human differences and freedom, and the force of cohesion necessary to sustain solidarity and unity.

Drawing on the ideas of Rudolph Steiner with regard to the “Threefold State,” the New Britain Group advocated the functional division of public life into three spheres: economic, political, and cultural. Each should be guided by different principles: equality in the economic realm, fellowship in the political domain, and liberty in the cultural sphere. In accordance with the principle of equality appropriate to the economic dimension of life, the New Britain Group advocated a guaranteed social wage for all.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, in the tradition of guild socialism, control of each sphere of production should be devolved to those who worked in it, with delegates from the workshop level meeting to coordinate economic affairs at district and regional levels, culminating in a national Economic Chamber where major aspects of economic policy would be determined. Political life should be organized according to the best Proudhonian principles of devolution and federation, but the basis would be geographical. Each village or ward would elect a representative to the county level, then delegates from the county level would meet at the regional level, and so on up to a national political chamber, the main concern of which would be the “state-like” functions of preserving law and order at home and deciding upon foreign policy abroad. A national Cultural Chamber would deal with problems of general human well-being, including the fulfillment of basic needs such as housing, health care, education, and matters relating to religion, the arts, and the sciences. The members of this Chamber would not be elected representatives or delegates, but rather the acknowledged experts in the relevant areas, each of whom would be kept informed of needs and conditions around the country by a network of local and regional cultural councils.

From the start, the New Britain Group pursued a very active propaganda program, with a stream of leaflets, pamphlets, policy statements, and public meetings, and in 1933 a weekly newspaper,

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<sup>24</sup> They were influenced by the ideas of Frederick Soddy, particularly in regard to the argument that social reform could only succeed if accompanied by reform of the banking and monetary system. See F. Soddy, “Monetary Reform for New Britain,” *New Britain*, May 24, 1933. Reprinted in V. MacDermot, ed., *The New Europe Group and New Britain Movement: Collected Publications, 1932–1957* (Bradford: New Atlantis Foundation, 1997), 455–58.

the *New Britain Weekly*, was published. Sales rose to over 32,000, and Mitrinovic availed himself of the paper's columns to write a second series of "World Affairs" articles under the pseudonym of M. M. Cosmoi. He reiterated his theme that the responsibility for the creation of a new age lay with alliances of individuals aware of themselves as unique individuals and as members of a global community. "The chief issue of the world-crisis is the birth of the Spirit of our Whole in our single souls. From the New Birth in singles depends the era which is in front of us: the era of world planning and planetary building, of luxurious plenty of material abundance."<sup>25</sup>

For those who found Mitrinovic's elliptical style difficult to follow, the editor regularly included a clear programmatic statement of what New Britain stood for: the transformation of the economic and financial system, the establishment of the threefold social state, the federation of European nations leading to the formation of a world federation, the centrality of the individual in the transformation process, and the significance of the "personal alliance" established between all who believed in this project.

Tensions soon emerged between those, including the editor of the weekly, who sought to turn the new movement into a political party, and those around Mitrinovic who saw the movement as just one phase in the deeper process of sowing the seeds of a new world order. Within little more than a year of organizational life, the New Britain Movement had split. Mitrinovic was left with his inner core of friends and associates, and during the years immediately prior to the Second World War he embarked upon his most sustained educational experiment, seeking to prepare his closest coworkers for living in the new world which they were trying to create.

SENATE INITIATIVE:  
TRAINING FOR COSMOPOLITAN CITIZENSHIP

*The Role of Senators*

How to prepare people to play their part in the evolution of a new cosmopolitan world order? The answer for Mitrinovic was fairly clear. If world change starts with individual change, then the important task

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<sup>25</sup> *New Britain Weekly*, 1, no. 10 (July 26, 1933): 298.

was not just to help individuals become aware of their role as cells of the emerging organism but also to make a start in the here-and-now, anticipating the problems of social order and conflict management in the new world that was being created. These were the twin tasks that Mitrinovic took upon himself, and he proceeded to orchestrate the lives of those around him accordingly.

At the core of his project was the deep belief that once an organic social order had come into existence, and the social state had been created based on the twin principles of devolution and federation, there would still be a need for people to fulfill an essential integrative function. That is, even when the institutional framework for the cosmopolitan order had been established, there would still remain the old anarchist dilemma of how social order might be maintained without a coercive state apparatus. It was Mitrinovic's belief that this function of conflict resolution and transformation would be fulfilled by people (senators) who, while going about their everyday life at work and in the community, would be able to assist parties to a conflict to move "above and beyond" their immediate dispute.

How would this be achieved? Firstly by helping people to realize and acknowledge their "true interests." To quote one of Mitrinovic's most ardent and articulate associates, Harry Rutherford:

The aim of the senate function in any group is to induce all the members of the group to discover and express their true will—what in their innermost selves they really mean and value—rather than the prejudices and false images of themselves that they have unconsciously taken as their own, and thus demonstrate that the real will of each is not incompatible with that of others but rather is complementary to them. Thus decisions would be reached by common agreement and not by force.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, as humanity at some fundamental level is characterized by an organic unity, then it follows that at that deep level there can be no contradiction between the "true" interests of members of that organism. Thus, alongside Polonius in *Hamlet*, one could affirm that "to thine own self be true. And it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not be false to any man."

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<sup>26</sup> Harry Rutherford, "Senate" (unpublished paper, 1988), 4.

Consequently, the next task of the senator would be to help the parties to a conflict to locate their dispute within the broader organic context of humanity as a whole, from which standpoint they would be able to work out their appropriate relationship with each other. To quote Rutherford again:

The senator knows that no problem can be solved on the level at which it occurs, but the truth must always be looked for “above, between and beyond the extremes and opposites.” . . . Most arguments about ideas assume that either one or the other of two points of view is right, and that they are mutually exclusive. But senate views reality as an organic wholeness in which opposites must be included. In every conflict, therefore, they are continually trying to see, and to make visible to others, what are the real valid opposites involved. They are actively working to get through the undergrowth of verbiage, false assumptions or neurosis in which most conflicts are wrapped; to find out and make clear and explicit what both sides really mean—what is the final value which constitutes the real significance of each, and how they can be functionally and humanly related.<sup>27</sup>

The vision is of a future society characterized by an organic unity that is manifested in and through diversity, within which an essential integrative function will be performed at all levels and in all walks of life by people—call them senators, peace makers, or cosmopolitan citizens— possessed of a deep understanding of the fundamental unity which underpins the flux of human affairs. It is a completely utopian vision. But it was Mitrinovic’s conviction that the only way to move toward that vision was to act as if it were realizable. Consequently the group life he orchestrated during the late 1930s was directed to training his intimate associates for this function.

### *The Universalization of the Individual*

There were between thirty and forty people gathered around Mitrinovic in London during the four or five years prior to the Second World War. The bulk of them were young, idealistic university

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 9–10.

graduates who had become involved in the New Britain Movement and had gradually been attracted to the central group at its heart. One of these, albeit not a university graduate, was Alan Watts, who was to become well known as one of the leading Western authorities on Zen Buddhism. In his autobiography Watts recalled that “the atmosphere of Mitrinovic fascinated me—his humour, the power of his eyes and voice, his secretive and night-owl habits, his oracular way of writing (under the pseudonym of M. M. Cosmoi) and his exotic tastes in art and literature.”<sup>28</sup>

If individuals were to act as cosmopolitan citizens, able to comprehend and communicate the interests of the whole of humanity, then they needed training in what might be termed, following Otto Weininger, “the universalisation of the individual.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, they needed to be able to identify with the rest of humanity in a very real sense, by developing within themselves an awareness of as wide a range of human qualities (and vices) as possible. Consequently, an important part of the training which Mitrinovic directed was the understanding of different cultures and worldviews. Learning to appreciate the food and wine of different lands, along with their folk tales and music, during evenings out at London restaurants was a part of this process. According to Alan Watts, Mitrinovic “used to take us to dinner in the Hungarian, Greek and Russian restaurants of Soho, order six different dishes, and mix them all up.”<sup>30</sup>

It was also important that these potential world citizens could speak different languages. One member, fascinated by Hindu philosophy, was encouraged to learn Sanskrit. Another was advised to study under the Egyptologist Margaret Murray. Group members were expected to familiarize themselves with different religions and belief systems, with regular study sessions on philosophy and comparative religions. Most of these evening sessions were led by Mitrinovic, with his “pupils” taking notes as he talked. Indeed, one of the main features of the time the group spent together was the amount of talking that went on, as one of the more “part-time” participants recalled: “he

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<sup>28</sup> Alan Watts, *In My Own Way* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), 110.

<sup>29</sup> For Weininger, the hallmark of a “genius” was a person who was aware within him- or herself of the full range of human emotions and qualities, and as a consequence could understand and empathize with a whole range of human types. Hence “the genius is the man [sic] who contains in himself the greatest number of others in the most active way.” Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (London: Heinemann, n.d.), 107.

<sup>30</sup> Watts, *In My Own Way*, 109.

would sit arguing hour after hour with his followers. The technique was strange, sometimes bewildering, and I think not very effective. All day, and sometimes until the early hours of the morning, Mitrinovic would sit discussing matters. Talk would go from subject to subject. Politics and economics, philosophy and the occult, psychology came into the picture too "<sup>31</sup>

But the discussions and the other focused activities were all taking place within the context of a wider educational process that was an integral part of the group life. As one of Mitrinovic's most committed young followers confided, over forty years later:

... as a young person at that time I received in common with my companions a great widening of my general cultural horizons—in music, in art and in literature. We heard wonderful music from his collection of classical records Books on art, with great reproductions of great paintings were available to us, and sometimes given to us to keep as our own. We were taken to art exhibitions, also to museums, and our sense of discrimination was encouraged. <sup>32</sup>

Another concurred: "I think that all of us would agree that our general cultural education was greatly increased and widened. We were made to form our own judgements on all we saw, heard or read."<sup>33</sup>

Alongside this general exposure to different cultures and ways of interpreting the world, Mitrinovic also guided his followers along a path of direct experiential training.

## CREATING AN ORGANIC SOCIAL ORDER

### *Personal Alliance*

Mitrinovic created around him a community of people, who had come together to share their lives not because they were tied by

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<sup>31</sup> Arthur Peacock, *Yours Fraternally* (London: Pendulum, 1945), 88.

<sup>32</sup> H. C. Rutherford, personal communication to author.

<sup>33</sup> The bulk of Mitrinovic's books are now held in a special collection of 4,500 volumes at the J. B. Priestley Library, University of Bradford, West Yorkshire, U.K.

bonds of blood and kinship but because of their shared commitment to the utopian venture. Given the seriousness with which they viewed this project, it was felt necessary for each member to make a deep and fundamental commitment to each and every member of the community. After all, if each and every thing is mutually interdependent, then each person was responsible for the well-being of the other. Hence, each member made an irrevocable commitment to the others, which they termed Personal Alliance, and which was marked by an appropriate ceremony and rite de passage.<sup>34</sup> As one of their number reflected: "Genuine community is the association of human beings—not because they belong to the same tribe or church or party, but simply because they are human. Yet it must be personal, a personal concern about particulars, about the unique beings each of us are."<sup>35</sup>

### *Truth-Telling*

This acceptance of others, with all their personal idiosyncrasies and frailties, had as its counterpart an equally serious commitment to "truth-speaking." Before senators could grasp the interconnectedness of the world, they had to know themselves. And for this the help of others was required, if the protective layers of pretension and egotism were to be discarded. Indeed, it was the commitment that each had made to each other that made bearable the distress caused by the barbed shafts of truth that lacerated the self-esteem of group members as they were subjected to truth-telling sessions. For one "victim" the pain was all too real:

The technique was simple. Six or seven of us would meet for a session of three or four hours, generally late at night, for one's unconscious was supposed to be less remote in the deep night. One of the group would start, perhaps by criticising something I had done. Against that criticism I would defend myself. By this time we were fairly launched, and gradually were out in deep waters. A member of the

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<sup>34</sup> See Watts, *In My Own Way*, 123, for an account of his "admission" into the community.

<sup>35</sup> Watson Thomson, *Turning into Tomorrow* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1966), 9.

group would then say, in language that lacked nothing of brutality and candour, exactly what he, more frequently she (which made it worse!), thought of me. I was an unprincipled liar; or a shallow, pretentious poseur; a hollow insincere tub-thumper; an impossibly vain, egotistic trumpet; a twister. And much else.

. . . Frequently those group meetings ended in electric storms. After they closed, we all made our way to a cafe, generally Lyon's Corner House, because it was open all night, for a meal, and the atmosphere cooled down. We were good friends once more.<sup>36</sup>

### *Group Work*

The overall group project was to create in microcosm an organic social order, within which the fulfillment of each individual was a necessary condition for the flourishing of the wider community. In real life no one could fulfill themselves through the performance of a single function. So Mitrinovic took it upon himself to create a constantly changing social environment within which members would be called upon to play different roles, fulfill different functions, in relation to the grouping in which they found themselves.<sup>37</sup> The aim was to create the contexts in which the participants might not only learn about themselves as individuals, but also begin to acquire the necessary aptitudes of senators in terms of an appreciation of all the many facets of human nature and behavior. As one of those who participated in this experience observed, it was easy to relate to people you liked, but it was far more difficult "to see every other member of the group as an individual, to see their specialities, all the ways that each one of us could work with one another. These were the different contexts he was trying to create, so that we all knew in what different ways we could meet together and integrate."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> D. R. Davies, *In Search of Myself* (London: Godfrey Bles, 1961), 141–42.

<sup>37</sup> Mitrinovic's understanding of the significance of group work in human development was derived from many sources, but especially the American psychologist Trigant Burrow. See T. Burrow, *The Social Basis of Consciousness* (London: Kegan Paul, 1927).

<sup>38</sup> Rutherford, personal communication to author.

Mitrinovic was continuously orchestrating the formation of new groupings, endlessly rearranging the personnel within them and the functions for which they were allocated responsibility. Frequently the focus of the group would be upon some external activity in relation to one or other of the public initiatives that the wider group launched during those years prior to the outbreak of war. A number of members were closely involved in a network of guild socialists called the House of Industry League.<sup>39</sup> The New Europe Group continued to organize lectures and discussions, and engage in other activities such as publishing newsletters, pamphlets, and leaflets. During the weeks following the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia at Munich in September 1938 these activities were particularly intense, with thousands of posters and leaflets distributed, and telegrams dispatched to politicians and opinion leaders throughout Europe calling for an American alliance with Britain and the establishment of a federation of Europe with Prague as its capital!

Groupings were created for other tasks, such as dealing with newcomers, visitors, and potential patrons. Others were created for study purposes. But more than anything else this constant flux of group work was intended to provide the participants with direct experience of all the problems associated with creating and sustaining what was referred to as a "human household": a community of people bound together by personal commitment and who, as such, were seeking to create in microcosm a living model of the emerging social order.

Looking back with proper detachment, it all seems like some continuous role-play, directed by the magus Mitrinovic. But again and again during interviews with those who shared in this life, it was emphasized that it was all "for real," they were not playing. They were making a start, they were planting a seed that would flourish someday, somewhere. They shared Thoreau's conviction that "it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever."<sup>40</sup> As such, they saw themselves as cells of the new organism in the process of becoming self-conscious. They constituted the embryo of the new order, "Universal Humanity," within which the utopian dream of achieving a reconciliation between individual fulfillment and community needs would be realized.

<sup>39</sup> See Mike Tyldesley, "The House of Industry League: Guild Socialism in the 1930s and 1940s," *Labour History Review*, 61 (Winter 1996): 309–21.

<sup>40</sup> H. D. Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Nonviolence in America: A Documentary History*, ed. S. Lynd (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 57–82, 69.

## *The Range of Human Types*

In training his associates for their prophetic role, Mitrinovic paid particular attention to the mix of individuals within each group. In this he was guided by his own understanding of the origins and nature of character and personality differences. First there was the difference between male and female. Women, according to him, were a fundamental force for continuity, reconciliation, and the preservation of life. For the male, the dominant drive was the individual quest for truth. Both had become corrupted under the pressures of a materialistic civilization. The male's search for knowledge had been distorted into the aggressive pursuit of self-interest. Men had become rudderless, without direction. It was up to women to provide the necessary guidance, and support, so that men could once more begin to act creatively to transform the world. Ultimately, of course, the aim was for both male and female to become truly individual, transcending such characterological differences. Thus, in one of his talks Mitrinovic expressed the view that The new male should be good; he should care more for failure and goodness than for success and truth. Would this not be a novelty? . . . The new woman should care for truth. Of course men must not cease to be true and women good. Both must attain a higher level of truth than ever before. The new female should have as straightforward a desire to know and speak truth as a male. Such individuated females and males could start the new civilisation.<sup>41</sup>

But in the meantime, the men in the circle were referred to as "auxiliaries" — the instruments of female initiative. This "natural" division between male and female was cross-cut by divisions along age lines. Another basis for allocation to groups, however, was according to one's orientation to time. There were those who experienced time as a continuous stream, and thus had a strong sense of the past, which meant that they were steadier and less mercurial than others. By contrast, others lived in the immediate present. What was happening now, this instant, was what mattered, not what happened in the past or might occur in the future. Such people were always swayed by their emotions. Then there was a third type, those who were always looking to the future, planning their path towards their goal, frightening in

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<sup>41</sup> Notes of one of Mitrinovic's talks, New Atlantis Foundation Archives, quoted in Rigby, *Innovation and Initiative*, 159.

their persistence and determination. The aim behind all this analysis of fundamental personality differences was to help the group members understand each other better, and of course to help them comprehend the full variety of human types.

## CONCLUSION

The people gathered around Mitrinovic during the late 1930s felt they were pioneers, exploring the way toward a new world, one without war and without artificial barriers dividing “us” from “them.” This path required profound changes in the economic and political structures—workers’ control through guild socialism, monetary reform, the radical devolution of decision-making power within new federated networks—but it also required new “universal” individuals, what we might now call cosmopolitan citizens, people who were truly individuated and yet able to acknowledge the great differences among people, while being able to grasp in some fundamental manner the “organic” functional relationship among us all. They were training to become such people. The utopian project was to help make real what was, in Mitrinovic’s words, “the very goal and meaning of human evolution, that our race should become an individuated collective, a functionally articulated organism, of interiorised, individuated, illuminated, self-shining persons.”<sup>42</sup>

In practical terms they failed. The Second World War broke out, the group dispersed. Mitrinovic’s health deteriorated and he died on August 28, 1953. Their experience has remained on the margins of history. But perhaps there are lessons to be learned from their project by those of us who still dream about a world without war.

Perhaps the main lesson lies not so much in the substantive detail of Mitrinovic’s worldview and the particulars of his pedagogic method in training for cosmopolitan citizenship, but in the spirit and the impulse that guided these efforts. In other words, we need to acknowledge that if we are ever to realize a harmonious world order, then we must act as if it is attainable. Unless we act as if the impossible is achievable, then we relinquish our responsibility as creative human agents. As Karl Mannheim observed, once we give up our belief in

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<sup>42</sup> *New Britain*, May 31, 1933.

utopias, then we lose our will to shape history, and consequently our ability to control it.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, if we are to act on such a utopian imperative, and seek to transform reality in the direction of a global commonwealth, then we need a vision of how that potential reality might be structured. It is not that we need a blueprint, but we do need a “creative fiction,” a myth, a paradigm—call it what you will—to give us direction. Mitrinovic’s depiction of humanity as a complex organism, in the process of becoming self-conscious, constitutes such a model. Moreover, since his death developments in ecological science have brought to many of us an awareness that we are part of a global system in which the well-being of the whole and of the constituent parts are mutually interdependent. Some have even gone so far as to depict our planet as a giant system that seems “to exhibit the behaviour of a single organism, even a living creature.”<sup>44</sup>

There are two features of this organic worldview that are of particular relevance to contemporary utopians seeking to bring about a new cosmopolitan order. First of all, it is literally a “worldview,” a vision of the world as a whole, which is able to embrace unity and diversity. Second, it is a vision that identifies the continuity between the micro and the macro-level, between the individual and the world as a whole, between the local and the global. Like others from the libertarian tradition of utopians, Mitrinovic saw the revolutionary project as primarily one of creating the space in which might flourish the new reality pregnant within the womb of the old order. In the words of Martin Buber, he looked to “the renewal of society from within, by a regeneration of its cell tissue.”<sup>45</sup> A new cooperative order cannot be imposed from above, it must grow organically from the grass roots upwards.

There is another lesson also: the emphasis on the need for structural as well as personal change. Many visionaries of a new age who have emphasized the significant role to be played by individuals in bringing about social change from below have failed to get far beyond vague moral injunctions about personal transformation, without specifying the kinds of structural changes required to make

<sup>43</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1936).

<sup>44</sup> J. Lovelock and S. Epton, “The Quest for Gaia,” *New Scientist*, 65 (1975):304.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 99.

the transformation possible. As the French personalist Emmanuel Mounier commented, “there is always a risk of mystification in the affirmation of spiritual values alone, unaccompanied by any precise statement of means and conditions for acting upon them.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, while Mitrinovic emphasized “self-change for social change,” he was clear about the kinds of structural changes that were also necessary. The program of the New Britain Movement, with its emphasis on workers’ control, geographical and functional devolution, and the radical reform of the world’s financial and monetary system, addressed problems that are as pressing today as they were in the 1930s. One might not agree with the details of the program, but one has to acknowledge the significance of the attempt to embrace both the personal and the structural dimensions of social transformation.

There is another lesson that those seeking to bring about a cosmopolitan world order might take on board. Mitrinovic realized that the creation of a new cooperative order embodying the values of freedom and fellowship cannot be achieved unless those values are embodied in the actual process of creation. It is not enough to talk, and write, about such values; they must be lived in the daily round of everyday life. According to his contemporaries, this is what Mitrinovic attempted to do. Thus, in a tribute to him after his death a contemporary reflected:

He was one of the best-living socialists, in terms of personal life, I have ever met. Socialism to him did not just mean a theory of state organisation. It meant personal co-operation with his fellow-men, and even when we were differing most profoundly with regard to theoretical ideas on this, that and the other, that bond was getting tighter and tighter between us.<sup>47</sup>

So we come back to the theme of acting locally while thinking globally. The true foundation of a cosmopolitan consciousness, and hence of active cosmopolitan citizenship, lies in the manner in which we relate to those around us—combining truth-speaking with active care for the real-life individuals with whom we share our common home, our human household.

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<sup>46</sup> E. Mounier, *Personalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 102.

<sup>47</sup> Jack Murphy, commemoration meeting, January 29, 1954, quoted in Rigby, *Innovation and Initiative*, 187.

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