

Critical review

"The twenty years' crisis, 1919-1939: an introduction to the study of International Relations" (2001). Brasília: Publisher Brasília University: 305 pp. ISBN: 85-230-0635-4

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"The SCIENCE of international policy is in its infancy" (pp: III)

The science of International Relations originated in the nineteenth century, before the two great world wars. The main object of this new science was to prevent ills in the international body politic and to avoid the causes and pressures leading to a new war. The fervent desire to prevent war determined the first observations of the discipline's study, as well as its direction.

It was not easy for the international society of the early twentieth century to understand the motive for Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination, which preceded World War I, or why this led to trench warfare. Furthermore, Germany was considered "guilty", leading to the demands for large economic reparations and so halting Germany's expansionist policies. The major powers of that time quickly found that these past practices would not be enough to bring back peace and stability to international society. It is in this critical context, in a time of profound disturbance in the political and economic order, that Carr writes this unique work. Like the major realists of the English School of International Relations, he demonstrates that the wars were responsible for the ruin of the old world order, an era of colonialism and aggressive territorial expansion.

The creation of International Relations as a subject is more recent than one may think. At the start of the twentieth century the Americans and British responded to the demands of society and addressed the way in which international politics was to be conducted. In relation to this, the author writes: "Desire to cure the sicknesses of the



body politic has given its impulse and its inspiration to political science" (Carr 2001: 5). One of the reasons to create this science was the need for the United States to understand the international political landscape and to exercise its hegemony as a superpower. Accordingly, the science itself met all the requirements necessary to inspire and instruct this new superpower. Strengthened by the losses of its allies in World Wars I and II, it became possible for America to change the domination of the world political order influenced by the old continent.

The new science lacked a serious body of thought. The development of knowledge in International Relations did not build soon enough, leading to serious consequences for the international order during the "twenty years' crisis", a period of serious political tension between the two wars that strongly influenced the writing and production of this work. Carr regarded as naïve the early utopian aspirations of this new science. The events of 1931 revealed the limitations of pure aspiration as the basis for international political science and this has led, since the beginning, to the development of serious analytical and critical thinking on international issues.

For Carr, the utopian ideals of the twenty years' crisis period have their roots in the Enlightenment, and essentially prioritised the non-use of force. Such utopian thinking led to failures of agreement in the League of Nations and the collapse of the European status quo.

The ideological line of thought that unfolds in the work, especially that concerning utopianism, shows how ideas struggle and unite with politics to transform the world order over time. Utopianism obscures the role played by external factors and material limitations, because once utopian ideas engage with them, the utopian ideas themselves acquire an alien function. Contemporary realism emerges in contrast to this line of thought, a theory that emphasises power and military and economic processes, though ignoring how important resistance is to the consolidated order (from a technological or utopian point of view), as well as how important it can be to the transformation or substitution of the established order. From a practical point of view, power is one and indivisible, but, for better understanding, the author has distinguished three parts: military, economic and power over opinion.

The rehearsal of realist and practical commentaries engages considerable attention. With unparalleled insight, Carr makes reference to Machiavelli, whom he considered the first major realist political scientist, and to Hobbes, who puts political events in their proper context. He criticises their excessive use of realist measures, which for Carr made political action extreme or impractical (Carr, 2001: 85). One of his main contributions has been to show that the balance of political order essentially depends on the balance between idealism and realism. Utopia often did not appear completely "unvirgin" or theoretically pure. Thus, it was interpreted in many international policies as a good and assumed other propositions, such as "all men are created equal", "the indivisibility of peace" and "the liberalisation of trade" (Carr, 2001:18). These ideas were promptly unmasked by realists who classified them as simple private interests – or in the case of Great Britain's trade liberalisation, as the claim to full sovereignty over its thriving trade.

Realists have described and identified these alleged universal interests through the so-called doctrine of the harmony of interests. Adam Smith's school of laissez-faire economics was mainly responsible for popularising the doctrine – in other words, it



promoted the disguised liberal ideals of Victorian society. Unmasking the doctrine also had another function, showing that power politics is always an essential element.

It is important to note that even though Carr was a devout realist he was sure, as any political scientist conscious of their particular scientific study, that realism fails. One criticism relates directly to the impossibility of realists being consistent and complete, which appears as one of the most correct and curious lessons of political science. Consistent realism excludes four essential factors of all effective political thought: a finite goal, an emotional appeal, a right of moral judgment and a ground for action. According to Carr, pure realism would not attract voters or loyal followers because the perspective is too tough for those seeking a spiritual promise, seen as something almost mechanical, while it is evident that mankind as a whole "rejects this rational test as a universally valid basis for all political judgment" (Carr, 2001: 120). Above all, realism fails because it does not provide grounds for action destined for goals and meanings. The most valid clarification in the author's critique of realism is that there is no fully static situation. Carr explains that there is always something that man can think and do, while making it clear that neither thought nor action are robotic or devoid of meaning. Thus, he returns to the point at which there should always be a constant balance between utopianism and realism, for pure realism offers nothing more than the naked struggle for power, and so prevents any manifestation or type of international society. To complete this criticism, he recalls that the whole political situation must unite in some mutual form those incompatible elements of utopia and reality, morality and power.

It is of interest that Carr regarded warfare not simply in terms of military power (an essentially realist proposition), but in many other ways. For example, during his time there were many disputes over treaties (territorial or not), economic expansion and monetary influence. Thus, interventions and negotiations in many countries were more than a simple exhibition of power, they configured from a form, like before, a requirement and need for moral compensation. A good example of this is Germany during the inter-war period. Many conflicts are of a purely ideological nature. In the case of Germany, there is the bitter dispute between the Nazi-fascist and democratic regimes, where the latter found few supporters at the time of war. To broaden their support, these regimes created a broad structure of propaganda, whose most influential exponent was Hitler.

One of Carr's most notable assertions is that a major power wants always to be at the forefront of global leadership in order to establish world peace. This happened during the *Pax Romana*, the *Pax Britannica* and can be seen now with the *Pax Americana*. The author notes US aspirations to become a global hegemony since the beginning of the twentieth century as well as a shift in its political tactics towards global isolationism and unilateralism. However, when extending these policies to its own advantage, the US bombarded Vera Cruz in Mexico in 1914, affirming its purpose to serve mankind. The author also notes that the global aspiration for Pax was a peculiar feature of imperialist nations. Thus, it was not strange for Japan to think of a *Pax Japonica* or for Germany a *Pax Germanica*. As may be appreciated, the author was a wise strategist in the field of International Relations and noted the finer details of the struggle for power.

Carr goes on to assess the important contributions to political science made by Karl Marx, whose critique of the historical bias of facts and analysis of history and economics has an eminently deterministic, though not over-rigid character and, further,



to consider the continuity of facts, such as the tendencies which work out with an iron necessity towards an inevitable goal. According to the "scientific" hypothesis of realists, reality is identified as the whole course of historical evolution, whose laws it is the business of the philosopher to investigate and reveal. One cannot conceive of any reality divorced from historical process. To highlight this argument, the author explains as follows: "to conceive history as evolution and progress implies accepting it in all its aspects, and therefore to deny the validity of judgments about it" (Carr, 2001: 89). For Carr, what was, is right. History cannot be judged except by its own historical standards (Carr, 2001: 89).

The book consists of four parts and fourteen chapters, with an introduction and conclusion. The first part consists of chapters one and two, which contain the conceptual foundations of the science. The second part consists of chapters three to six, presenting empirical evidence that bases the author's claims not only in the context of the two wars, but also in the real motivations that lead to the "universality" of facts. The third part consists of three chapters, where political motivations are analysed based on the nature of politics, as well as power and morality, explaining its great influence in the context of international order to dictate the course of nations, concepts based on realist theory. In the fourth part comprising of chapters ten to thirteen, the author presents changes in the political scenario through various legal examples, and brings to light the discourse and principles that enhance and secure coexistence in international relations. In the concluding chapter, the author brings important perspectives and forecasts to the international order, including one question that remains current among internationalists about the survival of the nation-state as a unit of power. This indicates that the features of the future international order are intimately linked to the future of group unity. In relation to group units, the author's diagnosis is fully confirmed as the new international order is arranged into economic blocs, with groups of countries that have developed complex power relations.

The Twenty Years' Crisis offers a profound interpretation of theories of realism and utopianism, showing that connections can be articulated between them which do not originate from simple theoretical tensions. Carr offers humanity a magisterial overview of the old world order and an acute insight into the realities of power games and domination. His themes remain contemporary and contain precious lessons on how to avoid the constraints and afflictions endured by humanity in the troubled context of war.

Carr remains one of the most considerable authorities in the international political community. This famous and timeless book is an essential read for academics and professionals of International Relations, History, Sociology and related fields.

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