Mackinder and His Critics Reconsidered

Arthur Butler Dugan

The Journal of Politics, Vol. 24, No. 2 (May, 1962), 241-257.

MACKINDER AND HIS CRITICS RECONSIDERED

ARTHUR BUTLER DUGAN
University of the South

IF ADAM SMITH DESERVES to be described as the patron saint of the dismal sciences, so far as the English-speaking world is concerned, it might be equally appropriate, for the English-speaking world, to call Sir Halford Mackinder the patron saint of geopolitics, were it not for the fact that the term has been pre-empted for a German pseudo-science and pseudo-philosophy of expansionism which might, like Walter Bagehot's *Physics and Politics,* more accurately be described as "Bio-Politics," and which has only incidental relationship with the subject in which Mackinder was interested. I shall accordingly resort to the use of an older term, and call Mackinder the patron saint, for the English-speaking world, of anthropogeography. This year marks a centennial which is receiving so much attention that it has perhaps, except for a very limited few, been overlooked that it marks the centennial of the birth of Mackinder, who was born on the 15th of February, 1861, the son of a physician, Draper Mackinder, in Gainsborough, Scotland. He died on the 6th of March, 1947, and the *Annual Register* for that year has an obituary notice as follows:

> "The Right Hon. Sir Halford John Mackinder, P.C., chairman of the Imperial Shipping Committee, 1920-1945, and of the Imperial Economic Committee, 1926-1931; also did much to establish geography as an independent science."[1]

This notice, although cursory and inadequate, does at least draw attention to one of the many ironies associated with Mackinder's career. He was himself concerned not simply with the establishment of geography as an independent science—it was already so established on the European continent—as with attempting to reduce the deficiency which the study had in Great Britain as against continental Europe. He was concerned with not only the fact that continental Europeans were ahead in geography proper, but also especially with the fact that they were ahead in the use of geography for political and strategic purposes:

> "We have had for a byword in these times the German war map. It may be questioned, however, whether most people in Britain and

[1] *Annual Register, 1947,* p. 528

America have fully realized the part played by the map in German education during the past three generations. Maps are the essential apparatus of Kultur, and every educated. German is a geogprapher in a sense that is true of very few Englishmen or Americans. He has been taught to see in maps not merely the conventional boundaries established by scraps of paper, but permanent physical opportunities —'ways and means' in the literal sense of the words. His Real-Politik lives in his mind upon a mental map. The serious teaching of geography in German high schools and universities dates from the very beginning of Kultur. It was organized in the generation after Jena. . . To this day. . . .if you want a good map. . . .you must have resort as often as not to one of German origin. The reason is that in Germany there are many cartographers who are scholarly geographers and not merely surveyors or draftsmen . . .

"In this country we value the moral side of education, and it is perhaps intuitively that we have neglected materialistic geography. Before the war not a few teachers, within my knowledge, objected to geography as a subject of education, on the ground that it tended to promote imperialism, just as they objected to physical drill because it tended to militarism."[2]

This statement was made in 1919. Yet twenty-three years later, commenting on the period subsequent to the publication of these remarks of Mackinder, Professor Strausz-Hupé was to write:

"War is bringing home to us an awareness of geographic realities. How close the democratic peoples came to losing this awareness is shown in the dismal story of the era of appeasement. They had made, in the First World War, vast sacrifices of blood and treasure for the possession of a strip of land, a few miles of seacoast, a few obscure villages. Yet, as soon as peace was made, it became a breach of good manners to mention the physical shape of states. In schools a new kind of history was taught; because of the violent revulsion against imperialism, the geographical realities of international relations were viewed through blinkers."[3]

In the English-speaking world, little attention was paid to what Mackinder had written. But in Germany, his words were taken so seriously that his was one of the two works in English on geography which Karl Haushofer commissioned his wife to translate. *Democratic Ideals and Reality* was published in the United States by Henry Holt in 1919 almost simultaneously with its publication in Great Britain. Yet it attracted so little public attention that it was not then reprinted. A note to the publishers in 1940 produced a response that there seemed to be no reason for a reprinting. Yet on June 14, 1942, Major George Fielding Eliot was to write a foreword to the first reprint, in which he stated that "I have read this book

[2]*Democratic Ideals and Reality,* pp. 20-21.
[3]*Geopolitics: The Struggle for Space and Power,* p. 4.

with astonishment, admiration and regret,"[4] and to state that "there is no escape from the logic of this conclusion," said conclusion being the oft-quoted cliché about East Europe, the Heartland, the World Island, and the World. From neglect, opinion suddenly developed into uncritical admiration, and this in turn was bound to produce unfavorable reactions, some discriminating and some irresponsible. Many of the criticisms of Mackinder have been from nationalistic points-of-view, e.g., the many American criticisms that he underestimated the importance of the United States and the continental European criticisms that he uncritically accepted the British conception of the balance of power. Many, on the other hand, have been reciprocally contradictory. Dr. Spykman suggested:

> "The actual facts of the Russian economy and geography make it not at all clear that the heartland is or will be in the very near future a world center of communication, mobility, and power potential."[5]

Professor Weigert, on the other hand, suggested:

> "Mackinder's citadel of land power still stands—and mightier than ever. And it is not merely the Heartland quality of its land mass that accounts for its leading role in today's world theater. Equally important are the wealth of its resources and the human intangibles which make a nation great."[6]

It might have been added, correctly, that Mackinder failed completely to appreciate the potentialities of the Heartland as a launching pad for astronauts, cosmonauts, and their ilk, even though he recognized the potentialities of a "winged mobility"[7] and felt that air power was "a new amphibious cavalry," and that "in the days of air navigation which are coming, sea-power will use the waterway of the Mediterranean and Red Seas only by the sufferance of land-power."[8]

Perhaps the most extraordinary contradiction among interpretations of Mackinder is that between Professors Strauz-Hupé and Spykman with reference to Mackinder's attitude toward Russia when he wrote *The Geographical Pivot of History*. To Professor Spykman antagonism between Britain and Russia was the essence of their international relationship:

[4]*Democratic Ideals and Reality,* pp. vii and ix.
[5]*The Geography of the Peace,* p. 38, Professor Gordon East agrees with this view.
[6]*New Compass of the World,* p. 89.
[7]*Geographical Journal,* April, 1904, p. 432.
[8]*Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 64.

> "Like all good geopolitical analyses, however, the Mackinder study represented a picture of the constellation of forces which existed at a particular time and within a particular frame of reference. It was first elaborated in 1904 before the conclusion of the British-Russian Entente of 1907 and was strongly influenced by the previous century of conflict between Great Britain and Russia. When, in 1919, his book *Democratic Ideals and Reality* was published, the conception of an inevitable historical opposition between Russian land power and British sea power was re-emphasized. The fallacy of this blanket application of a theory is seen when we realize that the opposition between these two states has never, in fact, been inevitable."[9]

Professor Strauz-Hupé, however, took another view:

> "Mackinder, writing for the English, pointed to the danger of a German-Russian alliance uniting the 'pivot peoples of the heartland' and pitting the strategic advantage of 'interior lines' against Great Britain. As an antidote he advocated an Anglo-Russian understanding which, after nearly a century of estrangement, was concluded in 1907."[10]

To one observer it seems that it would be more sound to say that Mackinder in 1904 was perhaps overimpressed by the strength of Russia before the Russo-Japanese War, and that after the Russo-Japanese War he underestimated Russia's strength and recuperative capacity.

Furthermore, in dealing with some of Mackinder's critics, it may be noted that many have not bothered to state correctly the name of his best known book, but have called it *Democratic Ideals and Realities*,[11] thereby indicating that in part they have missed one of the main points of the book; and that Professor Spykman asserted that "the Mackinder analysis defines the great desert region of Africa as a continental area inaccessible to sea power and therefore a southern heartland comparable to the northern one,"[12] when a glance at the map on pages 78 and 79 of *Democratic Ideals and Reality* would have shown him that the term "Southern Heartland" was applied by Mackinder to the region south of the Sahara. Truly it was an achievement to locate a heartland in a desert. Mackinder himself was perhaps most sensitive to the suggestion that he was a prisoner of the Mercator map, with the unfortunate result that in his last paper, written in 1943, he devoted himself more to demonstrating that he knew that the world was round than to adjusting his ideas to changed circumstances.

[9] *The Geography of the Peace*, p. 43.
[10] *Geopolitics*, p. 57.
[11] See, for instance, Strauz-Hupé: *Geopolitics*, p. vi, and p. 57.
[12] *The Geography of the Peace*, p. 41.

It is my purpose tonight to call attention to some of the less known achievements of Mackinder and to concentrate subsequently on one criticism which perhaps misfires but leads the way to an understanding of what Mackinder by his own standards would probably admit to be a blind spot. The first will be done briefly on the basis of the standard cliché that a presidential address in order to be immortal need not be eternal. The second requires somewhat more detail.

In the first place, it has not been sufficiently recognized, in my opinion, what great contributions Mackinder made as an educator, with an unusually broad background of academic knowledge. In 1883 he received a first class at Oxford in natural science, and in 1884 he was awarded a second class in modern history, after which he was elected Burdett-Coutts science scholar.[13] In 1885 Mackinder "began to serve the Oxford University extension movement and lectured up and down the country on what he called 'the new geography.' Accounts of these lectures reached the Royal Geographical Society, and in January 1887 he addressed the Society on 'The scope and methods of geography.' Only a few weeks later the University of Oxford decided to establish a readership in geography with financial assistance from the Royal Geographical Society; in July 1887 Mackinder was appointed to the newly created post which he held until 1905. He used to say that Richard Hakluyt . . . was the first Oxford reader in geography, and that he himself was only the second."[14] In 1892 he was elected to a studentship at Christ Church; he had been particularly active in his efforts to establish extension work from Oxford in Reading, and his services were offered by Oxford to Reading in connection with the replacement of the Oxford University Extension courses in Reading with a University Extension College in Reading in that year. He was Principal in this institution from 1892 to 1903. William Macbride Childs, who was later to be his Vice-Principal and ultimately his successor at Reading, has written of him and his work there somewhat more personally than have most of his acquaintances:

> "I knew nothing about this new College, nothing about Reading, and nothing about Mackinder, except that I had heard him lecture at Oxford. When I reached the College, a porter with a row of medals across his broad chest, a game leg, and a vocabulary that lives in my memory, ushered me into a small room. Here, seated at a writing-

[13]*Dictionary of National Biography, 1941-1950*, p. 556.
[14]Ibid. p. 556.

table, was Mr. Mackinder, apparently little older than myself. He asked me a few questions, told me about the work and pay, and offered me the job. I took it . . . .

"The first year passed. On the first Saturday in the new session, which began in September, 1894, Mackinder took me aside into the churchyard, which our building overlooked. It was a fit place for what he had to say. He told me that my first year's work had not been a success, but that he thought I had it in me to do better. What he said was unsparing, but not unfeeling. I knew that his criticism was right, but the rightness of things does not always make them palatable. No one had ever talked to me like that before. I felt challenged. A dangerous thing had been done at the right time in the right way. The criticism dealt out to me had braced without wounding. There, among the tombstones, was buried (as I hope) a part of my early self which did not seem to be serving any useful purpose. My unbroken friendship with my chief dated from that hour . . . .

"The fact that Mackinder was seldom able to visit the College more than once or twice a week was apt to intensify the pressure upon some of us at certain times. I should be sorry to say for how many classes I was late, how many I cut short, or how many I missed altogether, because something had to be settled there and then in the Registrar's room or my own. Nor should I care to say how many leagues of the open country, then delightfully close at hand, I have traversed in debate upon some college question of the moment. We were argumentative people, for our work had gripped our imaginations. I lay it upon Mackinder. He himself was a talker, convincing and provocative. He had a way of blending dreams and hard sense, subtlety and simplicity, and he never seemed to know when he passed from the one to the other. He made some opponents, as a leader in stark earnest is bound to do. He sometimes ploughed ahead, leaving a wake of troubled waters, and he certainly gave the rest of us plenty to think and talk about.

"Masterful, he yet made us his partners. We could always speak our minds; our criticisms were considered; sometimes they were even acted upon. But before engaging our chief in argument, it was well to be sure of one's ground."[15]

In April, 1903, Mackinder resigned as Principal of Reading, recommending Childs as his successor in an accompanying letter. Childs suggests that "when Mackinder left us, there were some who sighed for an interval of quiescence. They sighed in vain."[16] And he notes that the Bishop of Oxford, Dr. Paget, referring to Reading under Mackinder, said that he had never known a more aspiring or restless institution.[17] Meanwhile, in 1895, Mackinder had become connected with the London School of Economics and Political Science, became Reader in Economic Geography shortly thereafter, and

[15]W. M. Childs, *Making a University*, p. 2, p. 4, and p. 11.
[16]Ibid., p. 129.
[17]Ibid.

Director of the London School in 1903, a position which he held until 1908. With reference to his holding simultaneously positions at Oxford, Reading, and London, and drawing salaries from each, his comment was that he had always been a "pluralist."[18] Sidney Webb, seeking to sell Sir William Beveridge on becoming Director of the London School in 1919, said that Mackinder had run the institution with "two fingers of one hand,"[19] an achievement which few administrators claim to be able to emulate today. Meanwhile, unlike some geographers, Mackinder in 1899 had gained some first-hand experience by leading the first expedition to climb Mount Kenya. Whatever we may think of his use of the term "Southern Heartland" or "African Heartland," we can hardly accuse him of not having been familiar with it at first hand. In the contemporary jargon, Mackinder had "been there," on the scene.

Supplementing his academic career, both pedagogical and administrative, Mackinder studied law, ran unsuccessfully and subsequently successfully for parliament, and held several top administrative governmental positions. After reading for the bar he was called to the Inner Temple in 1886,[20] so that he can hardly be accused of not knowing about what he was talking when he suggested that the League of Nations Covenant, being a mere legalistic scrap of paper, could not take the place of or change the reality of the European political system. He ran unscuessfully for Parliament as a Liberal in 1900 and as a Unionist in 1909. In January 1910 he was successful as a candidate for the Camlachie division of Glasgow, winning by a majority of 434. In the following December he was re-elected by a majority of 26. He was again re-elected in 1918, but defeated in 1922.[21] Whether or not his career in Parliament was important, his remarks in the House of Commons are a useful supplementary source of information for those who wish to understand the fundamental assumptions on which his practical political suggestions were based. In one respect, they are particularly relevant. As a bureaucrat, Mackinder served not only on the Imperial Shipping Committee and the Imperial Economic Committee, but was also British High Commissioner for South Russia in

[18]*Dictionary of National Biography* 1941-1950, p. 556.

[19]Sir William (later Lord) Beveridge, *The London School of Economics and its Problems,* 1919-1937, p. 65.

[20]*Dictionary of National Biography 1941-1950,* p. 556.

[21]Ibid., pp. 556-557.

1919-1920, a position significant with reference to his views on Russia and world politics.

It is unfortunate that so few individuals who have discussed Mackinder's ideas on politics and geography have read *The Geographical Pivot of History*, which was delivered to the Royal Geographical Society in a lecture in January 1904 shortly after Mackinder became Director of the London School of Economics. Had they done so, they might have been impressed with other ideas than the theory of the Heartland. They might have noted the parallel between Mackinder's ideas as to the end of the Columbian epoch and the ideas of Frederick Jackson Turner as to the end of the frontier. As Spencer Wilkinson pointed out in the discussion which followed the delivery of the paper, the idea of the end of expansion was by no means new. But he also indicated that Mackinder's suspicions with regard to the decline of the factors underlying the supremacy of sea power were more original and more significant. In *The Geographical Pivot of History*, the spelling was "heart-land," with a lower-case "h" and a hyphen. There was also a very specific reference to the significance of the term.

> "It is obvious that, since the rainfall is derived from the sea, the heart of the greatest land-mass is likely to be relatively dry. We are not, therefore, surprised to find that two-thirds of the world's population is concentrated in relatively small areas along the margins of the great continent."[22]

The last statement indicates that Mackinder was not at all unaware of the importance of what Dr. Spykman called the "rimland." At the same time, it indicates that the use of the term "heartland" by no means implied that the term was synonymous with "hinterland," and that our Radio and TV commentators who reported the Democratic National Convention of 1956 in Chicago as being held "here in the great heartland of America" had no idea of the significance of the term which they were using. After all, the Mississippi and St. Lawrence Rivers can hardly be described as being rivers of interior drainage.

By the time that Mackinder published *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, he had seen the defeat of Russia by Japan, the Anglo-Russian Entente, the outbreak of World War I, and the collapse of Russia amidst the Bolshevik Revolution. He was convinced that the western allies were fighting the war with an ideology that in-

---

[22]*The Geographical Journal*, April, 1904, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, p. 428.

sufficiently recognized the realities of politics and geography, and with an inadequate appreciation of the realistic factors which should be taken into account in drawing a new map of Europe which was intended to underpin a League of Nations. Hence the title, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. In evaluating a book obviously written primarily for popular consumption, we should state carefully what Mackinder meant by some of the terms he used. We should also be careful to state accurately the goals which he set for himself in writing the book. The goals were two: to ascertain "what degree of international reconstruction is necessary if the world is long to remain a safe place for democracies? And, secondly, in regard to the internal structure of those democracies, what conditions must be satisfied if we are to succeed in harnessing to the heavy plow of social reconstruction the ideals which have inspired heroism in this war."[23] In answering the second question, which he attempted to do in Chapter 7, Mackinder was dealing with a subject not so intimately related with the subject which we are considering tonight. A judicious reviewer suggested that "In discussing the freedom of men, Mr. Mackinder shows himself a disciple of Le Play. If nations are to last, their organization must be based dominantly on local communities within them, and not on nation-wide interests."[24] To this two comments might be added. First, Mackinder realized that the kind of decentralization of which he approved could be attained only through central control. Centrally-controlled decentralization would be a more accurate description of Mackinder's ideas as to how to achieve the freedom of men. Secondly, Mackinder's concern for the consumer and for decentralization to protect the consumer found a strong echo in Professor E. H. Carr's chapter on *Britain at Home* in his *Conditions of Peace*, published in 1942:

> "The great industrial organizations have grown so powerful that the intervention of the state is necessary, if for no other reason, in order to protect other sections of the community. Both employers and workers are now highly organized for the defence of their interests, and are apt to bridge their differences by a compromise which weighs adversely both on the unorganized body of consumers and on the growing and equally unorganised mass of unemployed. The two great functions of production are the primary one of producing goods for the consumer and the incidental one of providing jobs for the worker. State intervention must in future be directed above all to the protection of these two interests."[25]

[23]*Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 7.
[24]Frederick J. Teggart in *American Historical Review,* Vol. 25, p. 258.
[25]E. H. Carr, *Conditions of Peace, pp.* 143-144.

What neither Mackinder nor Mr. Carr tells us is how a state which acts primarily in response to pressure groups is going to be forced to pursue policies opposed by two powerful pressure groups which take short-term views and almost totally unsupported by effectively organized pressure.

In answering the first question, Mackinder used a terminology which lent itself easily to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. In particular, we should be careful to grasp what he means by the term "East Europe." To Mackinder there was no Central Europe, only East Europe and West Europe. After having defined his own concept of Europe as the area extending from Cape St. Vincent in the southwest to "the land cape formed by the Volga elbow at Kazan,"[26] Mackinder is quite explicit:

> "Let us now divide our Europe into East and West by a line so drawn from the Adriatic to the North Sea that Venice and the Netherlands may lie to the West, and also that part of Germany which has been German from the beginning of European history, but so that Berlin and Vienna are to the east, for Prussia and Austria are countries which the German has conquered and more or less forcibly Teutonized."[27]

East Europe, sometimes interpreted to refer to the middle tier of postwar states between Germany and Russia, thus includes East Germany, the middle tier, and most of European Russia. This is the area which to Mackinder was of such vital importance in connection with his unfortunate oversimpliflication to the effect that:

> *"Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland:*
> *Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island:*
> *Who rules the World-Island commands the World."*[28]

Furthermore, it is clear that Mackinder by 1919 was concerned for the defense of Russia against Germany, and that his fear in 1919 was of a Germany (and not any other power) in command of East Europe and the Heartland:

> "We were opposed (in the nineteenth century) to the half-German Russian Czardom because Russia was the dominating, threatening force both in East Europe and the Heartland for half a century. We were opposed to the wholly German Kaiserdom, because Germany took the lead in East Europe from the Czardom, and would then have crushed the revolting Slavs, and dominated East Europe and the Heartland. German Kultur, and all that it means in the way of organ-

[26]*Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. 120.

[28]*Ibid.*, p. 150.

ization, would have made that German domination a chastisement of scorpions as compared with the whips of Russia."[29]

And again:

"Had Germany elected to stand on the defensive on her short frontier towards France, and had she thrown her main strength against Russia, it is not improbable that the world would be nominally at peace to-day, but over-shadowed by a German East Europe in command of all the Heartland."[30]

And again:

"The German blunder, under compelling destiny, having given us victory, it is essential that we should focus our thought on the stable resettlement of the affairs of East Europe and the Heartland."[31]

It is equally clear that Mackinder was convinced of the weakness of Russia and firmly believed that it was a major interest of the western powers to protect Russia from direct attack. Later concepts of the *cordon sanitaire* were far removed from Mackinder's concept of the function of the middle tier of states between Germany and Russia:

"The Russians are, and for one, if not two, generations must remain, hopelessly incapable of resisting German penetration on any basis but that of a military autocracy, unless they be shielded from direct attack."[32]

Mackinder was concerned with the protection of Russia, and was by no means the Russophobe that he has sometimes been pictured as being.

But if the function of Mackinder's middle tier has been misunderstood, so has the exact geographical concept which he had in mind. Professor Sprout suggests, in patronizing fashion:

"In retrospect it seems clear that Mackinder's remedy left much to be desired. The buffer states were created, but they proved an illusory barrier against the hammer blows of the Wehrmacht which the Nazis forged in defiance of the peace treaty of 1919. One can also pick flaws with Mackinder's oversimplified analysis of the historic struggles between sea power and land power. And one cannot escape the conclusion that he seriously underestimated the military potential of the New World in general, and of the United States in particular."[33]

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 139.
[30]*Ibid.*, p. 150.
[31]*Ibid.*, p. 150.
[32]*Ibid.*, p. 158.
[33]*Foundations of National Power*, p. 155.

There are so many false assumptions underlying a statement like this that it is difficult to know where to begin in questioning it. The statement that "the buffer states were created," implies that they were created as Mackinder suggested, although it does not specifically say so. They were not created at all in line with Mackinder's suggestions, and it is appropriate to point out the discrepancies:

First, Mackinder assumed a Poland which would not depend on a corridor. After showing on his map on page 161 a Poland (with an East Prussia to the East) comprising a corridor, he quite specifically suggested:

> "Why should we not contemplate an exchange of peoples as between Prussia east of the Vistula, and Polish Posen? . . . . a Polish Posen would bite a very threatening bay into the eastern frontier of Germany, and a German East Prussia would be a stepping-stone for German penetration into Russia."[34]

Furthermore, Mackinder assumed that the Polish Ukraine would remain Russian. Secondly, Mackinder assumed that "Great Bohemia," (as he called Czechoslovakia) and Hungary would have frontiers with Russia. It should be noted that in the map drawn by the peace treaties after World War I this was not the case. This became significant at the time of the Munich crisis.

Thirdly, it should be noted that he assumed, as evidenced on his map on page 161, that Bulgaria would retain her seacoast on the Aegean and thus remain in contact with British sea power.

Beyond these matters of the frontiers of Poland, Czechoslovakia. Hungary, and Bulgaria, Mackinder has two particular specific requirements with regard to sea power. He was afraid that insufficient precautions would be taken to insure the "internationalization" (meaning access for British sea power) of the Black and Baltic Seas by insuring that the straits approaching them be put under international control:

> "It is of prime importance in regard to any terms of peace which are to guarantee us against future war that we should recognize that under the conditions of to-day, as was admitted by responsible ministers in the House of Commons, the fleets of the islanders could no more penetrate into the Baltic than they could into the Black Sea."[35]

When we think in terms of the British guarantees to Poland

---

[34]*Democratic Ideals and Reality*, pp. 161-162.
[35]*Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

and Rumania of 1939, is it not clear that Mackinder had a much more realistic conception of the middle tier than some of his critics would admit? If the British navy had had access to the Baltic and Black Seas, the guarantees would have had far different meanings from what they had in 1939. But to return to the matter of the matter of the common frontiers of Hungary and Czechoslovakia with Russia, and to the suggested treatment of East Prussia, it is not irrelevant to point out that in many respects the Russians have followed, to their own advantage and under other circumstances, the suggestions of Mackinder.

It is not fair to Mackinder to suggest that this middle tier and the middle tier actually created are the same. Neither is it quite fair to suggest that he regarded previous history as primarily a struggle between sea and land power, when he fairly specifically interpreted the international relations of the nineteenth century as involving British sea power in support of the strongest continental opponent of the strongest power on the continent. He rather oversimplified when he suggested that there was a fundamental antagonism between East and West Europe, ignoring the way in which Britain had been allied with Russia and Prussia against Western European France when the balance of power demanded it as much as she was later in alliance with Western European France against the powers of the East when there was a similar demand in the other direction. Most questionable is the following generalization:

> "The events which we have thus briefly called to mind are no mere past and dead history. They show the fundamental opposition between East and West Europe, an opposition which becomes of world significance when we remember that the line through Germany which history indicates as the frontier between East and West is the very line which we have on other grounds taken as demarking the Heartland in the strategical sense from the Coastland."[36]

Perhaps those who look forward to continuing the partition of Germany may take comfort from these words, but there may be a strong case to be stated by the dissenters.

Be that as it may, it seems to one observer that the weaknesses in Mackinder's concept of the new map of Europe were more fundamental than have been noted by some of his critics. If he had had his middle tier as he wished it, with Baltic and Black Seas accessible to British sea power, his middle tier would still have been anchored

[36]*Ibid.,* p. 125. The Heartland, "in the strategical sense," includes both the Heartland in the physical sense and Mackinder's East Europe.

to Poland. And the temptation to Poland to play the game of join-ing Germany against Russia or vice versa was not likely to be resist-ed, no matter who might hold the Polish Ukraine. Mackinder cor-rectly said that "the condition of stability in the territorial rear-rangement of East Europe is that the division should be into three and not into two state-systems."[37] With all the wisdom of hind-sight, we in the west today can see that Tito's Yugoslavia, what-ever our attitudes towards its ideology may be, is something of a third force in Eastern Europe. But in Mackinder's time Poland was one possibility, and there was another, which he perhaps overlooked. He failed to recognize the potentialities of the Hungarians, as a na-tionality neither German nor Russian and not too favorably dis-posed towards either. A Hungary maintaining communication with the western world through an outlet on the Mediterranean would have been a less frail reed on which to lean than a Poland depend-ing on western access to the Baltic. This fact, overlooked by Mac-kinder, was well appreciated by Carlyle Aylmer Macartney, who, in *Hungary and Her Successors,* a masterly study of the after-effects of the Treaty of Trianon, suggested that it could be fairly said of Hungary "what Palacky said of Austria in 1848: that if she did not exist it would be necessary to invent her."[38] It remains to explain why Mackinder would overlook so obvious an opportunity to build up the interests of the western powers. It is not difficult to find sev-eral items which help to explain his attitude. The *Annual Register* for 1918, based, as always, on the *London Times,* contains the state-ment that "it will not be forgotten that the Dual Monarchy had been mainly led into the war by a clique of Magyar chauvinists."[39] This statement was made in complete honesty but also in complete ignorance of the heroic and futile struggle waged by Count Tisza, the Hungarian Prime Minister, against the warlike policies of For-eign Minister Berchtold of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy; and in equal ignorance of the methods of deception which Berchtold used in convincing Kaiser Wilhelm II that the Hungarians wanted war and in convincing Count Tisza that Kaiser Wilhelm II wanted war. The interpretation by the *London Times* and the *Annual Reg-ister* of 1918 was generally accepted in England until scholarship in the United Kingdom, the United States, France, and elsewhere ex-

[37]*Ibid.,* p. 158.
[38]Carlyle Aylmer Macartney, *Hungary and Her Successors,* p. 496.
[39]*Annual Register,* 1918, p. 212.

ploded this myth. The events of 1848-9 were forgotten. There was no reason to anticipate the events of 1947 in Hungary under Ferenc Nagy, nor was there reason to anticipate the events of 1956 which led to the brief Prime Ministership of Irmy Nagy. Still less was there reason to anticipate the defection of Laslo Rajk. Only a specialist in Hungarian affairs like Macartney could understand Hungary's potentiality for support of the West at best and opposition to the enemies of the West at the least. Mackinder perhaps unconsciously sensed the nature of this potentiality, but passed it over with the comment:

> "No doubt the Magyars have begotten deep feelings of hostility among the Slavs and Roumanians, but if there be no more profit to be made in farming Slavs in the German behalf, a democratic Hungary will sooner or later adapt itself to the new environment."[40]

It is here that Mackinder's remarks in the House of Commons are most suggestive. When there was, in May and June of 1917, a suggestion that the British Government was not altogether in favor of the break-up of the Dual Monarchy, Mackinder demanded an assurance to the contrary.

There is a second weakness in Mackinder's middle tier, even had it been laid out as he wished. He assumed that a middle tier based on nationality would consist of a number of independent states all of which would almost automatically co-operate in opposition to domination by either Germany or Russia. He failed almost altogether to recognize (what Bismarck well understood) that for a local power local rivalries almost always take precedence over interests of more long-term significance. He assumed that rivalries between Poles and Czechs, Hungarians and Czechs, Rumanians and Hungarians, and Yugoslavs and Hungarians, would be put aside in the general interest of opposing domination by Germany or Russia, should Russia recover. But we should not patronize him too much for this failure. In a more recent work published in the United States, Mr. William Reitzel's *The Mediterranean: Its Role in America's Foreign Policy*, we have the suggestion that something similar to Mackinder's type of co-operation might occur:

> "Countries that are now being subsidized would have to be converted into real centers of power. The smallness of the unit would not greatly matter provided it was independent and internally stable

[40]*Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 165.

and could not be coerced by one strong power without driving it into the arms of a competing strong power."[41]

The point is that the proviso is the unrealizable condition, and that we have a situation very similar to that of Mackinder's middle tier when we expect co-operation from Franco's Spain, Tito's Yugoslavia, Republican Italy, Ben Gurion's Israel, and Nasser's Egypt, or, more properly, its predecessor in 1948. Both Mackinder and Mr. Reitzel might have profited from a consideration of Bismarck's observations on this subject.

But even Mackinder's map of the suggested rearrangement of the European continent shows a third deficiency. A Europe with frontiers drawn up on the basis of national self-determination was bound to be a Europe dominated by Germany. Mackinder's map on page 161 of *Democratic Ideals and Reality,* although primarily devoted to illustrating the suggested settlement in the middle tier, illustrates this point. He assumed that German Austria would join Germany. He did not realize what a less professed realist, Arnold Toynbee, saw quite clearly with reference to the practical consequences of the principle of national self-determination:

> "An honest application of the principle of nationality was in any case bound to make Germany the strongest Power in Europe. . . ."[42]

Mackinder regarded himself as a realist. He made the distinction between the "organizer" (or the realist, as we should term him) and the democrat quite clearly:

> "The democrat thinks in principles, be they . . . according to his idiosyncrasy . . . ideas, prejudices, or economic laws. The organizer, on the other hand, plans construction, and, like an architect, must consider the ground for his foundations and the materials with which he will build . . . If it be a state which he is erecting . . . not, be it noted, a nation which is growing . . . he must carefully consider the territory which it is desirable to occupy and the social structures . . . not economic laws . . . which are to his hand as the result of history. So he opposes his strategy to the ethics of the democrat."[42]

But Mackinder was a child of his age. He was happily immune from German ideas of geopolitical expansionism. But he was more a product of the "climate of opinion" of his time than he realized.

---

[41]William Reitzel, *The Mediterranean: Its Role in America's Foreign Policy,* p. 183.

[42]*Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 317.

[43]*Democratic Ideals and Reality,* p. 24.

He may have abjured the principles of Woodrow Wilson, but he was more influenced by the forces which influenced Wilson than he supposed. It is, for better or worse, a tribute to the vitality and appeal of the principles which are commonly, whether favorably or unfavorably, called "Wilsonian," that Mackinder's ideas are steeped through with them despite all his professions of being a realist and all his deprecations of what he called democratic theory. Further, he was more a political theorist and less a political geographer than he was aware.

A friendly critic of Wordsworth once explained the fact that *The Excursion* was not a better poem by saying that perhaps the acids of modernity had bitten Wordsworth too deeply. It might be said with equal fairness that perhaps the failure of Malinder's realism to be altogether consistent and convincing is that the alkalines of the Wilsonian principles had diluted his realism more than he could possibly have understood.