**Henry Noel Brailsford: neglected cosmopolitan**

Peter Lamb

Faculty of Arts and Creative Technologies, Staffordshire University, Flaxman Building, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DE , UK.

**E-mail**: [p.h.lamb@staffs.ac.uk](https://weboutlook.staffs.ac.uk/owa/redir.aspx?C=69EepeWG9k-ZVhoeilQ7ya5M9mm0YdFIeVwX1JctgLgqJAyjbsSgyIX0KuilECs343ZJSgEzU1k.&URL=mailto%3ap.h.lamb%40staffs.ac.uk)

**About the Author**

Peter Lamb is Professor in Politics and International Relations at Staffordshire University. He gained his PhD for the University of Manchester in 1998. His publications include *Harold Laski: Problems of Democracy, the Sovereign State and International Society* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); *Marx and Engels’ Communist Manifesto: A Reader’s Guide* (Bloomsbury 2015); ‘Henry Noel Brailsford’s Radical International Relations Theory’ in *International Relations* (2011) and ‘The British Left in the *Problems of Peace* Lectures, 1926-38: Diversity that E.H. Carr Ignored’, in *The International History Review* (2014).

**Abstract**

Brailsford’s international political thought has contemporary resonance, not least for his contribution to a normative theory that fell out of fashion in the 1950s but has recently been revived. As is generally the case among international thinkers of the twentieth century, Brailsford’s work betrays the Eurocentrism which reflected his intellectual environment. He recognized this trait in his thought and made a self-critical effort to rectify it. Never able entirely to shake of the misperceptions and misunderstandings that undermined and limited his cosmopolitanism, he nevertheless made progress in the effort at self-enlightenment. With a distinctive view of human nature and a belief in the value of non-authoritarian education, he was confident that people (including himself) could liberate themselves from ignorance, change their nature and cooperate in a cosmopolitan international system..

**Key words**

Cosmopolitanism; normative theory; John Hobson; Gilbert Murray; League of Nations;

**Introduction**

Henry Noel Brailsford was once at the forefront of debates on the nature of international politics. Today however his work rarely receives attention. What is thus lost is a contribution to international theory which, though written in an earlier era can still today serve as intellectual support for cosmopolitan theory in International Relations (IR). Brailsford’s cosmopolitanism was reflexive, growing stronger in the course of his intellectual development as he addressed both his own misperceptions and those of others. His work can, hence, help show that, even if contemporary western societies are presently broadly communitarian, cosmopolitanism can and does have a future.

Like many intellectuals of his time Brailsford was influenced by paternalist norms. John Hobson (2012: 136 and 319), moreover, locates him within the Eurocentric tradition that encompasses Western international thought in general. Nevertheless, Hobson’s generalization draws attention away from significant nuances (Knutsen, 2014; Schmidt, 2014). In the case of Brailsford what is important is his recognition of the need to reassess conventional wisdom.

The course of events that helped cultivate Brailsford’s cosmopolitan thought began at Glasgow University in the 1890s. Gilbert Murray’s recognition of his brilliance as a student of philosophy certainly helped nurture his self-confidence. Upon graduation in 1894 he was awarded a bursary and four-year fellowship in Philosophy. What must have seemed like the beginning of a long academic career was, however, halted abruptly as his lecturing skills were judged unsatisfactory. Perhaps his performance had been undermined by his attention to political activities and attempts to court his academic peer Jane Malloch. Removed from the post at Glasgow - and unsuccessful in his application for a lectureship at Aberystwyth - he was compelled to reconsider his future and embarked on his lifelong career in journalism. He soon though found a very different vocation as an irregular soldier in the Greek struggle against the Ottoman Empire over the status of Crete. One reason for this particular adventure (in 1897) was his hope to find a hitherto suppressed side of his character; another reason was to impress Malloch. The move worked and after a campaign marked by bravery, he secured marriage to Malloch the following year. Sadly however the relationship was never a happy one and each remained unhappy for the next four decades (Leventhal, 1985: 1-39). All these experiences were significant for the way in which his international thought subsequently developed.

On return from Greece and Crete in 1897 Brailsford began to concentrate on his journalistic activities. Politically at this time he was beginning to move away from a broadly left-liberal perspective, with which he had for a while been uncomfortable, to one more distinctively cosmopolitan and socialist. The plight of oppressed peoples came increasingly to occupy his mind. ‘He used his pen’, as his biographer F.M. Leventhal (1985: 42) put it, ‘to espouse the cause of national liberation, exempting no government, and certainly not his own, from attack when it infringed upon the political rights of the masses’. Foreign policy that neglected the obligations of people towards their fellow human beings needed to be criticized. This became a key feature of his international thought, leading him in his early work to campaign for a league of nations to confront such neglect.

**Before the League of Nations**

In 1905 Brailsford criticized the Cretan government and the European powers which, in the interests of the *status quo*, turned a blind eye to the campaign by the oppressed people of the island for union with Greece (Brailsford, 1905). In his book *Macedonia* the following year he once again condemned the reluctance of the European powers to intervene in support of an uprising of ordinary people against exploitation and oppression. The Macedonian people not only faced repression within the Ottoman Empire; they were also exploited by landlords, provincial officials and others who benefitted from both collusion with the Empire and constant rivalry and violence between nationalities. Brailsford proposed in response to set up a system of international control (Brailsford, 1906: 332-335). Through a show of superior military force such intervention would, he predicted (1906: 321-325), glean a reluctant acceptance from the Ottoman Empire with minimal actual fighting. The future peace would be ‘an ideal of cooperation’ among European nations ‘animated by aims which a humane and enlightened individual would not be ashamed to avow’ (Brailsford, 1906: 335).

Whilst the cosmopolitan element can be identified clearly in these thoughts, Brailsford’s lingering Eurocentric paternalism is also evident. Furthermore, he slipped into the sort of assumption which post-colonialist thinkers would later condemn as Orientalism (Abrahamsen, 2007; Grovogui, 2013). Of the cooperative ideal, he suggested (1906: 335), ‘the existence of an Oriental tyranny on the very highways of European culture and commerce is the crudest negation’. This negative portrayal, however unconscious, of non-Western cultures as the Other detracted from his cosmopolitanism. As will be discussed shortly, however, Brailsford had actually already begun to question such Orientalist thinking several years before the remark in *Macedonia*.

Brailsford’s belief expressed in *Macedonia* that the way forward to a more peaceful international order would be through cooperation among the existing European nations was not unlike views later disparaged by E.H. Carr as Utopian. This outlook would, however soon begin to change as the socialist element of Brailsford’s thought grew stronger. His growing recognition of the importance of economic considerations to a cosmopolitan account of international politics led to the development of ideas that bear affinities with later work in International Political Economy (Ashworth, 2011). This concern was prominent in his most well-known book on international affairs: *The War of Steel and Gold*, in which he applied his analytical and philosophical abilities to international politics.

The normative considerations one finds in *The War of Steel and Gold*, the first edition of which was published in May 2014, are significant. Brailsford recalled that, almost two decades earlier, while fighting on behalf of the Cretans, he had recognized in his own thought a widely-held misperception. In what temper, he enquired, thinking back to that experience, ‘does the soldier achieve the miracle of disciplined murder?’ (Brailsford, 1917a: 174) Having played his part in reinforcing his Italian comrades in an operation that forced a Turkish retreat, he felt pleased with himself. In this good mood, however, he ‘stumbled across a thing in the grass’. ‘It was’, he went on, ‘a dead Turk’ with a clean bullet wound to his head that indicated just how sudden the ending of his life had been (Brailsford, 1917a: 175). Somebody from his company having fired the shot, Brailsford conceded that he had initially felt a certain satisfaction until he looked more closely and saw that the Turkish victim was a relatively old man in a reservist uniform. Until he had been called up to fight, Brailsford surmised, the man had probably been an ordinary good natured peasant with little awareness of international politics. This was at odds with the common, stereotypical portrayal of Turks as foes whose lusts and passions other people would have recourse to fear. Brailsford (1917a: 177) admitted that until that moment of realisation he ‘had been firing at “the enemy,” “the Turks,” “the Sultan’s brutal soldiery,” “the forces of Oriental barbarism,” and other names and abstractions’.

Reflecting on these misperceptions Brailsford noted that a problem for socialists who campaigned for international cooperation was that ordinary citizens had come to take and express such views and beliefs about peoples. Noting that charity and sympathy do sometimes ‘pass beyond borders’, he stressed that the growth of such feelings was nevertheless slow. It was still rare to find ‘a sense of a common brotherhood amid the problems of life or ‘the perception of a common interest in opposing predatory and anti-social forces’ (Brailsford, 1917a: 157). Reflecting his earlier liberalism, he stressed that only enlightened individuals tended to recognize these things consciously and by formed habit. Having, however, now taken a socialist standpoint, he suggested that such enlightenment was sometimes more highly developed in the proletariat than among those usually perceived as intellectuals.

*The War of Steel and Gold* appeared in nine further editions. The original text remained the same, with the additional material being restricted to the preface, an additional chapter, an appendix and notes. A central theme of the book was the economic force that drove international politics and which had become more significant in recent decades. The very nature of wealth had changed since the days of the old wars of balance of power. Having taken largely the form of land, wealth had now become instead ‘primarily the opportunity for peculiarly profitable investment’. In the course of this ‘economic evolution’ most social institutions had been modified, as had the nature of diplomacy. Old-style conquest was obsolete now that a ‘predatory Power’ did ‘not go out with drums and banners to seize estates for its feudal aristocracy’. Such a power had instead begun to seek investment opportunities, backed by ‘the possession of fleets and armies, to secure concessions for its financiers’ (Brailsford, 1917a: 31).

Brailsford’s original prediction in *The War of Steel and Gold* was that actual war between the major powers was giving way to the build-up of armaments by states to pressure others, including rival powers, into accepting economic and industrial interference in particular territories. Although the First World War broke out shortly after the publication of the first edition this did not, he insisted in the prefaces to the third edition of June 1915, and all subsequent editions, make the book redundant. First, it did not constitute a major blow to his broader thesis that, outside of wartime, the proliferation of armaments by the major powers served the purpose of gaining investment projects. Second, this process was significant in that precisely it had in turn caused the war to break out (Brailsford, 1915: 7-8; 1917a: 7-8). He had, however, underestimated the likelihood that this would happen.

Brailsford had made his point about the economic cause of the war in a pamphlet, published in the early months of the conflict, making the case for British withdrawal. After all, this was primarily a war between Russia and Germany for ‘the hegemony of the Near East’ (Brailsford, 1914: 13). He insisted that, whatever settlement might be worked out at the end of hostilities, the process of the existing international relations would remain largely unaltered. ‘The future’ would ‘stretch before us, a new phase of the ruinous armed peace, destined to end, after further years of anger and waste, in another war of revenge’ (Brailsford, 1914: 15).

The disinclination to rethink the original thesis of *The War of Steel and Gold* is summed up in the Preface to the eighth edition published in March 1917, where Brailsford (1917a: 7) said that the course of the war, which was being portrayed in terms of nationalism, was in fact being shaped ‘infallibly’ by the issues that had been at the heart of the armed peace with which the book was primarily concerned. ‘The issues of nationality’, he insisted, whilst being ‘living and real’, had in fact ‘provoked a universal war only because the economic rivalries of the Great Powers lay behind them’ (Brailsford, 1917a: 7). Such misperceptions of nationality continued to be a cause of concern to him as he sought in the decades that followed to make a convincing case for substantial economic and political reform at the international level.

In the appendix and additional chapter in the third and all subsequent editions of *The War of Steel and Gold*, Brailsford considered ways to resolve the situation. The appendix offered a sketch of what he at that time called a federal league (Brailsford, 1917a: 333-338). He also developed this outline into a substantial study, published in 1917, of the prerequisites for a successful league of nations (Brailsford, 1917b).

In addition to these views on international organization Brailsford held the view that widespread selfish, indifferent and apathetic views would need to be challenged and changed. Significantly, in this respect, his democratic socialism was tinged with the influence of anarchism and Enlightenment liberalism (Lamb, 2011). This is evident in one of his early books in which he endorsed the proto-anarchist ideas of William Godwin, the radical poetry of Percy Shelley which in part reflected those ideas and the Marquis de Condorcet’s contribution to the Enlightenment tradition (Brailsford, 1913).

The anarchist influence led Brailsford to believe that human nature is malleable from within the mind, without the need for authoritarian control. As one finds at various points in his writing (1913: 94-105; 1925:131-142; 1945: 19-21), he considered that education undertaken voluntarily would enable people to adopt an ethic of cooperation. This would guide the work of practitioners and administrators of international relations (Brailsford, 1943: 169; 1945). He was under no illusion that this could be achieved without fundamental changes to domestic and subsequently international politics and economics (Brailsford, 1945: 21). Change in one sphere required transformation in the others (Brailsford, 1928a: 123-131 and 404-407). He did not, therefore, envisage anything like a linear process of education, politics and economics. One finds this approach in his book *A League of Nations* of 1917, in which he proposed a rather more radical international arrangement than that which the League would actually form a few years later.

Brailsford stressed in *A League of Nations* that the idea of a League of Perpetual Peace actually dated back three centuries. Many influential thinkers such as Kant had kept the idea alive (Brailsford, 1917b: 32). US President Woodrow Wilson had ‘boldly adopted the idea of using “coercion” in the “service of the common order, common justice, and common peace”’ (Brailsford, 1917b: 34). What this meant was that ‘to be neutral when wrong and aggression are suffered by any nation is a dereliction of duty’ (Brailsford, 1917b: 35). This idea had often been ridiculed. In the past, ostensibly cosmopolitan conceptions of national duty had actually been intended to serve the selfish interest, whether or not this was done consciously. Only academic moralists and socialists had, Brailsford went on, offered a genuinely disinterested cosmopolitan advocacy of duty. Hence, whatever may be the fate of Wilson’s constructive proposal, it had made ‘an epoch in the world’s moral evolution’ (Brailsford, 1917b: 36).

Brailsford’s willingness to give Wilson credit where it was due was followed by a proposal for a League that may, at a glance, seem rather modest. The liberal side of Brailsford’s thought came, indeed, to the fore as the realities of the existing situation deemed a fully fledged socialist approach inappropriate. As will be seen in a moment, by focusing only on the surface of his position, Leventhal underestimates Brailsford’s radicalism in *A League of Nations*. ‘His immediate proposals—an executive of the major powers, pooled armaments, a charter of economic freedom, and guarantees of cultural autonomy—did not’, Leventhal (1985: 138) suggests, ‘go much further than the moderate proponents of the League’. Brailsford’s proposals, he went on, ‘presupposed no restructuring of the capitalist economy, no socialist revolution; they sought to mitigate the excesses of imperialism, not to eliminate colonial rule’ (Leventhal, 1985: 138-139).

Brailsford’s proposals in *A League of Nations* may indeed seem to be restricted to a short-term concern to build as fair an international system as would be possible in the post-war climate. The Paris Economic Conference of 1916, with its intention to isolate the Central Powers, had contributed to that climate. The programme of the Conference included, as Brailsford (1917b: 248) put it, a ‘frank declaration of a war of tariffs and exclusions after the war of flesh and blood...’. The attitudes of those in political and economic power, along with public opinion which reflected those attitudes, were shaping an environment no better and perhaps worse than that of the pre-war era. The continuing problem of nationality added to this scenario. In a situation of renewed enmity, he predicted quite accurately, ‘a menaced and isolated nation renews its armaments, rebuilds its ships, and prepares for the next round of the struggle’. ‘The armed peace’, he went on, continuing the theme of *The War of Steel and Gold*, ‘will have begun once more, but with less disguise than before, and a wider field for every sort of hostility that stops short of bloodshed.’ (Brailsford, 1917b: 30)

Presented in the moderate fashion that the political environment deemed appropriate, Brailsford’s proposals to avoid such a process were indeed designed to appeal to progressive liberal opinion. Those proposals were, however, also intended to provide the foundations for changes which would involve international cooperation, beginning with motives of self-interest but going on to foster a genuine cosmopolitan outlook. The stimulus would be a plan forged by an alliance of progressive political parties in which socialists would play a prominent role (Brailsford, 1917b: 313-315).

Brailsford’s proposals would actually require significant longer-term inroads into the established workings of capitalism. He offered what he called ‘a constructive economic policy’ that a League of Nations should adopt. Advocates of a negative conception of peace would, he accepted, dismiss such a policy as beyond the terms of an effective League, which should be concerned solely with securing peace by enforcing the obligation of states to a settlement procedure. States individually or in groups should, according to such advocates, be left to pursue their own economic policies. Brailsford (1917b: 266) insisted in response that peace ‘must mean something more positive than the existence side by side of nations which just contrive to avoid bloodshed’. ‘Peace’ he went on, must mean ‘some conception of a worldwide human society, within which a sense of solidarity may grow up’ (Brailsford, 1917b: 266). International justice would need to be enforced and checks would be imposed on narrow national egoism. It would, furthermore, be recognized that nationality was a cause of war. A system of universal free trade should be introduced as soon as possible. This, however, was not a realistic prospect in the present conditions. Given the inroads he wanted to make into international capitalism in terms of the pursuit of international justice, one can assume that this was a rather different sort of free trade to that of laissez-faire capitalism.

Brailsford’s cosmopolitanism in *A League of Nations* also included an appeal for better treatment of ‘natives’ of the colonies (1917b: 244-245). This was a paternalist approach involving acceptance that there must be some sort of control by the European powers. This book did nevertheless continue from *The War of Steel and Gold* the exploration of possibilities for cosmopolitanism. In the 1920s this was an approach that was maintained in his books *Socialism for To-Day* and *Olives of Endless Age*.

**The 1920s: high hopes to brute realities**

In the early 1920s the devastation and poverty that followed the World War had brought about a noticeably more radical but also pessimistic tone to Brailsford’s thought. This was expressed most clearly in his book *After the Peace* in 1920. The great powers had acted in a radical spirit at the Paris conference, but produced nothing that was really revolutionary. There had been talk of internationalism, but nothing indeed more than talk. ‘The ideas which have shaped these Treaties’, he complained, ‘are those of the old world which shattered itself in the war’ (Brailsford, 1920: 32). Conservatism had prevailed; there had been no revolution in international relations. Capitalism, which would ultimately be unable to provide for the needs of all people, had not been challenged with any significant force.

Within a few years, however, Brailsford had begun to seek ways to overcome the international problems that had brought about his pessimism. The problem with the League, he argued in *Socialism for To-day* in 1925, was that it was ‘the work of political thinkers who had no conception of the power of economic forces and economic motives in the modern world’. It was, he went on, ‘an attempt to frame an international society on a purely political foundation’ (Brailsford, 1925: 123). This meant that the League had no controls over commerce, banking and industry, transport, world-wide trusts or the sinking of oil wells. The reason was that liberal rather than socialist thinking had inspired the League in its present form. Ordinary people would therefore feel no loyalty to this international organization which was concerned with sanctions on states but not benefits for such people. If, however, the League were to take a socialist character and become concerned with controlling the banks, stabilising prices, regulating the international supply of raw materials and providing benefits for people in their everyday lives, then states would depend upon it and not defy it. (Brailsford, 1925: 123-124). A major argument for imperialism would also thus be undermined (Brailsford, 1925: 125-127). Brailsford was thus proposing a radically new global political economy with the cosmopolitan purpose of serving all ordinary people the world over.

Brailsford anticipated that a likely response to his ideas would be to insist that human nature was unsuited to socialism, meaning that his plans would place ‘too heavy a strain on human nature’ (Brailsford, 1925: 131). Such a response, he countered, assumed that human nature works specifically for personal rather than impersonal gain. Challenging this assumption he insisted that very few people were spurred by unlimited gain, these being restricted to those of acquisitive mind such as directors of companies in industry and those in commerce and finance. Such people were moreover, not the creators of wealth but, rather the manipulators and amassers of it. This was not, then, really an indication of human nature. In fact the actions and attitudes of the majority of people in their everyday lives indicated that humans were social beings. It was the openly immoral economic arrangement of the particular sort of society in which they lived that brought about most cases where people acted immorally, against the good of society. Even in such societies many men and women still led good lives. In order to minimize immoral activity a rational system of education was needed. Socialism required ‘a new challenge to human nature, a call to adapt ourselves, and to fit ourselves for a new and progressive society’ (Brailsford, 1925: 138). Human nature was not unchanging and fixed. If the outward social conditions were to change, so would the mind, morals, responses and attitudes to society that together made up human nature. The co-operative ideal would thus help develop good citizens.

One feature of Brailsford’s view of the changes necessary for such a new progressive society betrays a misperception that detracts from his cosmopolitanism. This was his proposal for the governance of Africa. Whilst South Africa, the Mediterranean colonies and Egypt would be granted independence, much of the remainder of the continent, especially tropical Africa, would be subject to the direct maintenance of the League. Suitably trained and educated administrators would run this scheme without bias (Brailsford, 1925: 129-130). This paternalistic approach betrays a lingering distrust, typical of Western political thought of the period, of the capability of people in many parts of tropical Africa to govern themselves. In his terms one might suggest that the development of Brailsford’s own ‘nature’ was being hampered by the assumptions that shaped his intellectual environment.

Although he still held Eurocentric views of the ability of many African peoples for government, Brailsford continued to reflect critically on the conventional wisdom that fostered Orientalism. If, he argued in a lecture of 1927, like the former Chinese nationalist leader Sun Yat Sen people in Asia considered themselves Oriental in contrast with Europeans, this was a result of the imperialism of the West. As Brailsford (1928b: 321) put it, ‘...the West, in India and elsewhere throughout Asia, has created nationalism by erecting its colour bar’. A ‘liberal education’ (Brailsford, 1928b: 35) needed to be adopted in order to guide the attitudes of Europeans in their relations with people in Asia. The inconsistency of his criticism of European attitudes towards Asian people with his paternalistic assumptions about many Africans illustrates how some of his own Eurocentric views survived his self-critical approach.

The text of Brailsford’s lecture of 1927 lecture was reprinted the following year in his book *Olives of Endless Age* (Brailsford, 1928a, 219-260). A misperception that Brailsford identified in that book reflected an expectation deep within humans that persuaded them that what has happened before will happen again. It was ‘a fear which ensures the fulfilment of its own predictions’ (Brailsford, 1928a, 32). Given the difficulties and frustrations of his career and personal life, it is difficult not to assume that consciously or otherwise Brailsford (1928a: 32) was drawing on his own experience when making the following point: ‘The man who has failed in love, or in friendship, moves to a new chapter in his record with a haunting dread that the old blot will stain the yet unwritten pages’. Nevertheless, he did not consider the human mind to be restricted permanently by this tendency. Indeed, his suggestion that fear ensured the fulfilment of predictions should be read whilst bearing in mind his commitment to education for development and his belief in malleability of human nature. Fear could be overcome.

Brailsford was in effect exposing the weakness of an expectation that helped shape the realist view of international relations—a view that the history and future of international relations are characterized by continual, anarchical struggle for power among states, each of which acts for what is considered as self interest. Brailsford was suggesting that the old expectations of the recurrence of war need not always be proven true. The realisation of a peaceful alternative nevertheless would require great effort on the part of the people of the world. ‘Only by hard struggle and critical thinking’ he insisted, ‘shall we crown ourselves with olives of endless age’ (Brailsford, 1928a: 62). ‘Olives of endless age’, a phrase used by Shakespeare in his Sonnet 107, was thus a reference to the olive branch as the traditional symbol to indicate the hope for a long-lasting peace.

For Brailsford, the thinking behind the attempt of the Wilsonian League to unify the world was insufficiently critical. The root causes of its comparative failure were ‘its ignoring of the economic factor and its acceptance of the myth of the sovereign national state’ (Brailsford, 1928a 48). This myth glossed over the fact there was a hierarchy of such national states. Furthermore, the economic interests of mankind needed a far higher degree of unity than the Versailles Treaty had put in place. The political form of the world, with its continuing reliance on state sovereignty could not correspond to the economic needs of the world. The solution would involve a supra-national government to which the sovereign state must give way and prevent states from injuring their neighbours in economic or political terms.

**1930s: search for a synthesis**

In the 1930s Brailsford continued to call for a role for supra-national government. A development in his thought, however, was a growing recognition of the ability of non-Europeans for self-government. In *Property or Peace*, nevertheless there is also clear evidence of a lingering ignorance of the capability of people in the colonies. Brailsford (1934: 19) recalled that in his youth democracy was seen as the ‘inevitable political form of our modern civilisation’. One’s own country’s conception of democracy was taken for granted and there was an expectation that ‘more backward peoples’ would adopt it. Parliamentary elections were considered ‘a reliable article of export’ (Brailsford, 1934: 19). Even now, he went on, few people would question that the Westminster model was the most appropriate model for Indian self government. He still wrote that help would need to be given that would ‘qualify the self-determination of Africans and Oceanic islanders...’ (Brailsford, 1934: 300). He also betrayed his own ignorance in stating that the ‘primitive races’ of the tropics had ‘not yet acquired an individualistic outlook’ (Brailsford, 1934: 302). Nevertheless, he did say that it was exploitation by the imperialist powers that had brought about the problems those people were presently facing. Furthermore, he suggested that as the powers had caused the problems then they should help the other peoples to overcome them. Importantly, the peoples should be helped with ‘a plan of development suited to their traditions’ (Brailsford, 1934: 302). Here in his mind was a battle between his developing cosmopolitanism and his lingering Eurocentric misperceptions.

Four year later, in *Why Capitalism Means War*, Brailsford (1938: 91-95) argued that the way to world peace would be through international federalism. With interdependent economies within a single commonwealth guided by a socialist view of human relationships, this would be organized for mutual defence and mutual aid. Suggesting that a number of African and Asian countries could potentially be members of the federation, he nevertheless again slipped into Eurocentric thinking when he referred to them as being on the fringe or as outlying regions. He proposed that the predominantly white British people should raise the standard of life of the ‘dark’, population of India and Africa to the level of the former. These Eurocentric generalizations coexisted with the insistence that it was the Europeans who, as the imperial powers, were at present in a position to begin the process which, once started, would lead to self-determination.

The responsibility of the imperial powers to help the process towards independence was a theme once again in Brailsford’s essay *Socialists and the Empire* of 1945, which considered how British imperialistic relations with other peoples may be brought to a satisfactory close (Brailsford, 1945). War had stirred the social conscience of many people and revealed ‘the shortcomings of our civilisation’ stimulating ‘our will to make good what was amiss’ (Brailsford, 1945: 19). As was the case in his earlier work, Brailsford saw the eighteenth century thought of Condorcet as an important early contribution to the case for social progress. Brailsford, nevertheless, inadvertently revealed his continuing ignorance regarding African people. Condorcet, he suggested, was one of the first thinkers to explore the question of ‘the duty of civilized men towards the backward races’ (Brailsford, 1945: 19). Later in the essay he again referred to these people as ‘primitive’ (Brailsford, 1945: 21). Brailsford, like Condorcet, believed that backwardness was a temporary problem that education could resolve. Along with social insurance this could bring about human equality. A problem, Brailsford suggested, that would need to be overcome was the difficulty of gaining the trust of the African people given the contempt with which Europeans had traditionally viewed people of different colour or creed. He did not grasp that the terminology he used was itself an example of contempt.

Reiterating a point he had made in greater detail in his book *Subject India* two year earlier (Brailsford, 1943: 166-175), Brailsford (1945: 24) suggested that many of the colonies including India, Burma, Ceylon and Malta were ready for independence and self-government. Each of those that remained should be treated like ‘a depressed area at home’ (Brailsford, 1945: 29). We must, he insisted, ‘cease to think of these countries as colonies’ (Brailsford, 1945: 31). Hence, there would be no discrimination and no exploitation. The difference was that these colonies should be prepared for independence. Substantial grants in educational and health services would be important in this respect, as would facilities for communications such as wireless sets and broadcasting stations. The International Labour Organization should help introduce a minimum living wage that would ensure a decent life. Decent housing and diet should also be assured. His point about depressed areas is significant here; this can be seen as policy for international social democracy.

Brailsford identified Condorcet’s failure to anticipate that economic imperialism as a feature of the capitalist system would stand in the way of the campaign for human equality. Education and social insurance would not suffice unless this fundamental obstacle was removed. Socialists were, in his view, ready to take this vital step in Africa. ‘But what of the Africans?’ Brailsford asked towards the end of his 1945 essay. It was important that a plan be made in consultation with them rather than simply devised for them. Tribes from across the continent all differed from one another in terms of traditional institutions that may be revived and combined with new technology if that was what they considered appropriate. Socialism, should it be adopted, would be adapted and transformed as the people in question required (Brailsford, 1945: 34). Whilst Eurocentrism is certainly still in evidence in this essay of 1945, one can detect the results of self-enlightenment as he had, to some significant degree over the previous half century, addressed his own misperceptions and misunderstandings. The development of his cosmopolitanism between these two publications of 1897 and 1945 serves to illustrate the possibilities for self-improvement in which he believed. Cosmopolitanism had developed in his political thought, even though this was imperfect cosmopolitanism.

**Reading Brailsford in the 21st Century**

The normative IR thought that Brailsford offered can be seen as an example of that which was marginalized during what Steve Smith (1992) called the forty years’ detour that began in the 1950s. Brailsford’s contribution to the tradition of normative theory—a tradition presently enjoying a revival (Erskine, 2013)—began before such theory became discredited during the period between the World Wars – largely (later) as a result of E.H. Carr’s critique developed in his *Twenty Years’ Crisis*. (2001 [1939]) For Carr liberalism and liberal theory of world politics had been overtaken by history. (Cox, 2001: xxii). There was, however, a broad, significant stream of socialist and progressive thought in the inter-war years to which Carr’s utopian label does not adhere at all firmly. This stream, of which Carr was aware, includes Brailsford’s work of the period (Ashworth, 2007; 2009; Lamb, 2011; 2014; Sylvest, 2004). However, this received no mention at all in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*.

But far from having a wistful utopian approach, Brailsford was concerned with actual political and economic obstacles to the goals of international social justice and equality. He searched for ways in which the existing system may be transformed into one that would provide the educational, economic and political framework for the realisation of such cosmopolitan goals. Hence, whilst he was attracted to Marxism, rather than insist on revolution and reject compromise he sought painstakingly for innovative international organization as the means to gradual and eventually fundamental change. This, on the basis of critical enquiry into imperfections in one’s own thinking as well as in that of others, may provide an example for tinkers and policy-makers today.

Of course, the realities with which Brailsford was concerned were quite different to those of international politics today. Hence, the historicity of his ideas would make any attempt to recruit him or any other thinker of his time, into a current school of thought distinctly unrealistic (Nardin, 2012: 314-318). Nevertheless, this does not rule out the relevance of his work to much of the orthodox commentary on contemporary international relations today, in which what Ken Booth (1999: 32) calls the ‘three tyrannies’ of presentism, culturalism and positivism continue to feed the underestimation of the possibilities for change, misrepresentation of people, and assumption of objectivity. US and European international policies and actions, for example, have been expected to result in swift adoptions of Western-style politics and society among peoples who, it was perceived, would eagerly grasp the opportunity. Faults in Western politics are overlooked from this Eurocentric approach and alternative paths of change are ignored. Human relations in the modern and contemporary Western society are widely assumed to be naturally competitive and acquisitive.

Brailsford is significant in this respect because, viewing human nature as malleable, he did not accept that the status quo was permanent. If, as a prominent assumption of contemporary cosmopolitan thought suggests (Cochran, 1995: 46-48), humans are capable of having a conception of the good and a sense of justice, such malleability is hugely significant. Whilst, as Hobson (2012: 136-142) suggests, his work was, like that of many other Western thinkers, subliminally Eurocentric Brailsford was constantly self-critical, thus developing his own nature by challenging conventional wisdom. As a result, one can detect a subconscious, ongoing battle with his own Eurocentrism. This perhaps reflects the universal vulnerability to suffering, the requirements of empathy and sympathy that are basic requirements of social life and the conventions against harm that serve as moral resources. The immanence of global obligation can be perceived in these resources (Linklater, 2007). Brailsford’s work is worthy of attention in this respect because he saw the need to overcome his own misperceptions and challenge those of others. Because of the malleability of human nature as crucial to the development of cosmopolitanism people could, through self-enlightenment, become more cooperative.

**Conclusion**

Brailsford’s position became less paternalistic as he continued to explore the possibilities for political and economic measures to change the existing world order. That he could gradually overcome some but not all the limitations in his own self-enlightenment helps substantiate his belief that great advancements in human society were achievable. The malleability of the mind was, he insisted, a feature of human nature. Hence, people could liberate themselves from ignorance and misperceptions. His work helps illustrate the possibilities for change in thinking that may be overlooked if one simply applies the Eurocentric label. The label certainly fits Brailsford but loosely, covering up important developments. The richness to be found in the history of international thought is missed if the label is used without qualification in cases such as his.

Brailsford was of course, like all writers, a creature of his intellectual environment. His particular recommendations have, indeed, long been outdated. Nevertheless, the broader picture remains very significant. Furthermore, the investigation into means of global governance and normative arguments for cosmopolitanism are prominent in contemporary IR. His distinctive view on human nature was a driving force for his work. Related to this view was his philosophy of education which, he hoped, could be applied to help bring about a new internationalism. His reflexive approach enabled into overcome some of his misperceptions and to identify those of others These various features make his work substantial, resonant and worthy of attention.

**REFERENCES**

Abrahamsen, R. (2007), Postcolonialism. In M. Griffiths (ed.), *International Relations Theory for the Twenty-First Century*. London: Routledge, pp. 111-122.

Ashworth, L.M. (2007) *International Relations and the Labour Party: Intellectuals and Policy Making from 1918-1945*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Ashworth, L.M. (2009) Rethinking a Socialist Foreign Policy: The British Labour Party and International Relations Experts, 1918-to 1931. *International Labour and Working-Class History* 75, pp. 30-48.

Ashworth, L. (2011) Missing Voices: Critical IPE, Disciplinary History and H.N. Brailsford’s Analysis of the Capitalist International Anarchy. In S. Shields, I. Bruff and H. Macartney (eds.) *Critical International Political Economy*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 9-26.

Booth, K. The Three Tyrannies. In T. Dunne and N. Wheeler (eds.), *Human Rights in Global Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brailsford, H.N. (1905) The Future of Crete. *The North American Review* 181 (585), pp. 251-260.

Brailsford, H.N. (1906) *Macedonia: Its Races and Their Future*. London: Methuen.

Brailsford, H.N. (1913) *Shelley, Godwin, and their Circle*. London: Williams and Norgate.

Brailsford, H.N. (1914) *The Origins of the Great War*. London: The Union of Democratic Control.

Brailsford, H.N. (1915) *The War of Steel and Gold: A Study of the Armed Peace*, third edition. London: G. Bell and Sons.

Brailsford, H.N. (1917a) *The War of Steel and Gold: A Study of the Armed Peace*, ninth edition. London: G. Bell and Sons.

Brailsford, H. N. (1917b) *A League of Nations*. London: Headley Brothers.

Brailsford, H.N. (1920) *After the Peace*. London: Leonard Parsons.

Brailsford, H.N. (1925) *Socialism for To-Day*. London: ILP.

Brailsford, H.N. (1928a) *Olives of Endless Age: Being a View of This Distracted World and the Possibility of International Unity*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Brailsford, H.N. (1928b) The Rise of Nationalism in the East. In Anon. (ed.), *Problems of Peace: Second Series*. London: Oxford University Press.

Brailsford, H.N. (1934) *Property or Peace*. London: Victor Gollancz.

Brailsford, H.N. (1938) *Why Capitalism Means War*. London: Victor Gollancz.

Brailsford, H.N. (1943) *Subject India*. London: Victor Gollancz.

Brailsford, H.N. (1945) Socialists and the Empire. In R. Hinden (ed.), *Fabian Colonial Essays*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Carr, E.H. (2001) *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* 1919-1939*: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Cochran, M. (1995) Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism in a Post-Cold War World. In J. Macmillan and A. Linklater (eds.), *Boundaries in Question: New Directions in International Relations*. London: Pinter.

Cox, M. (2001) Introduction. In E.H. Carr (ed.), *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* 1919-1939*: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Erskine, T. (2013) Normative International Relations Theory. In T. Dunne, M. Kurki and S. Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, third edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 36-58.

Grovogui, S.B. (2013) Postcolonialism. In T. Dunne, M. Kurki and S. Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, third edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 247-265.

Hobson, J.M. (2012) *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Knutsen, T.L. (2014) Western Approaches. *Millennium: Journal of International Studie*s 42 (2), pp. 448-455.

Lamb, P. (2011) Henry Noel Brailsford’s Radical International Relations Theory. *International Relations* 25 (4), pp. 479-498.

Lamb, P. (2014) The British Left in the *Problems of Peace* Lectures: Diversity that E.H. Carr Ignored. *International History Review* 36 (3), pp. 530-549.

Leventhal, F.M. (1985) *The Last Dissenter: H.N. Brailsford and his World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Linklater. (2007) Distant Suffering and Cosmopolitan Obligation. *International Politics* 44 (1), pp. 19-36.

Nardin, T. (2013) International Political Theory. In S. Burchill and A. Linklater (eds.), *Theories of International Relations*, fifth edition. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 291-318.

Schmidt, B.C. (2014) A Realist View of the Eurocentric Conception of World Politics. *Millennium: Journal of International Studie*s 42 (2), pp. 464-471.

Smith. S. (1992) The Forty Years’ Detour: The Resurgence of Normative Theory in International Relations. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21 (3), pp. 489–506.

Sylvest, C. (2004) Interwar Internationalism, the British Labour Party and the Historiography of International Relations. *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2), pp. 409-432.