Borderless Debate: A World Parliament: Democracy in the 21st Century

Awaiting an Unpredicted Historical Turning Point

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A World Parliament: Governance and Democracy in the 21st Century, by Jo Leinen and Andreas Bummel, is the book, looking forward to world federal government, that I have been waiting for. It builds on Andreas Bummel's work for years on behalf of a U.N. Parliamentary Assembly and on MEP Leinen's practical experience in the European Parliament. I was grateful to see my history, *The Politics of World Federation*, cited and also many others, such as David Wylie's global municipal assembly, the young Luis Cabrera's dissent at the anti-globalization rallies in Seattle in 1999, and Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson's *Cultural Creatives*. Fifty million people changing the world is about the right order of magnitude for what we need (50,000,000 was the target for United World Federalists in 1947, according to radio announcer Raymond Gram Swing). Thank you for what is called in the book the "long prehistory" of the Great Transformation to a democratic union of humanity.

The book is written from a central European point of view, which is refreshing since I tend to see only those from the Atlantic community. But what particularly encouraged me was to find German language scholarship so much in agreement with the Western history, sociology, economics, psychology, philosophy, law, and international relations that the two authors cite so abundantly. They also cite the best work of the United Nations, such as the proposal of a third generation world organization of Maurice Bertrand, and the many resourceful and ingenious proposals of various high-level expert panels. That saves us the need to comb through so many sanitized and ambiguous

U.N. documents. Leinen's references to the European Union's history are invaluable. They complement our recollections of *The Federalist* of Madison, Hamilton, and Jay.

Part II on what many call the global *problématique* – the global problems beyond the capacity of sovereign states to solve alone – seems to me to be virtually a handbook for action in the next decade – probably the next century. I was cheered to see Lord Boyd-Orr's World Food Board remembered, for it could solve the problem of distribution of food at stable prices. This part was hard reading since the global problems are so novel and intractable. Much has changed from atomic fear and early apprehension of global injustices by the world federalist movement of the 1940s. This is the part that surviving world federalists need to study. The historical conditions for world union have changed.

Part III (actually chapters 22–28), on the transition to the necessary common government of the world, seems vital and helpful. The writing maintains a calm, rational tone, especially when dealing with the opposition – realists, governance scholars, post-modernists, the cynics awaiting world war to motivate a new round of international organization. An Article 22 subsidiary organ of the U.N. General Assembly makes sense as a practical next step toward the ultimate goal. The book apparently was written mostly before Brexit and the post-2016 return to nationalism, if not fascism, but that's fine. The authors offer a long-term vision.

Nevertheless, I do feel that Part III is the weak part of the book. It is resolutely thought out,

but the politics of the transition is almost unimaginable. A UNPA could be established by a simple majority vote of the GA, without the Big Five, but why would the U.S.A. or other principal powers tolerate an innovation that basically threatened to revolutionize the system? They might well withdraw from the U.N., as Japan, Germany and Italy did in the 1930s. A wiser course might be to start with the United States, since the American Union has a democratic heritage and already acts as the world's government, as Michael Mandelbaum argues. It is possible that the "change in values and consciousness" that is hoped for in the book as the core of the democratic transformation, might pave the way, but signs of new leadership are hard to find these days. The last U.S. Congressman who went out on a limb to support the U.N. that I know of, was Representative James Leach (R, IA), who produced a work on U.N. reform in 1993, *Defining Purpose*. Another figure in the executive branch with something like such a consciousness is Strobe Talbot, as in his book of 2008, *The Global Nation*. The politicians some of us admire here are Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and Denis Kucinich (D, OH), but none of them is on record for changes in the institutional structure of the United Nations. I myself think that many millions are "ready" for the changes we see as necessary, but the evidence the authors cite for the change in values and consciousness seems to me still slight. The real test of public opinion is not a poll, but an election campaign on a world government plank. The only figure to run such a campaign was Henry Osborne in Birmingham in 1945 and 1950. Henry Wallace had a world government plank in his Progressive Party challenge to President Truman in the 1948 election. Since then in politics, not a peep. The *Occupy* movement failed for lack of a legislative goal. Enlightened people here cannot even pass a rational gun control bill. Similarly, a broad public in the world cannot

abolish nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, I am impressed with the patient, resolute arguments in favor of a revolution from below, rather like the public lobby of United World Federalists, and the revolution from above, as in the first U.S. Progressive movement (1890-1916, 1933), in which even Big Business saw the necessity of Federal regulations to stabilize the economy. But for the future, a great crisis will be needed. It could be the abandonment of the E.U. or the U.N. You may imagine it in the form of another international banking crisis, or the melting of the Greenland ice cap, or the democratization of China!

What is lacking in the great transformation is a coherent, exhaustive historical account of trends toward a global parliament or even federal government of the world. Trouble is, the historians do not generally see this coming. I have found only seven historians who deal with the efforts so far: by Paul Boyer, Wesley T. Wooley, Joseph P. Baratta, Lawrence S. Wittner, Mark Mazower, Richard Mayne and John Pinder. The world historian, Arnold Toynbee, did come to conclusions that world government would be the creative response of Western civilization, among the seven surviving civilizations, to the challenge of war. H.G. Wells before him was also quite eloquent about the coming of federal world government. "Human history" – Wells famously said – "has become a race between education and catastrophe." But steadily, historians have become more pessimistic. Wells' last book, *Mankind at the End of Its Tether* (1946), saw only catastrophe. We will see what Jürgen Osterhammel and Akira Iriye produce. ("Big History" is basically evolution.)

Eric Hobsbawm, whose four volumes of world history I have finished reading this summer, never mentions world federation, and cites the "supranational" E.U. only once or twice. His last chapter in *The Age of Extremes* ends darkly with reflections on the decline of the state and even of democratic politics in the future. What

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contemporary national leader would dare tell the business elite and the general public that taxes must go up, not down? Who would advocate a UNPA where decisions binding on Americans could be made by other people, even to arrest global warming? Are the people going to accept the hard truths that regulations of economies or taxes will be necessary to fund common solutions to global problems? Will they lead in demanding them, say, in a UNPA or a global parliament? Yet Hobsbawm concludes: "The common people have entered history.... We are at a historic crisis. The future cannot prolong the past or present. It must change." It is realistic to await one of those sudden, unpredicted historical turning points as forces accumulated for many years burst forth in a flood of change, like the end of the Cold War, or decolonization after WWII (or the Great War in 1914).

I have a small project to advance history after my retirement from teaching next year. I would like to trace how American policy makers after WWII decided to create the international institutions that produced what Hobsbawm calls the Golden Age of prosperity and order. When I am down with disappointment for the revolution to establish politically the brotherhood of man, as young Harris Wofford once put it, or establishing the rule of world law, as Grenville Clark and Louis B. Sohn did, I think of Norman Cousins' words near the end of his life, as he visited China soon after Deng Xiao-ping opened the Central Kingdom to foreign tourists. Cousins photographed a very old woman and added this reflection: "A life, no matter how long, is too short if the mind is bereft of splendor, the passions underworked, the memories sparse, and the imagination unlit by radiant musings."