

On Realism/Federalism

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A group of my colleagues, interested in Jo Leinen and Andreas Bummel's *A World Parliament: Governance and Democracy in the 21st Century* (2018), have been bemoaning the slow progress of projects of world federation. Why is the very idea held in such general contempt?

Thoreau tells a funny story about Walden (1854). His publisher printed 1,000 copies, but so few sold that he wanted to empty his warehouse and sent 706 copies to the author in Concord. Thoreau carried them all into the attic of his parents' house. He made this comment in his *Journal*: "I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself."

The short answer as to why world government has dropped out of common discussion about world politics was given by George Kennan in *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (pp. 93-94):

The most serious fault of our past policy formation lies in something that I might call the legalistic-moralistic approach to international problems. This approach runs like a red skein through our foreign policy of the last fifty years. It has in it something of the old emphasis on arbitration treaties, something of the Hague conferences and schemes for universal disarmament, something of the more ambitious American concepts of the role of international law, something of the League of Nations and the United Nations, ... something of the belief in World Law and World Government.

This Realist answer has been given time and time again. The task for world federalists is to demonstrate, on the contrary, that the rule of world law is the most realistic of policy proposals. This should be evident from the practice of virtually every constitutional sovereign state. They all aim to create a law making authority (usually a popularly representative legislature), an executive of the laws, and a judiciary to apply the law to novel cases. No state has made the deliberate mistake of providing for the enforcement of the laws by the armed forces, or to give the executive arbitrary powers to decree what is lawful, or a judiciary not independent of the other branches.

But at the world level, the problem is — just as the critics say — that humanity is so diverse that "most people are not ready" to accept laws enacted by representatives voting their consciousness of justice (not voting according to instructions from their sovereign governments). Democracy is so little developed, outside of North America and Western Europe, that world federation is premature. Hence objections, like those of John Foster Dulles, that world federalists were "obstructionists in the guise of perfectionists." World community still seems so rudimentary that a political union making possible the rule of world law is premature. The ideal is recognized, but in practice it still seems unrealistic.

Authors should note that Realism is a European tradition of interpretation, at variance with American ideas of foreign policy. Hans Morgenthau, Carl J. Friedrich, Frederick Law Schuman, Nicholas Spykman, and Brooks Emeny carried Realism (politics as the struggle for power, especially military power) from Hitler's Europe to America. E.H. Carr was like them but stayed in Britain. Several of these — notably Morgenthau, Schuman, and Carr — wrote plainly about the ultimate rightness of world government, but they argued that, until the peoples were ready, a "wise diplomacy" would have to serve.

Why Cord Meyer, taught by Spykman at Yale, returned to American idealism is instructive. The turning point seems to have come in his battles in the Pacific, particularly on Guam, where he lost an eye. "What under the sun," he asked himself later, "could possibly be worth the carnage, the sacrifice, the mutual destruction?" Meyer refused to believe that war was inevitable and that force was the ultimate arbiter of politics. He returned to Wilsonianism and Franklin D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms and Roosevelt's practical efforts to develop the wartime United Nations into a universal International Organization to keep the peace. He became first president of United World Federalists. The logic of realism pointed to a democratic, world federal state.

Today, the progress of economic globalization is building world community. That's the reality that has replaced the struggle between capitalism and socialism, democracy and the Communist Party. How far world community has formed is a matter for political judgment. I have concluded that common values are still so incomplete that it would be foolish to try to jump in one step to a global legislature. The proposal to create a Global Parliament as a second chamber of the U.N. General Assembly seems practical and wise. Let it begin with indirect national parliamentary elections of global representatives, with no more powers than to make non-binding recommendations as in the General Assembly. That would establish the principle of popular representation. The Global Parliament would have democratic legitimacy.

But there are signs of another step. I think that millions of people — if not billions — are ready to begin. They are the ones who already work in international businesses, who travel abroad eagerly, who serve in civil society organizations bringing aid to the poor and unfortunate, who are linked in the universal cause of science, who are engaged in scholarship and education that crosses borders, who care about the international news, who show extraordinary sympathy for the victims of continuing wars, who bring in refugees and the downtrodden, who as soldiers have been disillusioned with national use of force. These millions, if not yet billions, cherish the promise of human rights in all lands. They are ready to perform their duties as well as to enjoy their liberties under governments guaranteeing universal human rights.

The federal form of union is well established and available for the world. Historically, there have been some thirty national federations established since the United States of America, and Europe has taken its "first step" to what Robert Schuman called "a European federation" (1950). Britain established federations in some of its maturing colonies, notably Canada and Nigeria. The United States has done so recently in areas of its troubled interventions, as in Respublica Serbska and Iraq. But a world federal government would be humanity's greatest political revolution. It would be most prudently left to a gradual growth, punctuated by daring initiatives.

The historic world federalist movement was, as Tad Daley says, "brief but incandescent." When I was writing my book, one of its pleasures was discovering in the records very prominent people who recognized the logic of the idea. At the U.S. government level, Grenville Clark and Thomas K. Finletter were typical (Henry Stimson, too, in "unguarded" moments). Robert M. Hutchins and G.A. Borgese, among educators, were inspirational. The movement died before the working class under George Meany fully got the word. I discovered that the real difficulty for my book was that I was doing theology, more than history. World federation implies a revolution in our ideas of nationality, identity, standards of justice, the choice of the destiny of man. We can make a better world, but we must organize power (including military power) to establish permanent peace. That's why I took 25 years to write my history.

We may find instruction in reading the history — my book may help you while away a troubled summer — but I have concluded that we cannot go back to the movement of the 1940s (much less its continuation until the 2000s). As Lincoln said, "As our case is new, we must think anew. We must disenthrall ourselves." The appeal to fear (particularly fear of nuclear war) will not work. The national politicians (Truman and Stalin in the old days) will be much better placed to use public fears to maintain power diplomacy.

We need a positive vision of peace. People must see world federation as good government, belonging to them. It must bring collective powers together to solve our global problems, and at the same time be so guarded (as by checks and balances) to prevent its capture by self-serving elites and subversive minorities. We will need web sites, and blogs dealing with daily issues, and serious journals to rival Foreign Affairs, and books to challenge the Realists. Then we must build the popular organizations numbering 50,000,000, as Raymond Gram Swing predicted for UWF in 1947. A moment will come when we will need a world federalist political party, as Harris Wofford proposed before Henry Wallace formed the Progressive party.