

Book Reviews

A World Parliament: Governance and Democracy in the 21st Century

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“A World Parliament: Governance and Democracy in the 21st Century”, authored by Jo Leinen, MEP, and Andreas Bummel, director of UNPA Campaign, has been published by Democracy Without Borders on 11 April 2018. In 400 pages, the book describes the history, today’s relevance and future implementation of the idea of a democratic world parliament as centerpiece of a peaceful, just and sustainable world community. For the first time, there is a detailed account of the efforts for the creation of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly. As William Pace underlines, ‘In a time of dangerous and regressive political forces, Leinen and Bummel have given us an outstanding atlas of hope – and a roadmap for the survival of humanity and democracy.’

In the introduction, the authors declare that “The direct and complex interconnections mean that the actions of every individual, no matter how apparently insignificant,

impact on everyone else. Humanity, taken in aggregate, now shares a common fate. We have the means to destroy our highly developed human civilization.” And further on they remember the reader that “All people are part of a global community and if our civilization is to survive, all of mankind must unite”. The same conclusion emerging by the American disaster movie “Geostorm”, whose final quote is «One planet, one people. As long as we remember that we share one figure, we will survive.»

This book is the outcome of the authors’ longstanding concern with the topic of a world parliament and is based on intensive research work over many years. As they stated, it is not a neutral consideration of the issue, but rather a passionate plea. Bummel and Leinen are convinced of the necessity of a democratic world parliament. To write a neutral book was not their intention, nor would it even have been possible for them because in 2007 they were co-founders of the international campaign for a parliamentary assembly at the United Nations, which is now endorsed by thousands of politicians, former UN officials, distinguished scholars, cultural innovators, representatives of civil society organizations, and many committed citizens from over 150 countries.

The book is divided into 3 parts: past, present and future of the idea of a world parliament; “its history and pioneers”, “governance and democracy in the 21st century”, and “shaping the future: the design and realization of world democracy”.

In the first part, you can learn the first steps of the idea of a world parliament. “One of the founding principles on which the idea of a world parliament is based is that the entire Earth must be comprehended as the home of all human beings. The history of

cosmopolitanism is usually traced back to the Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope (ca. 400 to 323 BCE), who, when asked about his home city, is supposed to have answered that he was a *'kosmopolitês'* – a citizen of the world. Cosmopolitan thought is also found, and from very early on, beyond the cultural borders of ancient Greece, in India and in China. For example, in the collection of Old Tamil poetry *'Puranānūru'*, which is part of Sangam literature from the period between 100 BCE and the fifth century, it is said in a poem by Kaṇiyan Pūṅkunraṇ that 'every country is my country, every man is my kinsman'. The Hindu Upanishads, which are in part much older, and other ancient Indian Sanskrit texts contain the philosophical concept *'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'*, which in Sanskrit means 'the whole world is one family'. In the *'Book of Rites'*, one of the five classics of the Confucian canon, which are derived from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551 to 470 BCE), can be found the idea of the *'Great Unity'*, according to which the world should be shared equally and harmoniously by all.

Cosmopolitan thinking reached a highpoint in the philosophical work of Immanuel Kant. In the essay *'Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View'*, published in 1784, Kant outlined, following social contract theory, how world history was leading to 'the civic union of the human race' under a 'lawful constitution'. It is in Kant's philosophy that the idea of a world parliament is implied for the first time.

In the course of the Enlightenment, from the middle of the 18th century onwards, an 'unprecedented enthusiasm for cosmopolitanism' spread across Europe and North America, as Coulmas writes. Diogenes' claim that he was a citizen of the world became a programmatic statement of

the era, repeated by Thomas Paine, David Hume, Voltaire and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing among others. Benjamin Franklin, for example, expressed the idea in 1787 already that the new American federal constitution might function as a model for a 'federal union' in Europe.

It was an expression of the cosmopolitan revolutionary spirit of the time when, on 26 August 1792, the National Assembly awarded French citizenship to seventeen foreigners who had rendered outstanding service to the Revolution, including Jeremy Bentham, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Thomas Paine, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Schiller and George Washington. Among those honoured was Anacharsis Cloots, born in Kleve in Prussia but with Dutch family roots. Like Paine, Cloots lived in Paris, and had been an active member of the Jacobin Club since 1789. In September 1792, again like Paine, he was elected to the National Assembly, and was called on from time to time to help draft the Constitution. It is remarkable that Cloots, the first person to explicitly formulate the idea of a world parliament, was not a philosopher but a revolutionary.

Under the slogan *'Peace through arbitration'*, the *'Inter-Parliamentary Union'* was founded in 1889 in Paris, initially with the name *'inter-parliamentary conference on arbitration'*. It was the first international union of national parliamentary delegates. Very soon it was working on models for a standing international tribunal of arbitration. An early highpoint was the annual conference in Budapest in 1896, when 250 parliamentarians took part and approved proposals for submission to the European governments by the administrative office of the organization.

At the first Hague Peace Conference, it was

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agreed that a court of arbitration should be established for the voluntary resolution of international disputes, and the Hague Convention with respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land was issued. This document stipulates, among other things, that in the event of war, civilians and civilian establishments are to be spared to the greatest extent possible; and in an annex it forbids the use of chemical weapons. The court of arbitration is not a standing court for the judgement of cases, but an administrative bureaucracy which is available when needed to enable temporary tribunals or investigative commissions to be set up quickly and easily. Overall, the Hague Peace Conference and its outcome were judged a success by the inter-parliamentary movement. In the 1939 book 'Union Now', Clarence Streit, originally from the German Palatinate but an emigrant to the USA in 1911, bemoaned the lack of cooperation between the democratic countries, who in the international political sphere behaved like autocracies, and proposed a political union of democracies as a counterweight to the fascist dictatorships. This would begin with the USA, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland, and with the gradual accession of new members would ultimately grow to a universal world organization. Streit's book became a bestseller, translated into many languages, which gave new impetus to the idea of a supra-national federal union. In many free countries, new groups were established to press for the idea of supranational integration. In 1939, the organization 'Federal Union' was founded in the USA, with Streit as its chair; it advocated as a first step a union between the western democracies, and it is still active today under the name 'Streit Council for a Union of

Democracies'

The issue of federalism had long played an important role in some resistance movements. In Italy, there had been a tradition of federalist thinking since the First World War. In the '*Ventotene Manifesto*' of 1941 the Italian anti-fascists Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi set out the goal and ideal of a federal European state. They denounced the 'ideology of national independence' as the root of the formation of totalitarian states and the outbreak of wars. The principle of non-intervention as adopted by the League of Nations had proved absurd, leaving each nation 'free to choose the despotic government it thought best'. And they were already looking beyond Europe. 'Once the horizon of the Old Continent is passed beyond,' runs the text of the Manifesto, written during their imprisonment, 'and all the peoples who make up humanity embrace in a grand vision of their common participation, it will have to be recognized that the European Federation is the single conceivable guarantee that relationships with American and Asiatic peoples can exist on the basis of peace cooperation; this while awaiting a more distant future, when the political unity of the entire globe becomes a possibility.'

Looking ahead to the post-war order, the founder of the Ford Motor Company, Henry Ford, called for the creation of a world parliament directly elected by worldwide vote 'to put the world on a peace basis'.

Twenty prominent figures, including the Nobel Prize winners Albert Einstein and Thomas Mann, the philosopher and author Mortimer J. Adler, the former US Supreme Court Judge Owen J. Roberts and US Senator William Fulbright, published a joint statement on 10 October 1945 making the same point. 'The first atomic bomb destroyed more than the city of Hiroshima,' they wrote. 'It

also exploded our inherited, outdated political ideas.' Since the San Francisco Charter upheld the absolute sovereignty of rival nation states, it was similar in spirit to the Articles of Confederation of the thirteen original American republics. 'How long will the United Nations Charter endure? With luck, a generation? A century?', they asked. But it was not enough to rely on luck. 'We must aim at a Federal Constitution of the world, a working world-wide legal order, if we hope to prevent an atomic war.'

After a long and articulate overview on the evolution of the idea of a world parliament, in the final chapter the authors tried to show that global democracy is not only necessary but possible. But it will not come about by itself, but only as a result of a global movement's political action. The process of structural transformation into a world democracy will take a long time. Meanwhile there are countless acute problems that require

immediate attention. Nevertheless, it would be a fatal error – Bummel and Leinen underline – not to put our energies into the necessary long-term transformation for that reason. Short-term thinking will not bring about an evolutionary leap forward, and will lead us further down a blind alley. A fulfilling future for humankind in harmony with nature is possible. Humankind will finally be able to develop and deploy to the full creativity and energy, and in a productive way, for the optimal benefit of all people and of all life on earth. This dream can become reality. It must become reality – the authors stress –, if humankind is to have a future.

Concluding we can say that this book is an extraordinary and valuable contribution to push activists and scholars of international democracy to work for implementing a global democratic constitution able to manage the big issues facing humanity, such as war, climate change, poverty, injustice, migration, terrorism and rule of law.

