

The decentralist logic for a "Global Constitution Forum"

by John Ewbank

It may be that wisdom does not necessarily come with increasing years, but at age 89 I am more convinced than ever that Democracy is measured strictly on the basis of bona fide freedom at the grass roots. The choices available to ordinary people in many beneficent monarchies have been greater than in some countries featuring a bipartisan monopoly for the election of a national President. Whether there are elections, or not, is almost irrelevant with respect to grass roots freedom.

The establishment in our country has promoted the myth that any nation having any kind of an election is a democracy. That is a truly dangerous myth. Today, millions in such "democracies" meekly submit to fascism comparable to Hitler's, who for the record was also elected, and who had a number of subsequent elections to confirm his increasing power.

A government may enforce laws on individuals who happen to be within the geographical boundaries of its jurisdiction. This type of governance is a special case: "governance" in the root sense derives from the concept of steering a ship. It involves submission to a set of rules based upon voluntary membership in a group, such as a ship's crew, a church, lodge, party, or even an international Treaty Organization...from any of which secession is always an alternative. In the voluntary model, authority derives upward from sovereign individuals, united by common interests, who are members by choice.

The sovereignty of individual members works best when human distance between authority at the top and sovereignty at the bottom is minimized. Consequently, decentralist governance—where rules are made and enforced at the closest practical remove from the sovereign individual members—is likely to maximize individual freedom and enthusiasm for the government.

Extending this principle up through increasingly larger political jurisdictions, from local, to county, to state, to national, we finally come to the global arena where no effective governance now holds sway. Holding to our principle of minimizing the separation between the sovereign individuals and the governing authority, we would have to vigorously oppose any "federalization" of the UN, for that would institutionalize intervening layers of authority and complexity.

Instead of trying to force the UN into a mold alien to its current nature, what would seem most practical is a "supplemental federation," with a set of authorities limited to those where global scope is essential, which could co-exist with the existing system of national governments and international treaties. Whatever the treaty system has managed satisfactorily up to this point can remain as is. But there are various problem areas where the treaty system has obviously failed to function adequately, and where jurisdiction rooted in sovereign individuals is needed, such as

global-scope problems with terrorism, monetarism, the oceans, the atmosphere, biodiversity, etc.

Powerful nations such as the USA can be expected to behave in a reasonable manner with respect to foreign affairs under such a supplemental global system because they would cede it responsibility for the most difficult problems that overlap national jurisdictions. But so long as only the treaty system prevails, it is likely that the USA, with the most capable military force, will continue to try to impose its own solutions to such problems on other nations. With no better way to solve global-in-scope problems, powerful nations will continue to have reprehensible foreign policies, simply because international governance deriving from treaties and coalitions inherently violates the decentralist principle.

It is a regrettable fact that US foreign policy –manifested by our military actions and by our unrelenting support for the sometimes rapacious international corporatocracy– since the end of the cold war has sewn strong hatred for us in many parts of the world. Consequently, if the US government were in any way to take the initiative in promoting a "Supplemental Global Federation" it would be the "kiss of death" for any such movement. Being strictly practical about how to proceed, we should favor an approach where less dominant nations can go ahead, one by one, and ratify a charter for a supplemental global authority. When a dozen or so nations have taken the plunge, then persuading the USA to also ratify it will be free from any "kiss of death" risk.

Looking back at the history of the "world federalist" movement, over 65 years, my fellow Yankee federalists have persistently and consistently espoused hopeless strategies, generally trying to lure global thinkers into embracing a concept of world federation that would displace nationalism. There is no need to do this; in fact, displacing legitimate national authority runs counter to the principle of decentralist governance. What we need to do if we want to be practical is to encourage activism to promote the concept of solving out-of-control global issues such as terrorism by chartering a Supplemental Global Federation. Other issues that logically lend themselves to solution at the global level will follow once the Global Constitution chartering process reaches the fine-tuning stage. But our first step is to ignite an activist movement, and that is what this Global Constitution Forum is all about.