

Constitutional Common Sense at the Global Level

by John Ewbank

Government is a necessary evil. World government will be more hazardous than other levels of government because of the difficulty dissidents would have escaping its jurisdiction, of finding anyplace to hide. But in this age of the cell phone, the internet, the jet plane, the communications satellite, economic globalization, global warming, biodiversity collapse, unending wars and genocide, it is clear we need some kind of authority at the global level to handle these problems that are truly global in scope.

Many of us ordinary citizens who have tried to influence the legislative process in Washington have come away feeling powerless to compete with the moneyed establishments that manipulate our politicians. If we at the grass roots are ever going to succeed in establishing a World Federation, we need to learn hard lessons from this futility, this powerlessness that has overcome us in a nation that we proudly called "the land of the free". The proposals that follow are ideas for

a global federal parliament whose constituents at the grass roots will be more likely to feel like "participants," and less like futile pawns.

Flexibility

Back in the '30s our legislators in Washington imposed regulations to control the type of "scoundrels" who were deemed responsible for the great depression; commercial banks, savings and loans, and the securities industry in particular were tightly constrained. But within about 50 years, most of those constraints were cast off by intense lobbying from a new breed of corporate plutocrat, who now bend Washington to their needs. Recognizing that all such attempts at regulation are little more than time-limited experiments, likely to require replacement by further experimentation in the future; a global constitution should build in the ideal of flexibility, just as William Penn's Charter of Liberties built in the ideal of religious freedom. Constant experimentation is needed for seeking wise

management. In general, the imposition of downward authority should be constitutionally experimental, with the recognition that due to changes in technology, in society, and in the regulated themselves, all rules are likely to need modifications, or to be cast off in favor of completely new guidelines. Again and again, our human experience has been that problems have arisen because politicians sought to impose uniformity on diversity, or fixed rules where conditions were evolving.

Term Limits

To minimize the influence of money, lobbyists, and opinion polls -- all of which leverage on a legislator's ambition to be re-elected -- a delegate should serve for a single term only. Ten years, for example, might be a good choice for the term: long enough for that delegate to mature to the peak of his/her natural ability, but short enough to prevent a dominant personality from gaining excessive power. If elections were held every 2 years, with 1/5 of the delegates being replaced at each election, a proper mix from freshmen to senior members would always be assured.

Disentangling Deliberations from the Public Eye

Distancing mass media from close scrutiny of a global parliament would encourage delegates to do their business without posturing or making speeches for the cameras. A ban on roll-call voting would eliminate performance scoring by the press and lobby organizations, a practice that encourages sham votes by legislators who seek to manipulate their scores. This is not to say legislative proceedings should be entirely hidden from the public eye. But the same kind of restrictions, say, that we are used to in courtrooms would definitely help raise the level of integrity.

Multi-Chambered

The failures of the UN, and its predecessors have suggested that nations will never agree upon any formula for allocating a fair share of the vote to each nation. Recognizing the difficulty of hitting upon a system of parliamentary representation that would find universal acceptance, perhaps the best solution would be to have a variety of different parliamentary chambers, each with its own constituency or specialized

character. Suggestions for a number of constituency categories are set forth below. Once we start down this path we may find benefits in proposing that each such chamber might take on certain specialized tasks, appropriate to its constituency. Thus, for example, legislation for the elderly would always originate in the "Elders Chamber."

Different Methods of Selection used for Different Chambers

Elections might be a suitable method for certain chambers, but inevitably any chamber selected by popular election is going to have a bias toward selecting those who are best at manipulating the mass media. Elections are not the only way to achieve representation. Here is a list of other methods, and if there were a variety of chambers, perhaps all of them could be used: by election, in which voting is restricted to members of a particular constituency; by lottery - from tickets sold with the secondary purpose of raising funds; or, by lottery - from qualified lists of candidates; or, by volunteers, from qualified lists of invitees; or, by

appointment from regional or national jurisdictions, which is method used by the UN General Assembly.

Qualification Exams

Candidates for the certain chambers of the global parliament might be required to pass a battery tests appropriate to the particular chamber. For example, a global knowledge test would be appropriate for a chamber selected "at-large," where each delegate represents the population of the entire planet. Recognizing that the long-range tendency would be to dumb-down any such test, the best way to ensure its continuing effectiveness would be to make it a competitive examination, set up so only a top quartile, or quintile would pass. Such tests have been used to screen candidates for civil service jobs in many countries, going back to ancient times. It only makes sense to apply the same kind of screening to ensure that delegates for certain chambers would be well informed and qualified.

Elders Chamber

This would probably be an "at-large" chamber. A roster would be maintained of all humans 75 years or older. Then a lottery would be applied to the Roster to identify a list of "invitees". Pure luck would be involved in securing an invitation, so that it would not in any way be prestigious. If an elder were invited, he or she would be obliged to "RSVP" within a specified period of time, whether to "accept with pleasure," or "regret the pleasure". Hence all participants in the Elders Chamber would be "volunteers."

Other Age Related Chambers

Looking beyond the well proven value of a council of elders, younger people also should have a role in the global parliament. There might be chambers based upon age, such as a youth chamber for age 15-30; a young adults chamber for age 30-50; and an older adults chamber for those 50-75. As with the "elders" chamber, these other age related ones would logically be constituted "at-large", with each delegate representing that age cohort for the whole planet.

Affluent chamber

One chamber might consist of affluent individuals, having some set minimum net worth, set say at ten million to start, and kept up-to-date in the future by a price index inflator. In order to avoid money-propelled PR oriented campaigns by the candidates, such a chamber might benefit by being chosen by lottery rather than by election. A funds-raising lottery would add a little spice to the affair, say by selling tickets at one million dollars apiece?