



PROMOTING LEADERSHIP IN THOUGHT
THAT LEADS TO ACTION

THE WEALTH OF NATIONS REVISITED

CADMUS

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The CADMUS Journal

The acronym of the South-East European Division of The World Academy of Art and Science – SEED – prompted us to initiate a journal devoted to seed ideas - to leadership in thought that leads to action. Cadmus (or Kadmos in Greek and Phoenician mythology) was a son of King Agenor and Queen Telephassa of Tyre, and brother of Cilix, Phoenix and Europa. Cadmus is credited with introducing the original alphabet – the Phoenician alphabet, with “the invention” of agriculture, and with founding the city of Thebes. His marriage with Harmonia represents the symbolic coupling of Eastern learning and Western love of beauty. The youngest son of Cadmus and Harmonia is Illyrius. The city of Zagreb, which is the formal seat of SEED, was once a part of Illyria, a region including what is today referred to as the Western Balkans and even more. Cadmus will be a journal for fresh thinking and new perspectives that integrate knowledge from all fields of science, art and humanities to address real-life issues, inform policy and decision-making, and enhance our collective response to the challenges and opportunities facing the world today.

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Via della Torretta, 10 - 34121 Trieste - Italy / 53 route de Malagnou - 1208 Geneva - Switzerland

Editorial Office: 5, Pudukuvai Sivam St., Venkata Nagar - Pondicherry 605011 - India

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E-mail:

editor@cadmusjournal.org

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Towards a Global Democratic Revolution A Global Parliament and the Transformation of the World Order

Andreas Bummel,

Chair, Committee for a Democratic U.N., Berlin, Germany.

1. The Limits of National Democratization

The peaceful mass protests of millions of Egyptians that toppled the repressive and corrupt presidency of Hosni Mubarak in the course of 18 days and the ouster of Tunisia's President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali after massive civil resistance might turn out to mark an important milestone in the expansion of democracy in the world.* Over the last ten years the strong trend towards democratization that followed the end of the Cold War slowed down and at last it seemed that it might even reverse. In the five years from 1989 to 1994, the share of democracies in the world as counted by Freedom House in Washington D.C. jumped from around 40 to 60 percent. In 2005 and 2006, the share peaked at around 65 percent and then declined continuously until last year, back to the level of 1994.¹

International polls, however, have shown unabatedly strong popular support for democracy in all world regions, including, for example, an average of around 80 percent of respondents in the Middle East.² In fact, democracy is now almost universally recognized as the only legitimate form of government. Even the most autocratic regimes are required to maintain at least a democratic façade. The revolts in Tunisia and Egypt inspire protesters and advocates of democracy in autocratically ruled countries and might trigger a domino effect. A successful democratic transition in Egypt, achieved by a democratic mass movement, would constitute a watershed in the region and beyond. This is at least the hope that lies behind comparisons with the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989.

The revolt in Egypt is also an inspiration for all those who advocate a more democratic world order and the creation of a world parliament. The protesters in Egypt had enough of being condemned to being passive subjects that had no say in the affairs of their country. Many people have a similar feeling with regard to international affairs. Citizens are excluded from international decision-making as this takes place exclusively between government executives. At the same time, more and more subjects are negotiated and decided upon at the international level, for example the future of the global financial system or climate change mitigation. Globally integrated economic and financial markets and climate change have made the idea of democratic national self-determination obsolete. It is impossible, for instance, to escape from the impacts of rising food prices that result from the international commodity markets.

* This article reflects events up to February 15, 2011

What at first glance seems like a loss of autonomy is at least in parts a method of governments to protect their agenda against societal interference and to weaken democratic accountability. As Klaus Dieter Wolf argues, “Intergovernmental governance offers states the opportunity of making mutual self-commitments of a kind that can remove certain issues from societal debate and also from any possible revision”.³ The political agenda-setting of the informal G-20 process is an example; another recent one is the so-called Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) that has been negotiated over years in secrecy. National parliaments, except maybe the U.S. Congress, normally have no alternative than to accept unconditionally what governments have negotiated amongst themselves. From this perspective, the stark contrast between the alleged support of democratization in the world and the almost complete lack of action to democratize the international system is no surprise.

2. Transnational Democratization

Those who are engaged in building democracy in their countries and who are animated with a fresh spirit like in Egypt will have to ask themselves: What purpose does it have to build a democratic nation if it is embedded into an undemocratic and non-transparent international system? In a globalized world the confinement of democratic participation of citizens to the institutions of the nation-state is almost equivalent to disenfranchisement. True democratic emancipation cannot stop at national borders. As former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali explained, “Democracy within the state will diminish in importance if the process of democratization is not extended to the system of international governance as well... This project includes the task of giving the world’s citizens a more direct say in global affairs. A direct link between global institutions and the people on the spot needs to be established.”⁴

In fact, there is another aspect of democratization that has not attracted much attention so far but which is no less extraordinary. There is a forceful and increasing trend towards stronger interaction of elected representatives across national borders and towards the creation of formal mechanisms for their inclusion into intergovernmental organizations. According to a recent study by Claudia Kissling, more than 100 international parliamentary institutions exist today, around 70 of which have been established since 1999.⁵ Most important are the formal parliamentary organs of international organizations such as the European Parliament, the Pan-African Parliament, the Parlamento del Mercosur or the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

This trend confirms the need and the merits of complementing intergovernmental cooperation with parliamentary representation. However, the trend has not yet reached global intergovernmental organizations. Neither the United Nations (UN) nor any of its numerous specialized agencies and programs, nor the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank Group possesses a formal parliamentary body, not even in an advisory capacity. This flaw is one of the main sources of the democratic deficit of global governance.

3. A Global Parliamentary Assembly

The existence of numerous regional parliamentary institutions makes it difficult to argue that in principle it would not be possible to create a global parliamentary assembly (GPA) that represents the world’s citizens at the UN, the WTO or the international financial institutions.

Although for tactical and practical reasons it might be useful that such a body initially be created with limited scope as a consultative body of the UN General Assembly or as part of another organization of the UN system, the aim is that it eventually would be formally related to all major intergovernmental institutions that shape international governance. Permanent Committees, Sub-Committees and non-permanent Inquiry Committees set up by the assembly could deal with specific issues and become related to specific bodies and organizations. Committees could interact on cross-cutting themes and coordinate different approaches. At less frequent plenary meetings the outcomes of the Committees' work could be combined and adopted. As a parliamentary umbrella of global governance, a GPA could help to overcome the fragmentation of the international system and international law. Although the body proposed here is widely known and advocated as a UN Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA), using the term GPA fits better to stress this overarching approach.

A GPA should not be conceived as a mere extrapolation of the institution of parliament as it is known at the national level. It should rather be designed as a formally established and central platform for global deliberation that allows civil society to participate in its work. The assembly's Committees for instance could act as platforms for broad deliberation and should allow for participation of experts and civil society representatives.

In contrast with intergovernmental bodies such as the UN General Assembly, where appointed diplomats pursue their business, the voting members of a GPA would be elected representatives. Initially, the members could be elected by national parliaments, as in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In the long run, however, they should be directly elected as it is the case in the European Parliament since 1979.

The maximum number probably lies somewhere between 700 and 800 delegates. The assembly could emerge gradually from a much smaller structure. The Global Public Policy Committees suggested in the report of the panel on UN-Civil Society Relations in 2004⁶ or the Global Parliamentary Group "which should develop an integrated oversight of major international organizations of the UN system, the Bretton Woods Institutions and the WTO" proposed by the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization in the same year⁷ could constitute a good starting point.

Population size is generally considered to be a main factor in order to determine the number of members elected per country. At some ideal point in the distant future, every human being should have an equal weight, regardless of the country of origin. In the meantime, a pragmatic system of degressive proportionality needs to be devised that ensures a balance between small and large countries, from China with 1.3 billion inhabitants to Tuvalu with 13,000. Some models developed by the Committee for a Democratic U.N. show that this should be possible.⁸

4. Transforming International Governance

International opinion research carried out over the last decade shows that most people around the world support an international order that is based on international law. Steven Kull points out that "Majorities in most countries believe that international laws create normative obligations like domestic law and reject the view that nations should not feel obliged to abide by international law when doing so is at odds with their national interest."⁹ Whether

compliance with international law, climate change mitigation, enforcement of human rights, support of democracy, nuclear disarmament or strengthening of the United Nations, large majorities of the people all over the world endorse these goals. The citizenry as a whole is much more receptive to global cooperation than national governments. According to Steve Kull, a survey covering 46 countries found that an average of 72 percent also saw themselves as global citizens. In fact, a poll conducted in 19 countries in 2005 established that an average of 63 percent of respondents endorsed “a new UN Parliament, made up of representatives directly elected by citizens.”¹⁰ Yet, only a single government so far has expressed support.

That’s no surprise. As a GPA would be composed of elected representatives that are accountable to their constituents, it would probably tend to be closer to their views than to those of national governments. Its very purpose would be to take a global view and to consider the interest of humanity as a whole instead of narrow national interests. Once a large portion of delegates is directly elected, the assembly would be vested with unprecedented political legitimacy. Through a GPA the world’s citizenry could express itself as sovereign global authority.

While a GPA or UNPA at the beginning could be vested with largely consultative functions, its powers would expand gradually. Eventually it could become a key institution in a global legislative system. As former Czech President Vaclav Havel suggested in a speech at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, global legislation could be carried out by a bicameral system consisting of an assembly “resembling the present plenary, and the other consisting of a group elected directly by the globe’s population in which the number of delegates representing individual nations would, thus, roughly correspond to the size of the nations.”¹¹

Of course a GPA would only be a part of a much more complex and comprehensive process of transforming the international order into an effective system of democratic global governance. However, its creation may well be the most important single step as it could act as a center of gravity for further change. Such a center is missing. At the global scale, civil society lacks the structure, resources, persistence and coherence to maintain such a center over a long course of time. The permanent NGO forum that was vividly discussed in the 1990s, for example, never came about.

Over the last ten, twenty years, an abundance of high-level panels, expert commissions, policy groups and other initiatives has been producing an endless stream of smart reports on UN reform, the Millennium Development Goals and the need for global governance. No major reforms have been carried out. But without a transformation of the system as such, fundamentally different policies will not be viable at the global level. A GPA is needed to drive the process of world order reforms. No other player is in sight that is capable to do so.

Independent oversight exercised by a democratic body such as a GPA is an indispensable precondition for any sort of global taxation or standing UN peacekeeping forces. Without a GPA, any substantial strengthening of today’s intergovernmental system would only exacerbate the crisis of democracy and global governance.

5. Conclusion

Without doubt, humanity has entered into a new epoch. We are witnessing changes that are frequently compared with the “Gutenberg” revolution. The invention and dissemination

of mechanical printing in the 15th century were a decisive catalyst for societal change which eventually set off the age of enlightenment. The feudal order was swept away by a growing national consciousness of the population, culminating in the French Revolution of 1789 at which the notion of the modern nation state emerged in the Old World.

Similar to the feudal lords in the past, nation states today are also confronted with a changing consciousness. The technological revolution of the last three decades in communications, transportation, information technology and media is having an impact on many peoples and their world views. As Abhay K. commented recently, the invention of the internet and the mass availability of internet-connected mobile phones pave the way for planetary consciousness and global democracy.¹²

A GPA would not only be the result of the momentous change ahead. Quite the contrary, it is probably required as a catalyst for the new global enlightenment. After all, the assembly would be the first institution in human history that creates a direct link between every single human being and the planet, without any intermediary. It would embody the idea that every human being is a responsible member of the global community and not a passive subject of an impenetrable global apparatus, whether its name is G-8, G-20, WTO or IMF.

The struggle for a GPA is not only about shifting power in the international system in favor of the global sovereign, the people. It is also an intellectual struggle.

Addendum

*Creation of a world parliament suggested at World Social Forum*¹³

The establishment of a world parliament elected by the world's population was proposed at an event at the World Social Forum in Dakar, Senegal. "A democratic and representative world parliament would be an institution with unprecedented political legitimacy. It is needed to bring globalization under democratic control", explained Jo Leinen, one of the speakers at the event and a Member of the European Parliament from Germany who co-chairs the advisory board of the international Campaign for a UN Parliamentary Assembly. "It is neither possible nor desirable to reverse globalization. But those institutions that control the process to a large degree such as the World Trade Organization or the international financial institutions exclude the citizens of the world from their decision-making. This is no longer acceptable", Mr. Leinen continued.

"The people of the world want to have a say in the affairs that affect them. As more and more important decisions are taken at the global level, this aspiration cannot stop at national borders. Global democratic representation is needed. The goal is to create a directly elected assembly", said Manuel Manonelles, director of UBUNTU-World Forum of Civil Society Networks.

The Senegalese representative of the Campaign for a UN Parliamentary Assembly, Mamadou Ibrahimia Fall, elaborated on the campaign's proposal. "We suggest a gradual approach. Initially, the assembly could be composed of representatives from national and regional parliaments. Over time, a transition to direct elections could take place. Its powers in the international system could be extended gradually as well. At the beginning, the function could be largely consultative."

Coura Ndiaye, an advisor at the Economic and Social Council of the Consultative

Assembly of Senegal expressed how important the activities of civil society are to give initiatives but that a Parliament is necessary to take decisions.

Several participants from Uganda, Sierra Leone, Benin, Great Britain, Norway stressed the importance of building up democratic representation at a global level. It was felt that a more direct connection between the world's peoples and global institutions is needed. The proposal of a UNPA received much applause and support.

The World Social Forum is a major global meeting place of social activists and movements that promote solidarity, democracy and a fairer world. It is considered as a grassroots counter-event to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, at which the global elite of the political, financial and economic world come together on an annual basis.

Notes

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Those who are engaged in building democracy in their countries and who are animated with a fresh spirit like in Egypt will have to ask themselves: What purpose does building a democratic nation have if it is embedded into an undemocratic and non-transparent international system? In a globalized world the confinement of democratic participation of citizens to the institutions of the nation-state is almost equivalent to disenfranchisement. True democratic emancipation cannot stop at national borders.

Andreas Bummel, Chair, Committee for a Democratic UN

Politics is the whole of which economics is a part and employment is a small part of the wider domain of economic life. Ushering in a global government generates the power of solving these minor problems. Government is the context that activates the politician. Politicians can cure the ills created by economists. A wider vision of economics solves the problems created by narrow inspiration.

T. Natarajan, President, The Mother's Service Society

The role of labour is crucial for the social cohesion and stability it provides. Threats to financial stability do not exclusively emanate out of capital markets. As the unrest in several Arab countries demonstrate yet again, without social stability there can be no financial stability.

Patrick Leidtke, Director, Geneva Association

Economic thinking is still very largely related to traditional Cartesian (and Newtonian) concepts of science. The notion of equilibrium is not really a concept or an explanation, but rather a tautology, which has been given the value or status of an axiom. Understanding this notion of equilibrium, where supply is equal to demand, is essential because it explains why economic theory has from the beginning always tended to be one-sided...Once we enter real time, uncertainty and disequilibrium become the reference criteria of reality. Introducing the notion of real time into the economics of supply and demand (in modern terms, service based production and consumption) is a radical alternative to the view of the economic process as being based on timeless (instant) equilibrium.

Orio Giarini, Director, The Risk Institute

According to Roosevelt, "necessitous men are not free." The narrow conception of individual freedom founded on private property rights advocated by neoliberalism neglects a much wider, more humane conception of social democracy, freedom from want and human security affirmed by the New Deal, the Atlantic Charter and the UN Charter.

Winston Nagan, Director, Inst. for Human Rights, Peace & Development

A human-centered theory of economy and employment needs to be founded on the realization that human beings – not impersonal principles, market mechanisms, money or technology – are the driving force and central determinants of economic development.

Garry Jacobs & Ivo Šlaus, World Academy of Art & Science Global Employment Project

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Inside This Issue

Our world is headed into a Perfect Storm of an interconnected financial, ecological and social crisis. Almost all forward-looking assessments demonstrate that business as usual and incremental improvements will not be sufficient to take us to a future world blessed by equitable prosperity, safety, security and contentment.

Ian Johnson,
Secretary General of the Club of Rome

The three organizations – WAAS, Club of Rome and the Pugwash Movement – should sincerely join forces and act together, so that we can fully utilize use our collective experience, intellectual capacity and foresight. Together, we will have a much stronger voice to get our good messages out to the world and be listened to by policy makers, parliaments, governments, academics and all societies in general, in both the industrialized and developing economies.

Heitor Gurgulino de Souza,
Former Rector of United Nations University

Decisions on our common future should no longer rest solely on world leaders, who can evade or even obstruct meaningful change. A simultaneous electronic ballot on saving bios is a brilliant opportunity to demonstrate that, as citizens of the world, we can all agree on safeguarding the Earth for the generations to come. By giving priority to individual voices to be heard, the World Referendum can elicit the personal involvement of every citizen in the race to save the environment and help to bridge the gap between the rich and poor.

Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis,
President, Biopolitics International

The greatest global challenge that faces the international community today is that of the current trans-national revolution in human affairs, which in turn is triggered by the combination of three revolutions: a revolution of rising expectations, the information and communications revolution, and a broader industrial-technological revolution.

Jasjit Singh,
Director, Centre for Air Power Strategy

Continued . . .