

Globalization and a World Parliament

1. The Political Dimension of Globalization and the Decline of the Sovereign State

Globalization is the word which is on everyone's lips and is arousing the disquiet that comes from the prospect of deep and inevitable change. It is the word most commonly used to designate the new era that humankind has entered as a consequence of the revolution in production, communication, information and transportation technologies.

Globalization has been studied primarily as an economic process, while its political dimension has been largely neglected. The fact that the market has become global while governments have remained national is a contradiction that highlights the most significant change brought about by globalization. In other words, globalization has produced a shift of the borders between civil society and state. This means that it has opened a new space to civil society, that is that pre-political area of social life which is the ground where individual interests assert themselves and clash, but which does not produce those mediating mechanisms between interests from which the need originates to promote the common weal. Therefore, private centers of power such as multinational corporations, non governmental organizations or criminal organizations have taken a global size and acquired an increasing freedom of action with regard to the regulating power of states.

Here lies the root of the decline of the sovereign state, that will be overcome only through the establishment of new forms of statehood at world level. This is the condition that will allow to restore the pre-eminence of politics toward global civil society.

2. The Response of Governments: International Organization

The response of governments to globalization has been to pursue international co-operation, not because it is their inclination, but because they have no other choice. The expansion of the phenomenon of international organization shows the way governments are going along to seek a solution to problems they cannot solve alone.

The weakness of international organizations lies in their decision-making procedures, that are based on the principles of unanimity and veto, and in the lack of executive powers. The most widespread definition of this way of managing globalization is the expression *global governance*. This is a formula that justifies the established world order, which is based on the principle of national sovereignty and on the dominance of multinational corporations in the world market and of the United States in world politics.

It is a formula that hides the illusion that a solution to the main international issues can be based on a mutual consent among sovereign states. Federalism is the antithesis of the internationalist approach. Its strength lies in the alternative goals of world government and international democracy. However distant and though they can be pursued gradually, these goals are the answer to the need to control globalization and to start the process of establishing peace among nations through law.

3. The Decline of Democracy

When sovereign states decline, there is a parallel decline in democracy. The sharpest contradiction of our age lies in the fact that the problems on which the destiny of peoples depends, such as those of security, control of global economy, international justice or protection of the environment, have assumed international dimensions, where democratic institutions do not exist, while democracy still stops at state borders. In consequence, democratic institutions, having lost control of strategic decisions, confine themselves to govern secondary aspects of political life. The peoples are excluded from control of the questions which determine their future. In substance, we must face problems of global dimension, on which our destiny depends, while the world is still divided into independent sovereign states. The feeling widely shared by many citizens is that the most important decisions have migrated from the institutions they can control toward international centers of power, which are not submitted to any form of democratic control.

In conclusion, the decline of democracy has two aspects. On the one hand, national governments are unable to submit globalization to democratic control. On the other hand, the democratic deficit prevents international organizations from being something more than the place where sovereign states co-operate to solve global issues. It is a contradiction that can only be overcome through international democracy, i.e. through the extension of democracy to state relations.

4. The Process of Democratization in the World

The most revolutionary objective of our age is the democratization of the United Nations, which would allow the government of the world to be removed from the control of the big powers and the other private centers of power, like multinational corporations, and put in the hands of all the peoples of the world. Of course, it is a long term objective that can only be achieved gradually.

The democratization of the UN no longer appears a distant ultimate goal after the recent extraordinary advance of democracy in Eastern Europe, ex-Soviet Union, Asia and Latin America. Today, for the first time in history, over half of the countries of the world (120 according to the last Report of the Freedom House) have adopted a democratic form of government. Since the fall of fascist and communist regimes it seems that democracy has defeated all its alternatives. But the vacuum of power left by the fall of the blocs has opened the way to the revival of nationalism, that has triggered off a series of processes of disintegration of international organizations and multinational states and is threatening the new born democracies.

5. The Need for International Democracy

Democracy, precisely because it is fragmented among many national states, too small to assure the economic development and torn apart by international conflicts, is not the strong enough to prevent the authoritarian degeneration of its institutions. Only international democracy can submit international relations, which are still the ground of diplomatic and military clash among nations, to popular control. As a matter of fact, democracy and independence can be reconciled only within the framework of federal institutions that must be created both at regional and world level.

The European Parliament is the laboratory of international democracy. After its direct election it has increased its legislative powers and control powers over the Commission, understood as the potential European government. This means that the democratisation of the European Union has been a mighty tool for strengthening European institutions. It is worth recalling that the dilemma that arose during the process of European integration of strengthening first or democratizing first the European Community has been solved in favour of the second horn. The same hypothesis can be formulated as regards the problem of the democratisation of the UN.

6. The Decline of the Political Parties

The great revolutionary transformations marking the milestones of mankind's progress in history, have never been promoted by the established powers. These powers try to rule the new course of events with old ideological schemes and with old institutions. Revolutionary change, which creates new institutions and higher forms of political coexistence, has always been the result of the storming into the political scene of new social forces. These forces provide a vehicle for new cultures, new values and new political institutions. While the political parties have lost their attraction force and their former capability for mobilization, no longer succeeding in motivating commitment from young people, all over the world a non-governmental movement has grown. This expresses itself outside traditional channels of political representation and is a manifestation of a new dimension of political participation. It operates at all levels of political life (but more efficiently in local communities and at international level, where the limits of the established powers are more serious) in the sectors of peace, human rights, international justice, aid to development, environment, cultural goods, education, health and so on.

The decline of political parties is a consequence of the crisis of the sovereign state. Faced with the globalization of social, economic and political life, national power offers an observation-post that obscures reality as it is and prevents the mastering of it. Political parties are prisoners of the national states: like boats in a stormy sea, they find themselves in the trough of the wave, where they cannot see the horizon. Directed by powerless leaders, they depart from the real problems of humankind. Choked inside the tight limits of national states, the political decision-making loses any meaningful relation with real processes. Here lies the main root of the decadence of the moral and intellectual quality of the ruling class. When, in the debate among political parties, the great goals, those which make it possible to think of the future, are gone, politics deteriorates progressively in a mere power game which keeps at a distance the most dynamic and vital energies in society. The political parties represent for this reason politics without a future.

7. The Rise of the Global Civil Society Movements

On the other hand, the global civil society movements have tried to strengthen their influence over international politics. Wherever an international summit meeting gathers, a demonstration of the anti-globalization movement is expected. These are citizens who protest against being excluded from representation within international organizations and pretend to have a say in international affairs. They are the most genuine manifestation of the world unification movement and of the necessity, largely felt by young people, to deal with the great dramas of mankind. They are at present a varied mass of small and large groups, linked by a common situation (globalization). It is a movement dragged by the current leading toward world unification, but lacking the instruments to rule this process. It is not yet aware of its institutional objectives, nor has it worked out a political strategy. It represents the future without politics.

Two different positions can be distinguished. Some NGOs have taken on the role of opposing international organizations and globalization itself, often resorting to violence, and consider the international organizations as irreformable. Other NGOs are integrated in the state system, are recognized by international organizations and behave

according to a reformist attitude of mind. They participate in international conferences in an advisory capacity and exert real influence on negotiations.

The limit of these movements lies in that they have a sectorial perspective: each movement deals with one single problem. But to the extent that they interpret new needs and are the protagonists of a process tending to redefine actors and roles of political life, we can formulate the hypothesis that they can become the vanguard of international democracy.

8. Domestic and International Democracy

Is it true that the process of democratization of the domestic order of states must be accomplished before we are able to start an action for the creation of a World Parliament? As was pointed out by Kant in his treatise on *Perpetual Peace*, the first condition for the formation of a World Federation is that the member states have a republican regime. In other words, without domestic democracy, an essential pre-requisite of international democracy is lacking.

But the fact that the process of democratization of state regimes all over the world has not been completed does not represent an obstacle to start the process of democratization of the UN. If, in the logic of causal sequence, the democratization of the different states has to precede the democratization of the UN, in history these processes overlap.

The six Western European countries that have founded the European Community did not wait for the democratization of the institutions of all the states of Europe before starting the democratization of the European Community. The completion of the European unification and the democratic transformation of its institutions has become possible today, because a small group of states started the process of construction of the European unity fifty years ago.

9. The European Federation: the Leading Country of International Democracy

There is no concealing the fact that the plan to bring globalization under democratic control is meeting with formidable opposition not only on the part of the authoritarian regimes, but primarily on the part of the government of the United States, which will not let its power be lessened by the international organizations that it belong to, nor by movement arising in the global civil society. This shows that, to be a promoter of international democracy, it is not enough to have a democratic regime. The United States has so heavy world strategic commitments that it is unable to promote that design. To defeat the opposition of the United States, a center of power must emerge with the capability of supporting the plan for a world democratic order. It is reasonable to believe that Europe will play such a role. The significance of the European unification lies in the overcoming of the nation-state, a form of political organization that develops strength relations with the other states. Therefore it is fairly safe to assume that the European Union does not have, and in the future the European Federation will not have, hegemonic ambitions. On the other hand, Europe will hold sufficient power to relieve the United States of some of its overwhelming world responsibilities and thus have the authority to persuade it to support the democratic reform of the UN.

However, if it is to speak with a single voice, Europe must complete the process of federal unification. With a Parliament elected by universal suffrage, the European Federation can become the leading country of international democracy. Thus, it will be more inclined than any other political organization to promote this experiment in the other great regions of the world and at world level (democratisation of the UN).

10. Many competing projects

The process of globalization and the rise of the global civil society movements have been accompanied by a flowering of proposals addressing the question of the democratization of the UN through the creation of an assembly which would represent the world citizens. The problem to be solved is whether the traditional tool of a Parliament is appropriate to meet the exigency of popular representation at world level. I will take into consideration the most significant projects.

11. A Virtual World Parliament

A virtual World Parliament has been proposed as an alternative to a concrete World Parliament. Of course, the Internet can help in the exchange of ideas, the dissemination of information, the preparation of meetings and so on. Moreover, it can be used as a mobilization network. It enabled a scattered mob to become the people of Seattle. But, in order to make his voice heard and to exercise a real influence on the political process, that people was obliged to materialize in the streets and squares of a city. In addition, the circulation of the images of the demonstrations organized at Seattle increased the political weight of the movement born in that city.

Likewise, the Internet cannot compensate or replace in any way the face to face relations which take place in a political assembly which physically gathers in a hall. The public space where the representatives of the people meet, participate in public debates and take decisions is an irreplaceable aspect of democracy

12. The Global Civil Society Forum

The Commission on Global Governance, in the report published in 1995 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the UN, proposed the creation of a permanent Global Civil Society Forum. It was conceived as the vehicle to voice the expectations emerging from the international civil society and to transmit them to the UN. More precisely it was proposed that the Forum should gather before the beginning of the annual session of the General Assembly and convey to it its claims.

This proposal reflects the impetuous growth of the global civil society movements and the exigency to build a body representing them at world level. The Millennium Forum, held from 22-26 May 2000 at the UN Building in New York, has represented the dress rehearsal of the Forum. It showed at the same time the potentialities and the limits of such initiative.

It is not an exaggeration to state that it represented the first babble of global democracy. Awaiting the formation of a parliamentary body and political parties at world level (are the NGOs not movements anticipating political parties?), the Forum was an assembly representing as close as possible the peoples of the world or at least the most active part of them.

However, the limits of such an assembly must be pointed out. In the absence of international elections it is impossible to measure the degree of consent supporting the NGOs. The Forum would be lacking real democratic representativeness, being the expression of civil society movements and not of the will of the people, which can only come from an election based on a free competition among political parties. It can be compared to the medieval parliaments in which the orders were represented, not yet the people. And as these had the function of limiting the power of absolute sovereigns, likewise the Forum of Civil Society will limit the absolute power of the sovereign states ruling the UN. That is, as the medieval parliaments are distant forerunners of the contemporary ones, likewise the Forum of Civil Society may be an institution anticipating a World Parliament.

13. The WTO Parliamentary Assembly

The proposal to create a WTO Parliamentary Assembly has been drawn up by the Canadian WFM member organization and received support within the Canadian and European parliaments. According to this proposal, the Assembly should be composed of members of national parliaments and should have consultative powers.

The relevance of the proposal lies in the fact that it addresses the issue of the WTO's democratic deficit. Its limit lies in its sectorial approach: it is a partial response to the challenge of international democracy. The process of globalization does not involve only trade flows, but concerns many other aspects of political, economic and social life, like security, international monetary and financial issues, poverty, human rights, environment, health, education and so on.

In fact, the WTO is facing new issues such as unemployment, international migration, social rights, child labour, health, environment, etc. These problems are different aspects of the activity of international economic organizations, but find no appropriate answer, in the absence of the necessary powers and because of the plurality of bodies dealing with these problems. It will therefore be necessary to increase the powers of the new international economic institutions, and also to create a centre to co-ordinate functions that are presently scattered in many institutions operating independently from each other (G8, IMF, WB, WTO, ILO, UNEP, etc.).

All this shows, in my opinion, that the problems concerning the strengthening and the democratization of the UN must be addressed together. The UN, as a whole, should be entrusted with new tasks, particularly those related with the international commercial, monetary and financial relations, and a Parliament should be constituted in the fabric of the UN system. Therefore, if the goal to be pursued is the democratization of the process of globalization, the democratization of the WTO is not enough.

The same conclusion can be reached if we consider the global civil society organizations. If it is true that the people of Seattle has begun to act during a meeting of the WTO in December 1999, it should be taken into account as well that in the movement born in Seattle converge a great variety of claims (peace, human rights, environment and so on), being each of them a response to the various aspects of globalization. All those concerned about peace, international justice, sustainable development and protection of human rights need a democratic world order through UN reform.

14. *The UN Parliamentary Assembly, an Old-Fashioned Project?*

At a distance of approximately ten years from the publication of the booklet *The Case for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly*, written by Dieter Heinrich, it is necessary to reconsider this proposal, which has become one of most well-known and most cited world federalist programs and has received important acknowledgements from various milieux: the latest and most significant was the 2000 Millennium Forum. It is worth recollecting that the proposal was inspired by the example of the European Parliament, which, at the beginning, was an assembly made up of members of national parliaments and endowed with consultative powers. It was conceived as a preliminary step toward creating a real World Parliament directly elected by the world citizens and endowed with legislative powers. Even though the UNPA has not been established yet, we must ask ourselves whether it is still an adequate reply to the impetuous growth of globalization and the parallel increasing influence of the global civil society movements on international politics.

The European federalists started the campaign for the direct election of the European Parliament when the European custom union was achieved (1968) and a new goal -the Economic and Monetary Union - was put on the European agenda. This objective demanded an increasing intervention of the Council of Ministers, the ultimate decision-making authority in the Community, which was pursued without corresponding parliamentary scrutiny and approval. Hence the sharpening of the democratic deficit of the Community, which paved the way to the claim of the direct election of the European Parliament and the strengthening of its powers.

Now the process of globalization has reached an analogous turning point. With the creation of the WTO the custom tariffs, which in 1946 amounted to 50% of the value of imported goods, have been reduced to less than 3%. If the present degree of world commercial integration is comparable to that of the six member states of the European Community in 1968, today the world has to face the contradiction between the increasing intervention of international organizations in the field of economy, finance, human rights, environment and so on and the democratic deficit of these organizations.

Since globalization wipes out the distinction between domestic and international politics, the extension of democracy, which has asserted itself in a vast majority of states, to international relations has become an inescapable imperative. What is more, the growing activism of the global civil society movements proves that there is a popular pressure demanding citizens participation in global decisions that affect individual daily life.

In conclusion, I think that we are faced with a crucial choice. Should we continue to support the UNPA and consider ourselves satisfied with campaigning for an objective which seems too weak with regard to the big changes which are occurring in world politics and in the global civil society? Or should we propose a much more ambitious project aiming to the constitution of a World Parliament that seems a bold reply to the challenge of globalization and the claims coming from the global civil society?

15. *A World Parliament*

I think that we should choose the second alternative. "For a World Parliament" is the simple and strong watchword that identifies the sharpest contradiction of our time, the contradiction between globalization and the lack of international democracy, and expresses at the same time the deep reasons that inspire the global civil society movements, the need for an assembly representing the general will of mankind.

But we must be aware that the objective of a World Parliament is not incompatible with the four projects I have taken into consideration. All of them can be conceived as preliminary steps toward the final goal.

The historical role that the WFM can play is to become the reference point and the leading force of a large coalition of NGOs striving for a UN Parliament. In fact, most of global civil society movements are striving for peace, the protection of the environment, international justice and the defence of human rights, but do not yet have a strategy for achieving these goals. The task of the WFM is to make these movements aware of the means (that is to say the institutions) which mankind needs to attain peace and international democracy and justice.

The role that the civil society movements have acquired on the international scene paves the way for new forms of political action, now termed *new diplomacy*. One of the most significant examples is the alliance between reform-oriented nations and NGOs, which generated enough critical mass to give rise to the ICC.

It is the updated version of an old scheme of action largely experimented by the European federalists. It stems from the experience of the creation of a new power on the area covered by many independent powers. The strategy of state unifications is twofold in nature. It requires the combination of two political subjects: a government-inspired current and a popular-inspired one.

Governments view political unifications in terms of co-operation among sovereign states, while federalists conceive them in terms of the creation of a new power. Governments have the power, but are opposed to use it for objectives that go beyond international co-operation. Spinelli used to say that national governments are at the same time the vehicle and the obstacle on the way towards the European Federation. The vehicle, because they hold power, the obstacle, because they never spontaneously surrender national sovereignty. On the other hand, the federalists do not have the strength, but have an *initiating capacity*, which can be used during moments of crisis in order to move the governments to transfer their authority to supranational institutions.

The action for the construction of a World Parliament cannot be conceived otherwise. The World Parliament will be the result of the dialectical unity of the two currents mentioned above. According to two American academics, Richard Falk and Andrew Strauss, who published an article in *Foreign Affairs* at the beginning of this year entitled *Toward Global Parliament*, an alliance such as this could give rise to a treaty instituting a World Parliament. It could begin to exist after being ratified by a minimum number of states (20, according to the authors). But, if we consider that the European Union member states are 15 and their number will double in the next future, 20 states seem to be few. 50% of the UN members and world population can provide the sufficient basis for the entry into force of the treaty. As Falk and Strauss write, "once the assembly became operational, the task of gaining additional state members would likely become easier. A concerted organisation would then exist that citizens could urge their governments to join. As more states joined, pressure would grow on nonmember states to participate".

Before the conclusion, I would like to emphasize the difference between Falk and Strauss's project and the federalist one. What the two authors fail to state is that in order to democratize globalization, a global Parliament is not enough. The experience of democratic regimes teaches us that no parliament can govern a country alone. A government is necessary. So the World Parliament must be seen as a crucial milestone on the way toward forming a democratic government endowed with the necessary powers to enforce the laws passed by the World Parliament.

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