

TOWARDS ONE WORLD

Looking to Tomorrow – In Aid of Today

(TOWARDS ONE WORLD - Regd. Charity No. 277261)

FREEDOM AND EQUALITY in the YEAR OF THE UNBORN¹

by Francis Bennion

We all worry about nuclear war

Science has invented nuclear weapons. They exist, and cannot be uninvented. All of us worry about them. What exists will be used. Every human being feels the threat. It does not matter where one lives: people the world over know this fear. To be human is to dread nuclear annihilation.

Disarmament is not the answer

Politicians seek to avert the threat of nuclear war by talking endlessly about disarmament. They are prompted to do this by all the frightened people they are elected to serve. Unhappily disarmament, though superficially attractive, is not the answer. It puts the cart before the horse. Salvador de Madariaga, a former chairman of the League of Nations Disarmament Commission, said in 1973 –

'The trouble with disarmament was (and still is) that the problem of war is tackled upside down and at the wrong end ... Nations don't distrust each other because they are armed; they are armed because they distrust each other.'

De Madariaga added that to want disarmament before achieving a minimum of common agreement on fundamentals is as absurd as to want people to walk about undressed in the frosts and chills of winter.

We also worry about malnutrition

Another global worry is the plight of the starving. If a child starves outside my house I rush to feed it. When it starves a thousand miles away I do not care. Let it die, say I. It is no concern of mine.

But it is my concern, and deep down I know it. I am human, like the starving child. We humans cling together. Like goes with like. So what must I do?

What can we do about these two problems?

What can I or any of us do about these two human problems of nuclear war and starvation? The nature of humans is to want to do something. We are made to be problem solvers. How can we solve these?

We know they are immediate and pressing problems. They confront us today, not tomorrow. (No doubt they will confront us tomorrow as well, but still they confront us today.) The problems concern what action we should take now. We are all involved. Not one of us can escape, much as we would like to.

Durrenmatt said that what concerns all must be solved by all. We humans need to agree on fundamentals. Can that be achieved? There are thousands of millions of us dwelling together on this planet. Can we all agree about the very basis of our common existence? It would be strange if we could not. After all it is our planet.

¹ TOW Futurism Pamphlets No. 1

Page 2

How to solve problems

The long-term future of the world concerns us all, but not one person in the world knows what to do about it. The rule whenever we do not know what to do next is to take an imaginative leap into the future.

You protest at once. Imagination is not your strong suit; you are a down-to-earth person. You are practical, and demand a practical solution. Tell me, you say, exactly what I must do now. Forget the airy dreamings of the seer or prophet. If you can't be practical I have no time for you. Get thee gone.

A confession of inadequacy

Here the present author is obliged to confess that he cannot be practical in this sense. He has not the least practical idea what may be the instant solution of these two pressing world problems concerning nuclear war and world starvation. All he knows is that the human race is on the wrong track. We love each other, but cannot show our love.

So grasp at a desperate expedient. For one moment forget your practical virtues and look coolly and deliberately far into the future. It must be an imaginative look, for we have no other way. The imagination is our only access to what lies ahead. So how can we use human imagination as a problem-solving force?

Using Futurism

I must leap into the future not as a prophet or clairvoyant, for none of us is truly that. Nor as a designer of Utopias, for in this grim predicament we are determined to be realistic. We seek to grasp what might be, if the human race should manage to be sensible and lucky. Once we have understood it, we may be able to work out how to get there. This simple trick is called Futurism.

Futurism helps humans to be ready. Dostoevsky once warned that great events could come upon us and catch us intellectually unprepared. We are given brains and imagination to enable us to work out our salvation.

Futurism can be used in any difficulty which requires us to take a voyage. First suppose that, without a map, you are embarked on a journey to a known destination. You come to an unsignposted junction on the way. You cannot stay where you are, but do not know which to take of the roads you see branching ahead. So you make a mental jump. You imagine yourself at the end of your journey. The destination is known to you. The only problem is to discover in which direction it lies from where you stand (or in which direction you lie from where it stands). Perhaps you have a compass to help determine this, or you can use the sun or the pole star. There may be a passer-by, whom you can ask. Whatever aids you have or have not, you know where you are heading.

Next suppose, as with our present problem, that the destination is not known. It lies in the distant future. What will the condition of humanity be a century or two from now? We do not know. If you don't know what your destination is, you certainly won't be able to decide which road to take in order to reach it.

World unity

Here we must beware of a trap. It is easy to answer that our communal destination is 'world unity'. That maybe deceptive. On an ordinary journey we can choose our destination. This is not an ordinary journey. Whether the journey is ordinary or not, it is no use picking a destination that does not exist. No matter

Page 3

how hard you try, you will never reach it. So we must first ask ourselves whether world unity is a realistic objective.

Today we have a helpless feeling about world unity. We are not at all sure there is a solution to these two problems of peace and poverty. We have a nasty suspicion that the destination marked 'human togetherness' is located nowhere.

A jump into the distant future

Just for a moment let us forget our present situation. We will return to it later. First we need to take that jump into the future. If we can see what the position about world unity might hopefully be at some distant time, the only problem is how to get there.

Let's pick on a year which is just beyond the lifetime of people living now. That way we will not be obsessed by our own selfish interests. We might call this the Year of the Unborn.

On a literal meaning, we who are now gathered in anxious debate will never know what goes on in the Year of the Unborn: we have fixed it at a time after our own deaths. But we are not here concerned with such literal meanings. We care about the world beyond our lifetime because we are human beings, who look to the future. We care not only about ourselves but about our children, and their children. We care also about the children of our relatives and neighbours. We have even some concern for the world's children. We are so made as to feel like that.

What is more, as on any journey the ultimate destination governs our next step. That will certainly be taken in our lifetime. So let us now take an imaginative leap into the Year of the Unborn.

The lead-up to One World

Here we are. This is the Year of the Unborn. We have made the great imaginative projection, and now look about us. What do we find? We may find nothing. Mankind has annihilated itself, or starved itself to death. The globe is an arid spinning wilderness. If so the seekers will not know it. The human experiment will be over.

We are not interested in that. We are not looking for ways of getting to that situation. For our present purposes the Year of the Unborn is located in a successful time for mankind. The holocaust has somehow been avoided. We don't know how this was managed: we are hoping to find out. All we are able to do at the present moment is take in the outlines of what in the Year of the Unborn has become the human success that is One World.

Unity is inevitable

Now that we live in One World we realise how silly it would be with our present advantages to regard planet Earth in any other way. This is after all a single globe, spinning in its lonely orbit around the sun. Mankind is in charge of it, not through merit but because of innate faculties. (The metaphysics of how humans came to possess these faculties do not concern us here: we have enough to cope with for one essay.)

Looking back from the unified present, we do not despise those men and women who came before us. They were unable to inhabit One World, but it was not their fault. Time is an ever rolling stream, and for them it had not rolled far enough. The reason for their inadequacy lies in a single word: communications. Only when humans are closely in touch with each other can their latent shame awake into action, along with their latent power.

Page 4

The path to One World

The history of man has been towards larger units. One man fought another over a cave or a mate. Later, one settlement fought the next when each was self-sufficient and there were no

made roads between them. As human time moved on, one town or one tribe fought another. Then countries, each recently united, fought; and finally alliances.

The seeds of conflict sprang from the beginning. To obtain and keep a meal or a mate or a cave one had to fight. That meant being aggressive by nature. The best fighters are those who love fighting. So man's nature was warlike. He felt an urge in the blood to side with his comrades and battle against the stranger. It became natural everywhere for people to like their own kind. Each group developed its culture. An attachment sprang up to land, to language and to the gods of the family or tribe.

The need was for self reliance, in aid of self preservation. Blood was shed readily against the outsider; but within the tribe blood became thicker than water. For continuance of the race, people favoured the advancement of their kith and kin. There was a liking and a preference for one's own kind. Charity, it was said, begins at home. Outside the home there is fear, the unknown, and the lurking savage enemy.

The unfinished world

Yet all the time there was the movement of ideas. A larger view gained ground. Great civilisations sprang up, with a global vision. The proper business of mankind, said Alexander Pope in the eighteenth century, is man. In his prospectus for *The Liberator*, William Garrison wrote in 1803: 'My country is the world; my countrymen are mankind.'

In 1953 William Faulkner exclaimed -'What's wrong with this world is, it's not finished yet. It is not completed to that point where man can put his final signature to the job and say, "It is finished. We made it, and it works".'

In 1963 President Johnson complained that the world of mankind had narrowed to a neighbourhood before it had broadened to a brotherhood. Man had perfected his communications. All he had to do was catch up with them.

Life in One World

Now, in the Year of the Unborn, man has caught up. The world has at last broadened to a brotherhood. In Faulkner's sense, it is finished. What is life here like?

The first thing we notice is a strange psychic silence. Our planet is at last truly peaceful. The clash of arms has ceased. International tensions are no more. Power blocks do not exist, and the armaments industry is a thing of the past.

We now see the culmination of that process which so often in man's history led to larger political groupings. Think of England at the time of the Heptarchy, divided up among warring petty kingdoms. Mercia fights Wessex on one hand and Northumbria on the other. Kent wars with Sussex. Cornwall strives to maintain its independence both against Irish invaders and the fighting men from the east.

The same story was repeated in many countries that later enjoyed centuries of undisturbed unity. Now the world itself has unity. The cycle is complete.

There are still racial antagonisms. Human nature has not changed. People continue to prefer their own kind, and nurse prejudice against 'foreigners'. But now it happens rather in the way the inhabitants of an English village used to

Page 5

refer to those of the hamlet across the valley as 'foreigners'. The political content of prejudice has drained away. Nationalism is dead.

Freedom

Mankind is lucky in another respect. One World is a place of freedom. It is good to live in a free country, and now all countries are free. Arbitrary official action is forbidden by law. This law means what it says. It is enforced. The secret police, or the military patrol, do not make

sudden and capricious arrests in the small hours - or at any other time of day or night. They are not allowed to. There is such a thing as due process of law. It is rigorously enforced. The world is now a good place to be arrested in (this being, as John Vincent has said, the best test of civilisation). No political victims become, like thousands in late twentieth-century Argentina, 'the disappeared'.

It is true that in One World freedom has practical limits. Liberty is not equivalent to licence, much less to anarchy. Men and women would need to be angels if they could produce decent life without institutions. In One World the inhabitants are not angels. This is not heaven, but earth. It is no Utopia. It is just a safe homeland for ordinary people.

Democracy

One World has fortunately been able to adopt an institution mankind has through long centuries painfully wrought against despotism and anarchy. It is known as government of the people, by the people, for the people - in other words democracy.

It is not practicable for the world's inhabitants to govern themselves directly. Yet govern themselves they must. So it has to be done through the medium of free, secret elections. The people are treated as themselves present in their parliament. They debate and decide at one remove, by means of their elected representatives.

Thus the whole of mankind has arrived at representative government based on universal suffrage, a most ingenious and fair device. One does not have to prove that it is natural and right for civilised people to govern themselves in this way: provided the mechanism is efficient, it most plainly is natural and right.

As the happiness of the people is the sole end of government, said John Adams in 1774, so the consent of the people is the only foundation of it. Jefferson said - 'I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.'

The last word on this point may rest with Abraham Lincoln, who said that no man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent.

Equality

The world did not become truly One World until the long-delayed factual realisation of what President Woodrow Wilson demanded as long ago as 1917. He then said that the world must be made safe for democracy. Now at last it is.

This required among other things the achievement of equality. Once all men and women start to be governed in unity by the ballot box, before long they will have this benefit. When votes are equal, voters must be equal. If they are not equal to start with, they will very soon make themselves so by pressure on their elected representatives.

Votes are won by promises. If every elector must be given something, no elector can be given much. He certainly cannot be given much more than his

Page 6

neighbour. So democracy, if it is effective and lasts long enough, necessarily ends in equality.

Oppression of minorities

One of the greatest dangers of democracy is that the majority will so deploy their power as to oppress minorities. There have been minorities in every human society, from the Chinese in Malaysia to the Tamils in Sri Lanka, from the aborigines in Australasia to the Asians in East Africa, from the Catholics in Ulster to the Biharis in Bangladesh. Respect for minorities is the acid test of enlightened democracy.

This risk of oppression is inherent in the very concept of universal suffrage, and was used by Lenin to denounce it –

'A democracy is a state which recognises the subjection of the minority to the majority, that is, an organization for the systematic use of violence by one class against the other, by one part of the population against another.'

Human rights

The answer men have found to the oppression of minorities lies in another fateful concept: human rights. It was delineated by Thomas Jefferson in the United States Declaration of Independence -

'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness ...'

President Franklin D Roosevelt saw these rights as the content of a social contract. The practice of self-government, he said, is a covenant among free men to respect the rights and liberties of their fellows.

There have been some notable formulations of this principle. I disagree with what you say, said Voltaire - but I will defend to the death your right to say it. Thomas Paine held that he who would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression.

John Rawls

The principle was generalized by Rawls in his theory of justice. Each person, he said, possesses an inviolability founded on justice such that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. Therefore in a just society the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests.

How do we find out what these basic human rights are? How is the man who considers himself to be oppressed by the majority to establish the fact?

Rawls postulates the taking up of an original position, placed behind a veil of assumed ignorance. Installed in this original position, we seekers of norms faithfully pretend ignorance of every aspect of our actual situation. Then, using our intuition, we ask ourselves what a free and rational person would accept as just if placed in such an original position. Presumed to have no knowledge of our actual endowments and handicaps, we are bound to decide according to what would be best for us whatever those endowments and handicaps turned out to be.

So the legal system prevailing in One World lays down and enforces such rights and duties as ensure that none of the world's minorities is tyrannized by the majority.

Economic rights

Before One World was at last set up, men prepared the way for it by establishing the United Nations. This body promulgated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 25 of which said -

'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself

Page 7

and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.'

Promulgated in 1948, this was the clarion call for a world welfare state. The concept of the welfare state is one of the most notable contributions made by British thought and practice to the advancement of mankind.

The British acted upon article 25 immediately, by setting up within their own country the first effective system of total human welfare ever implemented. It was criticised by many who felt that it sapped initiative and self reliance. That argument only goes to the way a welfare state is organized however. No humane person could deny the principle: that the hungry must not be left to starve, the sick to die untended, or the homeless to suffer exposure.

Some opponents of the British welfare state argued that charity was enough. The key feature of the welfare concept is however that the needy should be cared for not by indiscriminate charity, which may miss its mark, or be inadequate, or arouse feelings of inferiority. Their succour should be available to the needy *as of right*.

The world welfare state

Now, in One World, we have a world welfare state. Social benefits and medical services are available to everyone, under a framework of legal rights. Unrelieved famine and untreated disease are things of the past.

To understand how this has been achieved we may compare One World with conditions in England at the beginning and at the end of the twentieth century. At the beginning, there were great disparities in wealth. There was no national health service, no provision for old age pensions, no unemployment relief, no entitlement to supplementary benefit.

Yet by the end of the century all these things, and many more social benefits besides, were taken in England as a matter of course. There had been no bloody revolution to achieve this; all had been done by agreement. True, the process was accomplished with much grumbling. But then grumbling acquiescence in the inevitable is one more English contribution to world civilisation.

As it had been done in Britain by the end of the twentieth century, so it was done for the whole human community by the time New Year's Day dawned in the Year of the Unborn.

Now our first brief trip is over. We must step back into our real present.

Back to today

So that must suffice for a first glimpse of One World. Now we are back in our own time. What have we learnt?

You probably feel more inclined to ask endless questions than admit to having learnt anything at all. How is this Utopia governed? Is it not in the grip of the huge populations: the Indians, the Russians, above all the Chinese? Has not western influence been overwhelmed, as it was in many colonial territories once they had achieved independence? Have the masses of the world's serfs and peasants really achieved release from their overlords? And so on.

This is to miss the point. One World is not a Utopia. Nor is it a prophecy. It is a projection into the future of the more optimistic of current trends. The only resemblance it has to a Utopia is that,

Page 8

while remaining practical, it concentrates on what is favourable to human happiness and wellbeing. Darker, uglier tendencies may in the end prevail. Not being soothsayers or clairvoyants, we cannot say.

What we do know is that the present affects the future. The things we say and do today alter the way things are tomorrow. The normal human method is to go step by step into an unknown territory. I do not ask to see the distant scene, said the pious John Henry Newman: one step enough for me. But how in our blindness can we know in which direction to take that step?

Developing Futurism

It makes sense to take a little time off from the present and use the technique of Futurism. After a good deal of preliminary groping of the kind set out above, we may learn to be more precise. Perhaps we should take a specific date as the Year of the Unborn - say the year 2200. People from many different countries and cultures have the ability to contribute ideas about how One World might hopefully be operating at that time. We need insights that are practical and realistic, yet give hope of happy and fruitful lives for all who will then be alive.

You may think it absurdly altruistic to spend time and trouble over the state the world will be in long after all of us are dead. It is not altruistic at all, because it concerns us closely. If the present inhabitants of this planet could first agree on how it should be governed as One World in the year 2200, they might then see more clearly how it should be governed as a still fragmented world in the year 2000.

We already know that the way we do things now is not good enough. This paper began with the two human problems of nuclear war and world poverty. In One World, as we have seen, those problems have disappeared. It is not so much that they have been solved as that they just do not arise anymore. That is the best way to get rid of problems: make them irrelevant.

The NATO countries arm themselves to the teeth against the Warsaw Pact countries, and vice versa. The overfed people of the north guiltily try to forget the underfed people of the south. Both scenarios are absurd and intolerable. They deny the true humanity of people, who deep down want not to kill each other but to stop each other from dying.

It is time to leap the chasm we call the immediate future, and learn what to do next from the things our imagination finds on the other side.

Francis Bennion is the Chairman of Towards One World, which is a registered educational charity. A barrister and former Oxford don, he has written numerous books and articles on legal and philosophical topics.

TOWARDS ONE WORLD enquiries to :

Peter Roberts 25 Chelwood Avenue, Goring-by-Sea, West Sussex. BN12 4QP
Telephone: Worthing (0903) 44764

TOWARDS ONE WORLD donations to :

National Westminster Bank PLC 1 Portman Square, London W1H ODQ.

© 2011 F A R Bennion Website: www.francisbennion.com

Any footnotes are shown at the bottom of each page

For full version of abbreviations click 'Abbreviations' on FB's website

References:

None