



THE MAKING OF WORLD GOVERNMENT

A radio discussion with Mortimer Adler,
G. A. Borgese and Rexford Tugwell

(Part 2 of 2)

TUGWELL: It might not be so very different, because we are thinking of a federal government. Both the legislature to make the laws and the executive to enforce them must be direct representatives of the people. And I think that when we say “direct representatives of the people,” it is quite clear that we mean that all the world’s voters must participate in their election.

ADLER: Let us look at that a moment, because that is a much more radical statement than may appear at first. Do you mean that there will be a deliberative assembly to which will come representatives from the various peoples of the earth?

TUGWELL: Yes. The legislative branch of a world government might be set up in several ways. Some are persuaded that at least two assemblies are needed—one as the direct representative of the people and one as the representative of the existing nation states. In such a scheme, the direct representatives might have the power to originate legislation, for instance, and the representatives of the

nations to ratify or veto it. But there is not complete agreement on these issues.

ADLER: Are the representatives who make the laws to be chosen by popular vote?

TUGWELL: Yes, indeed; and so must the executive also be elected by the same popular vote.

ADLER: And can and should we try to secure popular representation in a world legislature by election?

BORGESE: The actual realities of politics at this moment in the world are very different in the various countries. But it is remarkable that there is practically nobody in the world today who likes to talk any other language than the language of democracy. Let us take the Russians, for example. They call us the “old Western democracies.” Old or young, we do not think that the Russians are politically democrats. But they think that they are, or they say so. They call themselves the “young Eastern democracies.”

Let us not object that this is lip service. Lip service, even were it really of the lips alone, is important. It proves that there is a common language of mankind, and the common language presupposes a common mind and some sort of common belief—a world community—no matter whether, or where, that belief is more or less mature, more or less proved in practice.

This is why I think that a world constitution must assert unequivocally the democratic principle. I agree that concessions toward principles appear to be both unnecessary and useless. Electoral choice by the people must be the universal rule.

Of course, we are not utopians. We do not mean that the principles of electoral democracy will be applied everywhere overnight in the same way and with the same machinery as last Tuesday in Illinois or Massachusetts.

ADLER: But the democratic electoral principle must stand; that is clear; that much is indispensable. But is it enough? What about the economic aspects of democracy? In the last hundred years we have come to realize that the political machinery of democracy is only one aspect of democracy. In fact, it is an aspect which will not work unless it has support in the economic realities of democratic life. To what extent does a world constitution have to consider the elements of economic democracy?

TUGWELL: A good deal of what people need and want is certainly economic rather than political. I do not mean to say by that that better political arrangements are not still important and are not still in a great many places perhaps unrealized. But the economic has certainly taken on new importance with the increase of populations and also with the coming into view of possibilities for much higher levels of living.

The intensification of technological development, with better communications and better transportation, has syncopated time and space to an extent which would have been incredible to our near ancestors. People have suddenly realized that only faulty organization stands between them and something very like Utopia.

Such a realization creates enormous pressure, and I believe that the world constitution would not be permanent and not in any sense successful unless it somehow expressed or enabled people to express, through it, their aspirations for this kind of use for the new technologies of the world.

ADLER: And how might the goals of economic democracy be achieved?

TUGWELL: This can best be done through provision, I would say, for some kind of planning body which would make the world's hopes of this sort concrete and make them more rational, by reducing them to proposals which could have quantitative and temporal dimensions. I think that some special body for looking ahead and for providing the articulation which would make the world's enterprises work together as they must will be absolutely necessary.

ADLER: I gather that neither of you cares very much for what is currently called a world government of limited objectives—a world government whose only function is the prevention of war?

BORGESE: Particularly atomic.

TUGWELL: People usually say that kind of thing because they think it would be easier to get. On the contrary I think that the easiest thing is to get what people want most—the maximum rather than the minimum. Of course, a lot of vested interests would oppose it but no more than the changes which the limited objective school propose.

ADLER: A world government organized for a restricted aim of preventing war might come into being, but it could not long endure with so negative an aim. The functions of government must be positive and progressive. Government must serve the ends of justice and human well-being which are the substance of peace, not the prevention of war, which is the mere shell of peace.

BORGES: Such a limited world government, even if it could come into being, which I question, at best could be only a world police state. If such an ugly thing were not as unfeasible as it is undesirable, it would be a state with police but without justice or law.

TUGWELL: I feel that limitations on world government are in themselves impractical in the sense, that is, that all of us have a feeling of urgency at the present time about the rapid development of events; and, of course, I mean the atomic bomb. It is the awful fear and tension men have now which makes any kind of limitation on world government seem impractical. We must first think not of what will be the least offensive to objectors but of what really promises to provide security and well-being. If it does not promise to do that, it is thoroughly impractical in any case.

ADLER: I agree that those who want limited world government are willing to grant it a monopoly of atomic power, or other weapons of mass destruction, while leaving to the national states their standing armies, navies, and air forces. But along with generals and admirals go those other trappings of sovereignty—diplomats, foreign offices, and foreign policies—which are just as bad as any general or admiral ever could be. The constitution which permits this limits world government out of existence and right back to UN.

BORGES: People who think that have not given sufficient thought to the fact that atomic fear as well as atomic power is our own monopoly, an American monopoly. Practically all other nations in the world are exposed to any kind of destruction, whereas we are exposed, or we think we are exposed, only to the new instruments of mass destruction. But the bulk of mankind cannot be interested in anything less than the prevention and abolition of war altogether; and war cannot be prevented and abolished if an adequate amount of justice is not administered. There must be monopoly of armaments in the hands of the world government, except for such armaments which the world government may allow to local police forces merely for local purposes.

TUGWELL: More exactly, I really do think, as I said before, that an American might well think of a world government which resembles his own government, except that he would be a citizen of the world instead of a citizen of the United States. The government would operate on him and he on the government, in just the way he is used to now.

ADLER: And from the military point of view I gather that the United States or Russia or Uruguay or Iran, as a member of a world federal union, would have no military force at all for external activity. Is that right?

TUGWELL: They will have police forces for internal use.

ADLER: That looks like disarmament all right, but let us not be fooled by disarmament. The diplomats are proposing disarmament again. It is never enough. Diplomats and foreign policy must be given up as well as armies and navies if world government is to be constituted.

More still, there are two other matters which have a bearing on nationalism and national sovereignty: one, commerce; and the other, immigration—the movement of goods and peoples. At present a world split up among sovereign states puts barriers in the way of movement of both peoples and goods.

TUGWELL: I have a friend who says that commerce, citizenship, and currency are the indispensables of world government. I agree with him that these are indispensables, though there are perhaps others such as incentives to production in backward areas, for instance.

BORGESSE: When you say “commerce,” Tugwell, do you mean trade that must be equal and free?

TUGWELL: I mean trade managed by the federal government. That might not necessarily be equal trade.

ADLER: Or it might be trade regulated by a federal trade commission.

TUGWELL: To economists, you know, “free trade” has technical connotations which might not be approved. I mean to speak of trade managed in the interests of the people of the world rather than by nation-states in their own interests. That would not mean exposure of high-standard regions to competition from low-

standard ones. That could be managed. Everyone would lose rather than gain by such a thing. But what we need to do is to level upward and not downward.

BORGESE: You were referring, Adler, also, to the problem of immigration. I think that I am correct if I state that there is general agreement among all of us on the Committee in thinking that more advanced areas might desire rightly to put some brakes on immigration, but such restrictions, we all agree, should not be based on racial or national discriminations. They should be founded only on individual criteria of admissibility, not on quotas. It is encouraging to observe that many of late in America have become rather unhappy about the national and racial discriminations in our immigration laws.

TUGWELL: Apart from racial discriminations, which are always indefensible, one of the essentials of world government would be provision for bringing the economically backward regions of the world closer to equality with advanced ones; and objections which more advanced peoples might have to free commerce with, and immigration from perhaps less advanced ones, might, within a period of years, be met by improving backward peoples rather than by building walls to shut them out, though the walls may still be temporarily necessary.

ADLER: May I interrupt here a moment? In what you both have said so far, it is perfectly obvious that you both look forward to progressive change in the world's affairs. As you conceive world government, it is the bare beginning of something, not the ultimate achievement. Is that right?

BORGESE: You are right.

TUGWELL: Of course, a constitution which could not evolve would be a wholly unsuccessful one.

BORGESE: It would be a dead one—as dead as a Utopia or a door-nail.

ADLER: Precisely! The constitution we are trying to draft, therefore, is not going to be utopian, even though it will depart radically from the present anarchy of world affairs. But however radical the change from world anarchy to world government will be, our constitution can be only the beginning of a new era. It must be rich in the promise of future developments. World government ultimately rests upon the proposition that all men should be treated as politi-

cal equals. They are not so treated now. World government must change this; world government can.

BORGESE: Therefore, there cannot be a world constitution without a world bill of rights. It is true that the eighty-fourth *Federalist Paper* by Hamilton contended that a Bill of Rights in 1787 was not necessary and might even do harm. But conditions have changed; many at that time believed that, if liberty of competition were given, the best of all possible worlds was around the corner. We see now that technology and other circumstances to which Tugwell referred have made a greater intervention by the state necessary. Active democracy in the name of justice is no less indispensable than passive democracy in the name of liberty. At any rate, Hamilton's opinion was overruled soon in his own time. We in America have a Bill of Rights.

ADLER: But what are the minimum conditions of human rights that must be written into a world constitution?

BORGESE: We do not know as yet with ultimate exactitude. One thing I think I know for sure: whatever those minimum conditions of human rights might be, they should be affirmed in a world constitution not as desirabilities and pious wishes but as rigorous pledges for the world government to enact them positively and without delay.

TUGWELL: Otherwise our work would be for nothing.

BORGESE: The overwhelming majority of mankind would think that what we are after is insurance for ourselves against war—particularly atomic—without any premiums to pay. Our actual or virtual rivals or enemies should have to surrender their actual or virtual weapons; they would be remunerated with a bouquet of nice words. This is what a world government without a bill of positive rights would look like; it would be handcuffs with eyewash. I do not think that there is any significant national constitution today, made or in the making, without a positive bill of rights.

ADLER: Do you also think, Tugwell, that a bill of rights is indispensable to a world constitution?

TUGWELL: Yes, I think so. I assume that the bill of rights would be a statement of the fundamental needs of the individual in society. It would not necessarily be the same formula that has been used in other historic instances, but certainly the guarantee of rights to the

individual is one of the basic reasons for having a constitution at all.

ADLER: This, it seems to me, leaves us face to face with the practical problem—the problem of feasibility: whether and how a world constitution such as our Committee is tentatively outlining could be adopted by the governments in the world today. Some of them are dictatorial and despotic, unwilling to accept political democracy. Some others—and our own country, America, is outstanding among them—are economically conservative. So, I gather the world constitution we are talking about has two sorts of opponents: those who are to the right of its political principles and those who are to the right of its economic principles. What chance is there for enactment of a world constitution?

BORGESE: There is not much immediate chance, even though the alternative to one world is frightening. The alternative is two worlds, headed possibly for a war of annihilation, certainly for a destructive armaments race.

ADLER: At the very beginning of the atomic age there was the hope that fear might indicate a way to salvation.

BORGESE: Fear is one element of hope. Another element is faith—the faith in humanity and reason which has not perished from America. I admit that America, next to Russia, is the country where the idea of world government may be confronted with stiffest opposition. Yet, strangely and encouragingly enough, there is no country in the world where the movement for world government has been and is half as resonant and vast as in America.


TUGWELL: And we should not forget that there are other countries in the world, besides Russia and America, which would also be ready for world government if the two big ones, or one of the two, were genuinely for it. And who could be the one if not America? Those countries which are neither America nor Russia build the immense majority of the human race. They have no powerful armies or atomic stock piles. But they are not unimportant. They might exert a pressure.

ADLER: You seem to be in an optimistic vein. You seem, after all, to anticipate an early acceptance and enactment of a world constitution.

BORGESE: To predict when and how and on what final constitutional text a world government will be established is beyond our

power. We are no fortune-tellers. But let us take the Atlantic Charter. It was a weak and contradictory document, soon discarded. Yet it had its effect on the course of history; it acted on the developments and outcome of World War II. Let us suppose that there were a better document—a world charter. If there are chances of avoiding World War III—and there are such chances—a world charter will help to increase them strongly. If there should be war, an honest and consistent world charter would influence its course and outcome much more effectively than did the Atlantic Charter. At any rate, it would be significant for the survivors, for we hope there would be survivors. We are still entitled to surmise that even after another world war, gruesome though the prospect may be, there still would be a world.

ADLER: We will have one world in any case. We must have one world. Our constant premise, since the beginning, has been that world government is necessary; therefore, it is possible.

It will come from consent or from conquest; but it will come. We are trying the way of consent, which is the way of democracy and freedom. This is our task. Our task is not to speculate on the schedule of unpredictable events. Whether or not another war breaks out, the problem of how a world, one world, can be constituted remains a problem for human beings to think about. 

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More on This Topic

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Further recommended readings, would be these past issues of our weekly journal: 146, 211, 212, 213, 298 and 353.

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