

Essay on Nationalism and Globalism; Tyranny and Human Rights

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World leaders presently face a serious conundrum. This is evident in the negotiations that have been occurring at the G20 meeting recently. All of the leaders represent a particular nation, and in various degrees are accountable back to the people, or the electors, of the nation they represent. And yet they are faced with the startling fact, to a degree as never before in history, that most of the problems facing the planet, economic and otherwise, are now global in nature. They cannot be solved by any one nation acting alone. They require multilateral, co-operative solutions. Even the United States, with all the great might at its disposal, has now had to acknowledge this fact.

The result is that world leaders, when addressing publically, have often to speak with different emphases. When addressing their domestic audience, they tend to stress national credentials, interests and priorities. When addressing the international public, they tend to adopt a perspective that increasingly reflects the fact of this new global interdependence. Thus Senator Obama was able to say in Berlin not long before his election:

"People of the world -- look at Berlin, where a wall came down, a continent came together, and history proved that there is no challenge too great for a world that stands as one"

"We cannot afford to be divided. No one nation, no matter how large or powerful, can defeat such challenges alone"

In the speech, Senator Obama is reported to have challenged his audience to tear down walls between estranged allies, races, and faiths in a call for global unity. He warned of a world where partnership was not a choice but the only means of survival. But in practice, it seems that there will be some difficulties in reconciling this approach with one that reflects, from a United States perspective, its past global hegemony and national interests. There is a tension between domestic pressures and global demands. In a world order based on the concept of the priority of the nation-state, it is hard to come to terms with the emerging realities of the global village.

But there is another, related tension arising from the fact that the planet is rapidly globalizing. While the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and with it the

demise of the widespread practice of communism, were thought to mark a new transition to democracy and liberal capitalism across the world, subsequent events have not brought the freedom and hope that these events gave promise to. Various forms of tyrannical regimes have continued or have been reborn in many countries, often associated with governmental breakdown. And the disillusionment with unrestrained market capitalism is now evident in many places, where the unethical few can make billions while the mass of humanity suffer. Mass violence and human rights abuses have continued to plague the world, and are signs that the prevailing world order is lamentably defective.

There seems, however, to be an irresistible movement towards globalism. No nation, and no person, lives in isolation from all others anymore. But people are questioning whether global solutions can safely be countenanced in the light of these continuing defective circumstances. The tension is between the pressures pushing the leaders of the world towards global solutions, and the fears as to where this may lead in the future and how it may affect existing national rights and privileges. None of us want a future where the world is governed by the few for the benefit of the few, some sort of new global tyranny over which the mass of humanity have little or no control.

While Australia ponders in isolation its future and considers, for example, whether it should have a national Bill of Rights, there is little discussion and debate about the sort of future global world we would all like to live in – what sort of checks and balances there should be in such a world. For example, how do we ensure against any form of future global tyranny, how do we regulate global capitalism while still preserving human initiative, ethical freedoms and democracy, how do we effectively guarantee minimum standards of fundamental human rights for all persons on the planet, how do we outlaw violence and the threat of weapons of mass destruction as a means of conflict resolution, how do we effectively deal with the pressures on the environment of this one, small planet. These are, increasingly, the really important questions for determination.

Australia has, in the past, been a world leader in addressing global issues. Witness the contribution of Dr Evatt and others to the formation of the United Nations Organisation. There is room for Australia to once again take a lead in seeking the reconstruction of the global order so as to address the needs of this time. We need a serious debate on the ways and means of best

adjusting an increasingly outdated world order to emerging planetary realities. It is a debate that needs to adopt a holistic global perspective, with our national interests being seen as being best served by such a comprehensive adjustment and not by clinging to notions, laws and practices that may have worked in the past when the nations were much less interdependent. The issues involved are not just political, legal and economic, but also social, ethical and spiritual in nature. In the process, we need to look widely for guidance. We could do well to consider those writers, philosophies and religions which have constructively addressed these issues.

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