

CHAPTER 4

## We the Peoples

### *Building a World Parliament*

Our global revolution requires no tumbrils, no guillotines, no unmarked graves; no revanchist running dogs need be put against the wall. We have within our hands already the means to a peaceful, democratic transformation. These means arise inexorably from an analysis of how the world is run, and why the existing world order fails. Each of the following three chapters examines one aspect of global governance, shows why the current system is not working, considers the possible alternatives, chooses those which seem to work best and then explains how we – the dissidents of the rich world and the citizens of the poor world – can, using only those resources available to us, replace the system which works for the powerful with one which works for the weak. The first of these tasks is perhaps the most pressing: altering the mediation of war and peace and the relations between nation states, and seeking to replace a world order

built on coercion with one which emerges from below, built upon democracy.

The United Nations was conceived in 1941 by the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, as an alliance against the Axis powers. As the Second World War progressed, its scope and membership expanded, until, in June 1945, fifty nations signed a declaration of principles – the United Nations Charter – whose purpose was to promote peace, human rights and international law, to encourage social progress, higher living standards and to prevent another World War.<sup>38</sup> The UN, in other words, was founded with the best of intentions. But these, like the motives surrounding every aspect of the postwar settlement, were mixed with some rather less elevated concerns. No one gives power away, and those nations which constructed the UN were careful to ensure that it reinforced rather than diminished their global pre-eminence.

This concern is reflected in the constitution of the supreme international body, which is charged with the prevention of war, the United Nations Security Council. If one nation is threatening or attacking another, the council may use whatever measures are necessary to force it to desist: it can order a ceasefire, for example; levy economic sanctions; send in peacekeepers; or, at the last resort, authorize the armed forces of the UN's member states to take military action against the aggressor. At the international level it

asserts (though with little success) what the state asserts at the national level: a monopoly of violence.

The Security Council mimics the notional constraints of the democratic state. By this means it claims to sustain a world order founded on right rather than might. The problem with the postwar settlement is that those with the might decide what is right.

There are fifteen members of the council, of which ten have temporary seats (held for two years and then passed to another state) and five have permanent seats. Each of the five permanent members has the power of veto: no decision can be taken by the Security Council unless all five have approved it. Unsurprisingly, the five permanent members are the three powers which founded the United Nations – the United States, United Kingdom and Russia – and their principal wartime allies, China and France.\* They granted themselves the ability to determine, for as long as the UN continues to exist, who is the aggressor and who the aggressed.

The power of veto was introduced partly in order to prevent those states in possession of nuclear weapons from

\* Russia acquired the seat formerly occupied by the Soviet Union. China's seat was, following the revolution, held by Taiwan (the Republic of China) until 1971, when it reverted to the People's Republic (mainland China).

attacking each other: had the other member states, for example, collectively decided that the Soviet Union was threatening one of its neighbours, and then sought to restrain it through military action, the USSR may have responded by offering to meet that force with greater force, provoking another world war. Indeed, during the Cold War the Soviet Union used its veto repeatedly, precisely in order to prevent the other states from restricting its attempts to expand its imperial domain. But, while the veto may have functioned as a safety valve, preserving a global peace at the expense of the weaker states being threatened or attacked by one of the permanent members, it has also proved to be an instant recipe for the abuse of power and the impediment of justice.

The problem with the way the Security Council has been established is that those who possess power cannot be held to account by those who do not. The key democratic question – who guards the guards? – has been left unanswered. The Security Council is, by definition, tyrannical. Those who defend the way the world is run point out that veto powers have rarely been used since the end of the Cold War\* and that the veto can, in theory, be deployed (as France and Russia tried to deploy it in 2003) to protect

\* They have been used on eleven occasions between 1990 and 2001. Six of these were US vetoes on resolutions restraining Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.<sup>34</sup>

states from unauthorized attacks by other members; but the truth is that the threat of the veto informs every decision the Security Council does or does not make. Other member states know perfectly well, for example, that there is no point in preparing a resolution which the United States will reject. The US, and to a lesser extent the other permanent members, assert their will without even having to ask.

As other nations cannot hold them to account, the permanent members (or, more precisely, the two permanent members which have, since the UN's formation, wielded real power) can blithely defy every principle the United Nations was established to defend. Since 1945, the United States has launched over 200 armed operations,<sup>35</sup> most of which were intended not to promote world peace but to further its own political or economic interests. The Soviet Union repeatedly used its veto to prevent other member states from interfering with its sponsorship of violent insurrection, and occasional direct invasion. The five permanent members also happen to be the world's five biggest arms dealers, indirectly responsible for exacerbating many of the conflicts the Security Council is supposed to prevent. The five nations which possess the exclusive power to decide how threats should be handled are the five nations which present the gravest threat to the rest of the world.

The problem is compounded – and this is not commonly understood – by the fact that the powers of the Security

Council are not confined to the administration of peace. The UN Charter also grants the five permanent members vetoes over constitutional reform of the United Nations.\* Even if every other member of the General Assembly votes to change the way the institution works, their decision can be overruled by a single permanent member. Any one of the five can also block the appointment of the UN Secretary-General,<sup>†</sup> the election of judges to the International Court of Justice, and the admission of a new member to the United Nations.<sup>36</sup>

Those who benefit from this system argue that it simply reflects the realities of power: if the five permanent members were not using their vetoes to force other states to do as they bid, they would find some other means. This is undoubtedly true; but the problem with the way the council is established is that, rather than moderating the realities of power, it compounds them. It offers an immediate and painless means for a permanent member to prevent the rest of the world from pursuing peace or justice, whenever it suits its interests to do so. These special powers have rendered the UN General Assembly, in which every member state has an equal vote, all but irrelevant. The 186 member states which do not occupy permanent seats on

\* In Articles 108 and 109.

† In 1996, for example, the US blocked the reappointment of Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

the Security Council can huff and puff about how the world should be run, in the certain knowledge that real power lies elsewhere.

But even if the Security Council were to be disbanded tomorrow, and the supreme powers it possessed vested instead in the Assembly, the United Nations would still be far from democratic. Many of the member states are not themselves democracies, and have a weak claim to represent the interests of their people. Even those governments which have come to power by means of election seldom canvass the opinion of their citizens before deciding how to cast their vote in international assemblies. There is, partly as a result, little sense of public ownership of the General Assembly or the decisions it makes. At public meetings, I have often asked members of the audience to raise their hands if they know the name of their country's ambassador to the United Nations. Seldom, even at gatherings of the most politically active people, do more than two or three per cent claim to know; on one occasion an audience of 600 mostly well-read, middle-class people (it was a literary festival) failed to produce a single respondent. In turn, many of the ambassadors, who are appointed, not elected, appear to be rather more conscious of the concerns of their nations' security services than those of the citizens whose part they are supposed to take.

The assembly, too, is riddled with rotten boroughs. It is widely recognized in the United States that there is

something wrong with a system in which the 500,000 people of Wyoming can elect the same number of representatives to the Senate as the thirty-five million of California. Yet, in the UN General Assembly, the 10,000 people of the Pacific island of Tuvalu possess the same representation as the one billion people of India. Their per capita vote, in other words, is weighted 100,000-fold. If the assembly had real powers, this inequity would be a major liability: in international bodies which do make real decisions, such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the International Whaling Commission, rich and powerful nations bribe and blackmail small and weak ones to obtain the votes they need.<sup>37</sup>

But even if all the world's nations were of equal size, so that all the world's citizens were represented evenly, and even if the Security Council were abolished and no state, in the real world, was more powerful than any other, the UN would still fail the basic democratic tests, for the simple reason that its structure does not match the duties it is supposed to discharge. The United Nations has awarded itself three responsibilities. Two of these are *international* duties, namely to mediate between states with opposing interests and to restrain the way in which its members treat their own citizens. The third is a *global* responsibility: to represent the common interests of all the people of the world. But it is constitutionally established to discharge only the first of these functions.

From time to time, nearly all the UN's member states will unite to condemn a government's atrocious treatment of its citizens, such as the ethnic cleansing commissioned by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. But this is possible only because that country's behaviour is anomalous. There are other issues over which the interests of almost all member states are demonstrably at variance with those of their people. Defence spending is an obvious example. In most countries, from the democratic superpower to the tinpot military dictatorship, the confluence of interests which Dwight Eisenhower called 'the military-industrial complex' exercises inordinate power over government, and money which should be spent, for example, on public health and education, is instead spent on unnecessary weapons. But the member states will not unite to condemn this imposition, because almost all of them engage in it. The nation states tacitly conspire against their peoples.

For similar reasons the UN is inherently incapable of representing the common interests of all the people of the world. There is a strong argument, for example, for severely restricting the freedom of financial speculators, whose activities have in recent years wrecked several formerly healthy economies and contributed massively to the indebtedness of the poor nations. But because of the power these speculators possess to strip a nation of its financial assets, they have become the world's kingmakers. Nearly all the governments

in power today are those whose policies are acceptable to the financial markets: they are, in effect, the representatives of global capital. The opposition parties who might challenge this dispensation are kept out of power partly by citizens' fear of how the markets might react if they were elected. So while it might suit the interests of nearly everyone on earth to re-impose capital controls and bring many forms of speculation to an end, the existing system suits most of the world's governments rather well, even as their populations suffer. An assembly of nation states is therefore unlikely to take the kind of collective global action which would be necessary to rid the world of this plague. The preamble to the UN Charter begins with the words 'We the peoples of the United Nations'. It would more accurately read 'We the states'.

Ever since the formation of the UN, there have been efforts to modify this undemocratic order, but few of the existing proposals address the fundamental problems. Many of them fall into one of two categories: permitting national parliamentarians to influence UN policy, and granting members of 'civil society' a consultative or, in some cases, a junior decision-making role.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, for example, which is an association of members of national parliaments founded in 1889, now has 'consultation status' on the UN's Economic and Social Council and 'observer status' at the World Trade

Organization.<sup>38</sup> This permits some form of representation, albeit diffuse and indirect, for the citizens of the world. Like the e-parliament, which now provides national MPs with a virtual debating chamber,<sup>39</sup> the Inter-Parliamentary Union might, as some of its proponents argue, help encourage global democratization. But these initiatives also suffer from some of the constraints which limit the democratic potential of the UN General Assembly.

Every member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union or the e-parliament is subject to three conflicting pressures: the demand by her constituents that their immediate, or local, needs be met; the demand by her national party leaders that she keep to the party line; and, if they are sufficiently interested, the demand by certain of her constituents that she represent their needs or views at the global level. She will have been selected by her party largely on the grounds of her responsiveness to the second demand, and elected by her constituents largely on the grounds of her adherence to the first. These conflicting demands cause a number of problems at the international level. The first is that her main concerns are likely to be more parochial than we might wish of a truly international or global parliamentarian. Her membership of the international union, as it must take second place to her local concerns, will be something of a hobby. If ever she is faced with a conflict between the domestic needs of her constituents and their international needs, she will resolve it in favour of the former.

This is why the people of Europe are represented in the European Parliament not by their national MPs, but by special members elected for this purpose. The second problem is that she remains a member of her national party. If it discovers that her international activities conflict with its policies, it will instruct her to desist. A national party's concerns will always, of course, be overwhelmingly national.

The third problem is that as soon as the work of any international group of national MPs is taken seriously by powerful nation states, they will use the members' national interests to rein them in. This lever is repeatedly pulled by powerful states to discipline the representatives of weaker nations. When, for example, the United States wanted a UN resolution permitting it to wage war on Iraq in 1990 and discovered that some of the temporary members of the Security Council were opposed to it, it bought the votes of Zaire, Ethiopia and Colombia by persuading Saudi Arabia to offer them free oil. This helped ensure that Cuba and Yemen were the only two members of the Security Council to defy the resolution. As soon as it had been adopted, the US ambassador turned to the Yemeni representative and told him that his was 'the most expensive vote you will ever cast'.<sup>40</sup> Three days later, the US cancelled its \$70 million of annual aid to Yemen. An international body composed of national MPs is destined either to be ineffective and ignored, or effective and crushed.

A further problem arises from the sheer number of potential representatives it mobilizes. Either all 25,000 of the world's democratically elected representatives (or however many of them can be bothered) vote on every issue, or they must surrender their powers to a committee or a subcommittee of a committee. This leads to one of two political outcomes. Either there is a gross *horizontal* diffusion of accountability, caused by the vast number of potential representatives, or there is a gross *vertical* diffusion of accountability, caused by the process of photocopy democracy.\* In either case, it leaves constituents feeling that they have little real leverage over the decisions the parliament makes. Another obvious problem is that this system leaves those people who do not live in representative democracies with no opportunity to determine how the world is run. These people, perhaps more than anyone else on earth, need international or global assistance, both to undermine their oppressive governments and to secure the peace and material prosperity those governments tend to deny them. Far from offering them a means of confronting oppression, this system leaves them doubly unrepresented, placing them at a still greater global disadvantage.

\* A horizontal diffusion means that, as decisions are split between a huge number of representatives, their individual contribution becomes so small as to be negligible, which means that they cannot individually be held to account for what happens. A vertical diffusion means that accountability becomes lost in the obscure hierarchy of committees and subcommittees.

These and other problems have encouraged some people to suggest that the democratic deficits of the United Nations should be addressed instead through the representation of 'constituencies of interest', by which they mean non-governmental organizations, or NGOs. Already, gatherings of NGOs are being granted formal rights by some international bodies. The UN's Economic and Social Council, for example, has given 'consultative status' to 1500 NGOs. In 2000, the UN hosted a 'Millennium Forum' of NGOs, whose declaration was adopted as an official UN document, and whose representative became an official delegate at the UN Summit. Several eminent scholars have called for the creation of a permanent 'NGO Forum', sitting alongside the United Nations, helping to inform and guide the decisions it makes. This would, I believe, be a disaster for democracy. Permitting NGOs to represent the people of the earth introduces several unresolvable problems. The first is that either every body calling itself an 'NGO' must be permitted to attend, or someone must determine who can and who can't turn up.

If every self-appointed NGO is to be represented, then the diffusion of accountability which vitiates the parliamentary unions will be multiplied many times over, as every sub-faction of every possible interest group seeks to enter. If every member of an international NGO forum was to receive one vote, then we have effectively established a *plutocracy* (a political system governed by money), as the richest

organizations (in particular the corporations and corporate lobby groups) could each establish several hundred separate NGOs to represent their interests. Needless to say, such a forum would be so big as to be utterly incapable of making a decision. If, on the other hand, one vote was to be allocated to each agglomeration of interest groups, we would discover, for example, that the representatives of those (few and tiny) NGOs whose members insist that the human race was sired by aliens would possess the same global power as the big development agencies. So it seems clear that someone must decide which groups can and cannot be represented. There are several possible criteria this 'someone' could apply. The most obvious is to appoint to the forum those NGOs with the biggest global membership. The world's people would then be represented by animal welfare charities and cancer research trusts.

So the Grand Inquisitor with the responsibility of deciding who qualifies would need to establish his own criteria for choosing the representatives of the people. This means that he will pre-determine the political outcome of whatever debates the NGO forum might hold. NGOs, of course, represent entrenched and generally non-negotiable interests, so simply by deciding which groups should be allowed to attend and in which proportion, the Inquisitor decides in advance how every issue will be resolved.

This is, in other words, not just an impossible task, but a ridiculous one, which leads not to the promotion of democ-

racy but the pre-emption of democracy. And these constraints arise even before we come to consider such issues as presumed consent, accountability and the ranking of issues. The Inquisitor takes the place of the world's people in determining what is and is not important. Far from increasing the scope of popular representation, an NGO forum reduces it to the decision of one inherently unaccountable person or committee. It should not surprise the members of the global justice movement that two of our most committed enemies, the former director-general of the World Trade Organization, Michael Moore, and the European trade commissioner, Pascal Lamy, have both supported the idea of NGO representation, even though both men have questioned NGOs' transparency and accountability. It is precisely because they lack accountability that their engagement is acceptable to the dictatorship of vested interests. Whenever the NGOs it has elevated turn against it, it can, quite reasonably, dismiss them as illegitimate.

All those who live in democratic nations today would regard as intolerable a proposal to replace their national parliaments with one or other of these schemes. If a government announced that it intended to abolish parliament or congress and replace it with a union of the country's thousands of local councillors (many of whom know nothing of national politics), which would seek to legislate either as a vast and sprawling body or by means of ever more obscure

subcommittees, that government should expect to be overthrown. If it were to suggest that the task of representation should be handed instead to a forum of voluntary organizations, either self-selected or chosen by some all-powerful ombudsman, it would never recover from the ensuing ridicule.

Why such substitutes for democracy should be any more acceptable at the global level is impossible to see. If we wish to be represented, then let us be represented, and let us no longer accept the evasions, half-measures, impediments, intermediaries and arbiters whose installation masquerades as global democratization. The only genuinely representative global forum is a *directly* representative one, by which, of course, I mean a world parliament.

It is hard to think of any issue of national importance which now stops at the national frontier. The World Trade Organization has extended its mandate so far that its decisions could come to govern everything from food labelling to railway timetables. The World Bank and IMF have penetrated the poorer nations to the point at which they are, in some cases, telling their schools which brand of computers they should buy. The decisions being made by the Security Council will help to determine whether we live in peace or are perpetually subject to terrorism and war. Climate change, financial speculation, debt and deregulation reach us wherever we live. As everything has been globalized except democracy, the rulers of the world can

go about their business without reference to ourselves. Unsurprisingly, therefore, many – perhaps most – of the decisions they make conflict with the interests of the majority, and reflect only those of the dominant minority.

While the rulers of the world cloister themselves behind the fences of Seattle or Genoa, or ascend into the inaccessible eyries of Doha and Kanamaskis, they leave the rest of the world shut out of their deliberations. We are left to shout abuse, to hurl ourselves against the lines of police, to seek to smash the fences which stand between us and the decisions being made on our behalf. They reduce us, in other words, to the mob, and then revile the thing they have created. When, like the cardinals who have elected a new pope, they emerge, clothed in the serenity of power, to announce that it is done, our howls of execration serve only to enhance the graciousness of their detachment. They are the actors, we the audience, and for all our cat-calls and imprecations, we can no more change the script to which they play than the patrons of a cinema can change the course of the film they watch. They, the tiniest and most unrepresentative of the world's minorities, assert a popular mandate they do not possess, then accuse us of illegitimacy. Their rule, unauthorized and untested, is sovereign.

A world parliament endows us, in theory, with three democratic resources the world does not yet possess. The first is a forum that carries weight and commands recog-

nition, in which good ideas can do battle with bad ones. There is, of course, no guarantee that a democratically elected parliament will make sensible decisions, that people will elect those who best represent their interests or that the battles between them will always be resolved in favour of justice and distribution. But this is the risk associated with democracy everywhere. It is the risk which preserves democracy. We cannot warrant that democracy will deliver what we consider to be the right results. We can warrant that the absence of democracy will deliver the wrong ones.

The second is a system which can, in theory, hold the global and international powers to account. It gives the people of the world an opportunity to influence the decisions which affect their lives, and forces those who claim to act on our behalf to respect us.

The third is an accelerated fusion of human interests, which propels us towards the metaphysical mutation.\*

By itself, the investiture of a world parliament is an insufficient measure. As part of a series of transformative actions, it is an indispensable one.

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\* I have used Houellebecq's term throughout this book, though it might be more accurate to describe a change in the way human beings think as an *epistemological* mutation. While metaphysics is 'the science of being', epistemology means the theory of knowledge.

While a global people's assembly has revolutionary potential, it is hardly a new idea. The first reference to the notion I have seen is contained in Alfred Tennyson's poem *Locksley Hall*, written in 1842.\* Today there are at least six competing models and scores of proposals, each supported by a vocal faction. I won't try to compare them, but in seeking to choose the best version, it seems to me that a key component is simplicity.

Some of the models are staggeringly complex, demanding weighted voting, special chambers to represent minority interests, and sophisticated and elaborate means of delivering proportional representation. These are supposed to ensure that the system is as fair as it could possibly be, and in principle they could enhance a parliament's authority. But complexity undermines legitimacy. If people cannot grasp immediately how the system works, why it is relevant to them and how they can affect the decisions it makes, they will lose interest, relegating it to that ever-growing list of things I ought to know about but have neither the time nor energy to comprehend. Indeed, one of the impediments to public attempts to hold the dictatorship of vested interests to account is the extraordinary complexity of both the issues themselves and the structures, with their multiple layers of delegated authority, through which that dictatorship works.

\* 'Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were fur'd  
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.'

The fewer the citizens who engage in a democratic process, the less just and less legitimate it becomes. So while we could devise an assembly which catered in advance for every possible permutation of justice, it is likely in practice to prove less just than a system without such complex safeguards. The version I've chosen is therefore the simplest of all possible models. Every adult on earth possesses one vote.

The parliament would need to be big enough to represent a wide range of views, but small enough to make decisions with efficiency. So let us say, as it permits us to deal with nice round numbers, that it should contain 600 representatives, each with a constituency of 10 million people. The implications for global justice are obvious. A resident of Ouagadougou has the same potential influence over the decisions the parliament makes as a resident of Washington. A Haitian has the same representation as a Hungarian. The people of China will possess, between them, sixteen times as many votes as the people of Germany. While, unlike other models, this design makes no special provision for the votes of the poor, their representatives will massively outnumber those of the rich. It is, in other words, a revolutionary assembly.

A further implication is that, if we are to establish 600 constituencies of even size, many of them will have to straddle national borders. This is not, as some people have suggested, a liability, but an asset. The less our representatives are bound to the demands of nationhood, the less parochial their outlook is likely to be. The more we, as

constituents, are forced to share our political destiny with the people of other nations, the more we are forced to understand and engage with their concerns. Some people object that these constituencies would thereby affiliate the people of two hostile nations. So much the better. All existing constituencies lump together people with starkly different interests, crossing boundaries of wealth and poverty, farmland and industry, ethnicity and religion. If they did not, and represented, as an NGO forum does, only communities of interest, most political outcomes would be predetermined, a simple matter of arithmetic. In these circumstances, elections would be fixed by whoever established the constituency boundaries.

A key determinant of the success of a world parliament is that its members are seen to have no connection to the governments of the nations from which they come. This helps defend them from the pressures that governments might exert. If the United States told a member from Yemen that unless she changed her policies it would cut the aid it gives her country's government, she could reply that the decisions she makes have nothing to do with the government. This is not an assembly formed by nation states, but an assembly formed by the world's people. It is global, not international.

So how do we begin? We begin by liberating ourselves from the perception that we must wait upon nation states to deliver global justice. This assembly will belong to the

people, and we require no one's permission to establish it. So let us picture a process which starts with a series of global meetings, open to everyone, but whose participants have not – as it has to begin somewhere – yet been elected. Let us picture, for example, the annual meetings which already engage some tens of thousands of people, organized by the World Social Forum.\* These are in no sense representative assemblies. The people who attend them are self-selecting and drawn from among those who can either afford an airfare (to Brazil or India) or persuade someone else to provide one for them. But they attract citizens from most of the potential constituencies the members of a world parliament would represent.

Our first task would be to publish pamphlets and web pages explaining the idea in as many languages as we possess. Our second would be to organize a consultation of as many of the world's people, through randomly selected samples, as the budgets we raise permit, to discover whether or not our proposal commands popular consent. If the consultations reveal that the idea is unpopular, then (though we might seek to change people's minds through further publication and debate) we should cease the process of

\* This is the biggest of the global justice movement's gatherings. In 2003, over 100,000 people took part. The first three forums have been held in Porto Alegre, in Brazil. In 2004 the meeting is likely to move to India.

development. But let us assume, for now, that most of the people we have polled approve of the proposal. We then find ourselves in a rather stronger position to raise funds, and to set up an electoral commission, staffed by professionals, with a strictly neutral mandate. This could begin to draw up boundaries and design an election. Its reports would then be disseminated for global consultation.

It is important that at this pre-democratic stage as little is decided as possible, and that all decisions made could be reversed if either public referenda or the parliament itself decided that they were wrong. The first general election, for example, could be accompanied by a full referendum on whether the parliament should, indeed, be formed, and how it should work. The process must belong to the people at every stage.

The plan then becomes more expensive, more complex and more hazardous. The first and most obvious impediment is money. A global general election is likely to cost something in the order of \$5 billion,\* while the establish-

\* The data on national election costs are sparse (but for some reason more abundant for Africa than any other continent). I have taken the costs of general elections in five poor nations (Kenya, Senegal, Togo, Mozambique and Ghana) and two rich nations (the United States and Australia) and divided them by their populations to arrive at an average cost per citizen of \$1.03.<sup>41</sup> Multiplied by the world population, this gives a very tentative \$6.46 billion. I have reduced it to account for economies of scale (the election would be coordinated by a single administration).

ment of a parliament might cost around \$300 million,\* and its annual running costs a further \$1 billion or so† (an electronic assembly would be much cheaper, but a poor substitute for a real debating chamber). A very small proportion could be raised from individuals and charitable foundations. The only bodies which possess sufficient funds to provide the rest, however, are states, the international institutions and corporations, and we should, of course, be wary of accepting money from them, for fear either that they would co-opt the assembly or that we would feel constrained to adjust our plans to their convenience. Corporate funding, for obvious reasons, should be ruled out altogether. There may be a few liberal states and perhaps even a sympathetic UN agency which would give substantial sums and expect nothing in return, and this might be deemed acceptable to both the initiators of the model and the people they consult. But

\* The European parliament in Strasbourg, at 220,000m<sup>2</sup>, cost \$560 million to build.<sup>42</sup> If the world parliament is based in a poor nation, as I suggest later in the text, the building costs would be reduced. Construction costs an average of \$567/m<sup>2</sup> in the Philippines and \$657/m<sup>2</sup> in Kenya,<sup>43</sup> giving \$124.7 million and \$144.5 million respectively. I have doubled the figure and rounded it up to account for the cost of equipment and recruitment.

† The Strasbourg parliament costs \$1.005 billion a year to run.<sup>44</sup> It is slightly bigger than the proposed world parliament (750 seats). While staff costs in a poor nation will be lower, the MPs' travel and interpretation costs will be higher, so I'm guessing that the overall expense would be roughly the same. These calculations are, of course, rudimentary. Their purpose is to provide an idea of the *order* of cost.

there is an inherent contradiction between national or international funding and the aims of a global assembly.

Some people have suggested establishing a global lottery, offering enormous prizes and attracting, as a result, plenty of punters. This, though it has some ugly implications, provides us with both independent funding and weekly publicity, as even the most hostile media would find it hard not to report the results of the 'World Parliament Draw'. An alternative is to wait for the implementation of the proposals outlined in Chapter 5, which have the potential to generate far more money than we would ever need. Even so, we can anticipate a tussle over these funds between nation states and the global assembly.

The next obvious impediment is the opposition of national governments. Democratically elected governments would be foolish to seek to impede elections to a world parliament, as they would immediately be accused of despotism. But undemocratic governments would correctly perceive such elections as subversive – their citizens are likely to acquire a taste for voting. We can anticipate, therefore, that unelected leaders would seek to prevent elections to the world parliament from taking place.

There are two possible means of defeating them. The first is to hold underground elections. These are likely to be dangerous for both the participants and the people over-seeing them. They could also – as visibility is essential to

democratic accountability – be captured and co-opted, possibly by the very governments which drove them underground in the first place. The other is to hold elections among the exiles of the closed constituencies. This means that the great majority of the constituents would, initially at least, be deprived of a vote, while those who lived abroad would be disproportionately powerful. But, though both solutions are far from ideal, neither should be discounted, for the very reason that they are, as the governments would fear, destabilizing. Underground elections are precisely the kind of process which could begin to coordinate and mobilize opposition to an undemocratic regime. Elections among exiles have the potential to create profound resentment within the domestic population, as it perceives that it has been deprived of choice by its government. In both cases, we employ the self-reinforcing potential of democracy. A gradient of hope is established, and nothing is so threatening to tyranny as hope. Even so, we may have to start without some regions of the world.

Building a world parliament is not the same as building a world government. We would be creating a chamber in which, if it works as it should, the people's representatives will hold debates and argue over resolutions. In the early years at least, it commands no army, no police force, no courts, no departments of government. It need be encumbered by neither president nor cabinet. But what we

have created is a body which possesses something no other global or international agency can claim: legitimacy. Directly elected, owned by the people of the world, our parliament would possess the moral authority which all other bodies lack. And this alone, if effectively deployed, is a source of power.

Even those bodies whose legitimacy is at best diffuse, derivative and vague possess enough moral authority to moderate the behaviour of the world's only superpower. The government of the United States could have attacked Iraq whenever it wanted, without asking anyone's permission. It has sufficient military power to defeat any state on earth. It requires, as the president has constantly hinted, no allies to pursue its military adventures. Yet at the end of 2002, it chose to submit itself to the intensely frustrating and at times humiliating scrutiny of the other members of the United Nations Security Council. It did so because it wanted to persuade its citizens that the war it was proposing against Iraq was a just one. Opinion polls within the United States (whose people, despite the best efforts of successive governments, remain by and large civilized and humane) showed that the Americans would look more kindly upon a war which had the UN's approval. They did not want to see themselves as the citizens of a nation whose foreign policy was built entirely on brute force. The events of 2003, however, suggest that the council's limited reserves of moral power have been exhausted.

Similar concessions to moral authority constrain the behaviour of all but the most tyrannical states. The governments of the European Union have repeatedly enhanced the powers of the European Parliament, despite the fact that it competes with them for control over European decision-making.\* They have done so in order to persuade their people that the Union – and therefore its governments – is democratically accountable.

Perhaps the most startling example of moral power is one which takes us back to the potential starting point for our own parliamentary assembly. The 50,000 people who gathered in Porto Alegre in Brazil for the World Social Forum in 2002 represented no one but themselves. Yet theirs was widely perceived as the only international assembly which had any claim to reflect the views of the people of the world. The result was that officials from some of the world's most powerful governments and institutions came to try to persuade the forum that they were listening. Twice as many French ministers travelled to the World Social Forum as to the World Economic Forum, the official, intergovernmental meeting which was taking place at the same time in New York.<sup>45</sup> Even the president of the World Bank, one of the least accountable of all international bodies, applied to speak there. But, as if to

\* This point has been made by the legal theorist Richard Falk and Andrew Strauss.

show where moral power really lay, the forum turned him away.<sup>46</sup>

If even this self-selected convention can attract, without inviting them, representatives of some of the world's most powerful institutions, then we can only guess what moral power an elected global assembly might wield. A world parliament would be able to determine whether or not the international actions of a government or an institution have the support of the world's people. And as most of the world's big governments and institutions claim to act democratically, they would be drawn to our assembly like moths to a flame.

We already possess an example of a people's parliament built on moral authority, which managed to bring the world's most powerful government to heel. In the fifth century BC, Rome was governed by consuls, drawn solely from the *patrician*, or aristocratic, class. Theirs was an oppressive government, exercising absolute power over the other social classes. The record is a little hazy, but it seems that one day in 494 BC, prompted by issues which would not be unfamiliar to today's global justice movement (debt, unequal access to land and arbitrary treatment by the authorities), thousands of the *plebeians*, the working people of Rome, suddenly disappeared.<sup>47</sup> This event came to be known as the 'first secession of the plebs'. They had agreed to meet on the Sacred Mount, a hill outside the city. There they arranged themselves into a people's parliament – the

*Consilium Plebis* – and elected two *tribunes*, or representatives. All the people on the hill swore that anyone who harmed the tribunes, irrespective of class or power, would be killed.

At first the tribunes of the plebs had no constitutional powers; they could merely urge the authorities to recognize the needs of their constituents. But, backed by huge numbers, they were hard to ignore and impossible to kill. Gradually, the scope of the *Consilium's* powers began to increase, and in 449 BC, after a second secession of the plebs, it was officially recognized by the state. The tribunes, now ten in number, were granted a right of veto over the business of the government. The resolutions adopted by the *Consilium Plebis* (known as *plebiscites*) gradually began to be passed into law. The plebeians also elected a number of officials – the *aediles* – whose purpose was to record the proceedings of the Senate (the patricians' parliament), in the hope of being able to hold its members to their word, and to establish a body of written law which would protect the plebs from arbitrary treatment by magistrates.

The power of the plebs lasted for about a hundred years. By 367 BC, at least one of the tribunes had been admitted to the Senate as a consul. But (and there is surely a lesson here for all democratic movements) the transformation appears to have been rather too successful, for the tribunes began to accumulate so much power that they ceased to identify with the powerless and came, instead, to see them-

selves as a new ruling class. Ambitious young men began using the Tribunal as a means of entry to the Senate, and gradually the plebs' movement was taken over by the nobility. But, for a century or so, the oppressed people of Rome had moderated the power of the ruling class by means of a parliamentary assembly founded on moral authority. There is, then, plenty of evidence to suggest that our parliament *can* work this way. But *should* it work this way? Is there an alternative to coercive power based solely on moral authority?

In the early stages at least, I don't believe there is. \* The only available alternative is a parliament whose decisions are imposed on other bodies, if necessary by force of arms. This is how the Security Council works today. But the armies and the weapons it calls upon are those which reside in the hands of the state. Its coercive powers (and hence the monopoly of violence it asserts) depend on the compliance of the world's most powerful governments, which is why it is such a partisan organization. The point of a people's assembly is that it is independent of pre-existing powers. Only if the delegated officials of the parliament managed to accumulate so much weaponry that they could force every nation to do as they demanded would the parliament be able to impose its will, but that would necessitate a world

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\* I am indebted to Troy Davis for persuading me of the benefits of this approach.

government so powerful that it would swiftly become the most oppressive force on earth.

There is, moreover, a great advantage to a parliament whose power relies entirely on moral authority, and this is that it sustains this power by showing that it continues to command the support of the people. If it loses touch with the people, it loses much of its force. This has the potential, then, to be a self-regulating system.

So we are left with an assembly whose primary purpose is to hold other powers to account. It would review the international decisions made by governments, by the big financial institutions, and by bodies such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. Through consultation with the world's people and through debates within the chamber, it would establish the broad principles by which these other bodies should be run. It would study the decisions they make and hold them up to the light. When it discovers that they have breached the principles of good governance it has established, it would pass resolutions and publish critical reports. We have every reason to believe that, if properly constituted, our parliament, as the only body with a claim to represent the people of the world, would force them to respond.

Let us picture a situation, for example, in which a body such as the World Bank had decided to pay for the construction of a giant hydro-electric dam. The villagers whose

homes were due to be flooded might approach the world parliament and ask it to examine the bank's decision. The parliament would ask the bank for its comments, and perhaps send a fact-finding mission to the site of the dam. It would then judge the scheme by the principles it had established. If it found that the dam fell short of those principles, it would say so. The bank could refuse either to change the project or to withdraw its funding, but only if it was prepared to lose credibility. Judging by the success of an unelected and little-known body called the World Commission on Dams in forcing the World Bank to promise to change the way it operates,\* I think we can expect the bank to consider itself obliged to respond to the world parliament's decisions.

The same approach could be used, though to a lesser extent, to change some of the underlying principles governing the way the big international bodies operate. If our parliament, for example, ruled that the World Trade Organization's decisions are unfair because they are made by committees of corporate lawyers meeting in secret, I think we could expect the WTO to change those procedures. But it would soon collide with some intractable political realities. We could not expect our assembly to be able to prevent

\* The World Bank has since been accused of backtracking,<sup>48</sup> but the WCD's report has proved invaluable to the people seeking to hold it to account.

dictators from murdering their people or powerful states from invading other nations. The parliament might decide that the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO should dissolve themselves, but without any expectation that they would feel prompted to do so. Such tasks will require a different approach, which I will explain in subsequent chapters. The world parliament is the body which could hold our new, more responsive institutions to account.

But we can see how the power of this parliament could be enhanced even by those agencies which would rather it did not exist. Once citizens came to the parliament with a complaint, the bodies they were criticizing would feel obliged to respond. By responding, they would validate and recognize the parliament's authority. By recognizing its authority once, their obligation to respond on the following occasion would increase: they would gradually find themselves handing more power to the parliament. In this respect, as in many others, democracy can be self-establishing.

While the main function of our parliament, in the early years at least, may be to hold other bodies to account, it is also possible to see how it could begin to propose and initiate measures of its own. Though we cannot anticipate the novel solutions to some of the world's problems which an assembly, freely guided by its electors, might devise, it is not hard to see how the parliament might help to promote some of the progressive measures which have

already been projected but have so far proved impossible to implement.

The only just and sustainable means of tackling climate change, for example, is 'contraction and convergence', the model designed by the concert viola player and obsessively effective campaigner Aubrey Meyer.<sup>49</sup> This scheme first establishes how much carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases humans can produce each year without frying the planet. It then divides that sum between all the people of the world, and allocates to each nation, on the basis of its population, a quota for gas production. It proposes a steady reduction (or 'contraction') of both the total world production of climate-changing gases and the excessive production within nations which currently exceed their quotas. National production per head of population gradually 'converges' to equality; any nation which wants to produce more than its share must first buy unused quota from another one.

The model has been approved by ministers and government scientists in dozens of countries, and now appears to be the favoured solution of the United Nations and even the World Bank. But, because it conflicts with their national interests, none of the governments which claim to support it appear prepared to implement it, or even to champion it with any vigour. While we don't know how a world parliament might respond to this idea, it is easy to see why, if it did adopt the model as policy, it could prove to be a far more effective advocate than either governments or the existing

international bodies, all of which are constrained by national politics. It might also become a powerful defender of multilateral disarmament, a global tax (the 'Tobin tax') on financial speculation, or the UN's proposal that the rich nations should each devote 0.7 per cent of their national wealth to foreign aid.

In every case, if the parliament agreed that these were worthy goals, it could play the role of honest broker: an agency unconstrained by competition between nations. Indeed, we may well find that national governments begin to turn to the parliament for the arbitration of political matters, much as they use the International Court of Justice for the settlement of legal disputes today. In doing so, they would, of course, be recognizing and reinforcing the parliament's moral authority.

This, at any rate, is how we might expect our assembly to begin. But democracy demands that we make no attempt to prescribe how it should evolve. It may continue to exercise such modest functions as I have already described. It may, if the people will it and if states begin formally to recognize its powers, become a legislative body. This could begin to establish a body of global law supported – uniquely – by democratic consent. While the parliament would continue to exert no direct control over nation states, those which have signed a treaty granting it certain formal powers are likely to feel bound by the laws it passes, or risk the loss of credibility. It could become the legislature which

complements and helps legitimate the judicial authority of the International Criminal Court.\* Or, if the people of the world demand this, it could begin to establish the rudiments of a global government, accumulating certain powers hitherto vested only in the hands of nation states. But it is not for those of us who propose this body to make such decisions. The point of democracy is that it gets out of control; no person or faction, least of all those who design the system which starts the process, should be able to steer it. The parliament must come to belong to the world's people, not to the authors of the model.

If you respond with horror to the idea of a world parliament, as many do, I would invite you to examine your reaction carefully. Is it because you believe that such a body might become remote and excessively powerful? Or is it really because you cannot bear the idea that a resident of Brussels would have no greater voice in world affairs than a resident of Kinshasa? That the Ethiopians would elect the same number of representatives as the Italians (and more as their

\* The ratification of the ICC, in 2002, could be viewed as the first clear victory for democratic globalization. It is in some respects a *global* criminal court as, unlike the International Court of Justice, its resolutions do not depend on direct brokerage between nation states. It came into being partly as a result of determined lobbying by civil society, in particular the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, which is a network of over 1000 NGOs.

population increases)? That the people of Mexico would, collectively, become two and a half times as powerful as the people of Spain, while the Indians would cast seventeen times as many votes as the inhabitants of the United Kingdom? That, in other words, the flow of power established when a few nations ruled the world would be reversed? Are you afraid that this parliament might threaten democracy, or are you really afraid that it would actuate it?

In the heart of even the most radical European or North American campaigner lurks, I suspect, a residual fear of the Yellow Peril, of the people of other lands, who do not share our worldview, becoming too powerful. We might lament the excessive power of the United Nations Security Council, but are we not, in some secret recess of the heart, also thankful that our governments can force the world to comply with their demands? Which of us in the rich world is not aware that we have benefited, through public spending, safe housing and secure food supplies, from the power our government wields over others? Which of us does not offer a secret prayer of thanks to the earthly powers who have decreed that we need entertain no fear of invasion? Which of us, in other words, cannot see that the current dispensation of power relieves us of the need to break the economic grip of our own ruling classes, which, without the fruits of the colonial economy, would be so oppressive as to compromise our prospects of survival? Which of us cannot see that our government's power to demand the compliance of other

nations permits us to be complacent about the treatment of those nations, knowing as we do that they cannot punish our violations with conquest? Which of us, at heart, is not an oligarch?

If, as we claim, we belong to a 'global justice movement', then we must be prepared to accept the loss of our own nations' power to ensure that the world is run for our benefit. In rising against the excessive powers of our governments, we must rise against our own instincts: against the fear of other people's freedom, against the indolence which recognizes that our freedom not to act relies on their incapacity to act. Unless we are prepared to take our arguments to their logical conclusion, we may as well furl our banners and go home.

Few people frankly admit that they fear the freedom of the people of other nations; but when they do, they tend to argue that this freedom would compromise our own. Joseph Nye, for example, dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, is one of the fiercest opponents of a world parliament. It would permit, he claims, the 'citizens of around 200 states' (the rest of the world) to be continually outvoted by more than a billion Chinese and a billion Indians'. The result would be 'a nightmare' for those who 'seek to promote international environmental and labor standards, as well as democracy'.<sup>50</sup>

This assertion appears to rely on several curious assumptions. The first is that the Chinese or the Indians would not

vote according to what they wanted, but according to their nationality. The second is that the people of these nations would vote against the people of the rest of the world. He fails to explain why the interests of people in China or India should be at variance with those of everyone else. We could surely expect the impoverished textile workers of China, India, Bangladesh, Mexico and Haiti to express quite similar interests. We can further expect their choices to be at variance with those of their employers, which are likely to be more consonant with those of the Western elite.

Professor Nye further assumes, again without explanation, that the people of China and India would vote against higher environmental and labour standards, and even against democracy. Why the people of the biggest democracy on earth would seek to overturn democracy is not clear. As several revolutions and attempted revolutions, a successful decolonization movement and the extraordinary courage of those who stood against the tanks in Tiananmen Square suggest, the people of China and India are just as capable of assessing their political options and making rational decisions as anyone else. Nor is it obvious that the people who suffer most from low environmental and labour standards would be the keenest to keep them that way. Indeed, the world's biggest environmental movements are in India, and in both nations there is constant agitation, though often brutally suppressed in China, for higher labour standards. While the bosses of Chinese and

Indian corporations might vote to keep their employees in a state of near-slavery, we would, I think, have good reason to assume that their workers would not vote the same way.

The truth is that many people in the West, as they have done for centuries, entertain a lively hatred of the Chinese. We have long chosen to see them as faceless masses, statistics rather than human beings, without the capacity for reason or freewill, who prefer to be told what to do than to make their own decisions. One hundred and fifty years ago, we hated them for refusing to trade with us and for rebelling against our economic impositions. Now we appear to hate them for trading too successfully, and because we fear they *won't* rebel against our economic impositions. In both cases, our hatred reflects our unvoiced fear that they might become free and in doing so challenge the unjust world order which permits us to oppress them. Of course, we cannot guarantee that the people of India and China will always vote for democracy and for higher environmental and labour standards – the point of democracy is that you cannot guarantee anything. But we can be sure that the current system of global governance will continue to discriminate *against* these advancements.

Conversely, others have maintained that a global parliament would be yet another imposition of Western political and cultural values upon the rest of the world. This argument is also founded on a presumption that democracy is

alien to the people of non-Western nations. In truth, the majority of those who live in parliamentary democracies, flawed as some of them may be, live in the poor world. Those of us who have worked in such nations can attest that few of their inhabitants would prefer to be governed by a different system. It is true to say that the model on which many of their parliaments are based was first developed in the West, but it is also the case that this model no longer belongs exclusively to the West.

We can hope and expect, moreover, that as our parliament belongs to the people from the beginning of the process, it would differ from, and be an improvement on, the kind of democracy which prevails in the rich world. Guided by the consent of the electors, it should evolve its own political dynamic, which reflects the combined will of all the world's people and, because of the weight of numbers, particularly those who do not live in the Western nations. But our greatest safeguard against imposition is to ensure that nothing is imposed; if, in the initial referenda, the people of the world reject a world parliament, then a world parliament will not come into existence.

These concerns do, however, suggest the need for a further safeguard in the form of a new referendum every ten or twenty years, which would permit the people of the world to vote for the parliament's dissolution. This would be particularly important if we had to begin without some regions of the world, because of the opposition of their

governments. It would help to protect the world not only against the imposition of the values of a minority, but also against the possibility that our parliament may itself accumulate oppressive powers.

A variant on this objection is that the creation of a world parliament depends on a sense of global nationhood which does not yet exist. Joseph Nye argues that 'there is little evidence that a sufficiently strong sense of community exists at the global level' on which we could build a parliament. The world would first require 'a widespread sense of identity as a citizenry as a whole'.<sup>51</sup>

It is surely clear that parliamentary democracy does not depend on a strong sense of community. Within even the longest-established democratic states there are large numbers of distinct communities, which share little sense of engagement with their neighbours other than the fact that they inhabit the same nation and vote in the same elections. Professor Nye's own country, the United States of America, offers, perhaps, the definitive example of diversity co-existing with democracy. The ultra-conservative Christian communities of the deep South, for example, could scarcely have less in common with the gay and hippy communities of San Francisco. The poor Hispanic districts of Los Angeles are a world apart from the mansions of Beverly Hills. The nation's Orthodox Jews and fundamentalist Muslims could scarcely be said to see themselves as comrades. Yet no one in the US argues that democracy there

is impossible because an 'insufficiently strong sense of community exists at the national level'.

Indeed, all nationhood is to some extent artificial, the product of historical accident, the convenience of tyrants and the disengagement of colonists. It is hard to think of any nation whose members belong to just one religious, ethnic or tribal community. Even the tiny Pacific island states incorporate tribes which once collected each other's heads as trophies. Nations do not fall apart at every general election just because their people think in different ways; in fact most communities unconsciously reinforce the democratic process by vying to make that process work for themselves. The expansion of the European Union requires that the Hungarians must now perceive that they have a common destiny with the Portuguese, but not – at least until 2007 – with the Romanians. The Greeks must reconcile themselves to the idea that they may, one day, belong to the same community of nations as the Turks, but might never belong to the same confederation as the Russians. If we believe that this political project is viable, and that the people of the European Union are sufficiently adaptable and far-sighted to accept these staggeringly arbitrary distinctions, then we should surely have no difficulty in seeing the potential viability of a global political identity.

The world's population, by contrast to those of its nation states, is a self-defined entity, a country whose borders are indisputable, whose sense of common destiny requires no

patriotic speeches, no hanging of flags, no wars with other worlds. Though most of us have yet to acknowledge it, a global identity – rather, a species identity – has been there from the moment our ancestors first walked upon two legs. The demagogues who have created nations and established empires have sought to justify their governance by suggesting that the people who live beyond their borders are fundamentally different from those within. But now that the racial stereotyping required by empire is beginning to abate (or rather, because of the multi-ethnic character of the powerful nations, to be reserved only for the *leaders* of the enemy), many humans are coming to see that the other members of the species have broadly the same needs and responses, and that these needs and responses differ in some respects from those of other species. The nationhood of human beings, what Alfred Tennyson called the Parliament of Man, is pre-established.

Indeed, by making this political identity visible, by creating a forum in which the people of diverse nations can unite on some issues and divide on others, irrespective of nationhood, our parliament has the potential to begin to establish a sense of common destiny, to start the process of catalysis which foments the metaphysical mutation.

But here we do encounter a real conflict, though for precisely the opposite reasons to those advanced by the good professor. Is there not a clash between the universalism of human concerns and the diversity of human cultures?

Could our world parliament, and the other measures proposed here – or, for that matter, the metaphysical mutation itself – not accelerate the destruction of the distinct forms of social organization which so many of us in the global justice movement rightly wish to defend? This is not the fey or aesthetic concern that some universalists have suggested. The diversity of human cultures is valuable not only because it makes the world a fascinating place. Many cultures have evolved the subtlest of responses, honed over hundreds of generations, to environmental constraints. The anthropologist Darrell Posey has shown, for example, how the Kayapó of the southern Amazon have developed a farming system which permits them to survive in places otherwise hostile to agriculture.<sup>52</sup> They cultivate fire-resistant sweet potatoes, which catch the nutrients released when tree-trunks are burnt, and a staple crop which both produces its own pesticides, and, through a commensal relationship with a species of ant, weeds itself. Their survival relies on a refined appreciation of microclimates and the relationships between animals and plants. By contrast to almost all the more recently established cultivators in the Amazon, they both improve the soil, and, through planting islands of useful trees in the savannah, expand the forest cover.

Their techniques are encoded in their songs and stories, and in concepts which cannot be successfully translated into other languages. Their language and their sense of self-worth, like those of most of the world's indigenous people,

are now threatened; in this case by a combination of economic globalization, political oppression and the seizure of their resources by other Brazilians. This compromises not only their own economic survival, but also the survival of the ecosystems in which they live. Nor are indigenous people the tiny minority we often imagine. According to the United Nations, they comprise some five per cent of the world's population, or 300 million souls.

There is a conflict here that cannot be denied. There has always been a struggle between diversity and universalism. Those who, like most of the members of the global justice movement, wish to promote universal human rights find themselves at odds with cultural distinction whenever they contest female genital mutilation or the stoning of adulterers. By bringing people together politically, we are likely to enhance the use of common languages and common ways of thinking. We might also discover that we accelerate economic globalization. All these factors have the potential further to undermine cultural identity.

But we also invoke a countervailing force, in the form of an unparalleled opportunity for advocacy. Already, indigenous representatives are making better use of international bodies than any other citizens' groups, except, perhaps, development NGOs. Every few months, there are assemblies of people from all over the world whose cultures are threatened. Inuits from Greenland find common cause with the Dani of West Papua; the Maya agree strategy with

the Maori. It is arguable that all that prevents the final destruction of most of the world's indigenous peoples is the support which they and their defenders can summon from beyond their own national borders. By appealing to universalism, they defend diversity.

A world parliament provides indigenous people with more potent opportunities for mobilizing global support. A parliamentary resolution condemning the treatment of the Saami in Norway or the Aborigines in Australia could, for example, be profoundly embarrassing to the democratically elected governments of those countries. At present, the coercive power of economic globalization is unmatched by the moral power of political globalization. One paradoxical outcome of the Age of Consent could be that we cultivate a universal consciousness of the right to be different.

But these considerations do convey a warning for our democratic model: that we should be wary of striving for perfection. We must accept that democracy will always be something of a mess. Attempting to tidy it up too much could mean subordinating diversity to universalism and the individual consciousness to the general will to such an extent that we may establish the preconditions not for freedom but for captivity. We must leave gaps between the building blocks, in case we accidentally build a wall.

Indeed, there is no clearer exposition of the dangers of excessive tidiness than one of the most advanced and most

visible plans for a world parliament, the scheme presented by a gathering of academics, bureaucrats and other worthy people who call themselves the World Constitution and Parliament Association.<sup>53</sup> The Association's proposals have carefully eliminated all the uncertainties introduced by global democracy, by pre-ordaining its outcomes.

Without consultation or election, it has drawn up a 'Constitution for the Federation of Earth'. This provides for a world parliament consisting of three chambers, namely an elected 'House of Peoples', an appointed 'House of Nations', and a 'House of Counsellors', whose purpose is 'to represent the highest good and best interests of humanity as a whole'.<sup>54</sup> Members of the House of Counsellors will be proposed by representatives of the world's universities, colleges and scientific institutions, otherwise identifiable as 'people like us'. These guardians of 'the highest good' will kindly spare the rest of us the trouble of choosing a World President. The parliament will be accompanied by a 'World Administration', consisting of thirty departments of government, whose duties and powers have already been determined by the Association. It will possess a 'Presidium', an 'Integrative Complex', a 'World Ombudsman', an 'Office of World Attorneys General', a 'World Supreme Court' and any number of other grand posts and positions, some of which already appear to have been filled. Its decisions will be 'enforced' by the 'World Police' which, 'armed only with weapons appropriate for the apprehension of the individuals

responsible for violation of world law', will perform such light duties as ridding the world of nuclear weapons. Happily, they won't encounter much resistance, as 'all member nations shall disarm as a condition for joining and benefiting from the world federation, subject to Article X VII, Sec. C-8 and D-6' of the World Constitution.

The Association has also been so good as to devise, in advance, the laws which will govern us. They have composed a 'Bill of Rights', in eighteen sections, a set of 'Directional Principles', in nineteen sections, and a 'Jurisdiction of World Government' which is 'defined in Grant of Powers of forty sections'.<sup>55</sup> Just in case the world's people might be tempted, despite such foresight on the part of our guardian-philosophers, to alter these arrangements, the evolution of the world government has already been ordained, in 'first', 'second' and 'operative' stages. In short, world democracy has been planned so conscientiously that nothing has been left to chance, least of all that frightening and uncontrollable phenomenon called choice.

If democracy is not self-establishing, it is not democracy. Any system we initiate must contain the scope for its own transformation or improvement, for all the unanticipated developments propelled by the collective genius of free debate. Far from seeking to pre-ordain its outcomes, we must pre-ordain only the openness required to permit its electors' chosen outcomes to evolve.

Some critics might suggest that we need to prescribe 'subsidiarity', the principle that decision-making will always be devolved to the lowest possible level. But while we would do well to hope that our assembly does not become so intrusive or so pettifogging as to seek to wrench control of national or local policy from national and local parliaments, there are three problems with seeking to restrict its scope in advance. The first is that it is unnecessary: while states continue to exist, they will, or so we should expect, contest its ability to reach far into their domestic politics.\* The second is that the line between what is properly the preserve of a national government or a global body can be established only by practice, rather than principle: it is hard to prescribe, for example, the extent to which a government's sovereignty should be challenged when it treats its own people without humanity; the answer is likely to be different in every case. The third is that we should not seek to pre-empt the will of future generations. Faced with conditions yet more extreme than those to which we are responding today, they might, for example, decide that the nation state retains no relevance or purpose. Though we should be wary of parliamentarians seeking to seize too many powers for themselves at the expense of their constituents, their scope for abuse should be curtailed by our refer-

\* The European Union has intruded so far into domestic policy because it was initially an international body, empowered to do so by the member states.

endum, every ten or twenty years, on whether or not the parliament should be dissolved.

Some members of the global justice movement have argued that even the most open parliamentary model limits the scope of democratic choice, for the simple reason that it relies on representation rather than participation. There is no question that representative democracy is a clumsy system. The model proposed here permits people to represent 'us' even if they were fiercely opposed by forty-nine per cent of their constituents. We elect them once, yet they continue to represent us throughout their term of office, even if we later change our minds. We may vote for them because we agree either with the policies they choose to emphasize or with the majority of the policies they propose, or simply because their policies are not as bad as those of the other candidates. But once in office, they may press for other policies which very few of their constituents would support.

But, while representation without participation is clumsy, participation without representation is simply the dictatorship of those who turn up. The participants in any global gathering must be – by comparison with most of the world's people – rich, for they can afford to travel and to take time off from work. They must possess passports and enjoy freedom of movement, which means that participation is also the privilege of people who are both permitted to leave their home states and to enter the state in which the meeting

is being held, without being turned away as suspected refugees. Similar constraints govern electronic direct democracy: only the rich or the educated have access to the necessary technology, and only the free are permitted to use it.

The truth is that 'direct democracy' of this kind is, at the global level at least, a form of representative democracy, but one in which the participants appoint themselves to represent the views of the rest of the world, rather than being elected. Like the academics and bureaucrats who run the World Constitution and Parliament Association, they would be seizing, without a popular mandate, the power to determine how the world should be run.

But there is no reason why our representative system cannot be tempered with some forms of participation. We could envisage, for example, public consultations on major decisions, especially those with constitutional significance. There also seems to be a strong case for constituency ballots. If, for example, the members of a constituency managed to gather a certain number of signatures for a petition, they could demand a referendum on a decision their representative was about to make. Perhaps we could also introduce the possibility of a constituency vote of no confidence in its representative. If successful, this would force a by-election: a possibility guaranteed to concentrate the mind of any parliamentarian beginning to pull away from her electorate.

\* \* \*

These safeguards alone might prove inadequate for the defence of the world parliament against all the undemocratic pressures likely to confront it. Any body which becomes politically effective will attract the attention of groups – some of which will be extremely well-resourced and adept at persuasion – hoping to obtain special favours. Democracy everywhere is compromised by the lobbying power of special interest groups, particularly those representing the interests of large corporations and powerful religious groups. Those of us who have studied the co-optation of democracy in nation states or at the European level are familiar with a range of well-trodden techniques. The richest lobby groups will establish offices with a permanent staff large enough to outclass any competing interest, assign intelligent and well-rewarded people to work on a particular issue, and gradually wear down the resistance of our elected representatives.

In many nations, their assaults on democracy have been helped by their financial contributions to political candidates or parties. They may also resort to criminal bribery or, as I have documented elsewhere,<sup>56</sup> to subtle or less subtle forms of blackmail. The candidates themselves, if they are either extremely rich or have the backing of someone who is, can effectively buy votes through blanket advertising, handing out presents, or paying for some grandiose and visible gift to the public, such as a free party, street lights, even a football stadium, just before the election takes place.

All these distortions are compounded, on a daily basis, by the media organizations controlled by another special interest group (which is often affiliated to the powerful corporate or religious groups): the multi-millionaires who own them. Max Hastings, formerly editor of the British newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*, afforded his readers a rare exposure of proprietorial pressure, when writing about his boss, Conrad Black.<sup>57</sup>

Like most tycoons, Conrad was seldom unconscious of his responsibilities as a member of the rich men's trade union. Those who have built large fortunes seldom lose their nervousness that some ill-wisher will find means to take their money away from them. They feel an instinctive sympathy for fellow multi-millionaires, however their fortunes have been achieved . . . Not infrequently, adverse comment in our newspaper about some fellow mogul provoked Conrad's wrath. Our excellent art critic, Richard Dormant, once wrote scathingly about the malign influence on the international art market of the vastly rich Walter Annenberg . . . It took some days of patient argument to dissuade Conrad from insisting upon Dormant's execution for speaking unkindly of his old friend Walter.<sup>58</sup>

By appointing editors who represent and anticipate their points of view and by instilling the fear of 'execution' into their employees, proprietors ensure that their opinions

dominate and therefore distort the way their newspapers, television and radio channels and websites report everything from government initiatives and popular demonstrations to, as we have seen, the structure of the art market. Almost all multi-millionaires are fiercely opposed to the furtherance of the interests of the poor, as they have, by definition, benefited from inequality. Even those with rather subtler politics than Conrad Black's are encouraged to advance the interests of capital by the requirements of their advertisers, who do not wish to discover a promotion of their new car on one page, and an article about the adverse impact of private transport on the next. The great majority of the world's media helps to limit our political choices by misrepresenting them.

There are no definitive solutions to the distorting influence of lobbyists and multi-millionaires, as it is in the nature of all special interest groups that they will find enterprising means of negotiating the barriers we might raise against them. But there are plenty of lessons to be learnt from systems which possess insufficient safeguards. We should, for example, consider introducing a strict limit on the amount of money that any candidate or party can spend on seeking election. There is also a case for restricting the size of individual donations to the equivalent of a few tens of dollars, if individual donations are to be permitted at all. Some nations are beginning to discover that the only fair system for funding candidates is state sponsorship. Our

parliament, of course, has no state to draw on, but one of the other proposals presented in this book would generate many tens of billions of dollars, some of which we could hope to secure for the perpetuation of our parliament and the funding of its candidates. Even so, we would need to lay down rules governing the sources of money both the parliament and the parliamentarians are permitted to use, and preventing any of its possible sponsors (nation states or other institutions) from influencing the decisions it makes. It seems to me that it would be better to run a skeleton parliament which can discharge only a few of the functions we might envisage than a lavishly funded one which belongs to its sponsors.

It is hard to see how we might prohibit the inordinate activities of the professional lobbyists without also prohibiting the petitions, complaints and suggestions from the public (and the counter-petitions from the institutions about which the public might complain) whose consideration is a large part of the business of a responsive global parliament; but we might be able to prevent our representatives from being unduly influenced by the special interest groups. One defence is full freedom of information. If parliamentarians are acting in our interests, then they should have nothing to hide from us. We have every reason to be suspicious of public servants who refuse to let us see what they are doing.

Our global representatives would not be able to argue that they are prevented from disclosing full details of all the meetings and discussions they attend by concerns about

'national security', as they would have no national security interests to defend. Our world parliament can therefore be more transparent than any national parliament. In combination with our proposed ability to sack our representatives, either individually or en masse, this provision is likely to give us plenty of scope for forcing them out of the arms of the powerful. We might also establish a strict definition of corruption, and call upon the International Criminal Court to help us prosecute any representative who breaks the rules.

Of course the constraint which then emerges is the reporting of our representatives' activities, and of the circumstances governing the decisions they make. Those who rely for their information on the mass media, owned by multi-millionaires, are unlikely to discover that their representatives have been too responsive to multi-millionaires. They may also be gravely misled about the global context in which a debate is taking place, and the implications of the possible decisions the parliament might make. A mass media which systematically distorts our perception of the way the world is run is one of the greatest impediments to democratic choice. There is no easy solution to this problem. Any attempt to lay down rules governing the way the world's affairs are reported would be either unenforceable or oppressive. The gravest distortions, for example, often arise from the media's omissions: by ignoring the outrages commissioned by the powerful but emphasizing those perpetrated by the weak, and by disregarding the needs of the

oppressed while championing those of the oppressor, their factually correct but partial reports can be just as misleading as their misreporting. It is not clear how one might legislate to prevent this. And if legislation was so prescriptive that it could govern editorial choice, it would surely also be so prescriptive as to curtail the freedom of speech which is one of the predeterminants of democracy.

The best we can do, I believe, is to seek to establish competing sources of information. Already the global justice movement has produced thousands of websites, magazines, videos, pamphlets and books. Most of them reach only those who are interested already, and our resources are limited by comparison to those of the corporations with which we are competing. But their audience appears to be growing. The role of the world's alternative media is rather like that of the *aediles*, the parliamentary reporters appointed by the *Constitium Plebis*. As our movement grows, the ratio of *aediles* to other citizens will increase accordingly, until, perhaps, we can begin to tip the balance against the mainstream media.

One of our great challenges is to reach people who are illiterate and without access to technology. This task requires hundreds of thousands of volunteers: it responds, in other words, to our strengths. There are plenty of well-developed techniques, perhaps the most effective being those devised by the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, for both raising people's awareness of the underlying causes of the problems they confront, and assisting them to listen

sceptically to the voices of the powerful.<sup>89</sup> Interestingly, we may be helped here by national governments, which in a desperate attempt to reawaken people's interest in politics (and thus enhance their democratic legitimacy) have introduced citizenship lessons to schools. These, in some countries, draw upon the liberal and liberating techniques of the barefoot pedagogists.

There are a few other measures which could help to ensure that our parliamentarians continue to represent their constituents rather than just the most aggressive special interest groups. The first is to defend them from their own party structures. In most of the world's parliaments, representatives are controlled by their party managers. On those issues considered by their leaders to be important, they are told how to vote. Indeed, a 'free vote' in some systems is seen as a luxury, to be exercised only when the party leadership either wishes to prevent a parliamentary rebellion or regards the issue as so inconsequential that it does not matter which way the decision goes. Parliamentarians, moreover, are expected, in their speeches and public statements, to place their loyalty to the party and its policies above their other concerns. These restraints, often described as the 'whipping system', can be enforced with ferocity. Members of parliament in Britain, for example, have complained of discovering that ballot papers have been completed for them in advance, of being assaulted in the corridors of the House of Commons by the 'Whips', and

of being warned that if they do not do as the party says, embarrassing details of their private lives will be passed to the tabloid newspapers.<sup>60</sup> British MPs know that they have no chance of promotion unless they do precisely as they are told.

The whipping system, in other words, is a system of blackmail. Its purpose is to prevent our representatives from discharging their democratic duty, namely to vote and act according to their consciences, informed by the interests of their constituents. That this system supplants our control of our representatives with control by the party hierarchy; that it ensures that party leaders rather than constituents are represented in the decisions they make; and that the interests of the leadership are often at variance with the interests of constituents, is so obvious that we surely tolerate this system only because it is familiar to us.

Leaders of the governing party often maintain that this system is the only means of implementing their political programmes. They promised in their manifestos to introduce a body of legislation, and they can complete that programme only if parliamentarians do as they are told. But hardly anyone votes for everything in a party's manifesto, and most voters for most parties are unhappy with at least a few of the manifesto's promises. These promises, moreover, while so sacred when they prove to be politically expedient, turn out to be disposable as soon as a government encounters more opposition from vested interests than it expected.

We should surely expect our representatives both to be able to force the governing party to review the promises with which their constituents are unhappy, and to keep the promises for which their constituents voted.

Of course, if in the initial stages our world parliament has no executive and no direct legislative mandate, this excuse is removed outright. But in all parliamentary systems, democratic consent, if it is to mean anything at all, surely requires that party officials are forbidden to seek to interfere with the decisions our representatives make. In our world parliament, we might add this provision to those rules on corruption which could be enforced with the help of the International Criminal Court.

A further protection could be to keep the salaries of the parliamentarians relatively low. In countries in which the parliamentary wage is much greater than the national average wage, the representatives are removed from the people. Their salary encourages them to see themselves as a ruling class.

Those who defend high wages for representatives argue that they are necessary to attract the 'best' candidates, and that they protect the successful candidates from corruption, as they do not need to supplement their wages. But it seems to me that the 'best' candidates are the men and women who are prepared to subordinate their own interests to those of the people they are supposed to represent. High wages attract greedy people. If MPs are paid less, then

people who are interested only in self-advancement are likely to keep away from parliament. Instead of lamenting their disappearance, as most of those in the political classes do, we should wish them good riddance.

In the early 1990s, Brazil's congressmen sought to eliminate corruption (or this, at any rate, was their excuse) by awarding themselves the highest parliamentary salaries in the world. All that happened was that they gained sufficient legitimate wealth to hide the extra money some of them made by taking bribes. No one could now point to their new cars and new houses as proof that they were taking money to which they were not entitled. High wages, moreover, as anyone who has studied remuneration in the corporate sector knows, appear not to satisfy greed, but to encourage it.

There seems to be an argument, then, for pegging global parliamentary salaries somewhere close to the global average wage. There is also a case for preventing our representatives from taking money from any other source during their term in office – representing us should be a full-time job. These are all high, even draconian, standards to demand of our representatives, but the paradox of parliament is that the more their options are restrained, the more open our system remains.

For similar reasons, we might demand that the parliament should be established in a poor country. While this may permit parliamentarians to see themselves as superior

to those who live around them, that hazard is likely to be counteracted by their absorption of the perspectives of those they encounter while on parliamentary business. If we wish to contest the excessive power of the wealthiest nations, we harm our cause by permitting our assembly to be based in one of them.

Counter-democratic pressures of the kind I have listed here are often advanced as arguments against a world parliament. If we have so much difficulty holding our national representatives to account, would that difficulty not be compounded at the global level? It is certainly true that the greater the scale on which an organization operates, the less responsive it tends to become to the people it is supposed to serve. It is also true that it is harder to coordinate the opposition of ten million people to a policy, especially if they are distributed across national borders, than the opposition of ten thousand people. But all the counter-democratic pressures listed here operate whether a world parliament exists or not. Indeed, they are far more potent when applied to bodies which have no claim to democratic legitimacy, by which I mean all the current organs of global governance. Abandoning the idea of a world parliament does not mean that these pressures go away, simply that we have no means of preventing them from being exerted. The alternative to a world parliament, in other words, is not *no* global governance, but governance by a few self-appointed and unaccountable men in the rich world. That democracy

is hazardous and uncertain of success is not an argument against democracy. It is an argument for public vigilance.

But a world parliament will rapidly discover that there are limits to its powers. Its moral authority will force international bodies to amend some of their practices; it will not, as I have suggested, persuade them to close themselves down. Nor, without resort to armed force, will it be able to prevent conflict between states or prevent a state from murdering its people. While nation states exist, political globalization, however legitimate, must be accompanied by internationalism, if we are to retain any possibility of preventing international violence. This suggests that if there is to be a corrective to global governance by means of brute force, we will continue to require an international body which attempts to broker peace between armed states. We could (and should) disinvent the United Nations Security Council, but we would swiftly discover that we had to develop another organization, with a similar mandate.

If such a body is to be regarded as both legitimate and authoritative, it must surely be seen to operate by means of consent, rather than coercion. This suggests that the organization responsible for global security should be as democratic as an *international* body can be.

A democratic security system would be controlled not by five self-appointed governments, but by the entire General

Assembly. Each nation's vote would be weighted according to both the number of people it represents and the democratic legitimacy it possesses.

The government of Tuvalu, representing 10,000 people, would, then, have a far smaller vote than the government of China. But China, in turn, would possess far fewer votes than it would if its government was democratically elected. Rigorous means of measuring democratization are beginning to be developed by bodies such as the Centre for Business and Policy Studies in Sweden and Democratic Audit in the United Kingdom. It would not be hard, using their criteria, to compile an objective global index of democracy. Governments, under this system, would be presented with a powerful incentive to democratize: the more democratic they became, the greater would be their influence over world affairs.

No nation would possess a veto. The most consequential decisions – to go to war for example – should require an overwhelming majority of the assembly's weighted votes. This means that powerful governments wishing to recruit reluctant nations to their cause would be forced to bribe or blackmail most of the rest of the world to obtain the results they wanted. The nations whose votes they needed most would be the ones whose votes were hardest to buy.

This body and the world parliament are likely both to enhance each other's legitimacy and to restrain each other's

actions. The incentive to democratize would discourage governments from banning elections to a world parliament. The parliament's ability to review the decisions of the General Assembly would reinforce the Assembly's democratic authority. We might anticipate a shift of certain powers from the indirectly elected body to the directly elected one. We could begin, in other words, to see the development of a bicameral parliament for the planet, which starts to exercise some of the key functions of government.

The problem this scheme immediately encounters is that we can do nothing to change the way the United Nations works except at the behest of the five nations which control it. They can veto any attempt to remove their veto. They can use the UN Charter to prevent any changes to the Charter.

This appeared, until March 2003, to be an intractable problem. In the past, global security arrangements have been radically altered only in the wake of devastating world wars. But by shoving aside the Security Council in order to prosecute its war with Iraq, the United States may have begun to destroy the system which had formerly served it so well. By going to war without the council's authorization, and against the wishes of three of its permanent members and most of its temporary members, the US appears to have ceased even to *pretend* to play by the rules. If so, then the Security Council's residual claims to legitimacy and relevance will evaporate. It will lose its power of restraint. This would leave other nations with just two options.

The first is to accept that the security system has broken down and that disputes between nations will in future be resolved by means of bilateral diplomacy backed by force of arms. A world with no system would, as we would soon discover, be even crueler than a world with the wrong system. There would be no means of preventing the escalation of disputes and the possibility of world war. The second is to tear up the UN's constitution, override the US veto and build a new (and, we should hope, more democratic) global security system. This is a bold and dangerous strategy. The new system, just as the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto protocol on climate change have done, would have to begin without the involvement of the United States. The world's foremost military power would not then be party to the system of international law.

We could expect the US government to react with even greater hostility to this proposal than it has done towards the criminal court. The United States has tolerated the existing system only because it is undemocratic. A system which the US could neither veto nor easily reduce to an instrument of its foreign policy would be perceived as a threat to its power. The US government would then threaten to settle its disputes without reference to anybody else. So if a democratic security system, built on the weighted votes of the General Assembly, were to be devised, we would need either to persuade the United States to join and live by the rules, or to reduce its power to act outside the system. This second

task is surely necessary whether the existing Security Council collapses or not.

It is important to remember here that the excesses of the US government do not suggest that there is anything the matter with the American people. Their government has behaved as any lone democratic superpower would behave. It is threatening simply because it is powerful. Part of the purpose of a democratic security system would be to prevent any nation from becoming so powerful again.

While the military power of the United States looks unchallengeable, it is, in other respects, far weaker than it might appear. Its vast national debt and budget deficit are sustainable only because the dollar has become the dominant international currency. As Chapter 5 will explain, the US obtains a massive subsidy from this arrangement. This is unlikely to last. In Europe, Russia and China the case for holding currency reserves in euros or yuan rather than dollars is being seriously considered. In 2000, Saddam Hussein insisted that Iraq's oil be purchased in euros, not dollars. Other oil producing states have, as the euro's value increases and their trade with Europe expands, powerful economic reasons to follow him. If they do, the international requirement for dollars could be greatly reduced. Indeed, the need to prevent this possibility might have been one of the reasons for the US government's determination to go to war with Iraq.<sup>61</sup> The rest of the world, in other words, has the means to wreck the US economy and, in doing so,

to threaten its status as the global hegemon. This may be necessary if we are to construct a world order based on equity and justice.

We can expect our governments to seek every opportunity to duck these challenges. Confrontation with the superpower is something almost all of them have sought to avoid. I suspect, though, that oil traders, financial speculators and independent central banks will unwittingly begin to establish the financial pre-conditions for US containment on their behalf. Their courage will then be measured by their preparedness to seize the opportunity this creates. They will find this courage only if their electorates (led by a global justice movement which has, in many countries, given rise to and merged with the new peace campaigns) press home their duty to prevent the possibility of another world war.