

RETHINKING WORLD GOVERNMENT: A NEW APPROACH

by James A. Yunker

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(Book review by Ronald J. Glossop--January 17, 2006)

This book is a must-read book for everyone interested in the idea of world government. Professor Yunker is very supportive of the idea that the global community needs a world government and very critical of what he calls "the dysfunctional myth" (p. 201) that "global governance" or "global civil society" can adequately deal with global problems.

Supporters of world government should give some attention to the question of why their proposal is ignored by those interested in world politics. Yunker claims that, now that the Cold War with its ideological animosity is behind us, "global economic inequality represents the single most important impediment to world government" (p. 14). The result is the understandable fear throughout the developed world that a world government (especially a democratic world government) would try to bring about what Yunker calls "Crude Redistribution" (that is, rapid drastic redistribution) of the world's wealth in order to deal with the huge global economic disparities which now exist. (At the same time, the poor countries fear that a world government would be controlled by the rich countries as a new mechanism for maintaining the old colonialism.)

Yunker wants very much to address these disparities, but he thinks the redistribution of wealth must be done gradually. As an economist committed to justice, an important part of Yunker's program is the implementation of a World Economic Equalization Program (WEEP), a global Marshall Plan, where richer nations annually pay a certain part of their national income (as determined by a formula based on the "transfer allocation function" described on p. 99) into a fund which then gets distributed to increase the generalized capital (pp. 96-97) of the poorer nations, resulting in their economic growth. The whole third chapter of the book (pp. 87-136) is devoted to explaining and arguing for the implementation of this plan. It describes the extensive computer simulations which Yunker has carried out to show that WEEP, if carried out over several decades, could bring about substantial equalization without seriously slowing down the rate of economic growth of the rich countries and without aid going into the pockets of a few leaders in the poorer countries. Yunker does not claim that his simulations prove that WEEP will work, but he believes that he has shown that the program could work and that its success would constitute "a significant moral victory" for humankind (pp. 128-29). And, notes Yunker, WEEP "would be far more feasible of implementation were a world government in existence" (p. 188).

WEEP is part of Yunker's proposal for a better world, but it is the other part that will be of greater interest to world governmentals. It consists of a "blueprint for a limited world government, tentatively designated the Federal Union of Democratic Nations (FUDN), which would be virtually immune against the possibility that it would undertake and implement drastic worldwide income redistribution. Security against this possibility is embodied in three specific provisions . . . : (1) a constitutionally specified, permanent and inalienable right of each member nation to withdraw from the world federation at any time it desires; (2) a constitutionally specified, permanent and inalienable right of each member nation to maintain whatever military forces and armament (including nuclear weapons) it desires to maintain, and (3) a dual voting system in the world

government legislature that would essentially enable the rich nations to veto any proposed legislation they would regard as unacceptable--while at the same time it would enable the poor nations likewise to veto any proposed legislation they would regard as unacceptable" (p. 188).

Yunker realizes that traditional world federalists will complain that what he is proposing looks more like a confederation than a federation. But, he argues, his proposal at least allows us to start moving forward rather than getting nowhere. We must think long-term rather than insisting that we aim immediately for a federation such as now exists in the United States. By eliminating the fear of Crude Redistribution of wealth, we could begin to make some headway toward the creation of a world government, an "authentic state entity with the authority to promulgate and enforce laws, to impose and collect taxes, to raise and maintain permanent military forces. As such, it would represent a qualitative advance beyond the United Nations of today. The Union would display the various forms and trappings of state authority: a flag, an anthem, emblems, and a capital city. Formed under a Union Constitution, the Federal Union would comprise the standard three branches of government" (p. 75) An important part of its effort would be supervising WEEP, a program which would be bringing about the gradual economic equalization which the world so desperately needs.

Although many of the ideas and arguments in this book are first-rate, the book itself as a whole is not. Many books and proposals crucial to world federalist thinking and closely related to Yunker's own proposal are not even mentioned. For example, there is no mention of Clarence Streit's Union Now or James Huntley's Uniting the Democracies or of the Association to Unite the Democracies or of Joseph Schwartzberg's Revitalizing the United Nations: Reform through Weighted Voting. The writing style is often repetitive. The index is very inadequate. Sometimes the argumentation seems somewhat cursory, as for example when it is asserted that Canada might readily "assent to the departure of the province of Quebec from the Canadian national federation" (p. 209).

Nevertheless Yunker's novel proposal, "the 'unexplored alternative' . . . of limited global government" (p. 206) plus WEEP as a way of generating some needed action and not just more talk, should be given serious consideration by all interested in world government.