

TILTING AT WINDBAGS: Autobiography of a World Federalist

by Harold S. Bidmead

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(Book review by Ronald J. Glossop--June 15, 2006)

Harold Bidmead is a world federalist who pulls no punches. He is dissatisfied with all existing international organizations, including the U.N. and the European Union. What is needed is a federation, not a confederation of states, and that is true whether the context is a federation for the world or a federation for Europe. "Windbags" are those who don't appreciate the great difference between a union of individuals and a union of states.

The book is full of wonderful quotations that go to the root of the situation. For example:

"The world needs to be governed by constitutional law, not by war. True law acts directly on the individual, not on sovereign states and whole communities as such. Genuine law is law that can be enforced on individual law-breakers (not on Sovereign States, which is impossible without the use of military force). Preferably it derives from a democratic legislature, applies equally to every separate member of the community, and is peaceably enforceable through the courts." (p. 123)

Another example on p. 130: "In a federal world, peoples such as the Gypsies, Tamils, Kurds, Basques, Samis, Inuits, Native Americans (there are indefinitely many) would be political constituencies in the federation, with representatives elected to the legislature. Thus their grievances could be aired and dealt with without any need or excuse to resort to violence. The cure for terrorism lies at its source. Systems like the UN (that second League of Nations) are merely efforts to constitutionalize and legalize world anarchy, attempts to keep the peace by warlike means, which inflict misery on the weak and the innocent while the guilty go untouched. Thus all systems based on national sovereignty are pretending to cure the disease of war without harming the germ that causes it."

The subtitle indicates that this book is also about the author's life, and much of it is. The postscript titled "Working for Federalism (1940-1951)" (pp. 206-214) is especially helpful in providing a somewhat factual account rather than the extended personal remembrances found in the rest of the book. The problem for the reader interested mainly in Bidmead's views about world federalism is that they are mixed in with a very large dose of these purely personal incidents which have no connection whatever with federalist ideas.

The windbags against whom Bidmead is tilting are not only the political leaders and the media but even most of the leaders in the federalist movement. They are neglecting the key ideas of federalism while getting sidetracked on issues like more money for the UN. He notes: "The world does not suffer from lack of finance for the UN but from lack of government, and from lack of appreciation of the fact which Boutros Ghali pointed out to President Clinton: The UN is not, and never could become, a global government."

Bidmead includes the text of his "Open Letter to the World Federalist Movement" (pp. 218-219) in which he accuses the leaders of the WFM of misappropriating funds: "Ever since the creation of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over half a century ago, starry eyed idealists have been striving for an International Criminal Court. One would

have expected all true federalists to point out that such a Court, like the ICJ, could not be efficacious unless it was an arm of a Federal Government, because sovereign governments will never willingly give up their subjects or their officials for prosecution, and can be forced to do so only by military action." This book is Bidmead's closing protest against such betrayals of the federalist solution to the war problem. "The federalist express cannot stop to permit passengers to pick daisies along the track" (p. 219).