

# Say you want a revolution, or five

For centuries, world politics has been organised around nations and their official functionaries — with artificial borders drawn up, separating French from German, Australian from New Zealander. But this could all be blown away as technology and political movements reshape our understanding of world governance.

We are in the midst of five "revolutions" in how we govern ourselves that are as pivotal as the transition from the medieval to the modern world and as important as the great leaps forward in computer and bio-technology. They are the rise of global government, world corporations, people power lobby groups, the internet and fundamentalist politics.

As it was during the French Revolution, when it was not clear who was winning — the merchants, the aristocrats, the people or the Church — today's revolutions as well are occurring in almost simultaneous waves.

And, as with the French Revolution, which remains a watershed point in Western history (reducing the power of the Church and nobility), these changes in governance mark a dramatic departure from centuries of politics being organised around nations and their official functionaries.

## Revolution of global government

This is a revolution from above, a globalism of size and power. It is a strengthening of regional and global government, and their respective institutions. The most obvious is the European Union. Less successful but equally noteworthy is ASEAN.

Related to this revolution from above are international organisations such as APEC, World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, the IMF, the International Court, the World Health Organisation, and the full range of United Nations organisations.

They are all vying to become more than just a voice of the member states. They want to be able to advocate ways to best manage the transition from nation-states (as the main actors on the world stage) to regional blocks and international institutions.

These transnational institutions have an impact not just on conventional politics, but on all areas of life: from the regulation of work, media, trade, oceans and climate to atomic energy and space travel.

## Revolution of money

Another revolution from above, and just as important as the transnational institutions, is business.

Corporations have moved swiftly to become economically more grand than many nations. Their wealth in players such as GE, Microsoft and the large banks — while appearing to be limited to the private sector — in fact shapes global public policy.

So much so that Professor of Peace Studies and winner of the "alternative Nobel" the Right Livelihood Award, Johan Galtung, argues that a newly arranged United Nations should not only have a house of people, direct voting, and a house of nations, but a house of corporations as well.

Such a move would give them legitimate, but open, power and institutionalise the private power they already have.

The success of corporations in shaping what we think about, what we eat, how we work and consume is one of the main reasons they will be transformed, eventually becoming global citizens, with clear rights and obligations to local communities.

## People's power

This is a revolution from below: a globalism of the people. While corporate globalism creates wealth, people's globalism is focused on economic democracy — through community co-operatives — to create a more sustainable world where relationship to self, nature and others is central.

These are 1960s-style ideals, of people's power, student power, but now transformed into the local/global politics of international non-government organisations (NGOs).

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Jonathan Marsden



These include groups like Transparency International, Amnesty International, Greenpeace and Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Some NGOs take stronger advocacy positions, moving from efforts to solve the latest crisis to addressing the deeper causes of crisis. For example, instead of just asking for more government help in child care, women's groups contest the division of public/private concerns, where men dominate the public and women bear the burden of the private.

Instead of just organising for more women in government, they contest the maleness of industrial politics, seeing statecraft as essentially male-craft.

However, the future challenge for these people's organisations is to live up to the ideals they espouse, dealing with their own petty tyrants and bureaucracy.

## Cyberpower

This is the electronic revolution: a globalism of technology. Less concerned with specific political issues — be it nuclear testing or the melting of the Antarctic — the internet will allow for direct global referenda.

As with the idealistic NGOs, the guiding vision is "we are the world", but the linking agency is the internet, not some Jungian idea of the collective unconscious or spiritual ideal of the superconscious.

While there is a certain inevitability in the rise of cyberdemocracy, many ask: Can the people be trusted? What are the limits to democracy? Should there be direct voting on all issues, or just on issues that don't deal with national defence and security? And what of those not quite net-fluent or affluent?

Those questions can be worked out as we enter cyberia, but more important issues are:

- ☐ Whether the electronic village will more likely be an electronic Los Angeles. Anonymous, faceless communities pretending to be in relationship with each other — Blade Runner here we come.
- ☐ Whether cyberdemocrats can work out the

difference between good direct governance and the art of leadership.

## Back to the past

This is a revolution of a fantasised past: whether it is Slobodan Milosevic remembering Serbian past traumas; or Pauline Hanson taking Australia back to a world when men were men, when time was slow, when neighbours were friendly, when you clearly knew that the enemy was in some foreign land, and had different eyes than you; or the BJP in India reinvoking Rama Rajya, the ideal kingdom of Rama, when humans were moral and did their yoga regularly.

The revolution is particularly against multiculturalism, postmodernism, genetic technology, virtuality, and multinational corporatism. It is a revolution against anyone who is different, from afar, of all types of globalism (the movement of capital, ideas and people). It is a lower-middle class revolution.

It does not intend to overturn capitalism or end the nation-state, rather it reinforces the nation-state through the slogan of one god, one leader and one people. The ideal governance structure is not an issue, traditional moral values are.

## Which revolution?

Which revolution is most likely to dominate? Which revolution will change the world the most?

While all transform how we govern ourselves, most likely, in 50 or so years, we will have a world governance system, but probably not a world government; strong global community groups balancing large corporations; "virtual" governance on local issues but not binding (over-turnable by the executive and legislature).

For Mr Mark Luyckx, of the European Commission's Foresight Unit in Brussels (advising on emerging issues in politics, religion and technology), the challenge for all of us is to ensure that global governance is not merely about transplanting national institu-

tions to the global level, but about changing the nature of institutions. It is about making them more gender-friendly, more humanistic, more transparent, more culturally inclusive, and more future generations-oriented.

Equally important is the task of inventing social institutions that can better manage the transition to an advanced technological multi-civilisational society.

Building bridges and negotiating our many differences (including the structures of power/hierarchy embedded within them) and creating shared realities will be the most important challenge for a globalised planet.

To survive and prosper at all levels, we will need a vision of governance that is neither the nationalism of the modern world nor the everything goes of the postmodern, nor the traditionalism of the feudal. Mr Harlan Cleveland, former US ambassador to NATO, terms it the "different yet together" approach to world governance.

If all goes well, eventually over many decades, we will likely see an ecology of identity, where being human first is far more important than which passport one carries. Of course, multinationals, internet service providers, and NGOs will all make claims on who we are — issuing their own "passports" — but with luck we will slip through these identity boundaries keeping self, ideas and capital, while always grounded in the local economy and community and being mobile.

If we do not embark on this alternative future, we will create a world in the next century that is ungovernable for all of us.

The loss of national legitimacy and authority will create a world so utterly chaotic that, as with the French Revolution, a king will emerge, and he will desire only one thing — order!

Which future do we want? ■

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