

EARTH MODEL 2003

(from a talk given at a writers' night at the Saturna Café November 03)

First I would like to erect a model of an earth worthy of our children— second to consider how our current situation differs from that model—third to suggest how our present sorry path can be deflected toward it.

THE MODEL

The place I would like to see my children live in is free of intimidation destruction and murder— it is free of any institutional inequality between individuals and also free of any semblance of group rights or privilege including rights of corporations or religions or political parties and other non-individual entities presently treated as individuals under the law.

In this imagined place the rights of individuals (the only human rights) are enshrined in international law without regard to sovereignty of nations and enforced by the United Nations. Earth itself and the biosphere are also protected by international law which supersedes all regional and national laws. The right to bear arms is restricted to the UN. All weapons of mass destruction— including and especially armed forces— are prohibited to any group smaller than that.

No other laws beyond individual, earth and biosphere rights are declared or enforced by the UN. Regional cultural and ethnic uniqueness are matters of individual choice as are methods of local governance or absence of governance provided international laws are not violated by custom or in practice. (In adjudicating these customs and practices there is no escaping the conclusion that any form of institutionalized privilege is inimical to justice. And justice not peace is always the goal and in fact is the only path to lasting peace.)

There is no attempt at enforced homogeneity. Differences that do not result in institutional inequality are tolerated. The free exchange of ideas is encouraged. With the free movement of people care to control the rate of flow at least initially and for a period allowing the peaceful and non-disruptive movement of individuals is needed. There should be no destabilizing and hence destructive shift of population but rather a gradual diminution of regional inequities through transfer payments such as exist in the European Union and Canada. This will have a retarding influence on migration for most people, who naturally love their birthplace.

The enforcement of rights by the UN— including the free right to life health and education— includes the UN's right to taxation of nations according to ability to pay and of individuals worldwide without regard to nationality. This will necessarily involve some arbitrary limits on the growing disparity of wealth among the world's regions as well as its individuals

This means that the wealthy will not continue to get wealthier but ultimately with the end of military expenditures and costs of reconstruction no person anywhere will ever be forced to live in jeopardy. This does not mean that charity will be forgotten as long as inequities persist but that no lives will be ultimately dependent on it.

If this seems utopian so be it. It is obtainable when once the mighty have been subsumed in the family of mankind. To this end the Thoreau-Gandhi-King ethic of non-violent non-cooperation has proved itself more powerful than propaganda and armies combined and is the only technique necessary— or in my view even possible.

THE PRESENT

Preaching any war of any description for any purpose intended to make peace is doomed by definition— war is not peace. The UN has already fashioned an international bill of human rights more than fifty years ago. It needs the ability to enforce these rights not only between nations but internally within nations without regard to custom or status either historical or by reason of power and wealth. And its charter already expressly forbids acts of aggression by states upon other states, which it also needs the ability to enforce either by arms or preferably by international isolation of responsible leaders. This prohibition should be widened to include any occupation by any foreign power either militarily or by any other means of intimidation or threat, with the sole exception of the UN itself.

No nation today, least of all the United States, could exist in its present form without the cooperation, willing or otherwise, of other nations. The power of non-cooperation should not be doubted. The United States once isolated from its markets, for arms especially, would experience rapid economic decline more certainly than if it were deterred by force (which in any case could prove fatal to all). The US economy and standard of living depend on arms exports and controlled cheap imports of oil. This requires a climate of fear and conflict to continue. Peace, no matter how they posture as a peace-loving nation, is inimical to the whole American enterprise— a terrible predicament for them and indeed the whole world— and they are going to need outside help in the form of overt pressure in order to restructure and thence reduce the insecurity of the world, including themselves. In this our interests are the same no matter how differently perceived.

The world must help the US help itself. It must be weaned from this dependence on arms and armies— on intimidation destruction and murder— and the crime of murder, which is the ultimate denial of individual rights, cannot be suspended just because some leader(s) declares a military action a 'war'. It also must be made an international crime of the most serious magnitude to profit from violence in any way at any scale— another task for the world court.

What are the rights of war? And where does the peculiarly human notion of rights of any kind originate? I have a strong life-long feeling that I inherently own the right to my own life. I think all rights flow from that primary feeling. If this is true then individual rights being the origin of all rights must remain sacrosanct— and an idea like immunity from prosecution for any persons on the earth is an affront to all. The right of any person or nation to make war whether on its own citizens or others must be eliminated as individual reprisal has been eliminated between citizens under the rule of law within nations.

DEFLECTING THE PATH

The first step we must take in deflecting the current destructive path of history toward a model of equanimity is to strengthen the UN and to enshrine the Individual Bill of Rights in international law, at the same time giving the UN the sole power to enforce it— and only it— over the whole of the globe. We must wean nations gradually of absolute sovereignty starting with adoption of the world court jurisdiction as the world entire and continuing with granting the UN the power of taxation, then on to the gradual lock-stepped dismantling of all the nations' armed forces in favor of a small highly mobile UN peacekeeping and peacemaking force of conventional arms comprised of small representative forces from a majority of willing nations.

As a first step in reducing the world's national armies, the right to conduct military operations should be restricted to the territory legally owned by each nation, including the area of its fishing rights, up to the first two hundred miles of surrounding ocean where shoreline exists without conflicting claims and along some midpoint between nations where jurisdiction might otherwise overlap. This would allow for a less disruptive shift in internal structures of power, including both political and economic power, within nations. Ultimately, the only forces in the world that will be legitimately mobile will be UN forces.

No nation can seriously call its military forces defense forces which is involved in invasion or occupation of any other nation on earth. Those are offensive actions, in both senses of the word. And how long can it take for all the world's peoples to recognize that if no-one can leave the home territory there can be literally no-one to defend against except the UN, which will have such constraints against its actions as to be a most unlikely adversary. In any event, this position of allowing national forces as long as they stay home will be only a transient structure, and as the expense of keeping large forces will be a serious detriment to economic participation in a global economy, should die of its own weight, if in fact democracy is a workable system of governance.

This fundamental change in power will necessarily involve restructuring the UN so that veto status is eliminated and voting power reflects population with a qualified majority along the lines of the new EU constitution (with perhaps the addition of a 'taxation' factor). It should be understood that only nations in good standing would be accorded any vote at all and that to remain in good standing nations must comply with all UN qualified majority decisions and pay their taxes. This means the end of international unilateralism.

In game theory 'tit for tat' works out to be the cleanest simplest and most effective strategy of cooperation. Perhaps some modified less destructive version of that will prove useful in developing protocols for the new UN. But whatever system of control evolves it will have to focus mainly on national governments. They have done most of the killing and suppressing of rights throughout history and certainly lack any claim to legitimacy however they have arrived and for however long they have ruled. Only individuals have an inherent right to protection under international law— every group is suspect that is smaller than mankind and must prove itself worthy of international support by its egalitarianism and its actions.

Even mankind is too small a group. The biosphere— earth itself— is vital. The goal is to sustain life on earth indefinitely— not for one species or nation or region or generation but for all.

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I remain skeptical that these features of a world government can in fact be implemented without a possibly cataclysmic confrontation among the world's nations— a confrontation that it is not at all clear we can survive. But whether this vision of our world will be brought about gradually through diplomacy or suddenly in the aftermath of a deadly war that some manage to survive, I also have no doubt that by the beginning of the next century if any of our progeny do indeed still exist they will live under the auspices of some form of world democracy, and absolute sovereignty with its concomitant right to bear arms will be a relic of history.

That is the real business of the twenty-first century. It is time we got down to business.