

Chapter 10

WORLD SOCIETY REORGANISED

Besides the abandonment of money and weapons, a third cornerstone of Alternative World has to be maximum devolution of societal controls. The term politics derived from the Greek 'politikos', which means 'of a citizen'. Pericles, leader of Athens city state in the 5th century BC, said: 'We are called a democracy because the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few...we regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs not as harmless, but as a useless character.'

Discussing man's instinctive affiliations, Raymond Williams has written about 'rooted settlements, lived and worked with placeable social identities, and actual lives in knowable communities, as against the abstractions of modern national cultural identities. The term society began with a very strong stress on direct relations with other people, specifically physical relationships of contiguity, contact, relating. It was a word consciously opposed to the word 'state' - with all its implications of the power structure.'¹

The case for alternatives to nation states was put powerfully by Amos Oz during his speech accepting the German publishers' prestigious Peace Prize in October 1992:

I regard nation states as a bad and insufficient system. I think that upon this crowded, poverty-stricken and decomposing planet of ours there should exist hundreds of civilisations, thousands of traditions, millions of regional and local communities - but no nation states. Especially now, when national self-determination has deteriorated into bloody disintegration of some parts of the world, threatening to turn each of us into an island, there ought to be an alternative vision. There ought to be ways of fulfilling various yearnings for identity and self-definition within a comprehensive commonwealth of all humankind. We ought to be building a polyphonic world, rather than a cacophony of separate, selfish nation states. Our human condition, our solitude on the face of a vulnerable planet, facing the cold cosmic silence, the unavoidable ironies of life and the merciless presence of death, all of these should at long last evoke a sense of human solidarity, overruling the sound and fury of our differences. *Flag-patriotism must give way to humanity-patriotism, earth-patriotism, patriotism of the forests, the water, the air and the light: creative relations with creation itself.*²

Regionalism: world turned downside up

To replace nation states, which were shown in Chapter 3 to be anachronisms, totally new administrative arrangements would be called for in Alternative World. The optimum forms of these arrangements could well evolve over a period of time when, happily, the circumstances would be fundamentally different to today's, in that there would be, for instance, no bitterly competitive trading blocs, nor potentially warring armed factions. On the contrary, the primary concern at all levels would be simply the co-operative promotion of human well-being, by planning production and ensuring egalitarian distribution, supporting scientific developments, improved technologies, better working conditions and innumerable other worthwhile, constructive endeavours.

The term 'regionalism' is adopted here in order to focus on the most important ingredient of decentralisation - that is the grouping of peoples into administrative areas according to their natural instincts, in relation to the most fruitful ways to coalesce; and topographical/economic regions would be the most likely starting points. For there to be meaningful planning and efficient co-ordination of all activities world-wide, it would be essential for there to be administrative bodies at each step from local, via regional and, say, 'continental' levels to a world forum. At all levels these bodies should be held in equal esteem, with guidance rather than dominance emanating from

the 'higher' ones, but whose decisions would clearly have to be final in the event of any unresolved disputes. The aim would be for all ideas, proposals, draft economic plans and the like to have opinions formed upon them at all levels, which would then, if appropriate, be circulated for consideration in the contexts of the other levels, prior to final decisions being taken.

One of Alternative World's great assets is that these arrangements could start, and remain, flexible, in tune with mankind's continually changing, evolutionary circumstances. For example, the sizes of administrative areas, local or regional, could be readily increased or decreased according to organisational experience. Further, with equality of citizens world-wide, and minimal restrictions on movement, natural flows of talent would gradually take place as the needs for particular skills in certain regions attracted appropriate people from others, thus leading to a 'balancing up' of both cultural and technical capabilities. Such movements could also result in the increased integration of races, ethnic groups, and other allegedly divisive characteristics, leading to more harmonious cooperation throughout humanity. Such organisational devolution and flexibility, leading to enhanced human fulfilment, would be made possible by the abandonment of both nationalism and money, which have resulted, hitherto, in boundaries having been drawn in the contexts of chauvinism, racism, tax collecting, electioneering and other specious factors.

Representation: world without politicians

Devolution in Alternative World must mean the maximum, active participation by citizens in the shaping and running of their lives. Every issue arising, great or small, would need to be discussed as widely as possible in the community, in the certain knowledge that both imaginative ideas and worrying concerns would be considered seriously, and without undue delay. Also, citizens would have the satisfaction of seeing communities reaping the benefits of proposals they had made or supported.

In turn, representatives on bodies at all levels would feel confident of being able to benefit from informed, constructive criticism of issues put before them. Private, caucus meetings of representatives at all levels would be outlawed. The whole nature and tone of the only permitted, open discussions of representative bodies at any level would be quite different to those of today. They would be free of malign pressures from 'financial constraints', special interest lobbying, or issues involving potential armed conflicts. Thus the somewhat forbidding 'high-powered' image of representative bodies today would be replaced by a more relaxed, natural atmosphere in which all members of society could feel at ease, and able to contribute to what in the majority of instances would be common sense decisions.

Although the dispositions and sizes of administrative bodies in Alternative World could, and should, develop flexibly, certain principles would appear to be basic to success. In particular, representation should never be in any sense 'professional'. It should occur only once in a lifetime, for a brief period of perhaps three to four months, in order to provide opportunities for nearly every willing member of society to have the opportunity to serve once as a representative. We have seen in Chapter 3 that the existing widespread practice of 'politics' being a permanent, or semi-permanent job or career, is wrong on many counts, and totally at variance with the maximum involvement of all citizens - the lifeblood of democracy. Similarly, political parties would be extraneous and inappropriate, since their very existence implies partisan differences of interests, while in Alternative World only one interest would be paramount, namely the equal well-being of all citizens.

The various systems of elections, related to the occasional choosing of small numbers of long-term 'professional' representatives, would be inappropriate for Alternative

World's frequent needs for large numbers of short-term 'lay' representatives. The most effective method of choice would be random selection by computer from the whole local electorate.

This should be programmed to choose equal numbers of males and females, from all age groups from, say, 15 to 75, in proportions broadly related to the actual population numbers in those groups, with at least one teenage boy and girl always included.

Thus the basic 'local' councils, serving populations of around 10,000 to 20,000, would be formed by perhaps 50 representatives, each serving approximately four months. During their period of service, the more imaginative and enthusiastic representatives would become apparent to their colleagues, who could, in turn, vote to send one in ten, say, of their own number, as delegates to the council at the next higher level. This process could be repeated at 'sub-regional', regional, and 'continental' levels, culminating in delegates to the world forum, but in all cases kept within the serving duration maximum of about four months. At both local and higher levels, representatives would serve full time, having been released from their normal occupations.

In this way, it could reasonably be expected that the higher echelon bodies would be replenished regularly with the more able representatives, who would all have had the invaluable experiences of having served at one or more of the more local levels. In all cases, when not attending committees or full meetings, it would be expected that representatives would augment their knowledge by research into appropriate current affairs of concern, and provide 'surgeries' to meet and assist those they represented. At all levels, both full and committee meetings should be open to public attendance, fully recorded for access by all, and televised if possible. This would encourage everyone, particularly young persons, to become involved, and start thinking about the sort of contributions they would wish to make when their turn came to participate.

At all levels, it would be natural and necessary for there to be administrative staffs to implement the various decisions of the bodies of representatives. For reasons of simple efficiency, it would be sensible for them to continue in their particular departments for several years. However, in the interests of both stimulating exchanges of experiences and ideas, and of offsetting any tendencies towards permanent bureaucracies, these administrators should alternate, before too long, with other occupations, as suggested in Chapter 12.

The media and publishing

The whole spectrum of the media and publishing in Alternative World would have an extremely important role, both in providing comprehensive world news and information objectively, and in stimulating all manner of co-operative societal aims generally.

Exclusive control of the production or operation of newspapers, television, radio, films, audio and visual recordings, magazines and books would need to be vested in the councils of representatives, at whichever level proved appropriate. Actual editing and other production activities, together with the choice and employment of writers, would be the responsibility of professional sections of the various administrations, with whom the representatives would be in close and frequent contact.

Thus the people, through their representatives, would have the opportunity to comment on and influence all aspects of the various programmes or publications, and to make suggestions regarding useful, stimulating and entertaining subjects for articles, films or books. *Replacing the present day remote, reactionary domination of a handful of tycoons over the entire media field by genuinely popular, responsive control, would make a dynamic contribution to the success of Alternative World.*

The current daily production of around 1,000 books and some 20 million words of

technical reports clearly constitutes 'information overloading', which often proves highly stressful to those attempting to absorb it. Regardless of quality, the sheer bulk of data currently available, for example on the Internet, inevitably compromises its value. In Alternative World, global liaison between scientists and others, working free from the constraints of special interests, would ensure that research and development in every field of value to society were coordinated to maximise cooperation and minimise overlapping, without excluding differing approaches. Thus readers world-wide could benefit from reports and publications of all kinds which would not only be of premier quality, but would transform information into readily digestible knowledge.