

Letter to World Citizens

8/1

A Proposal: Drugs and a Critique: The U.N.

By Garry Davis

To lead off this year, rather than write to you directly, I am publishing a letter and excerpts from a criticism of the Campaign For A More Democratic United Nations (Camdun).

The letter, concerning the drug problem, is addressed to U.S. Surgeon-General Joycelyn Elders, who recently suggested that decriminalization of drugs in the U.S. “should be studied.” The public response was overwhelming. Sadly typical was the response of President Clinton, her old friend from Little Rock, who tartly stated that he had already studied the question and the issue was closed. But in his State of the Union message Clinton did propose allocating substantial resources for addiction rehabilitation centers along with education on the dangers of drug abuse.

I also consider it prudent to advise you of the contradictions inherent in the Camdun proposal to add a “Parliamentary Assembly” to the U.N. General Assembly in order to “democratize” that body. This is a popular concept, endorsed by numerous luminaries and respected organizations with large memberships, including the World Federalists, its main sponsor.

Here are excerpts from my January 6 letter to Joycelyn Elders:

When I ran for mayor of Washington, D.C., in 1986, I was alone among six candidates in denouncing the so-called war on drugs as hypocritical, devastating to our youth and perpetuating a government hierarchy actually devoted to repression and crime. Among other like statistics, I noted that 70 percent of Lorton prisoners were incarcerated for drug-related crimes. During the campaign I exposed the history of hemp interdiction, as promoted by Dupont, Mellon and William R. Hearst. (Before 1883, up to 90 percent of the world’s paper was made from cannabis hemp fiber, including the Gutenberg Bible and the first two drafts of the Declaration of Independence.)

How the present and past administrations can remain so ignorant or ambivalent on the issue of drug decriminalization will no doubt be an absorbing and illuminating subject for future historians describing our primitive era. Your citing of other countries’ experience in crime reduction after legalization of drugs is well taken. Moreover, while alcohol and tobacco are legal, though recognized as social problems, then so-called hard drugs must be treated the same way.

A recent editorial in the Burlington (Vt.) Free Press poses an essential question:

“The issue is not whether drugs are bad, but whether U.S. policy to combat drugs has worked — or has it only created a bureaucracy, made drug cartels rich, and propped up foreign dictatorships?”

To this I would add: Has not U.S. policy betrayed American youth by aiding and abetting profit-motivated criminal elements to invade an area?

Drug production, distribution and addiction is, of course, a global as well as local problem. Eventually it obviously requires a solution on both levels simultaneously. You have now courageously joined the issue at the highest national governmental level. You have this world citizen’s full support.

Sincerely,
Garry Davis

(I sent a copy of this letter to, among others, Independent Vermont Congressman Bernie Sanders whose reply is reprinted in LETTERS.)

Camdun Debunked

Now for my critique of the Camdun idea:

The United Nations has become the political blind spot of would-be world planners. The oxymoronic name itself is a dead giveaway. Nations cannot “unite” by definition!

After 48 years, 75 wars and millions dead, good and sincere people still worship this 20th century Golden Calf, all the while moaning that it must be “strengthened.” But how can a body already dead on arrival be strengthened?

So while the satellites whirl high above our heads, the communication highway expands exponentially, goods and services flow largely uninterrupted throughout the world community, and humanity desperately tries to recognize its unity and value on its home planet, national and international bureaucrats along with their faithful acolytes are earnestly seeking public approval for political rigor mortis!

“Problems facing humanity,” the Camdun pamphlet claims, require “a new kind of international co-operation based on a strengthened and democratized United Nations.” Immediately following is the claim that the U.N. must be strengthened “to enable it to more effectively govern relations *between nation-states*.” Already humanity has been relegated to second place.

We then read that “*Citizens have a right, as well as a responsibility to become equal participants in the governance of their common global home.*” The campaign, however, does not propose that the “U.N. Parliamentary Assembly” become an actual parliament — that is, a world legislative body, but “*a valid democratic link between the U.N. and the world’s citizens through their representatives in the national legislatures.*” The term “*world’s citizens*” allied with “*national legislatures*” not only denies the very meaning of world democracy but exposes the real intentions of the advocates: that of maintaining the status quo of the anarchic nation-state system.

Later, the proposal acknowledges that “...in its initial stages...(the UN Parliamentary Assembly would have) *a largely symbolic and consultative role.*” Again, the reliance on nation-states rather than world citizens is exposed by contending that “*it would also become an essential source of guidance to, and leverage on, national governments for strengthening the U.N.*” In other words, the so-called parliamentary assembly by itself would not strengthen the UN, but only be a kind of popular pressure for the nations to do the job.

Even to imagine that nations will relinquish sovereignty to a higher authority is to deny all the lessons of history. Nations fight each other and make treaties between themselves, but never create governments over them. To do so would be to deny their exclusive sovereignty.

This campaign also fails to recognize that the world’s citizens as such are by definition a sovereign body. That is what the word “citizen” means. The microcosm: the individual, of the macrocosm: humanity. Leaving spirituality aside, world society is dynamically linked technologically, environmentally, and spatially as well as biologically. The U.N., by definition denying all dynamic linkages, is a mere creation of the artificially divided world of 18th century political fictions: nation-states.

Ridding the world community of anarchy requires world law and its institutions. Yet this campaign claims that “*the transformation of the UN into a democratic governing authority for humankind is one of the single most important political tasks of our times.*” In reality, it is citizens who found governments; governments don’t found higher governments. To claim that the U.N., composed of equally sovereign nations, can be “*transformed...into a democratic governing authority*” is to deny that the individual citizen’s sovereignty is already allied with humanity’s as a dynamic reality.

The campaign does admit that the “*initiative for change will have to come from somewhere, and if not from governments, then where else but citizens?*” The obvious conclusion, however, is nowhere stated: that individuals must claim world citizenship as an

exercise of political right and in so doing enter into a new social contract with their fellow world citizens beyond national sovereignty. How else can democratic government begin?

While blasting the impotence of treaties between equally sovereign nations and endorsing both the concept and practice of world law as essential to survival and well-being, the endorsers lack the courage of their convictions by continually clinging to the obsolete U.N. metaphor. Nowhere do they offer the bold suggestion of jettisoning the entire structure, just as the founders of the USA jettisoned the Articles of Confederation to create the political vacuum into which they inserted the U.S. Constitution.

While referring to the “world’s citizens” numerous times, the writers maintain contrarily that “*Strictly speaking, there are no citizens at the international level, there are only governments: there are neither citizen interests, nor global interests, only national interest; there are no citizen rights or responsibilities, there are only treaties among governments.*” Leaving aside the obviously spurious notion that there are “international governments,” they conclude that only a U.N. Parliamentary Assembly “*would legitimize a set of profound political ideas...*” Among them would be “*the idea of a direct person-planet relationship not mediated by national governments;*” “*the idea of the individual as world citizen in addition to national citizen;*” and “*the idea of the world as one community, not just a collection of governments...*” The rhetoric appears perfectly sound. But all these “ideas” are already dynamic 20th century facts independent of any artificial assembly attached to an artificial body of national units.

In brief, the proposal by the federalists, in philosophical terms, is relativistic. Dualism is rampant throughout. We-and-they thinking dominates: we, people; they, nations. Moreover, “We, the people” = impotence, while “they, nations” = power. All the problems cited: war, population explosion, ecological devastation, nuclear holocaust, etc. are global and holistic, yet the thinking intended to solve these problems is partial, timorous, totally inadequate to the challenge. If humanity is indeed threatened with extinction, then only sovereign humans can save it. In political terms, only declared world citizens, exercising sovereign decisions, can claim the world laws which alone can protect, nourish and evolve the species.

The World Federalists are irretrievably buried in past centuries, as is the entire nation-state system, a carryover from feudalism.

The final clue to the unworkability of this artificial and ill-conceived campaign is the concluding “action” section: “What You Can Do.” After 26 pages of argumentation in which the poor reader has been inundated with sermonizing, s/he is not enjoined to storm the ramparts of nationalism, renounce nationality, claim world citizenship, proclaim world law, change his or her lifestyle a whit or even declare his/her candidacy for the vaunted “Parliamentary Assembly,” but merely to 1. “Endorse the idea and become a member of the International Network for the U.N. Parliamentary Assembly...” 2. “Have your organization endorse;” 3. “Order extra copies of this booklet;” 4. “Help organize a national working group, etc.,” 5. “Organize a public forum...to discuss the proposal;” and finally, of course, 5. “Send a financial contribution.”

Caveat emptor, World Citizens.
