

Idealism and Ideology: My Visit to the “Creating a Workable World” Conference

In October 2015, I won an essay contest put on by my fellow UNA Board Member Ron Glossop, in association with a group called the Workable World Trust. This trust is administered by Prof. Joseph Schwartzberg, author of *Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World*. The book, predicated on reforming the UN for a more equitable and democratic distribution of power in the world, helped begin the Workable World Trust. Generously, for winning the essay contest, I was given a free flight to, and lodgings in, Minneapolis, where the Trust was holding a conference. Allow me to share what I learned there.

For two days, about ten speakers were crammed into a tightly-packed schedule. Issues discussed frequently were international terrorism, the environmental crisis, and preventing gross human rights violations. However, the most important topic on the minds of the presenters was the need for global governance. This can mean anything from a federalist world government to more responsive regimes to solve international crises.

Andreas Bummel, for instance, fell on the more radical end of this spectrum: Head of the Berlin-based Committee for a Democratic UN, his speech called for a World Parliamentary Assembly, first as a consultative body, then as a world legislature. Charlotte Ku, meanwhile, spoke of legitimacy of international institutions. She called for strengthening and reform of current global bodies and norms, but asked the audience not to write off what currently exists. The international system, which prioritizes the rights and sovereignty of states, is “not going out of business anytime soon”. With this in mind, we should lobby our national governments to change the world-system for the better.

If the conference had a major flaw, it was its ideological nature. This is unsurprising; the proceedings were hosted by organizations like Citizens for Global Solutions (of which Ron Glossop is a key member and I am an admirer), an offshoot of the World Federalist Movement of the 1940s and 1950s. CGS and other sponsor organizations argue for a world government run on the federal model of the United States; President Truman, supportive of the movement, once quipped that it would be as easy for nations to get along in a world-republic as it is for states in our country to get along.

These are brave notions and ones that I at least partially support. However, assumptions were made that alienated some attendees. Some in the audience attended out of curiosity or a passion for international affairs. They did not necessarily support the World Federalist ideal. Furthermore, the anti-capitalist nature of many presenters angered a staunch member of the Democratic Party. At one point a verbal argument broke out between a member of Veterans for Peace and a political science professor who proposed a UN military force to stop outright genocide. The veteran did not believe an additional standing army would be beneficial to world security; the professor retorted with an assertion that only a UN force, free from nationalism, could end horrific violence like that in Yugoslavia and Darfur. These differences were not explosive, but they did underline the fact that the conference organizers very much assumed most attendees would share a similar worldview. This was not the case.

I should also discuss the film I saw with the conference. Entitled “The World is My Country”, it chronicled the adventures of Garry Davis, a peace activist who began his career as a Broadway actor. After serving as a pilot in World War II, Davis was appalled at the damage he and others had created via bombing runs. He became convinced the only solution to international conflict was global governance, in order to constrain states from waging nationalist wars. Davis renounced his US citizenship in Paris in 1948, proclaimed himself a world citizen, and began to wage a campaign for world government. His cause was adopted by Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre, among others. The end result of his crusade was the World Service Authority, which issues a world passport. While not recognized by many, the passport has extricated refugees and other displaced or stateless people from some truly horrific circumstances. This film was educational, inspiring, and fun: Davis, who died in 2013, was still active and sprightly into his 90s, displaying his Broadway charm. Aside from some cartoons segment that don't always get the intended point across, and a truly

horrendous “We Are The World”-esque song at the end, the movie was certainly worth a watch.

I learned much from the Workable World Conference in Minneapolis. I enjoyed interacting with other young people from across the USA and Canada. I heard intriguing proposals, witnessed lively debate and discussion, and saw a unique film. While much of what I heard and saw fell in line with my personal beliefs and passions, I think a wider range of issues and less assumptions of an ideological nature could have made the experience far better.