

**BOOK REVIEW**

**A People's Response To Our Global Neighbourhood  
By Michael Hays And Amy Morgante (Eds.)**

**Boston: Boston Research Center for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 1995, 294pp.**

Rene Wadlow

*"We shall not succeed in banishing that which besets us – the sorrow of being born too late for a great political era- unless we understand how to become the forerunner of an even greater one."*

-Max Weber

The Commission on Global Governance's report *Our Global Neighbourhood* stressed that "to make life in the twenty-first century more democratic, more secure, and more sustainable is the foremost challenge of our generation." As Max Weber noted, there are generations, which come after a great political era in which it was too young to participate and for which the current period seems only mediocre and incomplete. Such generation is usually filled with regrets and bitterness, willing to take unnecessary risks to prove its worth but born too late to have marked the creation of a State or a great institution. Therefore, such a successor generation must define itself not as too youthful for a glorious past but as the forerunners of a new era.

Our generation which came after the events leading to the Second World War, the creation of the United Nations, and the ending of the Western European colonialism in Asia and Africa have only been able to make alive the institutions of the earlier generation, but never to the extent that the earlier generation-"the fathers of the nation" hoped.

This is particularly true within the United Nations. The generation of the founders hoped to modify in depth inter-State relations and the balance-of-power mechanisms, which had always led to war. Yet the strategy of balance-of-power was at the heart of the Cold War. While the balance has now shifted to become nearly unipolar, the balance-of-power as a method of political policy-setting has not changed. Now all we can say about the United Nations is what Brian Urquhart, one of the early UN civil servants and a member of the Commission noted, "In the great uncertainties and disorders that lie ahead, the UN, for all its shortcomings, will be called on again and again because there is no other global institution, because there is a severe limit to what even the strongest powers wish to take on themselves, and because inaction and apathy towards human misery or about the future of the human race are unacceptable."

The Commission put forward a number of useful suggestions for the restructuring of UN bodies, especially to co-ordinate better economic and social policies and actions. However as Richard Parker of Harvard University said in this collection of seminars on *Our Global Neighbourhood*: "The crisis we face isn't about United Nations administration but about a tragically broken world

where poverty and violence are ever more visible, and where there is an ever-diminishing willingness to help those in need.”

One of the innovations of *Our Global Neighbourhood* in contrast to reports of other independent commissions was the emphasis on values and attitudes. The report of the Commission on Global Governance concluded: “We also believe that the world’s arrangements for conduct of its affairs must be underpinned by certain common values. Ultimately no organisation will work and no law will be upheld unless they rest on a foundation made strong by shared values. These values must be informed by a sense of common responsibility for both present and future generations.”

This emphasis on value led to some of the most interesting exchanges in particular in a seminar on, “A Women’s Response to *Our Global Neighbourhood*”. Virginia Straus, the Executive Director of the Boston Research Centre for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, chief organisers of these meetings, highlighted a distinction made by David Bohn, the Physicist, in his work with J. Krishnamurti: “Bohn’s theory is that wholeness is what is real in the world. Fragmentation results from man’s dealings with this whole. Analytical thinking teaches us to divide the world in order to create meaning for ourselves. Eventually we become hypnotised by the distinctions we’ve made and forget that we’re the ones that created them in the first place. This way we lose touch with the wholeness of things. True dialogue, in which we inquire into the roots of our thought, into the assumptions and distinctions we’ve forgotten, creates a condition of learning together where we can actually experience shared thinking...Dialogue has to do with trust. To have true dialogue, people have to trust each other enough to reveal the deeply held beliefs that lie behind their surface opinions. Then, they can question each other’s assumptions and begin to establish a context for shared thinking and action.”

Currently, there is much discussion on the issues affecting the future of humanity, but there is little real dialogue in Bohn’s sense. Yet the forerunners of true intercultural dialogue are there, sowing seeds for the new era. The leadership will come ever more into the public light. *A People’s Response* is a good indication of the serious thought being given to a new world agenda for action.

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