

MEDIATION BETWEEN NATIONS IN THE UN AND THE WTO

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The most fundamental change that is required to make globalisation work in the way that it should is... a change in voting rights.

Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalisation and its Discontents*, p 226.

ABSTRACT

Majority voting, at worst, is a cause of war. Even at best, it is the most inaccurate measure of collective opinion ever invented. Furthermore, compromise and reconciliation cannot be facilitated by means of a divisive, for-or-against, *closed* question. Indeed, as often as not, the majority vote is an instrument by which those in power, both in governments and in international organisations, (try to) manipulate events.

As in mediation, the methodology used in political decision-making should involve *open* questions. After all, a multi-option preferential vote is far less manipulative and much more accurate. What's more, especially when the debate is fraught with controversy, such a voting mechanism can be used to identify, if not the collective wisdom, at least the best possible compromise.

THE THESIS

Majority voting is a cause of war. It involves a *closed* question: are you Protestant or Catholic? Serb or Croat? Hutu or Tutsi? Capitalist or Communist? Or, to quote George W Bush, are you with me or against me? And the background of many *socio-ethnic* conflicts is, at least in part, majoritarian. But so too, majoritarianism is a cause of war in other scenarios, as in Iraq... of which, more in a moment.

Non-majoritarian decision-making methodologies involve *open* or at least multi-option questions, so they are more attuned for mediation. Furthermore, if adopted as our political *modus operandi*, they could help to prevent violence from erupting in the first place.

After all, *open* questions allow the mediator to establish just which option is acceptable to all concerned, that is, which option best represents the common consensus, or again, which option represents the highest average preference score for everybody. Such an outcome can be achieved via a voting procedure, if indeed the question remains *open*, i.e., if the ballot is preferential and multi-optional. The counting procedure is called a modified Borda count.

A DEFINITION OF DEMOCRACY

Firstly, we should establish the theory: democracy is meant to be for "all" the people, not just a majority. It is meant to be a means by which society, as a whole, comes to an accommodation. The process itself should be the same as that which is involved in mediation and conflict resolution.

Furthermore, in historical terms, this is what it was hoped it would be. In France, America, etc., democrats spoke of our common good, the general will, of "all" the people. It is to our great sadness that the voting methodology which came to be used was the two-option, majority vote. And this is true in international organisations, as well as in national parliaments.

THE UN

The Security Council has 15 members, 5 of whom are permanent members with veto powers. A resolution will be passed if all 5 veto powers plus at least 4 others - that is, a minimum of 9 of the 15 - vote in favour.

THE WORLD BANK AND THE IMF

The World Bank has 184 members. Just 8 of them, the G8 nations – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK and US – possess 49% of the votes.

Both the IMF and the World Bank require an 85% majority on all major decisions. The US holds 17% of the votes in the IMF, and an average of 18% across the agencies of the World Bank. In effect, then, the US has its very own veto!

Just in case that is not enough, the deputy president of the IMF is always a North American, the president of the World Bank, always a US citizen.

THE WTO

Founded on 1st Jan 1955, the WTO has over 100 members. “Each country has a single vote, and decisions are largely by [verbal] consensus.”

NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

Such consensual principals are seldom heard in our elected chamber, where nearly every problem, no matter how complex, is reduced to a majority vote. Hence, in many situations, political disputes are ‘solved’ by resort to a *closed* question, which, in many instances, is actually a cause of war. Let us consider a few examples.

RWANDA - 1994

In 1892, Africans fought Africans in the Battle of Mengo, which is just outside to-day’s Entebbe in Uganda. That battle was fought between the *wafaranza* and the *waingerezi*; the former were Catholics, converted by the French white fathers, the latter were Protestants, converted by Scottish missionaries; the former were French speaking, hence, *wafaranza*, the latter, English speaking, *waingerezi*. The cause of that war was a European mindset.

The same logic applies to the most recent tragedy in Rwanda. In 1994, the *Interahamwe* initiated their violent genocide with the slogan *Rubanda Nyamwinshi* – ‘the majority people’. The story starts in the 1930s, when the colonial powers issued ID cards. The tall were classified as Tutsi, and the short as Hutu, regardless of whether they were of a different tribe such as the Twa, or the child of a mixed marriage, or whatever. And those whose height was average? Well, they were asked a second question, based on the number of cows they owned: 10 or more, Tutsi; 9 or less, Hutu. By thus dividing society, (or by thus turning a social division into a racial one), we Europeans supported a system of minority rule. Then, after WWII, we said majority rule; so the losers of yesterday could become the winners of tomorrow. Hence *Rubanda Nyamwinshi*. A cause of that war, therefore, was the European mindset of majoritarianism.

YUGOSLAVIA - 1991

In 1991, the European Union set up the Badinter commission, which suggested that any ‘people’ (whatever that is) wishing to exercise their right to self-determination, could do so. As a result, there was a spate of referendums, over 20 in all, as each minority drew a border round itself and took a majority vote. Four of those polls were the sparks to initiate conflict, and, to quote *Oslobodjene*, Sarajevo’s now legendary newspaper, “all the wars in the former Yugoslavia started with a referendum”, 7.2.1999. A cause of those wars, too, therefore, was the European mindset of majoritarianism.

GERMANY - 1933

By taking a majority vote on the Enabling Act, Hitler came to power.

RUSSIA - 1903

In 1903, at the London meeting of the All-Russian Congress of Social Democrats, Lenin won a majority vote by “the accidental arithmetic of a single ballot”, and thus split the party into the majority – *bolshinstvo* – and the minority – *menshinstvo*. Hence the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, neither of whom, as it happened, were in the majority, which actually belonged to the SRs.

FRANCE

In 1804, Napoleon used a majority vote referendum, in order to then get himself crowned as emperor.

THE WAR IN IRAQ

But now to the war in Iraq. In October 2002, the UN Security Council debated Resolution 1441. Only the one draft was ‘on the table’, the one proposed by Bush and Blair. The Council then held a “take-it-or-leave-it”, for-or-against, yes-or-no vote. France, for one, did not like the expression “serious consequences”, yet she nevertheless voted in favour.

Why? Perhaps she thought that the resolution, taken as a whole, was better than nothing, or that there was a need for international solidarity, or whatever. That ‘yes’ vote, then, just begs the next questions: were France and perhaps some of the other countries only marginally in favour, and what did they really want? Secondly, for Bush and Blair to claim, as they did, that that vote in favour was proof of full international support, was just absolute, illogical nonsense.

Indeed, that majority vote was almost meaningless. Majority voting is (often but not always) the means by which those who write the motion thus dominate the agenda. And sometimes, when they know they are not going to get the necessary support – as was the case with Bush and Blair in the Security Council in March 2003 – they simply decide not to take the vote at all!

A BETTER PROCEDURE

In the interests of pluralism and transparency, it would obviously be better to allow all participants to propose either a motion or an amendment. If France does not like the expression “serious consequences”, she could change that phrase and submit an alternative wording, with the open support, perhaps, of Germany and, maybe, Russia as well. Syria, knowing as she does a thing or two about the Middle East, might want to suggest a further alternative. Ireland, a neutral country, may also have her own ideas.

Let us assume, then, for the sake of argument, that there has been a full debate, that each has asked questions, made suggestions and sought clarifications, but that, at the end of the day, there are five options ‘on the table’ – options **A**, **B**, **C**, **D** and **E**.

A majority (plurality) vote would be quite inappropriate, for maybe none of the options would gain widespread support. A series of five majority votes would also be unwise, for all five might lose, that or more than one might win.

What *could* be done, however, would be to ask all 15 members to state their preferences on all five options.

Now if, in the count, all 15 nations give option **D** their 1st preferences, **D** will get an average preference score of 1. If option **C** gets 15 bottom preferences, **C** will get an average preference score of 5. And if all 15 give option **B** their 3rd preference, (or if 5 give it a 3rd preference, 5 give it a 2nd and 5 give it a 4th), then **B** will get an average preference score of 3... and 3, of course, is the mean average preference score.

When a group of people cast their preferences on a range of options, some options will get an average preference score *above* the mean, and some options will be *below*. (The chances of every option getting the exact same mean score of 3 must be just about zero!)

If, then, in just such a five-option ballot, one option is way above the mean with an average preference score of between 1.5 and 1, then we can talk of (near) unanimity. If it is about 2, then we should use the term common consensus. And if it's of the order of 2.5, we should perhaps describe the result as the best possible compromise.

And Messrs. Bush and Blair can only claim international solidarity etc., if and only if their particular proposal comes out with a score higher than 1.5.

THE METHODOLOGY

The voting mechanism which allows for the identification of the option with the highest average preference is called a modified Borda count. It is a points system. In a 5-option ballot, a 1st preference gets 5 points, a 2nd preference gets 4 points... and the option with the most points is the winner. The modified Borda count (MBC) will always give a result! It may be the first preference of none; but if it is the 2nd/3rd preference of all, then maybe it is, indeed, the common consensus.

There may be occasions when some people refuse to cast their preferences on all the options listed. There may also be times when some participants abstain altogether. Such is their prerogative. If, however, someone does abstain, then, of course, they have no influence on the result. If they only submit a partial ballot, then, with a similar logic, they only have a partial influence on the outcome. While if they submit a full ballot, then, needless to say, they have a full influence.

Voting for only 1 option gives your 1st preference just 1 point.

Voting for 2 options gives your 1st preference 2 points and your next choice 1 pt.

Voting for 3 options gives your 1st preference 3 pts, your 2nd choice 2 pts and your 3rd choice 1 pt.

Voting for 4 options gives your 1st preference 4 pts, your 2nd choice 3 pts, your 3rd choice 2 pts, and your 4th 1 pt.

And voting for all 5 gives your 1st pref 5 pts, your 2nd choice 4 pts, your 3rd choice 3 pts, your 4th 2 pts and your 5th 1 pt.

The formula for partial voting is like this:

Borda count

A full vote = $n, n-1 \dots 2, 1$

Modified Borda Count

A full vote = $n, n-1 \dots 2, 1$

A partial vote = $m, m-1 \dots 2, 1$

CONCLUSION

In international fora, as too in national parliaments and local councils, all non-urgent decisions should be based on either a *verbal* or a *votal* consensus. The WTO aims to take decisions in consensus. Not yet, however, is it recognised that a consensus can be identified via a (non-majoritarian) voting procedure, a modified Borda count.

If wars are to be avoided, if decisions taken by the IMF and (an expanded Security Council of) the UN are to be free of manipulation, and if governments are not to divide their respective nations by alienating minorities - (of kulaks [USSR], Jews [Nazi Germany], Catholics [Northern Ireland], Orthodox [Croatia], Catholics [Serbia], Tutsis [Rwanda]) - then one of many reforms should involve the adoption of (electronic) multi-option preference voting, in parliaments both national and international, for all instances of non-urgent democratic decision-making.

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