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Social Cohesion: A Critique

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Foreword

Economics is blessed with its own unifying concept of the market and a rigorous measurement framework in the national accounts. However, the social and civil dimensions of our lives lack such coherent frameworks. The gap has inhibited the public debate about where we are and we might be heading.

In the quest to frame a more holistic notion of Canadian society, Canadian Policy Research Networks has made a number of contributions to the emerging literature on social cohesion since 1996. The most recent report has been Jane Jenson's study *Mapping Social Cohesion: The State of Canadian Research*.

This essay by Paul Bernard first appeared in the journal *Lien social et Politiques- RIAC* #41, early in 1999. It was not commissioned by CPRN, but the analysis builds directly upon Jane Jenson's mapping exercise and other studies by CPRN. In doing so, Paul Bernard has added considerable value to the debate in three ways: first, through his critique of what has gone before, second through a rigorous analysis of the tensions among the three contending values of solidarity, equality, and liberty, and third, by adding a new dimension to the five set out by Jane Jenson.

Both Bernard and Jenson stress that social cohesion is not an unmitigated good. The darker side shows up when cohesion is used to exclude rather than include, for example. It is also true that a society that fragments into a population of disconnected, self-interested individuals can end up making choices which are damaging to the quality of life of both current and future generations.

I want to thank Paul Bernard, who is Professor of Sociology at the Université de Montréal, for moving the discussion forward, and to thank the Department of Canadian Heritage which undertook the translation of the original essay. Work on a concept of society which embraces economic, social and political civil dimensions will continue, and all contributions to these efforts will be welcome.

Judith Maxwell
December 1999

SOCIAL COHESION: A CRITIQUE

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In the twentieth century, this ideological conflict between the egalitarian foundations of democracy and the inegalitarian reality of capitalism has been finessed by the grafting of social investments and the social welfare state onto capitalism and democracy. (...) The ideology of inclusion is withering away, to be replaced by a revival of survival-of-the-fittest capitalism.

-- Lester Thurow, *The Future of Capitalism*, 1996

I do not believe that secularism should present itself as the passage from shadow to light. (...) I think, in particular, that the practice of the Sabbath is a salutary challenge to the modern bustle.

-- Alain Finkielkraut, *L'événement du jeudi*, February 1999

The concept of *social cohesion* is emergent in current political discourse as expounded by, among others, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Club of Rome, the French *Commissariat au plan* and the Canadian government's Policy Research Initiative. In *Mapping Social Cohesion* (1998a), Jane Jenson argues that this notion is primarily used to mask growing social inequalities.

While reading her study, I remembered an anecdote that, in the early 90s, struck the few score labour sociologists with whom I was visiting an automobile manufacturing plant in Windsor, Ontario. We began by observing, on a very hot day in June, the endlessness of the line, the monotony of the gestures, the discomfort of some of the work postures; the director of the plant then welcomed us into a huge air-conditioned meeting room. Very well prepared, familiar with all the details of a work process for which he had been a foreman before climbing the ranks, he responded with great competence to what were perhaps rather unusual questions, often more "social" than technical. The

climax of his demonstration was this: the mother company had four similar factories around the world and, in response to changes in the market, one of them would soon be closing its doors; it was up to all the employees to make sure that it would not be the one that provided them with their daily bread. Armed with quotes from various "gurus", he called on everyone, from senior management to manual labourers, to guarantee their common salvation.

That was before the organisations mentioned above started making social cohesion trendy. And yet, that is exactly what it was. The common concern with productivity and loyalty to the company became the condition for prosperity, just as certain economists now argue that mutual trust, a component of social capital related to cohesion, is a condition of economic growth.¹ And this appeal to cohesion does indeed mask issues of inequality. There was no consideration, in the director's speech, of the workers in the other plants who would lose their jobs if his plant survived. Nor was there any mention of the downward pressure on salaries and working conditions exerted on the factory workers, the plant, the company, and the industry, even if these jobs obviously remained comparatively enviable to many. And there was even less question of what justified the differences in benefits between the various categories of workers within the factory.

The concept of social cohesion presents the characteristic signs of a *quasi-concept*, that is, one of those hybrid mental constructions that politics proposes to us more and more often in order to simultaneously detect possible consensuses on a reading of reality, and to forge them. I say "hybrid" because these constructions have two faces: they are, on the one hand, based, in part and selectively, on an analysis of the data of the situation, which allows them to be relatively realistic and to benefit from the aura of legitimacy conferred by the scientific method; and they maintain, on the other hand, a vagueness that makes them adaptable to various situations, flexible enough to follow the meanderings and necessities of political action from day to day. This vagueness explains why it is so difficult to determine exactly what is meant by social cohesion.²

¹ See Putnam (1993, 1996), and Helliwell and Putnam (1995).

² See Bernard (1998) for a similar analysis of the implicit significance of the new wave of social indicators that have recently appeared in Canada. Fred Block (1990) has carried out a similar critique, in the field of socio-economics, of concepts as basic as work, capital, market and production.

This ambiguity is not just surface and sham. The director of the automobile factory was perfectly correct to talk about the very real threat of closure, but he used it, with a certain success, to mobilise the workers without their stopping to consider the social forms in which their work takes place and the benefits are shared out. His was a concept of convenience, like that of social cohesion and related nebulous expressions such as social capital and mutual trust; these concepts rightly attract attention to the perils of neoliberalism, but in most cases they implicitly prescribe a dose of compassion and a return to values rather than a correction of social inequalities and an institutional mediation of interests.

Such quasi-concepts clearly call for a process of criticism and deconstruction. They are in part useful conceptual focal points, intellectual instruments that cannot be ignored because they contribute to the analysis of public policies and because they provide a partially correct reading of reality; at the same time, however, they must be analysed as data, as indicators of what this political discourse wants to say and of what it doesn't.

How should we proceed with this deconstruction? In the study mentioned above, Jenson suggests avenues by conducting a twofold criticism, external and internal, of the concept of social cohesion: she shows, on the one hand, that this concept is only one of the possible responses to the question of social order and, on the other, that it contains several dimensions whose diversity and interactions have not been sufficiently explored. I plan to go further down these two avenues by means of a systematic appeal to the concept of dialectic, in this case, the dialectic of democracy.

Social cohesion, social order and democratic society

According to Cope et al., the fundamental question of social order can be summarised as follows: "In view of the constant competition between human beings for scarce resources, what makes it possible for people to live together peacefully in a civil society?" (1995: 39). Philosophers, social scientists, politicians and citizens since Hobbes have given three broad answers to that question, in varied forms and combinations.

- Classic liberals insist on the free play of individual preferences, expressed through the markets, of course, but also in voluntary compassionate behaviour. The invisible hand, voluntarism and self-improvement, to whatever extent they can avoid even the most benevolent of political constraints, are assumed to produce a flexible and viable social order from the apparent disorder of individual freedoms.
- Conversely, others believe that the social order is constantly threatened by the unchecked pursuit of individual advantages, and that it is necessary to bolster the ability of society's institutions to produce and maintain cohesion founded on the sharing of common values, which take on the status of social morals.
- Still others believe that the social order will founder if the gaps between the conditions of social categories (class, sex, age, ethnic affiliation, etc.) widen to the point where injustices lead to conflict and upheaval.

I will be working on the hypothesis that they are all at once wrong *and* right, that the French Revolution got it right with the motto of the Republic: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity (this last word has recently been transformed into Solidarity, for reasons that seem just as clear to us today as they were undiscernible then).

I am of course not the only one or the first to try and take all three elements into account at the same time, even if there is far from unanimity on them. To pick just some recent works, Gordon Betcherman and Graham Lowe conclude their noteworthy synthesis report on the work of the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) in the field of labour, entitled *The Future of Work in Canada*, by saying that the three essential challenges of our society are to achieve sustainable economic growth, to ensure equitable distribution of labour and income, and to attain social cohesion (1997: 3 and 42-43). They argue that markets are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to meet the first challenge, while the State and civil society, in the form of the third sector in particular, are at the heart of the strategies required to meet the latter two.

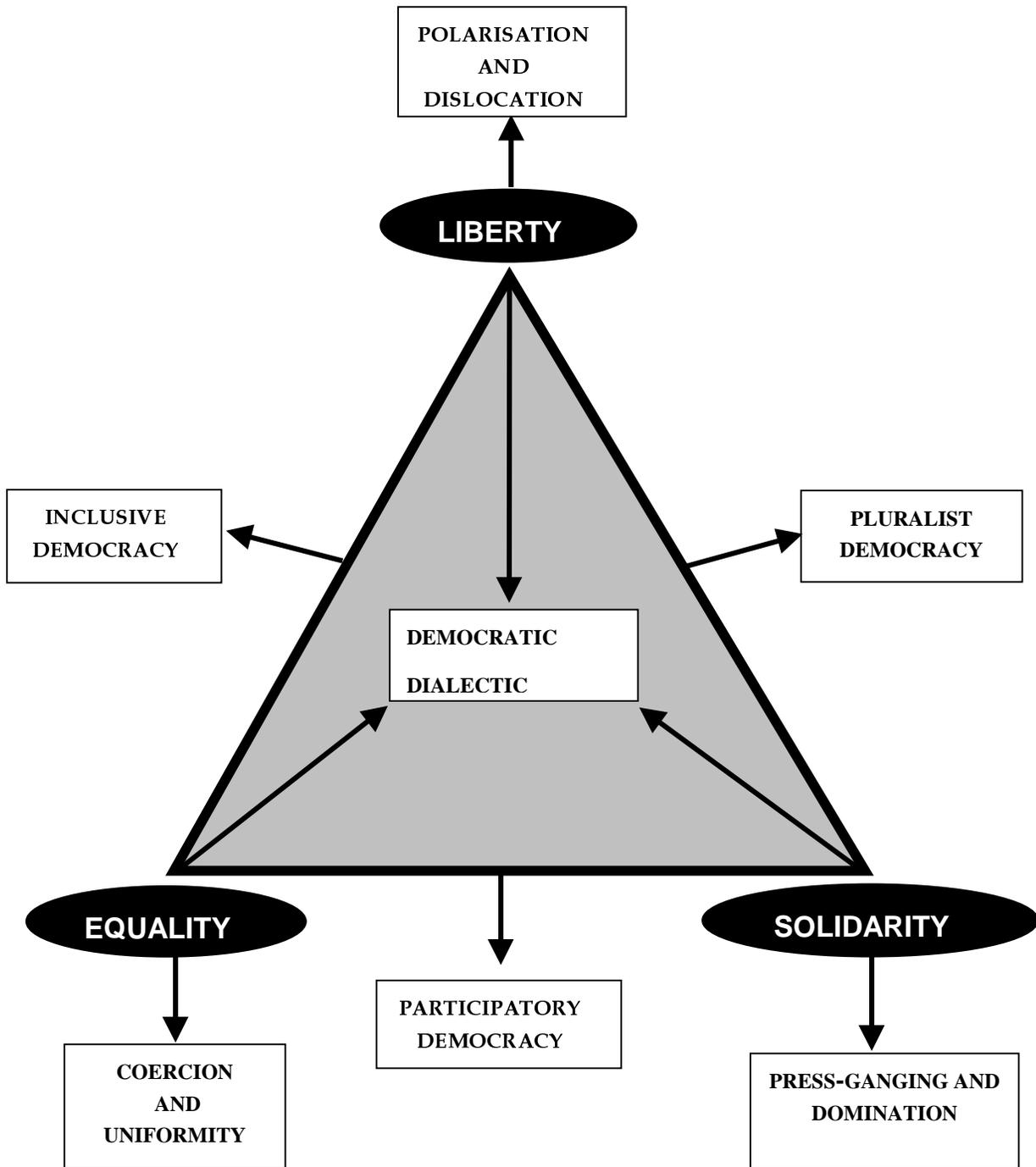
Judith Maxwell, who guides the destinies of the CPRN, has provided a definition of social cohesion that is often used as a reference in Canada, and of which equality is explicitly a part: "Social cohesion involves building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community." (1996: 13).

Not surprisingly, the Canadian government itself does not go that far. The Policy Research Initiative assigns three laudable interdependent objectives for the development of our society: economic growth, human development and social cohesion; but equality is not among them. The Social Cohesion Network, which is part of that same initiative, proposes a definition of the latter that goes further and that includes equality of opportunity, but not a reduction in inequalities of conditions.³

But what exactly does it mean to take these three elements into account at the same time? What relations should be established between them? More specifically, how is social order affected when one, or indeed two, of them are absent from public discourse and action? To answer these questions, it seems to me the only valid model is a dialectic of democracy, as shown in the following illustration.

³ As we will see later on, the concepts of equality of opportunity and equality of conditions, although quite distinct, are closely linked. This can be seen in a study by Dick Stanley (1997), one of the researchers with the Social Cohesion Network: without committing the government, he gives the concept of equality of opportunity a scope such that it includes, by extension, education, health and social security programs designed to correct existing inequalities.

The dialectic order and its variants



The central triangle indicates that liberty, equality and solidarity are all three indispensable to democracy, while the various rectangles represent the distortions of the social order when one or two of these elements are neglected. The central circle corresponds to a dynamic of the dialectic relations among the three elements. By dialectic I mean two things. First, that these elements relate to each other, that is, they form a totality:

- true liberty is only possible for people who are relatively equal and who share certain values, at least that of liberty;
- true equality cannot be that of slaves, and it is based on a sense of a common destiny; and
- solidarity becomes meaningless if it is not freely assumed and if it does not serve to combat exclusion.

On the other hand, these three elements also contradict each other:

- liberty, especially economic liberty and even more its neo-liberal form, obviously threatens equality, and it reduces solidarity to interpersonal action;
- the unchecked pursuit of equality can drown liberty in uniformity and prevent solidarity from taking form and demanding a commitment;
- some interpretations of solidarity can become the enemies of liberty and serve as a pretext for the perpetuation of inequalities.

Totality and contradictions explain the variability inherent in the compromises that give form to the democratic social order. Out of this triple-time ballet of theses and antitheses can emerge only provisional syntheses, historical compromises developed by the social forces that clash in the name of liberty, equality and solidarity.⁴ I will return later on to the conditions necessary to maintain an active dialectic in democratic societies. For the moment, I want to describe the distortions of the democratic dialectic when it breaks down, that is, when only one or two of these elements occupy almost all the space.

⁴ To add to the complexity, we should mention that each of these compromises, once imposed on the history of a given society, acquires a significant weight in the very determination of subsequent changes. That is what John Myles (1998) means with the expression "path dependency".

Unipolar distortions

Without reference to equality and solidarity, *liberty* becomes excessive and leads to a Thatcherian "market is all". Of course, in principle liberty opens up an infinite variety of spaces, and the pursuit of profit is only one of the many possible forms. But cultural liberty and political liberty splinter into a myriad of projects that divide individuals as much as they bring them together, if not more; I am thinking here of artistic trends as well as cultural and sub-cultural identities, party programs and political utopias.

Conversely, the free deployment of economic rationality imposes a fundamental equivalence among individuals, and among their desires; they all belong to the market, and nothing distinguishes them, apart from their ability to find satisfaction and the extent of the means at their disposal. As Betcherman and Lowe put it: "The current of modern economic life is now running against the collectivity of communities. We are at risk of becoming a society of consumers and customers, not citizens." (1997: 42) Have we not, moreover, reached the point of developing policy using a market model, of "managing" our emotional life, of making "cultural investments", of "rationalising" public support for voluntary action, and so on?⁵

Are we therefore heading toward a triumph of this free trade logic, which at present constrains government action and is infiltrating the private space as well as the public? Probably not, for two reasons: one which extends beyond the economic sphere, and one that goes to the very heart of its contradictions. In the first place, exacerbated liberty pushes inequalities towards a strong polarisation and provokes a dislocation of the most basic social consensus, a disenchantment that worries even that champion of "flexibility", the OECD. We are seeing what Betcherman and Lowe (1997: 39) call the individualisation of risk, the moment when the cracks begin to appear in the institutions that

⁵ In *L'esprit du don* (1992), Jacques Godbout clearly explains the profound differences between the logic of the market, the logic of politics, and the logic of giving (*le don*), which presides over all other social relations. If giving creates social ties, that is, relations which remain perpetually unbalanced and open, one might say that economic relations, while based on these social ties, tend to destroy them: economic relations impose as the sole rationale the exact opposite model of the closing of exchanges, of *quid pro quo*s. See also on this subject the article by theology professor Harvey Cox (1999), which demonstrates strikingly how the market over the years has taken on the attributes of the Christian God: omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence.

made the latter a collective responsibility (health insurance, social security, collective agreement, etc.). It is not surprising that anxiety reigns and cynicism threatens: we have gone to the well once too often!

In the second place, it is not simply a question of establishing a new equilibrium among the market, the State and civil society, but also of finding new conditions of economic development, a problem which sends us back to social relations. A polarised and dislocated society under-utilises its human resources, it hampers mass consumption, it is forced to make numerous "defensive" expenditures, in the form of either assistance or repression, it redoubles the resistance to changes that yet become more and more indispensable. There is an even more profound contradiction: an economy that listens to nothing but its markets reduces its capacity to mobilise for long-term investments, such as construction and maintenance of infrastructures, generalised education and the preservation of the environment; these, however, are essential to economic progress itself (Thurow: 1996).⁶ We are clearly in full dialectic contradiction, where the opposing social and economic forces are nevertheless part of the same totality.

If the drift toward liberty leads to the "market is all", the drift toward *equality* leads for its part to abuse by the State. For how indeed can we counteract the inequalities characteristic of capitalism if not by mobilising the countervailing political power, either to abolish the market or to contain it and compensate for its effects? In the worst case, we end up with communist despotism, and in the best case, with a welfare state beset by bureaucratisation and inefficiency, dependent client groups and insensitive managers; these problems, moreover, serve as ammunition for the proponents of strict liberalism.

I should point out that the problems of the welfare state are not solely of internal origin. John Myles (1995) has shown, for example, that the social programs of the Canadian government were

⁶ See, on this topic, the analysis of Fred Block (1996), who talks about the treasures that are overlooked by a short-sighted economic functioning, in which markets reign unchallenged. He talks in particular of the fact that only stockholders play a role in enterprises, while other stakeholders are excluded. See also Osberg, Wien and Grude (1995), who analyse the very different strategies of different organisations in this regard. Block also points out that mercantilised economies under-invest in what he calls *Aproductive consumption*,[@] that is, self-improvement (including education).

designed to function in a context in which the labour market produced fewer inequalities than at present; the fiscal crisis is thus the reflection of the tensions between economy and society, the onslaught of globalisation. However, the necessary equalising action of the State must reach a compromise with the liberty of economic agents. It also becomes increasingly clear that this action must, while remaining equitable, distance itself from the uniform bureaucratic treatment of situations; it must deal with the diversity of community dynamics, whether local, regional, ethnic or other, and seek the latter's contribution to achieve its ends.

If liberty is more than the market, and equality more than bureaucracy, *solidarity* cannot be reduced to rallying around common values. It is easy to see the oppressive side of a "solidarity" that press-gangs people at the expense of liberty; it imposes the domination of those who define themselves as authorised interpreters over those whose only contribution would be to follow orders. What naturally springs to mind is the various forms of fundamentalism and the countries where these have taken over (although there may sometimes be cracks in this dominance).

We might appear to be very far from this in societies such as ours, where individualism reigns. Two counter-examples can shake this complacency. First of all, an authoritarian populism can certainly forcefully affirm itself again within advanced societies, and it can offer a scapegoat to popular vindictiveness; such a phenomenon is persistent, even if it remains marginal for the moment in most advanced societies. Secondly, economic and political uncertainties can awaken "tribal" reflexes and modes of organisation within our advanced societies, such as those we have seen resurface in the former Yugoslavia, and those we hear echoes of, faintly, in some neighbourhoods and even in some schools. "Common values" are not always an anchor; they can divide societies as well as unite them when they become a refuge for those who have lost hope in equality and liberty.

Fragile bipolar equilibria

If each of the three elements taken in isolation presents gaps and dangers, what about situations where two of them serve as the basis for social order? Admittedly, the distortions are less pronounced, but difficulties arise just the same due to tensions between the two poles and the absence, or at least the deficiency, of the third pole. I will now examine, in turn, the liberty-equality axis, which I call inclusive democracy, the equality-solidarity axis, which I call participatory democracy, and the liberty-solidarity axis, which I call pluralistic democracy. I will concentrate on the latter, because this is where those who propose social cohesion as a response to neoliberalism focus their efforts.

The welfare state, which Lester Thurow talks about in the epigraph, represents the very model of *inclusive democracy*, whose problems are currently very apparent to us. Liberty here includes not only the formal liberties culminating in human rights charters, but also entrepreneurial liberty; the latter expresses itself vigorously, despite regulations designed to keep it within certain bounds, and despite social programs designed to restore a certain measure of equality or at least prevent exclusion. We should not exaggerate this model's setbacks; it is more resilient than expected: once social rights are created, it is not easy to take them back from those who hold them (see Pierson, 1994). But inclusive democracy always lives under the threat of a race to the bottom insofar as more deregulated countries, and the United States in particular, exert fiscal pressure on their competitors in an increasingly globalised market.⁷

What is missing in this model, and what governments propose to try to patch it up, is solidarity. On the one hand, what can one use to oppose those who stress the value of liberty, if not another value, solidarity? When the rich want unimpeded access to the medical care that their money allows them to purchase, how can one object except by saying that our common fate as mortals imposes on

⁷ Probably in reaction to this threat, the vast majority of electorates in the European Union have been choosing left-leaning governments in recent years. But these are prey to major internal divisions.

us all a compassion without exclusion? When they quit the public school system, what can we say except that they are weakening one of the most basic institutions of their own society?⁸

And the appeal to the community sector to take over from government efforts that have become too bureaucratic, too uniform and too expensive is based of course on solidarity: the solidarity of volunteers towards the disadvantaged; the solidarity of social groups that are asked to organise themselves on the basis of their belonging to a neighbourhood or region, or to a group with a common problem (such as mental illness) or a common identity (such as ethnicity); the solidarity, as well, that one finds in the "social economy", that vast area of possibilities that is in the process of taking form at the interface of bureaucratic administrations, voluntarism and militancy (I will return to this later on).

The Scandinavian social democracy is a good example of *participatory democracy*. State intervention furthering equality is very prominent there, and it harks back, according to Milner (1990), to values of community solidarity whose origin can be found in Lutheran traditions. The relations between these two poles are not however free of tension: for example, generous family policies that promote the education of children have had the perverse effect of maintaining the gender-based segmentation of the labour market (Clement and Myles, 1994).

There is no question that these are free countries; moreover, they have tried original experiments in active political intervention in the labour market (Milner) that have been a point of reference for many other societies (the famous "Swedish model" so often mentioned in Quebec, for example) and that still distinguish these countries from others, particularly those in North America (Clement and Myles). In the final analysis, however, one might think that the version of economic liberty that currently holds sway in all advanced societies has taken over from the specifically Scandinavian social-democratic model. Under the pressure of economic agents who want to escape a fiscal pressure that is greater than elsewhere in Europe and much greater than in North America, especially

⁸ An argument made, in 1997, on the front page of an American magazine that can hardly be suspected of leftist sympathies: *Business Week*.

the United States, these countries have had to accept a certain amount of harmonisation that imposes a different equilibrium among economic liberty, equality and solidarity.

Pluralistic democracy is the expression of a solidarity whose dynamic is intended to soften the hardships brought about by the free play of the economy. I have already discussed in some detail Jane Jenson's thesis that the current insistence on social cohesion as a way to counterbalance neoliberalism often fails to address the issue of inequalities: the State is enjoined to promote consensus on values rather than resolve conflicts of interest (1998a: 11). It is here as well that the concept of social cohesion most clearly reveals its nature as a quasi-concept: it is difficult to suggest circumscribing the effects of neoliberalism without alluding to the inequalities that it engenders, just as any appeal to the solidarity of all members of society cannot avoid all reference to elementary principles of equality. From whence comes the pussyfooting about the concept of social cohesion: it most often remains undefined, and when it is, the definition does not always include equality, unless it appears in the attenuated form of equality of opportunity.

The difficulty is not only conceptual, it is real. As Peter A. Hall (1997) maintains, social capital is an "exclusive good": those within the networks of contacts, which are the concrete forms of this capital, do not want to extend the privilege of this access to the point where it risks diluting the benefits. Social cohesion can take the form of the cohesion of some in opposition to others, who are excluded. At the same time, an appeal to the solidarity of civil society that denies the State's basic egalitarian mission leads to the downloading of responsibilities onto the volunteer sector: the standards of "new managerialism" are imposed on the latter, public funding is cut, and more generally, the symbiotic relationship between the public sector and the third sector is dislocated.⁹

But why describe this liberty-solidarity axis as "pluralistic" democracy? In the first place because cultural diversity is becoming an increasingly unavoidable reality in our societies, in its ethnic expression of course, but also in the form of various sub-cultures based on the categories of age, gender, sexual orientation, etc., or even regional affiliations. An appeal to solidarity that denied this

⁹ A number of studies show that far from being able to substitute its own efforts for those of the State, the third sector functions much more efficiently when the State itself is active (see, among others, Browne, 1996).

diversity would not have a unifying effect. Under these circumstances, however, the search for a common denominator that is not too small becomes a significant challenge; the simple appeal to the symbols of national identity, for example, can compromise the undertaking as easily as contribute to it.

In the second place, the neoliberal assault leaves us with less of a hold for the formulation of the common values on which solidarity can be based: liberty barely survives as a common ideal and is restricted almost entirely to the market; solidarity rarely transcends the borders of sub-groups and social categories, except in fleeting emotional outbursts; and equality, with its ideal of social justice, is not part of the discussion in the model we are analysing here. As a result, solidarity becomes more pluralistic, and even divisive rather than unifying.

In the third place, exalting solidarity while focusing on respect for differences and failing to call on the State to implement social rights, common to all citizens, can only lead in one direction: that the responsibility for each community's welfare be taken on by its members and their relations. This is often what lies, hidden or not, behind appeals to community, accompanied by usually inadequate offers of state support.

Pluralism thus becomes not only a requisite form for appeals to solidarity, but also, paradoxically, their very basis; it can even lead to a rupture of that solidarity and its scattering into spheres of more or less private mutual assistance. As Pierre Rosanvallon (1995) saw so clearly, the breakdown of the "social insurance" society (*société assurencielle*) means that these spheres are fatally submitted to the logic of a race to the bottom: each individual would want to belong to the most advantageous sphere of social protection, but these in turn would try to restrict access to the benefits that they offer. We are thus confronted, here again, with the potentially perverse logic of social capital!

Of course, reality does not correspond exactly to any of the six models we have just examined. But these models do allow us to understand the tensions that appear in contemporary political discourse and action. The search for more adequate solutions can only proceed from a recognition

of the need to take all three elements of the democratic social order into account, and to maintain an active dialectic of their relations.

Provisional syntheses of the democratic dialectic

We need to go beyond re-establishing a simple dynamic equilibrium between social cohesion and neoliberalism. Not just because equality must also be taken into consideration, but also because dialectic dynamics has much more complicated requirements. As we have seen, it risks at any moment degrading into unipolar distortions or fragile bipolar equilibria. It is no easy thing keeping all three indispensable and yet contradictory elements of the democratic social order in play at the same time. We must expect curious reversals and omnipresent ambiguities.

The epigraph from Finkelkraut illustrates this paradox remarkably well: nothing is ever established, even with principles that spring as directly from the Enlightenment as those of the French Revolution, such as secularism. The latter is obviously a democratic norm, the affirmation of the fundamental equality of all citizens before a State with no religious preferences. But secularism is also "complicit" in a retreat of values that leaves a great deal of room for what the author calls the "modern bustle". And paradoxically, this expression of particularistic religious values forces us to ponder the limited and imperfectly universal character of democratic values. It reminds us of the importance of values and solidarity; of course, it manifests itself within the framework of a society of liberty and equality, but it also affirms its difference and contests, by this very fact, other views of this liberty and equality.

Closer to home, the debate on the social economy, and in particular the desire to distinguish it from simple voluntary action, also proceeds from such a dialectic vision. J. Jenson, echoing the thinking of a number of Quebec researchers, including Lévesque and Ninacs (1997), describes the social economy thus:

Therefore, the concept of social economy evokes not only the issue of social solidarity (helping the disadvantaged and preparing for the future by focussing on children) but also a direct

political dimension. Full citizenship and democracy demand that everyone have the same capacity for engaging in decision processes that affect their own lives. That capacity is undermined by the apathy and loss of dignity which economic exclusion may foster. (1998a: 27)

This makes very clear that the three elements are indissolubly linked: the solidarity of the social economy must reinsert individuals in the circuit of recognised economic activity, which re-establishes their status as full citizens, free and relatively equal, rather than making them marginal, symbolically and legally, because they "get by" outside the norms, in the underground economy.

Pursuing this thought, Jenson emphasises the intuition of Raymond Breton, Jeffrey Reitz and Victor Valentine (1980) that what is important for social cohesion is less the sharing of common values than the presence of public institutions capable of adequately managing social conflicts.¹⁰ In other words, there are values and values: some form the basis for these conflict-managing institutions and must thus be the subject of fairly broad consensus, although debate should take place on their application; other values do not have this central status, and a free and democratic society must leave individuals and groups free to choose them and pursue them in their own way.

And what are these central values, which form the basis of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the institutions of the democratic social order and which, in return, must be supported by these institutions with all their weight? As one might have guessed, they are the three elements of the democratic dialectic. The detour via the role of political institutions leads us back to the same dialectic, and thus throws new light on it. There is indeed a fundamental asymmetry among these three elements. It is clear that liberty divides us into the diversity of our projects and that it "serialises" us, as Sartre would say, when it amounts to the liberty of the market. Solidarity, which is reputed to promote rallying around common values, is increasingly unable to play this role in modern societies, since the latter are divided into increasingly diversified categories and groups

¹⁰ The Club of Rome made a similar discovery: after first assuming that the vigour of civil society would be the main guarantor of social cohesion, it observed that such an orientation could accentuate divisions and it had to fall back on macrosocial institutions, including the State (Berger, 1998: 362-3).

whose loyalties are often turned inward. In contrast, equality and its main instrument, the State, unite us in a common and equivalent citizenship.

In practice, of course, the State's decisions are bitterly debated by political forces whose resources for intervention are greatly unequal. And these decisions can in consequence help increase inequalities rather than reduce them. But it is always possible to appeal to the fundamental equality among citizens that remains at the basis of the democratic State's actions. Moreover, equality still provides the common grand ideals of equity and social justice. The differences are obviously very great from the other two pillars of the social order, since the market has no need for the principles of equality and justice, and since solidarity can easily be built on bases that are far from universal.

In fact, to return to the thesis of R. Breton and his collaborators, I would say that the ultimate basis of the legitimacy of a society's conflict-managing institutions is the equitable treatment of citizens, wherever they stand in relation to the disparities of the market and the diversity of social groups and categories. But it is not easy to make such a principle the object of a deep symbolic allegiance. As Thurow says:

To last for very long, any social system needs to be buttressed by a powerful integrating ideology. Unfortunately, neither capitalism nor democracy is a unifying ideology. Both are process ideologies that assert that if one follows the recommended processes, one will be better off than if one does not. They have no "common good", no common goals, toward which everyone is collectively working. Both stress the individual and not the group. (1996: 158-9)

That is why we now turn to the examination of various concrete dimensions of social cohesion itself, to see whether it is possible, despite everything, to find mobilising values or unifying processes among them.

The dimensions of social cohesion: a dialectic of the formal and the substantial

The evocation of the quasi-concept of social cohesion might lead one to think that all of its heartening manifestations would occur together: there should be a correlation, among individuals

just as among social categories and societies themselves, between levels of mutual confidence, tolerance, participation in various associations and the density of networks and social life in general, indeed involving even levels of faith in common values.

Frances Woolley has examined the question more closely, and she has identified three distinct aspects, which were frequently evoked pell-mell in the literature on social cohesion: the lack of social exclusion, the intensity of social interaction and, finally, the sharing of common values and interpretations. Let us now examine with her the relationship between the first two aspects. She wanted to know whether people who participate in associations are more tolerant than others; taking a concrete case, she analyzed whether individuals involved in such apparently richer social interactions were more opposed than others to social exclusion based on criteria such as behavioural deviance, political marginality, ethnic or religious affiliation, sexual orientation (the survey question she used asked Canadians whether they would hesitate to live near members of these various categories). The answer was a surprise to those who had not foreseen that inclusion could also mean exclusion: the members of associations are not more tolerant than others; in fact, Woolley tells us, "people who volunteer are the centrist 'pillars of society', and are intolerant of political extremism, of those who break society's rules (criminals) and those who deviate from social norms" (1998: 23). The relationships between the various dimensions of social cohesion are thus more complicated than they might appear.

We must therefore follow the second path taken by J. Jenson and conduct an internal critique of social cohesion. To do so, we must isolate the various meanings of the concept and show that the presence of one or more in no way implies that the others are following behind. On the contrary, the restoration of a full measure of social cohesion requires a strategy that takes into account all these various meanings and fosters an equilibrium among them.

I will try to show that this equilibrium must be dialectic and that it brings us back to the three elements of liberty, equality and solidarity examined in the first part of the text. Same destination, then, but through a completely different route: we are no longer starting from a set of universal political ideas about social order, but from a repertoire of very concrete meanings that have been

given to the concept of social cohesion in social debates in Canada. Indeed, using O'Connor's (1998) empirical work, Jenson tries to bring in focus a few dozen studies by researchers and organisations (foundations, pressure groups, government departments, think tanks). She suggests classifying them on the basis of five dimensions:

- 1 **Belonging / isolation:** social cohesion signifies sharing values, a sense of being part of the same community.
- 2 **Insertion / exclusion:** social cohesion supposes a largely shared market capacity, particularly with respect to the labour market.
- 3 **Participation / passivity:** social cohesion calls for involvement in the management of public affairs, in partnerships and in the third sector, as opposed to political disenchantment.
- 4 **Recognition / rejection:** social cohesion considers pluralism not just a fact, but a virtue, that is, the tolerance of differences.
- 5 **Legitimacy / illegitimacy:** social cohesion supposes the maintenance of public and private institutions that act as mediators in conflicts.

How can we be sure that the identification of these five dimensions does indeed cover the entire range of the concept? And how, especially, are we to understand the oppositions and links among them, the reasons for which they are sometimes converging in reality, while at other times they are opposed? To advance in this direction, we can try to discover the structure underlying these five dimensions.¹¹ We can first divide them into three categories depending on whether they concern the economic (2), political (3 and 5) or sociocultural (1 and 4) sphere. We can then use the distinction that Woolley proposes between the simple lack of social exclusion, and the involvement in social interaction. It seems to me that what she means by that is, on the one hand, basic social

¹¹ Formally, this operation is called substructuring a property-space, as Allan Barton (1955) explains in a very

participation, which in principle must be accessible to all the members of a society, and on the other a more sustained involvement in the operation of society's economic, political and sociocultural life; I will call the first formal, and the second substantial. This distinction applies in each of the three spheres identified above, so that we can put the five types in the following table ... and discover a sixth type.

Typology of the dimensions of social cohesion

Character of the relation Spheres of activity	Formal	Substantial
Economic	(2) Insertion / Exclusion	(6) Equality / Inequality
Political	(5) Legitimacy/ Illegitimacy	(3) Participation / Passivity
Sociocultural	(4) Recognition / Rejection	(1) Belonging / Isolation

Examining each of the rows in the table gives a clearer idea of the distinction between the formal and substantial. In the sociocultural sphere, recognition simply requires tolerating differences, while belonging corresponds to involvement in the construction of a community, to a sharing of values -- which is not unanimity, but acceptance of an active dialogue about these values. In the political sphere, legitimacy refers to a recognition of the institutions by citizens, but participation goes much

useful, but unfortunately little known text.

further by calling for a more active involvement on their part. In the economic sphere, particularly with respect to employment, it is obviously necessary to exclude exclusion, but a deeper commitment supposes, it seems to me, the pursuit of equality, that is, of social justice and equity. We thus find, at the end of this process of logical reconstruction, the notion of equality whose absence Jenson deplored in the debates on social cohesion.¹²

When we push further the exploration of the relations between inclusion and equality, we run into the old debate between equality of opportunity and equality of conditions. In the fifties and sixties, for example, the polemic on the foundations of social stratification that pitted Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore against Melvin Tumin (1966) established the essential terms of the controversy. The first, hard-line functionalists, argued that social inequalities served to recognize the talents and reward the efforts of individuals who perform the social functions recognised as important in a given society. The second retorted that, since social privileges accumulated, consolidated and reproduced over the life of individuals and through the generations, there were distortions in the distribution of rewards that weakened the link to talent and effort. In other words, equality of opportunity becomes a myth unless there is a constant effort to restore it by reducing inequality of conditions.

In a more recent text (1998b), J. Jenson demonstrates just how topical this debate is. The focus has been moved, in Canadian social policies, toward the child, the bearer of all hopes and all opportunities, while adults are left to their own devices: they must take their fate in their own hands and muddle through in the market and in maintaining communities, while the State tries to slough off its responsibility. This desire to create equal opportunities for children obviously enjoys a very favourable moral prejudice. At the same time, however, there is a considerable risk that it will remain a formal principle rather than a substantial reality. How, in fact, is it possible to fight the poverty of children while ignoring the poverty of the family, while disregarding the growing uncertainty of employment and the wage gap between the sexes, while wielding the double-edged sword of "workfare"? In a word, how can one pretend to nurture equality of opportunity in the midst

¹² This is a case of conceptual triangulation. It brings us, through a very different route, to the same conclusion: it is impossible to ignore the concept of equality in the debates on the reaffirmation of the social in the face of neoliberal logic.

of growing inequality of conditions? And there is more to this: if the child is a potential citizen, he is still not one in fact. He cannot wield the forces of democracy to insist on equality of conditions as a condition of equality of opportunity. In fact, the focus on children is accompanied by a reduction in state support for, and receptiveness to political pressure groups calling for social justice in the other spheres of social policy and for resistance to market dictates.

Does this mean we risk giving up a sure thing for a very uncertain prospect: are the formal aspects of social cohesion fake, and only the substantial aspects relevant? I don't think so. On the contrary, it is necessary to establish dialectical relations between form and substance: these two terms form a totality in tension, so we must again avoid unipolar distortions. On the sociocultural level, we must steer a course between, on the one hand, a pluralism that is so distended that it no longer conveys to individuals a sense of a community of destiny, and on the other hand, a burdensome communion of values. The construction, for example, of a common and open Quebec culture in which all citizens within its boundaries participate is a legitimate goal, but it must not become an instrument of exclusion.

On the political level, the indispensable commitment of activists must not become so impatient at the lack of interest among many that it denies their legitimacy as citizens. Jacques Godbout has already shown (1983) that participation does not always uphold democracy: beyond a certain threshold, the one weakens the other, because organisations and factions are created that threaten democracy while claiming, indeed believing, that they are serving it. Those who are not excited by a given societal project, however enthralling it might appear, must under no circumstances be excluded from the ranks of authentic citizens.

On the economic level, equality will obviously always remain a target, and it can never be permanently established. First, because it has become more difficult to attain in a society in which the logic of the market imposes a reassessment and devaluation of government action. But also, and more importantly, because relatively advantageous positions, even those acquired in the name of the principles of equality, usually evolve into guaranteed advantages (rents) that the beneficiaries do not want to give up. In order to make equality a reality, we must endlessly pursue the twin figures of this

principle: equality of opportunity, but also equality of conditions, meritocratic equality, but also plain and simple equality which creates the working conditions for a true meritocracy.

Conclusion

The two analytical perspectives on social cohesion that we have pursued have thus led us to the same two-fold conclusion. First, that equality is an essential element of the democratic social order, linked to liberty and solidarity in a dialectical relationship. Second, that this dialectic cannot be maintained in the dynamism of its totality and its contradictions unless it operates on two levels, which are themselves in a dialectical relationship: on the one hand, a formal level on which the fundamental equality of all members of society is affirmed with regard to recognition, inclusion and the legitimacy of conflict-resolution institutions; and on the other hand, the substantial level on which those who want to freely engage in social debates forge unifying values and seek social justice.

We still have not answered the question that Thurow raised: how to involve the members of society, without coercion, in the quest for values that are not fusional, but that rather encourage debate? Perhaps the first step is to reject the amalgam that Lester Thurow makes of capitalism and democracy as simply two ideologies of process. That is undoubtedly true for capitalism, which finds its complete expression in the processes of the market. But it only appears to be true for democracy, which we must refuse to see solely from the perspective of maximisation of interests. It is true that democracy translates into basic rules that are in the nature of a process: free votes and majority choices, protection of minorities and, more generally, human rights, separation of powers, justice rendered publicly and using predefined procedures, and so on. But it is much more than that.

If we confine ourselves at first to the formal rules evoked above, their conciliation is already fraught with debates that have occupied generations of jurists and continue to do so. Logical coherence is essential in such debates, but the reference to first principles is never wholly absent; proof that the formal, without ever losing its importance, depends on the substantial, on basic values that are as inescapable as they are difficult to categorise, such as liberty, equality and solidarity.

We might also mention, in connection with Thurow's statement, De Tocqueville's concern: that the citizens of the republic, once assured of escaping despotism, might become so disengaged from the public arena that despotism becomes a threat once again. This is an important concern, obviously, but as Gouldner points out, the iron law of oligarchy makes no sense logically unless there exists a parallel counter-iron law, that of democracy: something cannot be threatened unless it exists, unless it survives despite all the ups and downs. Democracy is not indestructible, but it is not easily dismantled.

It is even less so when we think clearly about it. In this regard, the quasi-concept of social cohesion plays an ambiguous role: it crystallises the thoughts of those who refuse to see the market as the answer to all problems but, at the same time, it risks diverting our attention away from an essential component of the democratic order, equality. Under the current circumstances, it would be very risky to turn our backs on this concept, which is not merely a cover for growing inequalities but can open vistas of important debates. Instead, we must grasp it, as I have tried to do here, critique it and push it to its fullest logical extent, show that it necessarily maintains strong links to the principles of equality and social justice.

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