

Abstract

It is widely believed that civil society (CS) and the social economy (SE) occupy an “intermediary” or “*middling*” space divorced from both the public and commercial sectors of social life. I call this the “*middling consensus*”, and I argue that it is a pernicious myth. Despite its currency, even within our own ranks, it leaves us on a permanently and grossly uneven playing field, forever outmatched by those who control vast amounts of economic wealth and political power.

To transcend this disempowerment involves rejecting middling views and *reclaiming a stakeholder position in public policy*: along with conventionally elected representatives, *CS-SE must collaborate in democratic governance, and directly access public revenues*. This new and more diversified form of democracy is already being built in Brazil and many other countries through the participatory budget process, as well as by other citizen-driven processes of dialogue, deliberation, planning, and peace-making. How far we can travel in this shared authority direction is uncertain, but so long as we are captives of the *middling* (or “*piddling*”?) consensus, we will remain small, beautiful, and with negligible impact: “If you want to change society, you must take – *and remake* – power.” (Tariq Ali, my italicized addition.)

Résumé

On le croit largement que société civile (CS) et l'économie sociale (Se) occupent un espace de “intermédiaire” ou de “*middling*”, divorcé des secteurs publics et commerciaux de la vie sociale. J'appelle ceci “*le consensus middling*”, et j'argue du fait que c'est un mythe pernicious. En dépit de sa devise, même dans nos propres se range, il laisse nous sur le champ de jeu de manière permanente et excessivement inégal, pour toujours surpassé par ceux qui commandent de vastes quantités de richesse économique et de puissance politique.

Dépasser ce disempowerment implique derejeter des vues “*middling*” et *de reprendre une position de depositaire dans l'ordre public*: avec les représentants par convention élus, *CS-SE doit collaborer au gouvernement démocratique, et accède directement aux revenus publics*. Cette forme nouvelle et plus diversifiée de démocratie déjà est établie au Brésil et beaucoup d'autres pays par le processus participatoire de budget, aussi bien que par autre des processus

citoyen-conduits du dialogue, de la délibération, de la planification, et de la paix-fabrication. À quelle distance nous pouvons voyager dans cette direction partagée d'autorité est incertain, mais à condition que nous soyons des captifs de *middling* consensus, nous resterons petits, beaux, et avec l'impact négligeable: “Si vous voulez changer la société, vous devez prendre - *et refaire* – la puissance.” (Tariq Ali, mon addition imprimée en italique.)

Extracto

Se cree extensamente que sociedad civil (CS) y la economía social (SE) ocupa un espacio del “intermediario” o del “*acemite*” (“*middling*”) divorciado de los sectores públicos y comerciales de vida social. Llamo esto el “*consenso del acemite*”, y discuto que sea un mito pernicioso. A pesar de su modernidad, uniforme dentro nuestros la propia alinea, nos deja en permanentemente y el campo que jugaba grueso desigual, outmatched por siempre por los que controlan cantidades extensas de abundancia económica y de energía política.

Superar este disempowerment implica el rechazar de opiniones del *acemite* y el *reclamar de una posición del tenedor de apuestas en el orden público*: junto con representantes convencionalmente elegidos, *CS-SE debe colaborar en gobierno democrático, y tiene acceso directamente a réditos públicos*. Esta nueva y diversificada forma de democracia está siendo construida ya en el Brasil y muchos otros países con el proceso participante del presupuesto, así como por otro los procesos ciudadano-conducidos del diálogo, de la

deliberación, del planeamiento, y de la paz-fabricación. Cómo podemos viajar lejos en esta dirección compartida de la autoridad es incierto, pero siempre y cuando somos cautivos del acemite (o de "piddling"?) consenso, seguiremos siendo pequeños, hermosos, y con impacto insignificante: "Si usted desea cambiar a sociedad, usted debe tomar - y *rehacer* - energía." (Tariq Ali, mi adición puesta en letra itálica).

THE RESURGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE SOCIAL ECONOMY
Beyond the Middling Consensus to Shared Public Authority
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"(Representative democracy) must be combined with direct democracy of the citizens, so the people can control the state." Ubirata de Souza, Rio Grande do Sul state official

"If you want to change society, you must take [and remake] power". Tariq Ali (my addition)

1. It is a familiar claim that both "social economy"(SE) and "civil society"(CS) are highly contested notions, about which there is little agreement and much discordant controversy. In some sense (to which I'll return at the very end) this may be true, but a quick scan of how these notions are currently understood reveals a prevailing and almost unanimous consensus. I will call this prevailing view the "*middling consensus*", and its defenders the "*middlers*"; here are some illustrative quotes:

"[Civil society]... is a voluntary and in this sense 'private' realm devoted to public goods.... Civil society's middling terms can potentially mediate between the state and the private sectors, and offer women and men a space for activity that is voluntary and public." (Benjamin Barber, *A Place for Us*, pp. 44-49.)

"Civil society is composed of the totality of voluntary civic and social organizations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society as opposed to the force-backed structures of a state (regardless of that state's political system) and commercial institutions." (From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society.)

"Perhaps the simplest way to see civil society is as a "third sector," distinct from government and business. In this view, civil society refers essentially to the so-called "intermediary institutions" such as professional associations, religious groups, labor unions, citizen advocacy organizations, that give voice to various sectors of society and enrich public participation in democracies." (From www.civilsoc.org/whatisCS.htm.)

"...the term "social economy"... is generally accepted to cover the range of organisations which are neither part of the public or private for-profit sectors. It is a "middle way" or "Third Sector", relying often on innovative partnerships and creative management techniques..." (Manchester progressive enterprise network)

"Economies may be considered to have three sectors:

- 1. The business private sector, which is privately owned and profit motivated;*
- 2. the public sector which is owned by the state;*
- 3. the social economy, that embraces a wide range of community, voluntary and not-for-profit activities".* From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_economy.

"The social economy is a continuum that goes from the one end of totally voluntary organizations to the other end where the economic activity (social enterprise) blurs the line with the private sector." – the CCEDNet National Policy Council, *Social Economy Roundtable Consultation Briefing Notes*, 2005.

1.1 What these all commonly affirm is that SE and its mother concept CS occupy a *third, intermediary, voluntary, or “middling” space between and separate from both the public and the commercial sectors of social life.* According to these middler proponents, civil society groups and social economy enterprises are – and should remain – “independent” of and “distinct from” both governmental (authority-wielding) institutions and commercial (profit-maximizing) organizations.

1.2 In what follows, I challenge this widespread middling consensus, contending that it unduly constricts both our idea of SE and CS and our capacity to fully develop these sectors of society. Beyond this challenge, I offer a radically different framework – undoubtedly a controversial one, but one which offers CS and SE a genuine opportunity to become all that they can be.

2. My “radical framework” begins by reconstructing “the Democratic State”, and its relation to the “public”, “market” (or commercial), and “civil society” sectors of society. In particular, I think we need to question, nay, reject, the current state’s presumption – shared by the middleers – *that it alone has exclusive or final authority over the first of these three sectors and over any and all public goods and revenues therein.* (Almost a century ago, this presumption was challenged by John Dewey, in developing what he called “creative democracy”.) Shouldn’t civil society, social economy, and public interest organizations in general *share authority* over public policy as well as direct access to public resources? At the very least, wouldn’t this collaboration in governance “remake power” in deeply democratic ways not dreamt of within the middling position?

2.1 The contrasts between the middling consensus and my own “collaborative authority” framework can be summarized by the two following diagrams:

PUBLIC SECTOR

GOVERNMENT, e.g., political party officials who determine public policies and the allocation of public revenues & resources
(sole stakeholder, possessor of political authority)

COMMERCIAL SECTOR

MARKET AGENTS pursuing maximization of private profit dominate, e.g., World Bank, IMF, TNCs; small, medium, micro businesses; lending institutions...; *marginal* access for trans-market non-profit firms, as well as public enterprises

MIDDLING (or “Piddling”?) SECTOR

Can influence or lobby – but is not a stakeholder in – Public Sector; can influence (or even compete for market share with) commercial agents; voluntary membership;

MUD (Middling Undemocratic, Disenfranchised) ROAD

PUBLIC SECTOR

Shared governance (diverse stakeholders) politically elected and appointed officials collaborate with individuals, groups & delegates from CS/SE in the exercise of authority over public policies and the allocation of public revenues and resources

COMMERCIAL SECTOR

Both **MARKET** and **TRANS-MARKET AGENTS** (including public enterprises), compete on level playing field, receive public support on equal footing

THIRD SECTOR

CS/SE sector not involved directly in Governance (by their own choice or their refusal to engage democratically)

RASD (Resurgent Authority-Sharing Democratized) ROAD

3. This proposed shift from a middling (or, perhaps better, “piddling”) station to one that is co-creative and authority-sharing will no doubt raise thorny issues and projections of dire scenarios. Before turning directly to those, let me set forth four ways of justifying this proposal.

3.1 First: inasmuch as they *embody, promote, and protect vital public goods, and are non-governmental caretakers of society's public sector*, CS and SE have valid claims to stakeholderhood in governance. They thus deserve to have a share of political authority, rather than remaining mere recipients of, or reactors to, policies made “for” them by others, notably politicians often loyal, above all else, to their party’s predominance.

The vital public goods I have in mind include *peace-building and peace-making; social and economic justice*, especially for those under-served by the market economy; *animating a diverse range of citizen engagement in public life*; and the *education and de-indoctrination of the public* by providing critical and alternative perspectives to the status quo and to ruling ideologies.

3.2 There are, secondly, enormous benefits for CS and SE – and for democracy’s prospects – in this shift from the MUD to the RASED Road.

As we’ve seen, both practitioners and theorists of “civil society” have in general confined that sector to a middling position which involves giving up any direct role in the governance of society, and leaves final authority over the public sector entirely in the hands of political parties or their selected or appointed officials.

Confining civil society in this way, however, ensures that the playing field shared by these three sectors of social life is, and will permanently remain, grossly uneven. A middling civil society is divorced from any dependable source of funds, save “self-help”; it is given no power to shape its own development much less protect itself against the

two other power-wielding and resource-laden sectors. As such, we might indeed think of it as a “*voluntary sector*”, but one of “*voluntary poverty and marginality*”. For without authority or revenues, it is a sure and constant loser in the three-way battle, however ideal or well-intentioned the proposals are to strengthen it. No doubt, there can be isolated moments of resistance, as in the Gandhian rebellion against British rule. But in the absence of shared governance and control over public resources these are notoriously impermanent. By redrawing the boundaries in the “shared authority and collaborative governance” way I have suggested, by “taking and remaking power”, we could alter this inequity and make those “fugitive” moments an ever-present and powerful reality. We would shift revenues and legitimacy, once reserved solely for government officials and operations, to certain “independent” and resource-poor *non-governmental public interest associations and initiatives*. These would then no longer be segregated within the civil society sector; instead, they would have access to resources that could offset those in the other sectors, enabling them to attract and develop constituencies, and to have a direct and substantial impact on the shape of public policies and priorities. In brief, key elements of civil society – including the social economy as well as many other progressive initiatives – would be truly empowered, no longer doomed to a marginal or wholly dependent status, but legitimized with public authority, and empowered with access to public resources.

Moreover, this is not just a benefit for the CS-SE sector, but contributes as well to a more genuinely democratic society: empowering this sector can directly balance and set limits on the power of the now largely unaccountable and very often corrupt political party-controlled State. This would amount to an internal regime change that enfranchised and gave real weight to a diverse spectrum of stakeholder voices that the middling consensus – in agreement with the current public and commercial sectors – now discounts.

3.3 Third, the transitional bridge to a collaborative framework is already being built, in many places and in many forms. For example, in July, 2003 Minister Tarso Genro, past

Mayor of Porto Alegre and then head of the new secretariat of Economic and Social Development in Brazil, released a *Declaration* entitled “From Brazil to the World: Twenty Theses for a Democratic Theory of the State” (www.opendemocracy.org). It contained these crucial passages:

Jurgen Habermas spoke of a “citizen’s public sphere”, a space for organisation and dialogue in defence of rights without presuming that the state can and should be radically changed, and that in its structural change lies the “driving force” for the democratic transformation of society....The state can no longer “descend” toward society through political representation alone. Hence the need for the creation of a new non-state public space which will have...the project of creating a new political contract through which a new sphere for decisions is opened, by programmed decision and ideological definition from its managers.

This new sphere thus emerges from dialogue, from decisions elaborated under tension, from repeated confrontations and hegemonic consensus, in which the direct presence of citizens’ organisations (along with political representation) induces and agrees on immediate responses and long-term projects. This is the non-state public space – a system-process based upon representative democracy combined with direct participation on a volunteer basis, a space integrated by representatives from labour sectors as well as by organisations originating in popular autonomy, which alike contest the “abdication” of public functions by the state in the neoliberal order.

3.31 These passages from Genro’s *Declaration* may seem unduly abstract or merely philosophical, but we should recognize that they inform the ongoing *participatory budget process*, a process now adopted in dozens of countries, as well as hundreds of Brazilian villages, towns, and cities, and the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Through this process, ordinary citizens and citizen groups prepare their own budgets, and select delegates for a citizens council which shares the task of allocating public revenues with a government assembly. This initiative, now well into its second decade, has been successful in both increasing public participation and maintaining fiscal solvency – even the World Bank has acclaimed it as a model, citing its reduction of political corruption. The participatory budget exemplifies the “dual state” practice of sharing power and resources between politically elected officials, on one hand, and organizations within civil society, including the social economy, on the other. Its robust democratic process also appears to have aided the formation of housing and worker cooperatives: there were none in 1985 in Porto Alegre, but about 100 after fifteen years of the city-wide participatory budget process.

3.32 The PB is but one of a multitude of citizen-initiated and authoritative processes that have emerged to challenge the monistic nature of the state over recent decades. Let's look then at an even more radically collaborative reconstruction of direct or participatory democracy, which has emerged in many countries, including Canada, the UK, and the USA, and which I have called *APP: Authoritative Popular Participation*.

Through APP, ordinary citizens in many different contexts have addressed short term crises, instituted new policies, and developed comprehensive 5, 10 or 20 year plans. They have done this by drawing on a family of approaches, from contemporary ones such as participatory planning, community visioning, and community-wide study circles to the venerable "*charrette*" – a "*collaborative planning process of all interested parties to create and support a common plan for addressing a community problem, e.g., by changing public policies.*"

Typically this has involved three elements: (a) bringing together a full spectrum of diverse factions within a given community and forming these into small working groups or task forces; (b) supporting dialogue, deliberation, and conflict resolution both within and among those working groups, and, finally, (c) authorizing them to start making changes and initiating solutions agreed upon through this process..

Cities such as Baltimore, Cincinnati, Chattanooga and states such as Oklahoma and New Mexico have used different versions of this APP form of direct democracy to turn around obstinate problems such as racism and racial tensions, failing schools, hostility between police and community groups, malfunctioning economies and high unemployment, etc. Members of the official government are certainly welcome, but their voices count no more and no less than those of any other participants. When the process is concluded, the outcomes are viewed as binding on the entire community; *they carry the authority of a highly inclusive, and richly diverse, consensus*. That is, the

authority of APP decisions or initiatives is derived from processes which involve an inclusive multiplicity of diverse, and often conflicting, voices, factions, positions, sectors, loyalties, etc., and their facilitation of creative conflict resolution and dialogue within that diversity. We can call this “*emergent authority*” to distinguish it from the “*established authority*” exercised by an official government.

Frequently, especially in larger communities, a process of organizing and reconciling the results from separate task forces or sub-groups takes place. This was the case in Oklahoma where state-wide study circles, based in dozens of local coalitions, focused on the state’s criminal justice system, which had experienced burgeoning costs and diminishing public confidence. Proposals from these local groups were eventually gathered together and synthesized into recommendations presented to the state legislature, many now incorporated into law as Oklahoma Bill 1213.

As in the case of the PB, the reconciliation component here is typically carried out by means of *delegates* selected from the separate task forces or local sub-groups. But this delegated process is most often *combined with a principle of direct action*: if a study circle sub-group or a participatory planning task force reaches a consensus with practical implications, it is encouraged to find ways to implement that agreement. (For example, in Oklahoma, several local coalitions established peer mediation programs.) This might, or might not, require outside funding or agreement from other task forces, etc. But in any case, a measure of very direct participation, beyond dialogue and deliberation, is preserved for individual small groups.

3.33 What distinguishes the APP family of direct democracy from such processes as the participatory budget is its aim of providing ordinary citizens – *all of them* within a community – with opportunities to *engage directly in developing community priorities and policies and to address problems they have identified as important and in need of resolution*. In this, they resonate with Article IV, section 4, of the US Constitution:

The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union...a government in which supreme power is held by the citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by elected officers and representatives governing according to law. (my emphasis)

That is, the goal of APP is to enable citizens to actually *exercise* their “supreme power”, and to co-create their own communities, even in the absence of support from their representatives or other government officials. The PB offers citizens a chance to share power with conventionally elected politicians; on the other hand APP goes a step further, providing the opportunity for each citizen to have an authoritative and stakeholder voice, and the chorus of citizens to supercede the authority of those conventionally elected to office. Moreover, all of this is done without recourse to a single assembly-of-all or town meeting chamber, but through what can be seen as *diverse but inclusive* forms of direct democracy. Perhaps, then, we could refer to APP’s goal as the *exercise of supreme citizen power (or “popular government”) and the creation of “emergent authority”*.

3.34 To make the transition from “exclusive government control” to shared citizen governance more persuasive, consider what it could mean in the *macro-institutional arena*, that is, beyond the municipal..

A good place to start, at least in the USA context, is with “the airwaves”, for these, so we are often told, are already “owned by the public”. Public media may well be an analogy for the entirety of public life: Do we want to depend entirely on the (political party controlled and exclusive authority) state to regulate and disperse ownership and control over the public airwaves? If so, we in the USA now have what we deserve, in the increasing domination of radio by ClearChannel stations and in the latest morph of the FCC. (See here Bill Moyers’ editorial on *Truthout*, October 10, 2003.) If not, what options do we have? Presumably, few if any would want a “single player” system in which the current state determines what will be broadcast on a daily basis, and operates all of the frequencies, etc. This *might* be even more wretched than what we have now, though more transparently so.

A third proposal, based on convivial governance, is to take *exclusive* authority away from the state, and allow any and all public interest media groups to have their own associations and a separate decision-making assembly which will exercise governance to award broadcast licenses. Perhaps 50% of the bands could be “commercial”, private market channels. But 50% would then be available only to public interest groups, who would award licenses, through their democratic and decentralized delegates, good, say, for 3 years and maybe 2 renewals only. The role of the conventional state might be to monitor this assembly and its decisions, and to operate as a court of appeals should internally unresolvable disputes arise.

Similar proposals would shift us away from “state supremacy” and towards convivial governance in such key arenas of public life as *criminal justice and conflict resolution* (Think here of restorative justice groups, victim-offender and/or community mediation programs, peacemaking groups, creative conflict resolution groups, wisdom councils, and the like.) As a concrete case, one among hundreds actually, consider the state of Minnesota’s decision to hire Kay Pranis, as their “Restorative Justice Planner for the Minnesota Department of Corrections”. Since 1994, Kay has been promoting the use of restorative justice principles in the criminal justice system and in communities by providing training and technical assistance to courts; correction facilities; schools; and community groups. Or consider the story told by Edgar Cahn, the founder of Time Dollars, who used this local currency system to create (and compensate) juvenile juries who deliberated about juvenile offender cases in Washington, DC, in a court system that was so horribly backed up that it was dismissing all cases of first and second offenders.

And how might we get the governments of this world to take peace-building and peace-making seriously? Dennis Kucinich, Marianne Williamson and many others have organized a Peace Alliance which advocates forming a new Cabinet level “Department of Peace” (<http://www.thepeacealliance.org>). But such their proposal remains fettered to the political party controlled state: their Secretary of Peace would be selected by the

Presidential “commander” and could fill his or her new Department with pro-interventionist war hawks, much as the USA Department of Labor is now filled with anti-union, pro-corporate appointees.

On the shared governance view, any Secretary of Peace would have to be chosen, at least in part, by a Board made up of a majority of delegates from peace-building and peace-making organizations; moreover, the policies and priorities of any “Peace Department” would be established by this Board as well. Why go on trusting the foxes to provide security and pursue peace for the hens?

In short, then, convivial governance, and with it the hope for bringing CS, SE and a wide range of other progressive citizen initiatives out of the shallows, is already on the macro-institutional map, or could readily be added to it.

3.4 Finally, for our purposes here, an *ad hominem* argument against the middling consensus: this entrenched perspective appears to involve confusion or inconsistency. On one hand, it advocates remaining free and distinct from *both* the public and the commercial sectors, allowing CS-SE only an indirect, e.g., lobby-like or exemplary, influence on both of these.

But, as is well known, social economy enterprises often enter the market economy to directly compete (and even collaborate) with for-profit businesses. This is true, for example, of fair trade companies such as Equal Exchange, as well as service sector and many other cooperatives. Recently, the Nature Conservatory announced that it had partnered with Cargill, the world’s largest soy distributor (and a major target of environmentalist criticism), to decrease new clear-cutting of the Amazon rainforest. Indeed, such competition is often advanced as *the way* to effectively challenge the hegemony of capitalist firms. (See here the Bowman and Stone contributions to “The World Social Forum at a Crossroads? A Dialogue”, in *GEO*, Fall, 2006; Summer, 2007)

But if social economy enterprises can enter the commercial sphere and directly challenge – and indeed, collaborate with – for-profit companies, why block them and other public interest groups from an analogous entrance into, and stakeholder status within, the public sphere? Why this apparent double standard, and who benefits from it?

4. As for potential downsides and objections, let’s concede at the outset that the RASED road to shared governance will be long and windy – full of difficult conflicts and pitfalls. Still, what it offers may be well worth the risks.

Here are three concerns which have frequently been raised – mostly by folks within the CS-SE sector – and my responses to them.

4.1 When I presented the “take and remake power” perspective last October during the USFWC National Conference, several of my fellow USA co-op members – though not a majority of the workshop – reacted strenuously against it. In part, they saw it as “undermining the political neutrality” of cooperative enterprises. Cooperatives, and by implication virtually all social economy enterprises, attract a very wide variety of members, who occupy almost every side on any political spectrum: some are conservatives or free market advocates, while others favor strong governmental regulation, redistribution, and social welfare priorities; some claim to be neither right nor left, but green and, allegedly, ahead, and there are those repelled by or lacking interest in anything political. According to these cooperative critics, to adopt the Tariq Ali maxim, or become entwined with governance, would involve foisting a particular political agenda on all co-op members, rather than remaining politically neutral, non-partisan, and independent.

Intriguingly, this objection carried not a gram of weight a month later at a very similar workshop I offered at a national Conference of the *CWCF*. At that workshop, the Canadians seemed far less, or far less rigidly, wedded to “political neutrality” than their

USA counterparts: they viewed it either as less valuable than, or as compatible with, the goal of the new democratic state: that of recreating governmental authority so that public revenues would be in part disbursed by cooperatives and other public interest groups regardless of the political affiliations, if any, of members within those groups.

4.11 I side here entirely with the Canadians, whose response presupposed and pushed me to recognize an important distinction; that is, between *(a) exercising a co-creative or collaborative stake in governance and over public revenue allocations* and *(b) being compelled to follow the dictates of governmental officials or being beholden to a particular political party*. On the RASED view, a place for CS-SE stakeholders in governance is provided, who then work in collaboration as co-equal stakeholders with conventional government officials – *regardless of whatever political party happens to be in power*. These new stakeholders are not chosen because of their party affiliations, nor need they be loyal to any political ideology. In essence, they function as a separate and independent branch of governance; partners rather than subordinates, they retain their integrity and autonomy. Moreover, as opposed to conventional government, membership in CS-SE organizations is entirely voluntary: each of us chooses whether or not, and for what period, to belong, and there are no penalties imposed on those who reject or relinquish membership.

4.12 To see this more concretely, we can again turn to the PB process or to APP approaches, neither of which are dependent upon or have a bias towards any specific political party affiliation: the former endures in Porto Alegre after the fall there, in 2004, of the ruling PT (Workers) party, and has entered the rest of Brazil as much by parties other than the PT as by that party. Most important, both the PB and APP are open and voluntary processes, which even as they dramatically shift power from politicians to citizens, from conventional government to new CS-SE stakeholders, are driven by citizen groups of vastly divergent interests, constituencies, ideologies, and affiliations: all (or almost, all: see 4.3 below) are welcome.

In short, then, we can have *both* “political neutrality” and shared governance!

4.2 But now it must be asked, “*Is this transformation of power a realistic vision?*” How do we get from here to there, or more pointedly, from a few hundred mostly municipal experiments to shared governance at the state, provincial, and national/regional levels? And can this be attempted without seriously weakening the capacity of CS and SE to protect the admittedly small beachheads they now occupy?

4.21 To these worries about the realism of shifting to shared governance, there can be no fully compelling or definitive answer. Previously, I sketched some ways of implementing this shift in macro-institutional contexts (section 3.34). Beyond this, I would add the following to ease such worries:

- There is no way to know if this sort of vision is realistic, or to what extent, *unless we make a full-hearted effort to realize it*; this has been the case for virtually all historic “experiments in democracy”: the movements for womens suffrage, for civil rights, the Ghandian and anti-apartheid non-violent resistance – all these were deemed improbable or unrealistic, before they became, in various degrees, successful.

Moreover, what if it is *not* “realistic”? It seems clear enough that any and all of our ideals – peace, justice, sexual or racial equality, etc. – are only imperfectly or partially achievable; this, however, does and should not prevent us from taking them seriously and making good faith efforts to see them *increasingly realized*. If something, e.g., shared governance, is put forth as an “ultimate ideal”, it may be no real objection, then, that it cannot be fully realized, no more than the fact that we must all die counts against the ideal of saving or preserving life.

- The great majority of humanity, ordinary women, men, and children, are members or beneficiaries of CS-SE. Perhaps everyone besides the captains of industry and the political power brokers – and some of them as well – belong to or are served well by the

non-profits, cooperatives, NGOs...that comprise the vast but now-disenfranchised sector of society.

What power they – *we* – could wield were these fragmented, divided, isolated and even antagonistic sub-groups to unite around the deeply democratic, citizen-driven, processes of shared governance and dual state!

- A major difficulty of course is getting narrowly-focused groups to go beyond the boundaries of organizational self-interest. Those who presently hold dominion over either the public or commercial sectors seem in general to have far less trouble doing this than we who contribute to CS-SE. But perhaps that is changing: inter-collaboration within our ranks, on many fields of struggle, may be on the rise. And often, this cross-border or cross-organizational activity has been chipping away at what John Dewey called the “the dogma of the sovereignty of the national state”.

The past three decades have been witness to a geometric increase in the number and types of international and domestic NGOs. For the most part, though not entirely, these have arisen to meet grassroots needs and on the whole, they function with a comparatively high level of democratic participation and accountability. As several recent books testify, the growth of this democratic sector, and its expanding influence especially over international issues, has become the most distinctive feature of the global political landscape. (See here for example, Julie Fisher’s *Non-Governments and Political Development* and Edwards and Gaventa’s *Global Citizen Action*.) And if we now add the emergence of such cross-border initiatives as the World Social Forum, the thriving Fair Trade Networks, the Solidarity Economy, and of course the worldwide resistance to corporate globalization and to its para-legal agreements (GATT, NAFTA...) and financial enforcers (World Bank, IMF...), it becomes evident that *the nation state, in its present form, is being challenged from many directions and no longer is afforded automatic, much less exclusive, legitimacy*. The time, in short, may well be ripe for a further shift away from the current geo-political state to one that is more directly shaped by and accountable to public interest civil society groups.

Indeed, the conception of shared governance sketched here may be viewed as a way to join together many and perhaps most of the now separate and isolated components of civil society. Such diverse movements as restorative justice, workplace democracy, citizen peacemaking, racial justice, environmental sustainability, public interest media...may all see the objective of a non-state public sector, with its own authority and direct access to public revenues, as at least one clear basis for long-term collaboration and coalitioning. In short, the benefits of shared governance for all parts of the now-marginalized CS-SE sector, might themselves help create a very powerful constituency.

- Another very practical difficulty, also raised by my fellow USA cooperators, is that a campaign for convivial governance might usurp or undermine the hands-on efforts of those activists working to improve the current system rather than replace it with a new form of democratic state. In the case of workplace democracy, for example, it would be foolish for members of worker co-ops to devote themselves to creating or convening a cross-organizational constituency for convivial governance: that would be a sure recipe for the economic collapse of those co-ops. A similar problem undoubtedly could beset any other public interest organization.

Fortunately, however, worker co-ops (like public interest groups of many sorts) are in general parts of regional and national federations and international organizations. The primary responsibility of these secondary associations is to support and enhance the primary co-ops: *what better way to do this than to work towards ensuring them a share of public revenues and a seat at the public decision-making table?*

We can make this point more concrete by considering the recently introduced **CICOPA Declaration**, the objectives of which include clarifying the central and distinctive features of worker cooperatives, and indicating the optimum relationships between the worker co-op sector and the rest of society. (CICOPA is the International Organization of

Industrial, Artisan, and Service Producers, a special interest section of the International Cooperative Alliance.) There are hints, in this document, of the convivial governance model; e.g.,

All the branches of the cooperative movement should promote, at local, national and regional levels, the formation of cooperative parliamentary committees to improve the relevant legislation and prevent juridical and fiscal initiatives that hinder the development of worker cooperation. (See the entire Declaration at <http://coop.org.cicopa/>)

But these hints remain undeveloped. Imagine, instead, that the *Declaration* were to be amended to advocate an additional, or *eighth, cooperative principle* (the seven current cooperative principles are *voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for community* (ILO R193, art. 3 (b))). This proposed 8th principle might be formulated as follows:

8. COOPERATIVES COLLABORATE TO BUILD A JUST, FULLY DEMOCRATIC, AND PEACE-BASED SOCIETY. Co-ops join with a diverse range of other citizen groups to build, and share power in, a, fully democratic society whose institutions, resources, and opportunities are accessible equally by all, and where non-violent dialogue and conflict resolution are widely used to prevent and manage conflicts.

If some such principle were to be adopted – and it does not seem far-fetched to think it could be – the mission of CICOPA would be expanded to include the creation of a convivial governance relationship between the current state and the worker co-op sector, along with other public interest sectors. In this way, a campaign to shift from the exclusive authority state to one based on shared authority could be primarily coordinated by international, national, and regional associations and would not jeopardize either the survival of individual co-ops or incremental progress towards workplace democracy within the current system.

I proposed this 8th principle initially for the cooperative enterprise and workplace democracy sectors, but it applies equally, I believe, to all groups within the social economy or civil society: that is, *such groups must develop ways to collaborate as widely*

as possible with one another, and to use that collaboration to share, shift, and co-create power and governance in a fully democratic society.

This is not, I think, only or even primarily a moral imperative. Rather, it is a recipe for own survival and our own growth beyond marginality. I began to see this at the USFWC Conference I mentioned previously. After my own workshop, I went to one offered by Tim Huet of the NoBAWC consortium in California; this led me to reflect about the 8th principle in ways I had not even imagined.

Tim spoke lucidly on several key co-op issues, but what caught my attention (actually knocked my socks off) was *the question of whether coops are growth-averse* and if so, why. To address this question, Tim compared the slow, halting replication of Cheeseboard, the highly popular cheese and bread cafe in Berkeley, with what might have happened had Cheeseboard been privately owned. In the latter case, the single entrepreneurial owner would have had humongous incentive to create and develop dozens of additional Cheeseboards (or, maybe, Cheesebucks?). But where, he asked, was the incentive to do this within a cooperative that was already doing quite well for its three or four dozen worker owners?

Yes, Tim granted, aversion to growth is not an iron law for coops; notable USA exceptions include Equal Exchange and Cooperative Home Care Associates. Both of these have in fact actively and successfully sought growth; in fact, they made it part of their mission. But these co-ops, he said, were exceptions that “prove the rule”.

Tim did not elaborate on this last thought, but it suddenly helped synthesize the messages I had received from my own workshop. That is, perhaps the reason that these pre-eminent co-ops were both successful and growth-seeking was that they

had chosen to step beyond their own membership, join forces across organizational boundaries, and work to transform an entire economic sector and undo a systemic injustice.

They were both, that is, *co-ops with what we might describe as a mixed or double mission: to serve their members and to serve another constituency as well*. In the case of EE, this was the constituency of small family farmers chiefly in the southern hemisphere, and routinely exploited by the established systems of finance, production, and distribution of agricultural products. For CHCA, this additional constituency was the huge home health care workforce in the USA (close to a million by some estimates), whose workers were kept at the very bottom of the health care industry by avaricious home care agencies. The lessons seemed clear (at least to me):

- There are fewer coops than we would like to see because (in part) of our own tendencies to be averse to growth, one manifestation of which is our disinclination to join coalitions and develop cross-organizational alliances.
- One possible remedy or way out is for cooperatives to adopt mixed or double missions; i.e., to serve both the interests of their own members, and those of a wider constituency which would include more than cooperative members.
- In short, both for our own growth and development and because of what can we learn from and contribute to wider social justice movements, we may want to adopt, and be guided by, the 8th cooperative principle.

4.3 But here a final objection may arise: that the new Democratic state and its RASED Road *assume* that convivial governance will work well; i.e., that civil society organizations will in fact be guided by the common good or the public's interest. Is this a sound assumption? More concretely, what about such "voluntary sector" organizations as the various ethnic mafioso groups, or white supremacists, or for that matter, ideological fanatics of every conceivable description? Does the theory of

convivial governance provide such groups a “place at the table”? Tom Atlee, author of the groundbreaking, *Tao of Democracy*, put the point here (in a personal note) as follows:

Who decides which nonprofits are deserving of public funds? Are right-wing NGOs (e.g., who protect the rights of fetuses or the rights of property over the environment) as worthy of public funds as progressive/green NGOs? I think I see something deeper that my dubiousness about this [notion of convivial governance] comes from. It seems to me that NGOs (almost by their nature) represent specific issues or perspectives, rather than the general (integral, in the sense of embracing all the relevant diversity) interest. From a process standpoint, I'm not comfortable making that the foundation for democracy.

4.31 These concerns are both important and thorny; they call for additional clarification and development of the new democratic state. In a way, they revive the contention, dismissed at the outset, that social economy and civil society are somehow essentially contested notions, or at least, are replete with discordant and antagonistic groups that share little common ground. Here, as a start, is how I responded to Tom:

Shared governance need not (and should not) recognize all “voluntary sector” (i.e., non-state, non-market) groups as “non-government *public interest* organizations” worthy of legitimate authority and direct access to public revenues. On the contrary, such groups would need to meet, at the least, certain minimal *process conditions*: e.g., they are voluntarily formed and can be voluntarily opted out of; they do not seek private profit nor are they directed by any (non-convivial) government agency; they do not attack or interfere with the work or public outreach of other groups; they will need to be transparently accountable; and, perhaps, their membership would need to be open to all citizens, unless it could be shown that the public good they were advancing (e.g., self-esteem and empowerment of marginalized or disenfranchised groups) required otherwise.

Moreover, sharing political authority is not a matter of taking all sovereign power away from the (current, geo-political) state and giving it instead to non-governmental public interest organizations. On the contrary, it proposes that we divorce ourselves, in

understanding or reconstructing democracy, from any single foundation or any one supremely sovereign institution. Instead, a democratic society should be seen as open to diverse stakeholders and forever self-transforming; to quote Dewey here, "...it must be reborn in each generation". The political state remains, albeit shorn of its claim to *exclusive* authority and decisive control over public revenues. As such, it can be an ally in identifying genuine, or democratically functioning, public interest groups and in resolving conflicts among them.

As for conservative or right wing organizations: if they satisfy the process conditions sketched above, and if we believe in democracy's transformative and educative power, they belong and should be welcome at the table. Convivial governance democracy is, indeed, a rose garden, with perhaps more thorns than flowers. But we should not expect to see the latter in full bloom, if we scrape away or otherwise exclude the former. Books such as *The Tao of Democracy* and Bill Caspary's *Dewey on Democracy* have argued, and many groups focused on citizen dialogue and deliberation have confirmed, that conflict is not only inevitable within a richly diverse democracy, but a source of immense creativity. This is so, especially when many sides are represented, and facilitators and ground rules guide participants into open articulation and deep listening. Perhaps, then, there is truth in Proudhon's aphorism: "*Liberty is the mother, not the daughter of order*"?

5. In conclusion, then: I have argued that CS-SE have been severely short-changed and undermined by a pervasive myth, one in which they are confined to a disenfranchised and impoverished space divorced from the power to govern and unable to directly access public sector resources. This is a myth we, within CS-ES, have often acquiesced in and perpetuated. We deserve better. Becoming stakeholders sharing public authority and control over public revenues can unify and strengthen our own voices while helping to repair badly broken forms of democracy. The good news is that shedding the debilitating middler consensus in favor of shared governance is not only conceivable

and would yield more diverse and reliable forms of democracy, but has begun to take root worldwide, in concrete and stable forms. While such a radical shift is far from problem-free, and its longer range capabilities to transform macro-institutions are uncertain, it remains a path of potential democratic renewal and opportunity. And without it, how can we hope to escape the middling shallows?

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