

Chapter 3

Citizenship and Social Class Revisited: Liberal Reason, Sociology and Publics

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This chapter addresses T.H. Marshall's essay on citizenship and social class in the light of a subsequent attack on social rights of citizenship under the increasing dominance of neo-liberal political reason, and its adoption by Conservative and New Labour governments in the UK. The essay was written at a time when the growth of social rights and the amelioration of social inequalities seemed to be an unproblematic extension of political rights and the growth of the welfare state. This was also aligned with the professional ethos of sociology and social policy as disciplines. However, with the increased emphasis on replacing state-provided services by the market, including, now, the introduction of the market into the delivery of higher education, Marshall's prognosis that social rights would transform the market appears to be reversed. This poses serious questions for the constitution of sociology as a discipline (and for its future in a context where public 'impact' is imperative to secure funding, and the impact agenda is itself a product of a neo-liberal 'knowledge regime'). In this chapter I suggest that sociology needs to renew itself through a re-examination of its relation to the public. In doing so, I shall draw upon John Dewey's idea of the public and George Herbert Mead's idea of the social self to outline their significance for a sociological critique of liberal public reason and a renewed engagement with social inequalities relevant to legal scholarship. I shall suggest that this may provide the key to unlock Marshall's concept of citizenship from its rather problematic association with a dated moment in the development of social democratic welfare provision. At the same time, it can provide sociology with a new 'jurisdiction'.

The chapter also reflects many discussions with Zenon Bańkowski, and some disagreements, but always friendly and engaged. I was a colleague of Bańkowski's for about 20 years at the University of Edinburgh. I was in the Department of Sociology and a member of the Social and Political Theory seminar that brought together staff and postgraduates from politics, sociology, law and the humanities for fortnightly meetings for a good many of those years (it ran from about 1985 through to 2003). Our discussions ranged across many issues, but a constant theme was the relation between explanatory social science and normative argument. In particular, problems of inequality and social justice were paramount, especially in a context where the discourse of class was losing public salience. Essentially, the seminar took place through a period of the emergence and consolidation of neo-

liberal public reason. In consequence, the nature and moral meaning of markets was a preoccupation of our discussions, as was the fate of social democracy. In a period where social rights of citizenship were being dissolved in favour of the standard liberal freedoms, and where the sovereignty of the individual subject was rendered as consumer sovereignty, the meaning of freedoms expressed collectively was a central topic of discussion.

Ironically, from the 1970s onwards, T.H. Marshall's (1950) classic account of the social rights of citizenship had been subjected to emergent Marxist criticism as being a functionalist argument, where social rights served the reproduction of capitalism and did not challenge its essential structures of power (Gough 1979). Citizenship and social class were mutually compatible, it was argued, and in the phrase of the time, 'democracy was the best shell for capitalism' (Jessop 1978). By the mid-1980s, it seemed that the advocates of market capitalism disagreed, and social rights of citizenship were being challenged as incompatible with liberal freedoms and market efficiencies. I recall discussing Norman Barry's critique of welfare at the seminar, and his very telling statement:

Some socialists and all consistent Marxists have to regard the typical welfare institutions as in a very real sense harmful because they are structured on a pre-existing capitalist order. Their thriving would be inimical to the future aim of abolishing the capitalist order ... Indeed, in theoretical Marxism, since the state is defined in essentialist terms as a coercive force to protect class interests, any welfare role that social theorists might attribute to it must be illusory. Almost all overt socialists saw welfare as a form of social control. (1990: 41)

And then Barry delivers his *coup de grace*: 'as indeed it was' (ibid.). This chapter, then, is a continuation of a conversation begun in Edinburgh, and an expression of thoughts first released under Bańkowski's gentle probing. My own sense of the relation among the disciplines represented at the seminar was that law and politics appeared to operate in counterpoint, whereas sociology seemed to introduce a discordant and jarring note. This, I have come to believe, derives from the fact that sociology has a special relation to the problem of inequality, deriving from the circumstances in which it arose as a discipline. Broadly, this was at the turn of the nineteenth/twentieth centuries with the emergence of corporate capitalism, and what Sidney Fine (1956) called the idea of the 'general' welfare state and the critique of classical political economy to provide a role for the state in social reform. In this context, I suggest, a sociological project first emerged around a critique of liberal public reason, and its embrace of the market and associated theory of the possessive individual. Here, sociology was associated with the possibility of reform and its expression through the recognition of social interdependence – an interdependence that became ever more evident as the reality of the modern capitalist corporation outstripped the ideological representation of capitalist organization in terms of market competition and entrepreneurial effort.

In contrast to sociology, it seemed to me that the disciplines of law and politics had developed much more straightforwardly as expressions of liberal public reason. In part this alignment is reflected in that favoured trio of subjects for Britain's governing class, namely politics, philosophy and economics (preferably read at Balliol), and the alignment of legal philosophy and liberalism within them. Of course, there are heterodox voices within those disciplines (not least Bańkowski's). However significant the 'critical legal studies' movement has been in challenging this liberal orthodoxy, it has done so largely from a tradition of continental philosophy and Frankfurt School theory, in particular. In this context, Marxist accounts of capitalism functioned as a surrogate for sociological engagement with contemporary social relations and institutions. Acceptance of what I shall suggest are essentially 'unreal' Marxist categories functioned to signify the 'real' and to enable a critique of sociology for its insufficiently critical stance, as evidenced in the wider Marxist critique of Marshall and the limits of the welfare state.

What I regard as a quite different sociological sensibility can be demonstrated in key contributions from Emile Durkheim and G.H. Mead, through to Karl Polanyi and T.H. Marshall (among others; though it is significant that I include neither Max Weber nor Karl Marx – nor the traditions associated with them – in this list. I shall return later to this deliberate omission).¹ Yet, my defence of a distinctive sociological sensibility and the urging of its significance was precisely that – *defensive*. It was conducted in a context where I felt that sociology had also lost its way. In this chapter, then, I shall argue that the critique of liberal public reason has become attenuated within sociology, especially in the contemporary period. I also want to suggest that this forms a crisis within sociology that is associated with a wider normalization of social inequality. In other words, we currently face a troubling question: what is the role of sociology if, in T.H. Marshall's (1950) words, in the 'war between citizenship and social class', the latter is perceived to have won? And what is the consequence for citizenship of the normalization of inequality? The seminar coincided, more or less, with a widening of inequalities from its lowest range in the early 1980s to now, when inequalities have returned to the levels last seen in the USA and UK at the turn of the nineteenth/twentieth centuries, a moment I regard as foundational for the development of sociology.

1 Of course, there are sociologists who have embraced methodological individualism, or who have been ardent proponents of capitalist political economy – Herbert Spencer and William Sumner come to mind as significant figures historically. However, this view may be regarded as the heterodox position in sociology. Equally, sociology itself was also strongly influenced by Marxism during the 1970s and after, at the same time as critical legal studies came to prominence.

Sociology's Jurisdiction

In arguing for a particular sociological sensibility associated with social reform, I am suggesting that sociology has a special relation to democratic developments that have challenged structured social inequality. However, it is more usual, to identify T.H. Marshall with a tradition of 'political arithmetic'; that is, of social knowledge serving the purposes of government (see Halsey 1994). Indeed, this characterization of Marshall is not that distant from the wider characterization of the problem of sociology employed within critical theory, from Max Horkheimer to Jürgen Habermas, namely that sociology was a discipline at the service of administered capitalism. However, this is at odds with the democratic impulse of Marshall's work, evident in his seminal work, 'Citizenship and Social Class'. If correct, it would serve to bind sociological knowledge to interests of government, something that has become fashionable in the light of Foucauldian accounts of governmentality, or Bauman's (1987) argument about the 'legislatory' tendency of sociological theory. However, as I shall suggest, while Marshall does not provide an explicit sociological grounding of his idea of social citizenship, its status as an 'alternative road' to the 'classless' society (Marshall 1950 [1938]) is an important part of his argument and one that belies the representation of him as part of a tradition of political arithmetic. This latter idea is also important, and I shall return to it in the context of addressing an alternative view in sociology (derived from Weber and Marx), namely, that *capitalism is necessarily a class society* and that its forms of citizenship are in the service of class.

To disentangle some of these arguments, I turn to the American pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey, and, in particular, his idea of the 'public and its problems' (the title of a book written by him in 1927). His ideas are fertile because they have a strong affinity with sociology, not least because of his influence on Mead and the latter's idea of the social self. I want to suggest that Dewey and Mead also have a strong conception of the mutual relations between sociology, the social self and social reform, and that they articulate these relations in terms of what, following Savage's (2010) terminology, I call a 'founding jurisdiction' of sociology. It is precisely the conception of the 'social self' that I argue marks both a distinctive sociological sensibility and a challenge to the liberal self that is constitutive of the dominant approaches in other disciplines, such as economics, politics and philosophy (including legal philosophy).²

Dewey's concept of the social self is of the individual who forms associations and is, in turn, formed by them (and cannot be conceived of as acting outside them). The social self is necessarily antagonist to the liberal self, conceived as a rational calculating subject abstracted from social relationships. Whereas the latter

2 It should also be evident that the critique of liberal public reason associated with the pragmatic (and sociological) idea of the social self and the relations among social selves as 'publics' goes some considerable way to providing the dialogical account of public philosophy attentive to civic struggles that is sought by Tully (2008).

is expressed in market exchanges, the social self is expressed in social reform. As Mead puts it,

in social reform, or the application of intelligence to the control of social conditions, we must make a like assumption, and this assumption takes the form of belief in the essentially social character of human impulse and endeavor. We cannot make persons social by legislative enactment, but we can allow the essentially social nature of their actions to come to expression under conditions which favor this. (1899: 370)

The application of intelligence in the service of reform is strongly attached to the pragmatist emphasis on problem-solving, an association that leads Horkheimer (1947) and later writers to suggest that its concerns are piecemeal and accepting of the status quo. However, it is clear that the idea of problem-solving is understood as ‘world-creating’. Thus Mead writes that, ‘it is not surprising that in our reflective experience the world should present itself as an object of knowledge, for it is there primarily as the locus of a problem; and, when the problem is solved, if it is solved, it will be a different world from that which preceded the appearance of the problem’ (1938 [1900]: 63). This is also extended to the idea of the self, which, for pragmatists does not have a fixed form. ‘The growth of the self’, Mead argues, ‘arises out of a partial disintegration, – the appearance of the different interests in the forum of reflection, the reconstruction of the social worlds, and the consequent appearance of the new self that answers to the new object’ (1964 [1913]: 149).

For Margaret Archer, Mead’s social self is ‘over-socialised’, and therefore ‘conformist’ in character, where the actor’s internal conversation is between ‘the I and the we’, as Archer puts it, rather than ‘the I and the me’. ‘His “I”’, she suggests, ‘does not speak *for itself*, but for another “We”, that of a different community’ (2003: 79). However, it is quite evident from the previous quotations that the ‘social self’ is not defined by stasis, but only arises as a consequence of necessary engagement with problems in a world of other selves. In this way, the ‘I’ that speaks for another ‘we’, speaks for a ‘new community’ as the product of a transformed social world and transformed self, alike.

The idea of the social self, then, brings reform into being, but, for Mead, it also brings sociology into being and does so together with its function to serve the public (or publics). In this way, Dewey and Mead are arguing for a conception of social science that serves the public, independently of any use of that knowledge by the state. It is of fundamental significance that neither Dewey nor Mead associates the public with the state. Dewey, for example, argues that the public is a category independent of the state and prior to it. The key to the definition of a public is contained in the idea of action in the world having effects and consequences that are ramified and impact on others who are not the initiators of the action. Essentially, all action is associative action, but a public is ‘brought into being’ in consequence of being indirectly and seriously affected by the actions of others.

Part of Dewey's analysis of the problem of modern democracy is concerned with the imbalance in the development of associations and the proliferation of problems in areas where publics cannot properly defend themselves. Given that a 'public' is defined by the consequences of action on individuals, it is necessarily the case that it is initially formed as a 'passive' entity; that is, as a group to which things happen. The main issue is how their interest in self-defence is to be developed.

This is the point at which Dewey shifts gear to argue that the wider idea of a public achieves a level of generality that requires organization and personnel to express it, namely the idea of a state as a congeries of public authorities. Thus, Dewey proposes that, 'the lasting, extensive and serious consequences of associated activity bring into existence a public. In itself it is unorganized and formless. By means of officials and their special powers it becomes a state. A public articulated and operating through representative officers is the state; there is no state without a government, but also there is none without the public' (1927: 67).

Dewey by no means suggests that these developments mean that a state necessarily will act in the public interest – power can be accrued, authority exercised despotically, and, indeed, the personnel of government can act on their own private or other special interests. The fundamental point, however, is that the state takes its meaning from the idea of a public and its interests, and that this is conceived as a dynamic thing. This means that, for Dewey, not only associations external to the state, but the state itself, and its modes of organization, are subject to change and revision in the light of other changes in the development of associative life. In other words, though the state exists in relation to the problems of associative social life that create a public, its forms and modes of organization may come to constitute a problem for the expression of that public, though, paradoxically, that is its *raison d'être*.

Whereas a conventional view of the functions of government is the representation of publics, with experts playing a mediating role in informing government decisions, Dewey is concerned with the self-organization of publics and the role of expertise in that process. Knowledge, for Dewey, should serve publics, not government. In other words, it is directly opposed to a 'legislator' idea of knowledge and its uses. The idea of a 'public' (or 'publics') contains a strong idea of democracy associated with participation and dialogue, but does not deny that there will be functionally differentiated publics, whose articulation will be at issue. Thus Dewey writes of democracy that, 'from the standpoint of the individual, it consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands liberation of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are in common. Since every individual is a member of many groups this specification cannot be fulfilled except when different groups interact flexibly and fully in connections with other groups' (1927: 147).

Equally, the idea of the 'public' does not depend on an ideal form that acts as a regulatory idea for critique. As Mead puts it, 'a conception of a different world comes to us always as the result of some specific problem which involves readjustment of the world as it is, not to meet a detailed ideal of a perfect universe, but to obviate the present difficulty; and the test of the effort lies in the possibility of this readjustment fitting into the world as it is' (Mead 1899).

This argument establishes a critique of 'utopian' ideas of reform, and advocates instead the reform and reconstruction of existing institutions. Utopian reform, in contrast, is based on a fixed idea of the future, not on a readjustment of the world as it is; that is, *the world as it is within a sociological discernment of the developments that reform could bring into being*. Of course, the direct antagonist of Mead's argument is utopian socialism, including so-called Marxist scientific socialism, for which sociology is now presented as the 'true' scientific successor. However, the target – especially in Dewey – is also the liberal utopia of the self-regulating market. The representation of liberal reason as a (pathological) market utopia, then, is central to the tradition of sociological argument I am outlining here.

Dewey's account of publics was conceived, in part, as a riposte to Walter Lippmann (1925) and his idea that, in a democracy, the 'public' is a 'phantom category' (that is, something that functioned only in theories of democracy and had little real substance). For Lippmann, the 'eclipse of the public' was a necessary consequence of the complexity of modern societies that increasingly required organized expertise of various kinds. In consequence, 'expert opinion' would replace 'public opinion', and democracy would necessarily be attenuated (expert opinion, then, for Lippmann would function as a form of political arithmetic, a mode of calculation made available to elites and not to inform wider publics). Lippmann anticipated that expert opinion would operate in conjunction with the state and economic corporations in a manner that anticipated what, subsequently, has come to be understood as the 'Fordist' system of economic governance, in which social scientific knowledge became heavily implicated (Steinmetz 2005). However, Dewey also noted that the 'eclipse of the public' is prefigured in the very idea of the market economy in which decisions by (consumer) sovereign individuals are perceived to be efficiently aggregated through impersonal market exchanges. This is held to be in contrast to their inefficient aggregation by collective political decision-making through the agency of the state (Barry 1990). In other words, the idea of a political realm in which the public expresses its democratic will is severely compromised by the liberal distrust of 'group', or collective, actions and the idea that it is only the market that properly expressed the general interest. From the point of view of liberal individualism, then, modern capitalism has produced an appropriate eclipse of the public, in the sense of rendering the idea of the public nugatory. However, according to Dewey, this doctrine emerged just as the idea of an 'individual' free of associations was being rendered untenable by the very developments of corporate capitalism with which it was linked. Thus Dewey says that, "the individual", about which the new philosophy centred itself,

was in process of complete submergence in fact at the very time in which he was being elevated on high in theory' (1927: 96).³ Given that publics express the nature of the individual's social self, the liberal antagonism to publics is, in truth, both anti-social and damaging to the individual. In this way, the liberal idea of the market is not only utopian, but it expresses a pathology, in much the same way as is argued by Durkheim (see Dawson 2012).

I hope it is clear that if we place Marshall's arguments about social citizenship in the context of the social self and the public, we would get a more robust – or perhaps more explicit – critique of public policy based on the utopia of market exchange and the liberal individual. We would also get an argument about reform that displaces the state from its implicit role at the centre of consideration. The state is replaced by the idea of the 'public', though that does not discount the importance of the agency of the state as one possible expression of the public. To spell it out a little further – though I hesitate to do so – we might see that the idea of the 'public' provides a specification of what might be entailed by the idea of a 'Big Society', but does so by showing that its enemy is primarily the market (or, more precisely, the 'utopia' of the market and its role in the formulation of public policy), which is why the present government's policies towards the promotion of the 'Big Society' are self-defeating.

So, what went wrong? And why was sociology displaced from its role in relation to publics to a role in relation to government?

Sociology and the Welfare State

For much of the period since Dewey was writing (that is, post-World War II), the social sciences operated relatively unselfconsciously under an understanding that was broadly aligned with Lippmann, rather than Dewey. This perhaps did not matter too much, in the sense that this period also coincided with the rise of the welfare state and the latter was frequently seen as a response to public demands. In this context, the state might be seen as the expression of the public interest, and so the latter could be embodied in a developing professional ethos for sociology and perceptions of its growth in line with the growth of the welfare state. This, I suggest, is much the way that Marshall's own contribution was understood as 'political arithmetic'. Its corollary was that the nature of sociology (and other social sciences) as a public good was relatively unproblematic and need not be addressed directly. Indeed, in so far as the welfare state can be regarded as emerging to ameliorate the social problems of a market society, then a sociological project that was itself associated with the growth of the welfare

3 Livingston (1994, 2001) identifies the rise of the corporate economy as the moment of pragmatism. For Dewey, the idea of 'individualism' was peculiarly well suited to the promotion of the class-based associations of business activities and brought into being the corporate economy that is patently at odds with that individualism.

state might also be understood as being organized in relation to a 'normalized' critique of liberal public reason (though, of course, Dewey would have demurred at this 'normalization' of the idea of the public).

However, in the 1970s and after, this normalized version of sociology's 'jurisdiction' began to break down with the emergence of critiques of welfare state capitalism. Indeed, as I have suggested, Marshall's arguments concerning social rights of citizenship and the possibility of reform were themselves argued to be little more than ideological justifications for the reproduction of capitalism. In the language of sociological critiques of the 1970s and 1980s, since the welfare state was perceived as being functional for capitalism, it therefore lacked the positive substance that Marshall had sought to attribute to social rights of citizenship.

These criticisms were also aligned with critiques of professional organization, whose growth Marshall (1950 [1939]) had also identified as being associated with the growth of citizenship, in so far as citizenship rights require separate occupations designed to sustain them; see also Parsons (1939, 1959) for a different version of the argument. These criticisms extended to the professionalization of sociology itself (Gouldner 1970; Larson 1977; Collins 1990; Steinmetz 2005). While the criticisms were frequently intended to serve a greater democratization, the concurrent resurgence of neo-liberal public reason and its increasing influence over governments keen to reduce the scale of the welfare state and to de-regulate their economies meant that critique was easily absorbed by the neo-liberal project. Sociological critiques of welfare capitalism defined the problem as being that welfare was a system of social control; neo-liberals agreed and, of course, they that inherited the prize. This has left sociology (and arguments against inequality) adrift.

This is so in two respects. First, social scientific knowledge is organized increasingly in instrumental terms as a 'co-production' (Jasanoff 2004) of the academy, government and private agencies with little independent normative grounding, other than its putative significance for national social and economic goals. This is an updated version of political arithmetic, but it is now a general arithmetic of useful knowledge available to any beneficiary. Social science is no longer to be simply the servant of government but of anyone who will pay the piper, or on whose behalf the piper pays. This is the understanding intrinsic to the current 'impact' agenda that dominates the academy in the UK (Holmwood 2011a). Second, in so far as critical sociologies have emerged since the 1970s to challenge professional orthodoxies, they are victims of what Burawoy (2005: 20) has called a 'scissors movement' in their relation to the wider public, where public opinion has moved in the opposite direction from sociological opinion. Declarations 'for public sociology', then, potentially face a public that is itself not 'for sociology'. In this context, sociological argument has a declining capacity to influence public debate and, indeed, is readily represented as both a special interest and as a politicized form of knowledge within that debate, a fate that also befalls other forms of critique, including those within liberal studies.

The Decline of Class?

This is an impasse where sociology takes its meaning as being *for the public* and yet appears *estranged from the public* it seeks to serve. I now want to address this impasse via the fate of the sociological analysis of class inequality. Some will be familiar with the recent debate in British sociology over the putative ‘death of class’ (Lee and Turner 1996). The debate needs to be understood in the light of the re-emergence of Marxist and Weberian forms of class analysis in the period after Marshall was writing (and frequently in criticism of his works). This analysis was frequently designed to show the resilience of class in the face of the welfare programmes associated with what Marshall perceived as the expansion of social citizenship. It seemed that social citizenship could not be represented as the path to a classless society (though it should be noted that, for Marshall, the classless society was not to be construed as a society without inequality).

However, what might be represented as the increased significance of class in the subjective consciousness of sociologists was matched by its decline in the consciousness of the wider population. The ultimate failure of class analysis is that the language of class no longer has much salience in public discourse, at least not in the form that sociologists propose. At best, ‘class’ is used in popular understanding as a means of locating family experience in terms of the relation of the past to the present; for example, as a description of how things have improved (for ‘people like us’), or as part of a narrative of identification with other family members, especially those of earlier generations (‘where we have come from’). It is no longer the forward-looking discourse of social justice, or of necessary action to ameliorate inequality.

It is all very well for sociologists to offer the argument that subjective ideas about inequality are mediated by ideological legitimations, or other intervening factors such as gender or ethnicity, and that class as an ‘objective reality’ remains (Sayer 2005). The issue would still arise of how to understand and explain everyday ideas of inequality and social justice, their relation to the supposedly objective understandings of sociologists, and how different ideas of social justice might become effective in social change. Indeed, connecting the ideas of social commentators and publics through effective dialogue is a necessary task of public philosophy ‘in a new key’, as argued by Tully (2008). In this context, any sociological distinction between the ‘objective’ and the ‘subjective’ must function as the alienation of that dialogue.

I shall now introduce a slightly different terminology. My wider interest concerns the ‘moral economy’ of inequality. The idea of a ‘moral economy’ was coined by E.P. Thompson (1971) to capture the everyday understanding of inequality, prices and mutual (if asymmetrical) obligations that sustained economic relations in eighteenth-century England prior to the emergence of the capitalist system of extended exchange relations. Thompson did not address what lay beyond capitalist *political economy* (or liberal public reason), though his own Marxism implied a radical transformation of society. However, if my arguments

so far are correct, the sociological tradition I am elaborating identifies Marxism as a form of utopianism based on a fixed idea of the future. In contrast, the idea of reform and the social self postulates the possibility of capitalism itself as being capable of producing a different *moral economy*. It is this idea that has been lost in contemporary sociology. But, notice that the emergence of such a moral economy would necessarily displace the language of class in public discourse and, seemingly, this is what sociologists find, though as I have also argued that they are somewhat bewildered about its meaning.

This is because class analysis is tied to a theory of class society that makes it impossible to conceive of reforms except as the reproduction of the defining relationships of capitalism. For example, the idea of a modern society was for many sociologists prior to the 1970s an idea that incorporated the idea of a capitalist economy, but did not reduce society to such an economy. In this way, society necessarily had a substance beyond the principles deemed to organize the economy, and the latter were understood as being subsumed (or embedded) within them.⁴ The fact that neo-liberal public reason reduces society to the market economy and conceives public policies on that reduction does not constitute an understanding of the reality of social relations, but rather the active production of anomie in the space previously occupied by reform.

According to the theory of class society, and to use a resonant phrase coined by Charles Perrow (1984), in a different context, production and distribution in a capitalist system are perceived as simply being too 'tightly coupled' to allow reforms. Reforms in the area of 'distribution', for example, cannot take place without the transformation of relations of production, and those relations of production are also tightly coupled. Each part is mutually dependent on other parts, and change to one part cannot be undertaken without a simultaneous change to other parts. From the perspective of 'tight coupling', fundamental transformation is the only answer to the problem of reform.

In different ways and with different motivation, I suggest, the theory of class society and political economy (whether classic liberal or neoliberal) alike present capitalism as a tightly-coupled system. In each, the argument arises as an intellectual obstacle to reform. However, if the capitalist system is not tightly coupled, then reform is possible (indeed, it has been seen to take place). The paradox is that 'loosely coupled systems' are reliant on ideological justifications to sustain the mutual reproduction of their parts. Thus the view that the only true alternative is a form of radical transformation for which the sociological conditions are no longer regarded as plausibly occurring, has the consequence of reinforcing the liberal version of tight coupling as a form of ideological justification – 'there is

4 Polanyi, for example, writes that, 'the end of market society means in no way the end of markets. These continue, in various fashions, to ensure the freedom of the consumer, to indicate the shifting of demand, to influence producers' income, and to serve as an instrument of accountancy, while ceasing altogether to be an organ of economic self-regulation' (1957 [1944]: 252).

no alternative' – that secures the mutual reproduction of the parts in their currently problematic forms.

I suggest that the promise of sociology in its 'founding jurisdiction' is precisely that it challenged the idea of capitalism as a 'tightly coupled' system. However, this 'promise' of sociology is now undermined by the re-emergence within sociology of the idea that capitalism is indeed tightly-coupled. This is manifested in a number of ways. For example, as I have suggested, it is a feature both of arguments from the 1970s onwards, that welfare reforms were functional for capitalism (Habermas 1976; Gough 1979), and of many recent arguments about the nature of globalization and the new constraints it places on social reform by reducing the capacity of national welfare states (for discussion, see Hirst and Thompson 1996). Yet reforms have taken place, even if sociologists have given up the development of a positive language in which to express them. Those reforms contribute to the 'lived experience' of publics, and thus help to form their everyday understanding of inequalities and their reproduction. In this way, it is unlikely that their understandings would match those of sociological accounts which argue that class-based understandings are paramount and remain unaltered by reforms designed to ameliorate them.

A second, related problem is that, at critical junctures in the process of capitalist development, there are moments of 'counter-reform' that rely on a new iteration of liberal public reason. In this way, the very 'idea' of 'capitalism', I suggest, can itself become a form of critique, in much the same sense that has come to be attributed to critique in sociology. As Polanyi (1957 [1944]) observed, capitalism and the idea of the self-regulating market are 'anti-social' when viewed from a sociological perspective. However, from the perspective of the market, the 'social' is the source of obstacles to the operation of effective market relations that embody individual autonomy and freedom. In this way, liberal public reason can present the 'social' as the embodiment of various kinds of 'monopolistic' appropriation, with the market as their dissolution.

In the absence of a critique of the market as being both utopian and pathological, the market holds a default role as the basis of a critique of social institutions. Actual social practices may deviate from those represented within market models, but that enables the 'abstracted' – utopian – model of market relations to be represented as the basis of public policy to restore the rationality believed to be expressed within it. It is precisely this feature that explains the recurrence of the claim that the market is a 'spontaneous' phenomenon and yet, at the same time, has to be 'planned'.⁵ Governments presently 'plan' the marketization of public

5 There are similarities with Polanyi (1957 [1944]), too. The latter argues that, 'while laissez-faire economy was the product of deliberate state action, subsequent restrictions on laissez-faire started in a spontaneous way' (1944: 141). Dewey, for his part, comments that, 'actual economic conditions were thoroughly artificial, in the sense in which the theory condemned the artificial' (1927: 96).

functions, including, in England, the marketization of the public university (see Holmwood 2011b, for a discussion).

In fact, this analysis helps to make sense of the politics of our present time. The legacy of the 1980s in sociology and politics is a dualism of 'state' and 'market' as the organizing dualism of public discourse. This creates a rhetoric of the 'public' and its 'interests', which is the antithesis of that outlined by Dewey. For example, the public is variously invoked as having an interest in the reduction of the fiscal deficit, an interest in greater choice, and an interest in the efficient delivery of services. In this way, the public is identified as an aggregate of private individuals, and the government is tasked with representing its interests. The public interest, conceived in this way, is set against a tendency of groups to exert a form of collective power to maintain services for their own, private benefit. In this way, 'producers' of services are set against 'consumers', and the way to prevent their 'monopolistic' appropriation is via a mechanism that serves consumer interests directly, that of the market. In fact, this problem of 'collectivities' is extended to the government itself, which, apparently, must represent the public against its own tendency to appropriate decision-making.

Thus, on its website, the Cabinet Office states, 'The Big Society is about helping people to come together to improve their own lives. It's about putting more power in people's hands – a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities.'⁶ One of the weaknesses of this rhetoric is that the transfer is to communities in which markets also operate. At best, it represents the self-organizing community as the solution to 'market failure.'⁷ However, the market is also represented as putting more power in people's hands, and so the policies that promote the 'big society' are simultaneously engaged with the promotion of the market. What is missing is any understanding that the market is itself 'anti-social', bringing about the 'disorganization' of the community whose empowerment is being sought. The 'big society' is counter to the 'big state', but there is no equivalent analysis of the role of the market. However, once we recognize the significance of the Deweyan idea of the 'public', we can understand that the weakness of the state/market dualism is that both the state and the market stand in a potentially antagonist relation to the 'public'.

Indeed, nowhere is this more evident than in the 'Occupy' movement. For many, the movement is puzzling precisely because it seems to make no conventional demands in terms of specific claims on government to enact policies and so on. Yet, in another respect, it stands as the symbolic antithesis of the 'market', as a claim for dialogue and for spaces in which it can be enacted. The market, as the aggregation of the choices of self-oriented individuals is the antithesis of the idea of a public of 'other-oriented' social selves engaged in the resolution of their

⁶ See <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/big-society>. Accessed 30 November 2012.

⁷ It has to be assumed that there is a market failure or, from the logic of the position, there would be nothing for the 'big society' to do, yet there is no indication of what market failure might consist.

problems through dialogue. Indeed, as governments across Europe respond to the deficits created by the bailing out of the financial system by austerity measures introduced by technocratic and unelected governments, or governments claiming that there is no alternative, we are potentially witnessing a profoundly anti-democratic moment, whose character is revealed once the idea of the public as the foundation for democracy is fully embraced. Democracy, it seems, is no longer the best shell for (financialized) capitalism.

Conclusion

The sociological task of critique is distinctive (and difficult) precisely because it must be advanced by substantive sociological argument, rather than by reference to an alternative principle. In other words, reforms are always specific to problems and their solution, and cannot be derived from the operation of a principle externally applied to those circumstances, whether that is the utopia of the market, or of some other 'ideal' alternative to capitalist society.

It is my contention that this critique needs to be renewed for each new phase of capitalist development, but that, at present, we have entered a phase when sociological argument has itself seemed to become aligned to liberal reason. Sociology's jurisdiction remains defined by the problem of inequality, but to be equal to the task imposed on us, we need to undertake an exercise of reconstruction of our core categories of capitalism and class *and* an exercise of recuperation. The recuperation we need is the re-engagement with sociology's founding jurisdiction of social self, social reform and the public, addressed to problems of our own age. It is a recuperation that would serve legal studies more substantially than countering one utopia with another.

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