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These two books were of course written and published before the global economic crash. We wait to read what Bauman makes of these historic events. Will it be a just a blip in the colonisation of life by consumerism or will it be a turning point? Bauman, perhaps more than any other living writer, will help us understand the challenges and the opportunities that we face. I'm afraid his thoughts are too important to allow him to consider the sterility of retirement.

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Building a Citizen Society: the emerging politics of republican democracy

Edited by Stuart White and Daniel Leighton

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Reviewed by Henry Tam

Between December 1968 and April 1992, parties on the right of the political spectrum won control of the British Parliament and the American Presidency in virtually every election held (the only exceptions being Wilson (UK, 1974) and Carter (US, 1976)). During this period of intense soul-searching amongst progressives, two trends took shape.

The first revolved around the need to adapt progressive aims to suit the new global power structures over which large corporations increasingly held sway. Instead of challenging the growing inequalities resulting from plutocratic hegemony, progressives were told to focus on building a better relationship with the market, easing regulations, and lowering taxes. So long as the economy could be supported to yield more revenue to fund public services overall, it did not matter if the rich were getting even richer faster than ever before. Championed by influential 'Third Way' figures like Tony Giddens and Al From, it became a mainstream political outlook.

The second trend took a different direction. The provision of equal opportunities would not be enough. If the outcomes under prevailing conditions were such that the wealth, health and knowledge gaps between citizens were so wide as to undermine the democratic ethos of equal dignity for all citizens, then those conditions must be reformed. Unlike the advocates for the first trend, however, the thinkers and activists who were attracted to the second trend did not establish a common rallying point. Benjamin Barber's notion of 'strong democracy', David Marquand's exposition of civic republican ideas, the writings of progressive communitarians, David Donnison's anti-poverty agenda, and collections like Bernard Crick's *Citizens: Towards a Citizenship Culture* or my own *Progressive Politics in the Global Age*, all fuelled the trend without quite igniting a beacon for its wider recognition.

It is against this historical backdrop that the significance of White and Leighton's *Building a Citizen Society* has to be seen. Their book hoists a banner for the second progressive trend and invites active engagement from all who care to advance citizen-centred politics.

Its publication is timely as the façade of accommodation with corporate power has finally been exposed as illegitimate in theory and disastrous in practice. For well over a decade, progressives have been told that if they did not follow the corporate-friendly path away from both old socialist and neo-conservative approaches, they would slide back towards the cul-de-sac of a bloated and inefficient state.

But in reality, there is an alternative to grounding political vision on the state, the market, or even the voluntary sector for that matter. That alternative is based on a commitment to enabling citizens to develop their capacity to reflect on and take collective decisions for the common good. The principles underpinning this vision and their evolution in the British political tradition are set out in the introductory chapters by Stuart White and David Marquand.

The rest of the book draws together contributions designed to stimulate debates on how those principles could be realised. Rajiv Prabhakar's chapter on assets for citizens, and David Casassas and Simon Birnbaum's chapter on the provision of a basic income bring out one of the most distinctive features of a citizen society: the concern with cultivating people's sense of public responsibility by providing them with a decent level of financial guarantee to function as responsible citizens. If people were dependent on the whims of corporate leaders who would never hesitate to terminate the employment of countless others while paying themselves boundless bonuses, then precarious individuals would displace confident citizens as the foundation of society. This theme is further explored by Nien-hê Hsieh and Stuart White in their chapters on why workplace control over people's lives has to be regulated for the common good.

Other chapters reflect how the perspective of republican democracy can lead to new thinking on a range of prominent policy agendas. From the security of the nation to public accountability, the case is made that citizens need to be able to play a meaningful role in shaping the actions taken in their name. Otherwise attempts to deliver solutions to public problems would not carry conviction with the public, let alone draw on their support to implement change. This can be seen particularly with environmental concerns. John Barry and Kimberly Smith's chapter argues that green politics can only be sustained if people as responsible citizens are able to act collectively to protect the common good from the exploitation of non-renewable resources and thoughtless pollution.

Ironically, Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright's chapter on the prospect of empowered participation in the UK is the one most short of examples of what is happening in the country. At a time when we have witnessed an unprecedented growth of practical initiatives to give citizens more influence over the public domain, their chapter makes no reference to the evolving applications of participatory budgeting, the support for community management and ownership of public assets, the Take Part work to promote participation, the duty on a wide range of public bodies to involve local people in their decision-making, the adoption of targets to raise the level of empowerment in Local Area Agreements, or the impressive experiment in participation in New Deal for Communities.

The one other notable gap in the book relates to the strategic centrality of civic education. It is touched on in Catherine Howarth and Lina Jamoul's chapter on the new citizen organising movements (how activist skills are being developed through organisations like London Citizens) and Nick Pearce's chapter on diversity and solidarity (the need for measures to support civic integration). However, there are other related issues such as parenting skills, citizenship education in the broadest sense in schools, vigilance against faith-based segregation, the civic dimension of higher education, active learning for active citizenship skills, support for civic participation for marginalised groups, which together form the nurturing base of any citizen society by enabling citizens of all ages and backgrounds to develop the skills, confidence and sensibility to play their part in helping to shape public policies.

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While one can always wish a book like this would say more, overall it makes a convincing case for progressives to pay more attention to the ethos of republican democracy. Hopefully its editors, contributors and readers will take the discussions forward, not just at the level of political analysis, but in reorientating practical reforms.

Alan Finlayson, in his closing chapter, is half right about the value of having contested views in a vibrant democracy, but he would be mistaken in going along with libertarians and relativists in supposing that we could just stand back from such contests without taking a stand. Ultimately, a citizen society, unlike an authoritarian or a market system, can only be advanced when the citizens themselves are equipped and ready to resolve their fundamental differences and take collective decisions binding on all for the common good.

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