

Edited by Peter Askonas and Angus Stewart

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Possibilities and Tensions



Social Inclusion

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Edited by

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palgrave



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1

Social Inclusion: An Introduction

Angus Stewart

Possibilities of achieving social justice and social cohesion in a world subject to chronic and apparently irresistible forces of economic and cultural change are central to the contemporary political and social agenda. This situation arose most immediately from the collapse of state socialism in the former Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites, and from a recognition of the inability of unregulated market forces to generate and sustain necessary structures of cohesion, given the relentless erosion of stable social contexts by the steady advance of a global economy. The vacuum created by the discrediting of collectivist and liberal market models provides the critical context of the current search to identify new models of social order and justice. The rise of novel variants on familiar responses to processes of social change gives this attempt new dimensions and added urgency.

This attempt has various expressions. One has focused largely upon issues of social marginalization and exclusion within a market-driven society, advancing a range of proposed solutions under the general rubric of 'welfare to work'. While such solutions contain an implicit understanding of political priorities and possibilities, other expressions have involved a more explicit and systematic analysis of the causes which generate widespread social destabilization and exclusion, the major developed example of such analysis being the stakeholder project.¹

What these expressions share in common is the search for solutions to the tensions involved in the coexistence of competing values and interests in late modernity. These tensions arise from the diverse ideologies and interests of a pluralistic world and as such provide the inescapable conditions for any attempt to reconcile

competing conceptions of necessity, justice and order. The tensions involved are both intellectual – conflicting ways of analyzing the nature and possibilities of social organization – and practical, that is, between economic and political institutions on the one hand and the achievement of justice and social order on the other. The centrality of such tensions to current debate is evidenced in critical assessments of the Clinton administration's systematic erosion of public provision in the USA, and of the character and limitations of New Labour's understanding of social inclusion in the UK. Assessment of such arguments centres on the following proposition: from the point of view of policy and practice, projects of social inclusion can either seek to ameliorate the consequences of economically-driven modes of action and organization (the clear intention behind New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit) or they can be open to more fundamental changes in social organization and social relationships. These possibilities call upon distinctive arguments regarding both the nature and causes of social exclusion and the possibilities for an inclusive society.

Against this background, two elements give this book its specific character. The first involves the attempt to look systematically at the nature of social inclusion itself. This entails a group of interrelated questions such as: is inclusiveness as a social norm merely a utopian dream, an ideological construct or an achievable model? If social inclusion is a response to exclusion, who is being excluded, on what terms and why? Is the primary referent of social inclusion new forms of social organization, geared to maximizing the meaningful involvement of all citizens, or does it correspond to identifiable realities at the level of *how things are*? The second element involves the combination of a systematically reflective enquiry with practical considerations, on the one hand, with a commitment to explore these considerations in terms of possible structures and institutional developments, on the other.

As the sub-title indicates, this volume addresses these elements by focusing thematically on 'tensions and possibilities'. The tensions identified are those arising from the reality of different perspectives, interests, attitudes and policies, representing the expression of different value stances. Such tensions are necessarily many: between competing world views regarding the nature of political and economic activity, between divergent modes of reasoning about social process, between competing values, between strategies for meaningful social change and between conflicting human needs, such as predictability

and security as against creativity. Each contribution, whether primarily reflective or practical, represents an engagement with one or more of the relevant tensions.

As the range of contributions makes clear, there is a wide diversity of conceptions or discourses of social inclusion. Within that context, the following remarks are intended to offer a sensitizing guide to the central issues raised by current agenda of social inclusion.

Social exclusion and inclusion: a preliminary approach

Within the substantial body of material exploring the causes, characteristics and possible remedies for social exclusion, a number of questions can be identified as being of central importance:

The first is **the question of context**; specifically, within what context(s) is social exclusion proposed to be generated and are such contexts understood as being amenable to resistance, amelioration or transformation by projects of social inclusion? Here, the most frequently identified general context in terms of both the emergence of qualitatively new realities generating social exclusion and/or limiting possibilities for social inclusion is **globalization**. A number of the contributions engage with a range of possibilities here, either by way of a critical analysis of the major variants of the globalization perspective (Perraton) or by developing systematic arguments concerning the implications of particular 'readings' of globalization for inclusionary projects (Gray, Bauman, Coyle, Collins, Stewart²). The major possibilities are:

1. Globalization refers to a historically novel context of systematic economic interconnectedness which represents a given in terms of the analysis and pursuit of social inclusion;
2. The scope and significance of globalization are significantly if not greatly exaggerated, providing a powerful and potent social myth to legitimate particular kinds of political project and to delegitimize others on the grounds of their 'unrealistic' and therefore utopian character; and
3. While the term globalization may usefully refer to distinctive, important and novel contemporary economic processes, these do not involve a blanket and integrated transformation; therefore any analysis of their implications requires careful specification.³

The second context within which it is necessary and useful to locate thinking about social inclusion as we move into the twenty-first century is that of debates about the **possibilities of political**

projects of inclusion. Most immediately, these debates have focused on the meaning and feasibility of the Third Way as a distinctive political project in relation to the perspectives of Right and Left.⁴ Thus, Ruth Levitas has argued that fundamentally different inclusionary projects are embedded in three quite distinctive discourses of exclusion.⁵ The first of these is a redistributionist one (RED), the historical origins of which may have shown a central preoccupation with the causes and characteristics of poverty, but which has subsequently been broadened out into a general analysis of the relationships between social exclusion and diverse, societally generated inequalities of power and resources. The relevant inclusionary project here is one which focuses upon a comprehensive model of citizenship, refurbished from Marshall's original argument to take account of inequalities of gender and race as well as class.⁶

In its emphasis upon the structural generation of processes of social exclusion, RED stands in fundamental contrast to a second discourse, a moral underclass discourse (MUD), which identifies the cause of social exclusion with the moral and cultural characteristics of those who are excluded, the so-called underclass. This discourse is realized in a narrow but powerful political project which valorizes paid work while devalorizing unpaid work and identifies welfare benefits as the principal source of moral corrosion and social breakdown.

Both the redistributionist and moral discourses stand in contrast to a third discourse which is dominant in both the EU and the UK. This is the social integrationist discourse (SID) which prioritizes economic efficiency and social cohesion and links the two by a consistent emphasis upon the integrative function of paid work. The associated political project valorizes labour market participation as the overwhelming key to social inclusion, thereby obscuring massive inequalities in terms of reward and conditions of work, inequalities not only of class but also of gender.

Levitas notes that current public discourse involves elements of all three of these discourses, although in the case of the dominant discourse this largely only applies to SID and MUD.⁷ This very elasticity of the term 'social exclusion' may be a source of analytic difficulties, but it is unquestionably a source of strength in terms of political rhetoric. Social inclusion thus provides part of the landscape of very different political projects. The dominant discourse in particular represents the attempt to resituate fundamentally the political spectrum by marginalizing or eliminating the issue of equality from the political agenda. Indeed, one of the clear lines of distinc-

tion within the various positions on social inclusion is between those who continue to see general social inequalities as of central relevance to any adequate understanding of inclusionary possibilities and those who do not. (In this volume these positions are articulated by Ruth Lister and John Gray respectively.)

Two further issues can be identified as centrally important in considering the political context of social inclusion. The first concerns the question of **state power**. For those who view social inequalities as the critical terrain upon which to debate and practice inclusionary projects, redistributive strategies require organized state power for their implementation. On the other hand, the implementation of quite different political projects focused on economic efficiency and social cohesion equally require a strong state.⁸ In either case, what is left out of the equation is the question of the effectiveness of centralized state mechanisms in creating an inclusive political community. For example, the proposition that welfare state provision is inhibitory of economic growth does not stand up to empirical scrutiny, a point noted by Jonathan Perraton below. But it is equally the case that the delivery of social citizenship (which is to say state-centred citizenship) as an effective instrument of the redistribution either of resources or power has proved very difficult. Thus, while the New Right project might reasonably be characterized as the use of state power to implement a market dominated society and a particular ethical order, the alternative from the Left requires mechanisms which are themselves exclusionary through the exercise of categorization and control.

The complexities of any redistributionist strategy further derive from another issue central to specifying the political context of inclusion in late modernity. This is **the question of difference**. Whereas the politics of redistribution expresses a universalism of structural inequalities and corresponding political projects (focusing above all upon the divisions and dynamics of class), the adequacy and coherence of contemporary agenda of social inclusion require their engagement with the politics of difference. The pluralism of modern societies means that such differences are potentially mobilizable in a wide variety of forms, of which gender, 'race' and nationalism are among the most prominent. (The relationship between the 'differences' of multi-culturalism and projects of social inclusion are explored in Peter Ratcliffe's contribution, while the papers by Stewart and Lister consider possible relationships between the politics of redistribution and the politics of difference.)

The range of issues arising from a consideration of the political context of proposed inclusionary projects can be summarized in the form of two dichotomies:

1. Social Cohesion vs Social Justice; and
2. State Power vs Alternative Forms of Social Power.

As is almost invariably the case, such dichotomies may most usefully sensitize us to relevant problems rather than providing ready-made answers. The first of these may and should alert us to the capacity that particular discourses and practices of social inclusion possess for obscuring or revealing questions of general social inequality as relevant to the pursuit of meaningful social inclusion, but the effective pursuit of social justice equally depends upon the strategic negotiation of questions of social cohesion. (The tragic consequences of the absence of a meaningful and flexible interdependence between the two has been graphically illustrated in the continuing passion of Northern Ireland.)

Indeed, as Charles Taylor and Richard Collins argue below, to translate the dichotomy of justice and cohesion into that of rights and communalism is to recognize that the issues involved do not permit of any easy resolution, democratic or otherwise. The norm of social inclusion has been actualized historically by the coupling of polity and culture in the form of national societies. The emergence of multinational societies and the globalization of media can be and are seen as threatening the resultant communities of difference. To the extent that this threat is real – or indeed is perceived to be real – the potential consequences greatly exceed those of a loss of cultural diversity.

A key issue in the discussion of social inclusion therefore concerns the minimum requirements of social cohesion necessary to provide a framework within which justice and distinctive conceptions of the good life may be pursued. As we enter the twenty-first century, our world is stratified by inequalities of hitherto unknown proportions, whether within the affluent societies of the 'West' or even more strikingly across the globe as a whole. As Zygmunt Bauman and Richard Sennett note below, exclusionary monopolistic homogeneities, whether material or symbolic, and pervasive insecurities, whether of employment, safety or environment, chronically stimulate embattled fragmentation leading in turn to multiple homogeneities of conformity and mutual suspicion.

The position concerning actual and possible forms of political organization is, if anything, more complicated. The exclusionary

possibilities arising from state agency in the context of particular inclusionary projects have already been noted.⁹ Equally, assessments of the scope and significance of globalization particularly concern the proposed consequences for state-inspired inclusionary initiatives. (In the present volume, Gray argues for the necessity of all meaningful inclusionary projects engaging with the transformations of globalization – and predicts that they will have to!) To these important perspectives, a further reality must be added: Whatever their degree of internal inclusion, *national states are themselves fundamentally mechanisms of territorial exclusion*.¹⁰ This chronic reality of the spatial organization of political power in the modern world has been given a renewed emphasis and intensity in the brutalities of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia.

Given the complex relationship that has existed between the modern state and processes of inclusion/exclusion, the range and logic of discussions of social inclusion necessarily implicates questions regarding **alternative organizations of power**. Here, three possibilities are of particular importance: *supranational institutional forms*, *democratic restructuring of state power* and *various forms of collective agency*. With regard to the first, it has to be said that the contemporary reality can appear much more one of potential and aspiration than actuality. Both the examples of the EU and GATT involve powerful manifestations of ‘rich club’ exclusionism, highly structured in terms of both gender and race, rather than inclusionary projects transcending the limitations of state-centred processes. Similarly, the inclusionary possibilities represented by an international community focused on the UN appear greatly constrained by the diverse pluralisms of the modern world and the exclusionary agenda of a US hegemony which ‘walks tall’ but appears systematically enfeebled by both personal and institutional subservience to self-fulfilling electoral concerns.

And yet: there are opposing possibilities. Thus, for example, the EU, for all its bureaucracy and present unaccountability, is the continuing site of a genuinely democratic and inclusive agenda, one which represents possibilities of genuine political debate and which seeks to use concerted political power to subordinate the imperatives and consequences of deregulated market forces.

On balance, certainly, the present realities require a sombre but not pessimistic assessment of possibilities of inclusion ‘beyond the nation-state’ and its characteristic political configurations, whether of ‘culture(s) of contentment’, of inequality and marginalization or

of reactive and repressive fundamentalism. Nevertheless, the future coherence and viability of inclusionary projects in late modernity depends upon the painstaking development of collaborative international arrangements, whether with respect to the regulation of capital flows generative of chronic social exclusion, or of a serious engagement with the endless cycles of Third World debt or democratically driven agenda for the negotiation of international disputes and environmental control. Within the EU, there are diverse potentials, ranging from the economic laager of an inward-looking trading bloc supported by the complexities of a bureaucratic 'super-state' to a multiplicity of immanent communities of citizenship, including that of a democratic European citizenship.¹¹

Realistically, of course, states are going to continue as important sites of political conflict and policy implementation for the foreseeable future.¹² Consequently, any comprehensive analysis of social inclusion requires a consideration of any and all means by which processes of decision making from consideration and consultation, through negotiation to implementation can incorporate the widest diversity of interests and differences as possible. Bernard Crick restates and reaffirms his compelling argument 'in defence of politics' as both the most sociologically most realistic and ethically most desirable manner of negotiating conflict and commonality of purpose in plural societies, while recognizing that there is no 'hidden hand' determining that such political resolutions will be realized. (The centrality of politics and citizenship to any adequate conception of social inclusion is also emphasized below by Plant, Lister and Stewart, who lay particular stress on the importance of the possibilities of active citizenship.)

The distinctive character of citizenship implicated in different discourses points to a further important issue to be considered when assessing models and practices of inclusion. This concerns the degree to which any discourse or model prioritizes **agency as a critical aspect of social inclusion**. Broadly speaking, arguments about social inclusion can be divided between those which see integration into structures of market and/or state as a sufficient criterion of social inclusion, regardless of any inequalities which may continue to characterize such structures, and those which emphasize the importance of self-determination in contexts of mutuality and interaction as a critical, indeed irreducible, aspect of inclusionary projects, with consequent implications for existing structures of power. (The importance of agency in relation to projects of social inclusion is