

INTRODUCING THE PERSON INTO THINKING ABOUT SOCIAL POLICIES

John W. Burton

The Problem Area

Throughout history philosophers, social scientists and policy makers seem to have concentrated more on the need for order and stability and the preservation of the institutions of society, rather than on the lives and the needs of the individual person, which these institutions are there to satisfy. Psychiatrists and psychologists help the individual to adjust to society, but give little attention to the ways in which society might adjust to human needs. Contemporary economists are merely instruments of the free market system. They treat individuals as robots, to be employed or unemployed as the system requires. (Even in this limited role they seem to be failing, and we have books appearing such as Paul Ormerod's *The Death of Economics* (1995).

Sixty years ago, as a student of Psychology, I wondered when we would get down to examining the lives of persons rather than making statistical measures of IQs and of reflex actions. In three years of Anthropology I recall wondering when there would be thought given to the lives of individuals in their different cultures and environments, and not just racial and cultural differences between tribes. In Economics, even in those more socialist or Keynesian days, one always wondered whether this was a study of a part of a human society, or just an explanation or justification of the contemporary economic system. By introducing the individual person into thinking, barriers between disciplines are broken down. A holistic approach becomes possible, but no less analytical and "scientific".

The Birth of conflict resolution

The emerging discipline of analytical Conflict Resolution seeks to do this. It is based on the proposition that only when the whole person and the total environment in which the person lives become the focus of analysis can there be an identification of the real problems that lead to social conflicts, and, therefore, to the resolution of conflicts between societies and their members, and amongst their members.

This view is in accordance with experience. Constraints and punishments are not the answer to anti-social behaviours, crime, and violence. Constraint not being the answer, social change has to be examined. The source of the problem has to be ascertained and then eliminated. Prevention and correction of anti-social behaviours must be directed

towards the social environment, the family, the school, the society and its leadership, rather than towards the "deviant" whose actual need is rehabilitation (See Burton, 1996 and 1997).

Social values and human needs

This is not to deny the obligation of the individual to enter into and strictly observe a social contract - that is, to follow certain agreed social behaviours which harmony in relationships requires. However, one problem seems to have been to obtain a consensus on desirable social values, and to deal with the evolution of institutions and norms of behaviour in ways that alter or remove those which are incompatible with human needs. The free-market economy clearly requires examination from this perspective. An even more pressing social problem has been to ensure that agreed "human rights", such as freedom of individual choice, expression, association, social security and personal identity as provided for in Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are available to all. In practice "rights" tend to become just cultural or class values and norms.

Shifts in scientific thinking

There are the beginnings of a shift in thinking, due not to the thinking of social scientists or policy makers, but to a growing scientific interest in genes, and in particular discoveries in the analysis of the brain. It is now quite clear that many human behaviours and human needs for a personal identity and a social role go far deeper than contemporary cultures. They can be traced back to our hunter-gatherer past when group membership and cooperation became genetic. Genetic studies are revealing the ways in which deceptive practices, seeking competitive gains, have evolved in all species, and how calculated deception has evolved in the human species, taking different forms in different cultures. (See Chu, 1991) Human sex roles, behaviours of the young, and rivalries within groups for leadership roles - these are different only in that humans seek personal identity and security in more subtle ways.

The leadership problem

It is in this genetic context that leadership problems can be understood. In all societies leadership has always been and remains an accepted and valued social role. Leadership struggles, like behaviours generally, reflect the universal need to promote personal identity. Unless the institutions of society impose constraints, leaderships are bound to attract extreme paranoid individuals and ruthless behaviours - persons who, no less than those who commit crimes, require rehabilitation (See Miller and Mylroie, 1990).

So-called "terrorism" is frequently a function of leadership rivalries as tribal and ideological leaders seek the support of "the faithful" through organized terrorism, which further separates communities. (See Tully, 1991).

The failure of education to correct the past

These shifts in thinking, however, have not yet been taken into account in education systems. There is, as yet, little attempt to offset the effects on young people of their aggressive genetic influences, and of their adversarial environments - the adversarial party political, legal and industrial systems in which they live. Indeed, education promotes adversarial relationships - aggressive sports and coercive discipline at home and at school. What is required is an education and educational systems that promote the cooperative genes, which were also part of the hunter-gatherer past.

History Revisited

This is all understandable in the context of history. In many regions, tribalism gave place to class societies with the Agricultural Revolution. In due course, more complex class societies emerged as a result of the Industrial Revolution. From this evolved a world society dominated by "great powers", which sought to impose on other peoples unacceptable systems of exploitation. World War II was fought, especially in Asia, to preserve this colonial system. It was won by the great powers, but the peace was lost, in the sense that the colonial system was subsequently destroyed. Today, the global society, in the pursuit of the same market advantages, is experiencing a third struggle, both domestically and internationally, between the increasingly rich and the others.

The social sciences have evolved in this changing social environment, and academics and policy makers have understandably adopted its consensus values.

People as a Social Focus

But as yet there have not been significant shifts in thinking about human needs, as distinct from the human rights of those within societies. There have been no more than temporary reconsiderations of this historical power-political process both at a political level and in the academic community. For example, in the post World War II reconstruction period in Britain under Atlee, and in Australia under Curtin and Chifley, there were attempts to satisfy the human need for a role and an identity by designating employment as a human right. At an International Labor Organization Conference in Philadelphia in 1943, and at the Hot Springs Food and Agricultural Conference in 1944, Australia sought to prepare the ground for the United Nations Charter Conference in 1945 where it was intended to include full employment as an international goal. There was strong resistance from the USA to any firm obligation, but Article 55 of the Charter does, in fact, state that the UN will promote full

employment. In 1948 there was the UN Declaration of Human Rights that included, in Article 11, the right of protection against unemployment. Important in this process were some public servants with social science backgrounds who were adjusting to postwar conditions.

Class Politics becomes the Social Focus

But, in due course, the post-war reconstruction period led to the emergence of a politically powerful "upper middle class", members of which voted for governments, which would secure their class interests. "Labor" parties in several "developed countries", initially founded to give support to those who were in the "working class" also sought middle class votes. "Labor" no longer pursued policies of greater equality, welfare, education and medical services for all. 20% of populations in developed countries were no longer represented by a political party. The rich became richer and the poor poorer.

Now we have returned to the Corporate State [or a "Fascism" which World War II was fought to eliminate], backed by intelligence organizations whose role is to eliminate any dissent. Globally, military dictatorships are preferred to community-based governments, even by many "democratic" governments. Class conflicts, frequently taking the form of conflicts between class or ethnic groups within "sovereign states", are universal. The uncontrolled private enterprise system has led to resource depletion and environmental damage at unnecessarily high rates. In time, this will affect all members of societies, rich and poor. Unless anticipated and prevented or resolved, major conflicts within societies and between them will increase.

Social and System Goals in Conflict

Persistent and widespread unemployment, leading to an absence of a social role for those affected, has led to increased levels in crime and violence. Such activities, Exemplified by membership in street gangs, provide a sense of personal identity. But government intervention to offset these consequences of the private enterprise system continues to be resisted by those who benefit from that system. Social goals reflecting human needs, and system processes reflecting the satisfaction of these needs by adversarial means, are in conflict. Rather than dealing with the source of antisocial behaviours, more police and more prisons are becoming the norm.

Economics continues to be the justification for the free market system. Inevitably, the tendency now is to select academics for senior public service positions who also seek to bring public service administrations into line with system goals. A consequence is that the under-privileged are attracted to extreme ideologies and religious beliefs which advocate change by social violence.

Where Can We Go from Here ?

There is little thoughtful people can do about these trends. Despite amazing technological developments which enhance living conditions, we are probably experiencing the beginnings of a major crisis in civilizations, one more devastating than global war. This is despite the fact that the required initiatives are clear.

Education and Research

First there is the need to do something only the human species can do - that is, to educate ourselves out of our adversarial genetic behaviours and deliberately promote cooperative behaviours. The education of young people, with its emphasis on rote learning, does not address such topics. Children are taught the rules of industry and society, how to be on time, to be tidy, to be polite, but not how to think, to question and to engage in dialogue. There are few simple and readable books for parents and teachers about human needs and possible system change.

In response to economic trends and pressures, universities are moving away from thinking and questioning, towards technological skills.

Appropriate Interventions

It should be possible to demonstrate the interest societies have in discouraging forms of personal achievement that are at the community expense, despite the present emphasis on the profit motive as the means to economic development. Communism has failed because it became a party dictatorship lacking an experienced public service. It lacked, as do all societies, any clear understanding of those forms of government intervention which are constructive and those which are destructive. But capitalism, as we now know it, has also failed and is the source of innumerable social problems. We could be thinking about and exploring what controls and processes would help to promote human needs. For example, it should be possible to move our party political systems, our legal processes and our industrial relations away from adversarial forms towards dialogue and cooperative approaches.

In a related fashion, it should be possible to establish analytical systems which reveal the source of problems and prevent their emergence by anticipating them, rather than merely deterring them by threats and punishments once they have occurred. At a political level there are signs of less support for adversarial party politics, which exclude important factions from their democratic rights. Small parties and independents are emerging, and these may have a contribution to make, at least until they too become caught up in the vote-seeking system. As populations increase and resources are depleted there will be a tendency for local bodies and, small communities to come together to deal with their daily

personal and social problems, especially in the areas neglected by the free market system, such as health, education and welfare services.

Conclusion

Putting the individual person into thinking and practice in social policies is a major challenge to both human genetic beginnings and to systems of government which have evolved. It now has to be accomplished in circumstances which will require drastic controls of population increases, resource depletion and environmental damage. The first task is to ensure a universal awareness of the problem.

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