

I WILL TAKE UP JANET BIEHL'S CHAPTER : THE FORMATION OF CITIZENSHIP"

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Janet quotes Max Horkheimer: The emancipation of the individual is not an emancipation from society, but the deliverance of society from atomization, an atomization that may reach its peak in periods of collectivization and mass culture".

Janet continues correctly "Least of all does an atomized society foster the active, mature citizenship needed for a direct democracy. In today's mass societies citizens are reduced to mere „voters" and „taxpayers". Far from enhancing their mastery, the State and the capitalist system infantilize them. The citizen's very passivity, their very contingency to State processes, leaves them vulnerable to manipulation, be it by powerful personalities or by powerful institutions. "(p.84)

This means that a movement for libertarian municipalism meets a social reality where a lot of people are very passive or disillusioned. They don't believe that they can influence anything or even change things. On the other hand our movement needs self-confident citizens who behave actively, socially and try to change things. This is a contradiction. We can argue that libertarian municipalists are very conscious people, that they are able to act socially although in times of individualism. But if we want to build up a new social movement we need thousands and thousands of active people. And we need a lot of different ways to set them in motion. In Janet's chapter she excluded one simple way of mobilizing people:

"In order to enlarge citizen participation and democracy itself, some observers have proposed expanding the use of „democratizing" tools like the referendum, in which people vote on specific issues. But referenda merely offer preformulated options; they do not allow for the collective formulation of policies or the expression of a broad range of possibilities. As with mass voting for candidates, mass voting for referenda continues the degradation of political participation into the mere registration of preferences. It debases citizens into consumers, broad ideals into personal tastes, and political ideas into percentages." (p.85)

I agree that referenda are not an aim of libertarian communalism and referenda alone could not change the parliamentary system to a direct democracy! I agree that in

a referendum the questions are very reduced and therefore we can't see them as an ideal possibility for political participation.

But I disagree that we won't speak about referenda as a means to an end. Of course we can mobilize people with a referendum and of course we need such possibilities to create a new active citizen movement which is important and necessary for a libertarian communalist movement.

Only if we offer people new contacts in the political sphere we will achieve that they regain new power to act for themselves. We had powerful citizen initiatives in the 70s against nuclear plants, new airports etc. and we had a big resource of active people who had learned to look after themselves, who had learned to see that the problems wouldn't be solved without their pressure, without their different activities and, at last, who have learned how the State and its police will react against civil disobedience. The development of the Green parties has canalized a lot of these energies back to the system and meanwhile we can state, especially for Germany, that the threat of a new Big Germany has got a new quality: we can easily think of a Green Big Germany and after the coming elections we will have to face this new reality.

I will discuss two main theses:

1. At the moment we must realize that referenda doesn't „debase citizens to consumers" but are needed to help people being active in the political and social sphere. Therefore we should help to encourage all efforts to establish referenda.

2. And secondly referenda are not the same as parliamentary elections but could be one device to deestablish party elections.

1.

In Germany the press and of course the political parties very often are worried about the weariness of the State which is a very common attitude. On the other hand there was an opinion poll in 1995 that 70% of the people in Germany want referenda, because the people want to identify themselves with political questions, want to influence things or change things but can't.

If we state that all political and social questions are concerning everyone, we must create possibilities where people can articulate their opinions to important political

and social questions. Referenda are an instrument to improve the ability of the people to judge and decide problems and helps to stop the growing resignation. And at the end it may stop also much of the violence, which very often has to do with helplessness and powerlessness.

Second: referenda are vehicles which can introduce new ideas to the society. Connected to a referendum such new ideas will be broadly discussed in the public.

Third: referenda can take place on a local level, we don't have to think only about historical or nationwide referenda. In Bavaria for example a struggle for the possibility of local referenda has come to an end after three years. First only a few people in favour of direct democracy have tried to change the Bavarian constitution, in 1998 they achieved that local referenda are allowed.

Fourth: Referenda and of course all other communalist institutions like the municipal assemblies can use the know how of the citizens much better than the parliamentary system does. In Germany more than 70.000 citizen committees are existing right now which have lots of informations but their proposals were very seldom accepted by the party system and not used for the benefit of the society.

Fifth: A libertarian communalist movement should use every possibility to deestablish the political parties which are the only ones to decide political questions and make decisions. We must find different ways to help the citizens committees to gain have more political influence besides the parties.

Six: If we succeed in mobilizing more people, we of course will get more an more ideas and activities to solve the actual problems. And such a movement will help to build up the municipal assemblies and other decentralized institutions.

2.

Referenda aren't liked by the parliamentary system. I will talk about this later with the example of Germany. The dislike by the State is of course no reason to like referenda. But let us have a look to Switzerland where referenda have the longest history in Europe. Before the First World War the parliamentary elections have seen about 80% of the Swiss people at the polls. After the First World War when the direct referenda have been established the participation to the election has continuously fallen back to 50% which is not a normal figure in Europe. Of course, this is not necessarily the

outcome, and in Ireland and Denmark 13 or 16 direct referendums has not changed the participation at the polls at once, but the Swiss example shows how referenda can question the „normal" elections.

If we argue that referenda are not part of our libertarian communalist views, because it reduces complicated questions to a yes/no decision, we must be aware that this argument is used by the advocates of the parliamentary system and that we can find ways that a yes/no-decision is very well discussed in advance and therefore more complex as it seems. For example the question of abortion, it might be a question that polarizes society, that emotionalizes most people and therefore a critical view could state that it should be forbidden to reduce it to yes or no, but if there would be a referendum, all arguments will be in the public and will be discussed frequently and at the end it would be not decided by the majority of a parliament or the influence of the church on certain politicians but by the majority of the people. And everyone will know that such a decision could be changed by the same people again and everybody will know how to start it.

In short: a referendum is not a perfect method to improve the parliamentary democracy to a direct democracy, but it is one of our means to mobilize people, to make own experiences with the system, to add a new dimension to the political and social life and to fight the the so-called experts who claim to solve everything for us. The first side effect in establishing more direct democratical approaches would be that the politicians, afraid of being superfluous will be more cautious than ever.

Of course in some countries a referendum can enforce the political roll-back in questions we think are of emancipatorical importance. We can't foresee the will of the majority, we also don't like if questions are solved on a very low, perhaps the lowest level someone could imagine. If we again look to Switzerland in some Kantons they decided by referenda the absurd fact that women couldn't vote at all. On the other hand we can find very progressive decisions in other Kantons in questions of energy, drugs and traffic. Perhaps we have to discuss how misuse of referenda could be avoided.

If we think referenda are one of our tasks to develop our movement, we must look to the certain conditions in each state. We will realize that the „old" state does everything to create new problems! As an example I want to give some informations about the concrete situation in Germany. As you know we have a federal constitution

and therefore the conditions for referenda are different in every federal part (called Bundesland). In general I can say all conditions try to prevent the people to use elements of direct democracy. But there are differences how the constitutions want to stop us. Nevertheless there are three main problems to be solved:

1. In some federal states certain themes/subjects could not be decided by a referendum in general. For example we will never be allowed to decide in questions of development plans, communal economic corporations, etc.

2. In other federal states there exists a so-called „positive list“. This list contains everything that can be a question of a referendum. You certainly see the trap: everything that isn't on this list is impossible to be decided by a referendum.

3. You have very different situations in the question of time, in which you have to collect the signatures. In the state of Baden-Württemberg (Stuttgart-area) for example you have only 14 days to collect about 18% signatures of all possible voters. You need 1/3 of the voters to change normal laws but if you want to question the constitution you need more than 50% of the voters on your side. This possibility exists in Baden-Württemberg since 1948 but up to now no referendum was successful, of course.

Then you need a certain quote of signatures that a referendum will be accepted. The percentage of this quote differs from federal state to federal state. Sometimes from town to village! In a Bavarian town you need 3% in a village 10%, sometimes the reason is sensible. The town has a less quote because it is more complicated to collect signatures than in a village. In average this quote is about 10%. In the eastern part of Germany, for example in Thüringen (Erfurt) this quote is 20%!

Normally you might think, that there will be a decision if the majority will have said yes or no to a certain question. This is the case only in Bavaria. In all the other federal states you must reach a certain percentage of all the people in this state to achieve a decision. Here the average quote is 30% in some states 25%, in Bremen 50%.

If you look in which federal states you can find the best starting situation you find that these are Bavaria, Hessen (Frankfurt area) and in the east Sachsen (Leipzig area). (I will hand out a leaflet with the concrete percentages and situation of every federal state for everyone who is interested.)

All of them have no „positive list“ and no restriction on themes/subjects. Only in Bavaria you need no quote after the referendum has taken place. But you remember me, Bavaria was the place where the referendum was just allowed after a three years lasting fight.

VERFAHREN LAND	Volksbegehren		Volksentscheid Zustimmungsquorum	Verfahren bürgerfreundlich?'
	Unterschriften	Frist		
Baden-Württemberg	16.6%	14 Tage	33%/Q50%'	NEIN
Bayern	10%	14 Tage	nein	TEILWEISE
Berlin	10%	2 Monate	33%	NEIN
Brandenburg	ca. 4%	4 Monate	25%/50%+2/3-	TEILWEISE
Bremen	10%/20%'	3 Monate	25%/50%'	NEIN
Hamburg	10%	14 Tage	25%/50%+2/3-	NEIN
Hessen	20%	14 Tage	nein	NEIN
Mecklenburg-Vorp.	ca. 10%.	keine	50%	NEIN
Niedersachsen	10%	12 Monate	25%/50%	NEIN
Nordrhein-Westf.	20%	14 Tage	nein	NEIN
Rheinland-Pfalz	20%	14 Tage	nein	NEIN
Saarland	20%	14 Tage	50%	NEIN
Sachsen	ca. 12%	8 Monate	nein/50%	TEILWEISE
Sachsen-Anhalt	ca n%	6 Monate:	25%/150%	NEIN
Schleswig-Holstein	5%	. 6 Monate	25%/50%	TEILWEISE
Thüringen	14%	4 Monate	33%/50 %/o %	NEIN .
Zum Vergteich:	ca. 2%	18 Monate	nein	JA
Schweiz (Bundesebene)				
Kalifornien	ca. 2%	5 Monate	nein	