Notes

1. See W. Streeck and P. C. Schmitter, 'Community, Market, State – and Associations? The Prospective Contribution of Interest Governance to Social Order', *European Sociological Review* 1 (1985), pp. 119–38.

2. Of course, since the first problem deals with enabling groups to fight for collective rights, it is the more comfortable of the two and easier to treat in a conventional democratic theory discourse. The second problem, addressing primarily the generation of obligations, is by far the trickier one.

3. See W. Streeck, 'Interest Heterogeneity and Organizing Capacity: Two Class Logics of Collective Action?' in *Political Choice: Institutions, Rules, and the Limits of Rationality*, ed. R. M. Czada and A. Windhoff-Heretier, Boulder, CO: Westview 1991, pp. 161–98. See also W. Streeck and P. C. Schmitter, 'From National Corporatism to Transnational Pluralism: Organized Interests in the Single European Market', *Politics & Society* 19 (1991), pp. 133–64. Both in W. Streeck, *Social Institutions and Economic Performance: Studies of Industrial Relations in Advanced Capitalist Economies*, London and Newbury Park, CA: Sage 1992.

4. For an early, highly perceptive insight in the limitations of this view, see E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, New York: Free Press 1984, where he explains what he sees an increasing respect for international law in Europe by the fact that European nations have become 'much less independent of one another. This is because in certain respects they are all part of the same society, still incohesive, it is true, but one becoming increasingly conscious of itself' (pp. 76f.)

5. The concept of 'variable geometry' was first used, not surprisingly, to characterize the territorially and functionally uneven progress of European integration, with a set of 'excentric', functionally specific arrangements with differing national participation increasingly superseding the original project of a concentric, consolidated, functionally diffuse European superstate.

9

On Architectural Syncretism

Ira Katznelson

'Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance' is a work of many virtues of analysis and advocacy, not least its marriage of institutionalism and (analytical and normative) democratic theory. At a time when academic political studies and the craft of political practice are impoverished by the absence of robust ties connecting politics, theory and policy, Cohen and Rogers's insistence that they must be joined is immensely welcome. Their text audaciously combines political and policy analysis, doctrinal invention and a willingness to traverse ordinarily distinct disciplines and political impulses while suggesting how to build alliances for meaningful political change. Further, they keenly understand that not just the rate of political participation, but its modes and densities are vital for both a healthy democratic politics and for the resurgence of the Left at a time of disillusion, disappointment and defeat.

It is important that we appreciate not only the content of Cohen and Rogers's arguments, but the distinctive qualities of their discourse. Normative political theory, as they note, since *A Theory of Justice* burst on the scene has been obsessed with questions of doctrine without betraying much interest at all in the institutional requirements or feasibility of their clusters of propositions and ideas about how to conduct political life. Reciprocally, students of comparative and US politics rarely take the work of political theorists seriously. Cohen and Rogers point us, instead, toward an engagement of theory and institutions, on the understanding that any meaningful vision of democracy requires democratic institutions devoted to negotiation, compromise, arbitration and provisional outcomes. Attention to institutions, of course, requires a shift in priority from principles to history, context and arrangements to imperfectly manage and adjudicate both the passions and the interests. In a democracy that realizes democratic ideals, all citizens, they

underscore, must have access to these institutions and processes for the representation of interests.

Precisely because I believe these themes to be so fundamental, I should like to highlight qualities of opacity in the essay as a way of drawing attention to steps too hastily taken, to arguments left unclarified and to provocative silences. By inquiring about the kind of project entailed by the essay's proposals, as well as aspects of the current situation to which its design speaks, I should like to advance their project by extending the range of issues with which they deal.

Cohen and Rogers adopt the role of institutional architects; their building materials are drawn from both liberalism and socialism – especially the social democratic variant. Architects know, of course, that syncretism may produce beauty or ugliness, sturdy or flimsy structures, depending on both the quality of the blueprints and the decisions taken about how to make them work together. Cohen and Rogers know that we cannot hope to rebuild the Left without utilizing both liberalism and socialism to set goals, find means and leave room for situational adjustments. Whether the blueprints and materials they utilize produce beautiful and sturdy structures, however, depends on the manner in which they are to be used, sensitivity to intrinsic difficulties in their deployment and the mechanisms adopted to secure their joining.

I

Cohen and Rogers propose instruments with which to build a liberal regime with less institutional bias against a (refurbished) social democratic project than has existed within postwar US interest group pluralism, various European corporatisms and, even more certainly, non-liberal and non-democratic regimes. They do so by proposing to utilize public authority to provide incentives for a more robust and democratic associational sector with characteristics 'less sharply in tension with the norms of democratic governance'. The essay's commitments are to democratic processes and more egalitarian outcomes: quite obviously, the selection of the concrete examples of active labor markets, an incomes policy and environmental initiatives is not randomly drawn. Cohen and Rogers advance this attractive program at the juncture of liberalism and social democracy at a time when, not only but especially in the United States, the union and party institutions, as well as underlying ideas and persuasions, which have sustained the social democratic impulse within liberal democracies

since World War II, are in very deep trouble. In these circumstances, their program gains urgency from the growing class bias of interest representation and from an understanding that the renewal of the Left depends on whether it is possible to navigate the site where liberalism and socialism meet.

The difficulties faced in joining liberalism and social democracy, however, are not limited to current events, and they must not be gainsaid. Not just Cohen and Rogers, of course, but a host of others, including John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, Carlo Rosselli, Noberto Bobbio, Michael Walzer and Jorge Castaneda, have sought to marry liberalism and socialism (albeit on different terms) but, alas for those of us who are persuaded this liaison is the only possible basis we possess for a decent politics and society, it cannot really be said that their efforts have managed persuasively to weaken the tough-minded judgment of critics of this enterprise of varying ideological hues, including Perry Anderson, that 'liberal socialism reveals itself to be an unstable compound: the two elements of liberalism and socialism, after seeming to attract one another, end by separating out, and in the same chemical process the liberalism moves toward conservatism.'[1] Claims made for liberal socialism, in the main, have been more appealing for their social and political values than successful in their staying power or their capacity to fashion secure bulwarks against far less appealing options. Moreover, to the extent that liberalism is relatively thin, procedural, individualist, simply libertarian and indifferent to class structure; and to the extent that social democracy shares in the thick socialism of a Marxism that is consequentialist in its political morality, monistic in its understanding of interests and human nature and utopian in its expectations for the elimination of scarcity, liberalism and social democracy are incompatible. Not surprisingly, to this day the ordinary language of party competition in many Western countries treats liberals and social democrats as actors with incongruous values and aspirations.

Dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the English 'new liberalism' of T. H. Green, Hobhouse and Hobson, and from decisions by social democrats to participate, however provisionally, in normal bourgeois politics, liberalism (having been made social) and social democracy (having been inserted within liberal premisses) have been able to work out various forms of accommodation. These have been based on the domestication of class conflict, its canalization within unions and parties through the involvement of working-class actors, and the institutional creativity of welfare states which have incorporated and transcended class outlooks and have been

legitimated on the basis of both liberal and social democratic worldviews. This modus vivendi was most fully accomplished in the various 'postwar settlements', which are in such trouble today.

By their focus on democracy, Cohen and Rogers recognize that an attractive joining of liberalism and socialism must nestle the objectives and practices of the latter within a hierarchy dominated by the former. In this sense they are liberal socialists rather than social liberals. It is worth underscoring that while this kind of marriage of liberalism and social democracy may be desirable normatively, and while instrumentally it may be the only game in town, the thin imperatives of liberalism and the thick temptations of strong socialism have not disappeared. Thus, the relationship between liberalism and social democracy always hovers between mutual constitution and mutual threat.

II

Cohen and Rogers sidestep these questions by focusing on organizational engineering and by stretching 'democracy' to cover them over in an effort to fix the institutions of the US regime to make more possible the emergence of social democracy as a roughly coequal partner for liberalism. The authors suggest there may be topics, such as property rights, which they have chosen not to address, and which they think are intrinsically more important and more consequential for the realization of their objectives than those that focus on group life and political participation. Well and good, but at least two consequences follow from this. A resolution of the tension in the relationship between liberalism and social democracy appears more amenable to a relatively frictionless institutional invention than it possibly can be. Even more important, the essay gives the misleading impression that in the process of institutional design, all the relevant actors – whom they treat in terms of civil society as a whole – share a common ranking of goals, values and ideals, at least with respect to what might be called constitutional questions. Class and other markers of difference disappear into their discourse of democracy. This implicit tone and claim of consensus is not credible within the field of play defined by the complex relationship of liberalism and social democracy, let alone if we take any account of other political proclivities and their supporters. Democracy as a set of norms and practices thus manages to render tenebrous important bases of contest and conflict.

The essay's opaque treatment of state capacity is a case in point. The authors make 'competent government' one of the six conditions of

democracy because the means to efficient performance are 'needed to maintain public confidence in the democratic process'. This is a remarkably bland discussion of a subject that has sharply divided the liberal and social democratic traditions. Liberals, of course, fear a despotic state (whether or not controlled by majorities) and act to limit its hubris; social democrats have sought to use the state as a counterweight to the powers of capital. Controversy about the advantages and dangers of capable states in the space between the minimum required for order and the regularity of transactions on the one side, and totalistic conceptions on the other, is as fundamental as property-centered questions to the tensions between liberalism and social democracy, yet here it is enfolded in an implicit consensualism about values. Just as Cohen and Rogers elide the hard issues about property rights and distributions, so they avoid taking a position on the key qualities of modern states and apprehensions about them.

The essay's audience appears to be scholars and activists who share the authors' goals, but with regard to the basic doctrinal and practical themes of property and sovereignty, these are equivocal. Further, the essay is written as if everyone not only should share its values, but do. It manages this feat by approaching democracy in terms narrower than often obtain on the Left (by its silences about capitalism and production-based limits to political democracy), but broader than the usual liberal minimum (by its stress on distributive equity). In the absence of a sustained discussion of the choices entailed by the position they take, the status of the definition of the six conditions of democracy enumerated by Cohen and Rogers is not clear. Is this precisely the program the authors would prefer in relatively unconstrained circumstances, what they think is the best available set of goals within the constraints of US political development and discourse, or something in between?

The status of the US case within the larger Western universe of capitalist democracies, moreover, is a tandem unaddressed subject. Do the authors seek to define a democracy of strengthened secondary associations for all these countries or just for the United States? Would they prefer to see what might be called the pluralist-corporatism they propose supplant more conventional tripartite corporatism (because it is limited by a narrow definition of interests and confers monopoly privileges on a tiny number of associational possibilities) even in circumstances where such arrangements have favored the Left? Or is the scheme one we have to accept, because none better is available within the realistic limits established in countries without corporatism and with weak, or virtually nonexistent, social democratic party and union institutions, with the United States being the lead-case of this

kind? Put another way, what is the balance between the normative and instrumental torques of the paper? While the movement between democratic theory and US case illustrations provides a most welcome, and unusual, combination, it also obscures precisely these issues. The sui generis treatment of the United States necessarily leaves these questions open; but the failure to grapple with them is more than a problem for the clarity of the argument because it also impedes the potential political appeal of the program.

Not unrelated is the puzzle of how Cohen and Rogers view the status of the labor movement and, with it, orthodox conceptions of the significance, and signification, of class. Can there be any doubt that one of the main motivations for their essay is the erosion of labor strength – whether measured in terms of scale, scope or power – in the West generally and in the United States in particular (where today, about the same proportion of the active labor force belongs to unions as on the eve of the passage of the Wagner Act)? Yet there is a tension (even a contradiction?) in the essay between the way its proposals aim at the resurrection of organized labor – this is especially clear in the illustrations of associational democracy in practice with respect to economic regulation – and the manner in which its discussion significantly seeks to broaden the definition and bases of groups that are structured into political life as mediating locales between civil society and the state. Old Left, old-fashioned pluralist, new social movement and postmodern conceptions vie uneasily. Can we ride these horses simultaneously? Which types of group outcome, consistent with which of these formulations, should state-based incentives promote? More narrowly, what is the status of labor with respect to other potential bases of association? Does the resolution of such matters depend on a tacit or explicit model of social structure and interests, whether based on a single axis or multidimensional axes of domination and inequality, or will the free play of the associational market decide them? These, of course, are some of the most contentious questions within social science and social theory today as well as for political practice. Does it really make sense for policy engineering to skirt them? Won't these conundrums catch up with us later?

Even at the essay's most expansive moments with regard to the range of associations it would seek to promote, it is limited to instrumental groupings contesting divisible issues. In this respect, the paper reproduces a weakness shared by both the liberal and social democratic traditions, which might be characterized either as the inability or unwillingness to deal with nondivisible issues, which concern culture, communities and incommensurable moral dilemmas.

At a time when, for better or worse, cultural politics frequently overwhelms more economy- and distribution-centered issues, how would the prescribed associational democracy deal with matters of fragmented and heterogeneous culture and morality? It simply will not do in an age of feminist, ethnic and nationalist assertion to limit the scope of our politics to the kinds of themes the 'old' Left found most congenial. Does not associational life bear on the more multiple bases of identity and interest the Left has come, not without difficulty, to recognize and credit?

Put differently, the suggestive centerpiece of 'Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance' is the notion that the current organization of interests in US society is far too skewed and limited to make democracy substantive and robust for all citizens. The state is invoked not as an actor with interests or biases of its own, but as an agent of the rectification of these unequal resources. Yet, from another angle of vision, the more vibrant nexus of organizations and interest groups Cohen and Rogers propose would have the effect of both narrowing and privileging some forms of political identity over others. Such is the case in part because any system of interest representation – whether a non-hierarchical, non-compulsory pluralism or a hierarchical, compulsory corporatism, or the scheme of associative democracy they advance – necessarily privileges some groups and preferences over others and in part because the specific vehicles for interest representation they suggest demonstrate substantive (not just procedural) preferences. The result appears to be a narrowing of politics in the name of an extension of procedural democracy.

Finally, there is a worrying lack of precision about how Cohen and Rogers think the appealing institutional design they wish to construct could, would or should come into existence under popular democratic auspices. If the associational democracy they covet in fact is grounded in a broad democratic consensus, as they seem to imply, its instantiation should only be a matter of the dissemination of information and a process of persuasion. But if Cohen and Rogers's proposals do entail a radical redistribution of individual and group capacities, as in fact they do, then how, under current conditions of bias, do they expect that the transitional leap could be accomplished by democratic means? If their goals require the use of public authority to restructure the organization of civil society for political ends, then how can the divisions between constitutional and ideological issues, and between durable structures and situational majorities, be identified, defended and maintained? And who is to do the judging, as in 'if it were judged to be desirable for unions to be more encompassing . . . '?