few associations isolated and ruthless in their demands. There would be a strong temptation to silence these groups by agreeing to give them free rein over their own domain if they stay out of the bargaining in other areas. Yet such deals would undermine the balancing effects of broad representation.

Moreover, even the representation of a wide variety of groups is problematic. Aside from the obvious risk that the more people you include, the harder it is to reach agreement, the inclusion of too many groups may overburden the negotiations by widening the agenda to include conflicts that are extremely difficult to reconcile. Representation of agricultural and social welfare groups in negotiations over employment, incomes policies and social wages would invite discussion of the large socioeconomic inequalities between urban and rural workers, the employed and unemployed, as well as inequalities of race and gender. While this is precisely the point of associative democracy, consensus bridging such a broad issue space will be difficult to achieve. Resolution of conflicts of religion, language or ethnicity – the identities that have been termed cultural cleavages – pose an even greater challenge to associative democracy than do distributional issues. Certainly, corporatist bargaining institutions do not attempt to span such divides.

To conclude, the idea of using political means 'to secure an associative environment more conducive to democratic aims' holds promise for addressing a number of policy problems and increasing meaningful and responsible political participation. Involvement of associations in productive decision-making could even rejuvenate groups that are losing their constituencies by updating their mandates to engage in new issues that directly concern their potential members, thus encouraging a more deliberative form of public participation than electronic democracy. However, attention needs to be paid to the impact of the larger political and institutional framework on these procedures for interest negotiation and to the difficulties of balancing democratic concerns for broad representation with pragmatic considerations about effective negotiation.

Notes

1. See Steven Kelman, *Regulating Sweden, Regulating America: A Comparative Study of Occupational Safety and Health Policy*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981.
2. On the problems of joint decision-making, see Fritz W. Scharpf, 'The Joint-Decision Trap: Lessons from German Federalism and European Integration', *Public Administration* 66 (1988), pp. 239–78.

11

Social Groups in Associative Democracy

Iris Marion Young

The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War and other worldwide economic and political changes have made an important opening and need to reform and experiment with political and economic institutions. This historical opportunity for trying new things, unfortunately, has not been accompanied by any significant institutional imagination, especially in the United States, where leaders consider its current political and economic institutions to be the Promised Land toward which reformers in other parts of the world should aim. Thus Cohen and Rogers's proposal for alternative political institutions in the United States is greatly needed. Some people will and should disagree with aspects of either their theoretical framework or their practical model. But at least the essay is imaginative and can shake up our political and institutional complacency. Cohen and Rogers's model of associative democracy offers political theorists and activists in any part of the world where there now exist liberties of association, assembly, movement and free expression something substantial to chew on. In so far as it puts forward both a framework of normative principles of democracy and draws a fairly detailed picture of some practical means for how reformed political institutions in the United States might better instantiate those norms, the essay can serve as a model for how to fuel the institutional imagination.

Alternative institutions cannot be made out of air. Both imagining and enacting alternative institutions must begin with some elements of existing social life; as Marx said, the new society comes out of the womb of the old. Theorists of more democratic alternative political institutions thus should look around our societies to find undervalued or underused democratic forms, which we propose to deepen, extend and radicalize. I interpret Cohen and Rogers's model of associative democracy as doing just this. It excites my imagination to see new

possibilities in the civic and political associations that proliferate in our society as well as in institutions like coalitions, hearings, commissions and regulatory agencies.

Oddly enough, however, Cohen and Rogers do not seek to build on and deepen existing social forms in the United States. They acknowledge in passing that the United States has myriad forms of associative democracy and, indeed, some forms of associative governance. But their proposals for associative reform in the United States do not in any way draw on current associative forms.

This is a serious weakness in their view. My mail is flooded weekly with requests for money sent by various local and national associations, most of them civic-minded or politically oriented, and my mailbox is not unusual. Americans are compulsive joiners – of clubs, discussion groups, nonprofit organizations and their boards of directors, task forces, political committees and lobbying organizations, and community arts and theater groups, both at local and national levels. In Pittsburgh we have a progressive political coalition with forty-one member organizations, a minute portion of the civic and political associations in the region.

What could lead Cohen and Rogers to ignore these efforts and in effect to look outside the United States for an institutional starting point for their model? The basic reason is that they are not looking for the kinds of association that exist, but rather for class-based associations like unions and strong relatively encompassing constituency-defined political parties. They are looking for large, nationally-based labor unions, whose members together number a large majority of the workforce, and for strong, class-related political parties, whose political programs are comprehensive, clear and different. They fail to focus on the forms of association that are here because they are looking for those they find elsewhere. This failure is symptomatic of a more general bias of omission in the whole essay. Their model assumes economic class as the primary social group division and proposes issues of economic output and distribution as the primary issues that groups struggle about through democratic processes. This bias leads them to devalue the political importance of other major social group divisions, both in the United States and elsewhere, and the economic, social and cultural issues about which they struggle through political institutions.

I see the model of associative democracy as a means of linking state policy formation and implementation more strongly with the needs and interests expressed in civil society. Though such linkage risks sacrificing the autonomy of groups and movements in civil society, the model of associative democracy, as I read it, aims to preserve that

autonomy. In the United States, as elsewhere, associations are primarily civil – they arise from below, out of the immediate affinities that people find they have in their everyday lives, in their neighborhoods, religious congregations, occupations, consumer interests, cultural expressions and orientations and in their values and political commitments. They are tenant groups, civil rights groups, neighborhood organizations responding to hate crimes, coalitions to expand affordable housing options, gay male cultural collectives that help organize gay and lesbian pride day, groups supporting the struggles of people in other parts of the world, groups providing services and support to old people, people with disabilities and victims of battering or sexual assault, and groups that organize against the siting of a toxic waste plant. Significantly for my argument, in the United States today and for some time past, civic groups more often than not are organized along lines of gender, race, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation, even when they have not explicitly aimed to do so. Civic associations of this sort often promote grassroots participation and deliberation, provide their members with a sense of belonging and opportunities to develop skills of speaking and organizing, and frequently have a purpose oriented on what they take as a wider public good; often they do not regard themselves as merely working for the collective self-interest of their members.[1] Indeed, many civic associations of the sort I have listed may be more civic-minded in this sense than are many labor unions today.

As I imagine it, associative democracy would develop structures to link the opinions and activities of these groups more strongly to the policy-making process at both national and local levels. Some political practices already exist in the United States which could be built on and expanded as forms of citizen participation and representation in policy-making and implementation. Think, for example, of the process of public hearings. Especially in the last twenty-five years, in the United States many economic development, welfare and social service, and regulatory programs have been accompanied by mandates that legislative or executive officials hold hearings on policy proposals or proposed actions at which citizens may come and testify. During this same period, many of the sorts of associations I have cited above have participated in these processes at local, state and national levels. Presently such hearing processes have many flaws from the point of view of democracy. Rarely are the public officials who hold the hearings in any way bound to formulate their policies to accord with what they hear, and there are usually no mechanisms by which citizens can hold decision-makers accountable. Some kinds of groups

and associations have more direct access to information about when hearings will be held and greater resources to prepare for and attend them than others. As I understand the model of associative democracy, it would remedy these and other flaws in representation and influence in current, quasi-participatory processes.

Cohen and Rogers never specify what they mean by a group, but as their discussion proceeds it appears that they have in mind an interest group formed for the purposes of influencing policy. Such an understanding of group is too vague, narrow and instrumentalist. The sorts of civic groups that I have cited above, which I take to be seeds for the possible growth of associative democracy, usually have a wider orientation than influencing policy. They have ongoing social or cultural interests which lead them also and importantly to be interested in influencing policy.

Furthermore, as I have mentioned, such civic groups are often gender, race, class, age, ethnicity or sexuality specified. While Cohen and Rogers do acknowledge that there are social groups with oppressions or disadvantages of a form different from class oppression, they do not incorporate this recognition systematically into their model. I think this is partly because they fail to specify the meaning of 'group' enough and to distinguish kinds and levels of groups.

In another place I have argued that we cannot understand contemporary fractures of privileges and oppression and the new social movements that resist these oppressions without a conceptual distinction between an association and a social group.[2] An association is a formally organized institution, such as a club, corporation, political party, church, college or union. Cohen and Rogers's model recognizes only such formally organized institutions as groups. They rightly insist that associational activity is 'artifactual', that is, not natural and therefore subject to change and manipulation by institutional designers seeking to expand democracy.

Social groups, as I understand them, on the other hand, are more 'natural' in the society; while socially produced and changeable, they are not constituted by explicit decisions. Social groups emerge in ongoing social processes of the division of labor, affinity formation and the differentiation of communal identities from one another. A social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices or way of life. Members of a group have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experience or way of life, which prompts them to associate with one another more than with those not identified with the group or in a different way. Groups often interact with relations of exclusion,

exploitation or dominance, and such relations historically have caused the development of some social groups.

In the United States, economic class locates one important kind of social group in this sense. But just as important are gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability or sexual orientation for defining social group identity. The political importance of social groups arises, at least partly, from the fact that in all societies today some social group differences in addition to class privilege some groups and oppress others. Relations of privilege and oppression, however, are not necessary to the formation and relationships of social groups, and a multiculturalist politics aims for a group-differentiated society of inclusion and equality. Many actual and potential civic and political associations have members of these oppressed social groups as their primary constituencies, and aim to express the interests and perspectives of those social groups in public life.

I have proposed that one step, but only one, that political institutions can take to undermine social group oppression is to provide mechanisms for the special representation of oppressed or disadvantaged social groups in political agenda setting and policy formation. Since privileged groups tend already to be well represented in positions of power and influence in political and economic institutions, the promotion of procedural fairness and the voicing of diverse needs, interests and perspectives requires balancing that privilege with the special representation of, for example, women, African-Americans, American Indians, gay men and lesbians, and disabled people. Besides allowing the expression of diverse needs and interests, such group representation would promote greater orientation toward a public good beyond the expression of interests because it provides a greater check than now exists on dominant groups expressing their own interests as a general good. Distinct forms of representation for oppressed groups furthers political practical wisdom because it maximizes the sharing of social knowledge. Because members of different groups have different social perspectives, they are sometimes in a better position than members of other groups to anticipate the probable social consequences of implementing particular social policies. Thus the fair representation of all group perspectives can maximize the chances for making just and wise decisions.[3]

I think that Cohen and Rogers's proposal for associative democracy can be interpreted as one way to apply this principle of special representation for oppressed and disadvantaged groups. Interpreting it this way does, I think, require some adjustment in their model. Most importantly, their implicit assumption that most associations involved

in an associative democratic scheme are either capitalist or worker interests must give way to a more plural understanding of the fractures of privilege and oppression along which there is political conflict. Further, where their model appears to allow for a rough equality of representation for any associations, to undermine oppression I would call for mechanisms of differential resource allocation and organizing capacity to associations arising from oppressed or disadvantaged social groups. It appears generally compatible with Cohen and Rogers's model that the state could decide to promote the self-organization of members of oppressed groups where such organization is weak, or to provide greater resources to existing associations representing oppressed or disadvantaged groups, and to create compensatory political forms to ensure that such groups have an equal voice in agenda setting and policy formation.

Once we go beyond class division to understand the fractures of political conflict as also involving gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and so on, it becomes clear that issues of economic performance and state efficiency are not necessarily the most central areas of conflict. It is certainly arguable that US legislation, law and official executive policy have been as much occupied with cultural and social issues – sexual and reproductive issues, affirmative action and other issues of the relations among groups, questions of religion and its relation to public life, free speech in art and media – as it has been occupied with classical political economic issues of state efficiency, economic regulation and the distribution of the fruits of production.

Cohen and Rogers's model appears to ignore non-economic issues of cultural meaning or social relations or even to argue that they cannot be dealt with in a political system. They say, for example, that matters of principle are not amenable to political negotiation. This would appear to exclude from the region of democratic policy formation those issues and conflicts not amenable to distributive divisions. 'All or nothing' issues – such as whether state agencies may fund artworks that express gay sexuality – must be excluded from the associative democratic agenda. Contemporary new social movements, and the issues of cultural and social oppression additional to economic oppression that they raise, show why such a distinction between substantive ends and distributive means can no longer be sustained as a political distinction. In addition to social group-based movements, I would include environmentalism as a movement that politicizes cultural, lifestyle and social issues along with economic issues. Of course, a democratic polity must promote fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of economic cooperation and just organization

of economic institutions. But as events from Prague to Los Angeles remind us, just as important is the organization of democratic institutions so that social groups can deliberate about the policy conditions for promoting sexual, cultural, and social freedom and respect for difference.

Notes

1. Behind my identification of civic associations in the United States is the theoretical concept of 'civil society' being developed by some political theorists as a social arena not well conceptualized by either traditional liberalism or Marxism. For a recent comprehensive statement of this concept, see Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1992.
2. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1990, ch..2.
3. Ibid., pp. 183–91; see also Iris Marion Young, 'Justice and Communicative Democracy', in Roger Gottlieb, ed., *Tradition, Counter-Tradition and Critique: Essays in Radical Philosophy in Honor of Richard Schmit*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1992.