

The Strategic State

(TERCERA DE TRES PARTES)

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Abstract. *Canada, like many industrialized countries, is facing a crisis of the state. At a time when the new demands on the state are increasing, the old social technology appears to be inadequate. This calls for the definition of a new state. The paper identifies the guiding values and the design principles that are likely to underpin the social architecture of this new strategic state. It identifies also one feature of the strategic state (meso-forums, network organizations, moral contracts) and the nature leadership (leader as animateur and use language of citizenship). It is argued that in the new strategic state economy, society and polity must share the organizational task and that the only viable agenda is a modest one promoting social learning and finding the path of minimum regret are the only hopes that leaders may reasonably entertain.*

XIII. Reframing as lever

In answer to the first point, we would underline clearly that our main argument has been that there is a fundamental need for a guiding public philosophy as a loose "projet de société", and that a *reframing* of Canadians' vision of the world through such a framework is necessary before one proceeds with developing the electoral platform of a future government. Without such a framework, the program likely to be carpentered will be fraught with disjointedness, and the related constitutional, institutional, and organizational plumbing found to be unsafe. The leader of a political party must put forward a modest but clear public philosophy as the general "projet de société" underpinning the guiding "unwritten plan": this is a *sine qua non* in the politics of the 1990's.

In answer to the second argument, we would suggest that this approach may not be as unrealistic as it first appears. Three recent events may illustrate the power of this way of thinking, and hint

at the feasibility of the proposed strategy.

The first is the impact of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's expression of concern about the state of Canada's educational systems (directly, in the summer of 1989, and then indirectly through the Prosperity Forum documents in 1991) and his plea for "a new public consensus on learning goals". This has triggered a wave of soul-searching and questioning at all levels, and it is likely that what will come out of it is an agreement on *national educational standards* that should go a long way toward resolving the structural, organizational, and technological problems plaguing our educational systems. The second example is the impact created by Quebec Minister of Trade, Industry and Technology, Gérald Tremblay, in his September 1991 diagnosis of Quebec socio-economic malaise. Within days, this had heightened Quebecers' consciousness and helped him to become a catalyst for all sorts of cooperative arrangements, including multi-year, no-strike collective agreements, and a different way of crafting Quebec's industrial strategy as a partnership of government, business and labour (Tremblay, 1991). A third example of the progress of this way of thinking is the emergence of a new partnership between Canadian environmentalists and polluting chemical and forest product companies to hammer out acceptable environmental standards that they might jointly propose to governments (Geddes, 1991).

XIV. Leader as animateur

In answer to the third argument, one must emphasize that far from dwarfing the notion of political leadership, this approach underlines the new realities of leadership in a postmodern state.

Postmodernism is a summary way of referring to major changes in the socio-political and intellectual scene. It connotes four major phenomena: an increasing incredulity toward the broad ideo-



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logical interpretive schemes in good currency over the last century, a new awareness of the dangers of societal rationalization, a concern about the dangers and possibilities of the new information technologies and a recognition of the new post-materialist values and new social movements (feminism, environmentalism, etc.) underpinning local resistance to any broad normalizing force (White, 1991). This has led to a fundamental re-thinking of public discourse and political theory.

In this fractured and highly uncertain world, nothing seems linear and easily predictable any longer. The leader is no longer able to neatly separate appreciation and policy-making on the one hand, from executive decisions on the other. All those who are involved must have a *shared appreciative system* to take an active and effective part in this process. The leader cannot exert authority through command in this network, but has to *acquire* this authority through 1) the setting and promotion of certain *governing relations* or norms embodied in the unwritten plan, those "relations" that the state wishes either to maintain or to bring to "some level more acceptable to those concerned than the inherent logic of the situation would otherwise have provided", and 2) the negotiating of a true *moral contract or pact* between the leader and the led that is likely to inspire the led, to mobilize them to work within this shared appreciative system, to generate enthusiasm, to bring the led to go beyond the limits of being sheer executants and to become creative and imaginative intervenants. All this is to be done in a manner not much different from the creative animation of the musicians by the orchestra leader (Vickers, 1965; Paquet, 1978).

The heart of the matter is not goal-seeking and control, but intelligence and innovation: the definition of standards and norms, and the negotiation of a moral, intellectual, and emotional norm-holding pact built on a multi-level dialogue in which 1) leaders and constituents are in some measure the shaper and the shaped, and 2) the whole institutional process becomes itself the learning process and the source of the redefinition of norms and standards as a result of experience (Zaleznik, 1991).

Leadership is no longer a matter of personal charisma. It has become a complex phenomenon where the leader as *animateur* is literally a kind of soul of the body politic. Affirming values, motivating, achieving a workable level of unity, ex-

plaining, serving as symbol, representing the group externally, and being the continuing source of renewal are only a few of the leader's tasks in this new context. Fundamentally, there is a necessary sharing of these leadership tasks: if the heart of leadership is the taking of responsibility, empowerment of the led by the leader means that leadership tasks are shared and therefore responsibility is shared as well (Gardner, 1986: 12).

XV. Governing relations

Whatever the arrangement arrived at, all human systems are subject to deterioration. Consequently, leaders must first and foremost be persons capable of setting in motion and maintaining the processes of renewal around some guiding public philosophy.

For John W. Gardner, the role of the leader is clearly defined: "1) to renew and re-interpret values that have been incrustated with hypocrisy, smothered by cynicism or simply abandoned; 2) to liberate energies that have been imprisoned by outmoded procedures and habits of thought; 3) to re-energize forgotten goals or to generate new goals appropriate to new circumstances; 4) to achieve, through science and other modes of exploration, new understandings leading to new solutions; 5) to foster the release of human possibilities through education and lifelong growth" (Gardner, 1988: 12).

A former president of the Carnegie Corporation (who was also Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare of the United States in the mid-1960's), John W. Gardner puts the values component of leadership at the heart of the matter, and relegates the debates about plumbing to a subsidiary role, unless they have a contribution to make to the greater efficiency of the learning organization.

What is required at this time is a clearer definition of the *governing relations* and a strengthening of the leader-led pact to mobilize this dispersed leadership. This in turn requires, from those aspiring to define a third way between neo-conservatism and neo-socialism, 1) re-asserting their conviction that there is an important role for the strategic state and being able to say what it is, and 2) finding a way of renewing the conversation between political parties and the citizens of the broad and all-encompassing middle class on the strategic action of the state.

This cannot be accomplished in Canada or in

the United States unless and until some limits are imposed on the "moral agnosticism" of political parties. Comments on the fate of the Democrats in the United States have suggested that "progressives and Democrats" have failed to defend the liberal state because Republicans have successfully narrowed the scope for legitimate political action. In that constricted space, from which the middle class feels excluded, and where the government concentrates solely on the fate of the "have-nots" and on the state as safety net for them, the initial support for government initiatives—for acting collectively—quickly dissolves into skepticism and cynicism (Greenberg, 1991).

XVI. Politics and the middle class

Some thirty years ago, the liberal state embarked on an ambitious program of social reforms. There was at first, in the 1960s, some effort to promote the values that the program was trying to defend. Those were the days of the "just society", with which the majority of Canadians could identify. But as time passed, both in Canada and in the United States, the fixation on "have-nots" and the underclass (almost exclusively), and the futile attempts to rescue people from poverty has led politics to abandon the working middle class. This explains why they hate politics: politics has abandoned them (Dionne, 1991). It has been shown that families have worked harder, with more and more husbands and wives working, and yet they are losing ground. These people are not against specific broad-based programs, they are against a government that has failed to represent them, that does not seem to address their concerns, that has failed to "articulate a rationale for the government's role in society" (Greenberg, 1991).

It has been a quarter of a century since political leaders (Lyndon Johnson in the USA and Pierre Elliott Trudeau in Canada) have articulated a vision of a "broad-based state". It is hardly surprising that the middle class has lost a sense of its ability to attack problems collectively, since the state has made no effort to communicate a message it can understand or that would appear relevant to them. Social programs are in danger because most Canadians are only aware of some of their abuses (though these may turn out to be fiscally trivial); *they are not aware of what the public sector does for them every day*, of the extent to which their

standard of living and economic security depends on public policies, of what government is there for. There has been a disconnection between the taxes they pay and the services they are not aware they are getting.

XVII. A language of common citizenship

There is a tacit demand for a *language of citizenship* that would echo the concerns and values of the middle class, and help it to become articulate about politics. In the postmodern context, political leadership consists no longer of charisma and pirouettes—it amounts to providing a philosophy of the public household capable of mobilizing the dispersed citizenry. A case could be made for a *renewed notion of citizenship* (spelling out the individual and collective rights and obligations of Canadians, and the exact role of the state in it) as a promising arena where the Canadian identity might be forged, but also where the mandate of the strategic state might be articulated in conversations between the leader and active citizens (Paquet, 1989c; Oldfield, 1990).

In Canada, these discussions at the federal level (the definition of both the governing relations in the unwritten plan, and the moral pact of the leader with the constituents) call for a gamble on a substantial amount of decentralization *ab ovo*. This is a mortgage of the recent past: the echo effect of the federal governments' compulsive centralism in the post Second World War, and its reluctance to return to the provinces the fiscal and regulatory powers borrowed in situations of emergency. It is also the result of some unwise "coups de force" (especially in the early 1980s) that still linger in provincial memories: the National Energy Program of 1980 for Alberta, and Bill S-31 in 1982 for Quebec.

One cannot proceed as if these circumstances did not exist. Consequently, the degree of political roundaboutedness called for is much greater at present than it technically needs to be, or than it would have been one decade ago. But one can accomplish little if one ignores these constraints.

It is our view that it is possible, despite these circumstances, for discussion on a renewed notion of citizenship to serve as a way to jump-start a genuine renewal of politics in Canada. This has been envisaged in a timid way in the first portion of the Clark proposals for the shaping of Canada's future, in September 1991. It should be re-

garded as a good omen that there has been almost no disagreement about this portion of the document. Indeed, some may even suggest that the whole constitutional debate, if reframed as a way to define the rights and obligations of Canadian citizens, might allow the leaders to initiate the sort of creative dialogue that is needed at the moment.

Conclusion

This overall approach to the scope of government has the merit of re-establishing the centrality of state institutions, and exorcising the various theories of the withering of the state. Economy, society and polity must share the organizational task in redefining the human political socio-economy.

The leader of a political party has to jump-start and steer a process of social learning to ensure that the state plays its role as fully as it must, while allowing the other two domains to occupy their own terrains as fully as possible. There are two broad avenues the leader might follow right from the start: one that is modest and one that is more ambitious.

In the modest agenda, the strategic state does not aim at the *optimum optimorum*: in this context, the leader only strives for ways of avoiding excesses, for a loose codifying of a sense of *limits*. This modesty stems from the fact that very few political questions can be handled by simple rules. Therefore, even a wise public philosophy, and an efficient process of organizational learning, is regarded as at best capable of establishing by negotiation nothing more than an agreement on what is *not* moral, what is *not* acceptable. Since we understand intuitively what is unjust more easily than what is just, the challenge is to find the path of minimum regret, for that corresponds to the only hope a leader may reasonably entertain in a postmodern state (Shklar, 1989).

In the more ambitious agenda, the challenge is a bit more daunting: the objective is not to seek the utopian just society of yesteryear, but to develop an active leadership role that would promote active citizenship. This agenda is built on the following premises: 1) the *Tocqueville lament* about the peril of democracy is warranted: "not only does democracy induce to make every man forget his ancestors, it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone, and threatens in the end to confine him utterly within the solitude of



his own heart"; and 2) the *John Stuart Mill statement* about social obligations is also warranted: "every one who receives the protection of society owes a return for the benefit" (Buckley, 1990).

From these premises, three sets of actions follow:

a) the leader must frame a public philosophy aiming at nothing less than a change in the national ethos;

b) the leader needs to become an "official", *i.e.*, "a person with duties and obligations", not only of foregoing private interests in the name of public duty, but also being capable of "getting the ruled to do what they don't want to do" because what the public wants, or thinks it wants, or thinks is good for it, may not be what the public good requires; this entails a "devoir d'ingérence";

c) the citizen needs to be persuaded that he has an active burden of office, that a citizen may act unjustly, not only by breaking a law, but also by remaining passive in the face of a public wrong; this means that the citizen has to be *educated* into an active citizenship that entails a "devoir de solidarité" (Tussman 1977, 1989).

These two avenues are rooted in the development of "a national ethic", but demand different degrees of dynamism on the part of the leader as moral agent. The modest agenda is a backhanded moral approach: a public household that would ensure this sense of limits would already have done much to recreate the civil politics that is so badly needed. The more ambitious agenda would


attempt to reframe the national ethos as a way to guide the debate around the size and scope of the state in the year 2000. Such *reframing* is regarded by all political parties as the central challenge they are facing today.

The public philosophy in good currency suggests that the modest agenda is the only viable one. Dwight Waldo, one of the foremost observers of the public administration scene over the last 40 years, has reminded us recently that "we simply do not know how to solve some of the problems government has been asked to solve" (Waldo, 1985). For Waldo, the central feature in the discussion of the boundaries between the private and public spheres is the "growth of the 'gray area'... the fading distinction between public and private, caused and accompanied by increasing complexity of organizational arrangements where what is —or was— government meets and interacts with what is —or was— private, usually but by no means exclusively 'business'". And Waldo added somewhat sharply that any person who claims to have clear ideas about this 'gray area' is "suspect as ideologue, scenario writer, or a con artist".

Yet the times may call for leaders capable of envisaging a real attempt at a somewhat immodest agenda: enlightened pragmatism, an emphasis on practice guided by a modest public philosophy, an on-going and somewhat directed conversation with the situation, "under conditions of time and place" are the bedrock of the new modern and modest strategic state. But this enlightened pragmatism need not be amnesic and myopic; it must forge new concepts and new symbols, new options, and as "options are thus changed or ex-

panded, it is to be expected that choice behavior will change too, and changed choice behavior can in turn be expected, given appropriate time lags, to be conceptualized or 'habitualized' into a changed set of values" (Mesthene, 1970).

This hemi/semi/quasi immodest agenda is not echoed in the triumphant "politics of principle" developed by supposedly "great" political leaders, and likely to convulse society, but in the solution of "particular cases" in an innovative way. Already, there is an agreement on the profile of the new type of leader that the times call for, and the key features are 1) a capacity to listen, to learn and to entice others to learn, to change and adapt to change, and to inform the public clearly and serenely about the general orientation of the guiding public philosophy, 2) the courage to change one's mind when circumstances and problems demand it, but centrally 3) an "ethical attitude" acting as a gyroscope and permitting no concession to opportunism (King and Schneider, 1991).

It is not clear whether what is needed to kick start this transformation is a fully worked out "projet de société", an *avventura comune*, or nothing more than what Aristotle identified as "concord" ('homonoia' "a relationship between people who... are not strangers, between whom goodwill is possible, but not friendship... a relationship based on respect for... differences" Oldfield, 1990). What is clear is that the leader of the strategic state needs to find a way to energize the nervous system of the economy, society and polity, for, as Joseph Tussman would put it, a modern democracy is committed to "governance not by the best among all of us but by the best *within* each of us" (Tussman, 1989: 11). 



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investigación económica

revista de la facultad de economía de la universidad nacional autónoma de méxico
 abril-junio, 1997, núm. 220, issn 0185-1667, \$20.00

Alejandro Arranz, José Manuel García de la Cruz y Santos M. Ruesga, EL TRABAJO AUTÓNOMO. EL CASO ESPAÑOL • Guillermo Olivera Lozano, LA PEQUEÑA INDUSTRIA: RESTRUCTURACIÓN INDUSTRIAL Y DESCONCENTRACIÓN TERRITORIAL • Luis Miguel Galindo, EL CONCEPTO DE EXOGENEIDAD EN LA ECONOMETRÍA MODERNA • Gabriel Mendoza Pichardo, DE VALORES A PRECIOS DE PRODUCCIÓN: EL DEBATE RECIENTE • Fernando Antonio Noriega Ureña, TEORÍA DEL DESEMPLEO Y LA DISTRIBUCIÓN: MÉXICO 1984-1994.

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