**Pursuing Equality:
Pay Equity, the Kibbutz, and the Future of Egalitarianism**

A dissertation submitted to
the Department of Political Science, Carleton University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Scott Streiner, MA
June 2002

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Abstract

The main question underlying this dissertation is: how can egalitarian politics be renewed under contemporary conditions? This question stems from a recognition that since the late 1970s, the influence of public policies aimed at reducing substantive disparities has been on the wane.

The dissertation begins with analysis of the shared motives of, and conceptual and programmatic variations among, egalitarians. It then examines two cases where efforts have been made to translate the egalitarian ethos into a practical politics: Ontario's experiment in pay equity, which is viewed as a quintessential example of reformism in action, and the kibbutz, which is seen as an archetypical expression of radical thinking. Both cases provide a basis for drawing more general lessons.

The dissertation goes on to explore egalitarianism's retreat over the past two decades and the critical role played by economic globalization, and reviews four recent strategies for reviving a politics of equality: the Third Way, human rights, global governance, and direct activism. Finally, it provides a response to its central *problematique*, proposing a set of principles and practices for enhancing the relevance of the egalitarian project in the twenty-first century.

Dedication

Some people fill such an important place in your psychic space that even when they are gone, they remain with you.

Regina Schattner, my grandmother, struggled for a better world and strove to live fully. She obtained a university education, traveled extensively, and left husbands during an era when most women accepted passivity as their lot.

She joined the American Communist Party during the Popular Front period, because she believed the liberation of the individual required an end to exploitation. She rose through its ranks, became a state-level leader, and eventually spent two years in jail -- a victim of McCarthyism, her party's disloyalty, and her own refusal to be bullied.

She abandoned Communism after the Twentieth Congress, but continued to pursue social justice by helping to establish and run a ground-breaking education system for children with developmental disabilities. Thousands of kids written off by others received a chance in life due, in no small part, to her efforts.

She was a wonderful grandmother – attentive, warm, and always ready to serve as a bracing interlocutor. She introduced me to Broadway, sent me letters from Budapest and Miami Beach, and talked with me about the likes of Camus, Gramsci, and Mann.

She died at the age of 92, still lucid and energetic, just as I was putting the finishing touches on this dissertation. I was so sorry she never got a chance to read it.

If I seek a more just world, and occasionally have the courage of my convictions, it is partly her example that guides me.

This dissertation is dedicated to Grandma Regina, in very loving memory.

Acknowledgements

There are, of course, many people to whom one owes thanks by the time a dissertation is completed. The exceptional demands of conceptualizing, researching, drafting, and finalizing a dissertation can rarely be met without the support and generosity of others.

I want to begin by thanking my supervisor, Fiona Robinson, and my other two committee members, Vince Della Sala and Rosemary Warskett. When I decided whom to ask to sit on my committee, I had three criteria in mind. First, I wanted scholars whose intellectual qualities would help make my dissertation as strong as possible. Second, I sought out individuals whose interests and expertise would complement one another's, as well as my own. Finally, I hoped to find decent, fair-minded people with whom it would be a pleasure to work. The committee exceeded my expectations on all counts. I am grateful to Fiona, Vince, and Rosemary for their understanding, their constructive criticism, their efficiency, and the balance they always struck between, on the one hand, providing clear direction and, on the other hand, respecting my prerogative, as the dissertation's author, to periodically debate their advice.

I would also like to express my appreciation more generally to the faculty and staff of the Department of Political Science at Carleton University, who provided me with excellent doctoral training, and recommended me for several awards. A special thanks to Valerie Pereboom, undoubtedly the university's most dedicated and resourceful administrator.

I am grateful to the following organizations for financial assistance provided during the course of my doctoral studies: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Ontario Graduate Scholarships, the Epstein Foundation, the Lady Davis Foundation, and the Abraham Brum Fund. This assistance, particularly during the year I spent in Israel conducting field work and drafting most of the dissertation, played a critical role in allowing me to avoid a lifetime membership in the ABD club.

I am indebted to employers and managers who, over the years, found many ways of facilitating my studies. This was not something they had to do -- it was something they chose to do, as both savvy managers and good people. Their support contributed to my motivation as an employee, taught me lessons about how to get the best out of staff, and earned my enduring appreciation. Particular thanks in this connection to John Hucker, Marguarite Keeley, Gwenn Hughes, Paul Durber, Gerry Savard, and Gisèle Jacob.

I am grateful, of course, to the 38 individuals who agreed to be interviewed for the purposes of my case studies. Without their willing participation and remarkable insights, making sense of Ontario's experiment in pay equity and of the kibbutz experience would have been far more difficult.

I would like to thank my parents and in-laws for their warmth and support over the years. The many hours spent discussing “big questions” as I grew up, the assistance provided during difficult periods, and the time and love devoted to caring for the kids (giving us, the parents, an opportunity to re-charge or make headway on our projects) are all reflected in this document.

This brings me to my final expression of appreciation – to Zohar, Tamir, and Gilad. Zohar, you are the love of my life. Your intelligence, passion, and empathy make you the best possible partner in the daily effort to navigate this complicated world and figure out how it might be made a little better. Tamir and Gilad, you are the lights of our lives – the best sons anyone could have, a source of deepest and constant inspiration. I know that each of you, in your own way, will always enrich the world around you. Because you are very, very special. Thank you all for your encouragement, love, and patience.

Disclaimer

During the period of my doctoral studies, I was employed by the federal public service in a number of different capacities. There is no question that my work experience has provided important insights which inform the analyses contained herein; indeed, I have always believed that my professional and scholarly activities are mutually reinforcing, and that it is possible to develop clear academic positions while faithfully administering public policy. That being said, I wish to emphasize that I have conceived, researched, and written this dissertation exclusively in my capacity as a part-time student of political science, and that the views it expresses are of an entirely personal nature.

A Note on Citations

The citations style used in this dissertation is a slight variant on the standard APA and Chicago formats. Like those formats, it places short references – family name, year of publication, and page number where appropriate – in the body of the document, and full references in a comprehensive bibliography at the document's end. This approach has always struck me as the most logical, since it allows the reader to quickly identify the source of an idea or quote without losing momentum, while providing a convenient list of all sources for more detailed review.

I have, however, taken liberties with the accepted formats in one way: I have placed the short references in footnotes at the bottom of pages rather than in parentheses within the text itself. The reason for doing so is straightforward: like most readers, I find the latter unwieldy and distracting, especially where multiple sources are cited. Moreover, I am willing to wager that the preference for parentheses-enclosed references dates from an era when word processors were rare and, consequently, footnotes were difficult to manage. In a computerized age, this disincentive obviously disappears.

I hope the reader will find that, even if a little unconventional, the style employed in the dissertation more than meets the tests of clarity and completeness.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Egalitarianism as a political project is facing serious difficulties.

Egalitarianism is about more than a commitment to the abstract notion of equality, a notion most people probably endorse in principle; it is defined by a belief in the need for a different, more equitable distribution of resources. By implication, in a world of scarcity, it demands action to reduce substantive disparities. This is not a proposition that has enjoyed much popularity over the past two decades.

Egalitarian theory, in contrast, has thrived during this period. Since the 1970s, scholarly work on egalitarianism as a philosophy has been characterized by vibrant debate and increasing sophistication. However, even as academics committed to greater substantive equality have developed their conceptual thinking, the politics of equality has been on the retreat. A gulf has opened between the egalitarian ethos and our ability to translate that ethos into an effective, broadly-supported social project.

Matters were not always thus. For a half century after the onset of the Great Depression, egalitarian sympathies animated a good many public policies. By the end of the 1970s, however, the tide had begun to turn, as advocates of an unfettered market and smaller government gained the upper hand. The collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and Russia and the rhetoric and processes of globalization have reinforced this trend, sowing disarray among those who wish to see a politics dedicated to a less asymmetrical division of resources.

This dissertation is about addressing the challenges facing twenty-first century egalitarianism. The fundamental question which motivates the dissertation is: how can the egalitarian program be renewed so as to be more effective under contemporary conditions? Thus, the dissertation's fundamental concern is programmatic: it seeks to assess and develop strategies that will allow a politics of substantive equality – a politics whose focus is distribution of material resources – to regain influence. These strategies are developed through a number of steps. The next part of this chapter describes the epistemological premises, normative commitments, and methodology that frame the dissertation. Chapter 2 identifies the shared conceptual underpinnings of egalitarianism, discusses the primary programmatic cleavage among egalitarians (reformism versus radicalism), and reviews the evolution of egalitarian thought. Chapter 3 examines a quintessential example of reformist egalitarianism in action, the implementation of pay equity in Ontario, with an eye to drawing more general lessons for the egalitarian project. Chapter 4 looks at an archetypical example of a radical egalitarian experiment, the kibbutz, again with the aim of arriving at broader lessons. Chapter 5 traces the twenty year retreat of egalitarian politics, analyses the critical impact of globalization, and considers four recent responses to the egalitarian dilemma: the Third Way, human rights, global governance, and direct activism. The conclusion, chapter 6, uses the findings of the literature review, case studies, and overview of recent trends as a basis for sketching out a set of principles and practices for a renewed egalitarianism.

This structure stems in part from the epistemological approach which guides the dissertation, an approach that weaves together post-positivist and empirical strands.¹ Like post-positivists, I reject the possibility of unadulterated objectivity. Post-positivist literatures, including much of feminism and Critical Theory, have largely been a reaction to the arrogance of behaviouralist writing which purported to present an flawless picture of reality while concealing the play of power and, in many instances, legitimizing prevailing social relations. Feminism has probably done more than any school to underscore the absence of a hermetic boundary between what Catharine MacKinnon terms the “knowing subject” and the “known object”² and to show how taken-for-granted theories often naturalize the subordination of women and other disadvantaged groups. Although far from a unitary category, feminist writing generally attempts to strike a delicate epistemological balance: in Elizabeth Anderson’s words, while it seeks to “stress the situatedness or perspective-relativity of much knowledge” and “raise new questions about objectivity,” it does not “claim that perspectives can only be judged in their own terms, nor that no perspectives are better than

¹ The decision to include a discussion of epistemology in my introduction reflects two considerations. First, having been schooled in an era of vigorous metatheoretical debates, and being inclined in any event to reflection on how we know, I think it important to articulate for the reader the basic conceptualization of knowledge-accruelement that guides the dissertation. In this regard, the epistemological approach is prior to, and independent of, the specific substance of the dissertation. Second, however, the epistemology has importance inasmuch as it lends itself to the goals of the dissertation, since it would be difficult to reach conclusions about strategies that could facilitate a renewal of egalitarian politics from the decentred, ontologically indeterminate vantage point of postmodernism. In this regard, the epistemological approach has instrumental advantages to recommend it, though these are more bonuses of, than motives for, its adoption.

² MacKinnon (1982), 536.

others, nor that one cannot take a more objective view of the phenomena than that taken up in one or another perspective.”³ Similarly, feminist epistemologist Miranda Fricker argues against both positivism and postmodernism, deeming the latter “a counsel of despair...an expression of disillusion” because it can offer no stable basis for supporting calls for change and skirts the problem of self-refutation through ironic detachment from our own sense of the world. Fricker advocates recognizing the effects of social position and power on individual perspectives without denying the existence of a common external reality, and distinguishing between authoritarian and authoritative uses of reason. She calls this approach “perspectival realism.”⁴

Critical Theory has arrived at analogous insights, emphasizing the need for reflexivity regarding the impact on inquiry of social location and personal values and highlighting the relationship between scholarship and social processes, without abandoning the quest for demonstrably valid understanding. While CT’s claim that scholars *must* be driven by the goal of improving the world strikes me as a confusion of the (discretionary) normative and the (necessary) ontological, I share its aspiration to achieve something more than a “detached knowledge” which surreptitiously affirms the status quo. Mark Hoffman summarizes some of the key components of CT as follows:

³ Anderson (2001).

⁴ Fricker (2000), 156 and 159.

Critical theory does not accept prevailing ideas, actions and social relations as unchanging or immutable...it seeks to understand society by taking a position outside of society while at the same time recognising that it is itself the product of society. Its central problematic is the development of reason and rationality that is [sic] directly concerned with the quality of human life as opposed to the elevation of scientific reasoning as the sole basis for knowledge...It is not merely an expression of the concrete realities of the historical situation, but also a force for change within those conditions.⁵

Post-positivist theorists have done an important service by reminding us of the complexity of "reality," the limits of knowledge, the effects of the observer's position on his or her observations, and the ways in which supposedly "objective truths" have been used to exclude dissenting voices. These caveats imbue academic activities with greater modesty, scepticism, self-reflection, and openness to competing views. However, the slope grows slippery when post-positivist cautions are interpreted as meaning that no statement can be judged more persuasive than another, that empirical research adds nothing to the quest for understanding, or that striving for a more inclusive, impartial perspective is pointless. Such views, which seem typical of many postmodernists, suffer from the terminal internal contradiction of making an assertion about the impossibility of legitimate assertions, and no degree of obtuse semantical gymnastics can rescue them from the nihilistic morass in which all forms of unadulterated anti-foundationalism eventually founder. After all, if our understanding reflected nothing but arbitrariness and power relations, why would we bother searching for answers or engaging in dialogue in the first

⁵ Hoffman (1987), 233.

place?⁶ When postmodernism denies legitimacy even to insights arrived at through lucid, vigorous reflection, it does not emancipate, whatever its proponents claim, but disempower. Conflating the complexity of reality and contingency of knowledge with non-reality and non-knowledge is a grave error. Perhaps few postmodernists -- who must, like all of us, make life choices based on some sense of what is and what is not "real" -- actually endorse their literature's sweeping implications.⁷ But if this is the case, they would do well to strive for more nuanced articulations of their epistemological positions -- something which has not always characterized their energetic attacks on the perceived arrogance and conformism of dominant methods of scholarship.

Thus, despite recognizing that knowledge is inherently constrained and imperfect, I remain a "realist"⁸ in the sense that I believe a knowable world exists "out there" and serious scholarly work about that world must involve rigorous observation, seasoned with critical reflection. This "realism" is obviously not the rigid sort often associated with empiricist epistemology -- the

⁶ Habermas (1987, 281-282) makes this point in discussing Foucault.

⁷ I had a personal experience suggesting this might be the case. A few years ago, I spoke at the same London conference as the postmodern political theorist, Michael Shapiro. When I pointed out to Shapiro that his method of challenging existing constructions was strikingly empirical, he responded by saying that he would "never cede empiricism to the positivists." Of course, this begs the question of what one means by positivism. Shapiro's embrace of reasoned, empirical demonstrations of his postulates suggests that the positivism he has in mind may be a bit of a straw man: an exaggerated (though not altogether inaccurate) image of imperious academics who blithely impose their simplistic, self-serving versions of reality on everyone else. If true, this means that Shapiro's anti-positivism has more to do with style than epistemology.

⁸ "Realism" as employed here is the epistemological, not international relations, variant.

conviction that physical experience of atomized objects is the sole source of justified knowledge, and the concomitant negation of the role of theory and social constructs – but rather, a much broader belief in the value of observation as part of a complex process through which understanding is developed and deepened. At the end of the day, this mix of “realism” and post-positivist qualification leads to contingent, probabilistic inferences about reality. I realize, of course, that despite the substantial intellectual energy I have expended on these issues, this mixed position is hardly without precedent. It has much in common with Isaiah Berlin’s effort to integrate value pluralism and respect for reason and objective reality; Imre Lakatos’ attempt to steer a course between Popper and Kuhn on questions of scientific knowledge; Clifford Geertz’s defence of a form of soft relativism on the grounds that it is compatible with an empirical search for reliable truths; Anthony Giddens’ attempt, through his structuration theory, to elucidate the mutually constitutive nature of agency/social thought and structure/social reality; the efforts of constructivist international relations scholars such as Alexander Wendt, Emanuel Adler, and David Dessler to “seize the middle ground” between rationalism and reflectivism; and attempts by comparative-historical scholars such as Theda Skocpol and Charles Tilly to generate cautious theoretical conclusions from the in-depth “huge comparison” of a small number of cases .⁹

The “critical” or “perspectival” dimension of my own approach is partly

⁹ Lakatos (1978); Lukes (1994); Geertz (1984); Giddens (1986, 1990); Wendt (1992); Adler (1997); Dessler (1999); Skocpol (1979); Tilly (1984).

expressed in a willingness to be reflective, and frank, about my ethical commitments. I am not, I acknowledge, interested in egalitarianism for purely intellectual reasons. While I am no believer in absolute equality, I do think existing disparities cry out for a response – yet for some reason, the egalitarian ethos is not resonating much in contemporary politics. I want to understand why and see what can be done about it. This normative concern does not preclude systematic analysis of egalitarian experiments or, indeed, egalitarian politics as a whole, but awareness of it helps keep the dissertation on-track while ensuring that rigour is not lost in the quest for answers.

The “realist” dimension of my approach is manifested in a comparativist methodology. If observation is beneficial, then multiple observations which draw out similarities and differences between cases may be particularly helpful, especially if one is attempting to arrive at broad conclusions about complicated phenomena. When making comparisons with finite resources, of course, there is an unavoidable trade-off between the number of case studies and their depth. For this dissertation, the general purpose of which is considering how egalitarian impulses get translated into action, it was decided that the best approach would be to compare two “typical” egalitarian experiments, one reformist in nature and one radical. This comparison follows the familiar methodological contours. Where parallels are discovered between the cases, they are interpreted, tentatively, as suggesting elements common to egalitarian projects more generally. For example, if it appears that both experiments, notwithstanding their differences, stumble over analogous hurdles or achieve

analogous outcomes, we may infer that such challenges or accomplishments have something to do with the basic dynamics of most attempts at redistribution. On the other hand, where differences between the cases are found, we will be more inclined to attribute them to the divergent effects of evolutionary as opposed to revolutionary undertakings. For instance, if one experiment is strikingly more successful than the other, this may well tell us something broader about the egalitarian potential of reformism or radicalism.

Information on each of the two cases was gathered through a thorough literature review and 19 semi-structured interviews. Participants in the interviews were selected on the basis of rough representativeness: in identifying and contacting potential interviewees, I was consciously guided by the desire to net a wide cross-section of backgrounds and interests, on the assumption that this would allow for richer insights into the projects' mechanics, successes, and failures.¹⁰

The questions which guided the interviews were as follows:

- What were the basic goals of the experiment?
- Why were the strategies comprising the experiment chosen to advance these goals?
- To what extent did the experiment achieve its stated goals?

¹⁰ Because a significant number of the interviews were explicitly off-the-record, names of sources are not listed in this document; however, the types of organizations for which they worked, or kibbutzim in which they lived, are described in the method sections of chapters 3 and 4.

- Did the experiment have other, unanticipated egalitarian or redistributive effects?
- Did the experiment have negative effects for members of its target group?
- Did the experiment have negative effects for members of other groups?
- What does the future hold for the experiment?
- What can the experiment teach us more generally about egalitarian politics and contemporary efforts to renew them?

The information obtained through the interviews and literature reviews, along with the “critical realism” which has guided my research and reflection, have, I hope, led to some interesting and persuasive responses to the fundamental question of how the egalitarian project can be revived under contemporary conditions. That being said, this dissertation most certainly does not purport to provide an infallible map to the reconstruction of that project. What it does is point in some directions which seem promising, while ruling out others which appear to lead only into dead ends. In my view, twenty-first century politics is increasingly ready for a swing of the pendulum back towards substantive equality. It will, however, take a mix of imagination and pragmatism, and an ability to synthesize discrete components into a coherent program, to realize that potential. If this dissertation makes a small contribution to such a process, then it will constitute, for its author, a success.

Chapter 2

Pursuing Equality: Egalitarianism in Theory

This chapter lays the conceptual groundwork for the dissertation by dealing with three key questions: what is egalitarianism?; what are the critical cleavages within egalitarian thought concerning strategies for translating the egalitarian impulse into an effective program?; and how has egalitarian thought evolved over time?

While the second question is the most directly germane to the central *problematique* of the dissertation, the first and third are crucial inasmuch as they help elucidate the normative and theoretical dispositions which shape the egalitarian project; indeed, the ideas and intellectual currents discussed in the answers to these questions re-emerge repeatedly in the chapters that follow.

The first question -- on the meaning of egalitarianism -- is addressed in the opening two sections of the chapter. The first of these sections examines how notions of equality relate to egalitarianism, showing that it is not a commitment to the abstract ideal of equality *per se*, but rather to a concrete type of substantive equality, that underlies the egalitarian ethos. The second section extrapolates from this point, arguing that the distinction between egalitarian and non- and anti-egalitarian theories is a function of attitudes towards prevailing disparities.

The next part of the chapter considers the second question -- on egalitarian strategies -- contending that the most significant and abiding programmatic split among egalitarians is between reformists and radicals.

The third question -- on the development of egalitarian thought -- is addressed in the subsequent three sections of the chapter, which trace egalitarian writings from antiquity to the Cold War, look at neo-Marxism and liberal egalitarianism since the 1960s, and review challenges to dominant conceptualizations of egalitarianism that turn on roles of collectivities and the boundaries for the egalitarian project.

What Is Egalitarianism? I: Different Notions of Equality

“Egalitarianism” is conventionally understood as a commitment to equality. This, however, is too simplistic a theoretical formulation. Just as it is misleading to suggest that only libertarians seek freedom, it is fallacious to imply that no one but egalitarians values equality. Indeed, as will become clear below, the basic principles of equality are hardly in dispute in contemporary political thought.

Equality theorizing tends to rest on two foundations: the principle of fundamental human commonality and the principle of relevant differences. The former, which is essentially descriptive in nature, opens many discussions of equality. Sometimes, statements of basic equality (“all people are equal”) are seen as so self-evident that justificatory elaboration is not even offered. Although indicative of prevailing morés, this approach is philosophically unsatisfying, since humans are, from the moment of birth, demonstrably unequal in a variety of ways: physical attributes, innate talents, personal preferences, inherited wealth, and so on.

More refined works emphasize that humans are “equal” in certain essential ways which transcend their differences. The Stoics were probably the first to present such an argument when they claimed that people are naturally equal because they all possess reason. Contemporary theory, however, more commonly refers back to the early liberals, especially Locke, and to Kant’s categorical imperative to treat people as ends, not means¹ (Locke and Kant being more popular these days than the Stoics), and goes on to identify critical features of a shared human experience. Bernard Williams, for example, speaks of the capacities “to speak a language, use tools, live in societies, interbreed despite racial differences...feel pain...[and] affection”; Stanley Benn of each person’s “potentialities for moral freedom, for making responsible choices among ways of life open to him, for striving, no matter how mistakenly and unsuccessfully, to make of himself something worthy of his own respect”; and John Rawls of “equality between human beings as moral persons, as creatures having a conception of their good and capable of a sense of justice.”² Such putative commonalities, which Amy Gutmann clusters into the categories of “equal passions” and “equal rationality,”³ are seen by theorists as having direct implications for how people ought to be treated. Equality, in this sense, is closely linked to sameness -- a sameness which endures under all the more superficial features which differentiate human beings. Assertions of

¹ Kant (1949), 177-178.

² Williams, B. (1997), 92; Benn (1967), 70; Rawls (1971), 10.

³ Gutmann (1980), chapter 1.

fundamental commonality have indisputable normative value, since they act as a corrective to traditional conservative theories which perceived a natural hierarchy among people, and to present-day forms of racism, sexism, and so on, which contend that certain human beings are innately “better” than others. However, because “natural superiority” approaches have largely been marginalized, the potency of statements about basic commonalities has been significantly reduced. While still useful as a point-of-departure, they tell us little about how to proceed. Few theorists, even in the contemporary conservative (neoliberal) camp, outright reject any notion of shared humanity.

The main exception is postmodernists such as Richard Rorty, who sees “shared humanity” as a superfluous (and often dangerous) relic of Enlightenment metaphysics and prefers a local, “pragmatic “ system of ethics.⁴ Though there is much to the postmodern critique of the ways in which specious ideas of commonality have been employed to rationalize oppression, it must be said that the concept of an uncompromisingly contingent morality is fraught with internal tension. Even if one simply says that to slaughter brutally the innocent is everywhere wrong, one has in some sense endorsed a view of shared humanity. Rorty chafes against such universalism, but his more local alternative wants for coherence. His complaint, it often seems, is largely with how “universal humanity” has been deployed. But the traditional exaggeration or misuse of a concept does not necessarily mean that the concept itself is

⁴ Rorty (1989).

fatally flawed. In any event, there is very little theorizing about equality – even among postmodern thinkers -- which does not rely at least tacitly on constructs of shared humanity, however guarded and qualified. Rorty himself feels the need to make tolerance and anti-cruelty the guiding values of the political arrangements he advocates -- a position which appears to imply some sort of non-contingent conceptualization of the human experience.⁵ Such a conceptualization is arguably indispensable for any intelligible discussion of just human relations. As Anne Phillips notes in her examination of feminist struggles with the issues of commonality and heterogeneity, “if feminists suggest that we should concentrate on the differences between us *instead of* the things we all share, they risk losing the language for even talking about people as equal.”⁶

Like the principle of common humanity, the principle of relevant differences is widely accepted among those who write about equality. This can be traced back to Aristotle and his standard of proportionality, which holds that the treatment of individuals should vary in proportion to pertinent variations among them.⁷ The modern principle of relevant differences has been invoked by a variety of thinkers using similar language. Stanley Benn provided one of the pithiest formulations in 1967: “where there is no relevant difference between two cases, no rational ground exists for not treating them alike; but, conversely,

⁵ Welton (1998), 113-114.

⁶ Phillips (1993), 67 (*italics in original*).

⁷ Aristotle (1969a), 112-114 (1131a6-1131b15).

where there is a relevant difference, there is a reasonable ground for treating them differently.”⁸ In other words, determining whether individuals should be treated similarly or differently requires first examining whether they differ in any way germane to the treatment. Few would dispute this principle, which is essentially an injunction against arbitrary discrimination. The problem lies in implementation: the requirement to consider relevant differences and ignore irrelevant ones provides conceptual clarity, but little information on the tangible meaning of equality. Much contemporary political controversy over equality can be boiled down to the question: what differences are relevant, and what distinctions in treatment do they justify? The principle itself does not provide an answer. Aristotle himself pointed to this dilemma when he wrote, “all men agree that what is just in distribution must be according to merit in some sense, though they do not all specify the same sort of merit.”⁹

Thus, the traditional first principles of equality -- human commonality and relevant differences -- may be inspirational (which is not without importance) and help establish that equality of some sort is a noble goal, but they are incapable of providing clear guidance for action. Indeed, more than three and a half decades ago, R.J. Lucas was already arguing that though unassailable, they have almost nothing to do with practical questions of distributive equality.¹⁰ The concept of equality, when understood in abstracted terms, is so obscure

⁸ Benn (1967), 63.

⁹ Aristotle (1969a), 112 (1131a27).

¹⁰ Lucas (1997).

and so little debated that ultimately, it is of little analytical value. Leading philosophers of equality recognize this point. As Will Kymlicka writes, the notion that “each citizen is entitled to equal concern and respect...is found in Nozick's libertarianism as much as in Marx's communism.”¹¹ Similarly, Ronald Dworkin acknowledges that virtually all theories of justice, including libertarianism, at least implicitly accept the “abstract egalitarian thesis” that “the interests of the members of the community matter, and matter equally.”¹² If everyone endorses equality in principle, it ceases to be an effective notion for analysis and theory-building. It is for this reason that Amartya Sen, noting that “every normative theory of social arrangement that has stood the test of time seems to demand equality of *something*,” famously asked, “equality of what?”¹³ Reaching a similar conclusion, Douglas Rae wrote an entire book analysing the multiple meanings of equality to support his view that:

[f]or any society with structural complexity, there must be choices among equalities, hence equalities left out...We are always confronted with more than one practical meaning for equality and equality itself cannot provide a basis for choosing among them. The question ‘Which equality?’ will never be answered by simply insisting upon equality.¹⁴

In short, if we wish to understand conceptual differences among various positions, something more than equality is required. The idea only gains power

¹¹ Kymlicka (1990), 4.

¹² Dworkin (1992), 3.

¹³ Sen (1992), 12 (*italics in original*). The “equality of what?” debate is dealt with at length in the section, “Neo-Marxism and Liberal Egalitarianism Since the 1960s.”

¹⁴ Rae (1981), 144, 150.

when we define the types and degrees of equality we are talking about. It is around this critical issue that egalitarians depart from anti-egalitarians, and reformists from radicals.

As a point-of-departure, it is necessary to make the fundamental distinction between formal and substantive equality, for it is this distinction -- these modifiers -- that inject "equality" with the analytical meaningfulness it lacks on its own.¹⁵ Formal equality is concerned with procedures, and requires that people be treated in the same manner when provided with services or opportunities. Formal equality is individualistic in nature, and stresses neutrality. It opposes conscious discrimination -- the expression of "natural superiority" attitudes -- but also opposes attempts to correct for social disadvantage by measuring and changing the distribution of results. What matters, for those committed to formal equality, is that everyone is given a chance to play by the same rules. Who wins and who loses is of no consequence; indeed, paying attention to outcomes is likely to produce differences in treatment and so, undermine rather than advance true equality.

Notions of substantive equality are rooted in the view that such formal equality is inadequate at best, deceitful at worst. The problem, say proponents of this view, is that competition on identical terms is meaningless when people begin with grossly different means at their disposal. Pre-existing disparities

¹⁵ On the distinction between formal and substantive equality, see Galloway (1993); McIntyre (1993); Phillips (1993); Rustin (1995); Trackman (1994); Young (1990); and Williams M. (1995).

mean huge advantages for some and the impossibility of success for others, before the game has even started. Given the correlation between profound inequalities and factors such as race, sex, disability, and class, procedural equality can only perpetuate gaps. The idea of substantive equality shifts the focus from formal processes at the individual level to material distribution at the collective level. It seeks a reduction in concrete inequalities, emphasizing tangible outcomes, rather than abstract processes. Justice Rosalie Silberman Abella, who paved the way for employment equity legislation in Canada with her 1984 Royal Commission on Equality in Employment report,¹⁶ has argued that an approach which denies the significance of prevailing disparities is effectively a form of Social Darwinism. Abella summarizes the perspective of those favouring substantive equality when she writes:

Neutrality implies impartial application, but of what value is impartial application if it yields partiality? Process is only one side of the equation. The other is substance....Procedural sameness may lead to substantive inequality....If equality can be defined as the reduction of inequality, we must come to grips with how to narrow the gap.¹⁷

The debate between advocates of formal and substantive equality may also be understood in terms of differing conceptions of freedom. For supporters of formal equality, freedom is mainly about the avoidance of collectively-imposed constraints – “freedom-from” – while for proponents of substantive equality, freedom requires that people have the means for self-

¹⁶ Abella (1984).

¹⁷ Abella (1993), 67.

realization -- “freedom to.”¹⁸ Thus, the former tend to see liberty and equality as opposed to one another, while the latter see them as inter-related.¹⁹

Contemporary egalitarianism is underpinned by a belief in substantive equality and “freedom-to.” This is a more robust definition than was required in centuries past, since many of egalitarianism’s historical demands have now become uncontroversial. Once, as Kai Nielsen notes, “the commitment to political and legal equality was something that distinguished the egalitarian from the non-egalitarian. Now, in theory at least, even anti-egalitarians accept legal and political equality.”²⁰ To be an egalitarian today is to seek to go beyond formal equality: to aspire to a redistribution that will narrow existing disparities. As David Miller says, in rejecting the idea that egalitarianism is about equality as such, “the debate between so-called egalitarians and so-called anti-egalitarians is better understood as a debate about whether a particular kind of equality -- economic equality, say -- should be pursued or not.”²¹ Those who oppose egalitarianism are not opposed to the notion of equality in the formal sense but rather, efforts to achieve material redistribution. The following section focuses on sharpening and elaborating upon this conceptual distinction.

¹⁸ It was Isaiah Berlin (1969) who first and most famously made this distinction, though his own position was that “freedom-to” could lead to dangerous places.

¹⁹ Cohen (1991); Nielsen (1985); Taylor (1991).

²⁰ Nielsen (1985), 6.

²¹ Miller (1998), 21.

What Is Egalitarianism? II: Competing Views on Social Disparities

In order to understand the meaning of egalitarianism, two central, if perhaps obvious, preliminary observations are necessary. First, every society is characterized by at least some differences of wealth, power, and status. This will continue to be the case as long as there is scarcity -- which, given the tendency of expectations to rise in tandem with options, probably means forever. Second, politics is about choosing the priorities, rules, and administrators for collective action, which always involves choices related to the distribution of resources. If a situation of total plenty were actually possible, there would arguably remain little need for politics.

Combining these observations, we may say that many political struggles are about questions of distribution under conditions of scarcity and inequality. As often as not, these questions come down to the issue: should priorities and rules be set so as to reduce disparities? An egalitarian is someone who will generally favour such action, seeing existing gaps as unacceptable and perceiving few unmanageable hurdles to at least some redistribution. A non-egalitarian will question or oppose such action on one or more of three grounds: justice does not require, and may preclude, redistribution; inequalities are unavoidable; and forced equality is inefficient. Let us begin by examining each of these grounds for justifying disparities.

The traditional moral argument in defence of social gaps and against redistribution rested on the ostensible existence of a “natural hierarchy.” While this claim has largely faded away, along with the related “natural superiority”

world-view, a contemporary variant, articulated most famously by Robert Nozick in his 1974 *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, remains. Drawing upon Locke, Nozick argues that the possession of rightfully obtained property is sacrosanct and inseparable from the individual's inviolable "self-ownership." In this view, any effort to enforce a shift in resources from those with more to those with less is confiscatory and immoral. Justice is understood as a question of entitlement and the ability to live freely, and patterns of distribution are completely irrelevant so long as ownership has been arrived at through legitimate processes. Nozick summarizes his views on "justice in holdings" in three points:

1. A person who acquires a holding in accordance with the principle of justice in acquisition is entitled to that holding.
2. A person who acquires a holding in accordance with the principle of justice in transfer, from someone else entitled to the holding, is entitled to the holding.
3. No one is entitled to a holding except by (repeated) applications of 1 and 2.²²

As long as the natural right to property is respected, Nozick argues, uneven distributions will result, since different people will choose to do different things with what they own. Achieving egalitarian distributions therefore requires a tremendous infringement of personal liberty: "no end-state principle or distributional patterned principle of justice can be continuously realized without continuous interference with people's lives."²³ For this reason, says Nozick unambiguously, "redistribution is a serious matter indeed, involving, as it does,

²² Nozick (1974), 151.

²³ Ibid, 163.

the violation of people's rights."²⁴ Other libertarian theorists of justice echo these views. Anthony Flew objects to egalitarianism's "revolutionary move" of linking justice and equality, arguing that individuals are "entitled to their own natural talents and other characteristics, and entitled to what they may succeed in earning or deserving by their employment of these talents, and of all the rest of what they have, and are."²⁵ Jan Narveson contends that egalitarianism's philosophical bases are all rotten: it appeals to intuitions and envy, makes unsupported claims that wealth is a type of theft, and posits the "howler" of an argument that redistribution should correct for the arbitrariness of nature. In his view, "[t]hose who win the prize by being naturally talented do, often, deserve it: they exceed the others in relevant ways."²⁶ For thinkers with libertarian objections to egalitarianism, it does not matter whether redistribution is practicable; to attempt it is simply wrong.²⁷

While libertarianism provides the clearest-cut and best-known objection to any linkage between notions of justice and equality – because it posits against substantive equality a crisp counter-principle of inviolable property –

²⁴ Ibid, 168.

²⁵ Flew (1980), 137, 142.

²⁶ Narveson (1998), 90.

²⁷ For additional libertarian arguments against the idea that justice can legitimately lead to "encroachment" on property rights, see Letwin (1983). Julian Lamont (2001) notes that in contrast to many other libertarians, Nozick acknowledges that much of the existing allocation of property has probably resulted from processes that would not satisfy criteria of legitimacy and so, might be justifiably subjected to "rectification" through some form of redistribution. However, given the impossibility of determining which holdings flow from genuine entitlements and which do not, this potential concession to egalitarianism has few practical implications.

there are also non-libertarian theories which are just as non-egalitarian in terms of their understanding of justice. All believe, in contrast to libertarianism, that distributive patterns are a valid concern for political philosophy, but contend, against egalitarians, that what matters is not how people do relative to one another, but whether they are receiving their due or enjoying well-being in an absolute sense. Philosophers such as John Kane hark back to Aristotle's proportionality to argue that "[a]ny a priori assumption of either equality or inequality is simply beside the point, for we cannot know before examination of any particular case, and often before a great deal of moral argument, what a just distribution will require."²⁸ Utilitarians such as R.M. Hare contend that maximizing welfare is what is important, and that equality may or may not contribute to this end.²⁹ And thinkers such as Harry Frankfurt and Joseph Raz stress that helping the worst-off is the key moral imperative and that the egalitarian's preoccupation with comparative condition confuses the issue. As an alternative to egalitarianism, Frankfurt has proposed a "doctrine of sufficiency," which contends that what really matters ethically is that everyone has enough, not the same.³⁰

Countless books and articles have been devoted to philosophical arguments, from both libertarian and non-libertarian perspective, against the proposition that justice requires equality. Contemporary opposition to

²⁸ Kane (1996a), 389. For further clarification, see Kane (1996b).

²⁹ Hare (1978).

³⁰ Frankfurt (1987); Raz (1986).

egalitarianism, however, is no less frequently based on the pragmatic objection that disparities are in some sense inevitable (perhaps even unfortunately so) and hence, extremely difficult to change. Such reasoning begins with the inherent differences between people in terms of strength, talents, and the like, and goes on to contend that the unavoidable result in almost every society is differences in affluence -- and that to try to alter this result is to fight a costly, losing battle. Writing about this "natural tyranny of the bell-shaped curve" in 1972, when he was emerging as a leading opponent of the New Left, Irving Kristol stated that:

contemporary experiments in egalitarian community-building – the Israeli kibbutz, for instance – only work when they recruit a homogenous slice of the citizenry, avoiding a cross-section of the entire population....Purely egalitarian communities are certainly feasible – but only if they are selective in their recruitment and are relatively indifferent to economic growth and change, which encourages differentiation....In all the Western nations...the distribution of income is strikingly similar. Not identical; politics is not entirely impotent, and the particular shape of the 'bell' can be modified – but only with immense effort, and only slightly, so that to the naked eye of the visitor the effect is barely visible.³¹

Like the moral claim, the inevitability argument could, in principle, stand on its own: whatever the effects of disparities, if they cannot really be altered, why try? However, most scholars who oppose redistribution recognize that though difficult, it is not completely impossible, and they usually present an efficiency argument as well. The familiar claim here is that disparities are not only natural, but also necessary to motivate people and to keep societies and

³¹ Kristol (1995), 176-177.

economies running. Take away the incentives offered by greater personal gains for greater contributions and people will stop doing their best. As a result, socio-economic systems will become wasteful and lethargic, and everyone will ultimately suffer a declining quality of life. In the words of libertarian patriarch Friedrich Hayek, “[i]t would indeed be a tragic joke of history if man, who owes his rapid advancement to nothing so much as to the exceptional variety of individual gifts, were to terminate his evolution by imposing a compulsory egalitarian scheme on all.”³²

As noted earlier, the rejection of egalitarianism does not necessarily mean rejection of the idea of equality, construed a particular way. Anti-egalitarians often support, for example, the notion that people have an equal right to liberty and that public agencies should not treat people differently based on irrelevant grounds such as skin colour or religion. This commitment to formal equality is captured by Hayek when he describes the foundation of “classic liberalism,” with which he identifies, as the view “that government must *regard* all people as equal, however unequal they may in fact be, and that in whatever manner the government restrains (or assists) the action of one, so it must, under the same abstract rules, restrain (or assist) the actions of others.”³³ What distinguishes egalitarians is not the use of the concept of equality but rather, support for collective measures to reduce material disparities. This

³² Hayek (1979), 173.

³³ Ibid, 142 (*italics in original*).

support reflects egalitarians' scepticism regarding the three defences of the status quo outlined above.

Egalitarians reject the libertarian view that existing disparities are morally justified and thus, beyond the proper scope of social action. Property, for the egalitarian, is not so fundamental to the self as to be inviolable. Indeed, the egalitarian believes that much of the wealth, power, and status enjoyed by those with more has been obtained not by virtue of legitimate personal choices or efforts – what is termed “desert,” “deservedness,” or “merit” – but rather, by arbitrary factors such as serendipity and relations of dominance. Whatever their differences, egalitarians share what G.A. Cohen has described as “the primary egalitarian impulse”: “to extinguish the influence on distribution of both exploitation and brute luck.”³⁴ The distinction between chance and choice, and the contention that little of the existing distribution can be attributed to the latter, are central to the egalitarian ethos. This is what Robert Young means when he writes of “across-the-board skepticism by egalitarians about personal desert in distributive contexts.”³⁵ Some leading egalitarians even consider individual qualities like intelligence to be invalid bases for social disparities, since people do not choose the genetics and childhood conditions that mould them.³⁶ By this account, only a small part of prevailing inequalities -- say, the portion related an able-bodied adult's decision to work hard rather than laze about -- enjoys the

³⁴ Cohen (1989), 908.

³⁵ Young (1992), 322.

³⁶ For example, Rawls (1971), 104.

moral defence stemming from an “obtained by right” argument. The vast majority of social disparities are ethically open to challenge.

In fact, egalitarians not only dismiss the suggestion that justice requires respect for the status quo, but also claim that it demands exactly the opposite – action to change distributive patterns.³⁷ For some egalitarians, increased equality inheres in, and is thus inseparable from, the notion of justice; for others, it is a necessary and immediate implication of broader intuitions about justice.³⁸ Egalitarians, then, disagree with the non-egalitarian positions that justice is exclusively about due or absolute well-being. That being said, the view of justice-as-equality does accept elements of non- (as opposed to anti-) egalitarian theories, but gives them a particular interpretation. Like Aristotelians, egalitarians believe in giving people their due – but because they believe outcomes have more to do with luck than choice, each person’s due is expected to be similar. Like Utilitarians, they wish to increase well-being – but because it seems reasonable to assume that a gain of a dollar does more to improve a poor individual’s satisfaction than the loss of a dollar does to impair a rich person’s happiness, they believe this necessarily leads to a preference for redistribution. Like those who focus on the condition of the worst-off, they are concerned about absolute (and not just relative) deprivation – but because the pie is not infinite, they believe that correcting penury necessitates a degree of

³⁷ Baker (1987).

³⁸ On the distinctions between these two philosophical approaches, see Miller (1998); Parfit (1998); and Sen (1996).

egalitarianism.³⁹ While real philosophical differences between the theories of justice advanced by egalitarians and non-egalitarians should not be obscured, neither should such interesting points of conversion.⁴⁰

Whether they see substantive equality as an immanent or derivative component of justice, egalitarians ultimately agree that it is, in Kai Nielsen's words, an "intrinsic good".⁴¹ Justice, for them, demands that something be done to reduce disparities. Relative well-being is, they contend, morally important. As Larry S. Temkin writes, "concern about inequality is that portion of our concern about justice and fairness that focuses on how people fare relative to others....egalitarians have the deep and (for them) compelling view that it is bad – unjust and unfair – for some to be worse off than others through no fault of their own."⁴²

Just as the egalitarian rejects the anti- and non-egalitarian separation of justice and substantive equality, she contests the claim that disparities are

³⁹ The practical parallels between egalitarians and theorists such as Raz and Frankfurt have been noted by Stefan Gosepath (2001). Another word for worry about have-nots might be empathy, and in my opinion, it plays a larger role in the equality-justice linkage than many egalitarian writers acknowledge -- perhaps because of the tradition of logical reasoning and individualism in which many of them have been schooled. Feminist critiques of mainstream egalitarianism on this point are discussed below.

⁴⁰ Both Rawls and Dworkin stress important differences between egalitarianism and Utilitarianism, in essence arguing that the latter is indefensible since it treats all preferences (including, say, sadism) in a neutral fashion and cannot prevent the sacrifice of a few if it improves the overall welfare of the many (Rawls, 1971; Dworkin, 1985). There is much to this line of reasoning, but it is sometimes marked by a degree of overstatement which conceals affinities between the two approaches, as Kymlicka notes in his examination of Rawls' views on Utilitarianism (Kymlicka, 1988).

⁴¹ Nielsen (1985), 8.

⁴² Temkin (1993), 13.

inevitable. She sees them not as the natural outcome of human differences, but as a function of particular socio-political arrangements. Indeed, this is a central point of dispute, more generally, between those who would uphold existing social relations and those who would challenge them. Feminist international relations scholar Cynthia Enloe encapsulates the latter camp's rejection of the premise that the status quo is unavoidable with her "bumper sticker" slogan that "Nothing is natural - well, almost nothing."⁴³ Although few egalitarians would suggest that all gaps can be eliminated, the overwhelming majority would agree that the number and scale of gaps are largely determined by social arrangements which govern how wealth is generated and distributed -- arrangements that reflect deeply-rooted and continuously-reproduced differences of power. Those who have more resources today have the power to devise and legitimize norms, especially around the accumulation and retention of property, that will ensure they have more tomorrow as well. G.A. Cohen makes this point in rejecting libertarians' defence of rightful possession when he writes: "A structure which is not a permanent part of the human condition can be misperceived as being just that, and the institution of private property is a case in point."⁴⁴ Similarly, where Irving Kristol sees tremendous (and inevitable) consistency in distributive patterns, Ronald Dworkin sees enormous scope for variability: in the opening passages of his most recent

⁴³ Enloe (1989), 3.

⁴⁴ Cohen (1991), 169.

collection, Dworkin argues that:

Equal concern is the sovereign virtue of political community – without it government is only tyranny – and when a nation's wealth is very unequally distributed, as the wealth of even very prosperous nations now is, then its equal concern is suspect. For the distribution of wealth is the product of a legal order: a citizen's wealth massively depends on which laws his community has enacted....When government enacts or sustains one set of such laws rather than another, it is not only predictable that some citizens' lives will be worsened by its choice but also, to a considerable degree, which citizens these will be.⁴⁵

Finally, egalitarians deny that the economic-imperative justification of disparities is compelling. While egalitarian theorists have paid somewhat less attention to the efficiency defence than the justice and inevitability rationales, when they do address it, they usually contend that there is no good reason to believe economic breakdown will occur as a result of partial redistribution, even if some variation in rewards encourages productivity. This position is hardly surprising, since any other would probably require an abandonment of egalitarianism, but in disputing the efficiency claim, egalitarians are not merely engaging in knee-jerk protection of their own ideas. At the conceptual level, there is an obvious connection and coherence between the convictions, on the one hand, that social reality is as much structured as natural and, on the other hand, that it can be adjusted without destroying the economy. It is easier to imagine re-making that which has been made than that which is a necessary outcome of natural forces. At the level of economic analysis, egalitarians have sought to determine the extent to which the efficiency argument should be

⁴⁵ Dworkin (2000), 1.

accepted and how to reconcile it with egalitarian concerns. Their conclusion, in a nutshell, is that some differentials may in fact be useful from an economic perspective, but fewer than currently obtain. Some analysts have even argued that equalized allocation actually increases certain types of incentives.⁴⁶

Probably the best-known egalitarian economist to have grappled with the issue of efficiency and redistribution is John Roemer, who has written that

there is a *degree of freedom* in the distribution of property rights in firms, a parameter that can be varied without altering the efficiency of the system...there are egalitarian ways of reallocating profits that are economically feasible...paying attention to economic incentives, which societies must do as long as individuals are self-regarding, does not require régimes of highly inegalitarian property rights, nor highly inegalitarian distributions of wealth.⁴⁷

In summary, the egalitarian believes that justice requires changes to, not preservation of, existing distributive patterns; that these patterns are more structured than inevitable; and that their alteration can occur without causing severe economic disruptions. These positions bind egalitarians together and have grounded a range of ideologies and movements in different eras and locales. Indeed, they constitute the shared ethos, the common normative and ontological threads, which make it reasonable to view egalitarianism as a distinct genre. To ignore this shared ethos would be to overlook enduring affinities between different theoretical and political camps and, perhaps, the possibility of innovative strategies for advancing long-standing goals. That

⁴⁶ Moulin (1987); Ray & Ueda (1996).

⁴⁷ Roemer (1999), 66-67, 74 (*italics in original*).

being said, the nature of the exercise in this section – distinguishing egalitarianism from non- and anti-egalitarianism – has required a certain amount of generalization, which must now be attenuated by attention to the variations among egalitarians. We will begin with the division of greatest importance, both from a conceptual perspective and for the purposes of this dissertation: that between reformist and radical egalitarianism.

The Programmatic Split Among Egalitarians: Reformism versus Radicalism

It is, perhaps, simply logical that among those who seek change, a central debate will always be about the extent and means of that change. One can easily come up with countless historical examples, from the Girodin-Jacobin struggles during the French Revolution to the debates between the followers of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. It is therefore not surprising that such a range of views has featured among egalitarians. At one end of the spectrum are those who wish to reduce distributive gaps by gradually adapting existing social structures -- the reformists -- and at the other end are those who wish to achieve fuller substantive equality through wholesale replacement of existing structures with new ones -- the radicals.

Interestingly, the contemporary theoretical literature on egalitarianism has not devoted a great deal of energy to this fundamental distinction. That may be because it is seen as obvious and so, uninteresting, or because finer philosophical points -- such as the link between justice and equality, discussed

above, or the question of what the object of redistribution is, discussed below -- have preoccupied thinkers. Such questions have undeniable theoretical value, as they point to subtle variations in underlying images and motivations. However, for a study concerned with the translation of principles into practice, and not merely the fabric of the principles themselves, the reformist-radical divide constitutes a more sensible basis for distinguishing between egalitarian streams.

The tension between reformist and radical thinkers was very visible during the first decades of the twentieth century, when many still felt that the critical issue was less “whether socialism would come to pass?” than “what form of socialism?”. Disagreement on this question produced everything from heated debates in the Socialist International -- which after the Russian Revolution was abandoned by the revolutionaries, who formed the Communist International (Comintern) -- to show trials and murder. A classic expression of the debate is Lenin’s 1902 *What Is To Be Done?*, which aggressively laid out the case for revolution and dismissed more moderate, social democratic alternatives out of hand, describing them as “economist,” “opportunistic,” “primitive,” and the like.⁴⁸ *What Is To Be Done?* once held enormous sway among radicals, both symbolizing and justifying their contempt for those who would pursue incremental change through the electoral process rather than rapid change through the overthrow of existing social structures.

⁴⁸ Lenin (1999).

More recently, the text has fallen out of favour. Many would now agree with David Milner's description of it as "the paradigmatically anti-democratic text in the Marxist tradition," if not novelist Louis de Bernières' view of it as "an immensely tedious and irrational tirade."⁴⁹

A more nuanced analysis from the same period was provided by Rosa Luxemburg in *Social Reform or Revolution*. Like Lenin, Luxemburg attacked "revisionists" and "opportunists" in the ranks of socialists for their willingness to make due with incremental adjustments to the existing order, writing:

It is absolutely false and totally unhistorical to represent work for reforms as a drawn-out revolution, and revolution as a condensed series of reforms....He who pronounces himself in favor of the method of legal reforms *in place or and opposed to* the conquest of political power and social revolution does not really choose a more tranquil, surer and slower road to the *same* goal. He chooses a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new social order, he takes a stand for surface modifications of the old order.⁵⁰

At the same time, Luxemburg sees value in pursuing reforms, provided this is clearly done with the ultimate aim of laying the groundwork for revolution. If those advocating improved conditions for the proletariat within capitalism do so strategically, in order to hasten a ripening of the conditions for a social transformation, Luxemburg is with them. But if their vision is limited to those modest improvements in conditions, she is vociferously against them. "The struggle for reforms," she states, is the *means*; the social revolution, its *goal*.⁵¹

⁴⁹Milner, 1999, 59; de Bernières (1994), 232.

⁵⁰ Luxemburg (1971), 115-116 (italics in original).

⁵¹ Luxemburg (1971), 52 (italics in original).

While century-old arguments between moderate and revolutionary social democrats may seem dated and stale, debates between reformists and radicals remain common in much contemporary literature. Feminists, for instance, have long been divided into streams (albeit fluid ones) based on their analyses of existing social reality and the degree to which they wish to reconstruct it. Liberal feminists essentially accept the prevailing organization of society along individualistic lines, as well as an empiricist methodology, and aim to modify laws and practices to ensure that women receive the same rights always enjoyed by men. Some “standpoint” feminists also seek a type of reform, though in contrast to the liberals, they emphasize the uniqueness of women’s experiences and perspectives in both their epistemology and conceptualization of the sources of, and solutions for, women’s inequality. More radical feminists – for example, those with Marxist or postmodern orientations – argue that real improvement in women’s lives is impossible without the complete replacement of patriarchal social structures. As far as these feminists are concerned, reforms are incapable of producing substantive change because they leave in place the foundations of oppression.⁵²

In the field of international political economy, Caroline Thomas has made a similar reformist-radical differentiation with respect to those who are concerned about the effects of the Western economic policies on developing countries and want a change in approach which will mean less poverty among

⁵² Glenn (1994), 27-28; Harding (1997).

those countries' populations. Reformers, she says, "call for a softening of adjustment policies to make them more in tune with social reality," while "transformers" argue that "the overarching policy of global economic integration via free-market policies, of which structural adjustment forms a part, cannot satisfy the economic or social rights of the majority of human beings or states" and therefore "regard the transformation of social and economic structures as essential to the delivery of economic and social rights to humankind."⁵³

The reformist-radical divergence among egalitarians can be related to positions on the three broad issues discussed in the preceding section: the link between justice and equality, the degree to which gaps are "natural," and the probable impact of narrowing disparities. While there is, as noted, a general consensus among egalitarians on each of these issues – a "qualitative" consensus which defines their ethos and distinguishes it from anti- and non-egalitarianism – differences of views come into play at a more concrete, "quantitative" level:

- Though egalitarians agree that prevailing social inequities are unjust, they do not concur on how unjust. Are disparities bad, but not to the point where they should constitute the sole legitimate concern of those seeking a better world, or are they so nefarious as to demand a singular and uncompromising focus?

⁵³ Thomas (1998), 169, 171, 172.

- Though egalitarians agree that some human attitudes and behaviours -- and concomitant social structures -- can and must be altered in the interests of a less unequal world, they do not concur on the scope of change that is feasible. Are there durable aspects of "human nature" that make existing social structures resilient, constraining the possibility of *sui generis* innovation, or are the attitudes and behaviours in question socially constructed, and the associated structures therefore open to transformation?⁵⁴
- Though egalitarians agree that warnings about the apocalyptic effects of redistribution are overblown, they do not concur on the degree to which such considerations have some substance. Are concerns about government intrusion, economic inefficiencies, and other negative effects of redistribution serious enough to serve as curbs on the egalitarian program, or are they simply the empty, self-serving rhetoric of dominant forces in society?

These divergent perceptions lead to differing strategies for advancing an egalitarian agenda. The more one believes that some disparities are morally acceptable, that human nature and social structures are in some respects enduring, and that non-egalitarian considerations such as efficiency have a degree of validity -- the more one will be prepared to pursue incremental

⁵⁴ In what she sees as perhaps "the essential difference between the 'intuitions' of liberal egalitarians and Marxists," Amy Gutmann writes that "liberal theory does not presuppose a *radical* moral transformation of individuals from their present condition. Neither a complete altruism nor an identity between individual and collective wills is required." (Gutmann, 1980, 229 and fn.46 on 288).

reductions in inequities. Conversely, the more one regards social disparities as intolerable, “human nature” and related social structures as contingent and mutable, and countervailing considerations as inconsequential and propagandistic -- the more one will advocate revolutionary action.

Reformism, then, is about partial redistribution and gradual change, while radicalism is about much more extensive redistribution and dramatic change. To some extent, conceptualizing them in strictly dichotomous terms is an error: clearly, there is something of a continuum, which allows specific programs to be at intervening locations between the reformist and radical ideal types. Nevertheless, there remains an essential divide in the middle of the spectrum that separates those who would amend from those who would start from scratch. This contrast is not merely conceptual, but also empirical: to date, Rosa Luxemburg’s contention that incremental changes could pave the way for upheaval has not really been borne out; reform and revolution have typically been alternative rather than complementary egalitarian strategies, in practice as well as in theory.

Having made the key distinction between reformist and radical egalitarianism – a distinction that will help frame the balance of the dissertation -- we will now look at how egalitarian thought has developed over time, from musings on equality in ancient Greece, to the neo-Marxist and liberal egalitarianism that emerged from the 1960s, to contemporary debates concerning communities, diversity, and cosmopolitanism. This historical overview, as already noted, is of less direct relevance to our subsequent

concern with strategy (and so, can be skimmed by the hurried reader), but it still provides critical background information if we wish to have a clear understanding of how egalitarianism has developed and of the many hues which inform the contemporary egalitarian project.

The Evolution of Egalitarian Thought I: From Antiquity to the Cold War

Antecedents to contemporary egalitarian ideas -- and to the tension between reformism and radicalism -- may be found in ancient texts, particularly those of the Greeks. The Stoics led the way, making human equality a central tenet of their belief system and conjuring visions of a society in which all would live in egalitarian harmony. The myth-weaver Ovid, satirist Lucian, and historian Diodorus Siculus all write of a bygone, profoundly egalitarian Golden Age.⁵⁵ More famously, Plato, in *The Republic*, describes a utopian social order where equality will reign fully among the Guardians, the dominant elite, and to some extent between groups. "It is not the law's concern, " he writes, "that any one class in a state should live surpassingly well. Rather it contrives a good life for the whole state, harmonizing the citizens by persuasion and compulsion, and making them share with one another the advantage which each class can contribute to the community."⁵⁶

While contradictory interpretations are par for the course when it comes

⁵⁵ Cohn (1993), 187-191.

⁵⁶ Plato (1935), 213.

to the ancients, many have seen *The Republic* as a precursor to radical egalitarianism in the modern age, because of its emphasis on a sharing of resources and the collective good. Others, however, see it as inequalitarian because of its class-based divisions.⁵⁷ What we do know is that Plato was not the most radical egalitarian of his age. In *The Politics*, Aristotle writes, after considering *The Republic*, about the more revolutionary proposals of Phaleas of Chalcedon, who believed that wealth should be equally distributed among all. This is the only place we learn of Phaleas, but the reference indicates that such ideas were not unheard of in Antiquity. Aristotle himself is sceptical about such notions. While he warns that “inequality is generally the bottom of internal warfare in states,” he does not advocate strict equality in all domains, but rather advises polities to judiciously pursue a mixture of absolute equality and distribution according to desert.⁵⁸ Given the scope of disparities in ancient Greece, such calls can be seen as partially akin to a kind of cautious reformism, inasmuch as they recommend greater equality but steer a wide berth around dramatic social change or the elimination of “legitimate” hierarchy.

It has been argued that egalitarian sentiments may also be gleaned from many ancient religious scriptures, and that these scriptures played an important role in the emergence of modern ideas about equality and distributive justice.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Annas (1981), 172-178.

⁵⁸ Aristotle (1969b), 191-192.

⁵⁹ Combee & Norton (1991); Lakoff (1967); Mitchell (1993); Rackam (1967); Somjee (1967).

There is no doubt that religious movements often involve both protests against gross inequalities and the desire to establish communities based on human fellowship; witness the role of metaphysical faith in everything from the Essenes' desert settlements two millennia ago to nineteenth century utopian communes in the United States. This may be attributable to a number of factors, including the conceptual impact of thinking about all humans as spiritual participants in a common cosmic system, the fact that religions almost always concern themselves with the establishment of new (and allegedly improved) moral boundaries for behaviour, and the tendency of religions, when they are fresh and battling for followers, to seek out the alienated and disadvantaged. That being said, it is no less true that once established, religions often sustain rather than challenge social disparities; in this sense, the link between scripture and egalitarianism is tentative. This divergence, of course, is very much at the heart of the contemporary debate between Liberation Theology and the mainstream Catholic Church.

The tendency of institutionalized religion to buttress the status quo helps explain why egalitarian strains largely disappeared from European theories about the social order during the early part of the Middle Ages, when popes in Rome and monarchs across the continent were closely allied and rigid hierarchies were deemed to be divinely ordained. Granted, egalitarian sentiments did not disappear from religiously inspired writing; the thirteenth century's *Roman de la Rose*, for example, contained the following lines:

Naked and impotent are all,
 High-born and peasant, great and small.
 The human nature is throughout
 The whole world equal, none can doubt.⁶⁰

For most of the Middle Ages, however, such sentiments were associated with a long-lost Paradise or a far-off End of Days. The notion of the equality of all under Christ was a matter for theology, not society in its present incarnation. Only during the sporadic rebellions of peasants and poor city-dwellers between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries did Christian ideas of human equality begin to be treated as germane to contemporaneous social arrangements. These rebellions often took on a millenarian quality, with messianic leaders declaring that the End of Days was near -- and making revolutionary egalitarianism central to their vision. This was true, most notably, of the English peasants' revolt of 1381, whose leader, John Ball, relied on ideas of natural equality to demand radical redistribution; the Taborite uprising in early fifteenth century Bohemia, which drew large numbers of followers into anarcho-communist settlements and violent attacks on the clergy and nobility; the German peasants' insurrections of the early sixteenth century, whose leader, the mystical egalitarian Thomas Muntzer, dreamed of bringing about the Apocalypse; and the subsequent Anabaptist movement, which scorned the existing social order and championed communal ownership of property.⁶¹

The association of egalitarianism with the millenarian revolts of the

⁶⁰ Cited in Sigmund (1967), 140.

⁶¹ Cohn (1993), chapters 11-13; Sigmund (1967).

disenfranchised is not surprising in medieval Europe, given the dominance of the feudal order by monarchs, nobles, and clergy determined to preserve prevailing inequalities. Elsewhere, egalitarian thinking was less marginalized. In the Arab world, the Koran, with its concern for just social relations, and the writings of the Greeks, including their ideas on distributive fairness, were carefully studied by scholars and some rulers. In China, the governing class was installed on a partially meritocratic rather than aristocratic basis, through written exams, and the accepted view was that if a dynasty ruled poorly, it could lose the “Mandate of Heaven” and be legitimately overthrown. Among indigenous communities, the sharing of resources, maintenance of roughly equal material lifestyles, and wide participation of the population in decision-making were common. Of course, as long as contact between Europe and other societies was limited, the impact of less torpid and hierarchical traditions on Western political theories – which would subsequently become dominant around the globe – remained negligible.

Things began to change with the first stirrings of the Enlightenment. Influenced in part by the peasant insurrections and new information about far-off societies, some privileged European thinkers began to chafe against the bounds of orthodoxy. The Reformation breached hitherto immutable social arrangements, due in part to critiques of the Roman Church’s disregard for the underclass. Advances in the sciences fostered a willingness to question assumptions about what was “natural,” to doubt the infallibility of established authorities, and to conceptualize the world as something that could be

understood and shaped. And exposure to non-European ways of life, as well as the Greek literature reserved in the Arab world, undermined the perceived necessity of the status quo in Europe and invigorated scholars with new ideas about how society might be organized. As a result of such developments, egalitarian notions ceased to be the exclusive preserve of agitated prophets, and began to re-emerge in learned political thought.

The trend really gathered steam from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. John Locke played a critical role in its articulation when he grounded his political theories in the premise of basic human equality, inalienable natural rights, and the social contract. Even if he had never touched on questions of material distribution, these notions would qualify Locke, who lived in an era of aristocratic dominance, as an egalitarian of sorts, at least with respect to political power. Locke, however, did deal with issues of resources and possession. Anti-egalitarian theorists emphasize, with some justification, Locke's focus on property as a natural right; however, it should not be forgotten that Locke delimited this right. Valid ownership, Locke believed, only applied to those things in which people had invested their labour and of which they could make some practical use:

It will, perhaps, be objected to this, that if gathering the acorns or other fruits of the earth, etc., makes a right to them, then any one may engross as much as he will. To which I answer, Not so. The same law of Nature that does by this means give us property, does also bound that property too...As much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils, so much he may by his labour fix a property in. Whatever is beyond this is more than his share, and belongs to others.⁶²

⁶² Locke (2000).

Nozick's interpretation of these caveats, which cast something of a shadow over Locke's effectiveness as a source of libertarian authority, is predictably narrow;⁶³ unsustainably so, according to some egalitarians.⁶⁴ Certainly, Locke's provisos seem to suggest that a not inconsiderable portion of property held by the "haves" in society is fair game for a redistributive agenda. Clearly, though, if Locke is an egalitarian with respect to wealth, he is an egalitarian of a very reformist variety.

If Locke was a reformer, the other progenitor of social contract theory, Rousseau, was an unabashed (if inconsistent) radical. Using dramatic imagery and reviving the Platonic mode of describing the workings of an ideal society, Rousseau advanced the thesis, in the mid-eighteenth century, that politics precedes economics, that private property and the laws that protect it are little more than subterfuges to perpetuate exploitation, and that a more egalitarian, collective compact was both possible and desirable. In Rousseau's opinion, the existing order was constructed when the powerful tricked the vulnerable into agreeing to a society and laws "which gave new fetters to the weak and new powers to the rich, irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, established forever the law of property and inequality, made clever usurpation into an irrevocable right, and, for the benefit of a few ambitious individuals, henceforth subjected the

⁶³ Nozick (1974), 174-182.

⁶⁴ See especially Cohen (1986a).

whole human race to labor, servitude, and misery.”⁶⁵ The answer, Rousseau argued, was for people to establish a new society with far greater equality, meaning at minimum “that power should fall short of all violence and never be exercised except by virtue of rank and law, and that, with regard to wealth, no citizen should be rich enough to be able to buy another, and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself.”⁶⁶ This criterion may not appear to be radical by today’s standards, but it was revolutionary at the time of its writing.

Locke and Rousseau’s analyses and prescriptions played important roles in (respectively, for the most part) the American (1776) and French (1789) revolutions. Both uprisings were justified through reference to basic human equality and the need to apportion power, status, and to some degree wealth more evenly, and both heightened thinkers’ interest in questions of equality. That being said, neither produced significant material (as opposed to political) redistribution. True, the French Revolution was, for a time, highly concerned with matters of wealth inequality; Hannah Arendt even argues, controversially, that this helps explain its failure to produce stable democracy.⁶⁷ However, there was a yawning gap between rhetoric and action, and the French Revolution’s most enthusiastic advocate of radical egalitarianism, François Noel Babeuf, was jailed for his beliefs and, in 1797, executed for plotting to overthrow the government.

⁶⁵ Rousseau (1988a), 44–45.

⁶⁶ Rousseau (1988b), 116.

⁶⁷ Canovan (1998).

The egalitarian impetus evident in the political writings and events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the abject material conditions fostered by industrialization, spawned an increasing preoccupation among political thinkers with problems of inequality through the 1800s. This preoccupation culminated, of course, in the writings of Marx, Engels, and their many socialist and communist comrades and progenies. This school conceptualized the issue of inequality in terms of relations of production: the division between haves and have-nots was, at root, a division between the owners of capital and those compelled to toil for a pittance. In the Marxist analysis, the bourgeoisie grow rich from the surplus generated by an increasingly fettered, impoverished, and alienated proletariat. The solution, it is argued, is for the means of production to be collectively owned, such that the fruits of combining capital and labour will be shared out fairly among all rather than hoarded by the few. The route to achieving this end is revolution, which will inevitably erupt as capitalist exploitation deepens to the point of being insufferable. After the revolution and a period of transition, there will emerge a communist society of abundance, where each will give according to ability and receive according to need.⁶⁸

In light of its emphasis on massive redistribution through a reordering of

⁶⁸ These themes are so familiar as to barely require a citation. They are most extensively developed in *Capital* but alas, I must count myself among the many who have but leafed through that momentous tome (it surely competes with *A Short History of Time* for the title of most-mentioned, least-read publication). Many of Marxism's central messages can be found in the *Communist Manifesto*, albeit not always in a theoretically sophisticated form (Marx & Engels, 2000).

society and its utopian vision, Marxism can be seen as continuing in a direction marked out by Plato and Rousseau. However, it is important to note that Marxism has been ambivalent about egalitarianism, at least as a short term strategy. In part, this is a question of semantics. If egalitarianism is understood in primarily reformist terms, then it is not surprising that Marxists should have their doubts. Marxists, after all, view social disparities as a function of exploitation, not just bad luck; they view equality- and rights-based reforms as a part of individualistic, bourgeois ideology which ultimately serve to reinforce the status quo; and they worry that inconsequential redistribution within the context of capitalism might create the impression of real change, mollify the masses, and delay the revolution, which is the only way of truly eliminating exploitation.

Marx himself expressed profound scepticism about reformist ideas of equality both at the beginning and the end of his career. In "On the Jewish Question," published in 1844, Marx disparages political emancipation -- what many egalitarians would (and did) regard as an important redistribution of power and as progress towards political equality -- deeming it insignificant because of its egotistical nature and reinforcement of prevailing social relations. "The practical application of the right of man to freedom," he argues, "is the right of man to private property."⁶⁹ In *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, written thirty-one years later, Marx scathingly attacks the maxims of "equal right" and

⁶⁹ Waldron (1987), chapter 5 provides an excellent analysis of *On the Jewish Question* and, more generally, of Marx's attitude towards rights. The chapter includes the full text of *On the Jewish Question*. Quote from p. 146.

“fair distribution.”⁷⁰ Indeed, the *Critique* indicates suspicion of the very notion of equality, as the notion involves (says Marx) the imposition of arbitrary, uniform metrics on diverse realities:

Right by its very nature can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable only by an equal standard in so far as they are brought under an equal point of view, are considered in one particular aspect only.⁷¹

Although Marx provides no clear description of what would replace considerations of distributional justice in a future communist society, he does suggest that such considerations will eventually become unnecessary because of the comradeship among individuals and the material plenty resulting from by non-exploitative relations of production. Scholars have been deeply divided on Marx’s attitude towards questions of justice, equality, and rights, in large part because Marx’s comments on these matters were sporadic and ambiguous. In one of the most important attempts to come to grips with this issue, Steven Lukes suggests that Marx’s views actually had four layers: first, Marx showed how exploitation was rendered “just” by capitalism’s internal norms; second, he provided an “internal” critique demonstrating that apparently fair exchanges of labour for wages were nothing of the sort; third, he criticized capitalism for falling short of the principle of “to each according to his labour contribution,” which would guide communism in its initial phase; and finally, he attacked

⁷⁰ Marx (1999).

⁷¹ Cited in Lukes (1993), 171.

exploitation from the vantage point of communism's higher phase, when the very notion of "justice" would become an anachronistic relic of the past.⁷²

When all is said and done, one is inclined to agree with G.A. Cohen's straightforward assertion that Marxists are egalitarians,⁷³ since they oppose existing gaps and seek social arrangements under which wealth, power, and status will no longer be the prerogatives of a small, privileged class. Marxist scepticism about "equality" appears to be tactical, not normative. It is aimed against what it sees as a deceptive, liberal egalitarianism which pursues limited redistribution without the dissolution of existing social structures -- but not against the ultimate goal of redistribution. Indeed, in practice, Marxists have frequently been leaders in struggles for greater equality and basic rights. Thus, the fundamental egalitarian ethos, which sees prevailing disparities as unacceptable and wishes to change them, links Marxists and non-Marxist egalitarians, even when they disagree intensely on the causes of, and solutions for, this problematic. Marxism is one (but only one) form of radical egalitarianism.

Other versions that emerged in Europe during the 1800s included anarchism, which assumed that removal of hierarchical systems of control would lead to a more equal and harmonious society, and mid-century attempts to overthrow the old order, most famously with the establishment of the Paris

⁷² Lukes (1993), 173-174.

⁷³ Cohen (1986b), 80. Warren (1997) provides an excellent exploration of the conceptual compatibility between Marxism and liberal egalitarianism.

Commune. Meanwhile, in the United States, Abolitionist and suffragette thinkers and activists worked (cooperatively for a time) for fundamental redistributions of power and status, and various religiously-motivated groups set up hundreds of highly egalitarian (and usually short-lived) communities. Alongside radical egalitarian thinking were some reformist projects which edged close to the reformist-radical watershed – including Fabianism, Robert Owen's support for peaceful social transformation and cooperative communities, and the moderate social democracy which Lenin execrated.

Partly spurred by concern about the potential for revolutions of the very sort Lenin was seeking (and by 1917, leading), theorists and policy-makers began placing greater emphasis on reformism during the early twentieth century. This was particularly true during the 1920s, because of the perceived threat posed by then Soviet Union and Comintern, and the 1930s, because of the social turmoil sparked by the Great Depression. Thus, John Maynard Keynes, who sought a middle path between unbridled capitalism and socialism, wrote in 1926 of "the end of laissez-faire" and the need for "improvements in the technique of modern Capitalism by the agency of collective action."⁷⁴ Five years later, fellow British scholar R.H. Tawney, who was strongly influenced by both egalitarian strains in Christian scripture and Fabianism, argued in his landmark book, *Equality*, for progressive taxation and large national investments in health, education, and social security to reduce the arbitrary

⁷⁴ Keynes (1963b), 319.

factors giving rise to material inequality. Tawney's vision was of a classless society: "While diversities of income, corresponding to varieties of function and capacity, would survive, they would neither be heightened by capricious inequalities of circumstances and opportunity, nor perpetuated from generation to generation by the institution of inheritance."⁷⁵ Keynes was a supporter of the Liberal Party and Tawney of Labour, but both aspired to a reformed, more egalitarian form of capitalism and each criticized his party of choice for being excessively timid in pursuing such a possibility.⁷⁶ Keynes' prescriptions (and to a lesser extent, Tawney's) soon gained influence as Western democracies, often led by liberal or social-democratic parties, confronted the Great Depression. The American New Deal, which helped legitimize increased state intervention and labour legislation, was manifestly reformist in nature, even if, as Theda Skocpol states, it failed to produce a "social-democratic Keynesian breakthrough."⁷⁷

Reformism remained ascendent as long as unemployment was high, Communist parties were pursuing Popular Front strategies, and the West and Soviet Union were united against a common foe. However, with the advent of the Cold War in the mid-1940s, reformism became a target for attacks from both directions. It was assailed by orthodox Marxists, who reverted to the position that non-revolutionary egalitarianism was little more than window

⁷⁵ Tawney (1964), 150.

⁷⁶ Keynes (1963a); Tawney (1964), 202-210.

⁷⁷ Skocpol (1980), 194.

dressings for capitalism, and by anti-Communist crusaders, who sensed the presence of fellow-travellers under every bed and behind every lectern. In such a Manichean climate, moderate egalitarian theorizing in the Western academy petered out, particularly in the increasingly hegemonic United States.⁷⁸ One of the sole non-Marxist scholarly works with a distinct egalitarian flavour during this era – and one which received tremendous attention in part because it was so exceptional – was John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, published in 1958.⁷⁹

The Evolution of Egalitarian Thought II: Neo-Marxism and Liberal Egalitarianism Since the 1960s

The ebb in egalitarian scholarship lasted into the mid-1960s. Then, as was the case in so many domains, the times began a'changin'.⁸⁰ The decade (roughly) bookended by Kennedy's election and the Beatles' breakup was, of course, defined by the rise of the civil rights and anti-war movements, social ferment around the globe, and a generally liberalized atmosphere. These developments profoundly affected the academy, which soon witnessed the emergence of new versions of Marxism and the gradual revival of non-Marxist

⁷⁸ There is a certain paradox here, since even as reformist ideas went out of fashion, reformist policies continued to hold sway. This situation was reversed in the 1980s and 1990s when, as detailed in chapter 5, egalitarian thought managed to thrive while redistributive policies were rolled back.

⁷⁹ Galbraith (1958). That Galbraith was a Canadian working in the US may have had something to do with his willingness to break with the prevailing mood of the day.

⁸⁰ With apologies to Bob Dylan.

scholarship on issues of distributive equality.

Neo-Marxism was marked by interest in the state and specifically, in the question of whether the state had, to use Nicos Poulantzas' well-known term, a "relative autonomy" that might permit it to be used for the purpose of undermining capitalism. Such a proposition did not sit well with the dominant Marxist analysis, which assumed that political and social realities were merely superstructure: the manifestation of particular economic relations and so, entirely dependent upon them. This traditional view, which helps explain Marx's general contempt for equality rights granted by the liberal state, was central to the conviction that true change could only be accomplished through revolution. Neo-Marxists found sources and concepts to challenge this view. Drawing, *inter alia*, upon the Marx of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and the writings of Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci, theorists such as Poulantzas, Ralph Miliband, and Louis Althusser criticized established Marxists' reductionist "economism," which, they said, ignored the complexity of the state and its relationship with society. States, in their view, are multi-faceted institutions which may advance a number of purposes at once and be riven by internal contradictions.⁸¹ Though neo-Marxists were at pains to stress that they still believed the state was largely a tool of the ruling classes – especially after some critics questioned their Marxist credentials – their reasoning still implied the possibility of advancing Marxist ends through the penetration and transformation, rather

⁸¹ Althusser (1970); Miliband (1969); Poulantzas (1973). For one of the clearest overviews of the neo-Marxist literature during its mid-1970s zenith, see Jessop (1977).

than destruction, of existing state structures. In so doing, it brought Marxism a step closer to reformism. This trend was reinforced as the economic failings and repressive nature of “real existing” state socialism became increasingly apparent. From the 1970s, it found expression not only in neo-Marxist writings proper, but also in the works of neo-Marxist-influenced political economists and scholars interested in “bringing the state back in” to political studies.⁸²

The non-Marxist work on questions of substantive equality which paralleled (and only occasionally interacted with) neo-Marxism began with a number of publications in the 1960s, notably in the United States. Michael Harrington reminded self-satisfied Americans of the existence of “invisible poor” in their midst. Bernard Williams, in a path-breaking essay called “The Idea of Equality,” argued that the sole relevant criterion for certain types of distribution (for example, of medical care) was need, not money, and that true equality of opportunity had to result in approximate equality of outcome (foreshadowing later arguments in favour of affirmative action). Stanley Benn, in a seminal yearbook of the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy devoted to equality, advocated a non-formalistic, substantive approach to dealing with social gaps. And Hugo Adam Bedau, writing in the same yearbook, dismissed a radical egalitarianism aiming for equality in all respects, but championed the idea that “all social inequalities not necessary or justifiable should be eliminated.” This sort of theorizing quickly elicited anti-egalitarian responses:

⁸² Evans et al. (1985).

Milton Friedman, for example, strongly attacked egalitarianism as ethically indefensible and practically dangerous, while J.R. Lucas warned that “[t]he egalitarian is doomed to a life not only of grumbling and everlasting envy, but of endless and inevitable disappointment.”⁸³

Notwithstanding this expanding discussion, a sustained discourse among non-Marxist scholars on issues of inequality and redistribution only got under way following the publication, in 1971, of John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*.⁸⁴ It is difficult to overstate the impact of the text. To this day, most works on egalitarian theory – whether or not they are sympathetic to Rawls’ arguments -- reference his approaches, and many still use them as a touchstone. *A Theory of Justice* was, in the words of Kukathas and Pettit, “the big book: the book which...would make an unquestioned advance on established roads of thought...[and] vindicate and boost the new developments, ensuring the resurgence of political theory.”⁸⁵ William B. Griffith has called Rawls’ work “the fundamental reference point” for “the contemporary debate over egalitarianism.”⁸⁶ Whether Rawls’ theoretical contributions completely justify this attention is questionable: like most scholars, he actually reconstituted rather than invented many ideas. Nonetheless, the fact is that both the

⁸³ Harrington (1967); Williams (1997); Benn (1967); Bedau (1967), 26; Friedman (1967); Lucas (1997), 111.

⁸⁴ Rawls (1971).

⁸⁵ Kukathas & Pettit (1990), 6.

⁸⁶ Griffith (1994), 5.

persuasive style of the reconstitution – using arresting imaginative devices rather than dry argumentation -- and the linkage between liberal theory and redistributive politics were sufficient to re-energize the debate over egalitarianism and stimulate countless responses and refinements.

Rawls trod where political thinkers had hesitated to go for decades: into the contentious territory in which philosophies of justice and their implications for real-world politics are explored together. Drawing upon Kant and social contract theory, Rawls argued that the only way to determine what system would be just was to imagine the arrangements people would select if they were in an “original position” behind a “veil of ignorance”; that is, without any inkling of the social status they would have under the chosen arrangements. The outcome, Rawls believed, would be agreement on a system based on the following axioms:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.

Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.⁸⁷

Rawls grants the first principle priority over the second, and part (b) of the second priority over part (a). Nevertheless, given the relatively uncontroversial character of the prioritized elements, it is the approach to equality captured under (a) of the second principle, termed the difference principle or “maximin,” that constitutes Rawls’ most enduring contribution to

⁸⁷ Rawls (1971), 60.

egalitarian theory. The difference principle admits certain disparities if, for instance, they produce incentives which foster economic growth for the good of all, but tolerates no greater deviance from equality than can be justified by such general effects. In Rawls' scheme, it is the role of government to redistribute any concentration of "primary goods" exceeding the threshold established by the difference principle. "Injustice," he argues, "is simply inequalities that are not to the benefit of all."⁸⁸ That these inequalities might result from personal endowments is irrelevant: Rawls argues that individual abilities and talents are distributed arbitrarily and should therefore be treated as collectively held. This position elicits a stinging attack from Nozick, who believes it reduces the "self" to an empty shell.

The "primary goods" to which Rawls refers include basic liberties, freedom of movement and choice of occupation, the prerogatives of positions of responsibility, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect. Given that the first two of these five items are secured by the first axiom and part (b) of the second axiom, what is left for the difference principle are the last three primary goods. Many interpretations of Rawls, however, focus solely on income and wealth, presumably because the other two items are rather nebulous, and because Rawls himself, in elaborating upon his ideas, seems to do much the same.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Rawls (1971), 62.

⁸⁹ For a later attempt by Rawls to flesh out his notion of primary goods, see Rawls (1982).

A Theory of Justice set off a wave of egalitarian theorizing which has hardly abated, even three decades later. While it is possible to speculate at length about the sources of this scholarly exuberance, one explanation might be the fact that Rawls, and those who followed him, laid out an intuitively persuasive foundation for theory-development by thinkers animated by a (pent-up) egalitarian ethos, but unsympathetic to Marxist theory and disturbed by Communist realities. Judith Shklar writes that “John Rawls’ *Theory of Justice* was a great event not only because of its intrinsic excellence but also because it freed many of its readers from a long, self-imposed philosophical silence.”⁹⁰ Whatever the reason, discussions of egalitarian theory since 1971 have been vigorous, focusing on two central topics: what is it we should seek to equalize?, a question debated, for the most part, by people whose main theoretical concern is egalitarianism; and what are the roles of collectivities in, and the boundaries for, egalitarian projects?, issues usually raised by schools whose concerns are wider than redistribution *per se*.

The “equality of what?” debate was largely initiated by Amartya Sen with his 1979 Tanner Lectures of that name, and has mostly (though not exclusively) occupied liberal egalitarians. Responding to *A Theory of Justice*, Sen concurs with Rawls’ rejection of utilitarian-welfarist approaches to distribution, but goes on to argue that Rawls’ proposed alternative is unsatisfactory. A central problem with the difference principle, he says, is that it fails to calibrate

⁹⁰ Shklar (1986), 13.

resources to reflect special situations such as those of people with disabilities. Moreover, it is unable to take account of the more general reality that different individuals have different needs, such that the same primary goods will lead to very different outcomes. Indeed, its exclusive preoccupation with goods rather than their impact is seriously misplaced. Making an argument others repeat, Sen states that “there is, in fact, an element of ‘fetishism’ in the Rawlsian framework. Rawls takes primary goods as the embodiment of advantage, rather than taking advantage to be a *relationship* between persons and goods....rejection of welfarism need not take us to the point where utility is given no role whatsoever.”⁹¹ Sen believes that the best answer to “equality of what?” is “some notion of ‘basic capabilities’: a person being able to do certain basic things.”⁹² As examples, he offers the ability to satisfy one’s nutritional requirements, obtain clothing and shelter, and participate in communal social life. These concerns dovetail with Sen’s interest in questions of development and his long-standing view that conventional Western development theories are overly preoccupied with money as such, rather than tangible well-being, as experienced by people in different geographic and cultural locations. In writings subsequent to the Tanner Lecture, Sen has elucidated his ideas on “equality of what?” by referring to a person’s “functionings” -- full engagement in a variety of spheres -- where capabilities constitute the conditions that enable an individual

⁹¹ Sen (1982), 366 (italics in original).

⁹² Ibid, 367.

to realize these functionings. It is qualitative results, then, that interest Sen. An expensive school may contribute less to the life capabilities of poor village children than a well-trained teacher, and a costly piece of diagnostic equipment less than the distribution of basic medications. It is capabilities for functioning, not goods, that Sen wishes to equalize.⁹³

Two years after Sen's "equality of what?" lecture, Ronald Dworkin published two influential essays which played a key role in setting the terms of the subsequent debate over the target of equalization. In "What is Equality? Part I: Equality of Welfare" and "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources,"⁹⁴ Dworkin argues, like Rawls, against seeking equality of welfare. Equality of welfare, he says, is untenable because some people have expensive or offensive tastes that the rest of society should not be obliged to support, because individuals should be expected to take responsibility for the results of their decisions, and because no one should benefit or suffer due to the distribution of personal attributes over which they have no control. Egalitarians, Dworkin contends, should seek to ensure the equalization of every person's resources for making a life for themselves, not their welfare *per se*, and he argues that because this approach is more ambition-sensitive and endowment-insensitive than equality of welfare approaches, it is more just. Dworkin attempts to preempt the sort of criticism directed by Nozick against

⁹³ Sen (1991, 1996).

⁹⁴ Dworkin (1981a); Dworkin (1981b); recently reprinted in Dworkin (2000). For an elaboration of the argument, see Dworkin (1985).

Rawls on the issue of personal endowments by distinguishing between “ambitions” and “handicaps”; that is, between “those beliefs and attitudes that define what a successful life would be like, which the ideal assigns to the person, and those features of body or mind or personality that provide means or impediments to that success, which the ideal assigns to the person's circumstances.”⁹⁵

In addition to providing a clearer distinction than Rawls between those traits eligible for compensation and those ineligible, Dworkin argues that equality of resources improves on *A Theory of Justice's* difference principle in two inter-related ways. First, it more effectively deals with a situation where society must choose between an option which marginally worsens the position of the worst-off or dramatically worsens the position of other groups; the difference principle requires, unreasonably, that the former option be selected, while equality of resources does not. Second, it concentrates on individuals, not groups or social classes, and so is more attentive to variations in personal situations and less prone to a “flat interpretation of equality.”⁹⁶

In many respects, Dworkin's prescription is an expansive version of traditional liberal equality of opportunity: he wishes to leave choices about how to live to the individual, but to ensure that everyone has the same ability to realize those choices. In contrast to libertarian liberals, however, egalitarian

⁹⁵ Dworkin (1981b), 303.

⁹⁶ Dworkin (1981b), 338-344. Quote from 343.

liberals like Dworkin believe that equality of opportunity in an unequal world requires more than leaving people to their own devices – it requires equalizing the means by which good lives may be made. Their theoretical point-of-departure is not far from Nozick's, but their destination is closer to social democracy. In Dworkin's words, a "community that is committed to equality of resources, so that people can make their own decisions about what lives are best for them, enforces rather than subverts proper principles of individual responsibility."⁹⁷

Other theorists joined the debate over the object, or defining criterion, of egalitarian justice, during the 1980s. In his 1989 essay, "Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare",⁹⁸ Richard Arneson argues that Dworkin's equality of resources is flawed because it provides no practical method for compensating for differences in personal attributes and makes it likely that the naturally talented will be subjugated to the needs of the less fortunate and, ultimately, will enjoy less well-being. Arneson agrees with Dworkin that equality of welfare is an undesirable criterion for fair distribution, since it ignores people's responsibility for their decisions, but challenges the argument that the best alternative is equality of resources. Instead, says Arneson, egalitarians should pursue equal opportunity for welfare, which is designed to pay attention to people's satisfaction, remove the impact of luck, and preserve the relevance of

⁹⁷ Dworkin (2000), 319.

⁹⁸ Arneson (1989).

responsible choices. This standard is realized, he states, when all people

face equivalent decision trees...equivalent arrays of options...When persons enjoy equal opportunity for welfare in the extended sense, any actual inequality of welfare in the positions they reach is due to factors that lie within each individual's control. Thus, any such inequality will be nonproblematic from the standpoint of distributive equality.⁹⁹

A decade later, he reformulated his standard in a clearer fashion, stating that

true equality of opportunity obtains between two persons only when their material resource allocations are adjusted and the social environment altered in other ways so that if each behaves as prudently as it would be reasonable to expect over the course of her life, each has the same expected welfare (and in addition, the less than best sequences of choices that the individuals might select are also matched in expected welfare).¹⁰⁰

Having furnished a crisper statement of his principle, however, Arneson goes on in the same article to retreat from it. He does so in the face of a critique by Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, who doubts that equal opportunity for welfare can correct for bad luck which befalls someone after they have started down their decision path, or incorporate a viable understanding of individual responsibility.¹⁰¹ In the end, Arneson endorses a variation of a new construct developed by Derek Parfit and Paul Weirich, prioritarianism, which holds that the value of a gain provided to someone increases in proportion to (a) the enhancement of the individual's well-being as a result of the gain, (b) the degree to which the individual's well-being was low prior to the gain, and (c) the

⁹⁹ Ibid, 85-86.

¹⁰⁰ Arneson (1999), 489.

¹⁰¹ Lippert-Rasmussen (1999).

extent to which the individual's low well-being is beyond his control.

Conversely, the disvalue (their word) increases to the extent that the better-off person from whom the gain is to be transferred is responsible for his fortunate position.¹⁰² This approach bears obvious resemblances to non-egalitarian conceptions of distributive justice discussed earlier (such as Frankfurt's doctrine of sufficiency) with which, I have already noted, egalitarianism has some unmistakable affinities.

The same year that Arneson first proposed equal opportunity for welfare, G.A.Cohen – one of the few Marxists to participate actively in the “equality of what?” discussion – suggested yet another formulation: equal access to advantage.¹⁰³ Cohen agrees with Dworkin that simple equality of welfare is flawed, but disagrees that the only alternative is equality of resources. He believes Arneson has persuasively shown other options are available, but faults equal opportunity for welfare for being too narrow. The general problem with welfare approaches, says Cohen, is that they did not account for situations where someone is relatively content but still, because of some sort of disability, receives compensation for their resource deficit (compensation such as a wheelchair). Similarly, resource approaches fail to explain situations where people's resources are equal to others', but they receive some form of compensation for “illfare” (such as well-being-reducing pain). The solution, in

¹⁰² Arneson (1999), 497.

¹⁰³ Cohen (1989).

Cohen's view, is to differentiate between factors which will and will not be equalized on the basis of the individual's degree of choice regarding the factor. "The right cut," he says, taking direct aim at Dworkin, "is between responsibility and bad luck, not between preferences and resources."¹⁰⁴ Cohen uses the term "access" to indicate that it is the potential for satisfaction, not satisfaction itself, which is the egalitarian's concern (this is similar to the reason Arneson employs "opportunity"), and he uses "advantage" as an inclusive concept embracing both resources and welfare (though he expresses dissatisfaction with the messiness of this dual meaning).

The difference between Cohen's scheme and the Rawls/Dworkin resources criterion becomes evident around the expensive tastes questions.

Cohen writes that:

Egalitarians have good reason not to minister to deliberately cultivated expensive tastes, and equality of welfare must, therefore, be rejected. But we should not embrace equality of resources instead, since that doctrine wrongly refuses compensation for involuntary expensive tastes, and it does not refuse compensation for voluntary ones for the right reason.¹⁰⁵

He is inclined to think that his approach may be more analogous to Sen's concern for capabilities, but ultimately is not sure if this is so because of the ambiguity in Sen's application of the concept.¹⁰⁶ Cohen tries hard to avoid any such fuzziness, summarizing his position repeatedly in succinct formulations

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 922.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 923.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 941-944.

such as, “the positive injunction is to equalize advantage, save where inequality of advantage reflects choice.”¹⁰⁷

This extended debate about the standard for redistribution has been highly involved, frequently brilliant, and, the truth be told, of questionable practical import. Even Cohen concedes that he is mainly concerned with rendering the “supreme effect” of Dworkin’s contribution “more explicit,” not breaking dramatically new ground.¹⁰⁸ Egalitarians long ago agreed that strict equality of outcome in every domain was neither possible nor desirable, but that everyone should still have a similar chance of leading fulfilled, meaningful lives. At the end of the day, those engaged in the “equality of what?” debate have been concerned with finding the best way of articulating shared egalitarian instincts: first, that all people should be given a comparable ability to live good lives; second, that impairments to this ability beyond people’s control should be addressed; and third, that attributes or circumstances within people’s control should not be addressed. It is by no means clear that the subtle variations in their formulas mean much for egalitarian politics, as opposed to theory -- something the thinkers themselves occasionally acknowledge. Says Arneson in comparing his approach with equality of resources: “in the real world, with imperfect information available to citizens and policymakers, and imperfect willingness on the part of citizens and officials to carry out conscientiously

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 934.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 933.

whatever norm is chosen, the practical implications of these conflicting principles may be hard to discern, and may not diverge much in practice.”¹⁰⁹

The Evolution of Egalitarian Thought III: Debates Over Collectivities and Boundaries

Up to this stage, it has been fairly easy to determine what qualifies as pertinent egalitarian writing. For older works, that task was facilitated both by the existence of an obvious foil in theories of natural superiority, and the fact that the literature was relatively limited in scope due to a lack of scholarly interest. When it came to more recent literature, the task remained straightforward for neo-Marxism and liberal egalitarianism, given their preeminent concern with the reduction of disparities.

The designation of works as egalitarian becomes more complicated, however, for the increasingly wide range of literatures that begin to deal with social gaps from the 1970s. While these literatures are broadly concerned with questions of justice and status, material redistribution is often a secondary focus. Culling what might reasonably be deemed egalitarian theory from related theorizing in schools such as communitarianism, feminism, and multiculturalism requires some effort. But this effort is essential, for given the magnitude of the literatures in question, failure to distinguish between what is and is not germane to our overview could lead to conceptual bedlam -- and an

¹⁰⁹ Arneson (1987), 87.

even longer theory chapter.

A very significant portion of the work carried out in the humanities and social sciences today seeks to contribute to the reduction of social injustices of some sort. Were that to be our sole benchmark for “egalitarianism”, we could end up netting everything from efforts to decentre the “canon,” so that non-Western sources are given a more honourable place; to feminist accounts of political processes, since they seek to address the sources of women’s exclusion; to statistical monographs on the impact of health care funding, because they help ensure more equitable support for disadvantaged regions and populations.

These examples illustrate the need for rigour around delineating what counts here as relevant egalitarian theorizing, lest the dissertation be consumed by an array of literatures only loosely related to one another and to the dissertation’s purposes. I will, therefore, deem scholarship to be germane if, and only if, it (a) makes material redistribution its primary concern, and (b) somehow links theory to real-world distributive issues. These criteria reflect the primary preoccupation of the dissertation: shrinking gaps in tangible resources. I have already noted that egalitarians may be concerned with the uneven allocation of wealth, power, and status; however, it is the first of these categories that will be the main focus herein. I recognize, of course, that these categories are to some degree fungible, and that an argument can be made in favour of giving the same weight to all types of redistribution. More power or status, after all, can often mean more money. That being said, there can also

be, in practice, problems with simultaneously pursuing progress in all three categories. People's capacity to work towards and support change is not unlimited, and to the extent that it is expended in one area – say, more equitable legal recognition for different family structures – it may not be as available for others – say, more food for hungry children. Moreover, success in a more symbolic domain, even without material change, may lead to premature demobilization as people conclude that the battle has been won. Although it would be misleading to conceptualize matters as a zero-sum game, it is also simplistic to think that choices do not have to be made. The fact that it is difficult to achieve greater substantive equality on all fronts at once means that priorities must be established, and in this connection, I would argue that material redistribution is more fundamental and more pressing than other types. This is not to dismiss the significance of narrowing gaps in power or status – indeed, efforts to do so will appear more than once in the chapters that follow – nor to negate the possibility that under some conditions, various sorts of redistribution may be mutually reinforcing. But it is to indicate where the emphasis will be placed.¹¹⁰

Consequently, studies which deal only peripherally with material equality, which restrict themselves to high theory or the internal discourses of the academy, or which (conversely) are narrow and technical will not be reviewed below. Notwithstanding this cull, the two criteria provided in the preceding

¹¹⁰ For a good overview piece that distinguishes not only between formal and substantive equality, but also between the many variations of the latter, see Pojman (2002).

paragraph still leave (as the balance of this chapter demonstrates) a wide range of literatures to be considered – while allowing for some focus and conceptual clarity.

With filters in place, we can now consider challenges to prevailing egalitarian notions which, in contrast to libertarianism, still have redistribution as a goal. These challenges are rooted in a number of different (though often inter-related) literatures, and tend to centre around two broad issues: the role of collectivities in the egalitarian project, and the boundaries of the egalitarian project.

Both these issues appear in the communitarian critique of liberal egalitarianism. This critique reflects the more general communitarian challenge to liberalism – a challenge that is primarily concerned with the conceptualization of the individual and the community. Communitarians argue that liberalism erroneously and simplistically treats individuals as discrete entities who rationally invent social frameworks. Instead, say communitarians, the individual should be understood as enmeshed in a community, which has an independent existence that in many respects precedes any particular person. As April Carter and Geoffrey Stokes write, communitarians “are united in their claim that individuals do not exist independently of the society and culture within which they acquire their values, beliefs and perceptions of the social world.”¹¹¹ In this view, the liberal conceptualization of the individual is impoverished, inasmuch

¹¹¹ Carter & Stokes (1998), 7.

as it fails to understand how deeply involved she is in her social framework and how important that framework is for the development of meanings.

Michael Sandel has provided the most trenchant communitarian critique of Rawls, zeroing in on Rawls' conception of the self. Like Nozick, Sandel believes that *A Theory of Justice* posits an indefensible self devoid of any real content. Unlike Nozick, his alternative does not rely on robust, rights-possessing individuals, but rather, on a self intertwined with community. It is untenable, Sandel contends, to propose an original position that abstracts the individual, making him separate from, and prior to, his social environment. Real human beings have the capacity to engage in the sorts of reflection demanded by Rawlsian theory precisely because they are already embedded in a community. Philosophies of justice are therefore coherent only if they recognize and reflect the social context of the self.¹¹²

Although Sandel is the *locus classicus* for communitarian critiques of Rawls, he pays little attention to questions of redistribution. The communitarian theorist who has dealt most extensively with such questions is Michael Walzer,

¹¹² Kukathas & Pettit (1990); Sandel (1998); The relationship between conceptualizations of the self and theories of justice is a fascinating and important issue more generally, though not one we need to get into (beyond a tangential footnote) for the purposes of this dissertation. In many respects, it links back to questions of responsibility: if we agree, as a principle of justice, that people should not suffer due to factors beyond their control, we must have some clear idea of what we identify with the individual -- that is, what we deem to be under her control -- and what we treat as beyond the scope of choice and so, a concern of justice and society. Attributing "too much" to the self can be seen as a way of denying the effects of social forces and justifying rectifiable afflictions. This is typically a criticism directed against libertarianism. Attributing "too little" to the self can be seen as a way of emptying the individual of significance and eliminating any notion of personal responsibility. This is often a criticism aimed against theories on the left. This entire debate parallels (reproduces?) the long-running controversy among philosophers regarding free will, and among social scientists regarding agency and structure

who has famously argued for a notion of “complex equality.”¹¹³ In Walzer’s opinion, it is not possible to develop a single principle of distribution for all domains, all communities, and all times. His approach recognizes the existence of autonomous distributional questions in a variety of spheres and the key role of community values in determining what constitute just allocative criteria within each of these spheres. This reflects his view that goods do not have any intrinsic meanings: their significance, and the related patterns of “just” distribution, are socially constructed. Against Rawls’ abstracted Original Position, Walzer argues that:

the question most likely to arise in the minds of the members of a political community is not, What would rational individuals choose under universalizing conditions of such-and-such sort? But rather, What would individuals like us choose, who are situated as we are, who share a culture and are determined to go on sharing it? And this is a question that is readily transformed into, What choices have we already made in the course of our common life? What understandings do we (really) share?¹¹⁴

By stressing the plurality of spheres and the centrality of collective norms, Walzer is opposing the sorts of universalist principles advocated by most egalitarians. He does not see this as a rejection of egalitarianism, however, but as a path to a more genuine and plausible egalitarianism. The problem in contemporary society, according to Walzer, is that it permits success in a single sphere (money-making in capitalist states) to be granted ascendancy in other spheres, where different criteria ought to reign. Once this situation is

¹¹³ Walzer (1983, 1986, 1995).

¹¹⁴ Walzer (1983), 7.

corrected -- that is, once the autonomy of the spheres with their distinct success criteria is protected -- different people are almost certain to prevail in different spheres, such that everyone succeeds somewhere and the overall distribution of social goods is comparatively egalitarian. This redistributive effect is the necessary upshot of the wide and varied distribution of talents in the population. Complex equality is achieved when different people and groups dominate in different spheres, with none dominating in all. Walzer's approach, which he himself defines as democratic socialist, has been seen by sympathetic commentators as a path-breaking contribution to the literature on egalitarianism, not least of all because it is much better-grounded in the concrete realities of everyday social life than the established liberal theories it challenges.¹¹⁵

Others, however, are less convinced. Critics have expressed doubt that spheres can be kept discrete in the real world, where the boundaries between areas of social activity are usually amorphous, and have argued that even within single societies and single spheres, more than one set of distributive criteria may exist, creating irresolvable complications if general principles are not available to arbitrate. If accepted, these observations alone would seriously erode Walzer's contention that his approach would enhance equality. But his egalitarian claim is also attacked head-on, on two bases. First, deferring to community standards for distributive justice may mean accepting profound

¹¹⁵ See especially Miller (1995).

inequalities which go strongly against the egalitarian grain.¹¹⁶ This is, in essence, a rebuttal of the idea that egalitarianism can do entirely without broad, if not universal, ethical principles. Second, it is questionable whether increased equality really is a necessary outcome of Walzer's scheme, even if one accepts his other premises. After all, say the sceptics, such an outcome depends wholly on dubious assumptions about the distribution of talent in the population; that is, in Richard Bellamy's colourful turn of phrase, "that there are no renaissance men and women who happen to excel at most, if not all, things, or any complete duffers who are no good at anything, or whose only talent lies in a somewhat trivial sphere, such as the ability to recite the whole railway timetable from memory."¹¹⁷ Thus, the egalitarian results Walzer anticipates attaining indirectly through the separation of spheres (rather than directly through intentional redistribution) could be wishful thinking – and if this proves to be the case, there is no fallback mechanism in Walzer's theory to permit some other route to increasing substantive equality.

Even fellow-communitarian Charles Taylor, who is highly sympathetic to Walzer's work, wonders "whether one can do altogether without any principles

¹¹⁶ Arneson (1995); Den-Hartogh (1999). This objection reflects a more general debate over the relationship between communitarian ideas and social change. Communitarianism shares some significant features with Marxism -- concern about the alienation of the individual, attraction to organic collectivities, etc. -- and often appears informed by Marxist theory. However, its deference to community norms can also lead it to be interpreted as a fundamentally conservative philosophy.

¹¹⁷ Bellamy (1998), 167.

of distributive justice.”¹¹⁸ Having raised that question, however, Taylor still believes, like Walzer, that the complexity of society and inter-relationship between the individual and community mean that the liberal egalitarian effort to devise a universal tenet of distributive justice is doomed to failure. In Taylor’s view, there are two core distributive principles that are complementary, yet exist in tension: the urge to divide social goods equally, and the urge to divide them according to individual contribution. A healthy, realistic society, Taylor suggests, finds ways of balancing these principles. The problem in the contemporary West is that profound atomization has caused people to become alienated from social frameworks based on common citizenship, forget the ways they are dependent upon one another, and so, over-emphasize (uneven) distribution according to contribution and under-emphasize egalitarianism. He hopes for a “radical socialist politics” that would reduce the influence of multinational corporations, decentralize power, reverse processes of alienation, and thus, restore a degree of egalitarianism to Western social life. He is not, however, optimistic about the prospects: “this alternative,” he writes, “may be too weak in the face of the illusions of atomistic self-dependence on the one side and the Marxist mirage of communist society on the other, which both draw on the favorite self-delusion of western civilization, that of absolute freedom.”¹¹⁹

Taylor’s attempt at communitarian egalitarianism is vulnerable to some

¹¹⁸ Taylor (1986), 46.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 67.

of the same complaints that have been levelled against Walzer; namely, that redistribution is at best an incidental effect of its prescriptions.

Communitarianism has been very good at developing proposals for political systems that significantly modify prevailing liberal democratic models, as Taylor's own work shows. Perhaps the communitarians' difficulty registering similar success with respect to redistribution reflects a certain lack of congruity between their egalitarian instincts¹²⁰ and their stress on the embeddedness of the self and importance of collective norms. Arguably, their diagnosis of excessive liberal abstraction and individualism has proven more effective than the remedies they have prescribed.

That being said, Rawls has not been unaffected by communitarian criticisms. Most notably, in his 1993 book, *Political Liberalism*, he firmly situates his theory of justice within the political framework and history of the United States, thereby addressing the charge that he aspires to an ethereal philosophy detached from communally-based values.¹²¹ Although *Political Liberalism* has been widely interpreted as a retreat from egalitarianism, in part because it devotes little space to questions of distribution, Rawls has insisted this is not the case.

Communitarians, of course, are not the only theorists to criticize liberalism's conceptualization of the individual. This insight has also been a

¹²⁰ Walzer is an editor of *Dissent*; Taylor a supporter of the New Democratic Party.

¹²¹ Rawls (1993).

hallmark of feminism, though it has taken the feminist critique in a different direction from the communitarian one. Feminists believe that traditional liberals have tended to universalize male experience, ignoring the ways that sex and gender shape a person's life. The result has often been oppression disguised as neutrality. One of feminism's objectives is to uncover the role of gender in social relations as a first step towards ending male domination.¹²²

Most of the feminist discourse has dealt not with material redistribution, but with issues such as the dynamics of gender relations, sexual roles and sexuality, and internal theoretical quarrels. When feminists *have* directly engaged questions of material redistribution and attempted to link theory and practice, they, like communitarians, have been concerned with collectivities. In contrast to Walzer, Taylor, and company, however, the main collectivities that interest feminists are the sexes, and the primary focus is in equalization between rather than within those collectivities. Though they differ in their prescriptions, feminist egalitarians all set out from the premise that allocation is gendered. This belief that social disparities are partly rooted in gender relations means that any redistributive philosophy that ignores gender is flawed.

Perhaps the best-known feminist challenge to Rawlsian egalitarianism has come from Susan Moller Okin. Rawls, she argues, fails to recognize the importance of gender inequalities within the family unit, and the necessary role

¹²² Generalizations about a field as varied and saturated with debate as feminism are, of course, a bit tenuous. I think those I am offering here are sound, but I am not unaware of the difficulty of saying anything all-inclusive about feminism. For succinct, up-to-date overviews of feminist thought, see the introductions to two recent collections: Fricker & Hornsby (2000) and Kemp & Squires (1997).

of empathy in any theory of justice.¹²³ These lacuna can be corrected, in her view, if the original position is reconceptualized in a manner that makes it truly gender neutral by placing sex behind the veil of ignorance, and if self-interest is supplemented with concern for others. The result, she says, would be a fuller egalitarianism, since it would include rectification of gender-based gaps. Taking a similar tack, Martha Nussbaum argues that liberal notions of justice need to be augmented with what she terms compassion or sympathetic understanding, however difficult it may be for people to know how far to go with sympathy when social relations involve dominance.¹²⁴ Christine Koggel, too, advocates an approach to egalitarianism based less on isolated individuals and more on empathic relationships.¹²⁵ These theorists draw upon the path-breaking work of Carol Gilligan on typically female, care-based moral instincts – work that energized standpoint theory, though it also brought charges of sexual essentialism from some feminist quarters.¹²⁶ The standpoint-influenced perspective, however, does not completely remove these thinkers from traditional approaches to questions of justice: although they are highly critical of liberal thought, the ultimate import of their contributions is less to overturn than overhaul, by advocating a more gender-sensitive egalitarianism.

¹²³ Okin (1989, 1990).

¹²⁴ Nussbaum (1996, 1999)

¹²⁵ Koggel (1998).

¹²⁶ Gilligan (1982). Nussbaum (1999, 13) cites Catharine MacKinnon's acid comment regarding Gilligan's assertion that women have a different ethical voice: "If you will take your foot off our necks, then you will hear in what voice women speak."

Feminist adherents of Marxism are, predictably, much more sceptical about the possibility of achieving gender-sensitive redistribution without far-reaching social transformations. Socialist feminism argues that the dynamics of gender oppression (patriarchy) and exploitation (capitalism) are so deeply intertwined that it only makes sense to analyse and attack them together. As Zillah Eisenstein wrote in a landmark 1977 article which attempted to outline the logic and organization of a socialist feminist theory:

If the other side of production is consumption, the other side of capitalism is patriarchy...The model with which we would be working would direct attention to class differences within the context of the basic relationship between the sexual hierarchy of society and capitalism. Such an analysis of socialist feminism could continue to explore the relationships between these systems, which in essence are not separate systems and hence need to be dealt with in their internal web.¹²⁷

Socialist feminism believes that women's traditional domestic responsibilities play a key role in propping up capitalism, and that gender domination and capitalist relations of production must be ended in tandem. This thesis was highly popular during the 1970s and early 1980s, but thereafter began to lose ground, especially in the United States. This retreat has much to do with the difficulty of persuasively integrating class- and sex-based theories of oppression and liberation: inevitably, perhaps, questions of theoretical priority and practical strategy split socialist feminists and created tensions with other feminists and other Marxists.¹²⁸ Socialist feminist icon Barbara Ehrenreich, for

¹²⁷ Eisenstein (1990), 139.

¹²⁸ English et al. (1990).

example, writes bitterly about “the destruction of organized socialist feminisms by various Marxist-Leninist and Maoist groups” through “arcane struggles over the ‘correct line’.”¹²⁹ Despite the efforts of scholars such as Sandra Morgen to rejuvenate socialist feminist thought in the late 1980s¹³⁰ and the continuing influence of socialist feminism in Canada and Britain, it lost much of its cachet on American campuses -- and thus, much of its pre-eminence in feminist scholarship -- as a new generation turned their attention to questions of psychology and representation.

This stream of feminism, has drawn heavily (and inordinately, some would say) on psychoanalytic and postmodern literature to explore subtle dynamics of gender construction and domination. In contrast to socialists, who believe the material produces the social, thinkers in these quarters prioritize cognition and symbols, paying scant attention to issues of substantive distribution. While it is conceivable that less constrained ways of thinking about sexes and sexualities may indirectly lay the groundwork for some sort of substantive egalitarianism, this process is too incidental to justify treating the literature in question as primarily egalitarian, as understood for the purposes of this project.

To some degree, the same may be said of the loose cluster of intellectual currents that focus on diversity and “difference.” Like the other

¹²⁹ Ehrenreich (1990), 275-276, n.1.

¹³⁰ Morgen (1990).

schools examined in this section, these currents react strongly to liberalism's perceived over-emphasis on an abstract individual, to the exclusion of collectivities. The multiculturalism associated with thinkers like Will Kymlicka -- who proposes that liberal political theory be modified to better integrate, and facilitate the survival of, minority cultures¹³¹ -- is most germane in the present context, inasmuch as it urges a more diffuse distribution of social influence and, by implication, of social resources. Of less direct (but still, some) relevance are the more radical theories of difference and representation associated with scholars such as Iris Marion Young, Chantal Mouffe, Anne Phillips, and Mary Dietz, who seek fundamental changes to prevailing conceptualizations of citizenship and structures of liberal democracy in an attempt to permit the expression of a wide range of hitherto silenced voices.¹³² These theories are about making political equality more tangible -- which might eventually contribute to a narrowing of substantive disparities -- though their immediate interest in material redistribution is limited. As Phillips notes, "[c]ontemporary demands for political presence...all reflect inequalities other than social class."¹³³

That being said, in fostering a more inclusive democracy, scholarship on diversity may be more pertinent than even it sometimes assumes to the search for more effective means of narrowing gaps, given the correlation between

¹³¹ Kymlicka (1995).

¹³² Young, I (1990); Mouffe (1992); Phillips (1993, 1995); Dietz (1987).

¹³³ Phillips (1995), 8.

group identities (race, sex, disability, etc.) and resource inequalities.¹³⁴

Affirmative action/employment equity is the classic example of a policy that recognizes the salience of this correlation, and the enthusiastic support of it by a mainstream, liberal egalitarian like Ronald Dworkin suggests that we should not be too hasty in drawing a hermetic line between representational and redistributive politics.

All the egalitarian thought examined so far in this section has been concerned with collectivities and one (communitarianism) has also been concerned with the boundaries of redistribution. We now come to a final set of writings whose focus is exclusively on boundaries; more specifically, the degree to which egalitarianism should apply at a global rather than national level. These writings are rooted in a number of different theoretical traditions, but all share the view that contemporary theory pays too little attention to substantive equality between the West and the rest, and that this constitutes a significant deficiency for any attempt to develop a meaningful approach to distributive justice.

Brian Barry, a liberal contractarian, has criticized Rawls' restriction of the difference principle to domestic politics. Barry finds it difficult to accept Rawls'

¹³⁴ Interestingly, Joseph Carens has recently made a similar point, but with an opposite causal direction. "In my view," he writes, "we are most likely to encourage genuine diversity (both among individuals and among groups) if we minimize the role of the market as an arbiter of human worth. We should try to reduce invidious distinctions and differential material rewards in relation to education and occupation...a society in which there are relatively few inequalities among individuals (and hence among groups) will be the one in which the kinds of differences we want to affirm (among individuals and groups) will be most likely to flourish" (2000, 205-206).

argument that the primary contract stemming from the original position must be hammered out within pre-existing societies, leaving arrangements between those societies to a second round of discussion – a round which produces only formal rules of non-intervention and the like. Why, Barry asks, isn't societal membership placed behind the veil of ignorance, along with other personal characteristics such as race and social class? This could lead, he suggests, to a decision to set up one international state rather than separate ones. And even if Rawls' sequence is allowed, why wouldn't the motives that produced the difference principle at the domestic level play out at the world level as well? After all, if people understand they have a better chance of being born into a impoverished society than a rich one, it would only be prudent for them (following Rawlsian reasoning) to opt for an international order which reduces gaps. Barry's concern with Rawls' more conservative conclusions is clearly normative as well as logical: he finds the implicit endorsement of the global status quo intolerable in a world of such profound disparities. Barry has levelled similar criticisms against the analogous implications of Walzer's approach.¹³⁵

Charles Beitz shares Barry's concerns about the limitation of Rawlsian ideas of justice to the internal affairs of nation-states. Advocating "moral cosmopolitanism" as the most defensible version of morality for the human race, Beitz argues that the difference principle not only can, but must be applied

¹³⁵ Barry (1973), chapter 12; Barry (1995).

globally.¹³⁶

Theorists operating more within the international relations discourse have also criticized the common tendency to think about social justice in exclusively domestic terms. Chris Brown notes that the elimination of justice considerations from international relations is a widely-accepted component of the realist paradigm, but one that has been disputed by writers with a more cosmopolitan orientation. Brown expresses scepticism about *A Theory of Justice*'s approach to the issue, arguing that Rawls' conceptualization of societies as self-contained is descriptively inaccurate and, in any case, does not justify the leap of logic Rawls makes in restricting the parameters of justice.¹³⁷ Simon Caney criticizes as unduly restrictive Terry Nardin's influential work limiting the role of humanitarian concern in international relations, and calls for a cosmopolitanism that would permit intervention to secure for all people "the prerequisites of a decent life."¹³⁸ Friedrich Kratochwil contests the realist tenet that morality is excluded from international affairs by definition, rather than convention, writing that:

it is *not* the existence or absence of moral considerations which distinguishes actions in domestic affairs from those in the international arena. It is rather the weak *institutionalization* of international society which is the decisive characteristic...[it] prevent[s] us from feeling the pull of duty in the same way as we do when members of *our* society and their rights are at issue or when we accept taxation as being right for providing the conditions of a common life.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Beitz (1979).

¹³⁷ Brown (1998), 105.

¹³⁸ Caney (1997), 35.

¹³⁹ Kratochwil (1988), 239-240 (italics in original).

This new (or renewed) cosmopolitan spirit in writing on international relations has not led to a uniform approach. While scholars have attacked the dominant Westphalian model for inhibiting action to address transnational injustice, they have been torn between the desire to work towards global notions of justice and the desire to avoid a sort of cultural imperialism. As Cecilia Lynch states, “[i]nternationalism continues to confront the problem of whether it can transcend national parochialism and, more particularly, hegemonic meddling.”¹⁴⁰ This dilemma has led to a variety of formulations which attempt to bridge the gap between global principles of justice and respect for cultural variation, a typical example of which is Robert Cox’s somewhat strained notion of a “supra-intersubjectivity.”¹⁴¹

Such conceptual difficulties have not troubled more radical World Systems Theory writers concerned with international economic justice, perhaps because they see themselves not as establishing a shared idea of justice for all peoples, but as attacking deep, blatant injustices perpetrated against underdeveloped countries every day. World Systems Theory had its heyday in the 1970s and early 1980s, when Marxist-inspired scholars like Fernando Cardoso, Enzo Faletto, Andre Gunther Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein published tomes purporting to show how capitalist modes of production had resulted in the establishment of a global order through which a prosperous

¹⁴⁰ Lynch (1999), 97.

¹⁴¹ Cox (1992), 159.

“core” systematically extracts surplus resources out of an expansive “periphery.”¹⁴² Many World Systems Theory thinkers had a special interest in Latin America, and all concluded that the only way to end the exploitation and perpetual impoverishment of the Third World -- that is, to achieve greater material equality on a global scale -- was revolution. World Systems Theory lost popularity from the later 1980s, in part, one suspects, because some of its theses seemed to be undermined by the success of the “Asian tigers.” However, a few scholars still adhere to the conceptual framework of the school, arguing that its basic analysis remains persuasive. Christopher Chase-Dunn, for instance, writes that “there is no evidence of a reduction in the magnitude of core/periphery inequalities. Thus, reports of the demise of the core/periphery hierarchy are certainly premature.”¹⁴³

Challenges to the restriction of egalitarianism to the domestic sphere are now more often heard from thinkers opposed to globalization in its prevailing form. While a single theoretical model binding these thinkers together does not exist (and may not be possible or desirable), what they share is the view that it is wrong for the economy to be globalized while concerns about justice are left to increasingly ineffectual national governments. Such trends, they argue, are placing powerful economic forces beyond democratic control, leading to unrestrained exploitation of vulnerable populations and natural resources, and

¹⁴² Cardoso & Faletto (1979); Gunder (1979); Wallerstein (1979).

¹⁴³ Chase-Dunn (1992), 269.

deepening material inequalities. The theorists concerned with these effects see themselves as far more grounded in the concrete realities of human lives than the defenders of the current order -- echoing the self-perceptions of many critics of abstracted liberalism -- and regularly demand that the existing boundaries for thinking about justice and implementing equalization measures be superceded.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the theoretical bases of egalitarianism, the main programmatic cleavage among egalitarians, and the development of egalitarian streams of thought. It has shown that while egalitarians share a commitment to substantive equality, they disagree on whether redistribution should be pursued through incremental or revolutionary change, and have engaged in vigorous debates on everything from the focus of the egalitarian project to the role of the community in that project. It is hoped this elucidation of conceptual linkages and tensions will help us chart our way through the empirical and analytical chapters which follow.

One telling reflection on the debates outlined in the later sections of the chapter is provided by communitarian Ronald Beiner, who writes that egalitarians -- notwithstanding their theoretical disagreements -- are inclined to

¹⁴⁴ For two of the key works attempting to articulate and integrate the diverse positions of those concerned with globalization's effects, see Brecher & Costello (1994) and Klein (2000).

“embrace identical policy commitments in practice.”¹⁴⁵ While “identical” may be something of an exaggeration, there is no question that, at least among reformist egalitarians, practical prescriptions tend to overlap. Ronald Dworkin’s writings help illustrate this point. Dworkin has been one of the thinkers to most thoroughly lay out the political positions underpinned by his philosophical predispositions.¹⁴⁶ What is striking about these positions – support for a public health care system, legal access to abortion, campaign finance reform, affirmative action, equal rights for gays and lesbians, and a generous welfare system – is that they would undoubtedly be endorsed by the vast majority of egalitarians.

To understand why this is so, we must recall that whatever their differences, egalitarians share an ethos on substantive equality that separates them from anti-egalitarians. Whatever their theoretical inclinations, they are animated by what Richard Arenson calls the “generic egalitarian intuition”: “other things being equal, it is intrinsically (non-instrumentally) morally better that the good should go to a worse off rather than to a better off person.”¹⁴⁷ This intuition allows a degree of convergence around specific policy proposals.

Having said that, we should not lose sight of the critical distinction between reformers and radicals. Radicals often back the types of initiatives supported by Ronald Dworkin but, given their scepticism about achieving

¹⁴⁵ Beiner (1996), 204.

¹⁴⁶ Dworkin (2000), chapters 8-14.

¹⁴⁷ Arenson (1990), 251.

significant material redistribution within current social structures, they usually do so for instrumental reasons and after a good deal of internal debate. While such policies comprise the *telos* of reformist egalitarianism, for radicals, they are at best way stations on the path to a more fundamental transformation. As Samir Amin, a Marxist/World Systems theorist, writes of liberal-progressive efforts to reduce the exploitative character of globalization:

I do not object in any way in principle to this incremental project, which I would refer to as 'new social democracy' (which, like any social democracy, can be conceived of as an end in itself or as a staging post on the way to a more distant socialist objective)....[However] I believe that the aspect of 'financialization as a mode of crisis management' will prevail over the potential dimensions which could allow it to become a moment of transition to a more socially progressive mode of accumulation on both the local and global levels....The prospect of another social system, abandoning the sacrosanct institution of private property, and of another globalization, rejecting polarization, remains the only alternative.¹⁴⁸

In the final analysis, then, egalitarians are divided most fundamentally over the extent and pace of redistributive change. We will now turn our attention to in-depth examinations of a reformist and a radical egalitarian experiment. These case studies will help us better understand how theoretical and programmatic orientations have been translated into practice. And each experiment's accomplishments and failures will provide lessons relevant to the renewal of egalitarianism in the twenty-first century.

¹⁴⁸ Amin (1996), 257-258.

Chapter 3

Pay Equity in Ontario: Reformist Egalitarianism in Action

Choice of the Case

The pay equity experiment in Ontario was selected as a reformist case study for four reasons. First, as will become evident below, it is classically reformist in conception, inasmuch as it seeks partial redistribution through adaptation of existing social structures, not massive redistribution through their wholesale replacement. Second, Ontario's *Pay Equity Act* is the most comprehensive such legislation ever passed, making it a critical case for examining the efficacy of this sort of effort. Third, the active phase of the experiment has largely concluded, since the law's compliance deadlines have all now passed, meaning that the time is ripe for reflection and assessment. Finally, the case is methodologically manageable, since it involves explicit objectives undertaken within a clearly defined geographic area and time period.

Method

This chapter is based on three sources of information. The first is the traditional literature review. In preparing this chapter, I read what I believe to be a large majority of the available sources on pay equity and its American variant, comparable worth. The second source is, broadly, my own personal experience in the field of pay equity: I served as Director and Assistant Director of Pay Equity and Settlement Monitoring for the Canadian Human Rights Commission between 1997 and 2000, as Chief of Policy and Legislation, Employment and Pay Equity between 1994 and 1996, and as a policy and education consultant

in the Pay Equity Directorate between 1990 and 1992. While this experience does not figure directly in the account below, since it took place at the federal level and the case study considers provincial legislation, it unquestionably informs my analysis.

The third source, as noted in the Introduction, is a series of 19 semi-structured interviews. I am bound by promises of anonymity not to reveal the names of, or identifying data regarding, the interview subjects. I can, however, give details on the sorts of organizations or fields in which those individuals worked, which of course is critical to the perspectives and nature of information they provided. The following, then, is a list of the “origins” of interviewees which is as explicit as possible without compromising confidentiality:

- Officials of the Ontario Pay Equity Office: 3 (interviews 1 to 3)
- Members of the Ontario Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal: 3 (interviews 4 to 6)
- Employer-side compensation and human resources managers: 4 (interviews 7 to 10)
- Representatives of employer associations: 2 (interviews 11 and 12)
- Union officials: 2 (interviews 13 and 14)
- Activists in women’s organizations : 2 (interviews 15 and 16)
- Academics and consultants specializing in pay equity issues: 3 (interviews 17 to 19)

Thirteen of these subjects were interviewed individually; the other six in three interview sessions involving two subjects each. All but four of the

interviews were conducted in the Toronto area. All interviews were loosely based on the list of questions listed in the Introduction, though I often allowed discussions to digress in line with a person's particular interests, arguments, or area of expertise – though always attempting to ensure that key questions were dealt with before the interview concluded. Obviously, I have not referenced, in the pages that follow, every point made in an interview; however, I have endeavoured to give a reference wherever a point was especially novel, compelling, or central to the concerns of this dissertation. This means that the bulk of the interview references appear in the “Results” section of the chapter, as the preceding sections provide the factual “story” of pay equity, while the subsequent section is concerned mainly with my own analysis of the implications of the case. References are listed simply as “interview (1, 2, etc.)” based on the scheme provided above.

Theory and Objectives of Pay Equity

“Pay equity” is the now customary term for a public policy also known as equal pay for work of equal value or comparable worth.¹ Its purpose is to address what is perceived as the historic tendency to under-value work done mainly by women in comparison with work done mainly by men and in so doing,

¹ “Equal pay for work of equal value” was the expression most used in the early period of such policies; “comparable worth” is a name still widely used in the United States. “Pay equity,” though arguably not as clear a term, is generally preferred because it rolls off the tongue more easily and makes a link with employment equity. Although occasional attempts to distinguish the policies implied by each of these terms have been made, they have not been especially clear or persuasive. For all intents, the concepts are interchangeable.

to improve women's earnings. That purpose is achieved by comparing male- and female-predominant work on the basis of their value and wages.

Pay equity extends the older notion of equal pay for equal work. While useful for women who faced blatant wage discrimination – waitresses who were paid less than waiters, female school principals paid less than male school principals – equal pay for equal work did little for the vast majority of women who were concentrated in a small number of fields, including secretaries, clerks, nurses, librarians, child care workers, and the like. Occupational segregation meant that people doing low-paid “women’s work” had no identical, high-paid male jobs with which to make comparisons. Thus, if they wanted to prove that their low wages were related to the gender predominance of their jobs – something they often sensed intuitively -- they had to be given the opportunity to compare their work to better-compensated but qualitatively different work carried out primarily by men. Pay equity’s novelty lies in its acceptance of such comparisons.²

The under-valuation of “women’s work” has been traced to a number of factors. First, because men were traditionally the breadwinners of the family, employers and unions commonly saw women’s wages as secondary “pin money” and thus, felt it was appropriate to systematically pay them less. As Nan Weiner and Morley Gunderson write:

² Eyraud (1993).

The underlying assumption was not that women and men should be paid for the content of the jobs they were performing, but for their *presumed* financial responsibilities. Clearly, it was *presumed* rather than *actual* financial responsibilities that were being rewarded. 'Male' was used as a synonym for 'provider' while every women was presumed to be 'dependent' on some man.³

Second, because the work performed by women often built on their roles within the household, there was an often unstated assumption that it did not require any special learning or effort on their part. Ronnie Steinberg and Lois Haignere, for example, found that skill scores in the mid-1970s version of the *American Dictionary of Occupational Titles* systematically gave relatively low ratings to typically female jobs. Finding that "dog pound attendant and zookeeper were rated more highly than nursery school teacher or day care worker," they concluded "evaluators had overlooked important aspects of the female-dominated jobs...evaluators did not regard these as job related skills, but rather as qualities intrinsic to being a woman."⁴

Third, because of general social tendencies to downgrade that which is associated with femaleness, there has been an inclination to minimize the demands and worth of work done by women. Studies have shown, for instance, that when presented with an identical work of art or resumé, people will give it a more modest rating if they believe it comes from a woman than if they believe it comes from a man, and that women's job performance tends to

³ Weiner & Gunderson (1990), 9 (*italics in original*).

⁴ Steinberg & Haignere (1985), 13-14 (*emphasis in original*).

be given poorer evaluations than men's performance.⁵ Similarly, former New Zealand Parliamentarian Marilyn Waring notes, in *Counting For Nothing: What Men Value and What Women Are Worth*, that mainstream economic accounting systems place tremendous value on typically male activities and production, while attributing no worth at all to much of the (unpaid) work women perform (or to a clean environment).⁶

Finally, because men have traditionally been better organized and more vocal than women, they have been better able to obtain recognition and remuneration for the content of their work. Historical attempts by workers to achieve justice and equity in wages were conditioned by a variety of considerations – but gender was not one of them.⁷

The impact of these factors on income cannot, of course, be fully quantified, given the complexity of the phenomena and the passage of time. What is clear, however, is that a wage gap has always existed between men and women and that, according to most researchers, only part of it can be ascribed to non-discriminatory influences such as education levels and time in the labour market. Today, Canadian women working full-time make, on average, about 70 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts.⁸

⁵ Basow & Silberg (1987); Etaugh, Houtler, & Ptasnik (1988); Gerber (1989); Major (1989).

⁶ Waring (1999).

⁷ Kessler-Harris (1988).

⁸ Statistics Canada (2002).

Economists who have examined this differential have concluded that a substantial portion of it is inexplicable on the basis of “legitimate” inputs, and that merely removing obstacles to women’s employment in traditionally male fields is unlikely to close the full gap. The residual, unexplained portion of the wage gap is often attributed to the under-valuation of “women’s work.” It is this under-valuation which pay equity attempts to correct.⁹

The theory behind pay equity does not suggest that present-day decisions about wages are generally shaped by discriminatory intent. Instead, it argues that patterns of relative remuneration have persisted over time, even as discriminatory attitudes have gradually changed. Thus, pay equity does not seek to redress the sort of deliberate, individual mistreatment that people usually associate with the word “discrimination,” but rather unintentional, ingrained biases which affect an entire group. These sorts of patterned biases are now commonly termed “systemic discrimination.”

Pay equity’s concern with systemic discrimination in wage-setting reflects the fact that it assumes something more than supply and demand shapes wages. Neoliberal¹⁰ notions of the pure market attribute wage rates solely to supply and demand. If these notions held in reality, there would be no defensible basis for pay equity policies. One could not viably claim that pay for

⁹ Coish & Hale (1995); Mangum (1988). Solberg (1999); Weiner & Gunderson (1990).

¹⁰ I use the term “neoliberal” advisedly to represent that line of classic, laissez-faire theory which, over the past two decades, has (again) become highly influential in mainstream economics and hegemonic in the financial pages of the press. Neoliberalism is closely related to the anti-egalitarian theories discussed in the first sections of the previous chapter.

“women’s work” was affected by biases, and thus needed to be re-appraised and better compensated, if pay were truly the result solely of marginal rates of return and the number of people ready to work in a particular field. Indeed, it would be counter-productive to even attempt such a scheme.

In rejecting such a conceptualization of the market as overly simplistic, pay equity theory reflects the standard egalitarian contention that prevailing disparities are neither inevitable nor salutary. It does not deny that supply and demand play a role in the establishment of wages, but claims other factors have an impact as well. One of the more persuasive pieces of evidence for this claim is relative wage stability over time. If earnings really were reflections only of supply and demand, one would anticipate substantial fluctuations over time, particularly in situations of obvious shortfalls or surpluses. Yet this rarely occurs, suggesting that other influences limit the effects of the “pure” market. After all, goes one familiar illustration, there has been a shortage of nurses and a surfeit of lawyers for decades, yet few RNs earn more than LL.Bs. Wages are not merely the natural outcome of neutral processes, say pay equity advocates, but are also moulded by preconceptions about the content of jobs and the “fair” relativities between them, and by the inertia of entrenched habits of behaviour. To achieve more genuine neutrality, these preconceptions and habits need to be examined and their discriminatory effects rectified.¹¹

Pay equity does not try to reach these ends by abolishing existing

¹¹ Acker (1989); Gold (1983); Kessler-Harris (1990); Perlman & Pike (1994); Sorenson (1994); Willborn (1989).

systems and substituting new ones. Instead, it attempts to draw attention to the full content of “women’s work” and re-shape embedded wage patterns through job evaluation, a widely-accepted management tool. Job evaluation involves the ranking of different types of work against a common set of factors which normally measure some combination of skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. Job evaluation has been embraced by employers since World War II because it facilitates the orderly administration of compensation systems and helps to make relative wages seem more rational and defensible. Pay equity proponents turned to job evaluation because it seemed the only viable option for comparing dissimilar male-predominant and female-predominant work in order to uncover the effects of ingrained biases. True, in countries with highly centralized economies, such as Australia and Sweden in the 1970s, a form of pay equity was achieved through fiat. In more decentralized economies, however, wage adjustments imposed from above are seen as intolerable interference in the workings of businesses with different histories, missions, and internal cultures. Under these circumstances, job evaluation is viewed as the only realistic tool for deciding what work is of equal value and justifying wage increases to eliminate discrimination -- and the only politically saleable tool. That being said, pay equity advocates realize that many job evaluation systems have themselves incorporated biases about female-predominant work and therefore have the potential simply to perpetuate existing hierarchies. For this reason, when used for pay equity, job evaluation systems are generally vetted and adjusted with an eye to improving their ability to fairly “capture” and rate

female-predominant work.

Pay equity, then, is an example of reformist egalitarianism: it strives to accomplish some redistribution, but recognizes the validity of countervailing considerations; it focuses on incremental increases in equality, not absolute equality; it believes that existing structures can be reformed; it endorses liberal notions of neutrality; and it employs modified versions of mainstream tools. This reformist bent is widely recognized by feminists.¹² Even someone like pay equity expert Ronnie Steinberg, who wishes pay equity would prove more radical in practice, acknowledges its essentially reformist quality and explains this as an unavoidable result of the resilience of dominant social structures.

Steinberg writes:

this approach to change represents a messy route through the existing institutions in which the conventional discourse is used as the basis to redefine the existing discourse. At times, proponents appeared to be defending institutions and ideologies that were antithetical to the goal of pay equity as we originally envisaged it. But, I would argue, this messy route was the only route open to travel.¹³

The reformist character of the pay equity strategy has not mollified neoliberal opponents who believe it is a foolhardy intervention in the regular workings of the market -- a market which, in their conception, is already neutral since the invisible hand cares only about efficiency. According to this philosophy, it is silly to try to measure the relative worth of different types of

¹² Glenn (1994); Fudge & McDermott (1991); McColgan (1997); Steinberg (1990, 1991).

¹³ Steinberg (1990), 512.

work, since the sole “value” a job has is determined by supply and demand. The only possible results of a misguided attempt to manipulate natural wage levels, say neoliberals, are infringements on the liberty of entrepreneurs, economic inefficiency, and job losses for women in what will come to be over-paid occupations. Perhaps, they say, women willingly accept a lower wage because of the non-salary advantages of the occupations in which they have traditionally been employed and if this is not the case, then the only reasonable solution is for them to take personal responsibility and find other lines of work.¹⁴ This reasoning, of course, bears all the hallmarks of general anti-egalitarian positions, inasmuch as it treats existing disparities as fair, inevitable, and beneficial.

Opposition from anti-egalitarians has not meant that everyone interested in shrinking the male-female wage gap has endorsed pay equity as a remedy. Indeed, its reformist orientation has prompted those of a more radical disposition to question its effectiveness and, in some cases, contend that its accomplishments do not justify its price. The radical critique asserts that even as pay equity highlights a real problem and achieves a slight redistribution, it legitimizes the huge disparities which remain. By agreeing that some portion of the wage gap is attributable to defensible factors and valorizing job evaluation, pay equity erodes people’s willingness to challenge exploitative hierarchies.

¹⁴ Flanagan (1987a); Killingsworth (1990); Mathys & Pincus (1993); Rhoades (1993). Gold (1983) provides a refreshingly accessible account of the neoliberal-reformist debate over pay equity, in the Socratic form of an imaginary debate.

Moreover, job evaluation is seen as a highly technical process that consumes resources, saps energy, empowers “experts,” and shifts the arena of debate from the shop floor and the street to the evaluation committee and the courtroom. As a result, activists are co-opted and forced to accept the logic of most prevailing wages, workers are demobilized and left divided among themselves, little substantive change is realized, and a de facto ceiling is placed on additional redistribution. Better, say radical critics, to fight for equalized pay through more militant union action, large increases in collectively bargained wages, and ultimately, the replacement of capitalist modes of production with more collective forms of ownership.¹⁵ The classic Canadian radical feminist analysis of pay equity is the short but information-packed book, *Just Give Us the Money*, which argues that:

Attempts by the state to co-opt women's issues may not reflect a conscious, organized attempt to trick women, but rather a process of accommodating or adapting women's demands in a way that does not challenge or disrupt fundamental economic and social relationships. Since women's demands often require fundamental change, this accommodation process often does not work in our interests....A radical restructuring of society is necessary for women to get enough money....We must ask ourselves whether pay equity is the best we can do. We think not.¹⁶

Pay equity supporters reject neoliberal attacks as based on an unsophisticated understanding of the forces that shape wages, and argue that

¹⁵ Brenner (1990); Cuneo (1990); Evans & Nelson (1989); Lewis (1988, 1991); Warskett (1990, 1991).

¹⁶ Lewis (1988), 3-4, 112.

radical critiques underestimate the scale of redistribution pay equity can achieve when vigilance is exercised. While acknowledging that radicals' misgivings about demobilization and technicality have some justification, supporters deny that pay equity necessarily closes the door to other initiatives aimed at reducing wage differences.¹⁷

Having sketched the overall vision of pay equity, we will now turn our attention to how that vision has been pursued in a particular context: the province of Ontario, which in 1987 enacted an expansive pay equity law.

The History of Pay Equity in Ontario

Calls for the passage of "equal value" legislation to address gender-based wage discrimination in Canada date from the late 1960s, when the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, headed by Florence Bird, was holding hearings on the causes of, and remedies for, women's inequality. Those calls reflected frustration with the low wages for "women's work," women's disadvantaged economic circumstances, and the inability of equal pay for equal work laws to make much of a dent in these patterns.

The Royal Commission's report, released in 1970,¹⁸ called upon the government to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 100, the labouriously-titled *Convention Concerning Equal Remuneration for*

¹⁷ Haignere (1991); Steinberg (1990, 1991).

¹⁸ Bird (1970).

Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, and follow-up with appropriate legislative action. Adopted by the ILO in 1951, Convention 100 states that “Each Member shall, by means appropriate to the methods in operation for determining rates of remuneration, promote and, in so far as is consistent with such methods, ensure the application to all workers of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value.” It is one of three international instruments which enshrine the principle of equal pay for work of equal value; the others are the 1966 *International Covenant on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights* and the 1979 *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*.¹⁹

The federal government accepted the Royal Commission’s recommendation, ratifying Convention 100 in 1972 and -- after significant lobbying by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and other women’s organizations -- including an equal value section in the *Canadian Human Rights Act* when it was passed in 1977. Around the same time, Quebec incorporated an equal value clause into its *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*. Both statutes used a complaints-based model to achieve compliance and were implemented by a human rights commission.

¹⁹ Copies of all these instruments may be found through the website of the United Nations’ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2002). Equal value language has actually been part of international since 1919, when “the principle that men and women should receive equal remuneration for work of equal value” was included in the Treaty of Versailles. However, Thomas Flanagan – no fan of pay equity – has argued that it is a distortion to suggest this wording, or even the text of Convention 100, were intended to imply anything like pay equity. Instead, he contends, they were aimed at essentially the same thing as equal pay for equal work. This view is more persuasive with respect to the 1919 treaty than the 1951 Convention. See Flanagan (1987b).

The complaints-based approach had some successes, most notably in the federal public service where the Public Service Alliance of Canada -- the largest bargaining agent for federal employees -- has tenaciously filed and pursued wage discrimination allegations. However, the complaints model for pay equity began to come under fire within a few years. Because it required someone to come forward before any investigation or enforcement action could be launched, it was seen unduly reactive and haphazard. Pay equity advocates argued that gender-based wage discrimination, as a systemic problem, needed a systemic solution. Most individual workers simply did not have the knowledge, resources, or security of employment to lodge a claim with a human rights commission. As a result, many employers -- especially those without unions -- could simply ignore potentially discriminatory wage disparities among their employees, creating competitive pressures for those employers unlucky enough to be on the receiving end of a complaint. Moreover, complaints by their nature tended to spark a defensive reaction on the part of employers, who felt attacked despite the fact that wage discrimination was generally unintentional. The upshot was drawn-out investigation and litigation processes, which often exhausted complainants and produced disappointing results after substantial delay.²⁰

The answer, many contended, was to pass what came to be known as proactive legislation. A proactive approach, in contrast to the complaints

²⁰ Canadian Human Rights Commission (2001); Gallant & Streiner (1998); Handman & Jensen (1999).

model, lists steps that employers must take to reduce discrimination, along with timetables for those steps. Thus, it eliminates the need for complaints, addresses employer concerns about being the targets of discrimination allegations and competitive disadvantage, and, in theory at least, should lead to more consistent and timely achievement of pay equity.

The concept of proactive legislation took root in the early and mid-1980s, a period when new ideas about discrimination and its elimination were gaining legitimacy. It was during these years that scholars, activists, officials, and the courts came to appreciate how apparently neutral policies and procedures could have an “adverse effect” on certain groups and thus, be deemed as discriminatory despite the absence of malicious intent.²¹ Typical examples include workplaces that are unintentionally inaccessible to people with mobility impairments, mandatory work schedules that fail to take account of religious days of rest, or the use of physical prerequisites to screen job applicants that are not clearly linked to the work and are harder for women to meet than men. Acceptance of the notion that seemingly neutral systems could have “adverse effects” contributed to the acceptance of the idea of “systemic discrimination,” which can be understood as the cumulative impact of a range of adverse effects. Once systemic discrimination – in contrast to isolated, individual, deliberate discrimination – is seen as a real phenomenon, the conceptual groundwork has been laid for proactive statutes that assume the existence of

²¹ Pentney & Tarnopolsky (1991); Vizkelety (1987).

unintended systemic discrimination and obligate employers to weed out that discrimination. As Suzanne Handman and Karen Jensen write, “[t]he obvious advantage of a pro-active legislative regime, in contrast to a complaint-driven model, is the effective reversal of the burden on a complainant to prove discrimination.”²²

The arguments in favour of proactive pay equity legislation made their mark. Proactive laws for public sector employees were adopted by a number of American states (most notably, Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington) in the early 1980s²³ and by Manitoba in 1985. Soon, pressure for similar statutes began to build in other Canadian jurisdictions, particularly as it became clear that the Manitoba process was unfolding reasonably smoothly.

In Ontario, this pressure was applied by a large Equal Pay Coalition. Founded in 1976 and led by feminist labour lawyer Mary Cornish, the coalition brought together some 39 women’s and community organizations and unions, including the Ontario Federation of Labour, the Ontario Nurses Association, the United Steelworkers of America, the Legal Education and Action Fund, and the YWCA.²⁴ Through workplace campaigns, advertisements, political lobbying,

²² Handman & Jensen (1999), 84.

²³ Like in Canada, the ground for pay equity laws in the United States was prepared by a high-profile, government-sponsored report. In 1979, the head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Eleanor Holmes Norton, commissioned a report on comparable worth from the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. The report, written by Donald Treiman and Heidi Hartmann, was released in 1981 (by which time the EEOC, under the influence of Reagan appointees, had adopted an anti-pay equity position) and gave pay equity an intellectual respectability among policy-makers that it had hitherto lacked.

²⁴ Equal Pay Coalition (2002a).

press releases, and conference-style gatherings, the coalition pressed the case that systemic bias in wages demanded a proactive response. It proved to be a remarkably effective lobby group, thanks largely to its breadth and singularity of purpose, and Cornish's personal commitment to the issue. One woman involved in the labour movement put it this way:

The Coalition is, in my experience, an extraordinary group of people in that it has united women with sort of a liberal democratic view of the world with women from organizations like ours, a union, where the emphasis is more on collective rights than individual rights. And this equal pay for work of equal value issue is one where we have managed to use the power of both those groups of women to do something.²⁵

Thanks largely to the coalition's efforts, the New Democratic Party made a pay equity law one of its key conditions for supporting the minority Liberal Party government in 1985. Thus began a series of public hearings and legislative drafting sessions which culminated in the passage of the *Pay Equity Act (PEA)* in 1987, by which time the Liberals were in a majority position. The *PEA* was supported by all three parties in the legislature, and represented a compromise between the demands of women's and labour organizations for a proactive law, and the demands of business for "manageable" compliance requirements. Nonetheless, it was clearly the former who felt victorious when the statute was enacted, as it was (and remains) the most far-reaching pay equity legislation anywhere.²⁶ Employers accepted the legislation, but only

²⁵ Cited in Lewis (1988), 71.

²⁶ Quebec's 1997 *Loi sur l'équité salariale* is very similar to the *PEA* in scope, but because of its more extended implementation schedule, later start, and wide exemption provision, it is a less far-reaching and innovative experiment overall.

reluctantly.

The *PEA*²⁷ includes a clause stating that the legislation's purpose is "to redress systemic gender discrimination in compensation for work performed by employees in female job classes." Its most important innovation lies in combining a proactive model with coverage of both the public and private sectors. Under the law, all public sector employers, and all private sector employers with 100 employees or more, are required to:

- compare the value and compensation of male and female job classes in each of their establishments;
- prepare and post a pay equity plan indicating how job classes were compared and where wage adjustments are going to be made; and
- phase in wage adjustments.

Private sector employers with 10 to 99 employees are also required, in general terms, to achieve pay equity, but the law does not obligate them to prepare and implement a detailed pay equity plan.

The *PEA* provides no definition of "employer" and sets geographic criteria for delineating an "establishment." A job class is deemed female-predominant if it is at least 60 per cent female in composition, and male-predominant if it is at least 70 per cent male. Historical incumbency and stereotypes may also be used to determine gender predominance if the

²⁷ Good overviews of the *PEA*'s provisions may be found in Handman & Jensen (1999); McColgan (1997); and McDermott (1990), as well as at Pay Equity Commission (2001a).

percentage thresholds are not reached. The job evaluation system applied to male and female job classes must, by law, be “gender neutral,” but that concept is not defined.

Where a workplace is unionized, the entire pay equity process must be negotiated. In addition, pay equity comparisons must be attempted first within the boundaries of bargaining units; male comparators from other parts of the establishment can only be sought if none is available within the bargaining unit.

The aim of the law is to encourage a “self-managed” pay equity process, one result of which is the absence of any requirement to submit reports on implementation to an oversight agency. However, individual employees or unions who believe an employer has not met its obligations under the statute may turn to the Pay Equity Office,²⁸ which appoints a Review Officer to examine the objection, attempt to mediate a resolution, and, if necessary, issue an order. The Office is also mandated to carry out education programs. If concerns persist after the Office has attempted to deal with an objection, the case may be taken to the Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal, a separate body, for a binding ruling. The structure of Tribunal panels which hear pay equity cases, like adjudicative bodies in the area of labour and employment law, is tripartite: one labour side member, one employer side member, and a neutral chair.

The law includes a staggered compliance schedule: January 1, 1991

²⁸ The “Pay Equity Commission” is comprised of two distinct entities: the Pay Equity Office and the Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal. While it has become common practice to refer to the Office as the Commission, in this document I will stick with the official organizational names in order to avoid any confusion.

was fixed as the deadline for private sector employers with 500 or more employees and all public sector employers to meet their obligations and begin paying adjustments, while later compliance deadlines were established for smaller private sector employers.

Only one important provision in the original 1987 law was ever amended: that dealing with the method to be used in comparing male and female job classes to determine if the latter are underpaid. The technique prescribed in 1987 was direct, job-to-job comparison; that is, identification of a male comparator of the same or very similar value for each female job class. Where more than one such comparator was available, the law directed that the lowest-paid be used. This approach proved problematic in two situations: first, where female job classes seemed to be undervalued but did not happen to have a male job class in the same point range; second, where no male job classes whatsoever were available for comparison because an establishment, such as a child care centre in the broader public sector, was almost all-female. As a result, the legislation was amended by the NDP government in 1993 to permit “proportional value” and “proxy” comparisons where job-to-job comparisons were not possible. The former involve the use of regression analysis to calculate the average value-to-wage relationship for a range of male comparators, and then comparison of female job classes with that average wage line. The latter involve the examination of comparisons carried out in analogous workplaces -- in our example, child care centres in the public service proper -- to determine how much employees’ wages should be raised.

There was a large amount of activity in the years following passage of the *PEA*. The Pay Equity Office was set up and it, in turn, convened an advisory committee comprised of business, labour, and women's representatives; it began holding regular breakfast meetings with consultants who were marketing job evaluation systems; finally, it produced a raft of publications aimed at demystifying the pay equity process. The Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal was also established, and Tribunal members were provided with extensive training on the logic and mechanics of pay equity.²⁹

Meanwhile, large employers, unions, and consulting firms got busy with implementation. This was especially true in the public sector, which generally came closer to meeting its compliance deadline than the private sector. Significant wage adjustments began to be paid in some public sector establishments by the early 1990s.

Technical disputes, however, quickly arose. In part, this was the result of vague and complicated statutory language; in part, it was a function of the high stakes associated with abstruse interpretive questions. If, for example, whole groups of comparators could be included (or excluded) from the wage discrimination analysis by virtue of subtle definitional variations, the result could be tens of thousands of dollars more (or less) in wage adjustments for female-predominant work. Similarly, if a job evaluation system gave more credit to some types of skills or responsibilities than others, the result might be a smaller

²⁹ Interviews 2 and 4.

(or larger) gap to be closed.

The most important disputes concerned the notions of employer and gender neutrality. With respect to the former, the Tribunal's decisions in the *Haldimand Norfolk* (no.3) and *Metropolitan Toronto Library Board* cases adopted a broad approach, deeming nurses and librarians to be municipal employees rather than employees, respectively, of hospitals and the library board.³⁰ The criteria adopted by the Tribunal for identifying the employer included financial responsibility, responsibility for compensation practices, the nature of the business, and attention to the purpose of the *PEA*. This approach ensured a wide scope for comparisons and so, reduced the number of situations where female-predominant jobs would be denied pay equity increases because of the absence of comparators in narrowly-defined employment contexts.

With respect to gender neutrality, decisions in the *Haldimand-Norfolk* (no.6) and *Women's College Hospital* cases, both of which were launched by the Ontario Nurses Association,³¹ laid out a series of tests and techniques for ensuring that job evaluation systems are free of bias, and struck down systems already applied by the employers in question.³² The Tribunal's gender

³⁰ *Ontario Nurses Association v. Regional...*(no.3) (1989) and *CUPE v. Metropolitan...*(1989).

³¹ The ONA, an organization not previously known for its militancy, consciously chose a strategy of litigation shortly after enactment of the *PEA* in order to secure the highest possible wage increases for its members (Fudge, 1991).

³² *Ontario Nurses Association v. Regional...*(no.6) (1991) and *Ontario Nurses Association v. Women's...* (1992).

neutrality criteria include:

- tailoring the job evaluation system to the particular workplace in which it is to be applied;
- making a conscious effort to remove biases which have historically skewed the wage-setting process;
- ensuring the system's ability accurately and fully to capture the content of male- and female-predominant work, and to make visible traditionally overlooked aspects of "women's work";
- using comprehensible, non-sexist language throughout the system and during its application;
- gathering information on the content of work from incumbents;
- implementing pay equity through mixed-gender committees; and
- providing committees with effective pay equity training.

In addition to the interpretation of employer and gender neutrality, issues which have provoked disagreement and, sometimes, litigation include the identification of male and female job classes, the boundaries of establishments, the choice of comparators, and the start-date for retroactive pay adjustments. Litigation in the pay equity area has been characterized by lengthy hearings, extensive and complex expert testimony on technical issues, high costs to the litigants, and substantial delays between the time a case is initiated and the

date of decision.³³

Even as pay equity jurisprudence was being established by the Tribunal, the government was revisiting the issue of comparison methods. When, in 1993, the aforementioned amendments to the *PEA* were introduced -- adding the proportional value and proxy techniques -- pay equity advocates responded positively, though they remained concerned that the alternative formulas could only be triggered if the job-to-job technique proved inapplicable. Employers, on the other hand, argued that “changing the rules in the middle of the game” complicated their task and, in some instances, required the re-opening of completed pay equity processes.³⁴

Two years later, the Conservative Party under Mike Harris successfully ran on a platform that vowed to restore the province's supposedly eroded ability to compete in an increasingly competitive and globalized market. One of the platform's components was a promise to cancel pay equity proxy comparisons. When the government moved to do so, a constitutional challenge under section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was launched by the Service Employees International Union with the support of the Equal Pay Coalition. In 1997, Mr. Justice O’Leary of the Ontario Court of Justice, General Division ruled in favour of the application, stating that it was unconstitutional to

³³ Widespread frustration with the snail's pace of pay equity litigation is obliquely acknowledged in the Chair's message on the Tribunal's website, which informs the visitor of initiatives to reduce hearing time but goes on to somewhat sheepishly admit that “scheduling hearings remains an ongoing challenge” (Pay Equity Commission, 2001b).

³⁴ Interviews 7, 8, and 11.

provide relief from wage discrimination to one group of workers – those in public service agencies where male-predominant comparators were available – while denying it to another – those in broader sector agencies where no comparators could be found.³⁵ Thus, the proxy option was restored. The government did not appeal this decision, but has limited previously promised funding to underwrite the costs of wage adjustments flowing from the proxy formula, leaving smaller organizations without the means to pay required salary adjustments. In response to appeals that it intervene in this matter, the Pay Equity Office has argued that the question of funding is not within its mandate. This predicament has recently led five unions and a number of individual women, represented by Mary Cornish, to launch court action against Queen's Park in an attempt to secure funding.³⁶

In addition to attempting to remove the proxy option, the Tories initiated a full-scale review of the *PEA*. Conducted by Jean Read, the review may not have produced precisely the results the government was hoping for. On the one hand, its 1996 report did recommend that retroactive costs for employers late in implementing pay equity be limited, that the threshold for finding a job evaluation plan non-compliant with the statute be high, and that the Pay Equity

³⁵ *SEIU Local 204 v. Ontario...* This decision is a bit of a head-scratcher, since it seems to treat sector of employment as a prohibited ground of discrimination under section 15. The *SEIU* had proposed other (and in my view more convincing) rationales for a ruling in favour of the application; why the judge chose to base his decision on a comparison between different groups of disadvantaged women is known only to him. In any case, the legalities of the case do not bear on its practical effect: derailing the government's plan to scrap the proxy method.

³⁶ Elliot (2001); Equal Pay Coalition (2002c); interviews 9 and 15.

Office be folded to the Ministry of Labour. On the other hand, it expressed regret that employers had not been compelled to submit reports on their implementation of pay equity, recommended that the preference for the job-to-job comparison method be dropped, and proposed that employers without unions be required to post information every three years explaining how pay equity was being maintained.³⁷ Few of the review's recommendations have resulted in government action.

In 1997, the Pay Equity Office organized a public relations campaign and celebration to mark the tenth anniversary of the *PEA*'s enactment. The main theme was that pay equity had worked, and the main evidence was the closure of the wage gap by ten cents over the decade.³⁸ Many pay equity supporters have also seen the law as basically a success. Cornish and pay equity expert Pat Armstrong, for example, have written that the law "led to significant gains for women in both the public and private sectors."³⁹ Critics, however, are sceptical that pay equity has made a positive difference. Using complex statistical models, for example, Michael Baker and Nicole Fortin have recently concluded that there never really was much of a discriminatory wage gap for unionized women in Ontario, and that the *PEA* resulted in few gains for women employed in female-predominant jobs but suppressed wage growth for women

³⁷ Read (1996).

³⁸ Pay Equity Commission (1998).

³⁹ Armstrong & Cornish (1999), 15.

employed in male-predominant jobs.⁴⁰

Though perhaps predictable, such differences of opinion raise the question: what can be reliably deemed the main results of Ontario's pay equity experiment? The next section considers this issue.

Results

A comprehensive investigation of the *PEA*'s effects has never been carried out – and may be almost impossible, since there is precious little publically available information on pay equity activities in private firms where no litigation was launched. Nevertheless, some research has been conducted on the topic over the past few years and it, together with qualitative evidence, including my interviews, reveals a certain degree of consensus regarding twelve factual outcomes of the legislation.⁴¹

First, substantial wage increases were in fact obtained by tens of thousands of workers in female-predominant jobs. Adjustments paid pursuant to the *PEA* were often worth thousands of dollars per year to the affected individuals, making a significant difference in their levels of earnings.⁴² Although firm data on the average wage increases achieved through the Ontario process are not available due to the confidentiality of such information,

⁴⁰ Baker & Fortin (1998, 2000).

⁴¹ The summary of results in this section is based primarily on Ames (1995); Armstrong & Cornish (1999); Baker & Fortin (2000); Gallant & Streiner (1998); Glenn (1994); Gunderson & Lanoie (1999); McColgan (1997); McDonald & Thornton (1998); and interviews.

⁴² Canadian Facts (1992, 1993); Gunderson & Lanoie (1999).

especially in the private sector, anecdotal information on specific public sector cases is in the public domain. The Equal Pay Coalition, for instance, cites the following examples of payouts on its website:

- a \$7,680 annual raise to high school secretaries;
- a \$7,179 annual increase for police dispatchers;
- a \$4.28 hourly raise to law clerks;
- a \$2.79 hourly increase for health technicians; and
- a \$2.20 hourly raise to mental health workers.⁴³

Based on their own experience, senior staff of the Pay Equity Office and consultants have estimated that female-predominant jobs typically received raises of 5 to 10 per cent in the public sector, and 2 to 6 per cent in the private sector.⁴⁴ In short, pay equity's most important goal – increasing the income of people in poorly appreciated jobs performed mostly by women – was partly achieved. While far from revolutionary or comprehensive, redistribution did take place.

Second, the proactive nature of the legislation led to wider application of pay equity than would have occurred otherwise.⁴⁵ The time- and resource-consuming task of identifying and removing gender bias from compensation simply would not have been undertaken by most employers in the absence of statutory requirements and deadlines. The comparative experience of

⁴³ Equal Pay Coalition (2002b).

⁴⁴ Interviews 1, 2, 18, and 19.

⁴⁵ Interviews 2, 5, 8, and 15.

complaints-based and proactive regimes shows that the latter produce more action, which at least opens the door to more substantive results. Whether those potential results are actually achieved, however, depends on more than mere proactivity.

Third, pay equity was implemented most consistently and effectively in the public sector and in unionized settings.⁴⁶ In part, this is attributable to the fact that unions often acted as advocates and watchdogs, seeking to ensure that pay equity was conducted in a manner that would produce significant improvements for members in female job classes. It may also reflect the fact that unions brought a degree of knowledge to the pay equity process which enhanced its reliability, and had the ability to secure employee cooperation. Finally, in the case of the public sector, the absence of a profit motive presumably meant a greater willingness -- at least until the election of the deficit-slashing Conservatives -- to bear the costs associated with effective implementation of the *PEA*.

Fourth, where pay equity was implemented, it sometimes had (largely unanticipated) positive spin-offs for employers. Among the most common were modernization of wage-setting mechanisms, revision of work processes, and improvement of management-employee relations. Over the years, many organizations had come to rely on haphazard amalgams of compensation principles and procedures which confused even experienced human resources

⁴⁶ Interviews 1, 13, and 17. There is significant overlap between these categories, since most of the public sector is unionized, while most of the private sector is not.

staff, demanded significant investments to run, and fostered distrust among employees. Because pay equity obligated employers to apply carefully-designed job evaluation systems, it often contributed to the creation of more streamlined, transparent compensation systems. Similarly, the documentation of work -- required as part of the job evaluation process -- helped organizations identify inefficiencies and reallocate work in a more rational fashion. Pay equity not only highlighted female-predominant duties, but also unnecessary duplication and poor work flows. In addition, some employers have found that cooperation with unions on pay equity has led to less combative union-management relations overall. Finally, some organizations feel that the implementation of pay equity helped address employee concerns about fairness in wages and as a result, enhanced morale.⁴⁷

Fifth, pay equity drew more women into the ranks of unions and so, raised the general priority given to "women's issues" by bargaining agents.⁴⁸ This is a result noted by participants in pay equity processes in other jurisdictions as well.⁴⁹ Unions which had historically been controlled by men and relatively inattentive to matters such as child care, flexible work hours, and sexual harassment suddenly had to deal with an influx of female activists energized by the pay equity process. The ripple effect in areas far removed from wage discrimination is still being felt.

⁴⁷ McDonald & Thornton (1998); interviews 5, 7, and 18.

⁴⁸ Interviews 13-15.

⁴⁹ Acker (1989).

Sixth, notwithstanding the active role played by many unions in the pay equity process and the influx of female activists into some, there were instances where unions either collaborated with management to minimize disruption to the existing hierarchy among workers, or tried to use pay equity to make gains unrelated to issues of wage discrimination. While no one knows the scope of such phenomena, senior figures within the labour movement interviewed for this project quietly acknowledged the existence of some “sweetheart deals” to ensure union acquiescence in low pay equity adjustments, as well as attempts by certain unions to “leverage” pay equity during the Social Contract period, when the NDP government imposed fiscal restraints on almost every area except adjustments under the *PEA*.⁵⁰

Seventh, those involved in implementing pay equity – employers, unions, and individual employees alike – found the process to be complicated, challenging, and time-consuming.⁵¹ The novelty of the *PEA*'s requirements, the intricacies of job evaluation, the law's sometimes convoluted wording, and the absence of definitions of key concepts all contributed to this feeling. Many implementation processes became bogged down in confusing technical details and, notwithstanding the educational efforts of the Pay Equity Office, pay equity itself was never really “demystified” for many people affected by it.

Eighth, very large sums of money were spent on consultants by

⁵⁰ Interviews 2, 6, 7, and 13

⁵¹ Interviews 1, 3, 7-13, 16, 18, and 19.

employers who could afford them. These consultants helped organizations chart a way through the complexities of pay equity, promising (sometimes without justification) that their expertise would shield employers from accusations of gender bias.⁵² In fact, it is commonly (and logically) assumed that many consultants were retained with the specific purpose of helping employers keep wage increases as low as possible, and there is evidence that in certain instances, more money was spent on consultants' services than on improvements to the salaries of employees in female-predominant occupations.⁵³ According to one well-placed source, "the large amounts of money spent on consultants were part of a deliberate strategy to keep pay equity adjustments down. Over the long term, this meant savings for employers."⁵⁴

Ninth, a very large number of non-unionized, private sector employers simply ignored the law. This was especially true of smaller private employers. While it is impossible to determine precisely how many employers ignored the law (this is not something people readily admit to, after all), one study has suggested that non-compliance rates among such employers were 50 to 80 per cent,⁵⁵ a figure in line with the "roughly two-thirds" estimate provided by two of

⁵² Interviews 8, 15, 17, and 18.

⁵³ Read (1996).

⁵⁴ Interview 1.

⁵⁵ Baker & Fortin (2000).

this dissertation's most seasoned informants.⁵⁶ One interviewee with years of experience in the Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal went even further, bluntly asserting that "the law didn't do anything for women in non-unionized, private sector companies."⁵⁷ The reasons are partly evident from foregoing points: given that pay equity was difficult to implement, that it seemed to require the services of high-priced consultants, and that bargaining agents often acted as watchdogs in unionized environments, it is not particularly surprising that many small, non-unionized employers without sophisticated compensation systems or large human resources budgets were tempted to pretend the law did not exist. Reinforcing this inclination were the facts that employers did not have to report to any oversight agency on their progress towards meeting the requirements of the *PEA*, and that smaller employers had no obligation to develop and post a formal pay equity plan.

Tenth, in part because of the implementation gap between, on the one hand, public sector and unionized organizations and, on the other hand, private sector, non-union workplaces, many of the wage adjustments paid under the *PEA* went to female-predominant occupations that were already earning a comparatively good salary. Though nurses, for example, were no doubt substantially undervalued in comparison with other hospital staff, they were still earning much more than, say, private sector clerks and waitresses. Thus, the

⁵⁶ Interviews 2 and 6.

⁵⁷ Interview 4.

individuals who benefited most from the *PEA* were not the worst-off in absolute terms, and it is probable that pay equity actually increased differentials among those performing “women’s work.”⁵⁸

Eleventh, there was some job loss for people employed in female-predominant occupations as a result of increased salaries. How much is hotly debated: pay equity advocates think pay equity-related contractions in employment were highly marginal, since the scale of salary increases -- usually a few per cent of payroll at most -- could be absorbed by most employers with little difficulty; others, however, suggest significant job loss may have occurred where increases were large or profit margins tight.⁵⁹

Twelfth, it is doubtful whether all the wage relativities established through pay equity (where implemented) are being preserved over time. Although the law requires “maintenance” of pay equity, it is silent on how this is to be achieved. Many people expect therefore that gender bias in wages will re-emerge, especially as work becomes more fluid and more difficult to “capture” through processes such as job evaluation.⁶⁰

Assessment

In what respects, then, did Ontario’s pay equity experiment succeed from an egalitarian perspective, and in what respects did it fail? Its most obvious

⁵⁸ Interviews 2 and 6.

⁵⁹ Interviews 5, 7, 11, and 14.

⁶⁰ Interviews 1, 2, 5, 14, and 19.

achievement is clearly redistributive: it produced a greater transfer of moneys to people in female-predominant fields than would have been imaginable in its absence. Many thousands of real people in poorly-paid jobs received income above the levels they would have enjoyed had the experiment never been launched. For most pay equity advocates, this in and of itself is sufficient to qualify the experiment a success, whatever its shortcomings. Sometimes, they think what was achieved was the maximum possible; sometimes they hope it is only the beginning. The comments during interviews of three women heavily involved in promoting and implementing the *PEA* in the women's movement, unions, and Pay Equity Office are illustrative:

The Act's done something real for women. It got money into their pockets, money they wouldn't have received without the Act. What alternatives were there that would have actually worked? We shouldn't be naive.

The law was a step in the right direction. Reforms like pay equity push the envelope. They prepare the ground for greater change. Reform prompts questioning and contributes to a process of radicalization. We have to be realistic. Even the best law is only going to make small changes. It has to operate within the system. Still, given how much it's under attack, it must be having some effect.

Sometimes, partial success is the best we can do. At least we accomplished something.⁶¹

In addition, pay equity brought about cultural changes of benefit to people employed in female-predominant occupations. It raised awareness of the ways in which "women's work" has been historically under-recognized and

⁶¹ Interviews 15, 13, and 2, respectively.

drew attention to features of it which had long been overlooked. As several authors note, pay equity can have real significance simply as a statement of principle which begins to alter social norms.⁶² As a result of the *PEA*, it became more legitimate to demand sensitivity to the content of jobs performed mostly by women and, generally, to “women’s issues,” both in workplaces and in unions. The traditional hierarchy, and its link to gender, was disturbed, if not broken. This can be seen as a redistribution of power and status, and may prove as important in the long run as any closure of the wage gap.

Against these achievements stand a number of serious deficiencies. The most significant is the inconsistency of the *PEA*’s impact. This unevenness produced its own inequities, not the least of which was exacerbation of the gaps between people performing more privileged “women’s work” – the professionals, the unionized, the public servants – and others who slipped through the wide cracks in the legislation and were left even further behind as a result. When the better-off of the have-nots obtain better life chances as a result of an egalitarian program, the gap between them and more privileged groups is narrowed, but the gap between the worst-off and the rest of society is widened. From the perspective of egalitarian aspirations, such results can hardly be counted an unqualified success. They meet the threshold for satisfying what might be termed egalitarianism’s minimum standards -- since they involve an overall enhancement of substantive equality and do not erode

⁶² Kessler-Harris (1990); Perlman & Pike (1994); Willborn (1989).

the absolute position of the worst-off -- but they do not exceed that threshold by very much.

The haphazard nature of Ontario's pay equity experiment, of course, was unintentional. Indeed, a central objective of proactive legislation had been to maximize coverage. The failure to reach that objective is attributable to the ambiguity and complexity of the law, the heavy burdens associated with compliance, statutory features which allowed employers to avoid significant payouts through technical means (such as the restriction of comparisons to single establishments and the preference for job-to-job comparisons⁶³), and the absence of effective monitoring and enforcement except where someone had the wherewithal to bring concerns before the Pay Equity Office and Tribunal. There is no guarantee that in the absence of these lacuna, compliance would have approached 100 per cent, but it is reasonable to assume it would have been significantly higher.

Even where a pay equity exercise was conducted, the results were not always impressive. Although it would be unfair to deny that many employers, especially in the public sector, made genuine efforts to root gender bias out of their compensation systems, many others wanted to keep payouts down without formally being in non-compliance with the law, and found numerous avenues for doing so. Thus, though Ontario's pay equity experiment had redistributive effects, they were limited by the definitional compromises and

⁶³ Ames (1995).

gaps in the statute, the technically complex nature of the implementation process, and the willingness of some unions (mostly male-dominated ones in the private sector) to cut deals that were not in the best interests of members in mainly female jobs. If an egalitarian experiment achieves some redistribution, but less than was hoped, and less than might have been accomplished through better design, it cannot be counted an unqualified success.

Finally, whatever economic redistributions were achieved through the *PEA* may not prove durable. This is attributable to several factors. First, rapid changes in the structure of work, which are related to processes of globalization, have made it harder to know who is an employee and what her wages and the content of her work are. When much of an employer's workforce, especially in traditionally female fields, is retained through contingent contracts, laws which regulate the employment conditions of legal employees are rendered less effective. When pay rates are individualized through performance measures, commissions, and the like, it becomes difficult to know, for purposes of comparison, what salary each job earns. And when work is assigned on an ad-hoc basis, arriving at an accurate description and evaluation of a job becomes much more complicated.⁶⁴

Second, the ability of employers to relocate their operations, which is again a function of globalization, makes it easier for them to evade pay equity rules, and to pressure unions and governments to back off from pay equity

⁶⁴ Figart & Kahn (1997).

battles. Third, the difficulty people have understanding pay equity's intricacies, along with the significant resources demanded by gender neutral job evaluation, mean that substantial investments are required to achieve true maintenance – and such investments are unlikely once public interest has faded. Fourth, the lack of a detailed maintenance provision in the law makes it hard for individual employees, unions, or the Pay Equity Office to pursue organizations which stop paying attention to pay equity. Against these factors, all of which raise doubts about the longer-term effects of Ontario's experiment, must be weighed the cultural changes discussed earlier -- changes which, by reducing tolerance for gender-influenced wage disparities, may reduce the likelihood that such disparities will again balloon.

Feminists sympathetic to the goals of Ontario's pay equity experiment but sceptical about its effectiveness have been quick to downplay its achievements and emphasize its shortcomings. Just three years after the *PEA*'s passage, Pat McDermott wrote:

Although government policy is directed at closing only about 10 percent of an approximately 40 percent gender based wage gap, it seems clear that this *Act* will fall far short of accomplishing this relatively modest goal. It is likely that only a handful of those seeking an end to the undervaluation of their work will find a remedy under this *Act*. Those that are lucky enough to accomplish any significant wage adjustments will undoubtedly find the route to pay equity long and convoluted.⁶⁵

More recently, Aileen McColgan has argued that “the most valuable lesson to be learned from the Pay Equity Act concerns the ease with which

⁶⁵ McDermott (1990), 407.

grand schemes can be neutered by apparently minor details”⁶⁶ and Jan Kainer has written that “pay equity’s social vision is weakened and redefined in the process of implementation.”⁶⁷ Such assessments undoubtedly have some justification: there is indeed a significant distance between the egalitarian hopes of the *PEA*’s proponents and the statute’s actual redistributive results. Nevertheless, Ontario’s experiment was not without its accomplishments. This mix of achievements and failings holds several lessons for those interested in increasing substantive equality, and especially those seeking to do so through reformist measures.

A key lesson is that egalitarians must be careful not to underestimate the resistance of parties asked to invest and sacrifice resources in order to achieve redistribution, and be careful not to overestimate the potential for transformation. Altruism, though it often influences, rarely reigns. Pay equity advocates are right to argue that their law accomplished something tangible, but that does not change the fact that it accomplished less than was anticipated, and less than might have been possible. While radicals may overstate the case in arguing that substantive redistribution within existing structures is virtually impossible, that does not mean it is easy. Reform efforts have to be grounded in a realistic assessment of the challenges involved, lest they get sidelined by too much enthusiasm and too little strategic thinking.

⁶⁶ McColgan (1997), 320.

⁶⁷ Kainer (1995), 467.

When it comes to social groupings that benefit from the status quo -- which often means employers and the financially well-off -- reformers must strike a delicate, and often difficult, balance between the application of pressure for change and the need for engagement and collaboration. This lesson, though in some sense prosaic, informs many of those that follow.

One means of generating pressure for reformist equalization is to forge broad alliances of like-minded organizations. The Equal Pay Coalition demonstrates that the political potential of an egalitarian proposal is increased substantially when a wide range of committed groups stand behind it. This is a critical point from the perspective of egalitarian strategy, for it speaks to how advocates of greater distributive justice can establish and sustain momentum for their proposals in a political context heavily influenced by proponents of the status quo. Whatever the abstracted notion of rational political debate may imply, the fact is that a single spokesperson for a good egalitarian idea is much less likely to get a serious hearing than a spokesperson for thousands of angry supporters of a good idea. Reform becomes appealing to those who have to ante up when it is based not only on the demands of justice, but also on the need to assuage the agitated. This does not mean that reform only gets adopted when there is a perceived threat of revolution, but it does mean that the existence of a bloc of social movements all pressing in a similar direction helps focus minds and increase receptivity to redistributive initiatives.

Resistance to egalitarian agendas can be countered in part by framing those agendas in terms of basic rights. In some respects, this strategy of

depoliticization is highly effective, since it casts redistribution in terms of widely accepted principles of fairness and so, undercuts opposition. It is also in line with the egalitarian thesis that greater equality is an imperative of justice. That being said, questions of allocation are, at least in part, intrinsically political; that is, they are about setting priorities and making choices regarding who receives scarce resources. The tactic of treating them as exclusively technical (and by extension, legal) in character may be a double-edged sword, inasmuch as it can curtail healthy debate about distributional values, empower specialists (who are not always egalitarians), and facilitate obfuscation and obstruction by those wedded to the status quo.⁶⁸ Pay equity has even been attacked by opponents for having a hidden, political agenda – for being about redistribution *per se* and not the impartial valuation of work.⁶⁹ The lesson here is that the political dimension of egalitarian initiatives should not be concealed, and that the dichotomy between the technical and the political should be rejected. While there may be a certain tension between the technical and the political, they are not inherently contradictory. Redistributive schemes can (and almost always will) have both a political and a technical quality; and emphasizing one to the exclusion of the other is rarely constructive over the long term.

This has direct implications for the messages used to promote reformist

⁶⁸ Such concerns are common among more radical feminist critics of pay equity (cf n.18). Michael Mandel (1989) has written more generally about the perils involved when progressive politics are built around rights-based litigation. This is discussed more fully in chapter 5.

⁶⁹ Rhoades (1993), 220-223.

programs. Because reform, by definition, does not aspire to replace existing social structures, it is often accompanied by reassuring rhetoric that alleviates worries about disruption. Such rhetoric has the advantage of facilitating consensus at the front end – witness the tri-party support for the *PEA* in 1987 -- but may not adequately prepare the ground for change. If the “haves” are surprised and aggravated by the need for significant expenditures and transfers to the “have-nots,” they will naturally act more aggressively to minimize their liability and, by extension, the impact of the effort. Frustration of reformist aims can be reduced if clear and balanced language is used when discussing expectations. Without being unnecessarily spooked, the privileged and powerful need to be psychologically primed for change, both through positive messages regarding fairness and negative images of the consequences of continuing disparities.

The need for clarity continues to apply throughout the reformist effort. Because they are involved in incremental change, not revolution, reformers have to articulate requirements with a high degree of precision. Unnecessary ambiguity and complexity increase implementation costs and hence, incentives for resistance; they also provide openings for sophisticated evasion and alienate many of the very people who are supposed to be the reform's beneficiaries. In the case of Ontario's pay equity experiment, obscure statutory wording and the absence of guidance on key issues – especially the requirement to apply gender neutral job evaluation systems – were unquestionably a drag on effectiveness. Granted, the use of job evaluation is

probably necessary in a decentralized economy, and it must be acknowledged that Ontario was a pioneer in the area of pay equity and so, did not have the benefit of experience now available. Nevertheless, clearer direction on implementation processes would almost certainly have reduced non-compliance and extraneous expenditures on consultants, and increased the scope of redistribution.

Education and consultation can contribute to clarity and “buy-in,” even where legislative requirements are ambiguous. The Pay Equity Office almost certainly enhanced the quality of pay equity programs (where they were carried out) by placing great emphasis on information services and consultative initiatives in the period after enactment of the *PEA*. A decade later, it is still possible to find many employers and unions who praise these efforts -- and express regret at their abatement after the first few years.

The lessons discussed so far have largely dealt with the conceptual level: the framing and communication of egalitarian reform. But the Ontario experiment also has lessons related to the reform's actual content. The first of these is that broad coverage is advisable. Redistributive schemes which apply to only some of the people some of the time don't fool those who become their targets into believing their sacrifices are unavoidable. In contrast, reforms based on a common set of proactive requirements, systemic methods, and the widest possible application enhance the internal logic and social normativity of change, and decrease arbitrariness and competitive disadvantages. The less comprehensive a program, the more likely it is that those expected to pay will

be tempted to circumvent it, and the less likely it is that the effort will achieve far-reaching, sustainable redistribution.

The *PEA*, of course, was designed to be broad in coverage, but that goal was undercut by the absence of an effective compliance mechanism. The law's use of a "self-managed" implementation process made sense in light of the need to build consensus and the difficulties of directly regulating a huge number of organizations. However, equating self-management with the complete lack of any reporting requirement imported many of the problems of the complaints-based system back into the Ontario experiment – and thus, played a role in high rates of non- and formalistic compliance among employers and instances of dubious deal-cutting by unions. Because reluctance to see reforms through is inevitable, redistributive initiatives can only succeed where transparency and oversight are integrated into their basic structure. Otherwise, the temptation to leave things as they are can be too great to resist, and the comprehensiveness and redistributive impact of the project impaired.

The *PEA* experiment also highlights the importance of provisions that reflect the understanding of equality underpinning the reformist initiative. This is where the "equality of what?" question gets manifested, fatefully, in practice. The Ontario law's preference for job-to-job comparisons, use of the lowest-paid comparator for calculating salary adjustments, and delineation of the boundaries for comparison (establishment) on the basis of bargaining unit and geographic location all expressed a very modest view of the sort of equalization that could be "justified" by the statute's purpose. A less constrained

conceptualization would almost certainly have meant less restrictive provisions with respect to who could be compared to whom, and thus, greater redistribution.

An additional lesson is that the benefits of union representation and public sector employment to egalitarian reform efforts should not be overlooked. Given the laissez-faire tenor of the times, it has become fashionable to downplay these factors. Ontario's pay equity experiment, however, provides evidence that they remain important contributors to any redistributive program. Private sector firms are in business to make profit, not advance social justice, and the presence of labour representatives and a vibrant public sector, while no panacea, does help reinforce the impact of initiatives whose objective is partly to mould the effects of market forces.

The case study also indicates that reforms can spark change in unexpected places. Indeed, it might be argued that the positive but unanticipated effects of the *PEA* – for employers, within unions, and in terms of wider receptivity to “women's issues” -- largely compensate for some of the disappointment regarding the scope of wealth redistribution. It seems that the dynamics created when the status quo begins to be questioned, even tentatively, can resonate in areas removed from the original focus of the effort. This suggests that from an egalitarian perspective, reforms may be worth pursuing even when there is some doubt as to the scope of their redistributive effects.

Finally, the Ontario experience demonstrates that reformist efforts

cannot be insulated from prevailing economic trends. The use of competitiveness and globalization concerns to justify scaling back the reform and the difficulties with long-term maintenance both illustrate this point. It is also possible that some employers persuaded unions to keep pay equity “under control” by alluding to the profit pressures and relocation options engendered by globalization. Redistributive initiatives that rely on conventional notions of sovereign jurisdiction and conventional ideas about the nature of work are decreasingly effective. If it is to have an impact, egalitarianism has to engage shifting contextual realities and be flexible enough to respond to them.

These lessons are of relevance to anyone seeking to identify what works and what does not with respect to translation of the egalitarian ethos into action. It could be argued, however, that many of them reflect the inherent limits of reformism. As we have seen, radical critics fault the architects of the *PEA* not for their intentions, but for their naive belief that significant resources could be redistributed to poorly paid people doing “women’s work” without a fundamental transformation of social relations. In the next chapter, we will examine an egalitarian experiment born out of the conviction that substantive equality could only be attained through the inauguration of entirely new structures. Its apparent success over more than half a century and more recent period of crisis hold their own lessons for our inquiry.

Chapter 4

The Kibbutz: Radical Egalitarianism in Action

Choice of the Case

The reasons for selecting the kibbutz experiment as a case study mirror those that underlay the choice of pay equity. First, the kibbutz, for most of its history, was quintessentially radical in its analysis of social disparities and its choice of strategies for their reduction or elimination. Second, the kibbutz is a critical case, inasmuch as it constitutes the broadest and most durable attempt to create voluntary communes where property is collectively owned, consumption is based strictly on equality and need, and efforts are made to lead the surrounding society in a similar egalitarian direction.¹ Third, the kibbutz has gone through a profound crisis and transformation over the past 15 years – a crisis that has raised doubts about its continued viability and that is only now giving way to a greater sense of equilibrium – making this an apt moment for reviewing its development and considering what it can teach us. Finally, like pay equity, the kibbutz case is methodologically manageable, since it centres on a set of discrete communities with an explicit ideology, a tradition of openness and self-criticism, and a rich documentary record.

The structure and length of this chapter diverge from those of its predecessor to take account of differences in the nature of the cases. Pay equity was more of a “deductive” experiment: it started with clear, fixed goals

¹ The large-scale communal experiments launched in putatively socialist states such as the USSR, China, Mozambique, and Cuba were significantly less voluntary and egalitarian than the kibbutz. Religiously-inspired communes in North America may be less coercive and more enduring than such centrally-imposed collectives, but in comparison with the kibbutz (at least in its historic form), they are small, hierarchical, and isolated from wider society -- and thus, less pertinent to a project whose concerns are broader.

and implemented a strategy to achieve them within a specific time frame. This lent itself to the objectives-history-results structure. The kibbutz is more of a continuous work-in-progress where aims, means, and outcomes have evolved over a much more extended period, interacting constantly with one another. As a result, this chapter's narrative is longer and more heavily chronological. It begins, like chapter 3, with sections on method and on theory and objectives, but the latter is relatively short because of the "reappearance" of these issues through the historical account. The bulk of the chapter is organized in a series of sections which examine the implementation of kibbutz ideals and the results of those efforts in four sequential periods. The chapter concludes, like the pay equity case study, with an assessment of the achievements and failings of the experiment, and lessons the experiment offers for egalitarian projects more generally.

Method

This chapter draws upon the same three types of sources as its predecessor. In this case, the literature review involves both English and Hebrew publications, the bulk of the Hebrew material having been located at the libraries of the kibbutz movement's research centre (Efal) and a college founded by the kibbutz movement (Ruppin College). My personal experience with the kibbutz, though not as extensive as with pay equity, includes a year of residence and work on the Northern kibbutz of Gesher Haziv (1984-85) and

continuing links with friends and family members residing in kibbutzim.²

The interviews for this chapter were conducted with a heterogeneous sample of current and former kibbutz members. The sample breaks down as follows:

- Secretaries³ of individual kibbutzim: 5 (interviews 1 to 5)
- Kibbutz movement officials: 2 (interviews 6 and 7)
- Kibbutz researchers: 4 (interviews 8 to 11)
- Rank-and-file kibbutz members: 6 (interview 12 to 17)
- Former kibbutz members: 2 (interview 18 and 19)

Of the Secretaries, those covered by interviews 1 and 2 presided over large kibbutzim, those covered by interviews 3 and 4 over mid-sized kibbutzim, and the one covered by interview 5 over a small kibbutz. Of these kibbutzim, one was a relatively vibrant and stable community at the time of the interviews, two were struggling, and two were in danger of collapse.

One of the two officials interviewed for the dissertation worked at the Tel Aviv headquarters of the kibbutz movement, and was opposed to the far-reaching changes taking place in many kibbutzim (interview 6). The other was employed at the Efal research centre and was generally supportive of change (interview 7).

Among the four researchers, all were kibbutz members when

² It is common practice to use the Hebrew plural of kibbutz, kibbutzim, when writing in English.

³ The General Secretary (Mazkir) is the elected head of the kibbutz.

interviewed, all but one (interview 8) were employed in post-secondary educational institutions, and all but one (interview 9) were proponents of far-reaching change in the kibbutz.

Of the six rank-and-file kibbutz residents, two were elderly people from the founding generation of kibbutz members (interviews 12 and 13), three were middle-aged people from the second generation (interviews 14 to 16), and one was a young woman from the third generation (interview 17). The two older members and one of the middle-aged members (interview 14) were opposed to or ambivalent about recent reforms, while the other two middle-aged members and the young woman generally backed the change process.

Both of the two ex-members interviewed were, at the time of our discussions, professionals living in large cities in central Israel. One was positive about his kibbutz experience (interview 18), while the other was quite bitter about her childhood on the kibbutz and critical of kibbutz ideology (interview 19).

As in the previous chapter, the anonymity of interviewees is protected, and the information they provided appears mainly in discussions of outcomes rather than history – in this case, most prominently in the critical section dealing with recent changes to the kibbutz model.

Theory and Objectives of the Kibbutz

The kibbutz was established with two basic objectives. The first was a function of the Zionist drive to create a homeland for the Jewish people in the

Holy Land. Zionism arose in the late nineteenth century as a response to the persecution faced by Jews in Europe. It argued that the Jewish people was doomed to an alienated, insecure existence as long as it did not have a country in which it was a majority free to develop as a “normal” nation. The Zionist movement sought to settle Jews in the land to which they had always dreamed of returning after the arrival of the Messiah. This meant, of course, disregard for the concerns and rights of the local Arab population -- a population that would be partially displaced and suppressed in order to “solve” a largely European “Jewish problem.” However, without wishing to engage in an apologia, it is important to remember that this obtuseness sprang from a preoccupation with the needs of Jews who were suffering from continuous discrimination, bloody pogroms, and eventually, genocide, as well as the lack (in the early years of Zionist immigration) of a concrete national identity among Palestinian Arabs. This does not “excuse” the injustices occasioned by the realization of Zionist plans (to the extent that we choose to pass retrospective judgement), but it does provide historical context which helps us understand why Zionism was a credo that deeply moved thousands of idealistic, well-intentioned young people and inspired them to uproot themselves, usually from Eastern Europe, and begin new lives in a far-away land.

The Zionist components of the kibbutz project related to Jewish settlement of that land and renewal of the social structure of the Jewish people. The settlement goal involved obtaining and cultivating as much acreage as possible in order to strengthen the foundations, material and moral, of the drive

for a Jewish homeland. The social renewal goal involved the creation of a nation more closely tied to the soil and physical labour. Jews, argued the Zionists, had become too urban, bookish, and insular during their two millennia of dispersion, wandering, and exclusion from most occupations. Working the earth was essential to the creation of a healthy, normal people.⁴ The kibbutz, then, was perceived as a vehicle both for settling the land and embedding the Jewish nation in it.

The second basic objective of the kibbutz was to create an egalitarian, communal society based on radical socialist and, to some extent, anarchist ideas. The young people who came from Eastern Europe to set up kibbutzim were steeped in the revolutionary values surging through their places of birth during the early decades of the twentieth century. They believed that it was imperative to eliminate class distinctions and, in so doing, inaugurate social relations based on equality, close human bonds, and an appreciation of labour. Their vision was millennial at the outset, and remained highly idealistic for decades. Here, the congruity between the Zionist and socialist dimensions of kibbutz ideology becomes evident. Both involved establishing brand-new communities from the ground up, and both stressed physical labour. The Zionist strain required the creation of new settlements and of a new kind of Jew; the socialist strain saw *sui generis* communities as a golden opportunity to

⁴ Here, the effects of European attitudes is clear. In some respects, Zionism accepted negative, anti-semitic representations of Jewish life in the diaspora. And in its association of soil and vibrant nationhood, Zionism was clearly influenced by more general trends within emerging European nationalisms.

put radical egalitarian principles into practice and create a new type of human being. The kibbutz was to be the embodiment of the radical values in which the pioneers believed, and the prototype for the fully egalitarian society of the future.⁵

The radical socialism of the kibbutz project was initially as much intuitive as explicit, but it was rapidly given form and substance by the thinkers and theoreticians of the kibbutz movement. Yosef Bussel, the intellectual leader of the group that in 1910 set up Degania, the first kibbutz, defined "its basic credo" as "a serious attempt to create a life of economic equality."⁶ The Marxist slogan, "from each according to ability, to each according to needs," was quickly adopted by the kibbutzim as their guiding principle, and so it remained until very recently. A kibbutz member's work and contribution to the community on the one hand, and his or her consumption of resources on the other, were completely de-linked.

The literature on the kibbutz has been marked by debate over the degree to which the early kibbutz experiment was a product of ideological as opposed to practical considerations. On one side are authors who believe that the roots of the kibbutz can be found in the conscious application of egalitarian principles to a reality which certainly did not dictate, and in some respects complicated, the achievement of a communist way of life. On the other side are

⁵ Interviews 15 and 16.

⁶ Cited in Shur (1983/4), 170.

scholars who suggest that collectivism was adopted primarily because of the exigencies of establishing new communities in a difficult environment marked by scarce resources. The majority of writers fall between these views, arguing that a mix of *a priori* ideology and pragmatic demands shaped the kibbutz during its formative years. They term the kibbutz as a form of “utopian realism” in which ideology and practicality each generated “boundary conditions” for the other.⁷

Even if one believes that objectively, conditions largely imposed communalism on Jewish settlers at the outset, there is no doubt that subjectively, those settlers felt they were forging a new type of society based on ideals of cooperation and equality. The influence of utopian thinker A.D. Gordon on Degania is especially notable in this connection. Gordon lived and worked in Degania during its first (and his last) years, despite being much older than the first kibbutz's other residents. In doing so, he was motivated by his deep belief in what he termed the “religion of labour.” Drawing on Tolstoy, Gordon mixed egalitarianism, asceticism, and mystical feelings about tilling the earth and, through his daily contact with the first kibbutz members, deeply affected their thinking.⁸

While Gordon shaped the kibbutz mainly via personal example, other

⁷ Diverging opinions on this question can be found in a thick English-language collection on the kibbutz and other communes published in 1987 (Gorni, Oved & Paz, 1987). See especially the contributions of Gorni, Paz, Shapira, and Yassour. The quoted terms come from Gorni (49) and Paz (36) respectively.

⁸ Near (1992), 17; Shapira (1987).

socialist Zionist thinkers did so through their writings and political activism.

Chief among them were Ber Borochov and Berl Katznelson. Borochov was a member of the Russian Social Democratic Party before the Bolshevik-Menshevik split who wrote extensively on the relationship between Marxism and nationalism and, in 1901, founded the Zionist Socialist Workers Union (Poalei Tzion). One of the first theorists to claim that Zionism and socialism were naturally inter-related, he argued for Jewish “auto-emancipation” through a return to the Jewish homeland, physical labour, and radical socialism. Katznelson, who was from the next generation and, unlike Borochov, spent most of his adult life in Palestine, played a leading role in the establishment of institutions for the Jewish community in Palestine -- the Yishuv -- on the basis of socialist principles. These included a network of cooperative stores (Hamashbir), a socialized health fund (Kupat cholim), and a powerful labour federation (the Histadrut). For years, Katznelson propounded socialist Zionist theories as editor of the Histadrut’s daily newspaper, *Davar* -- the only newspaper many kibbutz members would consent to read.⁹ The ideas of Gordon, Borochov, Katznelson, and other socialist Zionist thinkers played a critical role during the kibbutz movement’s formative period, when its radical egalitarian ideology was refined and codified.

From its earliest days, then, the kibbutz was an intentional society marked by an effort to abolish private property and social disparities. Its

⁹ Short biographies of these and other Zionist thinkers can be found at Jewish Agency (2001).

premises and aims were radical to the core: it sought to achieve completely egalitarian distribution without delay; had few doubts that such a distributive pattern was not only possible, but necessary; and believed in the possibility of moulding a “new man” who would live such a life intuitively. Moreover, its ability to realize its radical vision is almost without parallel: in terms of its scope, influence, and durability, the kibbutz succeeded to a degree unseen in any other voluntary communist initiative. In the late 1940s, over seven per cent of Israel’s Jewish population lived in kibbutzim, and the kibbutz movement played a central role in the nascent Jewish state’s political life and national mythology. At the kibbutz movement’s numerical peak four decades later, some 170,000 residents resided in 270 kibbutzim.¹⁰ The kibbutz may therefore be seen not just as *one* experiment in radical egalitarianism, but as *the* leading experiment of this sort – and thus, as a potential source of important lessons for anyone interested in egalitarianism more generally.

The wider significance of the kibbutz has long been recognized by progressive thinkers and social scientists alike. In 1949, Martin Buber actually thought that because of capitalism’s inherent brutality, the decentralized, democratic socialism of the kibbutz would ultimately prove to be Soviet-style communism’s chief competitor.¹¹ In the 1960s, Georges Friedmann termed the kibbutz “the biggest and most successful ‘utopian’ revolutionary experiment that

¹⁰ Gavron (2000), 28; Near (1997), 364.

¹¹ Buber (1983), 35.

has been attempted and the closest approach to the way of living at which Communism aims” and Simone de Beauvoir hailed it as “a community of people that is different from all others” in which “there is no exploitation or alienation” but rather, “a sense of full equality and freedom.”¹² In 1983, Melford Spiro stated that in the kibbutz, “radical egalitarianism was practiced,” and it “ha[d] been a highly successful enterprise by virtue of its longevity (compared to almost every other utopian movement), as well as any other criterion by which the success of social systems is judged.”¹³ In 1990, Morton Deutsch said that “kibbutzim provide a laboratory in which one can seek answers to the basic questions about egalitarianism. One of the most basic questions is: can egalitarian communities survive?”¹⁴ Even today, after a decade and a half of crisis and change, leftist author Howard Fast expresses similar sentiments:

Of all the sociological experiments of the twentieth century, I consider the kibbutz movement in Israel to be the most important....At this moment of outrageous consumption and greed in the wealthiest sections of the earth, and hunger, misery, and poverty in the poorer sections, the kibbutz way of life appears as a dream...the coincidental set of circumstances that brought it into being...combined at an instant in history to create the boldest experiment in communal and collective living and creativity that the world had seen. This must never be underestimated. There had been many attempts at such efforts before, but never with the scope, ideological commitment, and success that marked the kibbutz movement.¹⁵

¹² Cited in Leon (1969), 1 and 196 respectively.

¹³ Spiro (1983), 3, 4.

¹⁴ Deutsch (1990), vii.

¹⁵ Fast (2000), ix.

The kibbutz, in short, adhered to a radical egalitarian philosophy and pursued radical egalitarian goals to a remarkable degree over the better part of a century, making it an ideal case study for our purposes. However, the path it has taken to achieving its objectives, and even the objectives themselves, have been far from static – and this, too, can teach us important lessons.

1910 to the Mid-1920s: Idealism and Innovation

The kibbutz, like most unconventional social experiments, emerged in a unique and emotionally charged environment. In Eastern Europe, where a large number of the world's Jews lived, anti-Semitism, nationalism, and revolutionary movements had been thriving since the late nineteenth century. Anti-Semitism, of course, deeply alienated Jews from the existing order, especially when it became violent. Many Jews took advantage of evolving transportation systems to move away from the racism and violence, seeking a better life in Western Europe, the United States, or Canada. Some, despairing of ever finding a country that would treat them as equals, developed the Jewish nationalism that came to be known as Zionism.¹⁶ Still others believed salvation lay in a revolution that would emancipate Jews along with all oppressed peoples and classes, and Jews led and participated in revolutionary

¹⁶ Doubts about the prospects for equality in predominantly non-Jewish countries increased as a result of the infamous Dreyfuss Affair of the 1890s, when a French military officer was framed and convicted of treason against a backdrop of intense anti-Jewish feeling. The shock of the Dreyfuss Affair convinced liberal Jewish journalist Theodore Herzl that the Jews had to have their own state, and he quickly became the leading theorist and spokesman of the Zionist movement.

movements in disproportionate numbers. More than a few combined these strains, becoming, for example, socialist Zionists or radical agitators in the United States.

Meanwhile, in Palestine, a decaying Ottoman empire applied a languid, corrupt system of rule to a country largely owned by absentee landlords and tilled by Arab peasants. In several locations, Zionist Jews had begun the process of settling in what they saw as their historic and future homeland, and funds were continually being collected by the Zionist movement to facilitate the purchase of additional territory.

It was under these conditions that several thousand immigrants came to Palestine and set up the first kibbutzim. Zionist immigration is typically divided into waves, or *aliyot*.¹⁷ The years 1904 to 1914 witnessed the Second Aliya, an influx of mostly Russian Jews, many in their late teens, who were charged with the conviction of their age (biological and historical) that the world could easily be re-made. Ultimately, a large percentage of these immigrants had second thoughts and abandoned Palestine in the face of a harsh physical environment, rampant malaria, and poverty; however, those resilient or committed enough to remain proved to be an unusually creative, energetic group, and were responsible for conceptualizing and moulding both the kibbutz and the wider Jewish society.¹⁸

¹⁷ The singular, "*aliya*," literally means "going up" and reflects the Zionist belief that it was a form of spiritual and historic ascendance to immigrate to Palestine.

¹⁸ For an excellent account of the Second Aliya and the origins of the kibbutz, see Near (1992), chapter 1.

A number of incipient collective experiments were attempted by Second Aliya immigrants in the first decade of the century, but their staying power was limited. Degania would prove to be different.¹⁹ Its origins are related to the desire of Arthur Ruppin, the Zionist official in charge of settlement activities, to encourage continued Jewish colonization of land purchased near the Sea of Galilee. In 1910, Ruppin contacted a group of labourers who had recently deserted an agricultural training farm in the same region in protest against the farm's retention of Arab labour – a violation, in their eyes, of the Zionist and socialist precepts of self-labour. Animated by strong collectivist ideals, the group agreed to Ruppin's suggestion that they establish a new settlement in the hope that it would evolve into a full-fledged, independent commune. Their optimistic, radical socialism contrasted with the general mood of discouragement in the Yishuv after the departure of thousands of Second Aliya immigrants. A book published on the fiftieth anniversary of Degania's establishment describes the aims and social patterns of the founders as follows:

On October 28, 1910, we came, ten male and two female comrades, to Um-Juni....We sought to create an independent settlement of Hebrew workers on the nation's land. A cooperative settlement without exploiters and exploited - a commune....For three years we avoided choosing leaders or committees. We feared the creation of a regime of managers and managed. It was good to sit together each evening in the communal dining hall, crowded around the long table, and discuss the next day's and week's work arrangements; to talk about the concerns of the collective, its fate and future, and afterwards to joke, to sing, and

¹⁹ For a brief, readable overview of Degania's origins, see Gavron (2000), 15-31.

to dance. Even if there was no one with official authority, there were some with moral authority, and we listened to them.²⁰

Degania signalled from the outset that it would not compromise its egalitarian principles. The year after its establishment, Ruppin suggested that it merge with Merhavia, a semi-collective settlement in the same area which combined family farming, joint ownership of some equipment, and oversight by an official of the Zionist movement. The Degania residents rejected this proposal outright. Yosef Bussel told Ruppin, “[t]he workers...are opposed to...differential wages as between workers; and supervision by an official manager.”²¹ The community also aspired to equality between the sexes -- though in practice work tended to be distributed along gender lines -- and to a reduction in the role of the traditional, “bourgeois” family. When Degania’s first children were born, a decision was made to raise them communally rather than leave them to the exclusive care of their parents, both as a matter of principle and in order to free the women for work. This pattern of child-rearing, which was supposed to contribute to the development of the socialist “new man,” became the norm on kibbutzim for seven decades.²²

During the years which followed Degania’s establishment, a variety of collectivist communities -- some closely modelled on Degania, others deviating from it in significant ways -- were attempted by the Jews of the Yishuv and the

²⁰ Kvutzat Degania Aleph (1961), 19, 59.

²¹ Near (1992), 36.

²² Gavron (2000), chapter 7.

Zionist movement. Debates raged about the forms of settlement that would best advance socialist and Zionist ends. Although Degania was an inspiration and egalitarianism a shared ideal, there was much disagreement about the precise social arrangements that should be implemented in the areas earmarked for Jewish colonization.²³

These debates intensified as the Third Aliya, the wave of Jewish immigration after World War One, gathered steam. Inspired by the Russian Revolution to believe a new age was dawning, and by the Balfour Declaration²⁴ to believe that a Jewish state was in the offing, thousands made their way to Palestine. Third Aliya immigrants swelled the ranks of the kibbutzim and added to the vibrant discussion of competing models of settlement. Among the critical questions was whether full or partial collectivization should prevail and whether small, intimate communities or larger settlements should be the goal. Even Degania itself was divided by such issues: some of its less ideological members departed in acrimony to live on moshavim, a mixed socialist-capitalist form of settlement which developed alongside the kibbutzim, and Degania itself elected at one point to split up in order to keep the number of members in the community low and, in so doing, maintain an atmosphere of intimacy and

²³ Ben-David (1983), 39-42.

²⁴ The Balfour Declaration was a November 1917 letter from Britain's Foreign Secretary to Lord Rothschild, a leading Jewish figure, promising British support for the establishment of a Jewish "national home" in Palestine. It was intended to secure Jewish support for the Allied war effort and conflicted with promises made by London to Arab leaders with the same goal -- a situation that added to inter-communal bitterness during and after the three decades of British rule (the Mandate period) over the Holy Land (1918-1948).

solidarity.

The latter action was scorned by many socialist Zionists – especially Third Aliya immigrants influenced by the new Soviet Union's promise of expansive communism -- who believed that the intimate kibbutz was overly ascetic, intellectual, and selective, and would therefore be incapable of settling large tracts of the land, fostering a class of Jewish labourers, and absorbing new immigration. Prominent among the critics was Shlomo Lavi, who in the early 1920s led a chaotic movement of mobile Jewish workers known as the Labour Brigade (G'dud Ha'Avoda). The Labour Brigade was part training ground for new immigrants, part putative prototype for a socialist society. Its members shared income, attempted to organize themselves according to socialist values, and aspired to transform the Jewish community into one huge kibbutz. Although it tended to lose its members after they had acquired trades skills, the Brigade contributed to the establishment of several new kibbutzim and the legitimization of the idea of the activist "big kibbutz."²⁵ Tensions between the small and large kibbutz tendencies, and between more and less puritanical versions of Marxism, would lead over time to the emergence of separate kibbutz federations.

Such disputes notwithstanding, by the end of its first decade and a half of existence, the kibbutz was characterized by a number of common qualities that set it apart from the wider society. These can be summarized as collective

²⁵ Near (1992), chapter 2, 136-148.

ownership of property, the existence of “mutual guarantees” by which all kibbutz members were liable and responsible for the well-being of their fellow members, the assignment of jobs on a rotational basis by a work coordinator, communal and egalitarian consumption, and collective decision-making through the direct democracy of regular general meetings.²⁶ Kibbutz members also shared a very strong sense of mission with respect to the Jewish people, seeing themselves as the pioneers who would redeem the land and realize the dream of creating a new society.²⁷ At the same time, there was concern among members about the persistent distance between their idealistic urge to realize radical socialism and pragmatic exigencies. During the very first kibbutz conference, at Degania in 1923, participants were already fretting over the stifling of individual initiative and the waning of revolutionary fervour.²⁸

Such worries can be interpreted in part as evidence of the winding-down of a stage of youthful spontaneity and mobilization. As kibbutzim grew and matured, the era of fluid idealism and innovation began, not surprisingly, to give way to a more defined set of social arrangements and guiding principles.

The Late 1920s to the Early 1950s: Ideology and Influence

The process of ideological crystallization is evident in the foundation of

²⁶ Lapidot et al. (2000), 32-33.

²⁷ Kanari (1989).

²⁸ Viteles (1967), 58.

four kibbutz federations in the late 1920s and early 1930s.²⁹ In 1927, the Kibbutz Meuchad (United Kibbutz), a federation favouring large kibbutzim, was set up and led by Labour Brigade graduates. This development came after several years of conflict among Brigade figures over the degree to which the Brigade should focus on urban as opposed to agricultural labour, the extent to which it should actively pursue a workers' revolution as opposed to constructing kibbutzim, and whether it should seek to set up one massive kibbutz or a network of autonomous kibbutzim. These feuds caused numerous schisms, one of which prompted Shlomo Lavi to resign, and another of which led a leftist faction to abandon Zionism altogether and move to the Soviet Union to set up a commune (which Stalin liquidated during the purges of the 1930s). The establishment of the Kibbutz Meuchad federation signalled the victory of the camp favouring large, mainly agricultural kibbutzim. The Kibbutz Meuchad's theorists, who were influenced by both socialism and anarchism, continued to oppose the notion of the small kibbutz, but also parted company with hard-line communism. Their approach was "constructive," aiming to realize society-wide socialism through the establishment of an ever-expanding chain of kibbutzim.

The same year, the Kibbutz Artzi (National Kibbutz), a more radical federation, was set up. The Kibbutz Artzi was a direct product of a highly idealistic youth movement, Hashomer Hatzair (the Young Guard), and reflected those origins in its official ideology, which tended to be both more romantic and

²⁹ The paragraphs on the establishment of the kibbutz federations are based on Near (1992), chapter 4 and Yadlin (1987).

more doctrinaire than that of the Kibbutz Meuchad. It favoured “organic” settlements populated by youth movement graduates, stressed Marxism, saw its kibbutzim as revolutionary “cells,” and was more ambivalent in its attitudes towards Zionism.

Four years later, in 1932, the intimate, less dogmatic kibbutzim which had not affiliated with one of the two existing federations united in Chever Hakvutzot (The Federation of Small Kibbutzim). For them, one of the kibbutz's main roles was to be an exemplary, agricultural society that would serve as an inspiration to those around it. A moderate, egalitarian socialism within, not mass revolution, was its goal. Like the Kibbutz Meuchad, it was pragmatic in its attitude towards the wider society; like the Kibbutz Artzi, it was selective in its acceptance of new members.

Finally, in the early 1930s, a number of new kibbutzim populated by orthodox Jews aligned themselves into the Kibbutz Dati (Religious Kibbutz) federation.³⁰ The ideology of the religious kibbutzim is unique in that it combines devout Judaism and socialism. However, the Kibbutz Dati has always been numerically insignificant and organizationally affiliated to the more moderate of the secular federations. It therefore figures little in our narrative.

In many respects, the distinctions between the three secular kibbutz federations were as much about attitude as policy. The Kibbutz Meuchad was open and expansive, the Kibbutz Artzi utopian and zealous, and Chever

³⁰ For accounts of the Kibbutz Dati, see Fishman (1983); Katz (1995); and Zur (1987).

Hakvutzot modest and prone to a touch of agricultural mysticism. These distinctions, of course, were hardly absolute and in any case, did not negate the fundamental similarities between the kibbutzim: all continued to be based on a radical egalitarian commitment to the elimination of private property, equal respect for all work, and distribution according to need. Indeed, the commitment to egalitarianism was so strong that in some kibbutzim, the “end of the kibbutz” was predicted by distraught members when it was proposed that each resident be assigned his or her own clothes rather than receiving different clothes every week from a common supply.³¹

These basic similarities did not prevent the federations from building up competing coalitions. After their establishment, a trend which had already begun in the previous decade gathered stream: each federation aligned itself with a different youth movement and a different Labour Zionist political party.³² This pattern facilitated the maintenance of distinct identities: a specific world-view could be propagated and expressed from childhood activities, through community life, to political behaviour. This system both symbolized and reinforced the transition of the kibbutz from its innovative to its ideological phase.

The founding of the kibbutz federations came after a number of years of crisis. The Fourth Aliya, which began in 1924, was comprised mainly of small

³¹ Near (1992), 382-383.

³² Yadlin (1987). By this period, “Labour Zionist” had become the accepted term for the broad spectrum of socialist Zionist movements, organizations, and parties.

business owners from Poland who moved to Tel Aviv and other towns to open shops. In contrast to the previous two waves of immigration, this bourgeois wave did nothing to strengthen the kibbutz's demographic base and, in fact, damaged its self-image as the avant-guard of the Zionist enterprise. The Fourth Aliya was followed by an economic downturn in the Yishuv that placed the viability of many kibbutzim in doubt.³³ The emergence of the kibbutz federations, then, was in part a way out of the morass.

The strategy of banding together and delineating ideological positions had a positive effect. However, the key factor which revived the kibbutz, and propelled it to new heights of self-confidence and achievement, was the renewal of the "national missions" of settlement, immigration, and defence.³⁴ From the late 1920s, Palestinian resistance to the Zionist project mounted and turned more violent, British mandate authorities imposed tight restrictions on Jewish immigration in an attempt to mollify Arab opinion, and the Jews of Europe faced an increasingly precarious position as Naziism and fascism took root. These circumstances prompted the Zionist leadership to adopt a more aggressive stance. First, it sought to expand the scope of Jewish settlement to ensure the best possible results, from its perspective, in the event that a decision was made to partition Palestine between the Jews and Arabs. The kibbutz, with its highly dedicated membership and its settlement credo, was

³³ Near (1992), chapter 4.

³⁴ For accounts of the kibbutz's role during this period, see Leiblich (1981), part 1, and Kanari (1989).

ideally suited to the task of geographic dispersion, and was soon specializing in the overnight establishment of new communities -- actually, the construction of a fence and tower -- in far-flung corners of the country. Second, the Zionist movement wanted to smuggle as many Jews into Palestine as possible, as a means of circumventing British immigration restrictions, saving lives, and bolstering the Yishuv. The social solidarity and ideological nature of the kibbutzim made them key co-conspirators in this undertaking, and many illegal immigrants found themselves quickly and quietly absorbed into kibbutzim immediately after their midnight arrival on Palestine's shores. Third, armed defence of Jewish communities became an growing priority as relations with the Palestinians deteriorated. The kibbutzim provided ideal hiding places for weaponry, and kibbutz members, with their philosophy of self-sacrifice for the collective, often proved to be the best fighters. The Yishuv's most potent armed force, the Palmach, was overwhelmingly kibbutz-based.

The outbreak of World War II and slaughter of Europe's Jews further heightened the Yishuv's preoccupation with immigrant smuggling, military action, and nation-building -- and the corresponding role of the kibbutz. As a result, both the kibbutz's population and stature grew tremendously during the decade between the start of the war and the establishment of the State of Israel. In September 1939, there were 71 kibbutzim with 24,105 members, constituting 5.3 per cent of the country's Jewish population; in May 1948, the figures were 177 kibbutzim, 49,140 members, and 7.6 per cent of the

population.³⁵ Concurrently, the kibbutz assumed a central place in Zionist mythology, and a period of residence on a kibbutz became something close to a *sine qua non* for those aspiring to leadership positions within the Yishuv's dominant Labour Zionist parties.

The tenor of the times comes through very clearly in the proceedings of the first Kibbutz Meuchad conference after the Second World War. The participants' speeches are full of outrage at the revelations of the full scope of the Holocaust and the decision of Britain's new Labour government to maintain restrictions on Jewish immigration, and a general mood of militancy and ideological devotion. Golda Meir, Israel's future Prime Minister, says, "because I cannot grasp socialism without a just solution to the Jewish problem, I will continue to be astonished by every socialist and every socialist gathering that treats us unjustly." Yitzchak Tabenkin, head of the Meuchad, concludes the conference with by declaring, "we believe in the human being, in human solidarity! Although we are isolated and alone we must fight, I have faith in the worker, the brave worker, the fighting worker, the revolutionary worker, the worker of the International, the worker of the final battle!"³⁶

The "period of glory" in kibbutz history began to come to a close with the announcement of the Zionist authorities, led by David Ben-Gurion, that they would accept the principle of partition in order to permit the establishment of a

³⁵ Near (1997), 364.

³⁶ Hakibbutz Hameuchad (1946), 290 and 298 respectively.

Jewish state in a portion of Palestine. The Kibbutz Meuchad, with its activist bent, opposed this compromise, preferring to delay Jewish sovereignty rather than accept what was, in its view, a truncated state. The Kibbutz Artzi, with its internationalist-communist orientation, feared that the mainstream Zionist movement was leading the Yishuv on an unnecessary collision course with the Arabs, and sought to explore the possibility of some form of a binational state. Although driven by different motives, the two federations shared disdain for Ben-Gurion's pragmatism, and joined forces politically to oppose him from the left in Mapam (the United Workers' Party). Chever Hakvutvot, remaining true to its less ideological traditions, was aligned with Ben-Gurion's dominant Mapai (Israel Worker's Party) and, in contrast to the other two federations, unhesitatingly welcomed the United Nations' vote in favour of partition and Ben-Gurion's proclamation, on the day the British Mandate expired, that a Jewish state had been established.

The rift between the Mapai leadership and the more left-wing kibbutz federations continued during and after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Aspiring to neutralize opposition and forge a single, professional army, Ben-Gurion disbanded the Palmach and dismissed many of its commanders. Later, seeking to forge a robust state, he ordered government bodies to assume nation-building roles hitherto carried out by the kibbutzim. Many kibbutz leaders, who had grown accustomed to a heroic self-image and public influence, were distressed by this deflation of their status and authority.

The final blow to the confidence of the kibbutzim came in 1951, when the

Kibbutz Meuchad went through a painful division. On one side was the dominant, activist faction that continued to distrust Ben-Gurion and, as the Cold War intensified, felt increasingly sympathetic towards the Soviet Union. On the other side was a large minority that was less drawn to orthodox communism and more supportive of the new state and its Prime Minister. Today, kibbutz members find it hard to explain how such differences of opinion could have caused a schism in the largest kibbutz federation.³⁷ At the time, however, ideological issues were so important that they actually fractured families and shattered long-time friendships.³⁸ On Kibbutz Ein Harod, the flagship of the Kibbutz Meuchad, barbed wire was strung across the collective dining hall to separate the two factions and eventually, the kibbutz, like several others, was physically and organizationally divided. In other instances, population exchanges took place between kibbutzim with different majority opinions, whereby members in the minority would relocate to a community which shared their orientation. Occasionally, physical violence erupted between kibbutz members in different camps. After an extended and bitter process of deliberation and kibbutz-by-kibbutz votes, the majority of the kibbutzim retained the federative name, structure, and activist-oppositionist inclinations of the Kibbutz Meuchad, and the minority seceded and combined with Chever Hakvutzot to create Ichud Hakvutzot V'hakibbutzim (the Union on Small

³⁷ Interviews 2, 3, 6, and 9.

³⁸ To get a sense of the human drama behind the division, one of the best sources is Lieblich (1981), part 2.

Kibbutzim and Kibbutzim). This acrimonious split marked, at one and the same time, the culmination of the era of ideology in the kibbutz and -- because it was both traumatic and cathartic -- that era's denouement.

Notwithstanding their dramatic conclusion, the years under discussion witnessed remarkable development in the kibbutz sector. The kibbutz was transformed from a tentative experiment into an integral part of the landscape, and its values were no longer viewed by the surrounding society as somewhat eccentric, but rather as a source of pride. The degree of egalitarianism achieved by the kibbutz during this period is testified to by Jessie Sampter, an American who came to live on Givat Brenner, one of the largest kibbutzim, in a 1930s letter to her sister:

All work is done without remuneration. All pay goes to the common fund. Life here is very free and there is a great deal of personal consideration...The ideal which guides us is, as far as possible, to give to each according to his needs and get from each whatever he can give...I would call this experiment a great success, not in relation to the ideal, but in comparison with other societies.³⁹

This success was widely admired. When in 1949, Marin Buber famously called the kibbutz as a "signal non-failure" -- a unique example of an experiment in democratic, egalitarian living that had thrived -- he was reflecting the views of many in and beyond Israeli society.⁴⁰ Yet with the end of the period of ideology and influence, difficulties that had been easy to ignore in an atmosphere of

³⁹ Cited in Gavron (2000), 55.

⁴⁰ Buber (1983), 28.

heroism began to become more evident, and the kibbutz again slipped into a mood of uncertainty. A decade after his celebration of the kibbutz's achievements, Buber was lamenting that "the hopes and dreams [had] vanished, as if the ideology had faded and withered away. It seem[ed] as if the freshness of life had gone out of the kibbutz movement."⁴¹ This shift away from fervour and towards institutionalization would shape the kibbutz during the following three decades.

The Mid-1950s to the Early 1980s: Introversion and Institutionalization

By the mid-1950s, the kibbutz was turning inward. This mood was attributable to a number of factors. First, kibbutz members needed time to recover from the disappointments and upheavals of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Second, the loss of a central nation-building role, and the accompanying prestige, reduced the motivation to become involved in society-wide projects, and increased the tendency to focus on the special features of kibbutz society.⁴² Third, after enduring relatively austere conditions for the sake of the greater good, kibbutz members felt entitled to make a better standard of living for themselves a priority. Finally, the kibbutz leadership came to recognize that internal issues, long left to the side because of pressing national tasks, were fostering dissatisfaction in the ranks and needed to be addressed.

⁴¹ Yassour (1987), 80.

⁴² Shur (1983/4).

One result of this introspective climate – a result Ben-Gurion bemoaned – was that the kibbutz movement was not a major player in the absorption of the hundreds of thousands of new immigrants who flooded into Israel from Arab countries during the late 1940s and 1950s. These immigrants, known as Mizrahi (Eastern) Jews, became concentrated in poorer urban neighbourhoods and newly established “development towns,” often not far from existing kibbutzim.

One needs to be careful not to overstate the introversion of the kibbutz. Members continued to be disproportionately represented in Labour Zionist political parties, the Knesset,⁴³ and the elite units and officer ranks of the Israeli military. Moreover, the kibbutz was still held in high esteem -- especially by Israelis who could recall its period of glory and by Jews outside of Israel -- and it enjoyed substantial economic support from the state. That being said, the kibbutz's role in the broader society unquestionably contracted and, in many respects, its presence in national endeavours came to be based more on individual accomplishment than collective mobilization. Moreover, the rate of recruitment into the kibbutzim plummeted and the number of members leaving regularly exceeded the number joining; it was only high birth rates that kept the kibbutz's total population growing.⁴⁴

The move from mobilization to stabilization was given added impetus by

⁴³ Israel's Parliament.

⁴⁴ Near (1997), 268.

events in the USSR. As Moscow stoked anti-Semitism, launched show trials, and grew increasingly pro-Arab, kibbutz leaders and members who had been sympathetic to the Soviets began to change their position. When Khrushchev spoke the truth at the Twentieth Congress, the few who had clung to orthodox communism finally abandoned it. This did not mean a breakdown in kibbutz belief systems, since most kibbutz members had been far from Stalinists. But it did mean that henceforth, the kibbutz belief-system would place greater emphasis on practicality and humanism.

This propensity was also related to the practical desire of kibbutz members to live a comfortable life. The end of the heroic stage coincided with the aging of the kibbutz population and a jump in the number of kibbutz families. The electric sense of mission and social solidarity declined, and more individualistic, hedonistic tendencies emerged. Instead of staying up late to argue politics or dance and sing, members wanted time with their families; instead of sacrificing their own needs to help construct the kibbutz and nation, they asked for decent food and consumer goods; instead of dropping out of high school to work in the fields, they wanted a post-secondary education. This emphasis on individual desires and material abundance only grew with the years, as a generation born into the kibbutz – a generation that knew it as the status quo, not a revolutionary cause – matured into adolescence and adulthood.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Near (1997), chapters 9 and 10.

In order to provide an economic foundation for increased prosperity, the kibbutz undertook a process of industrialization, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. Before long, virtually every kibbutz had a factory, or was linked to regional factories funded by the kibbutz movement. Industrialization fuelled a rising standard of living in the kibbutz movement for more than two decades, but also meant bureaucratization and the development of a managerial stratum. This prompted ambivalent responses among rank-and-file kibbutz members. They recognized that economic success demanded managerial prowess and accorded those in managerial positions a certain elevated status. At the same time, they were attached to the notion that all work was of equal value and that jobs should be rotated to avoid class hierarchies and so, they limited the tenure and prerogatives of managers, and even penalized them with social enmity.⁴⁶ Managers, in turn, chafed at the constraints placed upon them and felt that their special contribution to the success of their communities was insufficiently appreciated.⁴⁷ This feeling was reinforced when they observed the benefits enjoyed by counterparts in the non-kibbutz sector.

The emergence of partial social stratification within the kibbutz and the decrease in feelings of solidarity were accompanied by a decline in the effectiveness of the kibbutz's direct democracy. General meetings became less well-attended and less vigorous than in the past, and day-to-day decision-

⁴⁶ Kressel (1983), 144-148.

⁴⁷ Warhurst (1999); Yuchtman (1972).

making was vested with committees and elected officials – many of whom tended to rotate through the same set of higher-level jobs.⁴⁸ The overlap with employment-based stratification was significant: often, a small core of members were chosen again and again to fill either community or economic management posts. While the kibbutz remained a highly democratic society organizationally -- the individual member could always express opinions, raise issues for a vote, and run for any office -- it increasingly became, between the mid-1950s and mid-1980s, a sort of benign oligarchy.

Another implication of industrialization was the growing use of wage labour. Its ideology notwithstanding, the kibbutz had never been completely free of hired hands, but the phenomenon took on new dimensions as factories were put into operation. This prompted tremendous soul-searching. On the one hand, hired workers sometimes had skills that kibbutz members lacked, occupied production line and other jobs that kibbutz members could not or would not fill, and added to the kibbutz industry's profitability. In addition, Ben-Gurion pressured the kibbutzim to retain workers from the ranks of the new immigrants to help fight unemployment. On the other hand, once they recruited paid labourers, the kibbutzim clearly sacrificed part of their motto of self-reliance and the non-exploitation of others' labour. This could be rationalized to some degree with the argument that the hired labourers were always able (if they were Jewish) to apply for kibbutz membership, but everyone knew this

⁴⁸ Interviews 8 and 13.

possibility was remote. Over time, the kibbutz federations identified hired labour as a key problem and repeatedly issued commitments to replace salaried workers with kibbutz members. These commitments, however, proved very hard to translate into practice, and the kibbutzim never freed themselves entirely from the role of employer.⁴⁹

The combination of introversion, a focus on prosperity, and the employment of hired workers led to increasingly strained relations between the kibbutz and Israel's Mizrahi Jews. The relatively self-absorbed kibbutz continued to see itself in positive terms, enjoyed a rising standard of living, and viewed the new immigrants – with their Arab-Jewish culture and run-down living conditions – with a degree of condescension.⁵⁰ The Mizrachim sensed and took offense to this attitude, resented the gap between their living standards and those of kibbutz members, and found the kibbutz social structure – with its secularism, housing of children outside their parents' home, and absence of any reward for effort – puzzling and alienating. Although the kibbutz movement continued to declare its intent to contribute to social justice in the surrounding society, and set up several programs to this end, the overall pattern was one of estrangement.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Interviews 1 and 10.

⁵⁰ For an example of the kibbutz's failure to empathetically understand Mizrahi attitudes, see Amir (1983?).

⁵¹ Of course, this was even more true with respect to the Arab citizens of Israel and, after 1967, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Because of the kibbutz's Zionist roots, Arabs were almost off its social (as opposed to political) radar screen. This is an issue that will be considered in greater detail later in the chapter.

This estrangement was a key reason why, in 1977, the Labour Party, successor to Mapai, lost power for the first time in Israel's history to the right-wing Likud. Kibbutz members, along with most of Israel's privileged, European Jewish (Ashkenazi) strata, had always taken for granted Labour Party rule and the privileges that accompanied it. There is undoubtedly a certain irony in the fact that the Labour Party, a member of the Socialist International, had become the party of the elite, and the Likud, classically liberal in its socioeconomic policies, the party of Jews on the periphery. This was attributable largely to the fact that the immigrants of the Second and Third Aliyot had started out with radical attitudes, established the Labour Zionist movement, and then, almost unwittingly, become a dominant class. For years, the Labour Party had maintained power by dint of its leadership role, ability to balance competing social interests, clientalistic relations with broad sections of the population, and manipulative practices at election time. But noble rhetoric and paternalistic political tactics became less effective over time and the Likud, under Menachem Begin, moved to capitalize on the anger simmering at the Mizrahi margins. Begin knew that the Mizrahi underclass was tired of being economically disadvantaged and was relatively hawkish on questions of Israeli-Arab relations, and he rode into power attacking kibbutz members as "millionaires with swimming pools" and promising a hard line on matters of security and the occupied territories. The kibbutzim, which overwhelmingly supported the electoral alliance of the Labour Party and Mapam, were stunned

when they discovered that Begin would be their new Prime Minister.⁵²

There was good reason for concern. The Likud government, which was re-elected in 1982, scaled back public support for the kibbutzim. The Labour Party's loss of pre-eminence meant not only a further erosion in the prestige of the kibbutz but also, and more tangibly, a loss of money. For a time, the impact of these developments was not obvious to the average kibbutz member, because the kibbutzim were able, like the rest of the country, to enjoy a wave of consumer spending thanks to Begin's loose monetary policies. Easy credit allowed them to continue raising their standard of living as if nothing had changed; indeed, the early 1980s witnessed significant improvements in kibbutz housing and facilities, paid for through extensive bank loans.⁵³ But it was only a matter of time before the bubble burst and when it did, the absence of government support would prove fateful.

Until that moment was reached, complacency, and even hubris, was the rule. Over the long period of introversion and institutionalization between the mid-1950s and mid-1980s, the kibbutz experiment seemed to have proven its sustainability. It had passed through idealistic and heroic stages, weathered crises, and appeared to present a stable, well-delineated form of communal, egalitarian living for others to consider and mimic. This sense of consolidation was reflected in the adoption, in the 1960s, of state regulations setting out the

⁵² Interview 2, 7, and 11.

⁵³ Webber (1992), chapter 1.

meaning of “kibbutz” for legal purposes. The regulations, endorsed by all the kibbutz federations, defined the kibbutz as:

a free association of people set up for the aims of settlement, absorption, and the creation of a cooperative society founded on collective ownership of property, self-labour, equality and collaboration in all areas of production, consumption and education....Needs will be satisfied in a manner that realizes the criterion of “to each according to his needs”.⁵⁴

A further step in the stabilization of the kibbutz model was the re-integration of the Meuchad and Ichud federations in 1980, almost 30 years after the great schism, in the Takam (United Kibbutz Movement). The 1979 statement announcing the unification agreement stated that the kibbutz:

is rooted in the rejection of private property, and organized on the basis of shared property in both production and consumption, on equality, and on mutual guarantees....the commune being realized in Israel constitutes the point-of-departure for the future socialist society, free from exploitation and founded on individual liberty and equal human worth.⁵⁵

These excerpts illustrate the extent to which egalitarian aspirations continued to guide the kibbutz. Kibbutz equality had come to take several forms. Some goods were distributed freely, with members accessing as much as they wished. This category included food, education, and health services, and fully preserved the notion of “to each according to need.” However, for many goods beyond such basics, “needs” were difficult to determine and so, a system of mechanical equality was adopted whereby each member received

⁵⁴ Quoted in Shur & Rosner (1983/4), 55.

⁵⁵ Cited in Shur (1991), 24.

the same quantity of particular products or resources. This category included household items such as televisions and small appliances, and equal budgets for clothes, outings, and the like. Over time, as the pressure for greater choice rose, these various budgets were combined into a comprehensive individual allowance, but the size of the allowance remained identical for all members.⁵⁶ Finally, some goods were distributed according to a system of points based on criteria such as seniority and the number of family members. This approach was applied most conspicuously to housing.⁵⁷

Kibbutz members often viewed egalitarianism as the cornerstone of kibbutz society. When in 1961, Ben-Gurion (who was by this time himself residing on a kibbutz) wrote an article in *Davar* arguing that the kibbutz should see communal partnership, not equality, as its core value, many were incensed.⁵⁸ Amos Oz, a young kibbutz member destined to become one of Israel's leading authors, wrote that:

partnership is the prologue, a stage or means on the path to equality....The kibbutz ideal aspires to equality, despite our understanding...that equality cannot be fully realized, and that the achievement of complete equality would create an inhuman society. The belief, not its total realization, the struggle, not the final victory, are the essence of values....Partnership is an interest, and equality a value."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Spiegel & Templeman (1985) argue that increased choice in the area of consumption is a predictable result of rising prosperity. Once basic needs are satisfied, they say, individuals care less about what their fellow members receive and the logic of common baskets of goods declines.

⁵⁷ Gluck (1998).

⁵⁸ Ben-Gurion (1983/4a). For a summary of the debate, see Bitman (1983/4a).

⁵⁹ Oz (1983/4), 21,22,23.

Ben-Gurion dismissed Oz's views, writing in response that "humans do not fight nature, and simply cannot fight nature...Equality is...not in any sense a value....I do not accept comrade Oz's view that the key is 'the aspiration to achieve the unachievable'....We should seek to realize that which can be realized."⁶⁰

Kibbutz thinkers, in turn, lined up to rebuke Ben-Gurion's assertion that equality was a chimera. Shlomo Lavi, of Labour Brigade fame, argued that kibbutz egalitarianism was "the greatest equality that human effort can create."

Yitzchak Maor wrote that "human beings are not identical as individuals, but they are equal, equal in worth from a humanitarian-ethical perspective....On the basis of this principle of equal human worth and the equal worth of labour, we have established, in kibbutz life, the fundamental premise of 'to each according to his needs, from each according to his ability'." Shmuel Saborai contended that "the kibbutz has elevated the effort to achieve a just equality among its members in a much wider range of areas than is accepted in individualistic society, because the kibbutz does not interpret superior personal attributes as a basis for economic advantage, but rather as a natural gift and a source of benefits for society as a whole." Yisrael Bitman opined that "the notion of equality, properly understood, means eliminating the enjoyment of extra advantages by those who are more naturally endowed, more efficient, or more successful....a situation where there is not one bit of extra material benefit for

⁶⁰ Ben-Gurion (1983/4b), 28. The use of "comrade" here is not ironic; its Hebrew equivalent (chaver), which also means friend, has always been the conventional term for a kibbutz member.

the kibbutz member who happens to excel physically or spiritually.”⁶¹ One especially bitter response, coming from a Kibbutz Artzi leader in the Mapam newspaper, *Al Hamishmar*, accused Ben-Gurion of incessantly strong-arming socialist Zionism into a slide from Marxism to capitalism, and of provoking the debate over equality for crass political purposes.⁶²

The strong reactions to Ben-Gurion's musings show how deeply the kibbutz movement's thinkers and more idealistic members -- especially founding members who had consciously chosen a kibbutz life -- identified with the ideal of equality. They were convinced that by and large, the kibbutz had achieved a genuine and viable version of radical socialism -- a society without class distinctions -- and went to some length to tell the world about their achievements.⁶³ The more sophisticated among them, such as academic Shimon Shur, acknowledged that a certain degree of inequality had emerged in some spheres, but contended (in parallel, but apparently oblivious, to Walzer) that the lack of correlation between these spheres and non-transferability of advantages from one to another made the system fundamentally egalitarian, and belied claims that egalitarianism was unachievable.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Lavi (1983/4), 31; Maor (1983/4), 34; Saborai (1983/4), 37; Bitman (1983/4b), 40. The premises contained in last three quotes -- equal human worth and the irrelevance of personal endowments to the enjoyment of resources -- are strikingly similar to the positions advanced in subsequent decades by leading egalitarian thinkers in the West such as Rawls and Dworkin.

⁶² Horowitz (1983/4).

⁶³ Criden & Gelb (1974); Leon (1969).

⁶⁴ Shur (1983/4); Shur & Peres (1986); Shur & Rosner (1983/4).

However, there was also widespread recognition, particularly among rank-and-file kibbutz members, of the continuing distance between aims and reality. The retention of hired labour and, to a much greater extent, stratification of social status were seen as objectionable. Many members resented those who held senior positions and, while hoping for greater equality in the future, actually anticipated less. They tended to favour allocation according to need, but felt that most distribution on the kibbutz was based on mechanical equality. They knew that some of their fellow members had bank accounts and received support from family outside the community, and were frustrated that there seemed to be little anyone could do about these contraventions of basic principles. Such feelings were common among all age groups though, notably, the concern for equality was less prevalent among those born into the kibbutz.⁶⁵ In addition, the commitment to egalitarianism was constrained, or contradicted, by the desire for prosperity, which implied a degree of role-differentiation to ensure efficient production, as well as the pressure for expanded individual choice, which implied less equality, at least in the sense of uniformity.

By the early 1980s, there was a certain cynicism about the gap between egalitarian ideals and reality, and internal confusion regarding the reconciliation of competing priorities. These tensions were interwoven with a more general, if

⁶⁵ Cohen (1974), 218-221; Rosner et al. (1990), 80-89.

largely unarticulated, feeling of malaise.⁶⁶ In part, this feeling can be seen as a function of success: having achieved many of its stated goals and lost its sense of mission, the kibbutz had gradually become somewhat stifling, unclear about where it was headed and unable to fire up many of its members.⁶⁷ The malaise can also be interpreted as the result of the exposure of members, especially those of the younger generation, to higher education and lifestyles outside the kibbutz, and the attendant frustration with the limits imposed by residence in a small, rules-bound community. Whatever the reasons, as the period of introversion and institutionalization wore on, the kibbutz came to be characterized by a mix of pride and discontent. It was in this atmosphere that a sudden economic crisis hit in the mid-1980s, severely damaging not only the kibbutz movement's finances, but also its self-confidence.

Since the Mid-1980s: Insolvency and Instability

The crisis began in 1985 with a sudden cash-flow problem sparked by unprofitable investments by the kibbutz federations in Israel's semi-legal "grey market" and a sharp hike in interest rates. These developments reflected severe austerity measures adopted by a recently-formed Labour-Likud coalition (the "National Unity" government) in an attempt to reign in the runaway inflation

⁶⁶ Interviews 4, 5, and 13.

⁶⁷ Webber (1992), 71.

which, predictably, had resulted from the Likud's lax monetary policies.⁶⁸ The full scope of the problem only began to sink in when accountants, who were retained to examine the kibbutz movement's finances systematically, determined that the kibbutzim had accumulated enormous debts and lacked the means to cover them or even meet interest payments. With a shock, kibbutz members discovered that their prosperous communities, whose success and security had long been "givens," were essentially bankrupt.

The sources of this plight went beyond shady stock trades and a dramatic increase in interest rates. Indeed, the fact that the kibbutz, with its principles of socialism and self-reliance, was playing the market and taking out huge loans itself requires explanation. True, to some degree, the kibbutz was merely adapting to general norms: in the Israel of the early 1980s, easy credit and a roller-coaster stock exchange tempted many to make unwise investments – and ultimately ruined numerous businesses. However, the kibbutz's readiness to join in such activities can only be understood in the context of the expectation of ever-increasing prosperity, and the concomitant process of industrialization, which characterized the pre-crisis period. Reductions in government support from 1977 would have meant curbs on the construction of new factories, bigger homes, and swimming pools were it not for the "easy money" obtained by the federations' financial managers from banks and stock

⁶⁸ Much of the account of the causes of the kibbutz crisis in this and the following paragraphs is drawn from Ben-Rafael (1996); Ben-Rafael (1997), chapter 2; Gavron (2000), chapter 6; and Webber (1992).

brokers. Since everyone was playing the same game, few were inclined to listen to the warnings of a handful of kibbutz economists about its risks.

Complicating the situation was poor decision-making by those in charge of kibbutz funds. Not only the “grey” stocks, but also many of the expensive new factories, proved to be unprofitable. In part, this was due to inaccurate readings of the consumer market; in part, to the shortage of effective managerial and sales skills. Many kibbutzim found themselves turning out products hardly anyone wanted to buy, and lacking leaders able to make strategic management decisions or carve out new markets. Meanwhile, with growing affluence, internal services expanded considerably, drawing members away from income-producing branches and increasing cash-flow pressures. Finally, the kibbutz’s system of mutual guarantees resulted in arcane accounting techniques that made it virtually impossible to obtain an accurate picture of financial shortfalls before they reached emergency proportions.

Initially, many in the kibbutz movement assumed that the mid-1980s crisis, like its predecessors, would soon blow over. But this equanimity failed to take account of changed conditions: in contrast to the past, Israeli society, through the government, was no longer keen to bail the kibbutz movement out.⁶⁹ Moreover, the kibbutz population had aged, mellowed, and grown accustomed to a life of comfort, so belt-tightening and re-doubled effort were not much of an option. The seriousness of the crisis was driven home for many

⁶⁹ Lapidot et al. (2000).

kibbutz members in 1987, when the entire, mostly elderly population of a failing kibbutz, Beit Oren, was forced to abandon its community and re-locate to other kibbutzim or to seniors' homes in the cities. This episode shocked kibbutz residents, who had assumed that in exchange for giving up private property and working their whole lives on the kibbutz, they would always be cared for. The critical bond of trust between members and the kibbutz, and the long-standing confidence in the viability of the kibbutz model, were deeply shaken.⁷⁰ The economic crisis deepened into a crisis of faith. Kibbutz residents began to quit their communities in record numbers, and young people who had grown up on the kibbutz stopped applying to become adult members.⁷¹ In 1989, after three years of procrastination and a complicated process of disentangling kibbutz finances, the kibbutz movement finally reached an agreement with the government and banks to write off and re-schedule debts. The deal proved inadequate, however, leading to follow-up accords in 1996 and 1999. Such agreements did little to reassure kibbutz members; in some respects, they merely highlighted the scale of the predicament.

In this atmosphere of crisis, a group of thinkers advocating dramatic change appeared. Operating largely out of the Takam's research centre, Yad Tabenkin, they contended that the kibbutz could only save itself by altering its

⁷⁰ Gavron (2000), 8-9.

⁷¹ Since 1985, between 1,351 and 2,215 members have left kibbutzim every year. The largest number of departures was in 1988. This, combined with the aging of the kibbutz population and falling birth rates, has resulted in the largest demographic decline in the movement's history: a net loss of close to 15,000 people during the 1990s. See Pavin (2001), 13-20, 85.

most ingrained beliefs and practices. Leading the charge was Yehuda Harel, a researcher strongly influenced by American models of organizational change, who argued, in a series of articles and in his book, *The New Kibbutz*, that pure socialism had failed the world over and that economic branches had to be run according to modern principles of efficiency and profit if the kibbutz was to survive in a competitive, globalized market. Harel was no raving capitalist: he wanted to preserve the kibbutz as a unique experiment based on mutual support and egalitarian principles of distribution. But he believed that realism was necessary to achieve this end, and his realism included separating management of the profit-making branches from the life of the community and dropping the pretence that all jobs were of equal value. This, he said, was essential for rational, well-informed decision-making, and need not impinge on the principle of the equal worth of all kibbutz members in the eyes of their peers.⁷² Trying to prove his fidelity to kibbutz traditions, Harel presented himself as the true revolutionary, courageous enough to attempt radical innovations, just like the founders of the kibbutz 80 years before.⁷³

The push for new approaches was taken up by a range of kibbutz academics and members. Amir Helman -- a kibbutz economist trained in the United States who had been sounding the alarm and proposing change even before the crisis -- called for an increased emphasis on efficiency and rewards,

⁷² Harel (1993).

⁷³ Harel (1991).

and if this meant some erosion of equality, so be it. While praising the kibbutz's past achievements and expressing support for egalitarianism, Helman stressed that because the kibbutz had not succeeded in creating a "new man" ready to sacrifice all for the community, it could not ignore the attraction of high wages for high-demand jobs in the surrounding economy. If the kibbutz did not offer a better choice of work and economic incentives, he said, it would never be able to retain the sort of individuals it needed in order to flourish.⁷⁴

Prominent among kibbutz members who shared such views were the technocrats: the relatively privileged class which managed economic enterprises. Although this group could have been accused of a certain responsibility for the kibbutz's economic ills, it chose instead to focus on the shortcomings of the system, and to vent long-standing frustration over restrictions on managerial prerogatives and the lack of compensation for managers' "special" contributions to the community. In the atmosphere of calamity within the kibbutz movement, rank-and-file members were inclined to agree that the system needed a total overhaul. By the late 1980s, many communities had established "change committees" with a mandate to examine all options and bring recommendations to the General Meeting, and more than a few had retained the services of external consultants, who were quick to market their managerial and economic "expertise" to struggling kibbutzim.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Helman (1987, 1994).

⁷⁵ Schwartz & Naor (2000); Warhurst (1999).

Advocates of change interviewed for this dissertation did not mince words about the failings, in their eyes, of the traditional kibbutz model – a model which, they said, contradicted basic human instincts. Although perhaps tenable during a short period, when there was a strong sense of mission, a willingness to make due with Spartan conditions, and positive reinforcement from the wider society, the traditional kibbutz was ultimately unsuited to normal people. The current Secretary of one the biggest kibbutzim bluntly stated that “the kibbutz went against human nature. There were a lot of bad results that stemmed from good intentions. In the end, people got badly hurt. The founders and past leaders were arrogant. They thought they were establishing a model for all generations to come. Today, we are more aware of the complexity of things.” Individual well-being, he said, depends on making choices and taking responsibility – neither of which were required in a society where ideology was dictated, work was assigned, and everyone received the same rewards. During a 90-minute discussion, he termed the traditional kibbutz, variously, as a society that “consumes its own,” “sinned badly,” “is full of incredible, unacknowledged inequities,” and “is almost impossible to manage.”⁷⁶ He and other proponents of change contend that with the establishment of Israel in 1948, the kibbutz lost much of its *raison d’être* and, slowly but surely, freeloaders began to take advantage of the rigid ideology of equality. The Secretary of one of the oldest kibbutzim explained pro-change attitudes as

⁷⁶ Interview 1.

follows: “people got too accustomed to living without the slightest idea of how much things cost, how much they were earning for the community, and how much the community was spending on them. Eventually, those who busted their ass got sick of supporting loafers who made no real effort, yet lived as well as the rest of us.”⁷⁷ One of her supporters in the kibbutz added, “mechanical equality was like handcuffs that the kibbutz put on itself. Certain members took advantage of this situation, and there was a parasitic interpretation of kibbutz principles. The parasites were always the biggest ideologues.”⁷⁸ Those in favour of change frequently accuse their more traditionalist critics of willful blindness to the importance of earning one’s keep and to the inability of the historic kibbutz to retain its best and brightest. The traditionalists they say, are cut off from reality. The Secretary of a kibbutz that was once the largest in the country and the pride of its federation – and whose membership has now plummeted from over a thousand to about 600 – said that “ideology is like religion, but with one difference: ideology should pose questions. And when there are no answers, things have to change.”⁷⁹ Believers in the “new kibbutz” do not reject the idea of equality *per se*; indeed, they insist that they are striving to ensure all members can live dignified lives by creating strong safety nets, and that equality of opportunity, not social Darwinist capitalism, is what they seek. But this modest version of equality is clearly a far cry from the

⁷⁷ Interview 3.

⁷⁸ Interview 14.

⁷⁹ Interview 4.

comprehensive egalitarianism valorized by the traditional kibbutz -- more welfare state than socialist utopia.

As the pro-change mood surged through the kibbutz movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, voices of opposition began to be raised. Yehuda Harel was attacked by the Takam leadership of the time, and left Yad Tabenkin out of fear that the federation would slash the research institute's budget if he remained. Among the most strident traditionalists was Aharon Yadlin, a former Education Minister and head of the Takam during the first phase of the crisis, who believed that the kibbutz's predicament was mainly psychological, and that the advocates of change were guilty of sowing panic among kibbutz members instead of encouraging them to persevere and renew their commitment to historic values. The traditionalists claimed that the kibbutz model was actually more efficient than the capitalist version, because it encouraged high levels of identification and dedication, and they saw the financial difficulties as a short-term outcome of government policies beyond the kibbutz's control. The kibbutz had made it through challenging circumstances in the past because of its sense of purpose. What it now lacked was not the capacity to succeed, but the will.⁸⁰

Some academics also began to express scepticism about the need for far-reaching change. This was especially true of "establishment" kibbutz researchers. Although more nuanced than Yadlin, their message was typically one of reassurance: the kibbutz experiment had worked well; the situation was

⁸⁰ Yadlin (1991).

not as precarious as some were making it out to be. Dramatic change would rob the kibbutz of its soul, and would be economically and socially detrimental. It made no sense to opt for an old-fashioned capitalist method of production at a time when cutting-edge industries elsewhere were trying to reduce hierarchy and increase employees' involvement in their workplace.⁸¹ Chief among the traditionalist scholars was Menachem Rosner, who felt there had been an over-reaction to the financial crunch, held the kibbutz up as an example to others, and stressed the centrality of commitment to the success of egalitarian communities.⁸²

Older kibbutz members leery of change in the direction of capitalism share the volunteeristic attitudes of Yadlin and Rosner. "Veterans" interviewed for this dissertation argued that since 1985, a fundamental social contract had been breached by individuals who failed to truly understand the kibbutz ideal and who were naively convinced that they would always come out "winners" in a no-holes-barred competition.⁸³ An archivist in one kibbutz said, "in the past, if someone didn't like the kibbutz lifestyle, he left the kibbutz. Today, the kibbutz is leaving us. It's extremely difficult for me. This has been, and will continue to

⁸¹ Leviatan (1993, 1997); Leviatan et al. (1998); Palgi (1998); Pavin (1997); Satt (1994); Satt & Ginzburg (1992).

⁸² Rosner (1991, 1998a?, 1998b?, 1998c); Rosner & Tannenbaum (1987).

⁸³ This argument echoes Rawls' claim that rational actors should take account of the possibility that they will end up disadvantaged in an inegalitarian society and so, should opt to minimize disparities. What frustrates the veterans (and perhaps Rawls) is the fact that so many individuals do not grasp this "rationality."

be, a very painful time.”⁸⁴ The pro-change camp’s lack of conviction was attributed in part to the kibbutz’s insufficient selectiveness in screening members during its prosperous period. Once it became a comfortable community, veterans contended, the kibbutz attracted people whose motivation was escape from the pressures of city life or marriage to a kibbutz member, not devotion to a communal-egalitarian ideology. Because of its democratic character, the kibbutz was then compelled to allow such non-committed members to shatter its constitutional order. An additional factor cited by embittered traditionalists was the absence of ideological education for the younger generation, especially after the events of the early and mid-1950s brought ideology into some disrepute. An older official in the kibbutz federation’s headquarters lamented that “we raised whole generations that had no understanding of our ideology. We thought they would absorb our principles from the air. You can’t live in a democratic regime without comprehending its essence.”⁸⁵ Finally, dispirited veterans pointed to the absence of strong, committed leaders in their kibbutzim, and to the impact of the values of the surrounding, consumerist society. “Today,” complained a 90 year-old kibbutz member who had come with the Third Aliya and run some of Israel’s largest cooperative enterprises, “you can’t sell anyone on equality. You can only sell material success.”⁸⁶ In an open letter to his fellow kibbutz members, this

⁸⁴ Interview 16.

⁸⁵ Interview 6.

⁸⁶ Interview 15.

veteran tried to persuade them to slow the retreat from traditional principles:

The kibbutz movement developed and grew from a deeply-held belief in the necessity of building an egalitarian, democratic society. And now we're being told that the ideological, egalitarian period has reached its end, and a promising new spirit is awakening, the free market, privatization, and globalization....[These trends] hurt those with limited education, tossing them aside, putting them at the mercy of a privatized market ruled by employment agencies which supply slave labour....I say, changes, yes, but only those which will not damage the fabric of our cooperative life or create envy and bitterness in our home.⁸⁷

This plea went unheeded and the kibbutz in question proceeded with far-reaching changes, albeit in an incremental fashion. Efforts to check the forces of change also proved futile at the federation level, particularly after the collapse of regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR appeared to confirm the pointlessness of trying to adhere to a socialist model. By the mid-1990s, the traditionalists had lost control of the Takam and Artzi central administrations, which began to actively advise kibbutzim on change processes.⁸⁸ Later in the decade, as ideological distinctions lost relevance, the two federations merged. It was a sign of the kibbutz's reduced status, however, that in contrast to the 1951 schism and even the 1980 creation of the Takam, this shift in federative structure went almost unnoticed by the wider society.

⁸⁷ Because this letter was provided to me directly by its author and is not on the public record, and because of my commitment to preserve each interviewee's anonymity, I cannot provide a reference for this quote.

⁸⁸ Not every past General Secretary of the kibbutz federation was as opposed to change as Yadlin. Muki Tsur, who headed the Takam in the early 1980s and was its de facto poet laureate, wrote in 1996 that "among those interested in the future of the kibbutz are many who do not understand that dramatic changes can reflect direct continuity and an attempt at preservation" (1996, 22).

The heated debate over change has been repeated in virtually every kibbutz. Often, change committees became embroiled in controversy, internal tension, and power struggles, and took years to formulate a set of proposals that had any chance of obtaining the necessary approval -- usually about two-thirds because of the fundamental nature of the changes -- at a General Meeting.⁸⁹ In most kibbutzim, the older generation was extremely hesitant about change, seeing it as an abandonment of all they had struggled for and fearing for their own fate if the principles of mutual support and equality were sacrificed. Tending to favour change were not only the technocrats, but also women and the younger generation.⁹⁰ Women had never enjoyed the sexual equality promised by the kibbutz, and had been frustrated by their relegation to low-status "women's jobs," and by collective sleeping arrangements for their children.⁹¹ The younger generation had already seen many of its members desert the community for a more affluent life in the city, was strongly influenced by globalization and Western values, and yearned for greater personal freedom and the opportunity to find more interesting work than the kibbutz could offer.⁹² In short, commitment to traditional values correlated with the extent to which

⁸⁹ Schwartz & Naor (2000).

⁹⁰ Palgi & Sharir (1999).

⁹¹ Interviews 6, 11, and 12. Whether the changes will actually work to women's advantage is another question. Some fear the retreat from socialist principles will push women even further into segregated roles, though others speculate that the new openness to the wider labour market may expand women's employment options (Adar, 1996; Pagli, 1996).

⁹² Avrahami (1998).

one had consciously chosen to live by them and had benefited from them.

There has been tremendous variability in the balance of forces within different kibbutzim, and the scope and pace of change adopted by them.⁹³ One community has ceased to be defined as a kibbutz at all,⁹⁴ and several others have moved so far from collective and egalitarian principles that it only seems a matter of time before they, too, get a different legal designation. At the other end of the spectrum are kibbutzim that have changed almost none of the traditional model. Some have even banded together into a grouping called “the Cooperative Stream,” which posits the slogan of “the kibbutz forever” against “the new kibbutz” and provides advice to kibbutzim interested in preserving the established model -- advice aimed at promoting an alternative to the change processes supported by the federation leadership and marketed by consultants. A significant number of the kibbutzim in the Cooperative Stream are religious, a phenomenon which may suggest that the ability to maintain faith in an established belief-system is something of a transferable personality characteristic. In addition, kibbutzim in the Cooperative Stream tend to be economically successful, while those that have implemented far-reaching transformations tend to be in dire economic straits. The causal relationship behind this pattern is itself the subject of debate: traditionalists claim that strong values underpin their economic achievements and that other kibbutzim have

⁹³ Gavron (2000) provides case studies of a wide range of kibbutzim and their varied responses to the crisis.

⁹⁴ Ben Simon (2001).

faltered because they are inadequately, rather than excessively, principled; advocates of change say that kibbutzim lucky enough to have stumbled into profitable industries can afford to “buy” pure socialism by giving everyone a luxurious standard of living.⁹⁵ As the differences between the paths chosen by different kibbutzim has grown, there has even been talk of a new split in the kibbutz movement: this one between the kibbutzim which have opted for significant changes and the traditionalists of the Cooperative Stream.⁹⁶

The changes considered by kibbutzim are numerous, but can be clustered into six broad trends: privatizing consumption, permitting income differences, increasing labour mobility, restructuring economic branches, modifying communal social structures, and distributing collective assets.⁹⁷ Privatization, a word deliberately adopted from the neoliberal lexicon, has involved payment by members for goods and services previously distributed free of charge, and a corresponding expansion of personal budgets. Its purpose is to reduce waste and increase individual choice. Among the items most frequently “privatized” are electricity, food, travel abroad, cultural programs for adults, and home renovations.⁹⁸

In most cases, expanded personal budgets continue to be equal for all

⁹⁵ Gavron (2000), 275-280; Lieblich (2000), 425-426.

⁹⁶ Sheleg (2001).

⁹⁷ The overview of changes in this and the following paragraphs is drawn mainly from Ben-Rafael (1996 and 1997), Getz (1998); Palgi (1998); Pavin (1997 and 2001); Topel (1995); as well as my interviews with kibbutz members.

⁹⁸ Interviews 2-4, 10, and 13.

members but increasingly, this approach is being modified. In many kibbutzim, members can now earn a bonus if they agree to work extra hours or Saturday shifts, and can face a reduction in their budget if they do not work a minimum number of days per month. Numerous kibbutzim have also calculated the “value” of members’ jobs, based on the income they earn for the community and/or their average salary in the Israeli labour market. These calculations, which have often been conducted by consultants using quasi-job evaluation systems, have had two immediate goals: to help kibbutz managers allocate human resources, and to let the members know what their “real” contribution to the community is, perhaps creating pressure for them to find work that will bring in more money.⁹⁹ In some kibbutzim, the calculations have had an additional purpose: underpinning the introduction of differential wages. This contentious step involves reducing the equal allowance allocated to each member, and topping it up on the basis of the members’ “different contributions” (if they work on the kibbutz) or salaries (if they work outside the kibbutz). The size of the differential portion of the budget varies, but typically, members are allocated about 20 to 30 per cent of their contribution/salary. Of course, the lower the standard budget and the higher the percentage of differential income, the less the historic separation of contribution and reward – once the keystone of kibbutz ideology¹⁰⁰ -- is maintained.

⁹⁹ Interviews 1 and 14.

¹⁰⁰ Shur (1983/4).

Even in kibbutzim that have opted for differential wages, it is common practice to leave in place the traditional model of a high, standard budget for older members. This measure protects the “veterans” from an erosion in their standard of living – since few have high income-earning skills – while satisfying the kibbutz’s sense of obligation towards the founding generation and reducing opposition to change.¹⁰¹ Such prudence, however, does not obviate the significance of the departure contained in differential wages. In the early 1990s, differential wages were still so alien to the kibbutz idea that the first community to introduce them, Kibbutz Ein Zivan, was almost expelled from the kibbutz movement. Today, they have been adopted by a fifth of kibbutzim,¹⁰² and are being considered in many more.

Related to wage differences is growing labour mobility. In the past, work outside the kibbutz was viewed with suspicion; today, it is encouraged. External employment is seen as economically beneficial, since it brings hard cash into the kibbutz treasury and reduces the kibbutz’s obligation to find a job for unproductive members. It also has the advantage of expanding the professional options of those who find the range of choices within the kibbutz unsatisfying. Along with the removal of barriers to external employment has come a sharp rise in the use of hired labour. As the scale of the economic crisis became evident and a growing number of kibbutz members found work

¹⁰¹ Interviews 3 and 10.

¹⁰² Pavin (2001), 108.

outside their communities, much of the traditional opposition to the exploitation of hired workers evaporated.

The organization and management of the kibbutz's economic branches have also undergone a transformation – a transformation aimed at increasing kibbutz income by relieving those branches of traditional restrictions. In addition to the use of relatively cheap hired labour, this has involved ending the tradition of managerial rotation, establishing boards of directors with external representatives, hiring professional managers from the non-kibbutz sector, declaring service branches (including kibbutz educational facilities) to be autonomous “profit centres” free to sell their services to outside clients, and entering into partnerships with private investors.

Along with decreased community control over economic branches has come, in many instances, a broader reduction in direct democracy. Instead of regular General Meetings, some kibbutzim have begun to hold periodic elections for a representative council and referenda on key issues. The other social structure to undergo a transformation – in this case, almost universally – has been communal sleeping. As change processes got under way, the already powerful momentum in favour of children's sleeping in their parents' homes swept away all remaining opposition.¹⁰³

Arguably, however, the most far-reaching change is the distribution of collective property. This step involves the determination of each member's

¹⁰³ Interviews 11 and 12.

entitlements to housing, communal buildings, and kibbutz enterprises, and the allocation of legal deeds and shares. In the eyes of some, such a move effectively spells the end of the kibbutz, and to date it has rarely been adopted.¹⁰⁴ However, a significant number of kibbutzim have carried out the necessary appraisals -- just to ensure that they are prepared should apportionment become necessary-- and a kibbutz movement committee has recommended a sweeping privatization of members' houses (but not other collective property). In some kibbutzim, houses have been expanded and renovated in anticipation of such a development.¹⁰⁵

It bears repeating that not all of the changes described above have been adopted by all kibbutzim. Most have already privatized some types consumption and allowed external employment; a substantial proportion provide bonuses for overtime and permit managers to remain in their positions over the long term; but only a few have extinguished communal ownership of property. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the efforts of the Cooperative Stream, there is no doubt that the overwhelming majority have undergone a transformation that would alarm the idealists of the Second Aliya (only a handful of whom are still alive). This does not mean they are completely alienated from traditional kibbutz values; indeed, the evidence shows that backing for those values continues to be high, and that most change processes

¹⁰⁴ Interviews 4, 5, 8, and 9.

¹⁰⁵ Arad & Ronen (2000).

have been tempered by efforts to preserve a degree of collectivism and egalitarianism. But such counter-tendencies have moderated change, not forestalled it. This begs the question: when does a community cease to be a kibbutz? The literature is full of contradictory answers, and even the government authorities responsible for the certification and registration of kibbutzim have been uncertain as to how much change would be too much.¹⁰⁶ The Kibbutz Regulations, however, have already been amended to legalize much of what has taken place on the kibbutzim, so it would appear that officially, a kibbutz remains a kibbutz as long as some property is collectively owned and differences in income are not excessive.

This is not enough to assuage the sense of betrayal among many of the veterans and traditionalists, but the truth is that most of the current changes simply represent an acceleration -- albeit a large one -- of trends already under way in the kibbutz movement prior to the crisis. The malaise in the kibbutzim reflected the rank-and-file's desire for increased freedom and managers' dissatisfaction with the absence of material incentives; the emphasis on family and prosperity reflected a decline in social solidarity and the individual member's willingness to sacrifice for an ideal; and the growing debt of the

¹⁰⁶ For various views on the "minimum standards" for a kibbutz, see Leviatan (1993); Maron (1997); Rosilio (1993 and 1999); and Shapira (1988). Lapidot et al. (2000, 123) unwittingly illustrate how hard it is to provide clear criteria for defining a kibbutz when they suggest the following: communal ownership of property, *even if external owners are also involved*; *largely* egalitarian distribution of income; and mutual guarantees, *at least in emergency situations*. What is notable here is that the portions in italics (I have added the emphasis) constitute significant, and vague, qualifications of the (unitalicized) traditional features of the kibbutz. The inclination to insert gaping loopholes into established criteria indicates how ambiguous the understanding of the kibbutz model has become.

kibbutzim reflected unacknowledged inefficiencies and a failure to adapt to external conditions. Although there is much room to debate the types of change these developments demanded, it is not particularly credible to suggest that change itself could be avoided.

From the perspective of egalitarianism, the net result of the measures most typically adopted by kibbutzim over the last decade and a half has been a significant retreat away from what might be termed strict equality: identical or needs-based distribution, shared property, and the view of all work as inherently equal in value. In its place has come the notion of an equal minimum – provision to all of education, health, housing, and a limited standard budget – combined with the equity principle – assessment of work and payment of wages based on a job's perceived value or contribution.¹⁰⁷ Advocates say these changes preserve the principle of equal human worth; critics say they enervate it. Whatever one's views, the drama of the past 15 years adds to the complexity of the kibbutz story and to the lessons we can draw from it.

Assessment

Like pay equity, the kibbutz can be seen as a success from an egalitarian perspective merely, and indeed mainly, “because it's there.” The simple fact that communities which de-linked work and consumption could survive over decades places in doubt the anti-egalitarian contention that such a

¹⁰⁷ Adar (1996).

society is by definition impossible. Tens of thousands of people chose a communal model and made that model work, and this is no small feat. With all the kibbutz's shortcomings, and its recent retreats, its fundamental achievement – long-term survival against the historical odds – should not be minimized. Even today, as noted in the previous section, there is usually an attempt to keep transitions measured in order to preserve some of the basic egalitarianism of the kibbutz community. Kibbutz economics have not been completely emptied of ethical considerations. Furthermore, research suggests that the most effective kibbutz change processes have been those which have proceeded gradually and avoided complete ruptures with traditional communal and egalitarian values.¹⁰⁸

In addition, the kibbutz must be credited with facilitating a dignified existence, over three generations, for countless members who would have fared poorly under conditions of unrestrained capitalism. If egalitarianism is largely about preventing a situation in which the unlucky suffer while the lucky get rich, then it was undoubtedly realized for tens of thousands of individuals who lacked the endowments, skills, or inheritance needed to get ahead in a non-egalitarian rat race. Given the vocal criticism currently being aired over the traditional kibbutz's flaws, this achievement can be easy to overlook. While there is good reason for frustration over "parasites" who took unfair advantage of the commitment to equality, there were also many members whose limited

¹⁰⁸ Schwartz & Naor (2000).

contribution was a function of circumstance, not indolence -- and the kibbutz gave them a sense of self-worth and opportunities for a good life that would have been unthinkable elsewhere.

Finally, the kibbutz was successful at developing a complex approach to equality that highlights the possibility of combining various distributive strategies inspired by the same broad ethos. Egalitarianism in practice need not become fatally entangled in irresolvable debates about a uniform guiding principle.

Against these accomplishments are a number of shortcomings, from an egalitarian point-of-view, that raise difficult questions about the degree to which the kibbutz may be judged, on balance, a success. The first is that even internally, the kibbutz was always -- and increasingly over time -- far less egalitarian than it claimed. Money stashed away in secret bank accounts, work-related social stratification, the existence of dominant oligarchies, and the occupational segregation of women all detracted significantly from the kibbutz's supposed achievement of a society in which substantive equality prevailed. Granted, these disparities were not manifested, until recently, in significant gaps in material conditions, but the kibbutz's egalitarianism always, in theory, aspired to more than just identical houses and appliances for everyone.

If internal disparities mean that the kibbutz has fallen somewhat short of its own standards, the gap between the kibbutz as a whole and surrounding communities calls into question some of its basic moral claims. It is a bit of a stretch to declare the equal worth of all human beings, and then limit the application of that principle to chosen members. While the kibbutz can be

given credit for its cognizance of this problem – and periodic efforts to address it – the fact remains that with respect to disadvantaged groups such as Mizrahi Jews and the Palestinians, it was basically content to enjoy its privileged position and tolerate huge differences of wealth, status, and power. There were exceptions: Artzi kibbutzim were (initially) vocal in their opposition to the expulsion of Palestinians and expropriation of their lands during the 1948 war, and various kibbutzim made concerted efforts to reach out to Mizrahi Jews during the 1960s and 1970s. But exceptions these remained, and the general failure of the kibbutz to more fully come to grips with the implications of egalitarianism for its relations with nearby others stands out as a serious lacuna.

In some respects, this reflects a broader shortcoming evident in the history of the kibbutz: difficulty recognizing and resolving tensions between egalitarian and competing concerns. The kibbutz long suffered from -- but barely acknowledged -- hidden unemployment, low productivity, wasteful use of resources, and a mood of quiet desperation. These symptoms were related to rigid notions of equality and as a result, went largely unaddressed -- until their cumulative effects produced a crisis. In one sense, this criticism may seem unfair, since it appears to imply “too much” equality, while the previous criticisms suggest “too little.” However, an egalitarianism that cannot deal with internal tensions may ultimately prove self-defeating. The issue is not the degree of equality, but intellectual inflexibility. At one time, this inflexibility was attributable to the strictures of ideological correctness; later, it had more to do

with the conceits and inertia of (seeming) success.

This brings us to the kibbutz model's last failing for the egalitarian observer: its eventual deterioration. If survival is the kibbutz's biggest achievement, then its flip-side – the substantial erosion of the kibbutz model since the mid-1980s -- has to be seen as a blow for anyone inclined to view it as definitive confirmation of revolutionary egalitarianism's promise. It is rare today to hear people argue, as a former General Secretary of the Kibbutz Artzi did in 1980, that the kibbutz "has proven it is possible to motivate the individual to make supreme efforts and to work for the collective, without providing direct material rewards....People can replace material incentives with social incentives, incentives related to solidarity, identification with the collective, enjoyment of recognition within the collective, appreciation of the individual's efforts."¹⁰⁹ Much more typical (if almost as overstated) is the view that "[t]he world's most successful commune movement is in disarray...Human nature has triumphed over idealism; ambition has proved stronger than altruism; individuality has vanquished communal responsibility."¹¹⁰

A number of important lessons can be drawn from the kibbutz's history, accomplishments, and failings. The first is that equality is, indeed, an inherently appealing value for which people are prepared to make substantial sacrifices. The notions of equal human worth and empathic relations,

¹⁰⁹ Chazan (1980), 56.

¹¹⁰ Gavron (2000), 1.

expressed through social arrangements that seek to limit disparities, have profound inspirational value – so much so that even during a period of retrenchment, the commitment to them remains strong. The attraction of egalitarian premises exemplified by the kibbutz case -- an attraction powerful enough to produce 270 voluntary communes -- contradicts the simplistic contention that equality *per se* is somehow contrary to human nature. As Amos Oz wrote in a 1997 issue of *Dissent*, “[t]he kibbutz experience proves, if only on a ‘laboratory’ scale, that those who view humanity as a species of predators are not entirely correct....The kibbutz is a potential source of inspiration for future social reformers who can try to avoid its shortcomings.”¹¹¹

More specifically, the kibbutz’s sophisticated approach to the achievement of equality illustrates the potential for creative, multi-level strategies for translating principles into action. Both the traditional mixture of needs-based, mechanical, and criteria-driven distribution and recent attempts to combine an “equal minimum” with equality of opportunity suggest that an egalitarian politics grounded in the real world cannot concentrate on a single dimension or definition of equality. Instead, it should distinguish spheres of equality, to borrow Walzer’s term, and develop standards and strategies appropriate to each.

Of course, whatever the power of the egalitarian ideal, it only occasionally gets realized in radical form. The kibbutz’s history points to the

¹¹¹ Oz (1997), 46.

framework in which this is most likely to occur: small, homogeneous communities, motivated by a strong sense of mission, which combine idealism with a large dose of pragmatism. These communities encourage large degrees of solidarity and mutual concern, self-sacrifice, and self-discipline and so, allow for high levels of equality between residents without significant drops in efficiency.¹¹²

The problem is that such communities have a limited life span. An intensely ideological lifestyle, in which collective politics and public opinion are the driving forces, does not seem to be suited to the complicated array of human needs over the long term. The kibbutzim managed to maintain such a lifestyle over their first four decades, but only because of external pressures that provided continuous reinforcement. The removal of those pressures released strong counter-tendencies: the desire for comfort, serene family lives, and so on. In the 1970s, Erik Cohen famously divided the development of the kibbutz into three phases: bund, commune, and association. These correspond roughly to the first three historical periods discussed in this chapter.¹¹³ Today, Cohen might well add something like “community” to describe the fourth. This developmental path -- from intense, idealistic relations to more layered, contractual interactions -- has been followed by many egalitarian communities, from nineteenth century religious settlements in North America to Maoist

¹¹² Ben-Chorin (1987); Guttman & Schnytzer (1989).

¹¹³ Cohen (1983).

communes in China. For better or for worse, it appears a truism that as human beings mature, they tend to lose their taste for the hyper-charged, ascetic mood that characterizes, and sustains, radical egalitarian experiments in their youth.

Radicalism, by its nature, has difficulty recognizing this fact. Because it posits the possibility of dramatically revising social structures and human behaviour, it is predisposed to minimize signs of discontent and dysfunction, and exaggerate the potential of will power. At the outset, this volunteeristic single-mindedness can produce impressive results, as the early kibbutz demonstrated. Over time, however, it severely constrains the internal discourse and fosters a resentful despondency among those harbouring doubts about prevailing arrangements. This is especially true as it becomes ensconced as an official creed, resulting in a kind of conservative radicalism. The upshot is damage to the model's capacity for self-renewal and corrosion of members' commitment. Obvious examples in the case of the kibbutz include its obliviousness to the suffering of external communities, refusal to recognize the negative impact of collective sleeping arrangements for children, and inaction in the face of "hidden" un- and under-employment. Radicalism tends to implode because it is over-reaching and inattentive to the stubborn complexities of reality.

Among these complexities, the kibbutz experience suggests, are three enduring factors which militate against far-reaching equality. The first is the ingrained, if not innate, sense that some jobs contribute more than others and so, merit a larger reward. This "equity instinct" was always present in the

kibbutz, even in its heyday, and became much stronger once the heroic phase had passed. For a while, enhanced social prestige was an adequate bonus for those performing “special” jobs, but because it was unofficial, it lacked legitimacy within the established normative framework and produced disaffection among many members – disaffection which robbed it of much of its compensatory value.¹¹⁴ Astute observers diagnosed the emergence of social stratification and anticipated social cleavages years before the kibbutz moment was ready to wrestle with these trends.¹¹⁵ Moreover, research indicates that stratification, at least in terms of authority and influence, comes to characterize almost all communal experiments.¹¹⁶ The tension between equity and equality - - stratified rewards and universal allocation – was mistakenly treated by the kibbutz leadership and intelligentsia as inconsequential. The inability of the traditional kibbutz to find ways of satisfying equity expectations while preserving social cohesion can be seen as a major source of members’ lack of resolution when the crisis of the mid-1980s erupted.

The second factor that appears to be far more resistant to modification than kibbutz ideology acknowledged is the need for material incentives and penalties to motivate hard work and reduce waste.¹¹⁷ The notion that people

¹¹⁴ Ben Rafael (1996, 211-212) calls this the “paradox of the sociology of equality” and identifies it as a central reason why technocrats led the push for change after 1985.

¹¹⁵ Kressel (1983); Landshut (2000); Rosenfeld (1983); Talmon (1972).

¹¹⁶ Oved (1992).

¹¹⁷ Ben-Rafael (1992).

would indefinitely make supreme efforts for the collective and use its resources frugally was simply misplaced. Free-riding long existed in the kibbutz, but was basically ignored as long as all kibbutz members were able to enjoy a prosperous, state-subsidized standard of living.¹¹⁸ Once that became impossible, the efficacy of material motivators quickly became obvious. Although the kibbutz experiment indicates that anti-egalitarians are wrong in thinking that money is the *sole* motivator for efficiency, it also shows that radical egalitarians are wrong to think material inducements can be eliminated, over the long term, as a key consideration in people's behaviour. The enormous savings in electricity bills realized by most kibbutzim the moment electricity payments were privatized is a case in point.¹¹⁹

The third factor with which those aspiring to reduce social disparities must grapple is the powerful need for personal freedom. Kibbutz thinkers, like many of their fellow radical egalitarians, believed that the removal of economic competition and financial worry would liberate the individual, making her more free than she could ever hope to be in the context of capitalism. At least in terms of subjective experience, this did not prove to be true. Kibbutz members -- especially those who did not consciously choose the socialist lifestyle -- found the restrictions of the radical egalitarian model hard to accept. For a long time,

¹¹⁸ Ofer (1994). Rezin (1980) is a noteworthy exception to the rule, having cautiously recognized before the crisis -- and in the context of a collection which generally celebrated the kibbutz as a stunning success -- that allocative decisions insensitive to individual needs and to free-riding constituted serious flaws in the kibbutz approach to equality.

¹¹⁹ Interviews 2, 12, and 13.

they conformed, but the evidence indicates that they were not particularly satisfied, and that they believed equality and personal freedom were partly irreconcilable.¹²⁰ It turns out that charting one's own path and taking responsibility for the results have a great deal to do with fulfilment. Although solidarity and self-sacrifice are essential if radical egalitarianism is to survive, as communities mellow, they increasingly run up against the individual's (perhaps inherent) urge to make choices and look after his own well-being and that of his family.¹²¹ Arguably, most communal experiments collapse because of the victory of such "egosim" over collectivism.¹²² A community in which the politics are largely pre-defined, work is assigned according to collective needs rather than personal interest, and no one enjoys substantive rewards for effort can be spiritually oppressive -- and no combination of a "higher cause" and adult enrichment courses (as offered by many kibbutzim) will fully compensate for the feeling of disempowerment that accompanies the raft of rules and restrictions needed to gird a radical egalitarian system.

These three abiding considerations -- equity, efficiency, and freedom -- mean challenges for the egalitarian at the best of times. They were even present in Yosef Bussel's Degania. However, the kibbutz case illustrates how globalization has exacerbated their effects and so, complicated the task of those who aspire to reduced social disparities. Globalization affects values --

¹²⁰ Shur (1992).

¹²¹ Ya'ar (1992).

¹²² Van den Berg (1992).

popularizing the libertarian tendencies in American culture and the glorification of opulence – and heightens competitive pressures – spurring producers to cut costs in any way possible to fight off rivals from countries where workers are regularly paid a pittance. For the kibbutz, the results have been a decline in support from the surrounding society, a loss of confidence in the viability of socialism, and a feeling that treating workers well may be an unaffordable luxury.¹²³ Yosef Bussel's grandson, a member of the pro-change group in the kibbutz his grandfather established, captures this mood when, in talking about the founding generation, he says, "[i]f they had not been crazy, they would not have stuck it out. They had a vision, and they were prepared to sacrifice everything to accomplish that vision. Today we have a different situation...The task is to ensure that Degania survives. To that end, we have to make it more normal, more in tune with the rest of the world."¹²⁴ For the egalitarian, the broader lesson is that (almost) no community is an island any longer and thus, distributive justice in the twenty-first century must be concerned with global trends.

Finally, the overlap between the two case studies holds an important lesson. Both experiments have been centrally concerned with the worth of work. Both have been motivated by an egalitarian desire to remove from the assessment of a job's value the effects of traditional hierarchy and established

¹²³ Rosolio (1999), 250-252.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Gavron (2000), 39.

power relations – with an eye to shrinking or eliminating the socioeconomic gaps rooted in that hierarchy and power. And both have striven to identify fair criteria for determining the reward each individual will receive. The implication is that in a world where employment and material well-being are inseparably linked, egalitarian politics must pay close attention to questions of work.

These lessons, together with those of the previous chapter, should provide some guidance as we turn to the question, “whence egalitarianism?” Just as the kibbutz has been compelled to cope with shifting historical conditions in order to survive and to give its egalitarian ethos some expression in concrete social relations, so the contemporary egalitarian must ask himself, “what can be done today, in the face of current realities, to make the world a less unequal place?” The next chapter will seek to provide something of an answer.

Chapter 5

The Challenge

Having examined the theoretical foundations of egalitarianism and two real-world attempts to translate it into a practical project, it is now time to explore egalitarianism's contemporary quandaries and how it might be revitalized in the context of twenty-first century conditions and constraints. This chapter will begin with an account of egalitarianism's twenty-year retreat; go on to examine the critical role of globalization; turn next to an analysis of four strategies deployed in recent years in an attempt to revitalize the influence of egalitarian impulses (the Third Way, human rights, global governance, and direct activism); continue with a summary of lessons learned; and conclude with a description, drawing upon the previous chapters of the dissertation and the previous sections of this chapter, of principles and practices which, together, might pave the way for a more effective egalitarian politics.

Retreating from Equality

The urge to achieve a less lopsided distribution of wealth, power, and status has hardly been dominant over the last two decades. Our two case studies bear out the conventional wisdom: efforts to narrow social disparities have had a bumpy ride for many years, with proponents of egalitarian ideals increasingly on the defensive, seeking more to protect a modicum of redistribution than to seize the agenda. Small victories have replaced grand schemes and advocacy of distributional justice has come to seem almost quaint.

The causes of egalitarianism's retreat are multiple and, as is usually the case with social processes, impossible to fully disentangle.¹ Most analyses trace the beginning of the process to the deterioration, in the early 1970s, of the international Bretton Woods arrangements that had underpinned the postwar, welfare state compromise. The Bretton Woods scheme involved global capital controls and fixed exchange rates aimed at smoothing out the vicissitudes of the free market. Its most important institutional manifestations were the Stabilization Fund, which became the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which became the World Bank. Bretton Woods reflected the prevailing view -- following the deprivations of the Great Depression and the war-based, government-led recovery of the early 1940s -- that capitalism could be effectively regulated by public authorities in a manner that would maximize its creative potential while minimizing its deleterious effects.

In the context of domestic politics, this view led to the fortification of the Western welfare state, whose objectives were to marry a market economy with effective public oversight and universal social security programs. Although the shape of the welfare state differed markedly, from Swedish social democracy to American liberalism, the postwar consensus across the industrialized democracies entailed the same basic combination: significant scope for

¹ For a number of attempts to tell this story (from very different perspectives), see Galbraith (2000); McQuaig (2001), chapter 1; and Micklethwait & Wooldridge (2000), chapter 1.

capitalist activity combined with widespread support for government action in defense of the common good and the disadvantaged. It also led to broadly similar results: moderation of disparities, disaffection among major business interests, and the slow but steady growth of labyrinthine bureaucracies.

National economies and international stabilization mechanisms came under increased pressure with the onset of the energy crisis in the mid-1970s. In response, governments bent to the demands of major financial interests to revamp the Bretton Woods arrangements, but did not immediately foresake the domestic compromise of the welfare state; in fact, for the better part of the decade, they persisted with costly social programs that, in a difficult economic climate, meant escalating deficits. However, challenges to the prevailing model began to gather force -- particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries with strong libertarian traditions alongside egalitarian tendencies -- as these deficits mounted and as populations increasingly doubted whether the traditional welfare state was capable of providing the mix of stability and growth it had long promised. The sense that in the face of crisis, governments were only doing more of the same -- galvanized in Britain by the Labour government's indecisive response to 1978's Winter of Discontent and in the United States by dissatisfaction with a seemingly inept Carter administration -- paved the way for anti-egalitarian² discourses to gain the upper hand.

² "Anti-egalitarian" is used throughout in the same sense as in chapter 2: not to connote a celebration of inequality as such, but rather, opposition to efforts to close disparities because those disparities are seen as natural, indirectly beneficial (in terms of efficiency), or both.

Needless to say, these discourses had never disappeared, but over the preceding three or four decades, they had been in a defensive mode – much as notions of redistribution are today. The crumbling viability of the postwar settlement presented an opportunity for a more aggressive stance. Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*³ was an early sign of the libertarians' new sense of energy, and was soon followed by a burst of what came to be known as neoconservatism in journals such as *Commentary*, *The Public Interest*, and *The National Review*. Politically, moderate conservatives such as Nelson Rockefeller and Edward Heath – who essentially accepted the parameters of the postwar settlement – were displaced by more ideological, anti-egalitarian leaders such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. It is notable that just a few years earlier, both Thatcher and Reagan had been considered too extreme for the parties they would eventually lead to multiple victories. It is also noteworthy that both their administrations drew inspiration and guidance from anti-egalitarian intellectuals; for example, it is said that shortly after she was elected party leader, Thatcher firmly rebuffed a Conservative Party researcher promoting a middle course by pulling a copy of Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* from her briefcase and declaring, "this is what we believe."⁴

Reagan and Thatcher's successes at the polls, which signaled the formal dominance of an anti-egalitarian ethos in the English-speaking world's

³ Nozick (1974).

⁴ Micklethwait & Wooldridge (2000), 21.

two most powerful states, were arguably facilitated not only by global economic disruptions and the ossification of the welfare state, but also by demographic changes. From the 1930s to 1970s, the combination of lived hardship (for survivors of the Depression and war) and youthful, anti-materialistic idealism (for the baby boomers) had fostered receptivity to a more interventionist, protective state. But as the older generation approached retirement, it experienced greater financial stability and had less to fear from economic turbulence, thanks largely (and ironically) to ensconced public pensions that were rarely targeted for cuts by anti-egalitarians, sensitive as they were to electoral considerations. At the same time, the younger generation settled down to make a living, becoming more preoccupied with increasing its after-tax income and (without the experience of the Depression and having done its bit for justice in the tie-dyed years) less concerned about social safety nets. The upshot was that popular attraction to redistributive policy waned.⁵

The strength of the anti-egalitarian trend was soon evident in other Western states as well. In 1983, two years into his mandate, France's Socialist President, François Mitterrand, abandoned policies of vigorous nationalization and redistribution, following cries of opposition from business interests and a serious economic downturn. In 1984, New Zealand's Labour Party instituted far-reaching reforms that transformed the country from one of the industrialized

⁵ Galbraith (1992).

world's most social democratic to one of its most neoliberal.⁶ The same year, Canada's Progressive Conservative Party gained its first majority government in over two decades after running on a platform of deficit reduction; four years later, it won a second majority in an election which turned largely on the question of free trade with the United States.

By the late 1980s, neoliberal policies were being adopted by most Western states and imposed on developing countries, often with devastating consequences, under the aegis of the IMF's and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). A wide range of social security programs were being curtailed -- along with trade tariffs, public regulation, state ownership of businesses, and the influence of unions -- and the renaissance of individualism and aggressive capitalism were being proclaimed. Then, in 1989, "real existing socialism" -- the Marxist totalitarianism of the Eastern bloc -- collapsed, confirming for many the bankruptcy of egalitarian social engineering and feeding the triumphalist mood of the neoliberal determinists. Emblematic of that mood was Francis Fukuyama's 1992 *The End of History*, which declared in Hegelian fashion the final victory of the democratic-capitalist model and the replacement of politics with administration.⁷

The 1990s witnessed further entrenchment of neoliberal hegemony, as well as tentative efforts to moderate it. Domestically, entrenchment took place

⁶ Aberbach & Christensen (2001).

⁷ Fukuyama (1992).

most visibly through welfare reform, which left no Western democracy untouched. It was, predictably, most substantial in the United States, where the notion of an entitlement to welfare was supplanted by policies designed to push people into any available jobs and restrict the total amount of time they could collect support.⁸ But even in more traditionally collectivist states such as Denmark and the Netherlands, passive support was replaced by active programs that compelled recipients to look for and accept jobs.⁹ That being said, attempts to limit welfare retrenchment were periodically made by Western governments, particularly in Continental Europe, leading some frustrated neoliberals to argue that little was changing even as proponents of social programs mourned their demise.¹⁰ A commitment to moderation was most often proclaimed by social democratic parties, which ruled much of Europe by the end of the decade, though there is debate on the degree to which their governments actually did more than others to protect welfare. Indeed, some observers have suggested that social democratic parties actually found it easier to reduce welfare, since they had greater credibility with disadvantaged sectors and could assume these sectors would not abandon them at election time.¹¹

⁸ Besharov & Germanis (2000) and Sawhill (2001) provide relatively factual, disinterested accounts of the changes to the American welfare system. For competing views on whether the US experience has borne out the thesis that welfare recipients are victims of a job-scarce labour market or of their own dependency culture, see Hadler (2000) and Mead (2000).

⁹ Cox (1998, 2001).

¹⁰ Scarborough (2000).

¹¹ Ross (2000).

Internationally, entrenchment of neoliberalism occurred mainly through acceleration of the move to laissez-faire norms which had begun with the collapse of the Bretton Woods understandings and continued with the SAPs and the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement. The latter was replaced with a new deal, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), that included Mexico, and global free trade was advanced through completion, in 1994, of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations and establishment, on January 1, 1995, of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Efforts to moderate such global trends consisted of cautious actions such as development of largely toothless NAFTA side agreements on labour and environmental issues.¹²

Not surprisingly, the shift to a neoliberal discourse and policies has been accompanied by rising inequalities, though not in as consistent a fashion as might have been expected.¹³ Inequality and poverty have risen significantly in the United States, but much less so in Western states that were later, and more reluctant, passengers on the laissez-faire train.¹⁴ Canada, for instance, has seen little increase in after-tax income disparities despite a growth in before-tax

¹² These side agreements established general standards and oversight mechanisms (purportedly) aimed at preventing a serious deterioration in worker and environmental protections as a result of the elimination of tariffs. They are considered in greater detail in the section below on global governance.

¹³ There is perennial methodological controversy regarding how inequality, and especially poverty, should be measured: see, for example, Deaton (2001) and Jackson (2001). In this paragraph, I try to summarize the most commonly accepted, least agenda-driven evidence. For detailed on-line figures on inequality, see *UNU/WIDER - UNDP World Income Inequality Database* (2002).

¹⁴ For an outstanding article on inequality and poverty in the US, see Fallows (2000).

gaps, though rates of consumption poverty have gone up significantly.¹⁵ In any event, outside a small number of well-heeled countries with ingrained social programs, gaps have been widening continuously. The disparities between rich and poor have become much larger within developing countries, and the difference overall between rich and poor states has become a chasm. The statistics tell the story. Between 1960 and 1990s, the income ratio between the fifth of the global population living in the wealthiest countries and the fifth living in the most impoverished rose from 60:1 to 74:1. Between 1988 and 1993, the global Gini coefficient rose from .625 to 0.66.¹⁶ The world's richest 225 people now have between them some one trillion dollars in wealth, a sum equivalent to the yearly income of the poorest 47 per cent of the global population.¹⁷ A quarter of the world's population survives on under a dollar a day, and over half on less than two dollars.¹⁸ Estimates suggest that doubling or even tripling the income of the poorest quartile the world over would mean a decrease for the top decile of just one to two per cent.¹⁹ Although it is not certain that the number of individuals living in absolute poverty has risen – there is much controversy on

¹⁵ Banting (1997), 277-278; Pendakur, 2001.

¹⁶ Wade (2001), 73. The Gini coefficient is a widely accepted measure of inequality, where zero constitutes total equality and 1.00 equals total concentration. Canada's after-tax Gini coefficient has hovered at around 0.3 for the past few decades.

¹⁷ Short (1999), 20.

¹⁸ Bosworth & Gordon (2001), 4-5 .

¹⁹ Pogge (2000), 38.

this point²⁰ – it is clear that a growing number are stuck with very low resource levels and, in comparative terms, are falling further below the median as the rich grow richer. The middle, moreover, is shrinking everywhere: within developed countries (the traditional Western middle class has ceased its historical patterns of growth), within developing countries (the emergent middle class has largely been pushed down the socioeconomic ladder), and between states (most countries are well-off or poor with respect to per capita GDP, with few lying in intermediate gradations).²¹

Some defenders of neoliberal policy have made the argument that even if inequality is growing, this should not be a concern in and of itself as long as poverty rates are not rising; indeed, they sometimes say, larger disparities may actually spur poverty reduction by providing incentives for hard work. The normative aspect of this line of reasoning echoes the sufficiency theories of Frankfurt and Raz mentioned in chapter 2. From an egalitarian perspective, there are several problems with this argument. First, it ignores the relative dimension of deprivation: people's experience of destitution is exacerbated if others are becoming ever richer, even if their own bad situation is merely static and not actually getting worse. Second, it negates ethical questions related to the use of limited resources: if we accept that poverty is inherently a bad thing, then should we not also agree that the many added dollars going to the rich

²⁰ Wright (2000).

²¹ Graham (2001); Wade (2001).

would be better employed if they went to poor and near-poor people with more pressing needs, especially given evidence that extra resources have less and less impact on well-being as people get richer? Finally, in response to the practical objection contained in the neoliberal logic – that inequality helps reduce poverty in the long term – one can counter that the opposite may be true, at least in extreme situations: huge, persistent disparities may undermine social stability and produce a mood of despondence among the disadvantaged, thereby worsening rather than mitigating poverty. Even if we acknowledge that some discrepancies can boost innovation and productivity, that does not mean all discrepancies, no matter how large, do so.²²

Egalitarians, then, have something to worry about beyond the mere loss of discursive preeminence, for that loss has been accompanied by the real-world result one would have anticipated: a growing gap between rich and poor. Clearly, as the two case studies and the historical account in this section have demonstrated, the emergence of laissez-faire norms at a global level has played a critical part in this process. It has both fueled the shift away from egalitarianism and re-shaped the conditions under which anyone wishing to advocate greater distributive justice must operate. Globalization, then, is central to the contemporary dilemmas of egalitarianism and so, it is to globalization that we now more fully turn our attention.

²² Graham (2001); Hirst & Thomson (1996), chapter 3; Landa & Kapstein (2001). See also the analysis of UN-supported scholars who have examined the relationship between inequality and poverty at United Nations Development Programme (2002).

Globalization

Any discussion of globalization must begin with the oft-debated question: what is it? Scholars have noted repeatedly that despite (or perhaps due to) globalization's popularity as an analytical concept, its meaning has frequently been vague. In an attempt to clarify matters in 1997, one of globalization's most thoughtful observers, David Held, called it "a shift in the spatial form of human organizations and activity to transcontinental or interregional patterns of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power...a stretching and deepening of social relations and institutions across space and time."²³ Somewhat more parsimoniously, he and a number of colleagues defined it two years later as "the accumulation of links across the world's major regions and across many domains of activity."²⁴ James Rosenau, another leading thinker on globalization, has coined the term "fragmegration" in an attempt to capture globalization's twin effects of integrating and splintering social relations,²⁵ and Japanese scholars have come up with "glocalization" for much the same reason.²⁶

One reason for definitional ambiguity has been globalization's multi-

²³ Held (1997), 253.

²⁴ Held et al. (1999), 483.

²⁵ Rosenau (1997).

²⁶ One volume that effectively captures the multiple meanings and implications of globalization – especially its economic and political dimensions, which are of greatest interest in the present context – is the excellent collection edited by James Mittelman (1997).

dimensional quality; that is, the fact that it simultaneously involves several inter-related trends. Underpinning globalization are the development and application of communication and transportation technologies that tie physically removed locations more closely together by making it easier to learn about, contact, and visit them. Technological change is not globalization *per se*, but it is a critical factor making globalization possible. Developments such as the internet, satellite television, and increasingly affordable air travel create links between different countries and continents -- links without precedent in terms of their density and efficiency. While these links do not themselves dictate content, without them, globalization writ large would be much less likely to emerge.

Technological advances directly facilitate economic globalization, which can be understood as the growing interconnectedness of economic activities in different countries. Economic globalization's clearest manifestations are increased trade, multi-country production processes, rising external investment, and the rapid movement of capital between states and regions. Economic globalization has reached the point where a primary locus of some economic activities cannot even be identified; they take place in so many different locations that they are, for all intents and purposes, internationalized.

Such developments, in turn, spur various forms of cultural globalization, which involves a growing homogenization of attitudes, preferences, and behavioural patterns in discrete locations previously characterized by significant divergence along these dimensions. Cultural globalization is related to both increased exposure to other cultures through communications media and

travel, and increased enmeshment in the world's consumer and entertainment industries as a result of imports, advertising, and the like. In many respects, cultural globalization is simply Americanization – global consumers' embrace of McDonald's, Hollywood, Coke, and MTV. It is, however, offset by an opposing cultural trend: a rebellious withdrawal into angry anti-Americanism, as comparatively poor nations struggle to sustain embattled identities in the face of US dominance. This dialectical quality of cultural globalization was most famously noted by Benjamin Barber in *Jihad vs. McWorld*. It is worth noting, in the wake of September 11, that this reaction, though most pronounced in Muslim countries, exists elsewhere as well; witness, for example, the strongly nationalist resistance in China to membership in the WTO.²⁷

Between these three trends -- technological change, economic globalization, and cultural globalization -- it is the second that is of primary interest for the present discussion, for it is the category that most directly affects distributional questions and the ability of politics to address those questions. Moreover, it is more amenable to change than technological advances and cultural convergence, both of which are more the amorphous, decentralized results of applied research, marketing, and the accumulation of millions of individual choices. Economic globalization has more immediate effects on questions of public interest (poverty, the environment, democratic

²⁷ Barber (1995); Fewsmith (2001); Masini (1994); Robertson (1992). It often seems that people with roots outside the West who have themselves already adopted Westernized *morés* are the most sanguine about cultural homogenization -- even more so than non-American Westerners: see, for example, Global Culture (1999) and Rushdie (1999).

rule) and operates more fully within a set of rules designed and implemented by public authorities – rules that can be adjusted if there is a will to do so. This does not mean that shaping technological evolution or cultural globalization is impossible or that re-casting economic globalization is simple – it just means that the latter is easier, as well as more pertinent to the quest for greater substantive equality.

The argument concerning the ultimate mutability of economic globalization requires some elaboration, since a popular view of globalization is that it is inevitable. As R.J. Barry Jones says, “‘mainstream’ analyses of the sources of globalization...take as givens many of the political, social and technological conditions that are fundamental to the context within which trade is conducted or investment decisions are taken, and that remain open to the kind of profound redirection that was experienced during the two world wars”.²⁸ This mystification is, I would suggest, attributable to a number of different sources. First, conflation of technological and economic globalization may attach to the latter some of the inexorable qualities of the former. Second, powerful corporate interests that benefit from economic globalization may wish to shield it with the mantle of inevitability, to forestall any attempts to constrain their activities. Third, governments interested in pursuing unpopular policies may seek to deflect criticism by claiming, as Margaret Thatcher famously did, that there is no alternative: globalization made them do it. Finally, many who

²⁸ Barry Jones (1999) 360.

truly believe in the beneficial effects of economic globalization may be falling into the familiar trap of confusing the normative (we ought to continue globalization) with the ontological (we have no choice), whether for reasons of intellectual imprecision or public relations.

The reification of globalization has not gone unchallenged. Those with strong historical sensibilities, for instance, have stressed that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were characterized by a degree of global economic integration comparable to that which reigns today. Moreover, they note, this first era of globalization came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of the First World War and the rise of protectionism in response to the Depression. As Emma Rothschild writes, “[p]olitical philosophers have sometimes begun to reflect on the consequences of political and social internationalization just when economic internationalization was about to reverse itself....the sense of inevitability...that sometimes accompanies discussions of globalization is itself, often, a source of passivity.”²⁹

Radical academics, many working from a Marxist perspective, have argued that the current phase of globalization is simply a continuation of capitalism’s innate drive to extract profit from every possible location. The rhetoric of economic necessity, in their view, is a hegemonic discourse designed to secure acquiescence in exploitation.³⁰ This analysis is incisive up

²⁹ Rothschild (1999), 109, 115. On the not-so-novel character of globalization, see also Hirst & Thomson (1996) and Williamson (1998).

³⁰ Panitch (2000).

to a point though, in my judgement, too often adopts a dubious conspiratorial tone. Samir Amin, for example, contends that globalization is part of “a global political strategy for world management,” and Philip McMichael deems it “an historically specific project of global economic (financial) management [p]rosecuted by a powerful global elite of financiers, international and national bureaucrats, and corporate leaders”.³¹ Such intimations of far-reaching collusion (which are usually presented as givens rather than empirically demonstrated) detract from the important insights such works offer on how the ideology of globalization-determinism serves, and is therefore sustained by, powerful players.

More recently, globalization’s proponents have themselves begun to emphasize that it is a human artifact subject to reversal. This candor has come largely in response to public protests against globalization which, its advocates fear, could lead to a new wave of protectionism. In other words, the somewhat belated acknowledgment of globalization’s socially constructed character is meant as a warning to political leaders whose vigilance might waver, especially if they conceptualize globalization as a self-propelled process requiring no human sponsorship. *The Economist’s* John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, for instance, fret that “the naked opportunism that drives the typical politician” could produce a situation where economic globalization is “eroded by

³¹ Amin (2001), 22; McMichael (1996), 28. See also Dash (1998); Dupuy (1998); and Williams (1999).

a thousand small cuts.”³²

Together, these arguments underscore what should perhaps have been obvious all along: many elements of economic globalization are clearly the result of specific policy and institutional choices and can be cancelled or modified. Whether and how this should occur is another question – one that will occupy many of the pages that follow – but as a point of departure, it is critical to appreciate the possibility. Colin Hay recently put the matter this way:

As a growing number of commentators have come to acknowledge, the global free market was not an inevitable and inexorable culmination of centuries of natural selection. As is now well documented, it is in fact the product of a quite explicit (and still relatively recent) political project....The current ascendancy of this model rests on the continuing interventions of a range of international institutions in thrall to the US....the much-vaunted convergence of contemporary capitalism looks rather more contingent and, indeed, considerably more precarious than any simple Darwinian analogy would suggest.³³

Having recognized this point, it now becomes important to consider the forms, scope, and effects on policy-making of economic globalization. In terms of form, economic globalization can be boiled down, at its most basic level, to the elimination of barriers to international trade and investment through complex agreements between state governments as well as loan conditions dictated by international lenders. This removal of barriers results in increased inter-state trade, investment, and production. The intensification of these processes, in turn, produces pressures on governments to alter domestic policy in order to

³² Micklethwait & Wooldridge (2000), 285, 286.

³³ Hay (2000), 526, 527.

keep bond ratings high, stabilize currencies, and attract investors; typically, governments seek to eliminate deficits -- which leads, *inter alia*, to sharp reductions in social spending and the privatization of state enterprises – and to relax labour and environmental regulations that impose costs on producers.

How extensive has economic globalization been? It goes without saying that there have been important trade agreements in recent years, leading to increased inter-state commerce. As it turns out, however, trade and investment flows have not been nearly as widespread or as evenly dispersed as many believe. Empirical analysis indicates that economic globalization has been more limited than the technological variety, and that most cross-border trade and investment takes place within regions and among developed countries, rather than between the industrialized North and developing South.³⁴ This reinforces the point about globalization being as much a matter of psychology and rhetoric as reality: yes, it is happening, but not with the intensity or reach that deterministic treatments imply. The empirical evidence also raises interesting questions (to which we will return) about the extent to which trade and investment flows on the one hand and neoliberal domestic policies on the other actually do, or need to, correlate.

It is often argued that globalization has weakened the sovereign state. By constraining state authority and shifting economic processes to a supra-national terrain beyond the reach of state regulation, it is claimed, economic

³⁴ Measuring Globalization (2001).

globalization has hollowed out much of the state's authority. State prerogatives have been eliminated or transferred upwards to anonymous trade officials, and sovereign governments have supposedly been shown to be ineffectual in the face of calamities related to economic globalization (such as ecological damage) and beholden to the whims of powerful corporations. New civil society actors have emerged at both the local and global levels, both in response to the state's failures and thanks to the marvels of technological globalization, further diluting the state's credibility as the primary arena of political action. As a result, the traditional notion of sovereignty, where the state enjoys a monopoly over political authority and wields unchallenged power within clearly defined territorial borders, is allegedly being rendered more and more anachronistic.³⁵ As Goldblatt et al. say, "states today face a more complex array of international or global problems than hitherto; in addition, they must face a wider range of international actors....the autonomy of democratically elected governments has been and is increasingly constrained by sources of unelected and unaccountable power."³⁶

Decline-of-the-state analyses need to be treated with a degree of caution. While it is unquestionably true that state sovereignty is less absolute and straightforward under conditions of economic globalization than it was in its postwar heyday, it is far from disappearing. The state still has significant

³⁵ Della Sala (2001) provides a good overview of the decline-of-the-state literature.

³⁶ Goldblatt et al. (1997), 283, 284.

latitude for autonomous policy choices and, if it so chooses, for withdrawing its consent to specific global trade and investment rules (though such a step would carry economic penalties). The image of economic globalization steamrolling the state and imposing uniform, lowest-common-denominator social policies across the globe exaggerates the situation significantly, at least when it comes to fairly resilient Western states.³⁷ Poor states cracking under heavy debt loads and subjected to harsh SAPs may be another matter.³⁸

Examinations of the impact of globalization on social programs in industrialized democracies have found that it is relatively limited. Granted, investors shy away from high-deficit countries and economic globalization encourages a shift from more passive welfare-provision to more active labour market strategies; by and large, however, the Western welfare state has survived. Moreover, examinations of the link between trade and intra-state inequality in the Western world have found only a weak effect.³⁹ In fact, there is evidence that economic globalization and strong social programs may be positively rather than negatively correlated, perhaps because a reliable safety net reduces individual vulnerability and calls for protectionism, or because external investors are attracted to countries with good services, a solid

³⁷ For textured analyses that challenge the assumption that globalization has profoundly weakened the state, see Shaw (1997) and Weiss (1999).

³⁸ Cheng (1999); Hay (2000).

³⁹ Burgoon (2001); Garrett & Mitchell (2001); Mosley (2000); Richardson (1995); Scarborough (2000).

infrastructure, and stable social conditions.⁴⁰ Noteworthy in this connection is the fact that after Singapore, Sweden and the Netherlands, both states with high social spending, are the world's most globalized countries.⁴¹ In the Canadian context, reviews of social programs during the 1990s have concluded that the pressures of globalization were far from the most important factor driving policy change.⁴² Even analyses of globalization's impact on government policy in East Asia and, to a lesser degree, Latin America have found that states (at least those not subject to SAPs) retain scope for making their own policy choices and that the policy effects of globalization are by no means unidimensional.⁴³

The consequences of economic globalization, then, are complex. How do we reconcile indications of growing constraints on state sovereignty with evidence of continuing latitude for state action in areas such as social policy? How do we make sense of data showing rising North-South inequalities since the advent of neoliberal orthodoxy with figures suggesting that actual economic globalization is less substantial than we may have thought?

These tensions point to the need for nuanced rather than sweeping

⁴⁰ Garrett & Mitchell (2001); Rieger & Leibfried (1998); Therborn (2000).

⁴¹ Measuring Globalization (2001). Degree of globalization is determined in this piece by a metric combining data in areas such as international trade, investment, travel, and phone calls; cross-border remittances; internet use; and convergence between domestic and global prices.

⁴² Banting (1997); Hoberg et al. (1999).

⁴³ Kaufman & Segura-Ubiergo (2001); Zha (2000).

conclusions about the effects of economic globalization and, specifically, its implications for the project of renewing egalitarian politics. I would suggest there are four central implications. First, globalization writ large is not, by definition, bad for substantive equality. Some aspects of economic globalization, such as trade, foster growth and therefore may contribute to reductions in poverty and inequality. In this connection, it is worth recalling that protectionism and import substitution did not work especially well for the developing world during the period following decolonialization, and there is no reason to believe they would be more effective today. Indeed, from any perspective, high-trade developing countries in East Asia have fared better than low-trade countries in Africa. That being said, some aspects of economic globalization obviously do have deleterious effects in distributional terms. Chief among them are unchecked capital flows – which place national economies at the mercy of short-term speculators, leading to crushing events such as the Mexican and East Asian meltdowns in the 1990s – and the power (and inclination) of international institutions to impose SAPs that pay no attention to questions of social justice. It is these sorts of phenomena, and not economic globalization as a whole, that egalitarians should seek to address. To condemn globalization *per se* is analogous to exaggerating the decline of state authority: it starts with incontrovertible verities but carries them too far, and in so doing can cause as much harm as good, assuming that our fundamental aim remains a more equitable allocation of resources.

Second, our discussion of globalization points to the importance of

distinguishing economic integration from the neoliberal discourse and policies that accompany it. The intensification of trade and investment do not, by definition, demand the elimination of all policies aimed at a more equitable distribution of resources. However, neoliberal standard-bearers have been highly successful at bundling together all forms of globalization and laissez-faire governance. Thus, the inexorable spread of the internet lends an air of inevitability not only to expanded trade and investment, but also to privatized health care and regressive taxation. This line of reasoning has been so widely accepted that even those in favour of more activist public policy have tended to engage in self-censorship, assuming that globalization renders it impossible. For egalitarianism to become effective again, it must challenge this hegemonic view by unpacking the bundle and revealing the existence of space for public action.

Third, to borrow a neo-Marxist phrase discussed in chapter 2, it may be best to think of the contemporary state as enjoying relative autonomy. In using this term, of course, neo-Marxists were referring largely to autonomy from the influence of domestic capital; here its meaning is adjusted to include autonomy from the control of global corporations and the neoliberal thrust of international trade pacts. In other words, the state should neither be conceptualized in the traditional Westphalian sense as fully independent and coherent, nor in the currently popular sense as a virtually empty shell. On the one hand, economic globalization has undeniably complicated the work of the state as it seeks to mediate between myriad interests and promote competing objectives, such as

the attraction of investment and the reduction of poverty. The contemporary state must manoeuvre through a terrain pockmarked with booby traps and antagonistic forces allied with both business and social movements. And the state itself has become less uniform as disputes over policy directions get conducted as much within its confines as between it and other players. On the other hand, none of this means the state has been immobilized; indeed, as noted above, any argument that the state has lost the bulk of its authority fails the test of evidence. Our pay equity case study lends further support to this view: pay equity was legislated and implemented in Ontario after the free trade agreement with the United States. The putative imperatives of globalization may have curtailed pay equity, but they did not preclude it. An excessively sceptical view of the state is problematic because it has the potential to divert all attention to other political domains; namely, civil society or international institutions. Certainly, as I will contend below, activity in those arenas is necessary, but the state remains the strongest single locus for democratic action to modify social priorities and structures. If the relative autonomy of the state is dismissed and engagement with the state eschewed, the only voices at the most important policy-making tables will be those supporting the status quo. And then, when an opportunity arises, for example, to shape a position on international trade negotiations or determine whether taxes should be cut in a

progressive or flat fashion, those will be the only voices heard.⁴⁴

Finally, the most pressing egalitarian crisis today is between, not within, different states. As we have seen, North-South inequalities have shot up much more than disparities within developed countries, in part due not to the dominance of globalization, but its limits; that is, the fact that much of the increased trade and investment stemming from economic globalization has occurred among the rich nations. The gap between the poor sectors in most developing countries and the rich sectors in Europe and North America is so massive, so appalling, that only the most rigidly communitarian version of egalitarianism – a version that restricts distributive justice strictly to the boundaries of solidaristic political communities – could possibly reject the notion that egalitarianism today must concern itself urgently with global inequality. Indeed, under contemporary conditions, it is not clear that even such rigorous communitarianism can withstand the ethical demand to focus on distributive injustices across countries and regions, since globalization in all its forms has bound us closely to events far from our homes and so, compromised any claim that solidarity ceases at national frontiers.⁴⁵ This does

⁴⁴ A recent Canadian collection (Smith & Wolfish, 2001) includes several contributions that provide a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which the state is losing monopolies of authority in some areas while adapting, gaining new authority, and finding more effective methods of operating in others. See in particular chapters 2 (Bauer & Le Prestre), 4 (Della Sala), 5 (Clarkson), and 9 (Smith & Wolfish). See also Hirst & Thomson (1996), which added significant nuance to discussions of the state of the state under conditions of globalization, and Peters (2000), which provides an eminently sensible, non-dogmatic assessment of the state of the state.

⁴⁵ Michael Walzer has been criticized for allowing his communitarianism to get in the way of more egalitarian attitudes at the global level, and it is true that despite his progressive politics, his treatment of international issues scarcely mentions questions of distributive justice.

not mean that egalitarians should stop being concerned about inequality within their societies – far from it – only that this can no longer be their sole focus.

These four points – the distinction between constructive and pernicious aspects of globalization, the distinction between globalization and neoliberalism, the relative autonomy of the state, and concern with global inequalities – are central to the context within which egalitarians must operate in the early twenty-first century. We will now consider how some have attempted to confront egalitarianism's difficulties in recent years, and what their efforts have yielded.

Responses

The Third Way

The Third Way is both a theoretical construct and an election slogan. The author of the former is Anthony Giddens; the author of the latter is Giddens' friend, Tony Blair. Reduced to its essence, the Third Way refers to an attempt to craft a new type of social democratic politics by going beyond the prescriptions offered by both neoliberalism and what is pejoratively called the Old Left. Third Way theory claims to focus on values while being pragmatic with respect to means. It constitutes, at one and the same time, a rejection of traditional socialism and an effort to make many of its basic motives relevant again, in part by healing the breach between social democracy and progressive

See Orend (2000) and, for Walzer's most recent statement on his views regarding the global order, Walzer (2000).

liberalism. Social inclusiveness supplants class struggle as the basic frame of reference; investment in human capital replaces taxation and welfare as the primary means to improving the lot of the disadvantaged; state ownership and interventionism are discouraged; the market is viewed as a dynamic engine of development and growth; and globalization is accepted as an inalterable reality. As a concept, the Third Way is intended to move political thought “beyond left and right”; as a party motto it is aimed at making centre-left parties electable. Its success on the latter score is clearer than on the former, following two New Labour majorities under Blair’s reformist leadership. Other political leaders, from Bill Clinton to Gerhard Schroeder to Jean Chrétien, have enthusiastically adopted the Third Way discourse, seeking to present themselves as politicians who combine modern, market-friendly practicality with social compassion.⁴⁶

To its defenders, the Third Way is the only logical response to the crisis of centre-left politics, long the home of much egalitarian thinking. It rests on two key assumptions. First, it believes that much of the neoliberal project is here to stay, for a number of reasons: the accuracy of its diagnosis in several areas (notably the inefficiency of large bureaucracies), the fact that it has become ensconced in public thinking, and the momentum of globalization. Second, it believes that Old Left solutions are bankrupt, both because of their inherent deficiencies (excessive reliance on the state and insufficient attention

⁴⁶ The basic texts of Third Way theory are Giddens (1994, 1998). Its clearest political formulation was produced by Blair and Shroeder in 1999 and republished, with critical annotations, in *Dissent* (find citation - spring 2000) For succinct accounts of Third Way ideas, see Freedan (1999); Isaac (2001); and Meyer (1999).

to individual responsibility) and their failure to keep pace with changing times (general improvements in standards of living, the modernization of capitalism). Michael Harris, for example, argues that prior to the Third Way, a defeated centre-left “tended (not surprisingly) to retrench in its established ways of thinking, which further exacerbated its appearance of conservatism and anachronism.” New Labour, he says, “is born of the recognition, at long last, of how distanced the Labour party, and the left generally, was from the mainstream,” and is at root “a project to improve the working of a capitalist economy and society for progressive ends....far more radical in its possibilities than is often assumed.”⁴⁷

To its critics, however, the Third Way is little more than anti-egalitarian Thatcherism rationalized by globalization-determinism, packaged in soothing rhetoric, and marketed through shallow sound-bites.⁴⁸ In Shalom Lappin's words, it is “essentially an exercise in kinder, gentler neoconservative politics packaged as a progressive agenda...the rhetoric of globalization hangs heavy over New Labour. It is frequently invoked as something analogous to a force of nature.”⁴⁹ Frustrated radicals argue that it matters little whether one's vision is

⁴⁷ Harris (1999), 55, 58, 60.

⁴⁸ Given the focus of this dissertation, I deal here with critiques of the Third Way from a radical direction. There are, of course, numerous neoliberal critics who trenchantly argue that Blair et al. have trod too progressive, rather than too cautious, a path. However, because our present concern is with the renewal of egalitarianism, and because critics operating from anti-egalitarian premises naturally have no interest in participating in that discussion, their views are not reviewed herein. In addition to the sources quoted in this paragraph, recent radical attacks on the Third Way include Albo & Zuege (1999) and Nairn (2001).

⁴⁹ Lappin (2000), 17-18.

of a competitive, individualistic society à la Thatcher or an inclusive community à la Blair if your policies add up to the same immiseration of marginalized classes. Pointing to the fuzziness of Third Way commitments, the continuation of most Thatcherite policies, and even the mutual admiration of Thatcher and Blair, opponents see the Third Way as a Trojan horse for the maintenance of neoliberal hegemony. At best, they are willing to assume that New Labour is simply stumbling around, led by “people who do not really know where they are going.”⁵⁰ More common is the view that Blair seeks to depoliticize public policy, turning every question into a matter for technocratic problem-solving rather than ideological vision, perpetuating Thatcher’s message that “there is no alternative,” and enfeebling the party system, which should be the foundation for new ideas and democratic engagement.⁵¹ Bitingly reflecting radical scorn for Third Way academics and politicians, Alex Callinicos writes that the “intellectual vacuity” of their theoretical works “corresponds to the emptiness at the heart of ‘the project’ itself, where neo-liberalism has reduced egalitarian commitments to mere rhetoric.”⁵² Similarly, Perry Anderson, in a lead editorial outlining the twenty-first century vision of the *New Left Review*, from which many of the radical attacks emanate, contends that:

the neo-liberal consensus has found a new point of stabilization in the ‘Third Way’ of the Clinton-Blair regimes. The winning formula to seal the victory of the market is not to attack, but to preserve,

⁵⁰ McKibbin (2000). 69.

⁵¹ Barnett (2000); Mair (2000); Marquand (2000).

⁵² Callinicos (2000), 118.

the placebo of a compassionate public authority, extolling the compatibility of competition with solidarity. The hard core of government policies remains further pursuit of the Reagan-Thatcher legacy, on occasion with measures their predecessors did not dare enact.⁵³

Recently published debates between Giddens and Will Hutton, who had some involvement in earlier Labour attempts at re-definition through his notion of “stakeholder capitalism,”⁵⁴ make clear the fissures between the proponents of the Third Way and its detractors, even moderate ones like Hutton. Hutton points to “a dimension of globalization that is about opening up the world to American interests in particular and Western capitalism in general”; emphasizes that “[n]ot everything the old left believed is axiomatically wrong”; calls Blair and Schroeder’s 1999 joint essay on the Third Way “an astonishing statement of neoliberal principles”; and argues that “[b]oth Schroeder and Blair believe the neo-liberal doctrine that markets are essentially benevolent, a wealth-creating process that generates efficiencies.” Giddens, in reply, accuses Hutton of trotting out conspiracy theories with respect to the US; claims that despite globalization’s shortcomings, prosperity depends on integration into the world economy; and contends that there is “much more general will to regulate financial markets than there used to be. Neo-liberalism is pretty much dead.” In defense of the Third Way, Giddens says:

⁵³ Anderson (2000), 11.

⁵⁴ Hutton (1996).

The values of the left – solidarity, social justice, and the belief that active government is needed to achieve these – are still crucially important in the contemporary world. But the old strategies and institutions, including existing structures of the welfare state, are no longer able to deliver on them....Third-way politics...is unafraid to shed old left dogmas and prejudices. It is quite mistaken to identify [it]...with letting markets rip. We must take globalization seriously, which means responding above the level of the nation as well as domestically.⁵⁵

Part of the explanation for vehemence of polemics concerning the Third Way is the ambiguity of New Labour policies, which allows for highly divergent interpretations. Certainly, few of these policies have the explicitly redistributive purpose of traditional “tax and transfer” programs, but many have an indeterminate but genuine egalitarian potential. These include introduction of a minimum wage, substantial increases in funding for health and education, increases in the Child Benefit, increases in tax credits for poor working families, attempts to expand community-based support services for poor families (through the Sure Start program) and affordable child care, pension enhancements targeted to the less well-off, and welfare-to-work policies (called the New Deal) aimed at getting jobs for the unemployed through training and one-on-one career advice.⁵⁶ On the other hand, Blair has replaced talk of equality with the vaguer rhetoric of inclusion, pursued privatization as enthusiastically as his predecessors, and refused to roll back restrictions on union power enacted by the Conservatives. Even some of the potentially

⁵⁵ Quotes drawn from across Hutton & Giddens (2000).

⁵⁶ Although similar in some ways to neoliberal workfare programs, the UK’s New Deal places greater stress on facilitating success in the job market through individualized services, and less on automatic penalties and time-contingent benefit rollbacks.

positive (from an egalitarian perspective) reforms have possible downsides; most notably, active welfare programs may deny benefits if someone has not done enough, according to state criteria interpreted by state officials, to land a job.⁵⁷

Compounding the ambiguity of New Labour's policy initiatives is the adoption of vague guiding principles which seem to blame the disadvantaged (instead of the market) for their situation. New Labour has unceremoniously jettisoned "Old" Labour's postwar view of the state: a collective representative that legitimately collects and redistributes resources to give people the means to a good life. Instead, the state is seen as carefully applying the limited resources at its disposal to help people help themselves and give them a minimum, rather than optimal, level of well-being.⁵⁸ New Labour concentrates on results, managing instead of directing events, and in contrast to the traditional party (and radical critics), makes few *a priori* assumptions about what techniques will do the trick.⁵⁹

New Labour's ambiguous policies and rhetoric have, perhaps predictably, produced ambiguous outcomes. Recent figures indicate that during Blair's rule, the trend towards growing inequality that prevailed in Britain throughout the Conservative years has been slowed, but probably not reversed,

⁵⁷ Glyn & Wood (2001); McCormick (2001).

⁵⁸ Freeden ((1999).

⁵⁹ Temple (2000), chapter 8.

with disparities shrinking in some areas and growing in others.⁶⁰ Friends of the Third Way will no doubt use such numbers to prove that it is, in fact, an effective if incremental means of advancing a more just society. Opponents will argue that slowing the growth of inequality hardly constitutes a victory and will claim that much more would have been achieved if neoliberalism had been fully discarded.

What are we to make of the Third Way from an egalitarian point-of-view? Have Giddens and Blair mapped the route to a renewed politics of equality? Some academics and politicians certainly think so, and many European social democratic parties have declared an affinity for Third Way-type policies. However, there have been significant voices of dissent, not only among radical academics but also among political leaders and in the left-wing press. In Germany, Oskar Lafontaine resigned from Schroeder's government for reasons that have never been fully clarified but are presumed to have much to do with sharp differences over how much the SDP-led coalition should retrench the German welfare state.⁶¹ In France, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin has rejected the Third Way label and sought to apply neo-Keynesian policies through the still-active French corporatist state, and *Le Monde Diplomatique* has been unrelenting in its hostility to the new creed from London.⁶²

⁶⁰ Glyn & Wood (2001), 57-58; McCormick (2001), 95.

⁶¹ Ash (2001); Schultz (2000).

⁶² Clift (2001). Shortly before this dissertation was submitted, Jospin suffered an embarrassing defeat in the first round of Presidential voting in France, and announced his intention to resign. Commentators have been divided on the reasons for this loss: some have

On balance, it seems unfair to impugn the motives of Third Way advocates, as radical antagonists often do. Giddens, Blair, Schroeder, and even Clinton deserve the benefit of the doubt when they argue that they are impelled by a desire to achieve what social justice they can under difficult conditions. Moreover, those interested in narrowing social gaps should welcome the distinction between ends and means. Giddens is right to argue that the centre-left became too attached to particular methods in the postwar era – especially the traditional welfare state – and paid insufficient attention to their shortcomings.

Blair and company also deserve some credit for acknowledging the imperatives of electability. This is of no small consequence, unless one truly believes that extra-state activism can completely replace state power – and obviously, based on my analysis in the preceding section, I do not think there is much evidence to support this view. Puritanical opponents may have an aversion to mainstream policy commitments and sound-bite communication techniques, but society has become more affluent, media-saturated, and hurried -- and those who would ignore the implications of such developments risk an eternity in the purgatory of the conscientious critic.⁶³ There may be something psychologically satisfying about total ideological consistency, but if it

argued, *à la* Third Way, that if the Prime Minister had adopted more moderate positions, he would have garnered more support; others have contended, *au contraire*, that it was precisely middle-of-the-road rhetoric that did Jospin in, since it made him seem like a carbon copy of incumbent President Jacques Chirac.

⁶³ Taylor (2001).

places state power beyond reach, it is a poor way to advance a redistributionist agenda.⁶⁴ This does not mean that there is no limit to the policy compromises acceptable for the sake of power, nor that one should easily acquiesce in superficial sloganeering, but it does mean that plans for creating a more egalitarian distribution of resources must consider not only economic constraints, but also political-electoral ones.

Finally, given what appears to be a mildly redistributive impact on some measures, Third Way policies must be seen as providing egalitarian practitioners with, if nothing else, food for thought. "Making work pay" through increased benefits and tax breaks for working families, bolstering universal programs to provide basics like health and education, and placing greater emphasis on targeted social security programs may eventually prove themselves, at least in conjunction with other policies.

These advantages notwithstanding, the Third Way can be faulted for reinforcing the mystification of globalization, obfuscating its own limitations, undermining the legitimacy of substantive equality as a social goal, and ultimately doing little to narrow disparities. With respect to the first point, a clear differentiation between Giddens the theorist and Blair the politician is necessary. Giddens has consistently made a sophisticated argument about globalization that recognizes it as a construct and advocates the introduction of international regulation to curb its worst abuses. Blair, on the other hand, has

⁶⁴ Isaac (2000).

played the globalization-as-destiny card and done too little at the policy level to champion its modification.

With respect to obfuscation, on the other hand, Giddens is no less culpable than Blair. As Jeffrey C. Isaac, who is generally sympathetic to the Third Way, writes, Giddens:

is often clearer about what he is against – above all, old-style economic redistribution – than about what he is for....the communitarian, win-win rhetoric of his programmatic arguments ignores the obstacles to the values and policies he supports....his responses to critics tend to be formulaic.⁶⁵

If Third Way proponents believe far-reaching concessions to difficult circumstances are required, fair enough, but then they (or at least those among them who do not need to get elected) should be frank about the scope of their compromises. A meaningful discussion of how we renew egalitarianism is hampered by attempts to disguise necessary (if that is what they are) sacrifices at the strategic level as mere tactical adjustments.

The delegitimation of equality flows from the previous two criticisms. Giddens and Blair have accompanied their commitment to greater pragmatism, which is salutary, with a certain evasiveness on questions of substantive equality. While the point is clearly debatable, I would argue that such a retreat at the ethical-discursive level was not necessary to get elected and negatively affected (from an egalitarian point-of-view) public debate by making it seem old-fashioned to be concerned about differences between haves and have-nots.

⁶⁵ Isaac (2001), 67.

The kibbutz case study pointed to the inspirational strength of the equality ideal. Even if one prefers indirect measures such as training and incentives to direct measures such as transfers, one does not need to undercut the normative power of egalitarianism as an aspiration.

Finally, the fact that to date, New Labour's policies have had only a minimal impact on substantive inequalities – even allowing some to grow, albeit more gradually than in the past -- cannot but be cause for discomfort among those who would look to the Third Way as a ready-made model for twenty-first century egalitarianism. The French and Swedish experiences, and even the Canadian, suggest that the constraints of economic globalization leave more room than Blair has acknowledged for programs with redistributive effects. Indeed, by assuming from the outset that the constraints were severe, Blair and Giddens may have actually played a role in creating them, as Giddens' own structuration theory would lead us to expect.⁶⁶ If one is pursuing a goal while trying to remain cognizant of reality, it is always important to continuously test the boundaries of the possible. New Labour has too rarely made that effort. Its disinclination, even after winning resounding majorities, to press harder against the limits of neoliberal dominance damages the Third Way's credibility, and stands as a warning to the egalitarian project: yes, pragmatism is essential, but it should not serve as an excuse for inaction where action is possible.

⁶⁶ Structuration theory, which was briefly mentioned in the introduction, posits a mutually constitutive relationship – a continuous back-and-forth shaping – between individual agents and social structures. See Giddens (1986, 1990).

Human Rights

Human rights claims have become a strategy of choice in recent years for those discouraged by their inability to advance equality arguments in traditional political arenas. The potency of such claims stems from the status of human rights as inviolable. Whether this means that their deployment in support of an egalitarian agenda is altogether advisable is another matter.

The genealogy of human rights goes back to the natural rights ideas of Locke and Rousseau, discussed in chapter 2, and the American and French revolutions they helped spawn. Natural rights was a powerful notion, emboldening ordinary people to rise up against those who had long held sway over them and to discard the well-entrenched idea that rigid social hierarchies were divinely ordained. Not everyone, however, was persuaded by the putatively “self-evident” proposition that all individuals were born with innate rights. Indeed, the very idea was mocked as metaphysical nonsense in many quarters -- the utilitarian and Marxist, as well as the conservative⁶⁷ -- and lost much of its political cachet during the class- and nation-based struggles of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Had the world unfolded in an orderly fashion during the twentieth century, the natural rights idea might never have evolved into much more than a widely-acknowledged but ill-defined philosophical axiom. But the barbarism of the Holocaust so shook leaders and thinkers that the idea was revived and

⁶⁷ Waldron (1987).

codified, in the hope that comparable horrors would be prevented by a definitive statement about the minimum standards of treatment states owe their subjects.⁶⁸ During two years of postwar negotiation, representatives from a range of countries worked under the direction of Eleanor Roosevelt to hammer out the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On December 10, 1948, the Universal Declaration was adopted by the United Nations.⁶⁹

The Universal Declaration was one of the greatest challenges to the concept of absolute sovereignty since the Treaty of Westphalia. Its premise was that every state has obligations towards those living under its control: protection from torture, fair treatment in legal proceedings, freedom of religion, access to education, and so on. Largely unspoken but understood was the corollary that a state which failed to satisfy these minimum standards would lose some of its claim to sovereign authority, and could be legitimately subjected to pressure from the international community. In effect, a world still reeling from the discovery of the concentration camps was saying for the first time: there are limits to the things a government may do to its subjects and there are occasions when outside forces must hear the cry of those subjects and act on their behalf.

The Universal Declaration was followed by two International Covenants – one on Political and Civil Rights, and one on Economic, Social and Cultural

⁶⁸ Morinsk (1993).

⁶⁹ Canadian diplomat John Humphrey, the Universal Declaration's chief wordsmith, gives an engaging, hands-on account of the drafting process in Humphrey (1984).

Rights – as well as a growing corpus of human rights conventions, declarations, and treaties negotiated under UN auspices. Many governments, particularly in the West, incorporated some of the emerging international norms into national constitutions or human rights acts. In most cases, the enshrined rights were “negative,” individualist political and civil rights, which dovetailed well with Western legal traditions, as opposed to the more “positive,” collectivist economic, social, or cultural rights.⁷⁰ In Canada, for example, human rights legislation, which pre-dated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, was almost exclusively a guarantee of non-discrimination on grounds such as sex, race, age, disability, and religion.⁷¹

In tandem with the proliferation of human rights instruments came a dramatic increase in the number of activists, lawyers, scholars, and officials for whom human rights was the nub of professional life. This process accelerated from the 1970s, in part because that was the period when much of the domestic legislation was enacted, and in part because of social trends such as the rise of women’s and minority rights movements and the growing tolerance for challenges to centres of authority.

Human rights, however, would never have assumed the status they did if it were not for another factor: their effectiveness. It quickly became clear that the ability to ground a claim in a moral absolute – a human right – made it more

⁷⁰ This dichotomization is a bit rough, though it is commonly employed and will do for our purposes here. The terms “negative” and “positive” are used in the sense famously proposed (as noted in chapter 2) by Isaiah Berlin (1969) for liberty.

⁷¹ Vitzkelety (1987).

difficult for those with power to resist. The language of rights gave victims of discrimination and other humiliating treatment a sense that their struggles were matters of fundamental justice, along with a heavy rhetorical club with which to attack the status quo. This made rights talk especially attractive to those who had exhausted other avenues of struggle. At first, this mainly meant the deployment of “rights talk” in support of “first generation” civil and political rights: from African-American leaders challenging Jim Crow laws to Canadian First Nations battling for self-government to foreign workers in Europe seeking citizenship from host countries, many groups realized that framing their demands in terms of rights invested them with particular vitality. Eventually, the same logic began to apply to “second generation” social, economic, and cultural rights. As a result of the neoliberal ascendance of the 1980s and 1990s, many activists and academics became frustrated by their inability to defend social justice measures through the regular political process – and, looking for alternatives, they sometimes turned to human rights claims. We touched upon this point already in the examination of pay equity in Ontario. A similar dynamic played out with respect to pay equity at the federal level: when the Public Service Alliance of Canada failed to obtain salary adjustments from the federal government to address wage discrimination against members in female-predominant occupations in the 1980s, it took its case to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. The Commission referred the case to the Human Rights Tribunal (a separate body), which, after years of deliberation, ruled largely in the union’s favour. The government appealed the decision to the

Federal Court but, after losing there as well, agreed to pay out some 3.5 billion dollars to its clerks, secretaries, librarians, etc. Although not well-publicized outside Canada, this was the largest settlement ever reached under a human rights law; it is inconceivable, moreover, that a comparable payout to employees doing low-paid “women’s work” would have been achieved in the absence of a human rights legal framework.

Victories like the federal pay equity case, though rare, have prompted proposals to more fully integrate issues of distributional justice into human rights standards. At the international level, there have been calls to give teeth to mechanisms for monitoring states’ respect for the economic and other positive rights enumerated in international instruments. At the domestic level, the idea (already acted upon in some jurisdictions) has been to expand human rights clauses in constitutions and human rights statutes to include social conditions. At the NGO level, organizations like Amnesty International have added economic and other positive rights to the list of rights they are pledged to defend.⁷²

The trend towards more fully extending human rights protection to distributive issues has been reinforced by globalization, for three reasons. First, globalization has helped normalize the perception of human rights as an over-arching moral code in an age of secularism, adding to their appeal for those concerned with questions of justice; hence, the proliferation of rights talk

⁷² The Politics of Human Rights (2001).

in areas once the preserve of politics alone. Second, globalization has accentuated Westerners' awareness of global inequalities and of the growing power of corporations, prompting a search for universal standards to gird challenges to those disparities; hence, the common presentation of firms' practices in developing countries not just as offensive, but as rights violations. Third, because globalization has eroded the state's monopoly over political authority, the notion of human rights, which was impinging on sovereignty long before the latest wave of globalization, has gained in resonance; hence, the rising number of appeals "over the head of the state" to international human rights bodies on a range of economic rights issues, from welfare cuts to labour laws.⁷³ The net result: increasingly frequent attempts to discipline economic globalization through human rights. As far back as 1994, Ed Broadbent, in his role as President of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, was arguing explicitly for the use of economic and social rights as a check on the effects of economic globalization, including rising inequality. Broadbent has continued advocating such an approach, recently co-authoring a report which proposes the adoption of mandatory codes of conduct for multinational corporations and statutory penalties for those who do not comply.⁷⁴

Calls for the incorporation and enforcement of distributional justice

⁷³ McGrew (1998) examines the relationship between globalization and the evolution of human rights theory and practice.

⁷⁴ Broadbent (1994); *Canadian Democracy...*(2002).

through human rights instruments are part of a larger movement towards cosmopolitan notions of justice, mentioned in chapter 2, which reject the idea that state boundaries are valid constraints on our interest in the well-being of others. Leading the theoretical charge on this issue are scholars like Onora O'Neill, Charles Beitz, Andrew Linklater, and Thomas Pogge.⁷⁵ They argue that the world has become too interdependent for people to turn away when individuals suffer in other countries. Morality in an age of globalization, they argue, cannot exclude fellow human beings just because of (increasingly porous) political borders. As a consequence, reduction of global disparities becomes a moral imperative of our age. Cosmopolitan theory, Beitz writes, "extends to the world the criteria of distributive justice that apply within a single society....it must regard the reform of institutional structures, both domestic and international, as an instrument for the satisfaction of the just interests of individual persons."⁷⁶ And where cosmopolitan morality is the *Zeitgeist*, human rights are often its expression, the tangible specification of its implications. Says Beitz: "To whatever extent contemporary international politics can be said to have a 'sense of justice,' its language is the language of human rights."⁷⁷ Such notions have even spread into public policy, most notably, in the Canadian context, during Lloyd Axworthy's tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

⁷⁵ O'Neill (2000); Beitz (1999, 2001); Linklater (1999, 2001); Pogge (2000). Much of this literature is concerned with which humanitarian crises might justify military interventions: see, for example, the review essay by Makinda (2001).

⁷⁶ Beitz (1999), 520-521.

⁷⁷ Beitz (2001), 269.

Employing semantics designed to link the human rights and established security discourses, Axworthy touted the idea of “human security,” arguing that the international community has an obligation to protect the basic rights of all people, even if it requires a confrontation with the sovereign prerogatives of states. “Globalization,” Axworthy wrote shortly after leaving office, “has made individual human suffering an irrevocable universal concern.”⁷⁸

Such talk can lead to the feeling that an age of cosmopolitan concern with every person’s basic rights is indeed upon us, inspiring hope that human rights might indeed be the vehicle to reviving egalitarian politics. Given the fact that human rights enjoy wide appeal and appear effective at spurring change, perhaps egalitarians would do well to adopt an unabashed rights-based strategy.

This reasoning is not without its merits. However, the use of human rights to promote greater distributional justice has some significant drawbacks -- drawbacks often minimized by its proponents. Chapter 3 already touched upon some of them. Here, we will more fully examine the main downsides, from an egalitarian perspective, of valorizing human rights.

The human rights discourse is inherently legalistic, since it is rooted in a set of written obligations enforced through applications to expert authorities or adjudicators. This can undercut the empathic ground on which the egalitarian impetus rests. Abstract notions of justice, expressed as rights to be wielded in

⁷⁸ Axworthy (2001).

conflicts with the powerful, may be too ethereal to motivate a significant shift in resources to the disadvantaged. In other words, because egalitarianism by its nature is rooted in concern for the fate of others, it may not be served particularly well by depersonalizing rights language. Fiona Robinson makes this point in proposing a more “feminized,” care-based morality to guide global politics. The idea of rights, she argues,

can tell us nothing about *why people ought to have* food and shelter provided for them if they cannot provide it for themselves, and it is a grave mistake to use such a concept in the effort to give force to such vital normative claims....what is required is not more rights, but rather the recognition that rights alone cannot answer all moral crises facing the world today....Care ethics involves coming to an understanding that we...are not isolated from the moral situations which surround us....an ethic of care takes attentiveness to the needs of others as a primary moral virtue, and explores both [sic] our responsiveness, our motivation and our responsibilities to others.⁷⁹

Admittedly, the extent to which care can be made the central driving force in a successful egalitarian politics is open to question: detachment from the suffering of others, after all, seems to be as well-ingrained a human quality as attentiveness, perhaps in part for the psychological reason that otherwise, we might be swept away in the experience of others' pain. That being said, there seems little doubt that this quality is as much a function of nurture as nature, and that a greater stress on care is essential if egalitarianism is going to make sense, and make headway, in the competition over public priorities.⁸⁰ Notional,

⁷⁹ Robinson (1998), 65, 66, 70, 73 (*italics in original*). See also Robinson (1997).

⁸⁰ For one example of a practical attempt to examine how public policy would evolve if more fully informed by an ethics of care, see the website of the University of Leeds' Centre on Care, Values, and Welfare (*Care, Values...*, 2002). This centre, which is supported by a UK

largely individualistic human rights may be useful to a point, but are inadequate on their own.

An additional problem with the legalistic quality of rights is depoliticization. Getting a particular benefit or treatment recognized as a human right is a highly contentious process precisely because that designation raises the benefit or treatment above the realm of political struggle. In the short term, this has significant advantages, as we have seen: because they are imperatives, rights move to the front of the queue for collective resources, and that is part of what makes the rights strategy so attractive. But in the longer term, to frame the search for resources in black-and-white terms and secure them through litigation is to remove much of the potential for the involvement of the very people who are supposed to benefit, who all too easily become (increasingly bored) spectators of lawyers' efforts to prove that what they seek falls within the definition of a human right. Perhaps if the result is victory, the price of demobilization, of making a claim a matter of legal argumentation rather than political activism, is not too high to pay. But it is far from clear that a struggle for a less imbalanced distribution of resources can be sustained for the duration if its inherently political quality is obscured and its supporters relegated to the sidelines. It was precisely such concerns that led progressive law professor Michael Mandel, almost alone among his colleagues, to highlight the negative implications of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*

government funding agency and headed by Fiona Williams, is dedicated to examining possible changes to welfare programs to reflect contemporary circumstances and values.

following its enactment.⁸¹

The abstract quality of rights -- along with the fact that rights inevitably collide -- also means that their concrete meaning is open to constant interpretation. It is not a given, therefore, that a human rights strategy will lead to greater distributive justice. A poor person's right to more food may conflict with a farming collective's right to security of property. An isolated community's right to decent health care may exist in tension with medical practitioners' right to choose their place of residence and work. A whole class' right to more resources may clash with a sovereign nation's right to democratically choose its priorities.⁸² These examples may seem prosaic, but they underline the impossibility of knowing with any certainty whether human rights will invigorate or enervate the egalitarian project. Much depends on the inclinations of the authoritative interpreters: the judges and panels of experts charged with translating necessarily imprecise human rights standards into material outcomes, who (at least hitherto) have consistently prioritized civil and political rights over social and economic cultural rights. This does not mean rights talk cannot buttress efforts to divide resources more equitably -- especially if interpretive frameworks are developed that place a higher priority on well-being -- but it does suggest that human rights will be more effective as a starting-point

⁸¹ Mandel (1989).

⁸² Serej Felere (2001) tells of how human rights language in Slovenia was initially employed to bolster claims for national sovereignty -- an emancipatory project at a time when Yugoslavia was dominated by Slobadan Milosovic -- and then, after independence, used to justify a return of massive amounts of collectively-owned property and resources to owners from the pre-communist era, with little compensation.

and ethical rationale than a full-blown strategy.

One reason human rights are articulated in an amorphous way is the difficulty of obtaining cross-cultural consensus on the minimum treatment due to every person. Cultures vary enormously on such questions, and a raft of literature, and countless international meetings, have been devoted to trying to reconcile a universal moral code and incontestable cultural diversity. To speak in terms of ideal types: in one camp are those who see human rights as ethical fundamentals transcending differences of time, space, and values; in the other, those who see human rights as a contingent product of Western civilization whose imposition on other nations constitutes a sort of cultural imperialism.⁸³ Of course, these ideal types are too schematicized; no one who thinks deeply on these issues seriously advocates complete relativism or complete universalism.⁸⁴ The problematic, however, remains, and it severely complicates any attempt to make human rights tools for egalitarianism by expanding their coverage or being more specific about their meaning. International action purportedly motivated by universal morals can appear very different from the vantage point of poorer countries. Mohammed Ayoob discerns “hidden agendas” in Western humanitarianism, and wonders “whether Western European states as well as the United States would have successfully

⁸³ The best-known advocate of a comparatively universalist position is Jack Donnelly (1984, 1989). For a more relativist stance, see Galtung (1992) and Renteln (1990). An interesting pair of articles to review in this context are Pollis & Schwab (1979, 1996), which show the evolution of a pair of scholars away from strong relativism in the face of its misuse by brutal state authorities in the developing world.

⁸⁴ I elaborate upon this argument at some length in Streiner (in press).

completed their state-building endeavours...if the UN Human Rights Commission, Amnesty International, and the UN Security Council had been breathing down their necks.”⁸⁵ If anything, attainment of greater agreement on the general validity of human rights demands a smaller set of core rights and less, not more, prescriptive language. Unless egalitarians are prepared to ignore the objections of non-Westerners to highhandedness – not a likely course for an ethos that begins with concern for others – the cross-cultural difficulties associated with a human rights strategy will limit its utility.

A final problem with employing human rights as the central means for promoting greater substantive equality is the potential devaluation of its currency through overuse. The greater the number of priorities classified as human rights, the less powerful the term. The more crowded the terrain, the less likely a human rights claim will produce the intended results. Eventually, if enough competing agendas obtain access to the nomenclature of fundamental rights, it may come to mean little more than “this is what we want.” Yuen Foong Khong raises this problem with respect to Lloyd Axworthy’s approach to global politics, writing: “A priority issue is one that gets special attention, better resources, and a higher chance of satisfactory resolution. The question is whether we get these positive payoffs when we securitize the individual or end up prioritizing everything and therefore nothing?”⁸⁶ Better, perhaps, to leave the

⁸⁵ Ayoob (2001), 226, 227.

⁸⁶ Khong (2001), 232.

list of basic rights short and pointed, and to make it only a part -- perhaps even a small part -- of efforts to promote the reduction of substantive inequalities.

In sum, human rights and related notions of cosmopolitan justice can provide fodder for ethical arguments in favour of redistribution. But on their own, they are at best inadequate. There are conceptual and discursive advantages to relating the egalitarian impulse to widely-accepted, core human rights values. However, this must be done in a manner that adds care and cultural sensitivity to the equation and does not subtract practical politics. Human rights may be an element in an updated egalitarian project, but they are no panacea.

Global Governance

The structures set up to monitor respect for the International Covenants and other human rights instruments constitute one part of an array of international mechanisms, many falling under the UN umbrella, whose goal is to provide order for global relations. These arrangements and institutions are not always well-publicized, so the popular perception persists that the international sphere is a realm of anarchy. As the number of mechanisms multiplies, that perception is increasingly a myth. However, it is true that the procedures and apparatuses in question are often haphazard, and when they focus on issues of resources and allocation, it is usually in the context of poverty-relief, emergency aid, or investment-promotion -- not patterns of distribution.

Some who are concerned with substantive equality across states and

regions and with the impact of economic globalization believe that enhancement of the machinery of global governance holds much promise. They reason that because economic processes have “risen” to the global level, often slipping beyond direct control by the state, some of the democratic processes and regulatory activities associated with the state need to climb to the same plane. While few go so far as to propose a world government, many advocate a thickening of the international rules and procedures for directing the market, and a democratization of the processes through which these rules and procedures are established. As will become evident below, this can mean everything from adding worker and environmental protection to the mandates of international financial and trade institutions, to enacting restrictions on international currency speculation, to establishing cross-border forms of democracy. Whatever the approach, the underlying rationale is that because neoliberalism freed the market from public interest oversight by stripping away state-level barriers to laissez-faire globalism, instruments to address distributive concerns must follow economic processes into the global sphere.⁸⁷

Governance, of course, is a much looser term than government. This can make it slippery and, in some analyses, too all-encompassing to be of much use. However, if used carefully, it helps capture the wide array of activities -- formal regulatory enforcement, voluntary codes of conduct, consultations between officials and activists, and so on -- that consciously give

⁸⁷ Devetak & Higgott (1999); Hewson & Sinclair (1999).

shape to social structures. In a groundbreaking attempt to elucidate patterns of global governance, James Rosenau both clarified matters and inadvertently (one assumes) illustrated the indeterminacy of the notion, describing it as:

activities backed by shared goals that may or may not derive from legal and formally prescribed responsibilities....a system of rule that works only if accepted by the majority (or, at least, by the most powerful of those it affects)...regulatory mechanisms in a sphere of activity which function effectively even though they are not endowed with formal authority....order plus intentionality....routinized arrangements through which world politics gets from one moment in time to the next.⁸⁸

Ideas of global governance bear an unmistakable resemblance to long-standing international law and institutionalist theories,⁸⁹ but go much further by advocating a range of regulatory mechanisms, and replacing an affinity for somewhat arid abstraction with a more concrete and normatively informed approach. Indeed, the normative motivations of global governance thinkers are explicitly stated in much of their work. For example, Gerald Helleiner writes:

Inequalities in the distribution of income, wealth, and power are now widely recognized as both the most important determinants of economic outcomes in market systems and the most important targets for international economic activity....The goal for society, both at the national and at the global level, is to harness the power of markets in the social interest....Global governance, of sorts, already exists and continues to evolve.⁹⁰

An interest in global governance betrays, from the word go, a rejection of both the neoliberal claim that laissez-faire markets are inherently superior to

⁸⁸ Rosenau (1992), 4, 5.

⁸⁹ For good introductions to the international law and institutionalist streams, see, respectively, Charney (1993) and Keohane & Martin (1995).

⁹⁰ Helleiner (2001), 246, 247.

regulated markets, and any radical contention that markets can simply be discarded. The former is rejected on ethical grounds – because of the effects of free-wheeling capitalism – or logical grounds – because of the realization that a gamut of rules and procedures already establish frameworks within which global economic processes occur. The latter is rejected on practical grounds – because of the view that history has demonstrated the infeasibility of non-market economies. Proponents of global governance, then, like the architects of the postwar settlement, seek to combine a market system with controls designed for the collective good.⁹¹

The nature of the proposed controls varies. One school is especially concerned with the democratic deficit and proposes introducing some form of democratic governance at the global level. What form is often left unstated, beyond vague references to the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the need to think creatively about what supra-national democracy might look like. But the tone is usually cautiously optimistic. Michael Goodhart, for instance, says that “globalization upsets the conventional wisdom regarding democracy’s natural fit with the sovereign state...we should not begin by understanding globalization as a threat to democracy but should instead treat it as an impetus for the critical reevaluation of democracy.”⁹² A shade more prescriptively, David Held and his collaborators write:

⁹¹ Thomson (1999); Patomäki (1999); Rengger (1999).

⁹² Goodhart (2001), 545, 546.

We need to take our established ideas about political equality, social justice, and liberty and refashion these into a coherent political project robust enough for a world where power is exercised on a transnational scale and where risks are shared by peoples across the world. And we need to think about what institutions will allow us to tackle these global problems while responding to the aspirations of the people they are meant to serve.... Globalization is not bringing about the death of politics. It is reilluminating and reinvigorating the contemporary political terrain.⁹³

Related to ideas of cosmopolitan democracy are proposals to open international institutions – especially those that oversee economic globalizations, such as the WTO, IMF, and World Bank – to more vigorous public scrutiny and systematic engagement with representatives of civil society. The idea here is not to take away those institutions' existing powers, but to democratize them by increasing transparency, accountability, the involvement of parties who represent non-corporate interests, and oversight by parallel international organizations responsible for human and labour rights.⁹⁴ The assumption is that such measures, in addition to being inherently laudable for their democratizing effects, will invariably render the institutions in question more cognizant of social justice issues and so, less likely to make decisions that widen disparities and aggravate poverty.

Bowing to pressure, some international institutions have already agreed to meet regularly with NGOs, increase the availability of their internal documentation, and establish some arms-length oversight procedures. Of

⁹³ Held et al. (1999), 495-496. See also Held (1997) and Goldblatt et al. (1997).

⁹⁴ Bohman (1999); Reinisch (2001).

particular note was the World Bank's decision, in 1993, to set up a mechanism called the Inspection Panel – a body which can receive complaints from people who have been or could be adversely affected by a Bank-funded project. Complaints can be anonymous, and are considered by external experts who commit not to take future work from the Bank. After preparing an initial assessment, the panel reports to the Bank's executive board (government representatives separate from Bank management), who decide whether to authorize a full-blown investigation. At the end of the process, the panel's report and the Bank management's views are made public. It is interesting that the strongest support for establishing the Inspection Panel came from the United States, and the greatest resistance from developing countries. In fact, India and Brazil recently led a successful campaign to pare back the Inspection Panel's autonomy and authority. Explaining his hostility to the Inspection Panel in a discussion with disappointed Brazilian NGOs, Fernando Henrique Cardoso – of dependency theory fame, now President and supportive of economic globalization – reportedly said “in his day’ it would have been unacceptable for a civil society group to ask an agent of ‘imperialism’ to get involved in internal issues.”⁹⁵ The results of the Inspection Panel's work have been decidedly mixed, in part because of antagonism from developing country representatives on the executive board.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Cited in Fox (2000), 302.

⁹⁶ Fox (2000); Woods (2001).

A final strategy for increasing global governance in the interests of the disadvantaged relates specifically to labour standards. Various parties – academics, unions, and the European Union among them – have suggested the codification of enforceable, international minimums for bargaining rights, working conditions, a living wage, and the like. Their objective is to prevent situations where profit-seeking multinationals take advantage of desperation for employment in the developing world to pay starvation wages, prevent organizing, and ignore dangers to workers, driving every country towards a lowest common denominator. Different processes for achieving global labour standards have been proposed, from incorporating a Social Clause into the WTO's mandate, to giving the International Labour Organization (ILO) the power to impose penalties on states that do not respect its main conventions, to including labour provisions in bilateral trade pacts.⁹⁷ One ambitious experiment of this sort is the NAFTA side agreement on labour, negotiated by the United States, Canada, and Mexico as follow-up to Bill Clinton's promise, during his first Presidential campaign, to close gaps in the continental trade deal if elected. The side agreement provides for establishment of National Administrative Offices (NAOs) in each country's ministry of labour, receipt and investigation of complaints over alleged violations of labour standards, and Ministerial consultations on problematic cases. Although promising on paper, the agreement does not appear to be living up to its potential. An in-depth

⁹⁷ Burtless (2001); Wilkinson & Hughes (2000).

report by Human Rights Watch has deemed the agreement largely unproductive, citing both its structural deficiencies – such as the lack of arms-length oversight and enforcement powers – and the timidity with which NAOs have typically operated, and has called for amendments to make the agreement more effective.⁹⁸ More generally, the push to implement meaningful international labour standards has been resisted by developing countries, who fear that what underlies it is the veiled protectionism of Western unions intent on preventing the loss of members' jobs to more competitive labour markets overseas.⁹⁹ Again, what appears at first blush as a worthwhile measure to strengthen global governance in the interests of the have-nots runs into opposition from the governments of poorer states.

Developing states are not the only ones resisting new global governance initiatives. The cautious efforts of the World Bank's current President, Jim Wolfensohn, to increase the Bank's engagement with NGOs and expand its conceptualization of development to incorporate social conditions have sparked an outcry in some business quarters.¹⁰⁰ Particularly telling was Wolfensohn's 1999 decision to dismiss his own chief economist, the relatively progressive Joseph Stiglitz -- because of pressure from a US Treasury incensed over Stiglitz's outspoken criticism of how the IMF, acting in concert with the

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch (2001).

⁹⁹ Amsden (2000); Lehmann (2001).

¹⁰⁰ Fidler (2001).

Treasury, had handled the 1997-98 East Asian crisis.¹⁰¹ Clearly, powerful interests remain opposed to substantive shifts in the policies of international economic organizations. On the other hand, a quick perusal of business pages and journals indicates that in the face of repeated financial crises – Argentina being the latest – and a rising chorus of criticism from civil society, more and more business-oriented players are acknowledging the need for enhancements to global governance mechanisms to increase stability and decrease egregious injustices. Most famous among them is George Soros, who for several years has been attacking neoliberal dogma and advocating rules and institutions to address the disparities caused by economic globalization.

The equivocal record of global governance to date leads to conflicting assessments of its potential. Craig Murphy, noting that “international organizations....usually remain the creatures of the most powerful of their state members,” pessimistically concludes that “[g]lobal governance is likely to remain inefficient, incapable of shifting resources from the world’s wealthy to the world’s poor, pro-market, and relatively insensitive to the concerns of labour and the rural poor.”¹⁰² Similarly, Richard Higgott contends that global governance is more about the management of the globalization – ultimately to the benefit of powerful businesses – than its animation by politics – which might indeed inject a normative dimension that would work to the advantage of the

¹⁰¹ Wade (2001).

¹⁰² Murphy (2000), 793, 789.

poor and disenfranchised.¹⁰³ In contrast, Heikki Patomäki more optimistically argues that vaguely progressive ideas embraced by international institutions today, such as participatory development and good governance, “can, indeed, have radical implications when applied systematically to the governance of the world economy.”¹⁰⁴

Cognizance of the risk that global governance might become little more than effective administration of the status quo is important. Despair over its prospects for doing something more substantive, however, seems premature. It is, after all, only in recent years that the strategy has begun to be articulated, and many of its possible components – from some sort of global democracy to a deal on a strengthened ILO – have not even left the drawing board. The logic of constructing more egalitarian governance mechanisms at the global level to meet the effects of economic globalization remains unimpeachable. Moreover, the fact that there are serious cracks in the neoliberal consensus on global (non-)governance provides an opening that ought not to be ignored. The issue for egalitarians, then, is largely tactical: how to overcome obstacles to the introduction of global governance structures with a more democratic and redistributive quality – obstacles ranging from concerns about surreptitious protectionism to voting arrangements in the IMF and World Bank that guarantee US dominance. These are practical questions which do not, on their

¹⁰³Higgott (2000).

¹⁰⁴ Patomäki (1999), 120.

face, seem insurmountable. It is possible that the end of such efforts will be roughly the same as the end of Joseph Stiglitz's career at the World Bank. However, there is no reason to assume, *a priori*, that this will be the case. Global governance with a redistributive orientation will be neither easy to achieve nor a complete solution to the problems of massive inequality, but under conditions of globalization, it is surely a crucial part of the egalitarian equation.

Direct Activism

Among those doubtful about global governance and worried that the cause of distributive justice may be close to lost, the direct activism of NGOs, internationalist unions, and anti-globalization protesters is often seen as a ray of hope. The thinking here is that because the state and international organizations have effectively been captured by those with little interest in substantive equality, the only way to advance the agenda is by taking to the streets, the internet, and the meeting hall – in Gramscian terms, making space within civil society to construct a counter-hegemonic discourse.

A wide range of players are involved in this new activism. Some are long-standing, traditionally structured organizations pursuing specific policies with governments and international institutions. Included in this category are progressive social movements and unions galvanized by the challenges of globalization.¹⁰⁵ Others are newer, more informally organized, and focused

¹⁰⁵ Lynch (1998).

more on opposing neoliberalism and globalization than formulating alternative policies. Included in this category are a variety of internet- and community-based protest groups. As a general rule, activists in the second category are younger than those in the first.

The coming-out party for the new activism was, of course, the November 1999 "Battle in Seattle," when a loose alliance staged large anti-globalization demonstrations and clashed with police.¹⁰⁶ The coalition that emerged in Seattle (dubbed the Teamster-turtle coalition to reflect the emerging linkages between union and environmental groups) caught the world's attention, creating the impression of a dynamic new movement against global capitalism. This impression was reinforced when similar protests took place outside subsequent meetings of international institutions in Prague, Washington, Genoa, Quebec City, and elsewhere, and when French farmers protesting US retaliation against Europe's refusal to import hormone-fed beef wrecked a construction site for a new McDonald's franchise.¹⁰⁷ At long last, it seemed to many academics, hopes invested for two decades in civil society and new social movements might be proving themselves well-founded.

The collaboration between NGOs, unions, and protest groups has been

¹⁰⁶ For a range of analyses of Seattle's significance for progressive politics, from the mildly sceptical to the highly enthusiastic, see the following articles, all of which appeared in a special post-Seattle section of *Millennium* devoted to the topic: Gill (2000); Halliday (2000); Kaldor (2000); and Scholte (2000).

¹⁰⁷ George (2000). The effectiveness of the farmers' action was no doubt due partly to the way it symbolically interwove concerns over the environment, trade, employment, and Americanization.

facilitated by the World Wide Web.¹⁰⁸ Even prior to Seattle, web-based collaboration scored a major, if less-publicized, victory against neoliberal globalization when talks on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) fell apart in the face of incessant, well-orchestrated lobbying. Led by the Council of Canadians, among others, this campaign targeted the MAI because of fears that it would open countries to unrestricted foreign investment without the any consideration of social effects. The French government, which precipitated the collapse of negotiations with its withdrawal, declared that “[f]or the first time, we are witnessing the emergence of a ‘global civil society’ represented by non-governmental organizations, which are often active in several countries and communicate across borders. This is no doubt an irreversible change.”¹⁰⁹

But is it a movement? This question, which is partly, but not entirely, one of semantics, has been hotly debated. Seattle arguably happened as much because of police over-reaction -- always a sure-fire way to create solidarity among disparate demonstrators -- as any coordinated effort. More importantly, there are significant differences among the various protesters. A key cleavage concerns the presence of violent groups – some with progressive ideals, others with more nihilistic or neo-fascist motives, most vaguely drawn to notions of anarchism – who have increasingly come to see anti-globalization protests as an ideal context in which to vent rage against the establishment, or society in

¹⁰⁸ Warkentin & Mingst (2000).

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Laxer (2001), 1.

general, by breaking windows and defacing property. In the eyes of many NGOs and unions, this behaviour places public sympathy, and the influence gained since Seattle, at risk, and they therefore have begun to disassociate themselves from the extremist fringe. Others, however, defend attacks on property, arguing that it is effective in garnering media attention and pales in comparison with the daily violence of globalization.¹¹⁰

Naomi Klein has been the most successful at conceptually weaving together the many strands of the new, direct activism. She argues that its common theme is rebellion against the all-pervasive dominance of -- the "branding" of all aspects of life by -- the corporate agenda. People are fed up, she says, with the sale of common spaces and public goods to the highest bidder, the preference for profit-making over decent treatment of human beings, and destruction of the environment in the name of the market. She discerns a shared disgust with corporate power and its control over public institutions in defaced billboards, anonymous subversions of big companies' websites, strikes in developing world factories, the Zapatista uprising, letter-writing campaigns against free trade deals, rave parties occupying city streets, and smashed Starbucks' windows in Seattle.¹¹¹

Klein argues that these activities, with their common impulses, coalesce into something that can legitimately be called a movement, albeit a movement

¹¹⁰ Epstein (2001); Warcry (2001).

¹¹¹ Klein (2000, 2001).

of a novel sort: a “coalition of coalitions,”¹¹² a non-hierarchical web of groups and solo militants rather than a more traditional organization. Her arguments have been more than merely descriptive: by giving the loose network of activists a sense of coherence, she has helped energize it. Reflecting on Klein’s influence, *the Observer* has christened her best-selling book, *No Logo*, “the *Das Kapital* of the growing anti-corporate movement.”¹¹³

Optimism about the potential of the movement (accepting Klein’s definition) is running high among activists and progressive scholars. There is much talk of “globalization-from-below” – an increasingly vibrant trans-national coalition of civil society actors who together will be powerful enough to confront neoliberal-corporate dominance; revitalize democracy through participatory politics; and restructure the world in a way that puts human well-being, respect for labour, and environmental sustainability before private profit.¹¹⁴ Susan George, who is both an academic and activist, writes:

Wherever I travel, I find new energies rising to meet the challenge of globalization. International coalitions are burgeoning with electronic speed and people sense that they are engaged in an epic battle for civilization and freedom against barbarism and tyranny. Suddenly, one can actually use such words again: reasons to hope are manifold and manifest....We are heading

¹¹² Klein (2001), 81.

¹¹³ Cited in Johnson (2001).

¹¹⁴ Welton & Wolf’s (2001) collection of 60 short entries from a wide spectrum of activists is impressive for the anger, idealism, and confidence it conveys. The articles in the March/April edition of *Canadian Dimension* exemplify the degree to which disheartened radicals have drawn new hope from anti-globalization protests. For academic discussions of the new internationalism and globalization-from-below, see Carr (1999); Falk (1999), especially chapters 8 and 9; Hunter (1995); O’Brien (2000).

toward a new type of 'creative destruction' and it's actually a great time to be politically active.¹¹⁵

This enthusiasm is not altogether misplaced. In addition to blocking the MAI and increasing public awareness of the effects of economic globalization, activists can claim credit for having shifted the attitudes of the very institutions they criticize. The previous section already noted the receptiveness of some, in particular the World Bank, to greater engagement with NGOs and more socially sensitive ways of conceptualizing their work. This has much to do with the campaigns of the new networks.¹¹⁶ A year after Seattle, the World Bank published a book titled *The Quality of Growth* which, strikingly, endorsed the egalitarian view that it is legitimate to seek equality of results and not merely, as neoliberalism asserts, of opportunity:

Living barely above the poverty line, millions of near-poor have been thrown back into poverty by external shocks. So for growth to reduce poverty, it usually needs to be relatively stable, and its benefits need to be widely spread....Aims of development policy thus include not only reducing the inequality of opportunities, but also the inequality and volatility of growth outcomes.¹¹⁷

Given the ability of direct activism to have a demonstrable impact, to what extent might it offer egalitarianism a way out of current difficulties? To answer this question, it is necessary to take a closer look at the movement that proposes to do for the world what regular politics could not.

Let us begin with Klein's assertion that the coalition of coalitions has a

¹¹⁵ George (2001), 14, 15.

¹¹⁶ Ostry (2001).

¹¹⁷ Thomas et al. (2000), xxviii.

coherent ethos. While this analysis is in many respects insightful and inspiring, one wonders whether it is not overstated, confusing the frivolous with the portentous. To be blunt: it is hardly self-evident that anything politically profound drives angry youth in rich countries who spraypaint graffiti over advertising, hack their way into IBM's databases, or destroy newspaper boxes and windshields during protests. More obvious is an acidic alienation from a reified "establishment," but that has been the way of young Westerners since long before the current wave of economic globalization. To link undifferentiated acts of destruction so closely with struggles against the intense material suffering experienced by the very poor may trivialize the whole discussion.

Related to this point is the debate among activists regarding tactics. There is no question that a degree of theatre, including civil disobedience and calculated acts of confrontation with authorities, is an effective means of attention-grabbing in a world where a 30-second clip on the evening news may be the only way of entering the public's consciousness. However, that half minute window of opportunity is wasted when calculated civil disobedience turns into chaotic mischief. Such scenes feed cognitive closure and make it easy to marginalize the messages of the protesters. Only those who believe the masses are seething with a hidden revolutionary spirit could think riots will advance the cause of a less unequal world. Since I see no signs of such a spirit, I have to conclude that they do little for egalitarianism.

Once non-violent demonstrations have attracted attention, the tactical question becomes whether to engage state governments and international

institutions. More traditional social actors -- unions and some NGOs -- are prepared to do so; more militant activists believe it is a waste of time.¹¹⁸ If one accepts the earlier arguments concerning the relative autonomy of the state and the potential of global governance, it follows that engagement is worth a try. Activists who remember that politicians and officials – even rich entrepreneurs – are thinking human beings rather than robotic servants of oppression have a much better chance of advancing an agenda of change.

This brings us to the last point regarding the limitations of direct activism: its inherent inadequacy in respect of the choice of collective priorities. Klein argues that “globalization is in essence a crisis in representative democracy” and one of her sympathetic reviewers contends that “the common project” of the new activism “is participatory democracy.”¹¹⁹ But others have pointed out the rather obvious fact that the participants in the movement are not elected.¹²⁰ We cannot, therefore, accept unquestioningly their claim to speak for the disinherited of the earth, even if we acknowledge their intention to do so. Indeed, for reasons that will be familiar from the preceding section, governments and academics from developing countries have often viewed anti-globalization protesters with suspicion. Writes Jagdish Bhagwati:

The Seattle street theatre, in which the over-nourished workers of the rich countries were demonstrating against the under-nourished workers of the poor countries and pretending that it was

¹¹⁸ Ostry (2001).

¹¹⁹ Klein (2001), 86; Dale (2001), 373.

¹²⁰ Micklethwait & Wooldridge (2001); Westell (2001).

in the latters' interest, where turtles were preferred over poor fishermen by the young environmentalists who knew little better, where uncomprehending children were cynically made to march against the use of child labor in the poor countries that have no magic wand to support millions of children in poverty who work to support themselves and their families, and where street violence erupted against the delegates, including those from developing countries: all this made the developing-country delegations ever more aware that the game at the WTO had changed against them – and that it was an unequal contest, because the unions and NGOs wore halos around their heads.¹²¹

Even if we concede that elected governments, at least in the West where they have greater latitude, have not done a sterling job of defending the public interest against one-sided economic globalization, and even if we agree that the democratic process in recent years has left much to be desired in terms of the levels of debate and public attention, that does not mean that self-selected social movements are a more democratic alternative. The insinuation by supporters of direct activism that it can somehow supplant established democratic procedures is worrying, to say the least. Delegitimization of democratically elected government rarely ends well. What guarantee is there that “civil society” will always be progressive? One sometimes gets the feeling its advocates forget that not everyone organizing themselves into NGOs automatically believes in redistribution, a cleaner environment, and multiculturalism. Certainly, activism has a critical role: it can enhance democracy by invigorating the public debate, raising uncomfortable challenges, disseminating new information, giving voice to those who have been silenced,

¹²¹ Bhagwati (2001), 27.

and providing participatory avenues for a wider population. However, it must function in conjunction with elective democracy, not in its stead.

In summary, the direct activism associated with the “anti-globalization movement” can play an important but limited part in efforts to renew egalitarianism, by re-shaping the agenda, engaging the public, and pressing leaders and officials to implement new types of policies. But when it shades into random hooliganism or sees itself as the complete answer to the problems of the world, it becomes counter-productive and potentially dangerous. The challenge for those concerned with a politics of substantive equality, and indeed for the leaders of the movement itself, is to consistently make such distinctions.

Summary of Lessons

The dissertation to this stage has been about gathering the evidence and laying the foundation for an answer to my central research question: how can egalitarianism be renewed under contemporary conditions? Before proceeding to lay out a response, it would perhaps be worthwhile to briefly recapitulate the ground covered to this point – to tie together the main threads of the argument, with an eye to ensuring that it concludes (for both author and reader) in a coherent fashion.

I will begin by recalling the main themes of the chapters. The first outlined the normative motive and theory of knowledge underpinning my examination of the challenges facing egalitarianism. The second reviewed the

extensive theoretical literature in the field, explaining the conceptual core of egalitarianism, pointing to the reformist-radical tension as the key programmatic distinction among egalitarians, and tracing the evolution of egalitarian thought. The third and fourth took an in-depth look at twentieth century experiments in reformist and radical egalitarianism respectively, seeking to draw lessons from those experiments' successes and shortcomings. The fifth has provided an account of egalitarianism's twenty-year retreat, zeroed in on economic globalization as a critical factor affecting the present-day egalitarian project, and examined four recent strategies for revitalizing a politics of substantive equality.

What are our main findings? How can the literature and history surveyed inform the response to my primary research question? Being careful not to rehash at length the conclusions of every chapter and section, I would reiterate the following ten sets of points.

First, egalitarianism can legitimately be considered a shared ethos; indeed, it is arguably more conceptually meaningful than familiar but fuzzy categories such as "socialist" or "liberal." When it comes to finding a practical strategy for translating that ethos into practice – for advancing the cause of a less unequal world – one must select from a spectrum of approaches that converge into two broad clusters: those based on incremental change to existing social arrangements, and those based on the revolutionary replacement of current structures with entirely new ones. The choice between reform and radicalism is fundamental to the egalitarian project.

Second, the experience of pay equity in Ontario suggests that reformers should be realistic in their assessment of potential resistance, explicit in their definitions of equality and their expectations, and cognizant of the effects of globalization. Egalitarian reforms are more likely to be adopted when strong coalitions unite to advocate them; more likely to spur substantive change when their coverage is broad; and more likely to succeed when their implementation is straightforward, accompanied by education and consultation, and enforced with strong, independent mechanisms. Reform through the state can have a significant redistributive impact, including in unanticipated areas, but only if it is characterized by clarity, purposiveness, and collaboration.

Third, the kibbutz's 80-year attempt to build a completely new type of society demonstrates that a vision of distributive justice can inspire remarkable achievements, but must be balanced with competing concerns such as equity, efficiency, personal freedom -- and the simple desire to avoid an overly politicized life. The egalitarian impulse, the kibbutz shows, need not find expression in a single approach to equality: different distributive principles may apply to different domains. Finally, the kibbutz's history indicates that radical strategies may ultimately fall victim to their own innate difficulty adapting to complexities.

Fourth, the history of the past three decades suggests that the egalitarian project fell on hard times in part because it failed to adequately acknowledge the ossification of traditional methods associated with the postwar compromise, and the changes in conditions wrought by global economic

disruptions and declining government revenue. This rigidity exposed it to sustained attack from neoliberal theorists and politicians.

Fifth, economic globalization has played a critical role in placing and keeping egalitarianism on the defensive. However, it is a mistake to accept the reification of globalization and its conflation with neoliberalism. Economic globalization is a socially-constructed process and so, can be altered. Some aspects of it, such as increased trade and investment, have real potential to spur growth and reduce disparities. But they must be consciously shaped.

Sixth, the state is no longer the only player in the game, but it retains significant autonomy and is still the primary locus for democratic action -- and so, remains a vital arena for those advocating policies to reduce disparities.

Seventh, the Third Way shows the importance, for egalitarianism, of being pragmatic about the means to distributively just ends and to the attainment of power. At the same time, New Labour's tenure demonstrates the risk of pragmatism's leading to excessive caution. It is not impractical to proclaim egalitarianism as a goal, nor to pursue it once in office.

Eighth, human rights claims can provide a persuasive normative basis for explaining efforts to advance distributive justice, but should not be the main vehicle for achieving substantive progress. Rights talk needs to be leavened with an ethics of care, sensitivity to cultural difference, and a recognition of the political.

Ninth, in an age of globalization, still-nascent efforts at global governance need to be redoubled if the forces currently widening disparities are

to be tempered. This will be a challenging and incremental process, requiring special attention to the concerns of developing countries, but it is essential if we are to change patterns of distribution under twenty-first century conditions.

Tenth, while direct activism can play a crucial role in re-shaping attitudes and involving the public, it is vital to distinguish between largely apolitical acts of vandalism and more constructive, non-violent forms of protest and engagement that complement, rather than seek to replace, elective democracy.

In many respects, these lessons hint strongly at the arguments I will advance in my final chapter. The lack of surprise is unavoidable, given that my recommendations flow from my analysis. Nevertheless, I hope that the principles and practices discussed in the conclusion will make effective use of these lessons and provide a persuasive answer to the question that has underpinned the dissertation from the outset.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Principles and Practices for a Renewed Egalitarianism

It is now possible to sketch the outlines of an egalitarianism that would have an improved chance of shaping the agenda under twenty-first century conditions. While there are no magic bullets in the competition over political priorities, there is little doubt that a more coherent, confident program is required if those interested in reducing substantive inequalities wish to counter the effects of over two decades of rampant neoliberalism.

Such a program, I will argue herein, should be founded on five pillars: reformism; cogent conceptualization and articulation of egalitarian goals; use of dramatic strategies to attract public attention and shift the terms of debate; engagement of the state; and development of more redistributive, democratic governance structures at the global level.

Revitalizing Reformism

E.J. Hobsbawm has famously described the “short twentieth century” (1914-1991) as an age of extremes.¹ Radicalism in all its forms reigned supreme throughout much of a century where the pretensions of social scientists combined with the angst of the downtrodden to produce powerful movements for root-and-branch transformation. Some of these movements, like the kibbutz, were egalitarian in their thrust. Most ultimately miscarried. And in too many cases, projects that began with unimpeachably good intentions paved the way to, at best, purgatory.

¹ Hobsbawm (1994).

This uncomfortable fact must be confronted. Most Bolsheviks, in contrast to Nazis, set out with plans for equality, yet ended up as accomplices to massive bloodletting and oppression. Most Red Guards intended to forge a bright new world of solidarity, yet ended up destroying older people's lives, smashing cultural treasures, and causing economic chaos and famine. Most radical socialists in countries where power was never attained - from the Philippines to the United States – toiled against the odds for a more just world, yet abused, betrayed, and occasionally murdered their comrades in absurd disputes over ideological correctness while utterly losing touch with popular opinion.² Reflecting upon the late 1960s heyday of left-wing radicalism in the US, veteran activist Barbara Epstein wrote in the *Monthly Review* that:

a messianic mood, a sense that victory could come any moment, swept the movement. This was linked to a tendency to equate radicalism with militancy, to rapidly escalating standards for militancy, and to a tendency to equate militancy and radicalism with violence...the movement was pervaded by...wild fantasies of immanent revolution, fantasies regarded by those who held them as realistic views of what the movement could accomplish with enough effort....something like madness took hold.³

Indeed, such tendencies are not absent from present-day radicalism.

Take, for example, the recent analysis of Canadian radical theorist Tony Clarke, who claims that over the last decade, "Capitalism became fully globalized and totalitarian at the same time....we are living under conditions of

² For a lament by a Filipino Communist Party leader who became one of the victims of irrational politics and fanatical infighting, see A New Left Project (1998), which *inter alia* advocates a saner, more humane, more incremental path to social justice.

³ Epstein (2001), 6-7.

military occupation, where the corporations are the new armies of occupation, and there is much to learn from the French Resistance Movementwe are on the cusp of a paradigm shift.”⁴ What connection, it may be asked, do such hyperbolic statements have to the daily concerns and attitudes of blue-collar Canadians scraping together savings to send their daughters to a community college or looking for sales at the local discount store? What self-aggrandizing illusions lie beneath the comparison to the French Resistance? What evidence, beyond periodic meetings of the converted, is there of (yet another) “paradigm shift”?

Utopian exaggerations are incapable of sustaining the egalitarian agenda over the long term. The kibbutz case study pointed to many of the reasons why radicalism (even a comparatively temperate version like the kibbutz) seems to contain the seeds of its own destruction: reluctance to address the complexities of a reality in which a range of priorities demand attention, a rigid commitment to particular tactics and measures, an exhausting over-politicization of everyday life, and a paternalistic restriction of the scope for individual judgement. To return to the reform-radical comparison laid out in chapter 2: the empirical record strongly suggests that radicals’ faith in the possibility of total transformation of social structures is tragically misplaced.⁵ While the soaring edifices of radical experiments now lie shattered in the

⁴ Clarke (2001), 29, 30, 31.

⁵ In recent years, more egalitarians have, belatedly and often reluctantly, begun to acknowledge that while social realities are somewhat malleable, there are enduring features of human behaviour that constrain the potential for sweeping change. See Brociner (2001).

dustbin of history, the reformists' incremental efforts – derided in their day as weak-kneed half-measures – have better stood the test of time.

Acknowledging the end of the age of extremes, however, does not in itself answer the question of what comes next. In rejecting radicalism as a route to a less unequal world – not because of its motives but rather, the dangers associated with its Manichean and millenarian impulses – we have still to say what the alternative is. Failing to do so abdicates the stage of public policy to actors who would contend, à la Fukuyama, that there is no need for politics at all. And for those who think change is necessary in a world where rich families pay more for a single meal at a restaurant than poor families spend on an entire year's food staples, abdication should not be an option.

What is called for, then, is a revitalized reformism. Such a reformism must combine the pragmatism implied by the arguments above with a determination to actively and consistently pursue the objective of greater substantive equality. Even as we accept the Third Way's contention that the ends are central and the means to them negotiable, we must be wary of its tendency to sometimes lose sight of the ends. Even as we learn from pay equity's ability to achieve some redistribution, we must remain cognizant of how limited that redistribution was and how much resistance it ran into.

A revitalized reformism should not see itself as a simple compromise between extremes, but a distinct path to a better world – a path defined by both clarity of vision and recognition of complexity. It should acknowledge that considerations of efficiency, equity, and individual freedom place limits on the

potential for an egalitarian society – but rebuff any notion that they eliminate that potential altogether.⁶ It should draw upon the public's moral instincts by making visible the plight of the disadvantaged – but avoid the politics of victimhood and pity by articulating a constructive plan for greater distributive justice that speaks to people as powerfully as neoliberal nostrums about the glories of narrow self-interest. And it should work simultaneously at the local, national, and international level – without losing its coherence of purpose.

Articulating a Vision

As our review of the theoretical literature made clear, egalitarianism is more conceptually involved than it may appear at first blush. But complexity need not mean confusion. Indeed, as discussed in the pay equity chapter and the overview of the Third Way, the ability to clearly, crisply explain egalitarianism's goals and plans is essential if it is to increase its influence on public priorities.

Clarity can be accomplished in part through well-articulated, resonant guiding principles. To this end, as argued earlier, egalitarianism should closely link concern for substantive equality with an ethics of care and fundamental rights. Narrowing disparities, as the kibbutz experience showed, is an objective with significant inspirational appeal. Its persuasive power, however, is most fully realized when it is linked to care and justice. Care – attentiveness and

⁶ Recent empirical research conducted by Scott et al. (2001) confirms that equality is indeed a powerful distributive principle, but that for most people it must be balanced with principles such as merit and efficiency.

responsiveness to the experience of fellow human beings – overcomes the problem of the abstracted other, infusing the call for more equitable distribution with the force of moral imperatives founded on our basic responsibility towards those around us.⁷ This is not about the simple emotion of pity, but rather, an ethical stance that insists upon engagement with the realities of other people, as those people experience and articulate them. Fundamental rights – the small core of rights indisputably integral to personal well-being and dignity – frame gross disparities as a problem of justice. People sensitized to the scope of prevailing inequalities and persuaded of the universal right to adequate food supplies, basic health care, or protection from arbitrary violence will have a difficult time rejecting measures to provide these fundamentals. Taken together, attentiveness to others and a view of their privation as an affront to human rights provide egalitarianism with a strong ethical foundation.

A public discourse underpinned by care and basic rights, however, is just a first step. It must be followed by a clear conceptualization of the nature of the equality sought, to answer those who would misleadingly equate egalitarianism with the mechanical distribution of identical baskets of resources to every individual. Here, the approach of the kibbutz, as it evolved from an idealistic to a more practical society, is instructive, as is the recognition (discussed in chapter 2) of theorists such as Bernard Williams and Michael Walzer that each

⁷ Friedman (1993); Tronto (1993), especially part 3.

sphere may have its own distributional scheme.⁸ A renewed egalitarianism must make it clear that different principles of equality apply at different levels.

At the most fundamental level – that of the minimum resources needed for survival – the principle of need-based access should apply. Everyone, regardless of their station in life, has an equal right to clean drinking water, sufficient nourishment, life-saving vaccines, and so on, and these should be collectively provided with little regard for competing considerations. It is at this level that Marxism's radically egalitarian aspiration of giving to each according to need should unambiguously prevail.

At the intermediate level – that of resources which permit a standard of living above subsistence but below abundance – the principle of equal shares should apply. As long as economies produce sufficient surplus to permit, say, child care, bicycles, or radios for all, then everyone should be supplied, through redistributive action if necessary, with adequate resources to obtain them.

At the highest level – that which crosses the line from simple comforts to greater luxuries – the principle of equal opportunity should apply. Those who apply their skills in a manner that obtains greater payment from the market should be permitted to enjoy some of the fruits of their labour. It is at this level that those considerations which compete with equality – particularly the need for incentives and the sense that greater contribution should produce greater

⁸ Walzer (1983); Williams (1997).

benefit⁹ – come into play most forcefully. Egalitarianism can allow for a functioning market with income differentials – but only at the upper resource level, and only on the condition that equality of opportunity is real, and not merely a slogan concealing the effects of personal connections and discrimination.

The reader may already have discerned a difference between the nature of the boundaries dividing the levels: while the line between subsistence and comfort (the first and second levels) can be fairly objectively determined and will be more or less consistent across societies, the line between the resources for a simple but comfortable life and a life of greater luxury (the second and third levels) is more socially constructed and value-laden.¹⁰ This suggests that while the former is likely to be relevant in both domestic and global struggles for greater equality, the latter will pertain mainly to domestic struggles.

This three-level conceptual framework goes beyond the distinction between luck and responsibility, as discussed in chapter 2, to suggest that below a minimum threshold, such a distinction is immaterial. In other words, whether or not someone can be held culpable for their lack of independent

⁹ The assertion that such an intuition exists reflects, *inter alia*, the findings of the kibbutz case study, and is ontological rather than normative. To acknowledge that an effective egalitarianism must make room for this intuition is by no means to justify the manner in which the intuition finds expression in contemporary industrialized societies. As the pay equity experience shows, we can respect the need for some visible linkage between inputs and rewards, without unquestioningly accepting the validity of the existing allocation of rewards.

¹⁰ This distinction is analogous to that between absolute and relative poverty, which has been at the heart of many of the debates over how to measure poverty mentioned earlier in this chapter.

resources, egalitarians should insist they be provided with certain basics. Let us suppose, for example, that a very wealthy individual foolishly gambles away every last cent in a casino and then goes deep into unserviceable debt. A philosophy based strictly on the chance-choice doctrine might logically, if inadvertently, lead to the conclusion that the individual can rightly be allowed to starve. Our framework, on the other hand, explicitly insists that the consequences of poor decisions stop at a floor below which the doctrine ceases to operate. People should gain rewards and pay prices for their decisions, but only at the third and highest resource level.

Shifting the Terms of Debate

Neoliberalism's two decades of ascendancy have been secured in part through widespread acceptance of Margaret Thatcher's assertion that there is no alternative. In recent years, egalitarians have begun to recover and to challenge this view more assertively in the streets and the press. They need to do more. As discussed in the section on direct activism, drama is an important tool for drawing people into a new sort of discussion. Capturing public attention can alter the terms of the debate, and open new space for innovative policy debates at the national and international levels.

This is where civil society's role is critical. Although direct activism is no substitute for established electoral and policy-making processes, it plays an important part in boosting the profile of certain issues within those processes. Non-violent protest actions -- from street demonstrations to sit-ins to e-mail campaigns -- can pull popular attention to questions of inequality and give

decision-makers a different perspective on where the balance of opinion lies on a particular topic.

This can best be achieved by broad coalitions. As the pay equity case study indicated, coalitions can have far more influence than individual players, even when most coalition members are passive backers of a small band of leaders. This is so because coalitions wield influence over large populations, and serve as vehicles for educating participants about, and involving them in, issues that might otherwise be far from their concerns.

Once the agenda begins to shift, it becomes necessary to act at the national and international levels to promote policies that will shrink, rather than further expand, substantive disparities. This is the point at which broad, reformist visions must demonstrate that they have concrete ideas for re-shaping social realities.

Engaging the State

I have already argued that the state remains the key domain for pursuing a politics of equality. This view is shared by other observers, notwithstanding the current popularity of enfeebled-state theories. As Cecelia Lynch writes:

the decline-of-sovereignty thesis encourages a stance vis-à-vis the state and the world polity that is problematic....'Progressive' social movements (as well as xenophobic ones) are used to promoting solutions that criticize and transcend the state and its capacities, but a return to the state is in all probability necessary.¹¹

Even a radical such as Fredric Jameson recognizes that "the nation-state today

¹¹ Lynch (1998), 163, 164.

remains the only concrete terrain and framework for political struggle.”¹²

That being said, there are undeniable constraints on the roles the contemporary state can play; it is relatively autonomous, not fully so. In the twenty-first century, the state will almost certainly be less an intervenor in society and more a rule-setter and auditor.¹³ The last century saw numerous programs based upon the idea that the public sector should act directly in areas of collective concern. This reflected, in part, the assumption that socialized property would be used in an egalitarian fashion, with surplus value benefitting all citizens rather than a small, capitalist class. Indeed, nationalization of industry was the declared tool of choice for many socialist parties, including Britain’s Labour Party, seeking to foster a more egalitarian society.¹⁴ A similar reasoning underlay the construction of large bureaucracies to carry out social policy.

A loss of public faith in this model was, as we have already seen, one reason for the rise of neoliberalism from the late 1970s. The neoliberal assertion that state industries were inefficient and state bureaucracies imperious rang true for many people, including egalitarians concerned with the

¹² Jameson (2000), 65.

¹³ An analogous understanding of the contemporary state was presented by Janice Gross Stein in her 2001 Massey Lectures, which aired on CBC Radio’s Ideas program in November 2001. An excerpt from those lectures, in which Stein calls the modern state a “contractor, regulator, and partner” can be found at Stein (2001).

¹⁴ Indeed, the dominance of Third Way moderation within Labour was symbolically sealed when the party’s historic commitment to collective ownership of the means of production – Clause IV, written by Sidney Webb and printed on the back of all membership cards – was officially jettisoned in 1995, despite the objections of long-time party activists.

Kafkayesque experiences of ordinary citizens who had little sense that government was the embodiment of their collective concerns. This is where the pragmatic, reformist distinction between ends and means becomes so important: if a more modest state can provide paths to the reduction of disparities, egalitarians have no particular reason to seek a return to the last century's top-heavy model, with all its shortcomings. Moreover, if, due to popular sentiment, the chances of such a rollback are in any event slim, it only makes sense to examine approaches more consistent with contemporary expectations of the state.

Once we understand the contemporary state as rule-setter and auditor, the debate shifts to the content of the rules. This is the context in which a revitalized egalitarianism has to take on the anti-egalitarianism of the past 20 years. State-determined rules can facilitate the accumulation and retention of wealth by those with the means to dominate others, or ensure basic equality and more limited discrepancies in overall rewards. Virtually no one's resource levels, after all, emerge in a rule-free environment: most paycheques include tax and pension deductions; private economic transactions are conducted within a known legal framework; and practically every citizen draws upon collectively funded services. Though it may seem slightly banal in comparison with, say, storming the Bastille, the twenty-first century battle for greater substantive equality within the nation-state is about shaping the rules of the game.

Following the three-level scheme of equality principles, recalling the

importance of clarity and comprehensiveness, and conceptualizing the state as rule-setter, we can now identify the critical components of domestic policy if less unequal outcomes are sought.¹⁵ At the most basic level, programs to ensure needs-based access to essential resources must be reinforced. This does not mean government bureaucracies need to be expanded. Canada's medicare system, whatever its flaws, shows that needs-based equality can be protected with limited direct provision of services by governments. Egalitarians should advocate more rule sets like medicare which guarantee needs-based access to critical resources, while retaining a measure of flexibility about delivery models. In particular, they should pursue comparable public policies in areas such as food and shelter.

At the intermediate level, egalitarians should reconsider their traditional opposition to a guaranteed annual income (GAI). If part of the egalitarian formula is providing equal shares up to a socially-determined "relative comfort" as opposed to absolute subsistence boundary, a GAI achieved through negative taxation or, if necessary, individual grants may prove to be an effective and straightforward tool. Egalitarians historically feared that a GAI would become a ceiling instead of a floor, and that as a targeted program, it would be especially vulnerable to cutbacks. However, there is no inherent reason for matters to unfold in this fashion; indeed, an argument can be made that

¹⁵ It should be acknowledged that the comments herein on domestic strategy apply mainly to relatively rich, liberal democratic polities. Where resources are much more scarce or the political system more repressive, a modified set of strategies will be required.

because targeted programs have a more significant redistributive effect than universal ones, they are a more appropriate strategy at the intermediate level, particularly if they can be implemented through universal mechanisms such as the tax system. Moreover, if a reformist approach is accepted, then a GAI generous enough to constitute a substantive improvement in the resource levels of those in need would meet the criterion of being a step in the right direction whose immediate benefits would count for more than its theoretical shortcomings. Finally, as the pay equity case study demonstrated, redistributive programs sometimes have unanticipated, positive results from an egalitarian perspective. A well-constructed GAI run through the tax system could very well shrink gaps while reducing the tendency to see the disadvantaged as undeserving others.¹⁶

At the highest level, egalitarians must be concerned primarily with the allocation of work. Both our case studies pointed to the centrality of work for any politics concerned with distributive justice. This is even more true today than in the past, for several reasons. First, the sustainability of welfare programs that include no work requirement has been severely damaged over the past two decades, not only by neoliberal policies, but also by the popular view that condition-free welfare fosters unhealthy cycles of dependency. This is why active welfare-to-work policies have been implemented by social

¹⁶ Judy Rebick (2000) has recently made a similar proposal with respect to the GAI. For an excellent overview of the logic of a GAI and the (hitherto fruitless) attempts to enact one in Canada, with special emphasis on the MacDonald Commission, see Tanguy (2001).

democratic governments across Europe.¹⁷ Second, work has a durable role in shaping income. The kibbutz case study, one example among many, demonstrates the long-term lack of viability of allocative systems that pay no attention to factors such as skills and effort. Thus, even if we adopt policies that moderate the effects of the market, the critical role of work in the determination of resources will not disappear. Third, work plays a critical part in giving individuals a sense of dignity, self-worth, and autonomy. A decent job provides a degree of social inclusion, recognition, and independence that few other life experiences can furnish. Finally, the contemporary economy is leaving less and less work to go around. The very efficiencies achieved by the market and technological globalization mean that employers need fewer workers, resulting in a paradoxical situation where welfare is made conditional to satisfy the popular view that rewards should correlate more with effort, yet there is little decent work to be had. If egalitarians accept the legitimacy of certain income differentials along with active welfare-to-work policies, they must also insist that the labour market provide an adequate number of jobs, and that every individual enjoy equal opportunity to obtain them. Anything less would constitute acquiescence in rising disparities.

There are a number of ways to increase the number of good jobs, but the policies with the most potential for a dramatic impact are reduction of the

¹⁷ Fiona Williams (1999) notes that dissatisfaction with the passivity bred by the traditional welfare state extends well beyond the confines of neoliberal ideology, arguing that new social movements "contributed as profound a political critique of the post-war welfare state as those from the New Right and New Labour" (668).

work week and more liberal work-family rules.¹⁸ Both would have to be accompanied by measures making the creation of new positions an economically neutral (or advantageous) prospect for employers. Current rules in most industrialized countries attach fixed costs to each employee, causing it to be more costly, for instance, to employ five people for four days per week each than four people for five days per week. These rules need to be changed, so that the total outlay of the employer is no more in the second scenario than in the first. Reduction of the work week should be accompanied by programs to encourage individual workers to embrace shorter hours; partially offsetting wage losses, for example, and ensuring that all benefits are pro-rated for part-time employees. Liberalization of work-family rules would need to follow similar lines, creating incentives instead of disincentives for part-time employment, flexible hours, and workforce expansion. The net result of these sorts of policies should be more decent-paying work to go around – without the need for the environmentally problematic rates of economic growth that have been the mantra of many politicians and economists in recent years -- and a salubrious increase in the personal freedom and opportunity for well-being (in the form of leisure time and ability to care for family members) of workers.

Providing everyone with an equal chance to access the increased supply

¹⁸ James Laxer (1999) argues for a reduced work week as a key egalitarian strategy in an era of productivity-enhancing technology. A reduced work week has also been a centrepiece of Lionel Jospin's efforts to craft a French social democratic program that is more assertively redistributive than the Third Way. The importance of work-family policies for those seeking a more egalitarian order has been discussed by a number of thinkers, especially those with a feminist perspective such as Nancy Fraser (1994).

of jobs demands substantially higher spending on education – since progress in the labour market is strongly affected by education¹⁹ – along with effective anti-discrimination laws and targeted programs to extend employment opportunity into disadvantaged communities. Such policies should help reduce the effects of history and bias on the distribution of work and so, attenuate ingrained inequalities.

Taken together, a revised set of social rules that ensures people's basic needs are met, guarantees a minimum income for all, and distributes employment opportunity more widely provides a realistic but far-reaching vision for a reformist egalitarianism in the context of domestic politics. Moreover, if articulated through appeals to our sense of responsibility towards others and our sense that fundamental rights to dignity and well-being are being contravened, and advocated through direct activism as well as electoral politics, it has the potential to attract significant support among a public that is arguably ready for an antidote to the ensconced but ultimately impoverished view that acting together is always worse than acting apart.

This brings us to the final question for this section: how should such promotion take place? That is, beyond the initial agenda-shaping of non-violent protest, how should the state be engaged? I would suggest three strategies. First, civil society and academic actors should seek to inject their views into the

¹⁹ After surveying a number of egalitarian strategies, Marxist economist John Roemer (1999) argues that the most promising is education. Even if there is a degree of overstatement in this, it is a striking conclusion from a theorist steeped in the historical materialist tradition.

policy-making process through dialogue with elected leaders and state officials. The fear of co-option that limits such dialogue reflects an unfortunate inclination towards conspiracy theories – along with an unjustifiable lack of confidence in the capacity of non-governmental players to remember what they believe in. Second, those animated by an egalitarian ethos should consider careers within the state, through either elected office or the public service. The ability to mold the priorities and behaviour of the state from within should make such careers an appealing option for those wishing to reduce disparities. Third, egalitarians should seek to reinvigorate electoral politics, not only by becoming involved in political parties (though this remains critically important), but also by taking advantage of the new technologies that have served direct activism so well. E-democracy, though probably not the panacea some of its proponents claim,²⁰ has the potential to make the state more accessible, expand political involvement, and shift the dominant discourse towards more socially informed concerns.

Acting Globally

Domestic policy, of course, cannot by itself address the contemporary egalitarian dilemma. As the analysis in chapter 5 made abundantly clear, that dilemma is intimately related to the challenges of globalization. For reasons both tactical – because much of the action is now supra-national – and ethical – because the most disturbing gaps are between developed and developing

²⁰ See, for example, Clift (2002).

countries – twenty-first century egalitarianism must include a strong global dimension.

The point-of-departure for defining this dimension is the understanding that globalization, even its economic strain, is not by definition bad for equality or equivalent to world-wide neoliberalism. The crux of the issue, as at the domestic level, is the rule-set. Shaped by appropriate norms and structures, globalization can be a boon for the poor and a tool for advancing distributive justice. That being said, we should not underestimate the challenge: instituting more egalitarian norms and structures at the global level will be especially difficult, for two reasons. The first is the absence of the sort of clear political processes that, within the nation-state, provide multiple channels for action. The second is the existence of profound power disparities – even more profound than at the domestic level -- that severely complicate any effort at trans-national redistribution. These challenges should not immobilize egalitarians, but they do point to the need for strategies that are both carefully targeted and incremental. Modest movement in the direction of greater distributive justice across the globe may foster a momentum toward more significant progress in the future – and in any event, are preferable to fantasies of a dramatically transformed international economic order.

Because disparities at the global level are so severe, a globally-oriented politics of equality must focus first on the most basic level: provision of needs-based access to survival resources. Here, the situation is analogous to domestic politics of nineteenth century industrializing societies: straightforward

redistribution to stop people from starving or dying en masse of curable illnesses is needed most urgently, and must take priority over higher-level equality principles. Moreover, cosmopolitan theories notwithstanding, an overarching human society is still too nascent as to permit any attempt to apply higher-level equality principles like equal access to employment at the global level. Pragmatic reformism requires that we proceed one step at a time, securing greater equality of fundamentals -- and public acceptance of its validity -- before advocating a more sweeping inter-state egalitarianism.

There are, of course, already some policies aimed at advancing universal access to subsistence resources. The problem is that they are mostly ad hoc charity measures rather than functions of entrenched norms and behaviours. A renewed egalitarianism must demand that Western societies look developing world poverty squarely in the eye and accept that a redistributive response is a matter of fundamental justice. As such, it must be incorporated into the web of rights and obligations which are coming to define interactions in a globalized world.²¹

What would such a redistributive response look like, practically speaking? How can gaps be narrowed in a world which lacks a central government? The answer lies, at least in part, in a robust global governance regime that has straightforward, unambiguous redistributive measures at its

²¹ See Jochnick (1999) for an argument in favour of extending international human rights and distributive justice obligations to a range of powerful actors -- not only states, but also multinational corporations and international financial institutions.

core. Such measures, by definition, have two broad components: collection and expenditure. With respect to collection, funds for global equalization could come from many sources, including the direct government and philanthropic contributions which provide the moneys currently dedicated to poverty-alleviation. Direct contributions, however, have the downside of being unpredictable and prone to unilateral reduction in the face of policy disagreements. For the purposes of a global effort to reduce inequalities, they are too much an artifact of an anarchic, twentieth century world order devoid of consensual values and programs. If we believe that closing some of the yawning gaps between rich and poor across the globe is an egalitarian imperative, we should not settle for an outmoded tool ill-suited to the task.

Collection, instead, should be based on an international fee regime which makes logical, visible linkages between globalization processes and the funds gathered to reduce disparities. Candidates for inclusion in such a regime would include a Tobin tax on international financial transactions and a surcharge on goods that have not been certified as satisfying minimum standards.

The Tobin tax, named after the Nobel laureate economist who first proposed it, would impose a charge on the sorts of cross-border movements of money which have so destabilized the global economy in recent years. It would have a number of advantages. First, it would directly connect an activity which has exacerbated poverty in developing countries and efforts to alleviate that poverty. Second, by raising the costs of the deleterious activity in question, it

would help reign it in, thereby helping indirectly as well as directly to curb the growth of disparities between the rich and poor. Finally, it would be politically palatable for national governments to endorse, given the limited sympathy most people have for those who make their living through crass speculation.

Similarly, a non-certification surcharge would relate an equalization program's source of funds to the problem of inequality itself. The certification process would be based upon a small but widely-endorsed set of standards in the areas of human rights, treatment of workers, and environmental protection. These standards would have to be determined jointly by developed and developing countries to avoid suspicion among the latter; parsimonious enough to avoid the allegations of cultural arrogance that have dogged human rights campaigns in recent years; and balanced enough to challenge practices in developed as well as developing countries. Certification could be carried out through audits, where success would earn a product's manufacturer the right to advertise its compliance (as with ISO certification) and failure would result in imposition of a surcharge at the port of importation. Like the Tobin tax, a non-certification surcharge would have the dual benefit of raising resources and creating disincentives for behaviours that aggravate global disparities.

However global redistribution funds are collected, priorities for expenditure will obviously have to be carefully considered. A percentage of the money gathered will need to be devoted to the audit and certification mechanism discussed in the preceding paragraph. The remainder should be targeted and administered by local governments and NGOs and, following the

previous discussion of egalitarian priorities and strategies, broadly dedicated to ensuring long-term, needs-based access to basics such as food, clean water, medical care, shelter, and primary education. These sorts of core resources are not only the most appropriate focus from a normative perspective, but also more likely than traditional aid programs to create the sort of “capabilities for functioning” of which Amartya Sen has written.²²

Establishing a far-reaching global equalization program will not be easy. Critiques of the global governance agenda have already been discussed, and there is no question that powerful interests will strongly oppose any such initiative. Nevertheless, it provides a realistic, comprehensible -- and therefore, one hopes, potentially saleable -- alternative to both the neoliberal version of globalization, with its profound inequities, and autarchic protectionism, which would do little to foster development and close disparities.

The means for advancing this alternative are in many respects similar to those for promoting a domestic egalitarianism. This is hardly surprising, given the blurring of boundaries that has been part and parcel of globalization. Direct activism, engagement with elected leaders and bureaucrats, and human rights claims are useful not only at the domestic level, but also the global. However, over the longer term, the absence of an explicit global political process may, as the advocates of cosmopolitan democracy contend, compromise egalitarians' ability to promote and sustain rule-sets that work in the interests of

²² Sen (1991, 1996).

the many and not just the few. Thus, a contemporary egalitarian program should include steps towards the democratization of global politics, while (in the spirit of pragmatic reform) recognizing that these steps will by necessity be incremental.

A good start would be establishment of a global consultative forum that would meet periodically and operate in parallel to the UN General Assembly. Although states would, at least initially, almost certainly insist on retaining the prerogative of appointing representatives to the forum, one can envisage (and encourage) an agreement among democratic countries to select representatives through an electoral process or, failing that, from the ranks of credible civil society actors with an interest in global issues. Setting up such a forum would not be as large a leap as it might seem: consultative gatherings that bring together NGOs already take place alongside major UN conferences, usually with financial support from Western governments and the UN. In time, a broad, standing consultative forum might achieve -- like the Council of Europe as continental cooperation was taking hold -- a degree of institutionalization and legitimacy that would permit it to serve as the foundation for a more robust form of supra-national democracy.

These three elements -- a global equalization regime focused on universal access to basic resources, a mechanism for auditing compliance with minimum standards, and a modest dose of global democracy -- would do a great deal to create momentum towards a less unequal world. Granted, they would hardly bridge the abyss between rich and poor overnight. But they would

almost certainly help reverse the trend towards ever-widening disparities, and build the foundations for further action to advance distributive justice across states and continents. The obvious alternatives – despair or utopianism – offer much less.

Final Reflections

The world is an unequal place. As opponents of egalitarianism never tire of pointing out, human beings are characterized by different talents, divergent preferences, inconsistent views of the good life, and a varying thirst for achieving whatever it is they define as success.

The egalitarian (except in her most radical incarnation) can concede these points with little hesitation. Notwithstanding the claims of Hayek, Nozick, Thatcher et al., she does not, in fact, believe that everyone is the same, nor aspire to a world where each individual is supplied with identical resources by some central authority. She simply contends that current disparities far exceed any differences that might be justified by variations in individual qualities and contributions, concerns for productivity, or considerations of liberty. Such factors might legitimately account for the gap between, say, my ability to buy a used station wagon and my neighbour's ability to purchase a BMW. But they cannot be used as a rationale for the gulf between both our children's enjoyment of three nutritious meals a day and an African child's death from starvation.

Egalitarianism is rooted in the recognition not only that we share a

common humanity with the hungry African child, the impoverished Aboriginal teenager, and the unemployed labourer – but also that this commonality obligates us to do something more than smile sympathetically and toss a few coins into their outstretched hands. Egalitarianism is about believing that attentiveness to the experience of our fellow human beings and respect for their fundamental rights demand a more substantive response: a redistribution of resources so as to narrow the massive and growing gaps between the more and the less fortunate.

This dissertation has been concerned with attempting to repair the breach between that fundamental egalitarian impetus – which, I contend, is as relevant as ever – and a practical egalitarian politics – which clearly has had difficulty reconstituting itself in the face of rampant neoliberalism and economic globalization. In the tradition of *praxis*, the dissertation has not focused exclusively on either theory or tactics, but rather, has sought to craft workable policy expressions for specific normative and conceptual positions. It has, in other words, tried to find ways of making egalitarianism more resonant under contemporary conditions, neither accepting the status quo as an unavoidable given nor ignoring the constraints with which any viable political project must come to terms.

Will an emboldened reformism -- clearly conceptualized, forcefully articulated, and pushed onto the agenda by direct activism -- really be able to seize the public imagination? Will an engagement with the state with aimed at providing all citizens with basic resources and a guaranteed minimum income

while redistributing employment opportunity actually close gaps at the domestic level? Will a global equalization program and quasi-democracy truly give a bigger slice of humankind's pie to the hundreds of millions who today receive only a few meager crumbs? Obviously, I cannot say with any certitude whether this mix of prescriptions will cure egalitarianism's twenty-year ailment. But I can say with some confidence that it furnishes a fairly coherent point-of-departure.

It is often suggested (unofficially) that one should begin a dissertation with a mental picture of the answers it will produce. For better or for worse, I did not entirely fit this mould. When I began, I had only a general sense of where I would emerge when my dissertation was completed, and as I conducted my research and refined my arguments, my ideas and expectations evolved. The intellectual exercise, for me, has been about figuring out how to advance a particular ethical vision, balancing idealism and realism. It has been a fascinating, if occasionally exhausting, journey. A dissertation demands great patience from both its writer and its readers. For the writer of this particular dissertation, that patience has proven more than worthwhile. Hopefully, its readers, too, will feel that their time has been well-spent.

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