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The decline and the need of the key force of social intermediation

To be published in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. Paper delivered in the conference "Dreams of Peace and Realities of War The Friend-Enemy Polarization: Eastern and Western traditions confront the need for dialogue" (Dublin May 30 – June 1, 2024)

This paper, still in a very preliminary version, is part of a broader project on the decline of equality of opportunity in the exercise of political influence in Western democracies and, in this context, on the more general topic of the function and value of intermediation in representative democracies, that is, of the equivalent of what Montesquieu termed "intermediary bodies." In the current political literature on this topic, scholars mostly focus on political parties and the media (Urbinati 2015; Müller 2022). The decline of organized parties (yet not of parties as such) and the impact of the Internet on communication strategies and information provision—perhaps the most important technological revolution in the field of politics since the invention of the mechanical printing press in 1450—affect our democracies with consequences that are still difficult to predict and govern. Some scholars have situated this decline in what they call the *Great Regression*: a retreat of our political systems to less democratic forms of opinion and will formation (Geiselberger, Appadurai, Bauman 2017). The growing literature on alternative avenues of political selection (lottery vs. election) or the transformation of parties (digital vs. in presence) and the media (self-made bricolage vs. professional journalism) quite explicitly reflects this situation. The changes experienced and studied concern both the content of politics and the methods and styles of political expression. These changes come alongside other phenomena that are not directly political but which can no longer be ignored, such as the agony of social policies as a condition of democratic citizenship, the escalation of unemployment and, much more often, the shift from unemployment to the normalization of precarious labor relations (the data tells us of a growth in employment but not in living standards, whereby workers work more but with no prospect of having a decent life in return). All of this has contributed to the

rekindling with impressive speed and intensity of the ideologies of sovereigntism and protectionism, new forms of nationalism not identifiable with the antidemocratic versions that plagued Europe after the Great Depression. Be that as it may, from the revocation in 1971 of the Bretton Woods agreements (signed by the delegates of all forty-four allied nations in 1944) to the economic crisis of 2007-8, democracies have witnessed radical and sometimes dramatic transformations in the public and socio-economic life of their societies. The general perception among scholars and pundits is that, for the first time since World War II, constitutional democracies are regressing, both because of their lack of ability to deal with socio-economic inequalities and because their conventional procedures and institutions of participation and decision-making have been disrupted by new media technologies and the erosion of political parties in their classic function of organizing mass society, shaping political opinions and agendas, and channeling emotions. This is the context in which I propose thinking about the current transformation of the forms and institutions of representative democracy, primarily "intermediate bodies."

In this paper, I intend to focus on the relationship between "the social" and "the political," or more precisely between a society of individuals and associations on the one hand and the domain of political deliberation on the other (the dualism of the two "spheres" is conventional and far from clear-cut, as we well know, but I will adopt it for elucidation convenience). My interest is to understand whether the transformation of intermediary bodies in politics (the parties) reflects a transformation of intermediary bodies in society; my idea is that society does not experience a decline of intermediary bodies, but rather their unequal distribution among citizens, whereby, to be schematic, the "strong" parts of society enjoy more power of intermediation than the "weak" parts, with predictable effects as regards the power to influence politics and determine policy choices. It also seems to me (but the issue is beyond the scope of this paper) that the “cartelization” of parties (in relation to which scholars speak of “post-party democracy” or “crisis of party democracy”) (Mair 2013) is not an accidental or inexplicable fact, but a transformation that is linked, unintentionally of course, to that asymmetry in the strength of social intermediation to which I alluded above. To be clear, I do not want to suggest a hidden direction of history but to think in terms of a trend, thus siding with Mill instead of Marx or within a conception of social science as a study of trends, not predicted determinations. Finally,

my ambition is not to suggest recipes to citizens or lawmakers, but to offer an analysis that can perhaps help them to better square the problems democracies are facing.

The first part of the paper shall briefly elucidate the state of the art, as it were, and the second offers my contribution for discussion.

I.

Political institutions regulate human behavior with a view to outcomes consistent with the principles they embody and wish to reproduce; in democracy's case, these basic principles are political equality and freedom. This makes it possible to design institutions and procedures that govern uncertainty without ever silencing it—this is the main character of democratic politics, which from this viewpoint can be regarded as a government of crisis. In a democracy, immanent judgments on both legitimacy and institutions' performance have to be made from these two basic principles, which set the style, tone, and the limits of evaluations and disagreements of the way to answer critical challenges or govern the crisis. The most important assumption of constitutional democracy is that the "whole"—the equality of freedom as the general good of each and every citizen—should not be an object of exchange and contention in political competition: this is the condition for conflicts to have free rein without overflowing into violence or without giving rise to a regression to non-democratic regimes. Jan-Werner Müller's *Democracy Rules* (2021) will be my guide in this first part of the paper. It is the book that best articulates the analysis of the role of political intermediary bodies in transforming the management of political dissent and conflict, and that proposes a response to restore moderation in the system. According to Müller, the ideal scenario of a democratic polity should not be made up simply of "a few" and "many," but of "a few", "many," and "all". This is, in a nutshell, the normative frame of a politics that lives off a limited political conflict or a conflict that is meant to reactivate itself always as limited conflict.

Limited political conflict is under stress today, and this is the main factor in the suffering of our democracies. In almost all of them, the signs of this suffering manifest themselves in the form of a double secession: the secession of the few from their obligation to contribute proportionately to the functioning of society as a whole (the struggle against taxes) and the

secession of the many, or a substantial part of them, from paying their political duty to the "whole" by voting (the refusal to use the power that democratic citizens have to frame and condition decisions). According to Müller, this double secession highlights the growing power of an oligarchy—and the proof of this lies precisely in the state of the political intermediary infrastructure, the parties and the media. In a word, if the wealthy have disproportionate power over elections and elected officials, and even dictate the text of bills, the main responsibility lies in the state of the parties and the media.

Müller argues that public disaffection with elections, exhibited by a large portion of the citizenry, is mainly linked to party cartelization and the gradual decline of media independence. He says something important in this regard: the media has become more partisan while parties have become more dependent on the audience. This phenomenon explains, among other things, why the media is a breeding ground for populist leaders, who use the “all parties are equal” rhetoric to accredit the idea that the difference between parties is nonexistent but orchestrated by and for the benefit of the elite and to keep the many divided. In short, parties and the media have reversed their roles, and this is functional to audience democracy (as our democracies increasingly seem to be), where despite the weight of polls in the behavior of leaders does not correspond to an increase in citizen power. Media that operate as partisan actors fatally deplete their role of controlling and monitoring politics, that is, they impoverish the “negative” power of citizens; in turn, parties that turn into audience catchers impoverish their representative function.

Parties and partisan media are a major concern of democracy scholars today. For Müller, for example, the concern is about the lack of moderation that characterizes some parties, and his goal is to re-stabilize the political game (or moderate conflict) by redefining its actors—where re-stabilizing means a reactivation of the adversarial relationship between parties that today are instead like gladiators before an adrenaline-fueled audience. To be precise, the concern here is not about parties in general or the way they became cartel parties, but is about some of them and certainly those on the right who have lost that virtue of moderation that seemed to belong to them naturally. Right-wing parties are no longer conservative but radical in their destabilizing impact on public opinion and institutions. On some recent occasions, they have become radical in their messages and populist in their positions; they are no longer willing to compromise; they provoke rebellions and destabilizing contestations instead of defending the status quo, as they used to do. They do not want to quell the radical aspects of public discourse but unleash them. In

the end, they upset the rules of the game of electoral democracy and even delegitimize the constitutional order.

What should we do with right-wing parties that are extremist and recalcitrant to partisan play, that generate incendiary propaganda on every issue that emerges in public discourse so as to gain more attention, that fabricate a conspiratorial ideology that seeks enemies to humiliate and eventually expel from political competition? Müller's argument suggests that the status quo consists of the first principles of democratic institutions; that to save our democracies, we must reactivate those parties that help moderation and thus the status quo. The problems are radicalization and polarization, thus.

According to Müller, these problems can be addressed by reintroducing some restraint into the game of politics, even by resorting to legal interventions. Several options have been put forth in recent years, coming from the very history of democracies: some aim to curb radicalism, and others aim to make the use and control of intermediary institutions more accessible, for example, by making journalism more accurate and independent (there are various regulations in different countries in the form of professional ethics) or by intervening in resources (crucial would be to drastically limit private money in parties and elections and to better legislate on the distribution of public money).[1] Müller deploys additional potential responses.

As far as parties are concerned, he believes that they are essential and change over time but also that they can be changed; moreover, he thinks that reshaping their domain of disagreement is a sign of democracy's vitality. In fact, intervening at the institutional and legal level on these infrastructures goes hand in hand with the recognition that the old mass and ideological parties are definitely over, and yet the ones we have now are either "invertebrate" (leftist parties) or immoderate (right-wing parties), as we have seen.[2] There is, in my opinion, a paradox in Müller's strategy by state authority: that of wanting to set limits to uncertainty while

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[1] The financing of elections and political parties is an especially thorny domain of democratic governance. As the comparative scholarship on this topic shows, a wide variety of political finance arrangements can be observed in practice, generally involving some combination of state subventions, private donations and party membership dues; see at least Cagé 2020 and Wiltse et al. 2019. An important work on this topic in under press with Oxford, written by Matteo Bonotti and Zim Nwokora, *Who Schould Pay for Parties and Elections in Democracy?*

[2] Invoking Ortega y Gasset's *España Invertebrada* (1921), Giovanni Sartori used of the adjective "invertebrate" to describe the Italian parties that practice only "wars of position," thus creating a habit of conformism and adaptation to the status quo; see Anderson (2009).

assuming that uncertainty is the engine of democracy. I need to explain this conceptual knot further because Part II of this paper unravels from here.

"Return to the first principles"—the famous Niccolò Machiavelli motto—is the thread Müller follows in analyzing the formation of political opinion at a time of disintegration of intermediate bodies—parties and independent media—that have traditionally carried out this task, and in proposing the authoritative or legal solution. The disintegration of intermediary bodies is so hopeless that they can no longer carry out this task by themselves. Hence the state comes in. This line of thought, which lies in the shadow of Carl Schmitt, suggests to us that a political system whose autonomous mechanisms for managing opinion and political conflict are inept must defend itself (in order to defend its founding principles) by resorting to law or sanction, that is, the weapons of state authority. My question to this proposal would be the following: How can we limit political uncertainty by legal means without compromising pluralism and disagreement? Wouldn't it be sufficient to rely on (and make good use of) the constitutional limitations we already have (courts control whether groups use violence, offend minorities, or steal votes, etc.)? Should we bring moderation into the political system through authority? Here is not the place to open the Pandora's box of "militant democracy." What I would like to do, however, is to identify two problems within this line of reasoning that should then lead me to the central question of the essay, which is that we should refocus our attention on social intermediary bodies and their relationship to political ones if we are to understand both the state of political intermediation and the risk of oligarchic regression.

The first problem: Müller rightly states that abstention from voting by many citizens is a sign of disaffection with parties. However, if this is the case, guaranteeing certain parties through a militant democracy clause may give citizens the impression that those parties want to protect themselves from competition without needing to reform. Limiting uncertainty by law may result in stabilization at the expense of the incentive to curb the main contemporary vice of parties, cartelization. This would not perhaps cure disaffection toward parties.

The second problem: disaffection and abstention from voting probably reveals the drop in confidence in the political rules of the game, the fact that the many have no power to deter the few, and thus there is in fact no room for conflict. This is what we experience in several democratic countries today, where we see riots and rebellions but rarely political conflicts. The question is therefore to create a space for political conflict or to give the many the feeling that the

political game is not ‘possessed’ by any actor, good or bad. Elmer E. Schattschneider had clear words on this phenomenon of secession: “In this case the stronger side may impose its will on the weaker without an overt test of strength because people are apt not to fight if they are sure to lose” ([1960] 1975, 4).

These two problems raise an important issue: How to translate the principles of political equality and freedom into a stable institutional order? Machiavelli himself approved of mixed government. But his mixed government was a stable institutional “order” in that it was capable of accommodating alternative interests existing in society, not preemptively selecting or excluding some of them. He viewed the risk of civil war and the resulting concerns as drivers of politics and freedom. He did not seek a final solution to these uncertainties, let alone one that imposed unquestioning submission to the decisions of a majority. A republic that includes the dynamics associated with the fear of losing freedom (the many) or losing power (the few) through incentives, promises, compromises and temporary accommodations seems to be the permanent feature of the democratic political order under a condition of uncertainty.

This entails that the problems of democracy should be solved by the actors themselves in the field through the guidance of a written constitution and an institutional system. Responding to the radicalization of politics with a radicalization of norms risks being a choice that, instead of fostering moderation, could encourage belief that "the whole" is a good in the hand of the ‘moderate’ establishment. It seems to me that a political sphere in which party differences and conflict are robust is still the best option we have to save the democratic principles. Or, in short: reform democracy with more democracy. To anticipate the theme of Part II, introducing moderation through the authority of the state would not change the relationship between social and political intermediate bodies, but would affix a cap of authority to them, with the risk freezing an unequal status quo.

II.

It is undeniable that, as Müller argues, the problem of moderating political conflict exists. The question is where to direct attention to reverse the process that gives rise to the erosion of moderation today, whether to the state and state related institutions or to the extra-institutional

socio-political relations between citizens instead, that is, where social intermediate bodies grow and operate. I propose to stay within the sphere of intermediate bodies and, moreover, not to stop at the "revolt" against them (e.g., against parties), but to try to understand what kind of mediation parties play (or with what parts of society) in our democracies, which Müller appropriately denounces the two secessions mentioned above.

Let's start with a quick sketch of the two lines of thought we invoke when discussing intermediary bodies.

The first line of thought is in the *Spirit of the Laws,* where Montesquieu characterized intermediary bodies as essential conditions for a moderate government because they are countervailing powers against the endogenous tendency of any sovereign to become monopolized by its holders, whether they are one, the few, or the many. The sovereign needs to be limited both from within (through the division of state functions and a system of vetoes) and from without (through autonomous entities or practices that society itself produces). Pluralism is thus not merely an issue of institutional engineering but needs also to be rooted in society. In this account, Montesquieu also argued that the humanist Italian republics tended fatally toward despotism because their societies were not truly pluralistic (they had guilds of course but not nobility, thus were victims of a permanent turmoil among equals in the pretense of competing for power) (Montesquieu 1989, pp. 180–88).

My aim is not to call attention to the anti-egalitarian implications of constitutional republicanism in Montesquieu's tradition. My aim is instead to apply to contemporary democracy Montesquieu's theory that intermediary bodies are essential both to *articulate* power (division and pluralism) and to *obstruct* its tendency to concentrate. For this mechanism to work, the parts of society must somehow be unified within themselves, in organism-like forms, in order to perform the task of keeping citizens simultaneously diverse and united. This idea was of great inspiration to George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in his reflection on the dialectic of freedom/pluralism/unity in parliamentary government. Within this tradition is the modern idea of the political party as an agent of unity among citizens, of articulation of political conflict and the exercise of political freedom.

The second line of thought is that of Alexis de Tocqueville, who extended and adapted Montesquieu's strategy of political moderation to democracy but with some important variations. Tocqueville listed three kinds of intermediary bodies—civil associations, the press, and political

parties—that fit a government which pivots on equality and universal suffrage (individual votes). In relation to the press, Tocqueville stressed in *Democracy in America* three main functions: *dispersal*, or the tendency of freedom of speech to decentralize power and generate a plurality of printed materials that would counter the centralizing spirit of popular sovereignty; *surveillance*, or the press's ability to counter the power that opinions have to penetrate deeply into people's life and thus support political authority; and *self-empowerment*, or the tendency of opinion-formation pluralism to stabilize people's views not because citizens are certain that the opinions the press diffuses are true, but because they feel they are their own product. These functions, however, presume a society that is articulated in civil and political associations.

As for political associations, Tocqueville defined them in contradistinction to civil associations. Civil associations bind (and divide) individuals according to their specific interests (most of the time, one-dimensional interests or one-issues); they produce fragmentation "*ad infinitum* about questions of detail" that can hardly have general application since the life of civil associations depends on the relative closure of their borders and a primary interest in the output. But political parties are associations that bind (and divide) citizens along the lines of their evaluative interpretations of matters that are general, or of "equal importance for all parts of the country." Political parties interrupt fragmentation (they tend to unify) not, however, by imposing homogeneity or by concealing differences (making the whole society in the image of one party), but by creating new forms of difference, such as political partisanship, that raise and interpret claims, attract people, and lead electoral campaigns (Tocqueville 1969, pp. 174–75).[3][4]

But there is one aspect in the Tocquevillian analysis of civil (not political) associations that serves our case: these associations are functional to a society that is democratic, founded on the voluntariness of citizens' civic and public engagement and on political freedom. It is

[3] Anticipating Max Weber's distinction between ideological party and electoral machinery party, Tocqueville distinguished the "great political parties" from the "small parties" and suggested that whereas the latter aggregate interests "without political faith," the former unify citizens through principles and interpretations of the general destiny of the country. Tocqueville did not argue that private interests operate only in small parties, yet he saw that in great political parties, interests are concealed "beneath the veil of public interest." Similar to Tocqueville's distinction and as an anticipation of Weber's was Hegel's distinction between *hommes d'état* and *hommes à principes* which prefigured two different forms of party. See Hegel 1964, p. 325; Weber 1994, 152-154.

[4]

individualism (along with equality) that makes associations useful and necessary: they *empower* equal citizens in society, and they prepare them to share in political power not just as individuals (although they vote as individuals). Within this scenario, the problem of democracy thus arises when the citizens remain isolated or lose the power that comes from associating.

In this context, parties themselves are not sufficient to empower, since their proposals and ideas affect citizens that are associated (for interests or claim purposes) not isolated. This makes us better understand how elections work. Democratic elections are not about choosing Mrs. X over Mr. Y after comparing their qualities or salience but are about choosing candidates who represent a package of proposals and a recognizable vision of policies for the entire country. Thus, dissociated individuals risk being confronted with parties that do not talk about them and their problems. The loneliness or social isolation of the democratic citizen is the underlying problem of erosion of participation and the meaning of political equality. Trade associations, labor organizations, parishes, and religious communities are crucial for parties to attract citizens. It is an attraction mediated by social intermediary bodies. If the political landscape were between disassociated individual citizens and political parties, there would be no interactive relationship between them. If that were the case, critics of parties would be right to argue (as they do) that parties are electoral machines serving candidates rather than citizens, as indeed cartel parties are mainly today.

The problem of our democracies seems to be the following: some sectors of society have strong social aggregations representative of their claims; these are not a small part of society, but neither are they a very large one (such as professionals, merchants, the few blue collars, farmers, industrialists, people in businesses, etc.). All of them are not “simply” individuals, but are part of particular socio-economic interests with particular functions in society; with their aggregations of interests they can have a very productive and direct dialogue with political parties (and through them with the state), that is, many concrete possibilities to make their claims heard and to influence political decisions. The same cannot be said of that other part of society, the part that is made up of citizens who have the same right to vote, but whose vote counts fatally less because it counts only as a vote since they enter the political domain on their own. The problem in many of our democracies is precisely this one: a large portion of the population finds itself without associational support and thus is unable to find support by and in the parties, and finally

is unable to give value to its voting. Hegel asked democrats of his times the following pertinent question: What power has a voter who knows that he is one-millionth of the whole feel he has?

Voting for representatives is also not enough indication of political power because the free mandate makes representatives legally irresponsible to their electors and their responsiveness to them only voluntary and very selective or unequal. In addition, socio-economically weak citizens have no guarantee that their social organizations will voice their demands and appeal to representatives; more often than not, their associations are weak and poorly founded or, even worse, weak people have no real political network of reference that makes them capable of exercising advocacy. Indirectness in the exercise of political power makes us understand why it is crucial that we pay attention not only to political intermediary bodies but also to social ones.[5]

We could reconstruct the history of democratization in Europe by leveraging the relationship between social and political associationism. In the 19th century, the working and peasant classes were associated long before they had a party to listen to them and even before they gained suffrage. Political inclusion started within society, with the tool of organization. In the 20th century, with mass parties, there was a close correlation between the social and political spheres: the working classes associated with trade unions created strong social representations, often spread throughout society. Fascism, which abolished party pluralism, did not abolish the pluralism of social organizations, but incorporated them under the direction of the authoritarian state. In both cases, although very different and sometimes opposite, the relationship between social pluralism and the political sphere (whether that of the party system or that of the authoritarian state) was very strong and direct. What we see now is that our societies are inhabited only in part by social associations—this part is also the part that has parties of reference and is composed of citizens who go out to vote. As a result, parties themselves change society's structure in that they relate to certain parts of society not the society as a whole; in

[5] Only from this perspective can the lack of representative advocacy become visible. "Considered together, the small proportion of social and economic justice organizations within the overall interest group system and the biases within these organizations themselves powerfully demonstrate the tremendous hurdles and disadvantages faced by groups such as women, racial minorities, and low-income people in their quest for representation in national policies" (Strolovitch 2007, p. 210).

essence, they may be nothing more than cartel parties, because what they have to do is to propose themselves (on the theater of audience) to voters instead of attracting voters to themselves (as was the case with mass parties). These "liquid" or "thin" parties (in their organizational structure) are also easily captured by organized interests and have a tendency to avoid engaging with those citizens who lack associational strength and are socially weak, relying rather on their abstention from voting.

In sum, if we want to understand the "great regression" of democracy toward a political and social order that excludes a large part of the population from active politics (secession from voting) and in which some protected classes hold the game of the party system in their own hand and use it to give themselves more privileges (the struggle against taxes) we can perhaps find cognitively useful to rely on Machiavelli's paradigm: the withdrawal of a large portion of citizens for political action makes politics not more but less stable and less moderate because those who are engaged tend to become factional as proxies of specific socio-economic aggregations, to be less ready to compromise and mediate and more exposed to the risk of radicalizing their positions. The missing factor in this opposite track is the conflicting force of opposite interests. Part of the problem resides, as Müller notices, in a large number of citizens giving up to the ballot booth and keeping with themselves the emotions or claims or discontent that would inject reasons for political conflicts. Those who abstain seem to be precisely those who do not rely upon strong social links and associations, those who have a condition of "cumulative disadvantage."[6] We are thus faced with an exemplary case of inequality in the opportunity to exercise political influence, to have representation as advocacy, and in effect to feel represented at the political level. The effect may be destabilizing, though not because the self-excluded from the political game revolt (not until now) but because those who are politically

[6] "This process, which began for those leaving high school and entering the labor force after the early 1970s—the peak of working-class wages, and the beginning of the end of the "blue-collar aristocracy"—worsened over time, and caused, or at least was accompanied by, other changes in society that made life more difficult for less educated people, not only in their employment opportunities but also in their marriages, and in the lives of and prospects for their children. Traditional structures of social and economic support slowly weakened; no longer was it possible for a man to follow his father and grandfather into a manufacturing job, or to join the union and start on the union ladder of wages. Marriage was no longer the only socially acceptable way to form intimate partnerships, or to rear children. People moved away from the security of legacy religions or the churches of their parents and grandparents, toward churches that emphasized seeking an identity, or replaced membership with the search for connection or economic success" (Case and Deaton, 2017, pp. 429-30).

active are more and more capable of favoring their specific and sectarian (factional) interests. This inequality in relying upon social intermediary bodies should be seen as a source of vulnerability of democracies. This brings us to the line of thought represented by Tocqueville: in democracy, social (not just political) intermediation functions not so much as a limitation of power as an empowerment. If the multitude remains in a condition of associational disaggregation, it is the power of the citizenry that suffers.

Conclusion:

There is a broad consensus in the discipline on the decline of political parties and professional journalism as indications of a paradigm shift in representative democracy, from pluralistic to holistic, from conflicting interaction to polarized litigiousness, from pluralistic to sectarian, with implications for system stability and respect for civil rights. Originally, "intermediate bodies" (Montesquieu's tradition) were thought of as moderators of sovereign power and actually of equality, but they were also thought of as empowerment of equal individual citizens (Tocqueville). Today, social intermediary bodies seem to acquire a new and perhaps more radical meaning, that of being essential conditions of democracy. Yet, it is not entirely correct to think that social intermediate bodies have eroded or disappeared; it would be more correct to say that they do not involve or pertain to all citizens but some more than others. The more protected parts of society certainly have their social intermediary bodies of reference strong and visible, while the weaker or less protected parts have none or less effective ones. We could say that the presence of social intermediary bodies can be used as an indication of the extent to which citizens enjoy effective political equality, i.e., the power of opinion-formation and to influence those who hold the decision-making process.

If this reading makes sense, then it seems clear that worrying about the political intermediate bodies (parties and media) to look for how we can reactivate them in forms consonant with democratic principles, thus hoping to reactivate citizenship, is not enough. In fact, it is not from these political intermediary bodies that the problem starts, but from the "social question" (a term that has almost disappeared from political theory); it would be desirable for us to concern ourselves with fostering social associationism in the weaker parts of society, for example, among precarious workers or the unemployed or the poor (which are now substantial

parts of society). Finally, paying attention to the relationship between social and political intermediary bodies, we can assess how much citizens can count in the process of forming opinions and political choices. The inequality of representative social power among citizens highlights a society that is not integrated but divided into two: that of associated citizens and that of disassociated citizens, with significant inequality in the power to influence politics. This stratified society is about as far from political democracy as one can get.

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