CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

NATION-BUILDING AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

Much of what we know about “nation-building” derives from the historical experiences of Europe and America. For example, when the United States became a republic at the end of the 18th century it combined at least some of the institutions of modern communication, in particular the press and eventually political parties, with communal representation in government by the notables of the community, in some ways the best of both modern and traditional communal politics. However at this moment in history such scholars as Colin Crouch, particularly in his book *Post-Democracy* (Crouch 2004) complain that excessive corporate influence and its effect on globalization, the weakening of political parties, and excessive bureaucratization and/or excessive outsourcing of government functions all weaken communal representation in government and what replaces it is too often the “virtual reality” of the mass media producing glib entertainment posing as political discussion. Whether things are as bad as Prof. Crouch makes them out to be, the reader will have to decide.

To return to a comparison of America and Europe, Europe has government producing social order in areas which the mass of people want, and in areas which only elites want, reflecting their self-serving interests, paternalism, and intellectual fads. America is also somewhat class-ridden and elitist, though not yet at the European level, and because of the bias of its cultural inheritance government is less likely to intrude to produce social order, even of the kind the mass of people if given a choice would want. Instead the mass of people, and elites, are given more leeway to produce social order on their own, and if this social order (including cultural and moral values) disappears, it is not easy to replace it except through an accumulation of individual decisions, or through communal revival processes that do occur but slowly and in a hit or miss fashion.

In a manner of speaking, a relative lack of social order in the US compared to more authoritarian societies increases the opportunity for individual as well as local and communal decision-making (a traditional rationale for political freedom), and creates jobs and profits for
economic elites in those areas of life where the mass of people would prefer economies of scale, but they won't get it. They also won't get through government monitoring control of the free rider problem that complicates issues of public morality. Instead economic elites prefer to be paid to fill in all these gaps. American cultural values facilitate this taking to an extreme what are traditional American values of acting on individual self-interest, and a relatively weak tradition of aristocratic paternalism by elites, all of which are taken for granted as part of present-day American culture.

As a matter of fact, the pursuit of honor, and public morality in general, is increasingly not easily enforced in all modern societies, since this requires enforcing general attitudes and motivations toward the community. Instead what is increasingly enforced are bureaucratic roles and their relevant rules, including the role of law-abiding citizen with its relevant rules. The enforcement of bureaucratic rules can be more efficient for producing social order or even social morality than reliance on public spirited feelings by individuals or organizations, but not always.

Especially in America, it is thought nowadays that public morality can be a side-effect of both the pride that comes from individual accomplishment and the desire by individuals for a meaningful life, but this is different from the original religious source of morality in American culture, still strong at the time of the American Revolution, where communal conformity was actively impressed on the population. The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought (Shain 1996) writes about the early origins of American political morality.

To now discuss some of the prerequisites for political democracy from a historical standpoint, first of all it should be remembered that political democracy does not automatically require social democracy and vice versa, though it is of course possible to have both. Many societies that are social democracies in terms of equality of wealth and social status being rather widespread have very little formal government to begin with. This situation is commonly found among tribal societies. Sometimes such societies develop hereditary leadership not so much because government is so important to them, but because it isn’t and hereditary leadership, as long as the leaders accept advice from community elders and don’t themselves become tyrannical, is considered preferable to the complexities of politics and competition for positions of leadership.