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HUMAN PROSPERITY AND THE RETURN OF THE INDIVIDUAL ALTERNATIVE

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Human Prosperity and the Return of the Individual Alternative

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Abstract

Human prosperity is today presented as the concept that seeks to redefine the convictions that tie down our idea of progress. This opens up the question of whether it is nothing more than a simple conceptual redefinition, the results of which we find suspicious, or whether it is a challenge that proposes a redefinition of the hegemonic archetypes that guided the direction of the Latin American countries in their attempts to achieve modernity.

This dilemma is reflected in the alternative that, with a view to development of the region, points to a reconciliation between the actions of States and the participation of the individual, whose action, while motivated by need, exclusion, and the struggle against social determinism, is also motivated by the need to achieve freedom and creativity that on the whole are in opposition to all forms of dependency. We must recall that modernity is not the work of a few technocrats, modernizers, or bureaucrats who use it to impose their power, but rather represents the conjunction of efforts occurring between the State and the individual.

Introduction

The attempts made by the countries of Latin America during the 20th century to achieve progress – industrialization, growth, development, and inclusion – were based on the idea that more modernist expansion meant the submission of the individual to the proposed order.

The alternative provided by human prosperity is an approach to the individual as agent, substituting for the lost role of the State as the benefactor of social transformation and economic ascent.

This seems possible, basically, because this segregation of the individual, while it has excluded him from participating in political life, economic growth, the use of technologies, education, etc., currently proposes the need to seek the individual's inclusion as part of the redirection of the State, thus converging in the need to seek correspondence between action by the individual and attempts made by the State to seek an increasingly closer approach to modernity.

Human Prosperity and the Return of the Individual Alternative

Human prosperity is presented today as the concept that seeks to redefine the convictions that pin down our idea of progress. It is one more concept, added to the attempts made by the countries of Latin America to achieve modernity in the context of progress, which throughout the 20th century were reflected in efforts toward industrialization, growth, development, and now in a more “modern” way, inclusion, almost always resulting in industrial dependency, fragile and indebted economies, inequitable distribution of wealth, inability to provide access to decent employment, lack of access and equity in educational and health services.

This opens up the question of whether this new attempt is nothing more than a simple conceptual redefinition, the results of which we find suspicious, or whether it is a challenge that proposes a

redefinition of the hegemonic archetypes that guided the direction of the Latin American countries. As proposed, it involves an alternative which will be defined to the extent that States understand this dimension as a necessary transformation advocating for the return of the individual.

While politics have exercised supreme control over the social and economic life of the countries of the region, States have maintained that an increasingly closer approach to the idea of modernity involved the submission of the individual to the proposed order. This meant that they became responsible for everything: economic growth, education, health, basic services (Varela, 2001), as part of a project that commits to the submission of the subject – individual, culture, or ethnic group – and the replacement of any vestige of individuality in the name of social integration (Touraine, 2000a).

In contrast, the current context calls on States to provide the alternative of returning to the individual the right to participate in the common enterprise, and this return can and should be part of the attempts that rest on human prosperity. First, because prosperity is a concept that is not foreign to us – at least on this side of the planet – it is linked to the good wishes that most people exchange with a relative, friend, neighbor or colleague, which means the term is used familiarly, with a connotation that defines it through an approach to the subject as agent, replacing the definition that in the name of rationality required States and elites to act as benefactors of social transformation and economic ascent.

...they wanted to impose on us the idea that we had to renounce the concept of the individual in order to make science triumph, that we needed to smother emotion and imagination to liberate reason, and we needed to squash the social categories identified with passion, women, children,

workers, and colonized peoples, under the yoke of the capitalist elite identified with rationality. (Touraine, 2000a)

Later, because this necessity is reinforced by a reality that shows us a system of world trade established outside the social models pursued by States, a type of anonymous and predominantly economic global power emerges that governs the world. “Since economic globalization accelerated, since the technological revolution and the appearance of new industrial countries, what seems to govern the world and its transformations is the economic reality, while ideologies collapse and policies become more pragmatic” (Touraine, 2000b). Above and beyond the obvious economic connotation, this generally affects the social and culture life of regions, but unquestionably shows that their development is tied to the actions of the individual as an agent in the form of an entrepreneur, producer, trader, indigenous person, women, young person, etc.

...the modern world is increasingly penetrated by the reference to a subject which is freedom, i.e., that postulates as the principle of good the control that the individual exercises over his actions and situation that allows him to conceive of and sense his conduct as a component of his personal life history, to conceive of himself as an actor. *The subject is the will of an individual to operate and be recognized as an actor.* (Touraine 2000a)

Finally, because this segregation of the subject, while it has excluded him from the right to participate in political life, economic growth, the use of technologies, education, etc., currently presents the need to seek his inclusion as part of the redirection of States that supposedly have learned “...that the successes of technical action should not cause us to forget the creativity of human beings,” since there was never “...a single image of modernity, but rather two images facing

each other, whose dialogue constitutes modernity: rationalization and subjectivation” (Touraine 2000a).

In terms of numbers, this exclusion indicates that within the first decade of the 21st century the region had 184 million people in a situation of extreme poverty, and 68 million indigents (ECLAC 2008). This is not surprising since “...although our region is not the poorest on the planet it is the most unequal” (Insulza, 2007). Thus, the 40% of the population located at the lower end of the distribution structure captures only 14% of total income, under circumstances where the richest 10% concentrate 36% of resources (Insulza, 2007) and, perhaps as an aftertaste of colonialism, access to health and education services is closely tied to ethnicity and place of residence (PAHO, 2007).

Ironically, it is precisely that *substantially existing* reality that demonstrates the need to return the leading role that has been stripped from the subject, but not so much as a requirement than as an authentic alternative present although unknown at least in the construction of culture and the economy.

We need not go far to confirm this. It is enough to see that in our region a high percentage of families¹ subsists within the informal economy, not escaping the characteristics typical of this type of economy: marginalized from inclusion and the use of technologies and thus closer to handcraft activities, with a group of subjects developing economic activities without legal or regulatory recognition by their countries. But ironically, this informal economy encourages the birth of innovative survival strategies (Zegarra, 2008) because it acts as a catalyst challenging individuals to develop their knowledge, abilities, and skills, which in turn opens up the most propitious route for

¹ Statistics show a percentage greater than 45%. (ECLAC, 2008).

achieving wealth, job qualification, improved productivity, development of new services, the use of new technologies, and telecommunications services, etc.

Thus, we are embroiled in the corollary of a need that points to a reconciliation between the activities of States and the participation of the individual, whose actions although motivated by need, exclusion, and the struggle against social determinism, are also motivated by the need to achieve freedom and creativity that on the whole are in opposition to all forms of dependency. We cannot forget that modernity is not the work of a few technocrats, modernizers, or bureaucrats that use it to impose their power; rather it is the work of the conjunction of efforts occurring between the State and the individual (Touraine, 2000a).

Proposing to reassert the spirit of submission of the individual, in the name of “...the effectiveness and world domination that science and technology made possible” (Touraine, 2000a); indicating that, on the contrary, we want to form a new man and women on whose activities depend the progress of society and the progressive introduction of modernity.

Conclusion:

Human prosperity must be understood as a concept that opens up the possibility of a reconciliation between the actions of States and the development of the individual, the conjunction of which would embody secular efforts to achieve economic growth, equitable distribution of wealth, access to decent employment, education, and health – in summary what, with a more modern sensibility, we now call inclusion.

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