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Organized Interests and the Prospects of a Global Democracy

Leif Lewin

Abstract: Corporatism is being reinvented in current theories about global democracy. As I see it, corporatism can be regarded as a practical way out of democracy's intensity problem: should those more involved in an issue have greater say? By the same token, corporatism can be perceived as a response to the all-affected principle: should those especially affected by a decision have more influence? In nation-states, corporatism was to a large extent dismantled during the eighties. In world politics, by contrast, NGOs are now called upon to play an important role not only for articulating intense and affected interests but also, in so doing, for realizing a global democracy. The weakness of this argument is that today's NGOs do *not* reflect the will of most people – as national organizations once managed to do – and can consequently *not* fulfill the integrative and representative function associated with this form of interest politics.

Keywords: intensity, affectedness, corporatism, global democracy

Globalization calls the fate of nation-states into question, and thereby the kind of representative government that has developed within their confines. What is coming under challenge is, more precisely, the idea of political equality on which representative government is founded – in the words of Robert Dahl “the strong principle of equality” which implies that everybody is the best judge of his or her own interests (Dahl 1989: 97-105). If we consider the variety in people's political competence, involvement and commitment when the world's *demos* are fused to create a global *demos*, is it not a rather strange idea that everybody should have an equal say? Instead, two other principles are invoked, or rather one philosophy appearing in two different versions. According to the first, the influence exerted by different citizens should be graded according to intensity: those who are more involved in a given issue

should have greater say. The twin argument is that influence should be adjusted to affectedness: individuals who are especially affected by a decision should have more influence.

These objections to equality are well-known in the history of political thought. Classic anti-democratic arguments that ordinary people do not possess necessary “maturity” or “public interest” have long been lurking under the surface of the debate on global democracy. Yet, in spite of this proximity between global democracy and the problem of equality within it, political scientists have not yet addressed these two discourses in a theoretically convincing way. Instead of trying to find a conceptual solution to the problem, *corporatism* was brought out as a practical answer. Today, the same is done again, when scholars of international politics debate how a democratized world ought to be governed. Corporatism has, so to speak, “gone global”.

This article takes the following as its aims. I begin by analyzing the principles of intensity and affectedness respectively to conclude that these two principles are not only difficult to apply but also incompatible with the democratic fundament of political equality: grading votes *is* logically a deviation from equality. I then examine how intense and affected interests once manifested in real political life. In my interpretation, corporatism provided an opportunity in nation-states for citizens to, paradoxically, comply with two incompatible doctrines: both the equality norm of parliamentary democracy and the extra-influence norm of corporatism for especially involved or affected citizens. This article ends by asking whether it’s possible to export this “solution” to world politics and whether NGOs can lead us toward a more global democracy.

Intensity

Dinner is over. Mr. and Mrs. Jones and Mr. and Mrs. Smith are having coffee. The question arises: What shall we do this evening? Play bridge? Go to the movies? Listen to some chamber music from the local FM station? Sit and chat? Each, in due course,

expresses a “preference” among these four alternatives but with this difference: Mr. and Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Smith, though each has a preference, “don’t much care.” Their preferences are “mild” or “marginal”. Not so Mr. Smith. His preference is “strong.” He is tired, couldn’t possibly get his mind on bridge, or muster the energies for going out to a movie. He has listened to chamber music all afternoon while working on an architectural problem, and couldn’t bear any more. If the group does anything other than sit and chat, he at least will do it grudgingly. He “cares enormously” which alternative is chosen (Kendall & Carey 1968: 5).

Many readers of Kendall and Carey’s question may think Mr. Smith should have his way. Especially as these authors come to ask which “choice [is] most likely to preserve good relations among the members of the group?” But “good relations” are not always the ultimate goal for political action. It is true that they generally are an asset and that “system maintenance” is often valuable. Yet the rationale for many political missions has been the opposite: to *destroy* good relations and start a revolution, or go on strike or, as far as international politics is concerned, confront neighbor states and even go to war. There is too the risk that political goals become jeopardized if “good relations” wash out other concerns by giving certain groups greater say. In the same way as the expansion of the welfare state and the equalization of incomes, for example, might have been thwarted by the resistance of the upper class had its members continued to possess a disproportionate vote, the process of decolonization would have probably been stopped had the system of racial discrimination remained among Western powers. Giving minorities a veto, or requiring a consensus, imparts a pro-status quo tilt to the political order (Rae 1975: 1270-1294). We must distinguish, in the

post-Rawlsian discourse on ethics, between decisions that favor “those who are worst off” and decisions that favor “those who have most to lose” (Strasnick 1976: 241-273).

In addition, there are a number of methodological difficulties when it comes to measuring the intensity of preferences. How do we know, for a start, that Mr. Smith is actually more intensively involved? The only thing we can observe is how he behaves. But drawing conclusions about preferences from the observation of behavior is a common methodological mistake in the social sciences (Sen 1982: 54-73). Perhaps Mr. Smith’s personality is such that he always loses his temper, while the other guests are more controlled? If so, there is a risk that theorists who favor granting influence according to intensity give special advantages to persons endowed with certain traits of character, which of course was not the intention.

A related problem concerns the possibility of abuse. If intensity is accorded special weight, it will be tempting to exaggerate the strength of one’s preferences. After all, even if I do not care very much about the matter at stake, it is better to have a weak preference satisfied than to have it thwarted. Making decisions on the basis of the intensity principle, therefore, can lead to political cheating.

And why should intensity alone be rewarded? Why not also knowledge, for example? One preference, while intense, may reflect prejudice; another may be based on scientific studies. But then if knowledge is granted an advantage, why stop there? Ought not other traits which are valuable for society (e.g. solidarity, a feeling for the common good, etc.) be put at a premium as well? Should not “ethical” preferences weigh more heavily than “antisocial” or “irrational” ones (Harsanyi 1976: 13-14)?

It is furthermore the case that preferences can be very intense, quite intense, middling, weak, insignificant and so on. What position ought we to take towards these varying levels of intensity? Levels of intensity distribute themselves along a continuous curve, to which political influence must be matched. Each upward step brings with it the risk that someone will try to scramble up the ladder without due cause – which brings me back to the question of abuse for we must also recognize that the intensity problem is different to the larger question of the protection of minorities. The latter belongs to the philosophy of rights,

ultimately founded on natural law, and it specifies human rights which are considered so important that nobody, not even a majority, may violate them. The intensity problem, by contrast, deals with the satisfaction of preferences and forms part of the philosophy of utility. “Intensity” is not a natural right of the kind that can be enumerated in a constitutional catalogue.

And what about the tepid or, as political scientists say, “apathetic” majority? As electoral researchers have shown, voters take an especially low interest in international relations, prioritizing domestic issues such as employment, welfare and economic growth and politicians are correspondingly more focused on these areas. There are, for instance, “no votes in foreign policy” (Williams 2016).

Here too we meet measurement problems. It is not only “preferences” that are expressed by the act of voting. The latter is at least as much about class solidarity, party identification, and voters’ evaluation of the traits of candidates. How a person votes does not always tell us about that person’s views on a substantive issue. Nor can we be sure that the preferences of the apathetic majority are stable. The Founding Fathers of the United States distinguished between “frivolous and fanciful” preferences on the one hand, and more deliberated preferences on the other. Individuals with frivolous preferences do not much care what decisions are made; they can very well change their mind (Madison *et al.* [1788] 1987: 122-128). What is more, if we only know the first preference of the majority of voters on a few issues, we will not be able to conclude much about their “less intense” opinions, because doing that requires that we know the rank order of their preferences on various issues. Party platforms, granted, may supply some information of that kind, but such information is brief at best. And that is something for which we can be grateful: if all of the parties ranked all of their proposals, the information at our disposal would be complex and likely incomprehensible.

Another problem we face in connection with the rank order of preferences is the well-known voters’ paradox. When voters rank various alternatives, the resulting comparisons sometimes fail the test of transitivity: if someone prefers x to y and y to z , she must also prefer x to z . But that is not always the case. In such instances we cannot know what the priorities of

the majority really are (Arrow 1963). Can we not then simply ask members of the majority what their preferences are? That is what we have opinion polls for, but their weaknesses are well-known: polls do *not* try to reflect the thinking of individuals in all its complexity; the answers depend on how we formulate the questions; there are well-known methodological problems concerning the margin of error and the percentage of answers. Opinion polls are just *studies*, which in principle is something different from how voters will behave at the polls (Mendelsohn & Brent 2001).

However, all these problems associated with intense minorities and apathetic majorities must not lead us to *deny* the intensity problem. There are indeed great variations in people's involvement in different issues. But we seldom know how to handle this variation or how to measure it. The fact that people's feelings about political questions differ in strength is certainly real, but it is also elusive. My own view on this matter coincides with that expressed by Robert Dahl: that an analysis of the matter "strongly suggests, although it does not prove, that no solution to the intensity problem through constitutional or procedural rules is attainable" (Dahl 1956: 119).

Affectedness

The point of departure for the idea that influence should be graded according to how affected an individual is by a decision is another oft-cited remark by Robert Dahl (Dahl 1970:67).¹ He found reason to ask whether there was after all not some wisdom in the comment of a friend in Latin America who said that his people should be allowed to participate in US elections, for what happened in the politics of the US was bound to have profound consequences for his country. "Do not dismiss his jest as an absurdity", Dahl concluded. "In a world where we all have a joint interest in survival, the real absurdity is the absence of any system of government where that joint interest is effectively represented."

However, Dahl recognized several methodological problems with representation according to affectedness, just as he did with representation according to intensity. First, the set of people affected varies from one decision to another. Some are affected by decisions about schools, others by decisions about urban redevelopment. For each different set of

people affected, there would have to be different decision-making units. How could anyone mobilize enough time and energy to participate in all of these units? Second, people are by no means affected equally. Should those who are more affected have a greater say? That touches the problem already discussed – of how to handle intensity. Third, there is a difference between having one's interests affected and having a preference about something. Take a liberal East Coast professor who thinks the right of black southerners to vote in elections should be safeguarded. Is that a *preference*? Certainly it is. But are the professor's *interests* affected? Hardly. The professor may also have a preference regarding social conditions for peasant villagers in Vietnam or India; but again, his interests are not affected. So "the Principle of Affected Interests, which at first glance looked as bright and clear as Sirius on a winter's night, has turned out to be a diffuse galaxy of uncountable possibilities" (Dahl 1970: 64-67).

But again, the problem at hand here – that of affected interests – does indeed exist. Should not Danes, for example, be given a say in decisions regarding a nuclear-power plant in the far south of Sweden, which is close to Denmark? Ought not countries situated on the lower course of a river be granted influence over the discharge of effluents in countries located upstream? Should nations facing the same sea not be empowered to influence the environmental policies followed by their maritime neighbors?

One proposed solution to this problem is "reciprocal representation" (Schmitter 1997): states could agree to accord each other seats in their respective national legislatures. The number of seats – perhaps two or three – could vary, depending on the total number of deputies in each legislature, the degree of interdependence perceived by the populations of the countries affected by an international issue, and so forth. These representatives would have the same salaries, services and perquisites as the ordinary members of the host country's parliament. They would have the right to speak on the floor, they would serve on committees (except those dealing with sensitive security matters), and they would receive information on drafts and hearings just like "native" members of the legislature in question. While neighboring states are most likely to participate in such arrangements, "nothing would

preclude politics as far away as the United States and Japan or the United States and the European Community from exchanging representatives”.

Another solution to the problem of international affectedness comes in the form of “fuzzy citizenship” (Koenig-Archibugi 2009). As things now stand, people who are affected by decisions may be without influence over them (i.e. underinclusiveness). An equally problematic situation arises when individuals who are not affected by a decision are allowed to take part in making it (i.e. overinclusiveness). What is more, citizens may be affected only partly by decisions in other countries, and to varying degrees on different issues. Affectedness is also often asymmetrical: the citizens of Nicaragua, for example, are affected more heavily by policies of the US government than American citizens are by policies of the Nicaraguan government. The form of governance must be adequately designed to accommodate such variations. An excessive focus on territorial authority serves to exacerbate the problem of overinclusiveness, because it allows affected parties a say on any question rather than on questions relating to specific areas. As for underinclusiveness, extraterritorial entitlements are necessary in order to reduce it, because decisions by a state-like authority may significantly affect not only the residents of the territory in question, but also people elsewhere. In a properly designed system, the degree of political rights will vary. Fuzzy citizenship allows for full citizenship, no citizenship, and various degrees of citizenship. It aims at democratizing existing decision-making units rather than creating a wholly new global decision-making unit.

Taking affectedness into account can also help explain the policies that nations pursue. In spite of the fact that free trade is a superior welfare-improving policy, trade protection is often practiced. An important factor explaining this phenomenon is “the competitive position of affected economic sectors in global markets”. Protectionism is generally backed by producers who are globally uncompetitive; free trade by producers who are globally competitive (Moravcsik 2010: 4).

The decisive weakness of the proposal to grade influence according to affectedness is that it is unclear how the relevant group of citizens is to be delineated. Imagine a democratization of the old feudal order, Robert Goodin writes (Goodin 2007: 40-68). The

question here is whether commoners alone should be enfranchised, or if nobles ought to have a say as well. If the latter are excluded, their interests will certainly be affected. If nobles are included, however, their interests will *not* be affected, because they will have (Goodin stipulates) sufficient voting power to block the seizure of their lands. Or imagine a referendum in the United Kingdom on whether the UK is to transfer five percent of its GDP as restitution to its former African colonies. Should citizens of the former African colonies be allowed to vote in that referendum? Their interests will certainly be affected. Or take a decision about schools. Parents might seem especially affected. But so on second thought are many other groups: employers, retired people, university representatives – all are dependent on what kind of education children get as preparation for their future activities. Instead, then, of singling out a *special* group entitled to extra influence, the affectedness rule points to *universality*. Or in Goodin's words: the principle of affectedness means "giving virtually everyone everywhere a vote on virtually everything decided anywhere" On closer examination, influence according to affectedness leads us to recommend a power distribution that accords the same influence to everybody, that is to the very principle of political equality that the affectedness principle was supposed to replace.

The practical solution: corporatism

Obviously, we cannot structure the parliamentary channel in such a way as to satisfy everyone. There is, however, a practical solution to the intensity/affectedness problem: we can open up another channel for citizen influence over political decisions – a corporate channel. A two-channel system makes the political process less predictable than it tends to be if just conventional votes are counted. This uncertainty is a precondition for the continued cohesion of the system, because it offers minority groups a reasonable chance of getting their proposals through. Such groups can continue to hope, so they do not immediately give up. In a system with both universal suffrage and freedom of association, rational individuals have reason to remain loyal to the system and to hope for the best, even if they find themselves in a parliamentary minority. Consider, for example, those who strongly favor subventions to homeowners, or who deeply oppose pornography and seek its prohibition. It may be that

neither group sees any prospect for gaining a parliamentary majority for its proposal, but both can hope to influence policy through pressure exerted by the Homeowners' Association or by the People's Organization against Pornography. Such groups may be discontent yet remain confident.

Corporatism set its stamp on the development of the democratic welfare state during the twentieth century (Berger 1981; Cox & Sullivan 1988; Wiarda 1996; Gregg 2007). Society was reshaped through a combination of parliamentary decisions and corporatist agreements. Contrary to expectations, the labor movement was not able to achieve a political majority in most European countries. It was able, however, to wield additional influence through the pressure exerted by trade unions and other organizations. The same was true of business. Its ideas were seldom represented in parliament on a majority basis, but its interest organizations played an important political role. Both the state and the organizations gained from this arrangement. The state could take satisfaction in the fact that social peace was largely maintained and that decisions were implemented with competence and loyalty. The organizations, to their gratification, saw specific proposals of theirs being eventually accepted, in one way or another. Society held together because corporatism functioned as a safety valve for strongly committed minorities

“Corporatism,” as Phillippe Schmitter points out in his definitions (which are as famous as they are detailed), differs from “pluralism.” The former is a system of interest representation in which organizations are united

into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports.

Pluralism, on the other hand, refers to a system where organizations appear in

an unspecified number of multiple, voluntary, competitive, nonhierarchically ordered and self-determined (as to type or scope of interest) categories which are not specially licensed, recognized, subsidized, created or otherwise controlled in leadership selection or interest articulation by the state and which do not exercise a monopoly of representational activity within their respective categories.

Under corporatism, in other words, organizations are coordinated and integrated into the political system. Under pluralism, they are independent both of the state and of each other (Schmitter 1974).

In her discussion of how to design a democratic global order, Marina Ottaway, a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, takes up the gauntlet and confronts the problem of intense and affected interests. As she sees the matter, *voice* can complement *vote* within world politics in the same way it has within domestic politics. *Corporatism Goes Global!* she proclaims in the title of a widely noted article:

Corporatism was invented in the 1920's as a response to the problem of how to incorporate into the political system new political actors that could not be eliminated or ignored but that were also threatening to the political status quo. It was a response to the growth of a strong labor movement, which, together with the socialist and communist parties to which it was affiliated, had the potential to subvert the existing economic and political system. Corporatism in its authoritarian version sought to eliminate independent unions and socialist parties altogether. In its liberal version, corporatism sought to promote social peace by giving the labor movement a role in governance, but also by co-

opting its leadership and diluting its influence through the formation of tripartite councils (Ottaway 2001:270).

Today, Ottaway declares, “global corporatism is being reinvented ... for the same reason.” Established institutions are being challenged by NGOs, particularly those that have formed transnational networks which have proven skillful in pushing new agendas and stopping or delaying projects of which they disapprove. Global corporatism differs from the old domestic variant in that NGOs are highly decentralized and based on networks, rather than being centralized and hierarchical as old-fashioned socialist movements were. But like the socialist movement, NGO networks claim to represent the true voice of the people, “civil society” in the current terminology, against those of indifferent or repressive governing institutions and greedy private businesses.

The number of NGOs has grown greatly. Whereas 134 NGOs attended the Stockholm Environmental Conference in 1972, and as many as 1,100 showed up at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, today no fewer than 4,360 NGOs have consultative status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In the EU, the number of participating organizations has increased as much: in September 2015, they came to 4,158. Around 30,000 individual lobbyists are reported to be active in Brussels.

So the old corporatist game – in which organizational influence is exchanged for societal stability – is being played again, now at the global level (Ottaway 2001: 265-292).

Ottaway’s view is shared by many prominent scholars and politicians. In current world politics there is a general trend for international organizations to try to strengthen their democratic legitimacy by cooperating with NGOs; the UN is a good example (Thérien & Bélanger Dumontier 2009). Former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has argued that NGOs are “a basic form of popular representation in the present-day world” and that accordingly their “representation in international relations is, in a way, a guarantee of the political legitimacy of those international organizations” (Krut 1997:18). Kofi Annan regarded NGOs as “indispensable partners” contributing to “better and more legitimate decisions” (Paul 1999). Ban Ki-moon has underlined that “without the participation of non-

governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups, no initiative, however, visionary, can be fully achieved” (www.un.org 2016).

In political science, the most elaborate argument for the idea that global democracy can be achieved via NGOs has been presented by Terry Macdonald, the Australian specialist in international politics. Her point of departure is that democratic citizenship should not be bound to territory. For a global “stakeholder,” nationality is not so important. Citizens of the future are ideologically driven: rather than being Americans or Brazilians or Germans, they are environmentalists or feminists or defenders of freedom of speech. Cutting the ties with territory is a dramatic step as territory has always been the bedrock of representative democracy. Still, it is possible that Macdonald is right – that this really is the future for a *global* democracy. It is important to underline just how dramatic Macdonald’s step is. Both scholars and politicians, after all, have always underestimated the strength of nationalism. Three American presidents – Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon – famously did so in the case of Vietnam; and President Gorbachev of the Soviet Union did so in connection with the consequences of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. In a globalized world, Macdonald avers, the nation-state with its old-fashioned method for ensuring accountability through representative democracy is increasingly “obsolete.”

What she finds particularly worrying is the inability of representative democracy “to take account of the differing intensity of individuals’ preferences” (Macdonald 2008:131) and the propensity of “closed democratic societies” [that is nation-states] to allocate the entitlement of political participation “to all individuals equally” instead of, as she recommends, according participatory entitlements to individuals in relations “to those forms of power that impact in problematic ways upon their autonomy” (Macdonald 2008:41).

Macdonald proposes that a global democracy should be constituted through boundaries of a very different kind than national borders and her choice is the NGOs or, in her vocabulary, a “stakeholder model of democracy”, or even more precisely – to underline the varying pattern in citizens’ relations to politics – a “multi-stakeholder model of democracy”:

The fact that the multi-stakeholder model represents individuals by issue-area rather than by territorial locations or nationality ensures that it is better equipped than the nation-state model to accommodate the empirical reality of territorially dispersed interests within global society (Macdonald 2008:158).

Macdonald would like to replace traditional electoral accountability with another system. “Elections are not intrinsically valuable”, she claims. Instead she looks for non-electoral mechanisms for democratic accountability. One reason is “that the intensity of the autonomy-constraining interests that members of their stakeholder communities possess is usually not uniform across individuals”. What is more: the demands of free and fair elections would be impractical to establish within the territorially and politically dispersed constituencies of many NGOs. Instead of centralized sanctions of the sort afforded by lost elections within nation-states she proposes a less transparent disempowerment process implying “a successive withdrawal of support” – economic, moral – from the public, which are mechanisms for disabling public political agents’ capacity to continue exercising public power (Macdonald 2008:164, 185-186, 192).

There is one big problem with Macdonald’s model: NGOs are *not* representative for ordinary people. They do *not* reflect the will of the world’s population – as, oddly enough, both Macdonald herself and Ottaway admit elsewhere in their works (Ottaway 2001:11; Macdonald 2008:221). Nor do NGOs meet democratic standards of accountability.

Without elections, the disempowerment process will never live up to democratic criteria for citizens’ right to choose and *dismiss* their leaders. Daniele Archibugi, a leading theorist of global democracy, has, for example, ventured the restrained judgement that even if the NGOs grow in terms of numbers and power they will always be less representative than traditional forms of political representation and even if they will bridge some aspect of the democratic deficit they will in fact also generate new problems (Archibugi 2008:82-83).

Among the NGOs, business is heavily overrepresented. An analysis of the EU some years back, for example, showed that business accounted for 66 percent of the

organizations seeking to influence the EU. Public-interest groups accounted for 20 percent, professional groups for 11 percent, trade unions for 3 percent and public-sector bodies for 1 percent. The typical pressure group interacting with a global institution, such as the UN or the EU, is *not* a classical non-profit organization (even if such can also be found) fighting for health, disarmament, the environment, gender equality or freedom of speech. Instead it is a law firm or other professional lobby hired by big business to propose made-to-order policies on its behalf. Nor are the leaders of the NGOs always chosen or dismissed in a transparent way; these organizations suffer from serious accountability problems. Many registered NGOs are more similar to business firms than to democratic institutions; they speak more for narrow, owner interests than for the broader sector of society they pretend to represent; their purpose is more often to influence a certain proposal than to influence a general policy; there is seldom one that can be observed using a popular feedback mechanism to reflect on their actions such as is commonly seen in popular movements or political parties (Thérien & Bélanger Dumontier 2009:355-377; McCormik [2011] 2015; UN 2015; *The Guardian* 2015; Civitas 2015). By the definition stated above, global corporatism functions more as “pluralism” than as “corporatism”: the organizations in question are neither coordinated among themselves nor integrated into the political system; rather, they are competitive, independent and nonhierarchically ordered.

It is hard to see, then, how such organizations can live up to corporatist expectations, unless they abandon the role of lobbies altogether and transform themselves into people’s movements. This would require mobilizing the world’s silent majority – the billions in Asia, Africa and Latin America – and articulating their dreams and demands which would of course be an enormous challenge.

But could that not happen, after all? Is that not what Ottaway and Macdonald have in mind? Utopia is certainly worthy of our respect. Utopia is, as E. H. Carr once taught us, necessary for political scientists, for realism has its limits; realism, Carr develops, excludes four things essential for political theory: a finite goal, an emotional appeal, a right of moral judgement and a ground for action. “Any sound political thought”, Carr concluded, “must be based on elements of both utopia and reality” (Carr [1939] 2001:84 and 87). Stating that the

NGOs could lead us towards a global democracy if only they were representative and accountable seems to me to be unrealistic, at least in the foreseeable future. It would be something like saying that cars would solve the problem of how we could get to Mars if only they were super-power rockets.

Conclusion

Global democracy, in the sense of a supranational order, is a remote utopia but, as said, that does not mean that it never will be realized. Democratization is a non-linear and sluggish process for which it is necessary to take a long view (Saward 2011; Lewin 2012). Nobody denies the process of *economic* globalization since 1945 but its *political* equivalent is more questionable. However, on closer examination such phenomena as the International Criminal Court as an embryo to a common international law (even if fragile), the European Union as a step towards the formation of one Europe (albeit non-transparent) and the dramatically rising number of UN Chapter VII-resolutions (except that the great powers keep their veto) might be seen as signs of such a development beyond the nation-state in fact already begun.

Is corporatism, built on NGOs, a way towards the same goal?

My thesis is that it is not. History repeats itself, Marx says, first as tragedy and secondly as farce. To say that this is exactly what characterizes the current debate on “corporatism going global” would perhaps be somewhat of an exaggeration but there is really a world of difference between the old, domestic corporatism and today’s interest representation on the international scene. Present NGOs are *not* representative or accountable and the old corporatist experiment is consequently *not* repeated on the global scene. Contrary to democratic ideals the effect is rather to strengthen the voice of those who are already strong.

Democracy within a new world order cannot be built on special interests – just as it could not be founded on special interests within the nation-states. Democracy, if it is to deserve its name, should have its basis in political equality between citizens. It is true that interest representation can complement the parliamentary representation in order to make the system coherent and legitimate according to the corporatist model – but the prerequisite is that

the organizations function as tools for ordinary people. If we ever will see a global democracy, it should mean a regime where all citizens have the same right to political influence regardless of how involved or affected they are by the decisions taken in common.

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Notes

It is worth noting that all three sources mentioned in this article for citizens' legitimate influence – political equality, intensity and affectedness – originated with Dahl.