

## **SOCIAL INCLUSION/EXCLUSION**

What kind of inclusion, for whom and on what terms.

The performance of Labor's social inclusion initiative will be judged not only on whether they deliver social inclusion, but what kind of inclusion they deliver, for whom, and on what terms. The writer welcomes the initiative of the new state government, but takes caution as to the value as an analytical concept. The concept is highly variable in meaning and its political utility is largely dependent on the different paradigms or modes of thinking about society.

Inclusion is characterized by a society's widely shared social experience and active participation, by a broad equality of opportunities and life chances for individuals and by the achievement of a basic level of well-being for all citizens (Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Anchor Books 2000)

The notion of social exclusion and its identification with policy and program development has become part of mainstream thinking throughout most parts of Europe, as long-term unemployment and new levels of poverty become common features of the industrialised world.

Social exclusion is identified throughout the literature as a broader concept than poverty as it identifies with a vast array of processes rather than being seen as an outcome. The concept reflects the importance of participating in all aspects of the particular society, and focuses on both the individual and the institutions that enable and constrain social and economic participation. In particular, it identifies as a multi-dimensional concept, and introduces aspects of social and economic participation and citizenship into its conceptualisation.

However, a particularly important critique of the concept draws attention to the boundaries constructed around the notion of inclusion and exclusion, focusing on

margins, and creating a fictitious comfortable homogenous group with very little difference or conflicts within those who are included, and therefore its inability to confront the broader understandings of inequality within a society.

Social exclusion is also highly variable in meaning, notably because it is largely dependent on the different paradigms or theoretical frameworks developed about society.

The term social exclusion was originally used in France in the 1970s to refer to various categories of people labelled 'social problems' who were unprotected by social insurance. France was the first country in Europe to institute a global approach based on the concept of exclusion. Since the late 1980s, the European Commission has embraced the concept. In Britain there has been a clear continuity between the tradition of poverty, relative deprivation and social exclusion. The Blair Labor government set up a cross-departmental Social Exclusion Unit to address issues across many regions of the United Kingdom. The use of the notion of social exclusion is also to some extent in the USA with the label of the 'underclass'. It is also becoming increasingly important in the social development debate in the non-industrialised world. In Australia, the use of the concept of social exclusion draws on that as adopted by the USA and the more conservative elements of the UK. The terms that are identified with the Federal Government are 'the disadvantaged', 'welfare dependency' and the policy prescriptions woven around 'mutual obligation' and 'social participation'.

Exclusion varies in meaning according to the particular cultural context, and the different paradigms or modes of thinking about society transforming it into an essentially contested concept. As a multi-dimensional concept it does have broad political, moral and social appeal. This has led many writers to question its value as an analytical concept. Two writers who have written extensively and explored the contested meanings of social exclusion are Silver (1994) and Levitas (1998). The paradigms or theoretical frameworks identified attribute exclusion to different causes, and therefore grounded in different political philosophies. Each provides an explanation of multiple forms of social disadvantage in respect to the economic, social and political understandings of society.

Silver traces the evolution of the concept and focuses particular attention on European social and political thought. Levitas focuses on Britain and in particular Blair's New Labour and the competing discourses that dominate their ongoing development of social policy.

### **Silver**

Silver<sup>1</sup> introduces three paradigms of social exclusion; each grounded in a different conception of integration and citizenship. Each paradigm attributes exclusion to a different cause, different political philosophies of republicanism, liberalism and social democracy, different policy implications, and thus theories of poverty, inequality and citizenship. The solidarity paradigm is founded in French ideas about social solidarity. Specialization paradigm is dominant in the US, and perhaps the UK where exclusion is tied to notions of discrimination. Monopoly paradigm is dominant in Western Europe, in which exclusion is associated with group monopoly formation. These three paradigms are ideal types, and exclusion has different causes and meanings in each.

Solidarity refers to distinctly social relations, in contrast to political or market relations, and is seen as the 'social bond' that ties individuals to the larger society. The state and its citizens have a responsibility to maintain these 'social bonds' and link into the dominant culture. Solidarity sees exclusion as a breaking of the social tie, a failure of the relationship between the society and the individual. Implicitly there is a core of shared values and rights, within a 'moral community', around which the social order is constructed. A variety of institutions provide the mechanisms for integrating individuals in society, and exclusion reflects their failure and a possible danger to the social body. This model provides the underpinnings of the Republican notion of the French State.

Specialization is part of the liberal individualism philosophy, which underlies new-classical economics, political pluralism and public choice theories. Societies are composed of individuals with diverse interests and capability, and the structure of society is built around a division of labour and exchange in both economic and social spheres. The social order is seen as networks of voluntary exchanges, and citizenship is based on

contractual exchanges of rights and obligations. Exclusion occurs when the capacity of individuals and groups to engage freely in these exchanges is impeded. This may be a consequence of government action or discriminatory practises. Markets are the key to social improvements and they work best when not constrained by governments. The solution to exclusion within this paradigm is to create jobs by lowering wages and eliminating rigid employment regulations.

Monopoly is influential on the European Left, draws on Weber and Marx and sees exclusion as a consequence of group monopoly. The rules determining access to the more privileged groups also determine who is excluded. The identity of the excluded is thus socially constructed. In this perspective, an extension of citizenship rights to the excluded is seen as combating exclusion.

These three paradigms by no means exhaust the different ways in which social integration can be conceptualised and serve a variety of political purposes.

### **Levitas**

Levitas's<sup>2</sup> analysis of social exclusion and new Labour in Britain partly mirrors Silver's three paradigms. A redistributive discourse (RED) with the primary concern of poverty; a moral underclass discourse (MUD) which has a very moralistic and behavioural focus, identifying the delinquent behaviour of those seen as excluded; and, a social integrationist discourse (SID) focusing on paid work. To oversimplify:

RED, SID and MUD differ in what the excluded are seen as lacking. In RED they have no money, in SID they have no work, in MUD they have no morals. (Levitas 1998:7).

The RED *redistributive discourse* on social exclusion is embedded in the social democratic tradition. The origins of RED discourse are to be found in a major 1979 study of poverty and links with exclusion and social participation. Social exclusion was cast as the 'antithesis of citizenship'.

The MUD *moral underclass discourse* is rooted in neo-conservatism. Levitas describes this discourse as equating social exclusion with the development of an ‘underclass’. This form of discourse invariably highlights the pathology of the poor, the creation of ‘pathological communities’ and a culture of ‘dependency’. The policy implications are “not the extension of citizenship rights, but their greater conditionality, reduction, or removal” (Levitas 1998:18).

SID *social integrationist discourse* represents European influences and social exclusion understood as the “break down of the structural, cultural and moral ties, which bind the individual to society” (Levitas 1998:21). The British SID discourse of exclusion however, is far more narrowly interpreted within documents and policy instruments than Silver’s solidarity paradigm.

Silvers attention to European social thought and Levitas's analysis of the social exclusion discourse in Blair’s Britain demonstrates the flexibility of the social exclusion concept and most certainly its contested nature. Levitas argues that while the concept is lacking in ‘analytical clarity’ the very nature of its flexibility makes it extremely powerful. The language and concept is seductive as it can comfortably sit across a range of political actors and policy makers, and almost unnoticed mobilise a shift in policy outcome.

A case in point for Australia is that the current Federal government would clearly identify with a neo-liberal stand, as policy is directed towards extensions of rights conditional on individuals changing their behaviour with individual obligations, work tests and job readiness. Most definitely, for Australia, a SID and MUD act with specialization on the side.

Labor in South Australia is certainly expressing the need and desire for government to work in partnership with communities in order to create a more inclusive society. A society where we are all sharing in the good health and wealth of South Australia. What is needed is to keep sharp our analytical tools to check on the actions of the social inclusion initiative, what kind of inclusion they deliver, for whom and on what terms.

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<sup>1</sup> Silver, H. 1994. *Social exclusion and social solidarity: three paradigms*, International Labour Review, vol. 133, no.6, pp. 531-577

<sup>2</sup> Levitas, R. 1998. *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and the New Labour*, Macmillan, London.