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COMMENTS TO JONES

Professor Jones begins by pointing out how misleading it may be to restrict the investigation of the origins of our political concepts to what Koselleck called the '*Sattelzeit*'. And his essay admirably makes clear what we may miss if we commit this mistake. For he convincingly demonstrates the profundity and the originality of the discussion of the notion of political representation in late nineteenth century France. Moreover, Professor Jones is surely right when arguing that the political realities of the late nineteenth century were substantially different from those of the France of Sieyès and Roederer and that therefore decisive adaptations of the concepts of representation were inevitable. He thus writes: 'but what happens to the classical concept of representation in a world of direct and quasi-plebiscitary elections and organized political parties?'

However, after having read Professor Jones's erudite and penetrating essay one will have to conclude that this most sensible and urgent question is never really addressed by the participants in the discussions investigated by him. The role of political parties in the mechanisms of representation was never really recognized by the authors whose opinions he so competently expounds in his paper. Admittedly, there is one (telling) exception. Discussing Laffitte Professor Jones writes about him:

> 'he [Laffitte (F.A.)] slips easily from the claim that Parliament should be an image of the country to the claim that in a parliamentary regime

government should rest with the party which represents as accurately as possible 'the average opinion of the country, not the extreme.'

And we may infer from Professor Jones's observation that Laffitte had a tendency to (mistakingly) require of the party what we may rightfully demand of Parliament (as a whole): namely to represent as adequately as possible the electorate. Apparently, Laffitte tended to confuse the task and functions of Parliament with those of the political party. And it follows 1) that Laffite was unable to discern what new elements were introduced into the mechanisms of political representation because of the coming into being of political parties and 2) that we cannot expect him to say anything of interest about how the 'classical concept of representation' should have to be adapted in order to account for 'a world of direct and quasi-plebiscitary elections and organized political parties'.

I should emphasize that this is, in fact, truly amazing. For the discussion analyzed by Professor Jones mainly focussed on whether one should adopt in France a system of proportional representation or preserve the majority system (or 'first past the pole' system, as it is called sometimes). Now, one can imagine a majority system without political parties, albeit with some difficulty. For even though the candidates at an election have no party affiliations, their views can become sufficiently well-known to their electors. But proportional representation in the absence of political parties makes no sense at all. How could the voters in the absence of political parties possibly make up their minds about probably several hundreds of candidates, having no special ties to the elector's own world, and having only some notoriety at the national level (if at all)? How could these candidates make their views sufficiently well-known to the electorate if there are only the media to expound them to the public? And what could the media do when having to fulfil the impossible task of expounding the political views of hundreds of individual candidates? The media would see themselves confronted with the unpalatable choice between either gross distortion or a ridiculous catalogue of political opinions that could only result in their reader's utter despair and exasperation. The voter would turn away from politics in disgust – and there would be nothing else that he could sensibly do. Hence, proportional representation with-

out political parties is a program for political disaster: it can only result in chaos and anarchy.

Recognizing how absolutely crucial the existence of political parties is for the system of proportional representation, it may surprise us that the authors discussed by Professor Jones were so little interested in the political party and in how the political party might complicate their debate. And this faces us with the question why these authors, by no means stupid or narrow-minded people, could fail to see such an obvious thing.

Selfevidently, it will be hard, if not impossible to state with certainty whether any such explanation is the correct one. But on the basis of Professor Jones' own exposition the following explanation does suggest itself. Professor Jones points out that there is one assumption that is being shared by both the adherents of the majority system and those of proportional representation. The assumption in question is the idea that there is, or should be an 'electoral bond' between the elector and his representative. The proponents of proportional representation accused their majoritarian opponents of acquiescing in the absence of this bond for the voters whose candidates lost in a majoritarian election. And the majoritarians riposted that this bond simply should not exist under such circumstances and that those who believed otherwise – as their proportionalist detractors – were the victims of Rousseauist delusions. For them the demand of the electoral bond ought to be satisfied only for those voters whose candidates had won the election.

So, to the extent that the debate between the majoritarians and the proportionalists made sense (and was not merely a *dialogue des sourds*), it rested on a common embrace of this notion of the electoral bond. They only differed with regard to the scope to be allotted to the notion (i.e. whether this bond should exist for *all* voters, or *only* for those voters whose candidate(s) had won the elections).

Admittedly, this notion of the electoral bond may well have its meaning – and even its *raison d'être* – when in a majoritarian system the voter choses an elector by whose arguments he had been particularly impressed. The electoral bond will then guarantee that the voter truly experiences himself as an integral part of the body politick. And at a time when the politicization of the masses had only just begun, this surely was no small prize and one had every reason to

cherish it. This certainly is why the notion of the electoral bond was a most sensible one at the time.

But the notion can no longer have any function in a party system. For then the voters primarily vote for a political party and only in the second place for a certain candidate. This is also why it is considered indecent for a representative to keep his seat in Parliament if he moves over to another party. A seat in Parliament is the party's seat and not of the representative. So the electoral bond is cut through as soon as parties take over. From the perspective of political representation the political party then has a logical priority to the person(s) representing a party in Parliament. And that automatically implies the end of the kind of electoral bond that both parties in the debate depicted by Professor Jones believed in.

But, it might now be objected, in that case the electoral bond will tie citizens no longer to candidates but to parties, while remaining, for the rest, as necessary as it had been under a previous dispensation. True, of course, but it should be recognized that this is a quite different electoral bond than the one we had before. More specifically, the debate between the proportionalists and the majoritarians would no longer makes any sense in terms of *this* electoral bond. For how could the majoritarian argue his case in terms of *this* electoral bond? The losers in an election (either majoritarian or proportionalist) are no less represented than the winners in term of this electoral bond. So either they have to give up their majoritarianism or this specific version of the electoral bond (or both). And the same is true for the proportionalists (who always argued that the voter in a majoritarian system is not represented if his candidate loses). But as long as his party is present in Parliament the voter is represented within a party system, even if his own particular candidate lost his constituency in a majoritarian election.

Having established as much, it is time to come to a conclusion. I began with the observation that late nineteenth century debate on political representation remained indifferent to the changes effected by the introduction of political parties into the political system and that this meant a severe restriction upon the practical value of the whole debate. It then became clear that both parties in the debate still believed in an electoral bond between the elector and the representative. It was this belief which, on the one hand, made their de-

bate into a meaningful one. But on the other hand it also prevented them to see, and to discuss the real challenges of their time, i.e. the new challenge posed by the political party. This may, perhaps, explain why the proportionalist could remain so strangely blind to the fact that the introduction of the political party made their case into a so much stronger one than that of their opponents. For as soon as we vote for parties and not for individual representatives, it is not longer easy to see where the advantages of a majoritarian over a proportionalist system could possibly lie. Misrepresentation will then be the rule rather than the exception – as the British social-democrats know so very well.