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REVIEW OF:

Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka (eds)

Multiculturalism and The Welfare State: Recognition and redistribution in contemporary democracies

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 405 pp.

Until a few years ago, our chosen multicultural approach allowed some cultural and religious groups to pursue an aggressive strategy against our values. The targets of this ill-conceived ‘attack’ were individual rights, equality of gender, respect for women and monogamy. We have to combat this dangerous attitude, which can destroy the fabric of our societies, and we have to work hard to build up and pursue a positive integration approach (Frattini, 2007).

While this ill-concealed Muslim-baiting statement could have been issued from within any one of the national political establishments in today’s Europe, the enunciator in the particular case before us is no one less than ‘Europe’ herself; that is, the European Commission as represented by its vice-president and Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, Franco Frattini. But as seen, the statement, which was made at the Lisbon High-level Conference on migration in 2007, does not only depict European culture as verging on the edge of being annihilated by an aggressive Muslim ‘enemy within’. It also identifies the original cause of this emergency: multiculturalism.

Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka’s edited volume *Multiculturalism and The Welfare State* takes its point of departure in precisely the growing displeasure with multiculturalism that has transpired over the recent years, particularly as seen in Europe and the U.S. But instead of directing its primary attention towards the right-liberals’ attack on multiculturalism, which more and more has come to serve as a mere pretext for the fomentation of (anti-Muslim) racism and the curtailment of various rights for

migrants, asylum seekers and/or ethnic and racial minorities, this volume tasks itself with something far more convoluted. The principal aim of the volume, then, is to examine what we may term the sincere argument against multiculturalism, as it is pursued mostly within parts of the left and left-liberal scholarly tradition. Here, and in sharp contrast to its right-liberal counterpart, multiculturalism policies (MCPs) are chiefly criticized because they are seen as working to the detriment of the welfare state. But as the editors clarify, for the most part these critics do not consider advocates of MCPs to be opponents of the welfare state; quite the contrary. Rather, their chief concern centres on what they take to be such advocates' failure to comprehend MCPs' allegedly long-term divisive and thus undermining impact on the solidarity and coalitions that make up the bedrock of the welfare state. In this sense, Banting and Kymlicka explain, the incompatibility that these left-liberal critics identify between MCPs and the welfare state, or between policies of *recognition* and policies of *redistribution*, 'is not so much a matter of competing ideals or principles, but of unintended sociological dynamics' (p. 2).

But what are these sociological dynamics, or mechanisms? Drawing from the literature produced by the critics, which the editors know by heart, Banting and Kymlicka go on to compile these dynamics under three generic headings. Under the first one, termed '*The crowding out effect*', the reader is faced with the critics' argument that MCPs foment a dynamic that enfeebles the welfare state compact by rerouting time and resources from the struggle for economic redistribution to the one for cultural recognition. The second one, termed '*The corroding effect*', presents the critics' argument that MCPs work corroding on the broad-based popular solidarity, necessary for sustainable welfare policies, through these policies' focus on the citizens' cultural differences rather than their more fundamental social commonalities. The third dynamic engendered by MCPs, finally, Banting and Kymlicka term '*The misdiagnosis effect*'; and according to the critics this one works to promote an understanding that misdiagnoses the plight of minorities as primarily stemming from a lack of cultural recognition on the part of the wider society rather than from minorities' oftentimes disproportionate socio-economic disadvantage.

As Banting and Kymlicka contend, the main problem with these arguments and claims

is not that they can easily be dismissed as implausible. They clearly cannot be, at least not at first sight and particularly not when considering that the advent of MCPs in many countries was concurrent with the advent of the neoliberal challenge to the welfare state. This non-dismissive outlook runs through the entire volume and builds on a nuanced treatment of the arguments made by the MCPs critics in question. Rather, the main problem, according to the editors, lies in the fact that the critics' arguments have not yet been subjected to any rigorous and systematic empirical scrutiny. 'No one', they emphasize, 'has even attempted to test the recognition/redistribution trade-off hypothesis' (p. 22).

In the ten chapters following upon the substantial introductory chapter (by Banting & Kymlicka), the authors set about to begin to fill this empirical void. This is done with the help of a variety of methods, including cross-national comparative studies of numerous countries that employ statistical analysis, and several country case studies, spanning three continents (Europe, North America and Latin America). But it is also accomplished thanks to an impressive feat of cross-fertilizing the fields of migration and ethno-racial relations research on the one hand, and research on the welfare state on the other. While such an enterprise has been in great demand for decades now, it still largely remains in its infancy, a predicament that makes the volume in question all the more important.

Despite the plurality of methods and empirical settings, moreover, the authors manage to maintain the conceptual clarity and rigour, established initially, throughout the volume's 350-plus pages. This is just one of the many sub-achievements that helps lend such weight and credibility to the analyses, results and conclusions of this volume. Analyses, results and conclusions that unequivocally put to rest the claim that MCPs of recognition by definition should impact negatively on the prospects of redistributive welfare policies. As the volume's empirical examinations indicate, the most common dynamic between the two seems rather to be one of mutual reinforcement, something that, among others, Donna Lee Van Cott evinces brilliantly in her account of the developments in Latin America. To reveal empirically the non-existence of an *inherent* trade-off between recognition and redistribution does not, however, lead the authors to claim that there are no such instances of trade-off in the empirical world. This is

something that also receives important theoretical reflection in the two well-argued and partly self-critical chapters concluding the volume (by David Miller and John Myles & Sébastien St-Arnaud).

Any shortcomings? Well, as I hinted at in the opening paragraph, the volume would have benefited from a chapter on the ever more rabid political attack on multiculturalism unfolding in EU-Europe at present; this in order to better assess the future of MCPs in the EU. But given the overarching aims of the volume, this is indeed a minor remark on a book that I am sure will be a standard work for a long time to come.

Reference

Frattini, Franco (2007) 'Enhanced Mobility, Vigorous Integration Strategy and Zero Tolerance on Illegal Employment: A Dynamic Approach to European Immigration Policies', speech/07/526, High-level Conference on Legal Immigration, Lisbon, 13 September.

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