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THE SOCIAL SUMMITS OF THE SOUTHERN COMMON MARKET (MERCOSUR): A VIEW ON DEMOCRATIC STABILITY

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Abstract: This article aims to demonstrate that the Social Summits of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) are close to Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism. To achieve this goal, a bibliographic review of the Social Summits is carried out, based on the publications available on the MERCOSUR website, and on agonistic pluralism, based on the main works of Chantal Mouffe. As a result, it appears that the Summits are concrete mechanisms for the stability of democracy and its institutions. Furthermore, we observe the transformation of antagonisms into agonisms, the agonistic confrontation, the formation of political identities, the multiplicity of conflicting interests and values, the sharing of power, the constitution of collective subjects, the channeling of demands into regional public policies, between others.

Keywords: Agonistic pluralism. Chantal Mouffe. Radical democracy. Southern Common Market. Social Summits.

INTRODUCTION

Seeking to break with the scientific hegemony of elitist and deliberative political theories, which ignore the political dimension and conflict, Chantal Mouffe, a Belgian political scientist and professor at the University of Westminster (England), developed a new model for reflecting on democracy: the agonistic pluralism.

Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism has relevance for society, as it represents a model of deepening democracy, in which there is a perspective of its stability and its institutions.

Mouffe's theoretical musings, despite being innovative, may seem infeasible or distant from social reality, so in this article we seek to show that the Social Summits of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) approach agonistic pluralism.

We structured this article in five different

moments: first, we seek to introduce the theme, the problem, the objectives and the justification; in a second part, we present the MERCOSUR Social Summits; in a third section, we recover Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism; in a fourth moment, we associate the Social Summits to Mouffe's agonistic model and; in a fifth and final section, we make some final remarks.

THE SOCIAL SUMMITS OF THE SOUTHERN COMMON MARKET (MERCOSUR): A VIEW ON DEMOCRATIC STABILITY

In this section, we aim to develop the view on democratic stability from the MERCOSUR Social Summits, based on Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism. In order to achieve this goal, at first, we present the Social Summits, their background, organization, periodicity, methodology and the first Summit. In a second moment, we return to Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism. In a third moment, we defend the democratic stability of the Social Summits, which are the path to Mouffe's radical democracy.

THE SOCIAL SUMMITS OF THE SOUTHERN COMMON MARKET (MERCOSUR)

The Social Summits of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) are supranational spaces for debates regarding the paths of regional integration and for the discussion and formulation of regional public policies, being formed by representatives of social movements and organizations, governments and MERCOSUR instances.

The antecedents of the MERCOSUR Social Summits are the Ouro Preto Protocol (1994), the "Buenos Aires Consensus" (2003), the Somos MERCOSUR Program (2005) and the Regional Meeting for a Productive and Social MERCOSUR (2006).

The organization of the Summits is attributed to different government bodies in each country belonging to MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela) (MERCADO COMUM DO SUL, 2018).

The periodicity of the Summits is biannual, concomitantly with the Presidential Summits¹. As of 2015, through the Decision of the Common Market Council (CMC) No. 10 of 2015, the Summits were institutionalized as a regular and official event, included in the MERCOSUR organizational chart. Since 2006, twenty Social Summits have been held, the last one being held on July 5, 2016, in the city of Montevideo (Uruguay).

Normally, the Summits last three days and their methodology includes the opening and closing, through the speech of representatives of the instances or of the MERCOSUR presidents, the discussion of regional themes in Working Groups (WGs), or in thematic commissions, holding workshops and lectures² and, finally, the elaboration of a final declaration, with the demands, agendas of struggles, reports, suggestions and other matters considered important by the WGs.

Both in the GT'S and in the workshops and lectures, all and all social activists have the possibility to speak, raising important issues, disagreeing, expressing their opinions, among others. In order for there to be an equitable participation among the social actors, the coordinators of the WGs usually set a specific time for speech, which can be complemented later. The dynamics of the social actors' speculations depends on the organizers of the Summits.

The first MERCOSUR Social Summit³ took place in Brasília (Brazil), from December 13 to 15, 2006, bringing together

five hundred participants. The organization of the meeting was in charge of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic of Brazil, the Somos MERCOSUR Program, the FCES, the CPC, the MERCOSUR Permanent Representatives Commission and national and regional social organizations (MERCADO COMUM DO SUL, 2018).

CHANTAL MOUFFE'S AGONISTIC PLURALISM

For the Belgian political scientist Chantal Mouffe, one of the great theorists of post-Marxism and post-structuralism, democracy cannot be understood as a space in which antagonisms and conflicts do not exist and opponents do not defend their political positions. Hegemonic political theories cannot express the importance of dissent, power and different antagonisms in a democratic society (MOUFFE, 2003).

Agonistic pluralism has as the center the question of power and antagonism. Both power and antagonism have an ineradicable character, that is, they can never be eliminated from society, only neutralized. Social objectivity is formed through acts of power and, ultimately, is also political, showing the acts of exclusion that characterize it.

Power, in turn, constitutes political identities, given that the entire political order is the expression of a hegemony and a specific pattern of power relations (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 1987). Faced with the realization that power relations constitute the social, a democratic policy must aim not to eliminate power, but to establish forms of power that are more reconcilable with the values of a democracy (MOUFFE, 2005).

To consider a democratic society, we need to verify that no limited social subject

1. With the exception of the meeting in Brasília, in 2006, and the one in Chaco, in 2010.

2. Workshops and lectures do not take place at all Summits, being provided according to the planning of each MERCOSUR member country.

3. At the Brasilia meeting, it was the first time that the Social Summit took on its own nomenclature.

can represent the totality or totally control representation. There cannot be any distance between power and legitimacy, both must coexist in two ways: a) if any type of power is able to impose itself, it is because it is considered legitimate and; b) if legitimacy is not based on an inductive notion, it is because it is based on a successful form of power.

In addition to presenting a new vision of social objectivity, power and legitimacy, Chantal Mouffe reiterates that, in order to understand agonistic pluralism, the distinction between “politics” and “the political” is indispensable. The first category, “politics”, is the set of discourses, practices and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conflictive conditions, since it suffers interference from the “political”. The second category, “the political”, comprises the dimension of antagonism related to human relationships, given that this can take many forms and arise in different types of social relationships (MOUFFE, 2005).

Democratic politics aims at unity in a society permeated by conflicts and diversity and the formation of an us in opposition to a them. The us-they opposition will never cease to exist, however a democratic society must try to reconcile it. The group called them must be seen not as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries, or legitimate opponents, whose ideas can be fought and whose right to defend those ideas must not be questioned. Here we need to clarify that, even if there is a change in vision from enemy to adversary, antagonisms will not be extinguished. The adversaries and the we share respect for the ethical-political principles of liberal democracy: freedom and equality.

Conflict, a condition for the existence of democracy, cannot be resolved rationally, as it has an antagonistic dimension, which will never be eliminated, only controlled.

Accepting the adversary’s view characterizes a radical change in the political identities of social actors (also called conversion). The acceptance of the opponent’s position comprises pacts [compromises], which are part of political life, and can be seen as “(...) temporary interruptions of a continuous confrontation” (MOUFFE, 2005, p. 20).

Antagonism can manifest itself in two different ways: antagonism and agonism. Antagonism comprises the struggle between enemies and agonism, in turn, the struggle between adversaries. Based on this conception, the objective of agonistic pluralism is to transform antagonism into agonism, that is, to create ways for collective passions to express themselves on certain issues and, therefore, promote the democratic design.

Conflicting consensus is the temporary result of a provisional hegemony, the stabilization of power and the existence of some form of exclusion. The peculiarity of modern democracy lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and in the renunciation of its suppression through an authoritarian order. A democratic society opens space, therefore, for the manifestation of conflicting interests and values. Agonistic pluralism requires a certain consensus, however this refers strictly to its constitutive ethical-political principles. The principles, in turn, if they exist only through many different and conflicting interpretations, will become conflicting consensuses (MOUFFE, 2005).

A good democracy, for Chantal Mouffe, is one in which there is a lot of agonistic confrontation, the opening of paths for dissent and the promotion of institutions in which it can be raised. The continuity of agonistic democracy is linked to collective identities, originating from clearly differentiated positions, as well as the possibility of choosing from a range of alternatives (MOUFFE, 2003).

THE SOCIAL SUMMITS OF THE SOUTHERN COMMON MARKET (MERCOSUR): A VIEW ON DEMOCRATIC STABILITY

To think about democracy beyond the liberal-pluralist, scientifically hegemonic current is an important task for political scientists and other interested parties. Reflecting on democracy on a regional scale, transcending the geographic, political, economic and social borders of nation-states, becomes, then, an imperative challenge. Nevertheless, we see that the Social Summits of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) can be considered a materialization of Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism.

The Social Summits are a path towards a radical democracy, rescuing its value dimension, opening space for conflicting consensus, providing the stability of institutions, creating conflict management mechanisms and establishing democratic rules.

One of Chantal Mouffe's first premises concerns social objectivity, which is constituted by acts of power, which form political identities (MOUFFE, 2003). The Social Summits create the political identities of actors belonging to movements and social organizations, as there is a meeting point between hegemony and power relations. When an actor participates in a working group or expresses his opinion, he exerts hegemony and inserts himself in a power relationship, building, therefore, his political identity. As identities are the result of social relations, which are incomplete, social actors have fragmented identities, but even so, the construction of these is a relevant aspect provided by the Summits.

With regard to representation in Social Summits, as well as in agonistic pluralism, no social subject represents the totality or fully controls representation, given that everyone can participate equally, representing

themselves and their movement or their social organization (after the legitimacy granted by them). Even when the social actor represents the movement or social organization, being able, for example, to speak on their behalf or vote, it is because there was acceptance by each of the members of the movement or social organization.

Furthermore, still with regard to power and legitimacy, Mouffe asserts that: a) when any type of power is imposed, it is because it is legitimate and; b) if legitimacy is not based on a foundation, it is because it is based on a successful form of power. In Social Summits, when the power of a social actor is imposed solely and/or shared, as well as in representation, it is due to the legitimacy given by their companions or companions of movement or social organization, by the Working Group (WG's) that integrates, or even by the dome as a whole.

In addition to social objectivity, hegemony, political identities, representation, power and legitimacy, another aspect of the agonistic politics of the Social Summits is the us-them opposition. The us-they opposition is part of the very definition of the Summits, because when there is a debate on themes of the Mercosur regional agenda, there is the formation of an us in opposition to a them. Even if in social meetings there are movements and social organizations with flags of equal or similar struggles, conflicts between social actors never cease to exist, being only reconciled. The group they are seen as an adversary, not being destroyed, but whose ideas are fought and their right to defense is not called into question. The antagonisms in the MERCOSUR Social Summits are present all the time, when there is a debate in the WGs, when workshops or lectures are held, when the final declarations of the Summits are read and in the informal conversations themselves. of social actors.

When there is acceptance of political positions and the transformation of vision from enemy to adversary, agonism, there is a radical change in the political identities of social actors. The actors accept that the opinion of others, despite being different from their own, is important for improving the lives of the people of MERCOSUR member countries. However, such a seal does not exclude the existence of antagonisms and the broad discussion around themes of the regional agenda in the WGs. We can see, therefore, that the MERCOSUR Social Summits generate the conflicting consensus, or the agonistic confrontation, created by Mouffe.

After the agonistic confrontation, pacts [commitments] are established between the social actors, materialized by the final declarations of the Summits. In the final statements, conflicting interests and values can be perceived, which become consensual, so that the demands of social movements and organizations can be expressed. Declarations, or pacts, are temporary interruptions in a process of ongoing confrontation, that is, they establish conflicting consensus only at the Summit in question, so that at the next Summit, antagonisms re-emerge again.

There is yet another relevant aspect of the Summits: the so-called rules of the game or democratic rules. Democratic rules are a set of assumptions for the construction of guidelines, based on conflicting interests and values, that is, in the face of the pluralism of social movements and organizations, determinations are necessary to organize conflicts, passions and pacts. The rules of the game are created by the actors responsible for organizing each Summit, and these are different in each MERCOSUR member country. The rules, however, do not exclude antagonism, which is latent in each new social encounter.

Conclusively, we found that the Social Summits of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) are an experience of agonistic pluralism, as they transform antagonisms into agonisms and create paths for the externalization of collective passions on certain themes, thus promoting democracy in regional scale. In addition, Summits recognize and legitimize conflict, allow for much agonistic confrontation, open avenues for dissent, and provide institutions for confrontation to take place.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As Daniel Mendonça (2010) well reflects, it is necessary to think about effective political institutions or practices that make the agonistic model count. The MERCOSUR Social Summits are concrete experiences of Chantal Mouffe's agonistic pluralism.

Furthermore, the MERCOSUR Social Summits are participatory democratic experiences that strengthen political representation, attributing power to citizens. As Luis Felipe Miguel (2017, p. 110) points out: "Opening spaces for direct popular participation is important (...) as a way of empowering ordinary citizens". Empowerment grants the broadening of citizens' horizons, giving them an understanding of the logic of politics (the politics called by Chantal Mouffe) and making them more capable of intervening more effectively in the achievement of their interests.

In conclusion, the Summits are concrete mechanisms for the stability of democracy and its institutions, and this is the way to achieve a radical democracy. In this sense, we believe that these agonistic experiences recover the evaluative dimension of democracy, not excluding institutions, on the contrary, strengthening them and making citizens democratic.

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