The Short Analysis of Libertarian Municipalism

The aim of this paper to analyze political proposal of social ecology that Murray Bookchin and Janet Biehl's studies are reviewed. Social Ecology, developed by Murray Bookchin provides a coherent and radical critique of environmentalism as a discourse of capitalism. The solution of ecological crisis cannot be granted by environmental actions, projects and campaigns, green production & consumption. These environmentalist activities not only cover the roots of ecological crisis, but also the need to construct of a rational ecological society through a political program that is much beyond environmental actions. This ecological and rational society can be organized from bottom-to-top at neighborhood scale through citizen assemblies to provide face-to-face relations as well as direct democracy. In order to construct a public realm as citizen assembly on a neighborhood level, endless education, face-to-face interaction, and local elections are some of the tools. Using formal or legitimate local direct democratic channels to construct citizen assemblies for self-management is another strategy. Each formation of citizen assembly is a step to libertarian society of decentralized confederation of democratized municipalities.

Social Ecology and its politics as Libertarian Municipalism

Social Ecology, developed by Murray Bookchin provides a coherent and radical critique of environmentalism as a discourse of capitalism. He is influenced from critical theory in terms of the notion of domination and a critique of Marxism. The domination critique of critical theory is most significant for the development of his theory. Bookchin implies that the main reason of ecological crisis as domination of nature stems from the domination of people within the current hierarchical societies. Both Marxism and liberalism claim that nature dominates humankind. In order to liberate humankind from nature, domination of humankind and domination of nature are favored. On the other hand, deep ecology welcomes the domination of humankind by nature in order to sustain natural order with "natural laws" and caving in to nature (1999:44-45).

Social ecology like Marxism criticizes the capitalist domination of nature; however, Bookchin goes beyond class domination and asks to challenge all forms of dominations within society. Women-men, ethnic and minority groups, handicapped, colored people, poor, the young and all "others" who are dominated as wells as workers. Both Marxism and social ecology conceptualize society through conflicts and power relations. They both aim at a radical change, however social ecology does not accept workers as revolutionary subjects, but develops a radical change through "citizens" of ecocommunities of neighborhood space. Social ecology strongly criticizes liberal environmentalism that is considered as legitimizing and strengthening the current capitalist system dominating nature and asks for a radical ecological change, i.e. instead of liberal environmentalist activities.

The solution of ecological crisis cannot be granted by environmental actions, projects and campaigns, green production & consumption according to liberal environmentalism critique of social ecology. These environmentalist activities not only cover the roots of ecological crisis, but also the need to construct of a rational ecological society through a political program that is much beyond environmental actions. This ecological and rational society can be organized from bottom-to-top at neighborhood scale through citizen assemblies to provide face-to-face relations as well as direct democracy where "people act directly on society and directly shape their own destinies" (Biehl 1998:163).

Hence, using social movement approaches which are depending on opportunity, resource, mobilization and ideology, etc. are considered as insufficient to cope with the holistic approach of LM depending on citizens, ecocommunity, direct democracy and municipality The direct democracy approach of social ecology that is depending on citizen assemblies is more radical than radical democracy. Social ecology offers a slow but a revolutionary change to libertarian society against nation state structure, which remains in the scale of radical democracy.

Based on rich tradition of face-to-face democratic tradition of societies like Antique Athens, New England, Medieval European Cities, Bookchin wants to ignite a process-LM to reach a confederation of democratized municipalities. The aim is a libertarian society, so the process-LM what do you mean should be. LM does not favor momentarily and violent changes; but asks for a slow, bottom-to-top process of construction of direct democratic citizenship at neighborhood level against central authority. In order to construct a public realm as citizen assembly on a neighborhood level, endless education, face-to-face interaction, and local elections are some of the tools. Using formal or legitimate local direct democratic channels to construct citizen assemblies for self-management is another strategy. Each formation of citizen assembly is a step to libertarian society of decentralized confederation of democratized municipalities.

The Administrative Organization of Political Realm: Municipality

Dobson (2003: 106) implies that the space of his ecological citizenship notion is not given by boundaries of nation-states or EU but "produced by the metabolistic and material relationship of individual people with environment". Social ecology states this space as neighborhood where Dobson's metabolistic relation between ecological citizen and environment is possible only with direct democracy generating self-governance. The political realm is citizen assembly, the space is neighborhood and the administrative structure should be municipality of neighborhood that is also political community. Municipality exercises the decisions of citizen assembly. However, the current

municipality structure needs radical change to adapt ecological society. Current municipalities are different in quality and quantity. Even they have "residual" democratic tradition, but they are management bodies of current capitalist system. Mostly in developed countries in the age of global capitalism age, they transform into town/city companies governed by patriarchic entrepreneur making town/city as production and consumption spaces, where citizens as consumer monads.

There are two ways reforming current municipalities to make them as the political realm of community: Decentralization and Democratization.

Decentralization

Institutional decentralization aims to reorganize municipalities in manageable size like neighborhoods. Metropolis should be divided into neighborhood municipalities to let people transform into community governing itself. Rural towns are too small for physical reorganization. City halls are changed into multiplicity of neighborhood centers where main living space is neighborhoods.

The terrain and infrastructure should be smaller; the city centre should be formed according to this new municipality space for new civic life. Parks, squares etc. are other spaces for public realm. Civic life is the sign of ecocommunity that is very different from agglomerations of cynical consumers aware of their neighborhoods and neighbors living at megapolis.

Democratization

The institutional decentralization can be active only with appliance of direct democracy. Biehl states (1998:58) that democratization of current giant municipalities, city government bodies goes parallel with decentralization. Smaller municipalities provide space for direct democratic approach; through citizen assemblies that meet regularly like weekly for widest possible participation of concerned citizens.

"Building a Movement"

LM movement can only activate only if at least several people interested in LMM meet and recognize each other about their commonality of views. They meet regularly to form a study group about LM ideas, social ecology, democratic traditions, social criticism and they educate themselves. During second phase of LMM, the **core group** is to enlarge in terms of both members and its affect. It seeks out new members from friends, interested people. They begin to study about a popular community issue with linking LM ideas. They produce position papers, reports, posters, leaflets, demonstrations, protests not only just to solve the issue but also ignite citizen assembly process. Third phase of LM is call for **citizen assembly**. The chosen topic is also a tool and opportunity to imply the need for

direct democracy and call citizen assembly. The assembly is the traditional form of town management. If there is not any, a new one should be claimed. During the assembly meeting through the discussion of community issues, direct democracy, face-to-face relations and assembly itself can be exercised. These meetings also should be held regularly to keep public realm alive. Once the municipal citizen assembly is formed as institutional decentralization, it ignites the neighborhoods to form assemblies that are desired to form a confederation of assemblies as Paris early 1790s.

Problems

The LM and its aim; rational, ecological, democratic society seems attractive and unique but it has also significant problems. The birth of LM process inevitably needs presence of a core enlightened citizen group that passionately works to construct citizen assembly. The risk of localism threatens humanitarian principles of LM. Another problem is the assumption that direct democratic decision-making favors ecological life that it may cause destruction of nature also.

References

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