

Abertura da Reunião Anual da American Sociological Association

San Francisco (USA), 17th August, 2004.

It is my pleasure to be with you tonight.

Professor Peter Evans has asked me to share some impressions with you about the relationship between academia and politics, between the chair and the pulpit.

As you all know, this is an enduring theme for social scientists and has been of special interest to me, as I moved from the academic life to politics and am now, at least for some months a year, at Brown and at Harvard, trying to resume my academic interests.

The distinction made by Max Weber between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility is the most common criterion used to assess this challenging relationship. To Weber, the academic mindset is guided by the search of truth, while politicians are oriented by a constant concern for consequences. The academia is linked with the world of facts, while politics is linked to the world of values.

Weber himself acknowledged that things were not that simple and that conviction and responsibility often coexist in both realms, the academia and politics. It is virtually impossible and hardly acceptable for an intellectual to distance himself from the challenges of his time.

Likewise, politicians cannot do without knowledge. From my time in office, I can tell you that leaders should not simply follow what they believe to be the most sensible and politically rewarding line, regardless of any technical consideration.

Today's world does not allow for such a facile solution. Be it in the United States or in Brazil or anywhere else, public agents are supposed to respond to an increasingly wide range of societal interests. All the more so as social identities are no longer defined along class lines alone.

Citizens respond to a variety of loyalties, involving religion, race, profession, nationality, sexual preference, consumption habits, to enlist some of them. Demands from such a complex social network can hardly be accommodated into a zero-sum equation.

Especially as some of them are of a symbolic or institutional nature, such as requests for affirmative action. Neither should we underestimate the fact that, with the development of mass media and information

technology, demands are being conveyed directly to power holders, dispensing with traditional means of representation.

As a result, governments are asked to process demands and deliver services at a pace they were not used to. This implies some serious risks. Perhaps the most important one is that of jeopardizing the legitimacy of public agency.

I dare say that governments do not derive their legitimacy any longer from sustaining the "right cause", but from delivering well what their constituency expect them to. Today's motto is not "what to do", but "how to do it" in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. I am not suggesting that values or ethical considerations ceased to matter to political life. Politics has not been confined to a technical optimization of defined interests.

Values continue to be as important to politics as ever, but they import in a different way. Political agents are now supposed to engage in deliberative exercises with a multitude of actors for the definition of the common good.

Rather than a pre-determined variable as in Rousseau and his followers, the general will is seen as the outcome of extensive and open-ended deliberation. Hence the importance that the Modern Prince bears a republican mindset and has a clear view of the ultimate values political decisions should promote. Otherwise he risks being held hostage to corporatist interests.

As ever before, expectations are that virtues prevail over vices in the conduct of public affairs. But, again, the Prince is definitely supposed to be more "enlightened" today than in the past. The task of fitting many conflicting demands into policies of common interest can only be successfully pursued if the necessary expertise to evaluate and fine-tune the various inputs is available. To be meaningful, republicanism has to be effective. Public virtues cannot be cultivated in the abstract.

These are the impressions I thought of sharing with you tonight. As I am among fellow social scientists, I apologize for having dealt more with the political realm. I am still under the influence of my years in office. If you happen to invite me again in a few years time, I may have more to say about the coexistence of conviction and responsibility in the academic life.

For the time being, I am pleased to learn that from you.

Thank you very much.