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Simon Tormey (2015): *The End of Representative Politics*, Polity, Cambridge. Reseñado por Lasse Thomassen, Queen Mary University of London. Reseña recibida: 13 junio 2016. Reseña aceptada: 24 junio 2017.

Simon Tormey's book, *The End of Representative Politics*, draws on his work on representation from the last decade. The book also draws on a case study of the tumultuous, but exciting, Spanish politics of recent years, which is also the topic of a co-written companion volume (Feenstra *et al.*, 2016; English translation as Feenstra *et al.*, 2017). Tormey is interested in a new form of politics that puts into question two images: our inherited image of representation as a unilateral relationship between governing and governed, and our inherited image of democratic politics as representative politics. Politics and democracy are much more than institutional, representative politics, and there-

fore contemporary activists and movements such as 15M are not anti-political, but challenge a particular view of democratic politics as representative politics. With these activists and movements, Tormey shares the critique of representation as «a disjuncture between those who govern and those who are governed» (Tormey, 2015: 11).

Tormey situates the crisis of contemporary representative politics against a wider historical and societal background. Today there is a crisis of representative politics in general and political parties in particular, although we also see the emergence of a form of anti-political party parties, such as Podemos in Spain and the Five Star Move-

ment in Italy. Together with movements such as 15M and Occupy, these new parties challenge our inherited practices and institutions of political representation. Those practices and institutions have a long history and are intimately linked to modernity and, especially, the modern state in the form of the nation-state. What emerges with modernity is a particular image of politics that is still holding us captive. It is an image of politics as centred around the state, and where there is a hierarchical relationship between representatives and represented. The latter are the people conceived as a nation with a shared identity; later that shared identity is challenged by class divisions, but those divisions become represented within the (otherwise unitary) state as party divisions. This is the reason why we have ended up with a particular image of politics as representative politics today: «Representative politics is in this sense a politics of *disjuncture* that is firmly rooted in the experience of modernity: the disjuncture between the state and society, between elites and ordinary people» (Tormey, 2015: 57-58).

Our societies have changed, however. Societies and their citizens have become increasingly reflexive, and this is undermining the division between representatives and represented, between elites supposed to

know and ordinary people. The result has been that, «where once the powerlessness of ordinary people pointed at the *need* for representatives, ...the figure of the politician has come to represent *loss* of the power to act and speak for oneself» (Tormey, 2015, 63). Identities have also become more fluid, overlapping and individualised, and, as a consequence, «the people» as a homogenous identity has disappeared as have class identities. The bottom line is that our inherited image of representation no longer fits the world we live in.

Most people would accept Tormey's account of modernity and of contemporary society. However, I wonder if he is not held captive by the very image of representation that he is criticising. Perhaps Tormey is held captive by this particular (modernist, etc.) image of representation, so that he can only see representative politics as this and within this narrative. What is more, Tormey seems to think of political representation as the representation of already existing (collective) identities, and so the legitimacy of political representation becomes a matter of the correspondence between representative claims and already constituted identities. This is why he can conclude that traditional forms of political representation are undermined when identities become fluid and individualised. On this line of

argument, the problem of political representation becomes its lack of representativity. However, this overlooks the ways in which modern identities – of «the nation», for instance – were also the result of political representations, rather than preceding these; and how, today, new collective identities are also being articulated through political representation. This is not to deny that these new identities are very different from previous ones, nor that the forms that political representation takes are different. Tormey works with a limited image of political representation as about the state and political parties, an image that takes representation to be the reflection of society, and when there is a crisis of political representation, it is because the state and political parties no longer adequately reflect society.

Therefore, and to paraphrase the title of one of the book's chapters, for Tormey, the question «is representative politics over?» becomes – and, in my view, is reduced to – the question «is the (political) party over?». This is somewhat ironic because Tormey ends with an analysis and discussion of new forms of political parties. I think he is quite right to identify how these movement parties challenge our conceptions about political parties. We are moving from a situation where representative politics is based on a

«linear» model of politics, Tormey argues, to «a different kind of «post-representative» politics based on a different non-linear economy that we have been terming *resonance*» (Tormey, 2015: 132). This «post-representative» politics does not entail leaving behind representative democracy altogether, but a particular image of democratic politics that has held us captive: «We are not about to leave representation; rather, we are seeing a querying and questioning of the inheritance of representation» (Tormey, 2015: 142).

Tormey is, I believe, mistaken about the nature of political representation, yet he is right when it comes to identifying societal developments that undermine our inherited images of representation. He is also right when it comes to identifying new developments in social movements and political parties. As such, *The End of Representative Politics* is an important contribution to our understanding of some of the changes politics is undergoing today. Beyond that, the book is an important contribution to debates in contemporary political theory about the so-called «representative turn» (Disch *et al.*, forthcoming 2017). Apart from that, it is also a well-written and engaged book that speaks to larger debates about the state of our democracy, and I would recommend it to both researchers

and students interested in these questions.

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