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GUEST SPEAKERS AT THE ECOLE DE PARIS

Session No. 12

FROM SOCIAL EXCLUSION TO ESTEEM

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Debate led by

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Monday 19 February 1996
at the French Ministry of State Education,
Higher Education and Research

Report by Lucien Claes

Summary of the meeting

The numerous efforts to combat exclusion have generally brought disappointing results. Many of the organisations dealing with the problem find that their management systems force them to process a maximum of cases within certain time limits, which does not allow for the particular care that each case demands.

Abbé Pierre's Emmaüs communities offer a solution to the problem by making sure that each *companion* feels that he is held in esteem in his own environment. While it's difficult to apply this framework to other situations, it does open up the way to promising research in the future.

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The Association can also distribute commentaries arising from these documents.

INTRODUCTION by Michel BERRY

We at the Ecole de Paris try to draw on hindsight and investigate the origins of current issues. With this understanding, we then venture to put forward solutions. Current concerns include employment and exclusion. The last Ecole de Paris evening session¹, entitled “Dreams, Laws and Customs. What Better Way of Managing Nations?”, left us with two convictions: firstly, that the most universal human need is the need for esteem; and secondly, that politicians, the media and public opinion all fall victim to the mind-boggling effects of economic science. Tonight’s debate will further illustrate these ideas.

If we’d kept to the classic view of the problem, we could have called this session, “From Social Exclusion to Reintegration”. The word reintegration conjures up the idea that somewhere in society there is a place waiting for each social outcast, and that all it takes for him or her to find that place is a good transitional framework. But we can see that in companies and the civil service alike, the tendency is to reduce spending and cut the payroll. This turns the outcast’s prospective place into a rather hypothetical idea. There are nonetheless stop-gap measures, places for people to wait for ‘something’, which means that people end up moving from place to place. They might have enough to eat and somewhere to sleep, but they feel a serious lack of esteem.

Damien Genestet is a graduate of the Ecole polytechnique and the Ecole des mines de Paris and he is now working for a corporate bank. Last year, he and François Dutilleul wrote a dissertation on managing exclusion². He is going to present his analysis to us tonight. Martin Hirsch is going to explain how the Emmaüs communities work. He is currently director of the Paris hospitals’ central pharmacy, having moved on from his role of deputy secretary general at the State Council. He studied medicine and science, then entered the Ecole normale supérieure and the Ecole nationale de l’administration (ENA). However he will be speaking here tonight as president of the Association of Emmaüs communities.

PRESENTATION by Damien GENESTET

The Emmaüs communities

Abbé Pierre founded the first Emmaüs community in 1954 at Neuilly-Plaisance. He based it on three key principles: welcome, work and solidarity. These rules, which are as original as they are strict, haven’t changed much since then; they still guide the large number of communities that exist today.

The community takes in people who are in difficulty, more often than not men, and provides them with bed, board and assistance, both social and medical. They become *companions*.

In exchange, they have to put in regular work. This work provides the community’s sole source of income, and consists mainly of salvaging objects (furniture, clothes, etc.) and making them suitable for resale.

¹Claude Riveline, “Dreams, Laws and Customs. What Better Way of Managing Nations?” The Speakers, Session of 20 November 1995.

²Copies are available from Claude Riveline, professor at the Ecole des Mines de Paris.

The sale of these objects provides money for the community to live off as well as a surplus which is passed on to others in need. Abbé Pierre advises, “Help people who are worse off than yourself”, and anything that is left over is redistributed to other charities or people in difficulty; this is solidarity.

A delicate balance

The communities have been run on these principles for forty years now, and yet surprisingly, their managers are worried about Emmaüs’ future. An investigation showed that the communities appear to be in no financial danger. Instead, the managers seemed to think that the threat comes from how the population of social outcasts is evolving. This evolution poses a threat to Abbé Pierre’s scheme of things.

From one surprise to another

This led us to make a closer study of the companions. The first surprise in store for us was discovering that the companions are very homogeneous: they are mainly men who have done manual work, are in relatively good physical and mental health, and are aged between 35-50. They gradually find themselves ‘excluded’ from society after losing their jobs and all family ties.

The second surprise, or shock, was noticing that these people do not generally reintegrate back into society. Very few companions find work when they leave the communities. This should be within their reach, because they’re better off than other people on the street. Our reaction to this was complete indignation.

As there was no sign of any evolution in the communities’ population, we decided to widen our study to other institutions.

Putting logic in check

We came up against a major obstacle: the fact that no comprehensive list of these associations exists. One by one, we had to identify the many different types of existing associations, as if spotting different species in the depths of a forest. For example, we discovered that there are companies for reintegration. These operate like other firms in the competitive sector, but with State aid they recruit one or more people in trouble and provide them with vocational training in a working environment; this should allow them to find a ‘normal’ job by the time they leave. We also discovered the CHAPSA, the rather formidable place that provides a shower, a meal and medical help to the people picked up off streets of Paris by the police.

We thought that the diversity of organisations must reflect the diversity of cases of exclusion (with the loss of jobs, accommodation and family ties, as well as illness, alcoholism, etc.) Following this logic, we imagined that after a person had had his needs correctly identified by social workers, he would then be oriented towards the right organisation, spend enough time there to sort out at least one of his problems, go onto somewhere else to treat another problem, and so on, until step by step he would get back on his feet and reintegrate back into society.

We realised with a shock that it doesn’t happen like this at all!

The sheer number of cases

In practice, social workers have no way of identifying the best organisation, and if by chance they do manage to find it, they’re told that there are no places left! Given the extremely large number of cases they have to deal with, they tend to send people to the most well-known organisations, relying on an unofficial quota system for places. The

outcome is that people are sent to organisations that are unsuitable for their level of exclusion. This can mean that they fail to adapt or are sent away if the level is too high for them, or that they are adversely affected by the others if the general level of the people they mix with is too low.

Moreover, if the person is finally able to go to a suitable organisation, there is still a time limit to respect, which means that they are forced to leave after a certain time. Some good work may get underway, only to be interrupted when the person is sent to another organisation!

These phenomena are aggravated by three other factors:

- the lack of coordination between organisations: the organisation that orients a person in difficulty towards another institution doesn't generally know whether they actually get there or not, and conversely, when a person arrives at an organisation, no-one knows where to start because they don't know what work was done before. In exceptional cases where we've been able to piece together someone's programme, we've noticed that they don't get back onto their feet; on the contrary, they slip down further into a worse level of exclusion ;

- the huge number of people in difficulty that come to us: in particular, young unemployed people, who are going to overwhelm the organisations aimed at the people most likely to integrate, pushing out those who are considered to be in more serious difficulty; these people will then find a lower rung on the ladder of organisations and push out people who are even worse off than themselves, and so on and so forth in a domino effect;

- problems in the way effectiveness is measured: it's difficult to define a successful case, although there is a need to measure the effectiveness of state funds allocated to integration; this means that social workers are assessed on the number of files they handle; this naturally encourages them to deal with as many cases as possible; in the case of integration organisations, the decision to allocate new subsidies for the coming year is not linked to the number of successful cases (how can they be defined?) handled in the current year but to the company's turnover; when a company chief is judged on his turnover or net profit, there isn't necessarily much incentive for him or her to make the effort to integrate one of their employees.

The lesser of two evils

We'd imagined that there would be a framework to help people get back on their feet, but what we saw was the complete opposite! Faced with this worrying fact, we realised that one form of effectiveness was indeed stabilising people in difficulty.

In the end, the situation concerning Emmaüs communities isn't so shocking after all; the global context doesn't allow their companions to find accommodation and jobs but at least the communities manage to give them some stability and stop them from falling further. It's no accident that their population is so homogeneous: they try carefully to avoid the domino effect, since other types of people in trouble threaten to throw them off balance. This is why they prefer their new companions to be people from other communities and why they don't try to make themselves excessively known to the population of people in difficulty.

Towards which solutions?

Increasing the number of organisations by doubling up on the existing bodies or creating new types of institutions, is surely not a good way of facing up to the number and diversity of people in difficulty. First of all, there's a need to institute effective relations and coordination between the different organisations, as well as introduce the reorientation and long-term follow-up of people in difficulty.

Social workers must be able to choose from a whole range of existing organisations that match up with the different profiles. They must also be capable of correctly identifying

the type of person they are orienting, so that they can send them to the organisation that best suits their special needs.

Emmaüs' strengths

The Emmaüs communities can claim to be relatively effective, compared to other organisations that help in cases of social exclusion. This comes down to three key factors:

- a long-term approach: if a companion accepts the house rules and plays the game, he can stay there for as long as he likes;

- a global approach to combating exclusion, offering the companion accommodation, meals, work and health care all under one roof;

- the companion is not seen merely as someone receiving aid from a charity; he is not a number on a file but a face with a name, and part of a community of people who are rehabilitating and rebuilding their lives.

PRESENTATION by Martin HIRSCH

Esteem

The word *esteem* is extremely important, even though it's a criterion that can't be measured. Exclusion may be characterised by a loss of respect from others, and we sense that Emmaüs companions rediscover this lost sense of esteem. A social outcast is someone who is no longer given any respect, seen as worth nothing and not deserving of any esteem. He or she loses all his or her self-esteem and stops making any effort to make themselves presentable or respect certain rules. They no longer attach any importance to what other people may think of them.

Exclusion

The French word *exclusion* made its first appearance in the vocabulary of social issues about twenty years ago: René Lenoir published a book entitled "Les exclus" ("Social Outcasts") that highlighted the fact that there were down and outs in the middle of a boom society. This was the same society that had introduced the social security system after the second world war, writing in the preamble to its 1946 Constitution that any person who finds himself unable to work, due to his age, physical or mental state, or the economic conjuncture or current job market, has the right to obtain the necessary means to live from the community. The preamble also mentions the right to health and a job, and it's worth remembering that these texts are as binding as the articles written into the Constitution. Let's just say, this means that a lot of things in our country are unconstitutional!

Which value system?

This supposed inability to work can be traced back to the way that society itself works, and not merely individuals' mental or physical state, as the Constitution puts it: far from helping things, society itself can play a part in people's inability to work.

The community doesn't fulfil its role in allocating the appropriate means to live; this is not because it's incapable of mobilising the necessary funds, but precisely because it answers to the problem of social exclusion by handing out money and because it measures the effectiveness of social policy in terms of the hundreds of billions that are dedicated to the cause.

The Emmaüs communities reverse this value system so that money doesn't come first. A companion won't be asked how much he needs, although this doesn't mean either that he'll be told "God helps those who help themselves". He'll be told Abbé Pierre's phrase: "I need you!" Is there any bigger mark of respect? And why do we always need each new companion? Because an Emmaüs community wouldn't be able to function without its companions; they keep the wheels turning, carrying out activities that provide them with a living.

The *nouveaux pauvres*

We first heard the expression *nouveaux pauvres* in the eighties, to describe people who have fallen into poverty despite not fitting the normal criteria. They include people who have worked before, people with qualifications, and people with a classic family background. They're a problem because the way they have fallen into poverty reveals society's inability to keep them in the system from the moment when they become anonymous social outcasts and in a way useless objects.

How to win back esteem

We can see how the companions have regained their esteem in the communities. They all have a job to do, and they can find an identity in this work and in the community they belong to. Their main role is collecting items for resale and this is very symbolic: if you can salvage clothes, old iron and furniture, why not save people? They rescue themselves as they salvage other things.

Of course you need strong principles for this to work; I mentioned these earlier in passing, but they deserve further attention:

Independence through work

One of the founding principles is independence through work. This independence applies to every level of the Emmaüs organisation: neither the Association of Emmaüs Communities, the federations nor the associations appeal to public subsidies and the individuals themselves do not receive the RMI, the minimum welfare payment normally given by the French government to those who are not entitled to unemployment benefit.

Joining an Emmaüs community and becoming a companion means making this choice and accepting a certain number of rules linked to the work and life in the community. This sets up a moral contract between the companion and the community: the other companions will make sure that each newcomer toes the line, and are the first to denounce parasites. Their self-regulation ensures that things run smoothly.

Solidarity

The same companions that have needed help become providers of solidarity with others: solidarity committees, made up of companions, decide on how to allocate funds to other communities in difficulty, other charities, foreign aid campaigns and even other individuals. The fact that they themselves provide solidarity generates a great deal of esteem.

Respect and responsibility

The companions are given responsibilities. Each person has her own duties to carry out. This creates mutual risks: on the one hand the companion takes a risk, because it's not

necessarily easy to manage a salesroom or the cash register, and on the other hand, the community unquestioningly risks placing their trust in someone that they respect.

These are genuine risks. For example, one companion helped himself to the till he was in charge of. The sum that he took amounted to tens of thousands of francs, and the companion had to leave the community. However, companions tend to move around the communities, and what he did was come back one day, saying this particular community was the only place where he felt right. He was told that he could come back, but on two conditions: one, that he wouldn't be in charge of the till, which he understood, and two, that he reimbursed the large sum of money he had taken. Of course the companions are given bed and board, and they also receive a small payment of 200 francs a week. In this case, the companion would only receive 190 francs. Obviously I pointed out that it would take 200 years to pay back the debt at this rate, and the reply was "So what?" This illustrates the communities' respect for companions that doesn't necessarily follow the standard way of thinking.

To give another example, last summer, the Nice community had to close after embezzlement and malpractice. We had to open another community and try to start again on the right foot, but how? It seemed that the best way was to leave the reopening up to voluntary companions who we could count on. Time will tell whether this was the right decision, but the fact is that we now have a new community.

Why does it work?

Perhaps one reason why it works is that there is a global approach, comprising bed, board, work and freetime activities, as well as social and medical care. Another is that a companion who used to be a social outcast can gain access to social welfare, in terms of pensions and healthcare, by working. If you like, the person is reconnected to the social system.

Then there are strict rules and shared responsibility. For communities of between 40 - 60 companions, there are on average two or three managers and no night officer: this seems a good indicator of the self-regulating mechanisms that keep the communities going.

There is some coherence between companions' previous work history and what they do in the communities, as well as between clients' expectations and the products on offer.

Last but not least, a number of values are shared by the managers, the hundred or so Federation employees, volunteers and the companions themselves. This creates a very strong feeling of belonging to Emmaüs, and each of these people feels responsible for upholding these values.

Can the system be applied elsewhere?

This system has given respect to several thousands of people. The question is, can it be successfully applied elsewhere? And can we draw any conclusions about the way to design policies for fighting social exclusion?

It's difficult to answer these questions. But I'm confident that money isn't the only answer to the problem of social exclusion. This challenges the entire social system, that we used to think could be assessed by the billions it is allocated, regardless of the outcome.

We now realise that dedicating an extra 30% of the GDP to the health system does not automatically mean better care, and that it's not because state pensions take up more of the state's funds that old people will be happier in France than elsewhere. Similarly, having to spend 3% of the state's money on family policy hasn't solved the problem of

families or boosted the birth rate; and it's not spending 3%, 5% or even 10% on combatting social exclusion that will solve the problem.

We won't curb social exclusion without making some fundamental changes to society, so that we no longer look on the problem as marginal. Exclusion won't be curbed through by-laws that outlaw such-and-such person in such-and-such hostel, nor by new beds or lodgings for confining a certain population.

Nor will we be able to solve these problems unless we ask ourselves about the mechanisms behind them. At the same time, we need to integrate, generate and encourage respect from the very beginning, instead of hiding away a population who are given no value or respect, but merely short-term emergency help.

DEBATE

Esteem

A participant: *What exactly are you referring to when you use the word esteem?*

M. Berry: In a recent Ecole de Paris meeting³, Antoine Martin, chairman of the ANPE (the national employment agency) broached the question by taking one example of a sudden loss of esteem: the manager who loses his job and suddenly misses the daily contact with colleagues, the numerous handshakes and the feeling of playing a role in a working environment; the telephone stops ringing, family and friends are surprised that he can't find another job and everyone runs out of sympathy.

M. Hirsch: I like the ambivalence of the word esteem. Having esteem for someone means holding that person in high regard. In French, the word 'estimer' can also mean to judge someone, and this judgement can be made according to several criteria, including economic criteria. It's clear that we behave as though some people have no value. Here are companions who have come from being judged worthless to proving their worth in their own communities, showing that they too have something to contribute, at Emmaüs or elsewhere. What is at issue is giving back this feeling of genuine esteem to the individuals who have been deprived of it.

Participant: *But economic value isn't the only thing that can justify esteem: the human value of individuals is of prime importance.*

Participant: *Descartes, in his Discourse on Method, said words to the effect of "Being worthless means being of no use to anyone."*

How the communities are organised

Participant: *How are the community managers chosen?*

M.H.: There are several approaches. There are federations where the companions can become managers. At the Central Union of Communities, the salaried managers are chosen for their skills as militants. They earn a fairly comfortable living, in conditions that aren't actually comparable to the companions'. We believe that choosing managers with different backgrounds and different career paths is one way of keeping a balance between the companions and the managers, as well as a certain stability.

Participant: *What are the companions' living arrangements like?*

³Pierre Larrouturou, "The Four-Day Week à la Carte", Crisis and Change seminar, 24 November 1995.

M.H.: The communities live in places that are either donated, rented or bought and then converted; the companions add on rooms so that they each have their own.

Participant: *If I've understood correctly, there are no women in the communities. Are there any rules regarding the relationships between men and women?*

M.H.: There are no mixed communities, except for one. This is for no other reason than it simply wouldn't work. This doesn't prevent the companions from living their lives as they like and with whom they like.

D. Genestet: These are big questions - for mixed-sex or single-sex communities, managers of working communities or old companions- that have caused differences of opinion between the communities and led to the creation of several new federations. The fact that the communities are differentiated and companions have the option to move between them gives a certain stability to the companions, who are often unstable characters, This way, they can have a change of environment without leaving the Emmaüs fold and risking going downhill again.

Participant: *Is there a fast turnover of companions in the communities? And what happens to the people who leave?*

M.H.: In recent years, we've witnessed more and more young people come to Emmaüs and stay for an increasingly short time. We see two sorts of people: long-term companions who fit the description made earlier, and young people who leave much sooner, have fewer bearings and no work experience. They have problems entering into a spirit of reintegration, and we don't know what the right model is for stopping them sliding back down again. We don't know how to find the answer.

Alternative solutions

Participant: *The Maison de Nanterre houses the CHAPSA, as well as a retirement home for former homeless people. There is also a new centre being built, which we'll call the Welcome Centre for the sake of argument; I'm involved in some research to help set it up. I made the assumption that I know nothing about what the residents want and that they can tell me what they do want. So I've asked them about it, and my office has turned into a real floor for debate. I've witnessed people start up projects in an institution that in many ways seems crazy, but in others is similar to Emmaüs.*

What's more, I'm not sure that there is a good correlation between esteem and recovery. I've lived and worked in shacks in Cairo, where Sister Emmanuelle has worked, and I think that people who search through rubbish to find objects certainly don't see this as a source of respect. Perhaps the Emmaüs companions do less offputting tasks, but we'd need to listen to what they think. Do they feel demeaned by the work? In other words, would they agree with the version of events that we've heard tonight?

Just one more word on the Cairo shanty town: it's completely autonomous and has economic links with Cairo and the whole of Egypt. It would be very interesting to study the Cairo microcosm given that it's independent and we would have an outsider's point of view.

Divided opinions

M.B.: Over two years ago, people said that Emmaüs wasn't doing much to help the companions reintegrate because they seemed to want to stay there. I don't know if this is still the case, but it did seem like a problem at the time, as though the best thing for the companions was for them to find a normal job in a normal environment. I told

Dominique Moyen, Mr Hirsch's predecessor, "So what? If the people are happy, where's the problem? Is it a problem for Emmaüs and the companions, or is it more to do with your view of the situation?"

M.H.: This is still a subject of debate, and we mustn't be content to simply give stability to people who've got over the worst but could still be autonomous. Few of our companions go onto classic jobs. We can't be proud of this, but we shouldn't despair either: being a companion is already a sign of integrating into a network of communities, where people can move around and sometimes break out altogether; sometimes people return, depending on the problems they may have, but it's always their choice, rather than something that is forced on them.

The companions' situation isn't completely abnormal either: they make their own living and in most cases they have their own place to live and a social life. Let's ask the question: where is there normality? Is it outside the community, where every social bond has been broken, or is it within this system which has created a number of links?

Participant: *I must admit that I wouldn't be proud if ever my son were to become an Emmaüs companion. It would certainly give him a lifeline for him, but since we're talking about esteem, I'm not sure he'd be overly grateful. It's true that I don't know much about the communities; the way they operate is perhaps different to how people imagine. I don't want to criticize institutions like Emmaüs or the charitable newspapers that battle on against adversity, but it has to be said that people hardly have much choice, if we listen to what D. Genestet said : either they join Emmaüs to find a balance, or they move from institution to institutions in a downward spiral. In other words, where are the alternatives for those who don't want to live in a community and earn only 200 francs a week? This is a problem of "captivity", which comes down to a major fault in our society.*

Participant: *I compare the increasing amount of waste we produce with the growing number of social outcasts, which is starting to reach frightening proportions. I feel we might be dealing with people no faster than we're dealing with recycling. I'd like to add that one major obstacle to recycling individuals is the excessive specialisation of people, nations and materials that results from a process of monetary optimisation. If I were to become unemployed tomorrow, I don't think I'd good at all to anyone at Emmaüs.*

M.H.: What is important for being able to integrate into a community is not having a special professional skill, but to be used to working within a framework and respecting working hours. This is a major obstacle for some young unemployed people who have never worked and have never even known their parents work.

As for the first point you raised, I didn't mean that the companions find their identity by salvaging objects; what I was trying to say was that it's shocking that we can salvage scraps of iron but see people as un-recyclable. We refuse to see them as irretrievable: it's society that has decided that certain people have no value because they aren't needed anymore; the same society has problems finding consumers, but worries about them a lot less when it comes to producing: the country's wealth has risen by more than 50% in 20 years, in the middle of a recession! It could rise by at least another 50% in the next 20 years, by dividing the number of jobs by two or three! So the question is whether we're heading towards a society which will only employ 'worthy' people and try to keep the rest quiet with hush money. What we're saying is that money can't buy social cohesion. It's the idea that we can integrate people and produce a turnover of 100 million francs with workers that are reputed to be of no value and objects that are worth nothing.

M.B.: The term 'recycling' bothers me when it's applied to people, because it implies that they have to be found a similar place in society, which is very unlikely statistically

speaking. This is especially true of managers, who find that their dismissal removes a status that was only valued in their particular companies. This means that we need to look outside the classic system for new ways of regaining others' respect: it shouldn't necessarily imply finding a job in a company. There's a lot at stake, but we can't build the right places overnight. The other point I'd like to make concerns the symbolic value of the work: at Emmaüs, people sort themselves out by sorting things out. Another organisation for social integration, the Table de Cana⁴, works with food. The symbolism is far from innocent when an organisation for social integration happens to be one of the big Parisian delicatessens, meaning that social outcasts wait on people at the Elysée garden party!

Testimony

Participant: *I've been to an Emmaüs community and have experienced some very special initiation rituals: an introduction to work, integration into the community, and also some tests. People don't talk very much; nobody asks a companion about his life and nobody tells you about theirs either. I was struck by the reason why people stay there for years, when they've found a stable private life: it's because there's an invisible barrier that prevents them from leaving. The outside world is hostile and strange: you don't leave the Emmaüs world and expect to get away with it. Some people are physically afraid of the policeman they'll find waiting at every street corner. I left the community, and the Emmaüs helped me, as an old companion, to set up home in Neuilly-Plaisance. While this was happening, a 17-year-old boy came to ask whether he could join the community. The place was already completely full up. But the next day at 7.30 am, when some companions came round to deliver some basic furniture, as promised, the young man was with them. He'd been taken into the community: it was either that or leave him on the streets. Now there's one rule that society doesn't follow.*

Let's not reverse the roles

Participant: *Our society's duty is not to integrate social outcasts, but to prevent people from dropping out of society in the first place. Yet disintegration has become normal, ever since company chiefs have been able to dismiss their staff! We mustn't confuse the roles by imagining that the associations are there to reintegrate people, complaining that Emmaüs isn't reintegrating people! We can throw out lifelines, but it's not associations like Emmaüs, La Raison and Le Lampadaire that have sunk the boat in the first place! Emmaüs has been compared to a monastery: I think that society should rebuild systems similar to the Egyptian monasteries of the fifth and sixth centuries: when 2,000 monks chose the monastic life, they supported 3,000 people living around the monastery: these people were dependent, but happy! A lot of honest associations try to recreate this kind of happiness. But we'll go off the tracks completely if we don't see the problem from the right angle, i.e. if we put the blame on the wrong side as opposed to on companies, the State and society. My experience has taught me that society's duty is to avoid exclusion: if it does happen then it's almost pointless to talk about reintegration!*

Participant: *I believe that the problem of social exclusion cannot be solved unless it's seen to involve the whole of society. What esteem do we give people in paying a lot of money to a confident manager who'll be judged by the number of people he can throw out of the system? I'm not against the market culture, but we've placed too much value on the golden calf, and have perhaps overlooked the true value of people.*

⁴Franck Chaigneau "From the Integration Organisation to Integration by Organisations", Ecole de Paris Breakfast, 28 November 1995.

M.H.: When people say that the real answer must come from society, they mean that society has to put an end to this schizophrenia: how can people talk about effectiveness and profitability and their repercussions on the job market, while at the same time sounding off a rise in social exclusion that is partly their fault? It's a vital question that can no longer be considered marginal.

The illusions of economics

Participant: *I see Emmaüs as a company that has a founding chief, Abbé Pierre, and strict rules concerning the way it is organised and run, a market, a decent turnover and satisfied clients. It's a real company, but one that approaches people who are less solvent and employs less well-paid staff: this isn't far off from the main rules of economics.*

M.H.: Certainly, we're not outside the market, and we even have competitors. We don't survive by under-paying our staff: the companions are in the social security system and we pay their contributions, but we do have a different type of organisation and different profit criteria.

But I'd like to put economy in its rightful place. If we analyse what has been said about the job market over the last twenty years, we realise that the problem has always been put in the same way: we'll sort out unemployment when other more pressing problems have been solved... These have included inflation, the deficit in our foreign trade, the exchange rate against the dollar, the parity between the mark and the franc, interest rates, etc. Each of these obstacles has been lifted but unemployment hasn't budged an inch. And there's now talk of a new pressing problem, the state deficit...

M.B.: At the end of his "General Theory of Work, Interest and Currency", Keynes said that the world is impatient for a better diagnosis: it's readier than ever to accept and experience a new framework even if it's not plausible. Economic philosophers' ideas, true or false, are more important than we generally give them credit for. Men of action that see themselves as well above doctrinating influences are usually slaves of some past economic theory.

It seems to me that we are victims of economic ideas from another age that prevent us from finding a way out of unemployment and social exclusion. But I hope that our discussion tonight has helped to present the problem more clearly and ease the way for future research.