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Beyond Statism And The Market Economy: A New Conception Of Democracy

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Abstract: This article attempts to show that democracy is irreconcilable with any form of concentration of power, political or economic. Therefore, neither the liberal conception of democracy, which takes for granted the political and economic concentration that the representative democracy and the market economy respectively imply, nor the socialist conception of democracy, which presupposes that the separation of state from society will continue until the mythical communist phase is reached, are relevant to democracy. Finally, the article develops a new conception of democracy, which, extending the classical non-statist conception, introduces the elements of economic democracy, community and confederalism that are necessary for any modern conception of democracy. The new conception takes for granted that democracy is not just a particular structure implying political and economic equality, but a process of social self-institution and a project. Therefore, democracy's grounding on any divine or mystical dogmas and "scientific" laws or tendencies about social "evolution" is ruled out.

1. Introduction

Few words, apart perhaps from socialism, have been so widely abused during the century now ending, as the word “democracy”. The usual way in which the meaning of democracy has been distorted, mostly by liberal academics and politicians but also by libertarian theoreticians, is by confusing the presently dominant oligarchic system of representative “democracy” with democracy itself. A good illustration of this distortion is offered by the following introduction to the subject by a modern textbook on democracy:

> “The word democracy comes from the Greek and literally means rule by the people. It is sometimes said that democratic government originated in the city-

> states of ancient Greece and that democratic ideals have been handed down to us from that time. In truth, however, this is an unhelpful assertion. The Greeks gave us the word but did not provide us with a model. The assumptions and practices of the Greeks were very different from those of modern democrats."[1]

Thus, the author, having asserted that democracy is a kind of "rule" (an error repeated by several libertarians and anarchists today), he then goes on to argue that:

> "If ruling is taken to mean the activity of reaching authoritative decisions that result in laws and regulations binding upon society, then: it is obvious that (apart from occasional referendums) only a small minority of individuals can be rulers in modern, populous societies. So, for the definition to be operational, ruling must be taken in the much weaker sense of choosing the rulers and influencing their decisions."[2]

The author, therefore, having concluded that "an objective and precise definition of democracy" (p 48) is not possible, goes on to devote the rest of the book to a discussion of the Western regimes, which he calls "democracies". However, as I will try to show below, the modern concept of democracy has hardly any relation to the classical Greek conception. Furthermore, the current practice of adding several qualifying adjectives to the term democracy has further confused the meaning of it and created the impression that several forms of democracy exist. Thus, liberals refer to "modern", "representative", or "parliamentary" democracy, social democrats talk about "social", "economic" or "industrial" democracy, and, finally, Leninists used to speak about "soviet" democracy, and, later, "people's" democracies, to describe the countries of "actually existing socialism". But, as this essay will attempt to show, there is only one form of democracy at the political level, i.e. the direct exercise of sovereignty by the people themselves, a form of societal institution which rejects any form of "ruling". Therefore, all other forms of so-called democracy are not but various forms of "oligarchy" i.e. of ruling by the few. This implies that the only adjective that is permissible to precede democracy is "economic", because economic democracy was indeed unknown to Athenians for whom economic activity, unlike political activity, did not belong to the public realm.

However, the meaning we give to democracy crucially depends on the meaning of freedom and autonomy. Furthermore, there is no way of defining democracy today unless we delineate first its relation to the state and then to the market economy and the consequent growth economy. In this article, after an initial discussion of the above

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[1] Anthony H. Birch, *The concepts and theories of modern democracy* (London: Routledge, 1993), p 45.
[2] Ibid. p. 48.

issues, the liberal and socialist conceptions of democracy are examined and then an attempt is made to develop a new conception of democracy, by starting from the classical non-statist conception and complementing it with the necessary elements for a modern conception of democracy, namely, economic democracy, community and confederalism. Finally, the discussion concludes by touching upon the important issue of how we move from "here" to "there".

2. Freedom, autonomy and democracy

How to define freedom?

One useful starting point in defining freedom is the distinction that Isaiah Berlin[3] introduced between what he called the "negative" and the "positive" concepts of liberty/freedom (he used the terms interchangeably). The former referred to the absence of restraint, that is, the freedom for the individual to do whatever h/she wants to do ("freedom from"), whereas the latter referred to the freedom "to do things", to engage in self-development, or participate in the government of one's society ("freedom to"). One could, roughly, argue that, historically, the negative concept of freedom was adopted by liberals, individualistic anarchists and libertarians, whereas the positive concept was used by socialists and main stream anarchists.

Thus, the negative concept of freedom was developed by liberal philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and others, whose main consideration was to establish criteria for determining the proper limits of state action. In liberal philosophy, citizens are free in so far as they are not constrained by laws and regulations. It is therefore obvious that the liberal conception of freedom presupposes the power relations implied by the existence of the state and the market, as long as they are "within the law". In other words, the liberals' conception of freedom presupposes the existence of state as separate from society; in this sense, their conception of democracy was, also, a "statist" one.

The negative concept of freedom has been criticised on several grounds. Liberals themselves have criticised this conception as it does not imply even the very right to choose rulers in representative democracy,[4] which is clearly a "freedom to" and not a "freedom from". But, even more important is the philosophical criticism that human beings have always lived in communities bound together by social rules and regulations

[3] Isaiah Berlin, "Two concepts of liberty" in Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).
[4] Anthony H. Birch, p. 101.

and that, therefore, their history is not just a history of isolated individuals, coming together to form a civil society, as liberal philosophers like Hobbes and Locke assumed. In other words, human values are socially determined and social rules and regulations to uphold them do not represent a restriction on some pre-existing freedom but part of the conditions of a satisfactory life.[5]

On the other hand, the positive concept of freedom is usually associated with self-realisation through the political institution of society, which supposedly expresses the "general will". But then, of course, the question immediately arises: which type of societal institution could express this general will? Historically, the positive concept of freedom has been associated with the "statist" conception of democracy, where the state was supposed to express the general will. In particular, during the period from the beginning of this century until the Second World War, the positive concept of freedom was fashionable among statists of all persuasions: from Nazis to Stalinists. No wonder that the collapse of statism, as an ideology and political practice, led to the corresponding decline of the positive concept of freedom and the present flourishing of its negative conception. However, as I am going to show below, there is no intrinsic relationship between the positive concept of freedom and statism. In fact, the opposite is true. Statism is incompatible with any concept of freedom, positive or negative, given its fundamental incompatibility with both self-determination and individual as well as collective autonomy.

Still, the ambivalent character of the connection between statism and freedom led to a situation where the positive concept of freedom was adopted by both the statist and the non-statist wings of the Left. Thus, on the Marxist side, freedom was expressed in terms of self-determination, in the sense of the conscious control over society and nature. According to Engels, "freedom consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature".[6] Also, according to Kolakowski, for Marxists, "freedom is the degree of power that an individual or a community are able to exercise over the conditions of their own life".[7] On the anarchist side, Bakunin had exactly the same notion of freedom, which he defined as "the domination over external things, based upon the respectful observance of the laws of Nature".[8] Similarly, Emma Goldman explicitly adopts a positive concept of

[5] Ibid. pp. 102-3.
[6] Frederick Engels, *Anti-Duhring* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969), p. 137.
[7] Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), Vol. 1, p. 387.
[8] G. P. Maximoff (ed), *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (New York: The Free Press, 1953), p. 265.

freedom: "true liberty (...) is not the negative thing of being free from something (...) real freedom, true liberty is positive: it is freedom to something; it is the liberty to be, to do.".[9]

Finally, today's ideological hegemony of liberal ideas has influenced several libertarians who resort to individualistic conceptions of freedom. McKersher, for instance, defines freedom "as the ability to choose between alternatives".[10] However, this conception of freedom separates the individual's self-determination from that of the community's, or in other words, the individual's self-determination from that of the *social* individual's. As a result, the link between the political institution of society and the social individual's self-determination is broken (no wonder that Milton Friedman's best seller was entitled "Free to choose"). In fact, even if we qualify the definition as the *equal* ability to choose, to bring in the ethics of equality and democracy (what McKercher calls "the qualitative areas of choice") still, the definition does not explicitly posit the question of the political institution of society. But, it is society's political institution which conditions in a decisive way what "the alternatives" are and therefore the ability itself to choose. It is not therefore accidental that such a definition of freedom is amenable to be attached to the ethos of individualism, private property and capitalism. Nor is it surprising that the adoption of such a definition of freedom could easily lead to a situation where "freedom becomes individualism, and individualism becomes the possession of property, and possession becomes democracy", so that, at the end, "private property and capitalism become synonymous with 'democracy'."[11]

To my mind, the best way to define freedom is to express it in terms of individual and collective autonomy. Such a definition of freedom not only combines individual freedom with collective freedom, rooting firmly the freedom of the individual in the democratic organisation of the community, but it also transcends both liberalism (negative freedom) and statism (positive freedom).

Autonomy, as Murray Bookchin correctly points out, has been identified in the English literature with personal freedom or self-government.[12] However, the original Greek meaning of the word had a definite political dimension, where personal autonomy was inseparable from collective autonomy. The term "autonomy" comes from the Greek word αυτο-νομος (autos-nomos), which means (to give to) oneself one's law. This, according to

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[9] Alix Kates Shulman (ed), *Red Emma Speaks* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p.98.
[10] William MacKercher, "Liberalism as Democracy: authority over freedom" (in this issue).
[11] Ibid.
[12] Murray Bookchin, *Urbanization without cities* (Montreal, Black Rose, 1992), p. 64. See, also, his article "Communalism: The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism" (in this issue).

Castoriadis, is "a new *eidos* within the overall history of being: a type of being that reflectively gives to itself the laws of its being."[13] And he continues:

> "The ***poleis*** — at any rate Athens, about which our information is most complete — do not stop questioning their respective institutions; the ***demos*** goes on modifying the rules under which it lives (...) This movement is a movement of explicit self-institution. The cardinal meaning of explicit self-institution is autonomy: we posit our own laws. (...) The community of citizens — the ***demos*** — proclaims that it is absolutely sovereign (***autonomos***, ***autodikos***, ***autoteles*** — self-legislating, self-judging, self-governing — in Thucydides' words)."[14]

It is therefore obvious that, in this conception of autonomy, an autonomous society is inconceivable without autonomous individuals and vice versa. This is so, because, if we assume away the concentration of power and its epitome, the State, then, no individual is autonomous unless he/she participates equally in power. Similarly, no society is autonomous unless it consists of autonomous individuals, because "without the autonomy of the others there is no collective autonomy — and outside such a collectivity I cannot be effectively autonomous."[15] Similarly, Murray Bookchin stresses that "individuality is *inseparable* from community, and autonomy is hardly meaningful unless it is embedded in a cooperative community."[16]

Furthermore, an autonomous society is a society capable of explicitly self-instituting itself, in other words, capable of putting into question its already given institutions and what I will call the ***dominant social paradigm,*** namely, the system of beliefs, ideas and the corresponding values, which is associated with these institutions. In this sense, a tribal society which is not capable of questioning tradition, or a religious society not questioning divine law, or, finally, a marxist society which is incapable of questioning the dominant social paradigm are all examples of heteronomous societies, irrespective of the degree of political and economic equality they may have achieved.

The above definition of freedom in terms of autonomy has three very important theoretical implications. First, it implies democracy. Second, it implies the transcendence of the traditional division between individualism and collectivism, liberalism and socialism. Finally, it implies that freedom can not and should not be based on any

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[13] Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), p. 164.
[14] Ibid. pp. 105-6.
[15] Ibid. p. 76.
[16] Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1995), p. 153.

preconceptions about human nature or on any divine, social and natural "laws" about social evolution.

In the context of an indefinite plurality of individuals belonging to society, it is obvious that the very acceptance of the idea of autonomy inevitably leads to the idea of democracy. We may, therefore, assume that the connection between autonomy and democracy does not need further elaboration and we can proceed with an expansion on the other two implications of the adopted definition of freedom.

The need to transcend both individualism and collectivism

There is no doubt that the central unit of any libertarian analysis should be the individual. However, the issue is not, as some modern libertarians present it, a black and white choice between the individualist tendency (human individuals can be free to create their world) and the collectivist tendency (the world creates the individual).[17] The real issue is how we can transcend both these two tendencies. This can only be achieved if we recognise the historical fact that individuals are not absolutely free to create their world, nor does the world just create the individual. As long as individuals live in a society, they are not just individuals but *social* individuals, subject to a process which socialises them into internalising the existing institutional framework and the dominant social paradigm. In this sense, they are not just free to create their world but are conditioned by History, tradition and so on.

Still, this socialisation process is broken, at almost all times, as far as a minority of the population is concerned and in exceptional historical circumstances, even with respect to the majority itself. In the latter case, a process is set in motion that usually ends with a change of the institutional structure of society and of the corresponding social paradigm. This statement is just a historical observation and I will not attempt to "ground" it somewhere because any such "grounding" will inevitably involve a closed theoretical system — as, for example is the case with the Marxian or Freudian interpretations of the socialisation process. This historical observation should be complemented by another one, which transcends both idealism and materialism. Namely, it is neither ideological factors alone, nor just material factors that determine social change at any moment of time. Sometimes, the former may have been more influential than the latter and vice versa but, usually, as Murray Bookchin stresses,[18] it is the interaction between the two that it is decisive. However, any generalisations aiming at deriving a "philosophy of History", like the ones attempted by Marxists and idealists, are just not possible.

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[17] L. Suzan Brown , *The Politics of Individualism* (Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1993), p. 11.
[18] Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, p. 151.

Societies therefore are not just "collections of individuals"[19] but consist of social individuals who are both free to create their world, i.e. a new set of institutions and the corresponding social paradigm, and are created by the world, in the sense that they have to break with the dominant social paradigm in order to be able to recreate the world.

So, it is not just state collectivism but, also, liberal individualism of every type that is incompatible with freedom, defined as individual and collective autonomy. In this context, recent libertarian attempts to "reconcile" individualism and liberalism on the one hand, with left libertarianism on the other, are invalid. This applies, for instance, to Susan Brown's attempt to distinguish between what she calls *existential individualism* (individualism that stresses freedom as a desirable end in itself) and *instrumental individualism* (individualism that sees freedom merely as a means to achieve egocentric competitive interests) which she assigns to anarchism and liberalism respectively.[20]

But, as Castoriadis points out, "the idea of autonomy as an end in itself would lead to a purely formal 'Kantian' conception. We will autonomy both for itself and in order to be able TO DO."[21] One may, therefore, argue that, in fact, there is only one type of individualism, instrumentalist individualism, which sees individual autonomy as a means to achieve egocentric competitive interests. Similarly, there is only one type of collectivism, instrumentalist collectivism, which sees collective autonomy as a means to achieve Progress in the sense of the development of productive forces. So, the real point at issue is whether we wish autonomy and freedom in order to further our egocentric interests, which emanate basically from property rights, or whether, instead, we wish autonomy and freedom in order to further our self-development, which is impossible without the self-development of everybody else in society and is not just identifiable with Progress in the above sense. In the first instance, we refer to liberal individualism (what Brown calls instrumental individualism), which is consistent with a negative conception of freedom and an exclusively individualistic conception of autonomy. In the second instance, we refer to individual autonomy seen as inseparable from collective autonomy. To my mind, Brown's definition of individualism is perfectly compatible with liberal individualism and incompatible with individual and collective autonomy. In this sense, her treatment of anarchism and liberalism confuses the fundamental differences between the two, particularly with respect to their diametrically opposite conceptions of freedom and autonomy.

What is the foundation of freedom and democracy?

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[19] Ibid. p. 12.
[20] L. Suzan Brown, *The Politics of Individualism,* p. 3.
[21] C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 121.

Although, as I pointed out above, the connection between freedom/autonomy on the one hand and democracy on the other can be taken for granted, the question still remains about the foundations of democracy, indeed freedom itself. Traditionally, most libertarians, from Godwin to Bakunin and Kropotkin, based their ethics and politics, freedom itself, on a fixed human nature governed by "necessary and universal laws", by which — in contrast to marxists who emphasised economic "laws" — they usually meant natural laws. This reflected the same nineteenth century incentive which led Marx to develop his "scientific" economic laws, namely, the incentive to make the liberatory project look "scientific" or, at least, "objective". However, this approach is not tenable anymore, since it is not possible today to continue talking about objectivity, at least as far as the interpretation of social phenomena is concerned. As I pointed out elsewhere,[22] the very existence of several competing and incommensurable (in the Kuhnian sense) interpretations about social reality, combined with the absence of any "objective" criteria to choose among them, makes the "objectification" of the liberatory project at least doubtful. At the same time, in view of the role that the marxist "scientification" of the socialist project played with respect to the establishment of new hierarchical structures in the socialist movement first and in society at large later, the desirability of grounding the liberatory project on an "objective" base is also questionable.

It is not therefore accidental that some libertarians today (Benello, Brown, Marshall et al.) question the traditional grounding of freedom on a fixed human nature, or on "scientific" laws and "objective" tendencies. However, several of those libertarians usually link this questioning with liberal individualistic assumptions about society. But, such linking is anything but necessary. If we adopt a definition of freedom in terms of individual and collective autonomy, then, it is possible to avoid the trap of objectivism, without succumbing to liberal individualism. In this case, autonomy/freedom, as well as its political expression, democracy, becomes a social *project*, i.e. a matter of conscious and self-reflective choice at the individual and collective level, and not the outcome of debatable interpretations of social "evolution".

Just to give an important historical example, the historical uniqueness of the Athenian democracy can not be explained adequately by any "grand" scheme of social or natural "evolution". Thus, despite the fact that several places in the Mediterranean, including "next door" Sparta, were at a similar phase of social and natural "evolution" as Athens, still, it was only in the latter that direct democracy reached its highest stage. As Castoriadis put it:

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[22] Takis Fotopoulos, "The 'objectivity' of the liberatory project", *Society and Nature*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1992), pp. 1-31.

> "Democracy and philosophy are not the outcome of natural or spontaneous tendencies of society and history. They are themselves creations and they entail a radical break with the previously instituted state of affairs. Both are aspects of the project of autonomy (...) the Greeks (discovered) in the sixth and fifth centuries that institutions and representations belong to **nomos** and not to **physis**, that they are human creations and not 'God-given' or 'nature-given'."[23]

Still, the fact that the project of autonomy is not objectively grounded does not mean that "anything goes" and that it is therefore impossible to derive any definable body of principles to assess social and political changes, or to develop a set of ethical values to assess human behaviour. Reason is still necessary in a process of deriving the principles and values which are consistent with the project of autonomy and, in this sense, are rational. Therefore, the principles and values derived within such a process do not just express personal tastes and desires. In fact, they are much more "objective" than the principles and values that are derived from disputable interpretations of natural and social evolution, since the logical consistency of the former with the project of autonomy could be assessed in an indisputable way, unlike the contestable "objectivity" of the latter.

3. Democracy, sovereignty and the state

The concentration of power is incompatible not only with freedom in the sense of autonomy but even with freedom in the negative sense of "freedom from".[24] It is not therefore accidental that today, when the market economy and representative democracy lead to increasing concentration of economic and political power respectively,[25] neo-liberals and "libertarians" of the Right try to dissociate power from freedom.[26] However, the oligarchic character of the present regimes does not just arise from the fact that real power is in the hands of a political elite, as supporters of the theory of elitism suggest, or, alternatively, in the hands of an economic class for whom politicians act directly or indirectly as agents, as instrumentalist versions of marxism imply. The oligarchic character of the present "democracies", which, in fact, negates any

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[23] C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy,* pp. 36-38.

[24] See for the logical contradictions of the Right-wing libertarianism, Alan Haworth, *Anti-Libertarianism: Markets, Philosophy and Myth* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[25] See K. Kavoulakos, "The relationship of realism and utopianism in the theories of democracy of Habermas and Castoriadis" as regards political concentration and Takis Fotopoulos, "The end of socialist statism" as regards economic concentration, *Society and Nature,* Vol. 2, No. 3 (1994), pp. 69-97 and 11-68, respectively.

[26] Alan Haworth, pp. 37-40.

conception of freedom, is the direct outcome of the fact that the present institutional framework separates society from the economy and society from the state.

Although the market economy was formed two centuries ago, when, within the process of marketization of the economy,[27] most social controls over the market were abolished, still, the separation process had begun earlier, in 16th century Europe. At the political level, the emergence of the nation-state, at about the same time and place, initiated a parallel process of concentrating political power, initially in the form of highly centralised monarchies and later in the form of representative "democracies". From then on, as Bookchin points out, "the word 'state' came to mean a professional civil authority with the powers to govern a 'body politic'."[28]

It was also during the same 16th century that the idea of representation entered in the political lexicon, although the sovereignty of Parliament was not established until the 17th century. In the same way that the king has once "represented" society as a whole, it was now the turn of Parliament to play this role, although sovereignty itself was still supposed to belong to the people as a whole. In fact, the doctrine that prevailed in Europe since the French revolution was not just that the French people were sovereign and that their views were represented in the National Assembly, but that the French nation was sovereign and the National Assembly embodied the will of the nation. As it was observed:

> "This was a turning point in continental European ideas since, before this, the political representative had been viewed in the continent as a delegate. According to the new theory promulgated by the French revolutionaries (...) the elected representative is viewed as an independent maker of national laws and policies, not as an agent for his constituents or for sectional interests."[29]

The European conception of sovereignty was completely alien to Athenians, since the separation of sovereignty from its exercise was unknown to them. All powers were exercised directly by the citizens themselves, or by delegates who were appointed by lot and for a short period of time. In fact, as Aristotle points out, the election by voting was considered oligarchic and was not allowed but in exceptional circumstances (usually in

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[27] See Takis Fotopoulos, "The nation-state and the market", *Society and Nature*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1994), pp. 37-80.

[28] Murray Bookchin, *Urbanization without cities,* pp.33-4.

[29] Anthony H. Birch, p. 58.

cases where special knowledge was required) and only the appointment by lot was considered democratic.[30]

Therefore, the type of "democracy" that has been established since the 16th century in Europe has had very little in common with the Athenian democracy. The former presupposes the separation of state from society and the exercise of sovereignty by a separate body of representatives, whereas the latter is based on the principle that sovereignty is exercised directly by the free citizens themselves. Athens, therefore, may hardly be characterised as a state in the normal sense of the word. As Thomas Martin[31] rightly points out "decentralised self-governing communities like ancient Athens or medieval Lubeck were not 'city-states'. Without centralised authority there is no sovereign. Without a sovereign there is no state". So, despite the fact that Greek philosophers did speak about sovereignty in the polis,[32] a fact that some could take it as implying the existence of a state, I think that in the case of the Athenian polis we can not properly speak of sovereignty and state

It is true that power relations and structures did not disappear in the Polis — not only at the economic level, where inequities were obvious, but even at the political level, where the hierarchical structure of society was clear. At the top of the social pyramid, the free citizens, who were entitled to take part in the democratic process and in particular the proceedings of the *ecclesia,* and, at the bottom, women, followed by slaves. We may therefore argue that overall, Athens was a mix of non-statist and statist democracy. It was non-statist as regards the citizen body, which was "ruled" by nobody and whose members shared power equally among themselves, and statist as regards those not qualifying as full citizens (women, slaves, immigrants), over whom the demos wielded power.

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[30] According to Aristotle "Λεγω δ' οίον δοκεί δημοκρατικόν μεν είναι το κληρωτάς είναι τας αρχάς, το δ' αιρετάς ολιγαρχικόν" i.e. "I say that the appointment by lot is commonly held to be characteristic of democracy, whereas the process of election for that purpose is looked upon as oligarchical" (Aristotle, *Politics,* Book IV, 1294b), John Warrington, ed. (London: Heron Books).

[31] Thomas Martin, "The end of sovereignty" in this issue of S&N. Bookchin (*Urbanization without cities*) and Castoriadis agree on the non-statist character of Athens. The latter, for instance, states that "the Polis is not a 'State' since in it explicit power — the positing of nomos (legislation), dike (jurisdiction) and telos (government) — belongs to the whole body of citizens, Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy,* p. 157.

[32] Aristotle was clear on this when he discussed the various types of regimes: "next we ask: what should be the sovereign in polis? The people? The rich? The better sort of man? The one best man? Or a tyrant?", Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, 1281a. He then goes no to define democracy as the case where the free citizens are sovereign, ibid, Book IV, 1290b.

Still, the Athenian democracy was the first historical example of the identification of the sovereign with those exercising sovereignty. As Hannah Arendt points out:

> "[T]he whole concept of rule and being ruled, of government and power in the sense in which we understand them, as well as the regulated order attending them, was felt to be prepolitical and to belong to the private rather than the public sphere (...) equality therefore far from being connected with justice, as in modern times, was the very essence of freedom: to be free meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move to a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed."[33]

Therefore the Greeks, having realised that "there always is and there always will be an *explicit power*, that is, unless a society were to succeed in transforming its subjects into automata that had completely internalised the instituted order",[34] concluded that "no citizen should be subjected to power and if this was not possible that power should be shared equally among citizens."[35] It is therefore obvious that libertarian definitions of politics as "the *rule* of one, many, a few, or all over all" and of democracy as "the *rule* of all over all",[36] are incompatible with the classical conceptions of both politics and democracy.

4. Liberal and socialist "democracy"

Democracy and the growth economy

The dynamics of the market economy, namely the economic system which emerged about two centuries ago, led to the growth economy, which, in this century, took the form of either a capitalist growth economy, or a socialist growth economy. The growth economy, in both its versions, implied a high degree of concentration of economic power.[37] But, as a high degree of economic concentration is incompatible with the spreading of political power, it is no wonder that the growing concentration of economic power this century was accompanied by a corresponding concentration of political power.

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[33] Hannah Arendt, *The Human condition* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 32-33.
[34] C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy,* p. 156.
[35] "Εντεύθεν δ' ελήλυθε το μή άρχεσθαι, μάλιστα μεν υπο μηδενός, ει δε μή, κατα μέρος. Και συμβάλλεται ταύτη προς την ελευθερίαν την κατα το ίσον", Aristotle, *Politics*, book VI, 1317b.
[36] MacKercher, in this issue.
[37] See Takis Fotopoulos, "The end of socialist statism".

Thus, as regards, first, the compatibility of democracy with the capitalist growth economy, one could easily see the fundamental incompatibility between the marketization process, namely, the process that involves the phased removal of social controls over the market and democracy. It is obvious that the marketization process would have been impossible in a democracy, since in a capitalist growth economy it is those who are **not** in control of the economic process who constitute the vast majority of the population. In other words, the more oligarchic the form of political organisation, the more amenable to the marketization process the economy is.

It is not therefore surprising that the present internationalisation of the market economy, which implies further concentration of economic power, has been accompanied by a parallel concentration of political power. So, although It is true that today we see the end of sovereignty (as Thomas Martin points out in this issue), still, it is not sovereignty in general that withers away but the nation-state's sovereignty, particularly its economic sovereignty. The decline of state sovereignty is directly linked to the present internationalised phase of the market economy and the consequent withering away of the nation-state.[38] In this context, one may argue that state sovereignty is today replaced by market sovereignty and a form of supra-national sovereignty. The former means that, today, it is the market which defines effective human rights, not just economic rights, but even who can really exercise his/her human rights in general. The latter means that, at present, political and economic power is concentrated at the supra-national level of new inter-state organisations (like the European Commission) on the one hand, and of the emerging network of city-regional governments on the other.[39]

Furthermore, the continuous decline of the State's economic sovereignty is being accompanied by the parallel transformation of the public realm into pure administration. For instance, international central banks are being established, which, in the future, independent from political control, will take crucial decisions about the economic life of millions of citizens (see for instance the planned European central bank that is designed to take over the control of the new European monetary system and the common European currency). Hannah Arendt prophetically described this process as follows:

> "A complete victory of society will always produce some sort of 'communistic fiction', whose outstanding political characteristic is that it is indeed ruled by an 'invisible hand', namely by nobody. What we traditionally call state and

[38] See Takis Fotopoulos, "The nation-state and the market".

[39] As it was recently observed, "for the first time, instead of being primarily part of national economy, cities now form part of a world system, sometimes with closer connections to each other than to the countries of which they form part, Sir Richard Rogers's Reith Lecture (quoted in *The Observer* 19/2/95).

> government gives place here to pure administration — a state of affairs which Marx rightly predicted as the 'withering away of the state', though he was wrong in assuming that only a revolution could bring it about and even more wrong when he believed that this complete victory of society would mean the eventual emergence of the 'realm of freedom'."[40]

In the light of the above trends, it may be interesting to examine briefly the "proceduralist" model of democracy that is promoted by Habermas lately, as a third way between the liberal model on the one hand and "a communitarian interpretation of the republican model" on the other. Habermas, differentiating his model of democracy from what he calls the "state-centred understanding of politics" that, according to him, both the liberal and the republican models of democracy represent, stresses that according to discourse theory the success of deliberative politics depends "not on a collectively acting citizenry but on the institutionalization of the corresponding procedures and conditions of communication". His model consists of a "decentered society", i.e. a "democracy" which is based on a civil society that "provides the social basis of autonomous public spheres that remain as distinct from the economic system as from the administration."[41]

However, the Habermasian view of democracy not only converts democracy into a set of procedures, as Castoriadis rightly points out (in this issue), but it is also utterly irrelevant to the present trends of the market economy and the bureaucratization of today's "politics" that I described above. The fact that the present internationalised economy rules out the possibility of "autonomous" public spheres at the economic level (unless new forms of economic organisation are created outside it) is obviously ignored by Habermas. Equally ignored by him is the fact that, even at the political level, the possibility of autonomous public spheres is effectively undermined by the marketization process (deregulation of markets etc.) which was accelerated during the present internationalised phase of the market economy (see, for instance, the present withering away of autonomous trades unions).

As far now as the compatibility of democracy with the socialist growth economy is concerned, we should remember that the dominant social paradigm in the latter was grounded on the idea that the principal goal of human society was the maximisation of production on the one hand, and the creation of a just system of distribution on the other. Furthermore, the fact that the dominant social paradigm was supposed to be grounded on a "science" (marxism) implied the imperative need to "prove" it, in the sense of

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[40] Hannah Arendt, *The Human condition,* p. 45.

[41] Jurgen Habermas, "Three normative models of democracy" in *Constellations*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1994), pp 1-10.

outproducing all competitor economic systems. There was therefore no doubt whatsoever in the minds of the Soviet elite about what will have to be sacrificed in any possible clash between the dominant social paradigm and democracy. No wonder therefore that, as early as 1920, Lenin was declaring that "in the final analysis every kind of democracy, as political superstructure in general (...) serves production", reminding the romantics who wanted to go back to "workers" control and industrial democracy that "industry is indispensable, democracy is not".[42]

So, whereas the original Leninist project for the soviet democracy, as expressed in *The State and Revolution,* was about the transformation of power relations, the Soviet elite, from 1920 onwards, consistently maintained the view (no doubt, "external" events have also played a role on this) that socialism wholly consisted in equality of ownership relations and not at all in equality in power relations. The incentive was obvious: to achieve the goal of maximising production, which was identified as the main goal of socialism. As Harding points out:

> "Socialism was conceived of as the maximisation of production which could only be achieved by state ownership of the means of production and the implementation of national plan for the allocation of all resources (...) the trick was (...) to convince its adherents that the essential matters that concern society were not at all political matters that involved the power of some over others (...) but that they were, rather, matters whose optimal resolution proceeded from the correct application of objective or scientific knowledge."[43]

History, therefore, has shown in an unambiguous way that democracy is incompatible with both versions of the growth economy. However, the question still remains whether it is just the practice of liberal and socialist democracy that is to be blamed for the oligarchic character of the liberal and socialist regimes respectively, or whether instead it is the very conception of democracy that liberals and socialists adopt, which is incompatible with democracy — a conception that is identified by a fundamental common characteristic: "statism".

The liberal conception of democracy

The starting point in the description of the liberal position on democracy should be that none of the founders of classical liberalism was an advocate of democracy, in the sense

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[42] Quoted by Neil Harding, "The Marxist-Leninist detour" in *Democracy, The unfinished journey, 508 BC to AD 1993,* ed. by John Dunn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 173.
[43] Ibid., p. 178.

of direct democracy. In fact, the opposite was the case. For instance, the American Founding Fathers Madison and Jefferson were sceptical of democracy, precisely because of its Greek connotation of direct rule: This is why they preferred to call the American system republican because, "the term was thought to be more appropriate to the balanced constitution that had been adopted in 1787 than the term democratic, with its connotations of lower-class dominance."[44] Furthermore, not only the liberal philosophers took for granted the separation of the state apparatus from society but, in fact, saw democracy as a way of bridging the gap between state and society. The bridging role was supposed to be played by representative "democracy", a system whereby the plurality of political parties would provide an adequate forum for competing interests and systems of values.

However, the fact that, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau pointed out, men's wills can not be represented by others could lead to a different understanding of the motives behind the liberal adoption of representative "democracy". In this understanding, representative democracy is a form of statist democracy whose main aim is the exclusion of the vast majority of the population from political power. As John Dunn stresses:

> "It is important to recognise that the modern state was constructed, painstakingly and purposefully, above all by Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes, for the express purpose of denying that any given population, any people, had either the capacity or the right to act together for themselves, either independently of or against their sovereign. The central point of the concept was to deny the very possibility that any DEMOS (let alone one on the demographic scale of a European territorial monarchy) could be a genuine political agent, could ACT at all, let alone act with sufficiently continuous identity and practical coherence for it to be able to rule itself. (...) the idea of the modern state was invented precisely to repudiate the possible coherence of democratic claims to rule or even take genuinely political action (...) representative democracy is democracy made safe for the modern state."[45]

It is not therefore surprising that Adam Smith, the father of economic liberalism, was in pains to stress that the main task of government was the defence of the rich against the poor — a task that, as John Dunn points out, is "necessarily less dependably performed

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[44] Anthony Birch, p. 50.
[45] John Dunn, *Democracy*, pp. 247-8.

where it is the poor who choose who is to govern, let alone where the poor themselves, as in Athens, in large measure simply ARE the government."[46]

The socialist conception of democracy

As regards the socialist conception of democracy we have to distinguish first between the social democratic and the marxist conceptions of democracy. The social democratic conception is essentially a version of the liberal conception. In other words, social democracy consists of a "liberal democracy" element, in the sense of a statist and representative form of democracy based on a market economy, and an "economic democracy" element, in the sense of a strong welfare state and the state commitment to implement full employment policies. However, for reasons that I developed elsewhere,[47] social democratic parties, all over the world, have now dropped the "economic democracy" element of their conception of democracy. As a result, the social democratic conception of democracy is by now indistinguishable from the liberal one, in the context of what I call the present "neoliberal consensus".[48]

As far as the marxist conception is concerned, I will argue that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, it is clearly a statist conception of democracy. In this conception, democracy is not differentiated from the state for the entire historical period which separates capitalism from communism i.e. for the entire period that is called the "realm of necessity", when scarcity leads to class antagonisms which make inevitable class dictatorships of one kind or another. In this view, socialism will simply replace the dictatorship of one class, the bourgeoisie, by that of another, the proletariat.

Thus, according to Lenin, "democracy is also a state and consequently democracy will also disappear when the state disappears. Revolution alone can 'abolish' the bourgeois state. The state in general, i.e. the most complete democracy can only 'wither away'."[49] And he continues that the state (and democracy) will wither away only when:

> "people have become so accustomed to observing the fundamental rules of social intercourse and when their labour becomes so productive that they will voluntarily work according to their ability (...) there will then be no need for society to regulate the quantity of products to be received by each; each will take freely 'according to

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[46] John Dunn, *Democracy,* p. 251.
[47] Takis Fotopoulos, "The end of socialist statism".
[48] See Takis Fotopoulos, *The neo-liberal consensus and the crisis of the growth economy* (Athens: Gordios, 1993).
[49] V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1917), pp 31-2.

> his needs[50] (...) from the moment all members of society, or even only the vast majority have learned to administer the state themselves (...) the need for government of any kind begins to disappear altogether (...) for when all have learned to administer and actually do independently administer social production, independently keep accounts and exercise control over the idlers etc. (...) the necessity of observing the simple fundamental rules of human intercourse will very soon become a habit."[51]

It is therefore obvious that in the marxist world-view, a non-statist conception of democracy is inconceivable, both at the transitional stage leading to communism and at the higher phase of communist society. In the former, because the realm of necessity makes necessary a statist form of democracy where political and economic power is not shared among all citizens, but, only among members of the working class. In the latter, because when we reach the realm of freedom no form of democracy at all is necessary, since no significant decisions will have to be made! At the economic level, scarcity and division of labour will by then have disappeared and therefore there will be no need for any significant economic decisions to be taken about the allocation of resources. Also, at the political level the administration of things will have replaced the administration of people and therefore, there will be no need for any significant political decisions to be taken either.

However, the marxist abolition of scarcity depends on an objective definition of "needs" which is neither feasible, nor — from the democratic point of view — desirable. It is not feasible, because, although basic needs may be assumed finite and independent of time and place, the same can not be said about their satisfiers (i.e. the form or the means by which these needs are satisfied), let alone non-basic needs. It is not desirable, because, in a democratic society, an essential element of freedom is choice as regards the ways in which needs are formed and satisfied. As Bookchin points out:

> "[I]n a truly free society needs would be formed by **consciousness** and by **choice**, not simply by environment and tool-kits (...) the problems of needs and scarcity, in short, must be seen as a problem of selectivity-of choice (...) freedom from scarcity, or **post-scarcity** presupposes that individuals have the material possibility of choosing what they need — not only a sufficiency of available goods

[50] Ibid., p. 165.
[51] Ibid., pp. 174-5.

> from which to choose but a transformation of work, both qualitatively and quantitatively."[52]

So, the communist stage is in fact a mythical state of affairs and the reference to it could simply be used to justify the indefinite maintenance of state power and power relations and structures. It is therefore obvious that, within the problematique of the democracy project, the link between post-scarcity (defined "objectively") on the one hand, and freedom on the other, should be broken. The abolition of scarcity and, consequently, of the division of labour is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for democracy. Therefore, the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom should be de-linked from the economic process. Still, from Aristotle, through Locke and Marx, to Arendt, the distinction between the "realm of necessity" (where nature belongs) and the "realm of freedom" always has been considered to be fundamental. However, although this distinction may be useful as a *conceptual tool* in classifying human activities, there is no reason why the two realms must be seen as mutually exclusive in social reality. Historically, there have been several occasions when various degrees of freedom survived under conditions that could be characterised as belonging to the "realm of necessity". Furthermore, once we cease treating the two realms as mutually exclusive, there is no justification for any attempt to dominate Nature — an important element of Marxist growth ideology — in order to enter the realm of freedom.

In conclusion, there are no material preconditions of freedom. This, of course does not mean that the satisfaction of material needs, particularly the basic needs, is not important for freedom. On the contrary, it means that it is freedom, as expressed in direct and economic democracy, which is the precondition for the satisfaction of the basic needs of the ENTIRE population (as they define them democratically) and not the other way round. Therefore the entrance to the realm of freedom does not depend on any "objective" factors, like the arrival of the mythical state of affairs of material abundance. The level of development of productive forces that is required so that material abundance for the entire population on Earth could be achieved makes it at least doubtful that such a stage could ever be achieved without serious repercussions to the environment — unless "material abundance" is defined democratically and not "objectively", in a way which is consistent with ecological balance. By the same token, the entrance to the realm of freedom does not depend on a massive change of consciousness through the adoption of some form of spiritualistic dogma, as some deep ecologists and other spiritualistic movements propose. Therefore, neither capitalism and socialism, on the "objective" side,

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[52] Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom, the emergence and dissolution of hierarchy* (Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1991), p. 69.

nor the adoption of some kind of spiritualistic dogma, on the "subjective" side, constitute historical preconditions to enter the realm of freedom. Today, the realm of freedom is even more feasible than in the past, as a result of recent developments on both the "objective" and the "subjective" levels that make easier a new synthesis between the two.

Finally, as regards recent developments with respect to the marxist conception of democracy, the present ideological hegemony of liberalism has led to a situation where most marxists, neo-marxists, post marxists and so on, today identify socialism with an extension of (liberal representative) democracy rather than with the emancipation of the working class[53] and concentrate their efforts in theorising, in several ways, that socialism is the fulfilment of liberalism rather than its negation. A typical example of this trend is Norberto Bobbio[54] who characterises liberal democracy as "the only possible form of an effective democracy" to protect the negative freedom of citizens from the state! In the process, Bobbio attacks what he calls the "fetish" of direct democracy on the usual grounds of scale (ignoring the proposals of confederalism) and the experience of the student movement (ignoring the fact that democracy is not just a procedure but a form of social organisation). In essence, therefore, what Bobbio, Miliband[55] and other writers in the same ideological space promote today is a form of economic democracy to complement liberal democracy. In so doing, in effect, they try to take over the social democratic space, which was abandoned by social democrats after they moved to the right and adopted the neoliberal consensus.

As regards the marxist ecological left, we should mention the views expressed by James O'Connor, who talks about "sublating" "local" and "central", spontaneity and planning, exclusive and inclusive cultural identities, industrial and social labour etc.[56] Similarly, John Dryzek[57] stresses the need for "democratization at all possible levels: in the autonomous public spheres, such as those constituted by new social movements, at the boundaries of the state, where legitimacy is sought through discursive exercises, and even within the state, e.g. in the form of impact assessment". It is therefore obvious that the red-green conceptions of democracy are, also, statist and, in this sense, are incompatible to democracy as such.

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[53] For an analysis of these trends see Andrew Gamble, "Class politics and Radical Democracy", *New Left Review,* No. 164 (July-August 1987), p. 115.
[54] See Perry Anderson, "The affinities of Norberto Bobbio", *New Left Review,* No. 170 (July-August 1988).
[55] Ralph Miliband, "Fukuyama and the socialist alternative", *New Left Review*, No. 193 (May-June 1992).
[56] James O'Connor, "Democracy and ecology", *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism,* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Dec. 1993).
[57] John Dryzek, "Ecology and discursive democracy", *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism,* Vol. 3(2) (June 1992), p. 37.

5. A new conception of democracy

But, let us now turn to the characteristics of democracy and consider how we may define the conditions for democracy and develop a new conception of it which is appropriate to today's conditions.

Direct democracy

As I mentioned above, there is a lot of confusion today about the meaning of democracy. A typical illustration of this fact is the various "qualifying" adjectives added to democracy. However, in fact, there are no various forms of democracy, among which we can choose the one which is compatible with the institutional framework of our liking, as liberals, socialists and some libertarians do. At the political level, there can only be one form of democracy, what we may call *political* or *direct democracy*, where political power is shared equally among all citizens. This implies that parliamentary "democracy" (as it functions in the West), soviet "democracy" (as it functioned in the East) and the various fundamentalist or semi-military regimes in the South are just forms of political oligarchy, where political power is concentrated in the hands of various elites (professional politicians, party bureaucrats, priests, military and so on). Similarly, in the past, there had been various forms of oligarchy when emperors, kings and their courts, with or without the cooperation of knights, priests and others, concentrated political power in their hands.

Several attempts were made in the past to institutionalise various forms of direct democracy, especially during revolutionary periods (for example, the sections of the French commune, the Spanish assemblies, the Hungarian worker councils etc.). However, most of these attempts were short-lived, whereas, in other cases, democratic arrangements were introduced just as a set of procedures and did not involve the institutionalisation of democracy as a new form of political *regime* which replaces, and not just complements, the State. The only historical example of an *institutionalised* direct democracy, where, for more than a century, the state was subsumed in the democratic form of social organisation, was the Athenian democracy.

Of course, the Athenian democracy was a partial political democracy. But, what characterised the Athenian democracy as partial was not the political institutions themselves but the very narrow definition of full citizenship adopted by the Athenians. A definition, which excluded large sections of the population (women, slaves, immigrants), who, in fact, constituted the majority of the people living in Athens. Furthermore, I refer to "institutionalised" direct democracy in order to make clear the distinction between

democratic institutions and democratic practice. The latter, as critics have pointed out, could sometimes be characterised as de facto "oligarchic", in the sense that the decision-taking process was often effectively controlled by a strong leader (e.g. Pericles), or a small number of demagogues. However, this could hardly be taken as a serious criticism of the democratic institutions themselves. It could be argued, instead, that it was precisely the partial character of the political democracy, which, combined with the prevailing significant disparities in the distribution of income and wealth,[58] not only created serious contradictions in the democratic process but also, at the end, by weakening the economic base on which this process was built, led to the collapse of the democratic institutions themselves.[59]

Economic democracy

However, it should not be forgotten that direct democracy refers just to the question of political power. In classical Athens, for instance, the question of economic power, in other words, who controls the economy, was never a public issue, except in the limited sense of redistribution of income and wealth. The reason was, of course, that the accumulation of wealth was not a structural characteristic of the Athenian democracy and consequently part of the dominant social paradigm. Therefore, questions about the way economic resources were to be allocated did not belong to the public realm,[60] except to the extent that they referred to the setting of social controls to regulate the limited market or to the financing of "public" spending. It was only when the market economy and the consequent growth economy emerged, two centuries ago, that the question how the important economic decisions are taken, (how, what and for whom to produce) and the corresponding issue of economic power arose.

In the type of society that has emerged since the rise of the market economy, there was a definite shift of the economy from the private realm, into what Hannah Arendt called the "social realm", where the nation-state also belongs. Today, it is no longer possible to talk about democracy, without referring to the question of economic power, since, to talk about the equal sharing of political power, without conditioning it on the equal sharing of

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[58] The importance of economic inequities with respect to the stability of democracy was recognised even at the time of the classical Athenian democracy. According to Aristotle "some hold that property (...) is always the pivot of revolutionary movements (...) the common people are driven to rebellion by inequality in the distribution of property", Aristotle, *Politics,* Book II, 1266b & 1267a.

[59] See Takis Fotopoulos, "Direct and economic democracy in Athens and its significance today", *Society and Nature*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 1-17.

[60] Aristotle explicitly classifies the economic activities as parts of household management, see Aristotle, *Politics,* book 1.

economic power, is at best meaningless and at worse deceptive. This is why I think that it would be wrong to consider the USA as "an unusually free country", as Noam Chomsky seems to suggest in a recent interview to an Athens daily.[61] I think that such an assessment would only stand if we could separate political freedom and equality from economic freedom and equality. But, taking into account Chomsky's political work,[62] I think that he will not agree with such a separation of the two freedoms. So, even if one agrees that a significant degree of political freedom may have been secured in the USA at the legislative level (though, of course, one may have serious reservations about how the relevant legislation is implemented with respect to minorities etc.), still, the very high degree of economic inequality and poverty that characterise this country with respect to its level of economic development would rather classify it as "an unusually unfree country". From this point of view, also, it is not surprising that the present decline of representative democracy has led many liberals, social democrats and others to pay lip service to direct democracy, without referring to its necessary complement: economic democracy.

Historically, in contrast to the institutionalisation of political democracy, there has never been a corresponding example of an institutionalised economic democracy. The forms of economic organisation that had prevailed since the emergence of the market economy, i.e. capitalism and state socialism, were just versions of economic oligarchy, where economic power was concentrated in the hands of capitalist and bureaucratic elites.[63]

I am not going to expand here on the meaning of economic democracy, which I have attempted elsewhere,[64] but I only wish to make the following point clear. The type of economic democracy I propose does not assume what Arendt called the "communistic fiction" that there is one interest in society as a whole. Such an assumption (which implies that the "invisible hand" in a market economy — or, alternatively, the planning process in a state socialist economy — would satisfy the general interest), abstracts from the essential fact that social activity is the result of the intentions of several individuals.[65] What I propose, instead, is to explicitly assume the diversity of individuals (which, in turn, implies that consensus is impossible) and to institutionalise this diversity, through the adoption of a combination of democratic planning procedures on the one

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[61] *Eleftherotypia* (31/7/1995).
[62] See more recently, N. Chomsky, *The prosperous few and the restless many* (Odonian Press, Berkeley California, 1993), pp. 18-20.
[63] See Takis Fotopoulos, "The end of socialist statism".
[64] See Takis Fotopoulos, "The economic foundations of an ecological society", *Society and Nature,* Vol. 1, No. 3 (1993), pp.1-40.
[65] Hannah Arendt, *The Human condition,* p. 44.

hand and voucher schemes within an artificial "market" on the other. The aim is to secure an allocation of resources that ensures both freedom of individual choice and the satisfaction of the basic needs of all citizens.

It is obvious that the proposed economic democracy assumes away the mythical stage of free communism and addresses the issue of how, within the context of a *scarcity society,* a method of resource allocation might be found which ensures that the above aim is achievable. From this viewpoint, it is not accidental that some modern anarchists who support the "politics of individualism" find it necessary, in order to attack democracy, to resort, on the one hand, to the myth of free communism[66] and, on the other, to the distortion that democracy involves a kind of "rule" in the form of majority rule. The intention is clear: the former makes economic democracy superfluous whereas the latter makes direct democracy undesirable. It is however characteristic of the distortion involved that when libertarians attack democracy as a kind of "rule" they usually confuse direct democracy with statist democracy. This is not surprising, in view of the fact that it is obviously impossible to talk about a "rule" in a form of social organisation where nobody is forced to be bound by laws and institutions, in the formation of which he/she did not, directly, take part.[67]

Finally, it should be stressed that economic democracy does not just mean, as Castoriadis seems to suggest, equality of income within the framework of an economy where money is still used as an impersonal means of exchange and a unit of value (although — in a way never clearly defined — money will not be used as a store of wealth as well) and where a "true" market is combined with some sort of democratic planning. Such a system is based on a crucial institutional arrangement, what the author describes as "non-differentiation of salaries, wages and incomes".[68] But, such an arrangement is not only utterly impractical and makes this system utopian in the negative sense of the word; it is also undesirable because, as I pointed out elsewhere,

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[66] Suzan Brown, for instance, starting from the anarcho-communist slogan "from each according to ability, to each according to need" she agrees with Goldman that "it is up to individuals to decide, voluntarily, how best to live and work together. It is not something imposed on them from above, or dictated by the majority but rather individuals themselves freely and voluntarily create and recreate the social and economic forms of organisation that they desire", L. Suzan Brown, pp. 127-128.

[67] April Carter seems to agree with the conclusion that direct democracy does not involve a form of "rule": "The only authority that can exist in a direct democracy is the collective 'authority' vested in the body politic (...) it is doubtful if authority can be created by a group of equals who reach decisions by a process of mutual persuasion", April Carter, *Authority and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 38. She further states: "commitment to direct democracy or anarchy in the socio-political sphere is incompatible with political authority", ibid. p. 69.

[68] Cornelius Castoriadis, "An interview", *Radical Philosophy,* 56 (Autumn 1990), pp. 35-43.

"given the inequality of the various types of work, equality of remuneration will in fact mean unequal work satisfaction".[69]

In conclusion, the type of direct and economic democracy that is proposed here would represent the re-conquering of the social realm (in Arendt's sense) by the public realm, i.e. the reconquering of a true social individuality, the creation of the conditions of freedom and self-determination, both at the political and the economic levels.

Democracy as a process of social self-institution

One common error in libertarian discussions on democracy is to characterise various types of past societies, or communities, as democracies, just because they involved democratic forms of decision-taking (popular assemblies) or economic equality. However, democracy is not just a *structure* institutionalising the equal sharing of power. Democracy is, also, a *process of social self-institution,* in the context of which politics constitutes an expression of both collective and individual autonomy. As an expression of collective autonomy, politics takes the form of calling into question the existing institutions and of changing them through deliberate collective action. As an expression of individual autonomy, "the polis secures more than human survival. Politics makes possible man's development as a creature capable of genuine autonomy, freedom and excellence".[70]

Democracy, as a process of social self-institution, implies a society which is open ideologically, namely which is not grounded on any closed system of beliefs, dogmas or, ideas. "Democracy", as Castoriadis puts it, "is the project of breaking the closure at the collective level".[71] Therefore, in a democratic society, dogmas and closed systems of ideas can not constitute parts of the dominant social paradigm, although, of course, individuals can have whatever beliefs they wish, as long as they are committed to uphold the democratic principle, namely the principle according to which society is institutionalised as direct and economic democracy.

The democratic principle itself is not grounded on any divine, natural or social "laws" or tendencies, but on our own conscious and self-reflective choice between the two main historical traditions: the tradition of heteronomy which has been historically dominant, and the tradition of autonomy. The choice of autonomy rules out any kind of irrationalism

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[69] Takis Fotopoulos, "The economic foundations of an ecological society", p. 34.
[70] Cynthia Farrar, referring to the thought of the sophist philosopher Protagoras, see her article "Ancient Greek political theory as a response to democracy" in John Dunn, *Democracy* , p. 24.
[71] C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy,* p. 21.

(faith in God, mystical beliefs etc.), as well as any "objective truths" about social evolution based on social or natural "laws". This is so, because any system of religious or mystical beliefs (as well as any closed system of ideas), by definition, excludes the questioning of some fundamental beliefs or ideas and, therefore, it is incompatible with individuals setting their own laws. In fact, the principle of "non-questioning" some fundamental beliefs is common in every religion or set of metaphysical and mystical beliefs, from Christianism up to Taoism. Thus, as far as Christianism is concerned, it is rightly pointed out that "Jesus' ethics are theologically based: they are not autonomous, i.e. derived from the needs of human individuals or society".[72] Similarly, as regards Taoism (adored by some anarchists today!) it also explicitly condemns reasoning and argumentation ("Disputation is a proof of not seeing clearly" declares Chuang Tzu).[73]

Therefore, the fundamental element of autonomy is the creation of our own truth, something that social individuals can only achieve through direct democracy, i.e. the process through which they continually question any institution, tradition or "truth". In a democracy, there are simply no given truths. The practice of individual and collective autonomy presupposes autonomy in thought, i.e. the constant questioning of institutions and truths. This could also explain why in classical Greece it was not just democracy that flourished, but, also, philosophy, in the sense of questioning any "truths" given by custom, tradition or previous thought. In fact, questioning was the common root of both philosophy and democracy. While popular assemblies, as a form of decision-taking, existed both before and after the Athenian *ecclesia* (usually having their roots in tribal assemblies), still, the differentiating characteristic of the Athenian ecclesia is the fact that it was not grounded on religion or tradition but on citizens' *doxa* (opinion).

From this point of view, the practice of several modern libertarians of characterising some European Christian movements, or mystery Eastern religions, as democratic is obviously out of place. For instance, George Woodcock's references to "mystery religions that emerged from the East", or to the Christian Catharist movement of the 11th century, are completely irrelevant to the democratic tradition.[74] Similarly out of place is Peter Marshall's focusing on those philosophical currents which emphasised natural law (Cynics, Stoics etc.) and his understating of the significance of the Polis, as a form of

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[72] Paul J. Achtemeier (ed) *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 481.
[73] Quoted in Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (London: Fontana, 1983), p. 126.
[74] "It may well be, however, that the tradition of democracy in the post-Greek world had its obscure roots among the Catharists", George Woodcock, "Democracy, heretical and radical", *Our Generation,* Vol. 22, Nos.1-2 (Fall 1990-Spring 1991), pp. 115-6.

social self-instituting and equal sharing of power among citizens.[75] No wonder that the same author, as well as many anarchists today, stress the significance of mysticist and spiritualist "philosophical" currents of the East (Taoism, Buddhism etc.). But, these currents, as Bookchin, Castoriadis and others have stressed, have nothing to do with democracy and collective freedom, let alone philosophy, which always consisted in the questioning of any type of law (natural or man-made) rather than in interpreting the teachings of the masters. No wonder, also, that in the non-democratic societies of the East, where the spiritualist philosophies have flourished, the attachment to tradition meant that "new ideas were often offered as the rediscovery, or the correct interpretation, of earlier lore (...) the focus was on how to perfect a given system, not how to justify any system by the pure dictates of reason".[76]

The conditions for democracy

After this discussion of the fundamental characteristics of democracy we are now in a position to summarise the conditions necessary for democracy. Democracy is incompatible with any form of a closed system of ideas or dogmas, at the ideological level, and with the concentration of power, at the institutional level. If, therefore, we assume that the two main forms of institutionalised power today are the political and economic power, i.e. the power to control the political and economic decision-making processes respectively, then, democracy implies the equal sharing of institutionalised power at the political and economic levels. Of course, there are other, also important, forms of power (patriarchal power, religious power, cultural power etc.). However, these other forms of power usually are not institutionalised any more — at least in all societies in the North and many in the South. In other words, although the constitutions of many countries preach equality between sexes, races, religions etcetera (a fact which, of course, does not preclude various forms of discrimination to flourish de facto and, in many cases, even de jure) none preaches the equal sharing of political and economic power among citizens in the sense of direct and economic democracy.

Therefore, democracy, according to our definition, implies that the following three sets of conditions have to be met:

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[75] Peter Marshall, erroneously identifying NOMOS (i.e. the laws of the Polis) with custom and convention points out that "The Cynics of the third century came even closer to anarchism (...) they alone rejected *Nomos* in favour of *Physis*; they wished to live purely 'according to Nature'. Since the Greek *Polis* was based on the rule of custom or convention, by rejecting *Nomos*, the Cynics denied the right of established authority to prescribe the limits of their actions", Peter Marshall, *Demanding the impossible* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), p 68.

[76] G.E.R. Lloyd, "Democracy, Philosophy and Science in Ancient Greece" in John Dunn *Democracy,* p. 55.

First, at the ideological level, society is grounded on the conscious *choice* of its citizens for individual and collective autonomy and not on any divine or mystical dogmas and preconceptions, or any closed theoretical systems involving social/natural "laws" or tendencies determining social change.

Second, at the political level, society is founded on the equal sharing of political power among all citizens, i.e. on the self-instituting of society (direct democracy). This means that the following sub-conditions have to be satisfied:

a) That there are no institutionalised political *processes* of an oligarchic nature. This implies that all political decisions (including those relating to the formation and execution of laws) are taken by the citizen body collectively and without representation.

b) That there are no institutionalised political *structures* embodying unequal power relations. This means that where delegation of authority takes place to segments of the citizen body, in order to carry out specific duties (e.g. to serve as members of popular courts, or of regional and confederal councils etc.) the delegation is assigned, on principle, by lot, on a rotation basis, and it is always recallable by the citizen body. Furthermore, as regards delegates to regional and confederal bodies, the mandates should be specific. This is an effective step towards the abolition of hierarchical relations since such relations today are based, to a significant extent, on the myth of the "experts" who are supposed to be able to control everything, from nature to society. However, apart from the fact that the knowledge of the so-called experts is doubtful (at least as far as social, economic and political phenomena is concerned), still, in a democratic society, political decisions are not left to the experts but to the users, the citizen-body — a principle consistently applied by the Athenians.

c) That all residents of a particular geographical area (which today — for reasons I will explain below — can only take the form of a geographical community) are members of the citizen body and are directly involved in the decision-taking process.

Third, at the economic level, society is founded on the equal sharing of economic power among all members of society (economic democracy). This means that the following sub-conditions have to be satisfied:

a) That there are no institutionalised economic *processes* of oligarchic nature. This means that all "macro" economic decisions, namely, decisions concerning the running of the economy as a whole (overall level of production, consumption and investment, amounts of work and leisure implied, technologies to be used etc.) are taken by the citizen body collectively and without representation.

b) That there are no institutionalised economic *structures* embodying unequal economic power relations. This implies that the means of production and distribution are collectively owned and controlled by the citizen body directly. Any inequality of income is exclusively the result of additional voluntary work at the individual level. Such additional work, beyond that required by any capable member of society for the satisfaction of basic needs, allows only for additional *consumption*, as no individual accumulation of capital is possible and any wealth accumulated, as a result of additional work, is not inherited.

Of course, the above conditions for democracy refer just to the institutional framework and constitute only the necessary conditions. The sufficient condition for a true democracy, so that it will not degenerate into some kind of "demagogue-crazy" where the demos is manipulated by a new breed of professional politicians, is crucially determined by the citizens' level of political consciousness that, in turn, is conditioned by ***paedeia***, the education of the individual as citizen.

Historically, the above conditions for democracy have never been satisfied fully. The Athenian democracy was a partial democracy since it only met the first condition above and the first two sub-conditions of the second. The socialist "democracies" that collapsed a few years ago did not satisfy any of the above conditions, although they represented a better spreading of economic power (in terms of income and wealth) than liberal "democracies". Finally, today's liberal "democracies", also, do not satisfy the above conditions, although they represent a better spreading of political power than socialist "democracies". However, an argument can be put forward that today's advanced liberal "democracies" may partially satisfy the first condition. This is so because these societies are not grounded on any divine and mystical dogmas, or some closed theoretical systems involving "laws" about social change. Furthermore, the very institutioning of the market economy and representative democracy is not based on some divine, natural or economic "laws" or tendencies, but on a choice: the choice of heteronomous society (I am not considering here how this choice was made) at the political and economic levels.

In conclusion, the above conditions for democracy imply a new conception of citizenship: economic, political, social and cultural. Thus, political citizenship involves new political structures and the return to the classical conception of politics (direct democracy). Economic citizenship involves new economic structures of community ownership and control of economic resources (economic democracy). Social citizenship involves new welfare structures where all basic needs (to be democratically determined) are met at the community level. Finally, cultural citizenship involves new democratic structures of dissemination and control of information and culture (mass media, art etc), which allow

every member of the community to take part in the process and at the same time develop his/her intellectual and cultural potential.

6. Democracy and confederal municipalism

Community and democracy

Today few doubt, and research has conclusively shown, that participation should infuse any model of social change, i.e. that social change should **at least be initiated** at the local level. The real issue therefore is not whether the participatory model of social change is desirable or not, but whether any real participation is feasible within the present institutional framework. This is a framework, which is defined, at the political level, by representative forms of democracy and, at the economic level, by the internationalised market economy and its institutions (TNCs, IMF, World Bank etc.) — a framework which, today, tends to develop into a series of networks of city-regions within federated structures of political power. In short, the real issue is decentralisation versus remaking society.

In this context, it is interesting to note that today both the proposals to decentralise and those to remake society are centred at the community level. This is not of course a surprising development, as it just represents the inevitable consequence of the collapse of socialist statism on the one hand and the failure of "actually existing capitalism" on the other. A failure that is both economic, as shown by the fact that this system cannot even meet the **basic** needs of at least 20% of the world's population,[77] and ecological, as the advancing ecological disintegration reveals. Thus, a new consciousness is emerging among radical movements in the North and the various community movements in the South — a consciousness, which ascribes the basic cause for the failure of both capitalism and socialism to the concentration of power. It is therefore becoming increasingly realised that collective and individual autonomy can only be achieved in the context of direct and economic democracy.

However, the rebirth of democracy is today possible only at the community level (the municipality or its subdivisions). It is only at the community level that the conditions that would make direct and economic democracy possible could be fulfilled, i.e. economic self-reliance, municipalization of economic resources and democratic allocation of goods and services among the confederally organized communities; it is also at the same level

[77] According to the latest (1995) annual report of the World Health Organisation (WHO), 1.1 billion people live in extreme poverty conditions and one third of the world's children are undernourished.

of confederated communities that the preconditions for an ecological society can be met, as I will try to show below.

The community is, of course, a notoriously disputed — some even say anachronistic — concept. However, I would agree with David Clark that community could never be destroyed or civilisation itself would collapse and that the real issue is how to define and operationalise the community, so that it would be useful in the urbanised, technological and highly mobile society of today. A useful starting point in this effort might be David Clark's definition of community in terms of what he calls "ecumenicity" (defined as a sense of solidarity that enables people to feel themselves part of and not hostile towards wider society) and autonomy (defined as a sense of significance that enables people to feel they have a role to play in the social scene, a role that is determined by rules that members of the community choose themselves and feel free to modify).[78]

But, to my mind, the ecumenicity and autonomy elements constitute only the *necessary condition* defining community relations. I think that community members cannot have a real sense of solidarity and especially a real sense of significance, unless a third element is present, which I would call the democracy element. The democracy element, which rules out the concentration of political and economic power, is in fact the *sufficient* condition for any true community. Historically, this has always been the case. Thus, as Michael Taylor[79] has shown, drawing on the experience of stateless primitive societies, peasant communities and "intentional" (utopian) communities, a community requires rough economic equality, as well as relations between its members that involve reciprocity (mutual aid, cooperation, sharing) and that are *direct* (i.e. unmediated by representatives, leaders, etc.) and many-sided.[80] So, taking into account all these three elements (ecumenicity, autonomy, democracy), we may end up with a definition of community like the one recently put forward by Bookchin as "a municipal association of people reinforced by its own economic power, its own institutionalization of the grass roots, and the confederal support of nearby communities organized into a territorial network on a local and regional scale".[81] I think that starting from a definition of

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[78] David Clark, "The concept of community education" in *Community Education*, ed. by Garth Allen et al, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), pp 58-60.

[79] Michael Taylor, *Community, Anarchy, and Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 26-32.

[80] Michael Taylor also shows conclusively why the liberal arguments of the "anarcho-capitalist school" (F. Hayek, R. Nozick and others), that no equality would survive for long without state interference, are logically and historically invalid and that, in fact, community is a necessary condition for the maintenance of an approximate equality; Michael Taylor, *Community, Anarchy, and Liberty*, pp. 95-104.

[81] Murray Bookchin, *Urbanization Without Cities*, p. 245.

community, like the one given by Bookchin, who developed the "Confederal Municipalism" approach, we may outline a model of a community-based economy and society, as it has been attempted elsewhere.[82] Of course, although community, as a political and economic unit, is geographically defined, it is assumed that it interlocks with various other communities (cultural, professional, ideological etc.).

It is, I hope, obvious that the community has been seen above as the fundamental social, political and economic unit, on which a new type of society could be founded, In this sense, the community is the foundation of a third social system beyond socialist statism and neo-liberal capitalism.

Communitarianism: the false "third" way

As I hinted above, however, apart from radical proposals to remake society on the basis of a new community-based social system,[83] there are also community-based proposals to decentralise society, in the sense of empowering communities at the expense of the centre. Today, the concept of community has become fashionable again. Religious "communitarianism", with its notion of "community" that is irrelevant to the political institutioning of society, competes with a kind of cultural communitarianism, where the revival of the "community" explicitly aims at the restoration of old community values (solidarity, mutual aid etc) or the creation of new common values. However, the real objective is to mobilise citizens, first, in an effort to alleviate the effects of the social decay that the neoliberal consensus involves (crime explosion, drug abuse, moral irresponsibility etc.) and, second, to recover some of the welfare services, which are presently effectively undermined by the demise of the welfare state. Communitarianism, therefore, which has particularly flourished in the USA since the late 80s, is in fact a middle-class movement against the social *symptoms* of the neoliberal consensus, as a result of the internationalisation of the market economy. It is not therefore accidental that, today, parts of the old social-democratic movement, like, for instance, the British Labour Party, turn to various forms of "communitarianism", in the sense of empowering communities as counter-balancing forces to the market and the supranational federal forms of statism, which are presently under formation. Communitarianism offers them the opportunity of creating an image of a "neoliberal consensus with human face" at no extra cost to the state budget!

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[82] See *Society and Nature,* Vol. 1, No. 3 and, in particular, the articles by Murray Bookchin, "The meaning of confederalism", pp. 41-54; Howard Hawkins, "Community control, workers' control and the cooperative commonwealth", pp. 55-85 and Takis Fotopoulos, "The economic foundations of an ecological society", pp. 1-40.

[83] See Murray Bookchin, *Remaking society* (Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1990).

It is obvious that communitarians want to have their cake and eat it, since, in effect, they wish to enjoy the privileges which the market economy and its internationalisation allows them to enjoy, without paying the price of living in a society of tremendous inequality in the distribution of income and wealth. No wonder therefore that communitarians concentrate their efforts on cultural factors and declare themselves in favour of enhancing traditional hierarchical structures like the family and creating new ones (some argue for compulsory community service for teenagers, others back curfews on them, increased police powers to search for drugs and guns in urban areas etc.).[84] It is not, also, surprising that the socio-economic framework is ruled out of the communitarian problematique and Etsioni, the guru of communitarianism, gives an unequivocal answer when asked about socio-economic rights and the communitarian economic agenda. "The short answer is", he says, "there is none".[85] Still, Etsioni has no qualm in presenting his communitarianism as a "third" way between liberalism and socialism![86]

This position is, of course, consistent with the fact that any revival of communities is impossible within the framework of today's internationalised market economy where the economic life of every community, i.e. the jobs, incomes and welfare of every member of the community, is utterly dependent on economic forces, which no community can control any more. Global free trade and movement of capital means that no community can be economically viable any more, since the level of economic viability has now moved to the new city-regions and the multinational networks. No wonder that the communitarian argument is full of contradictions, particularly when the declared ultimate aim is a social fabric "designed to facilitate fraternity" and at the same time the price mechanism is cheered enthusiastically![87]

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[84] Paul Anderson & Kevin Davey, "Communitarianism", *New Statesman & Society* (3/3/1995).
[85] Amitai Etzioni, "Common values", *New Statesman & Society* (12/5/1995).
[86] See his interview in the Athens daily *Eleftherotypia* (29/5/1995).
[87] "Democratic communitarianism supports multiple sources of economic initiative as a matter of principle. It offers 'two cheers for the price mechanism' (...) the social principle is to permeate right through to the inner workings of a decentralised, primarily market-based economic system (...) Economic communitarianism (...) means developing a social fabric in and around the economic system which would, at the very least, make such interactions as are bound to exist between economic units and government and society more open, constitutional and accountable. At best, such a fabric would be designed to facilitate fraternity, inter-institutional associateship and democratic participation whilst also nurturing a balanced, sustained form of economic development", Jonathan Boswell, *Community and the Economy, The Theory of Public Co-operation* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 189-90. See also Dick Atkinson, *The Common Sense of Community* (London: Demos, 1994) on the CED in UK.

It is therefore obvious than communitarianism could play a significant role with respect to the present phase of marketization, as it is perfectly compatible with a shift of the power centre away from the decaying nation-state, without challenging in any way the market economy and its internationalisation. From this viewpoint, it is not accidental that communitarianism is supported not only by social democrats but also by pure neoliberals in USA and in Europe. It is therefore clear that communitarianism has nothing to do with the type of community we discussed above as it takes for granted the very institutional framework that a community-based society has to transcend.

Similar arguments could be put forward against the type of communitarianism presently expanding, particularly in North America and Britain, in the form of what is usually called "Community Economic Development" (CED). This involves a strategy of gradual removal of land, labour and capital from the market economy (through the establishment of Community Land Trusts, community financial institutions, community enterprises etc.) with the double aim of creating a community culture and making private firms and the state socially responsible. However, CED, although useful with respect, in particular, to its first objective, could not seriously challenge the present concentration of political and economic power, as supporters of this movement themselves admit:

> "New forms of economic activity and institutions created in the community will never be adequate, within an economy dominated by private enterprise, to generate enough jobs and wealth at a local level to compensate for the consequences of economic centralisation outside of the community (...) Since communities do not control in any direct way economic resources, partnerships with both government agencies and representatives of business have been accepted as inevitable by CED activists in order to secure both recognition and resources. These are tricky relationships because of the inequality of power."[88]

It is therefore obvious that only a radical economic and political restructuring at the community level could create again the preconditions for the revival of communities, in fact, for the transcendence of both the market economy and statism as well as the corresponding forms of statist democracy. CED, by not aiming at establishing a political and economic power base at the community level, could easily end up as just another attempt at radical decentralisation. However, radical decentralisation is neither feasible, within the existing institutional framework, nor desirable. It is not feasible, because, in the context of the present internationalised phase of the marketization process, any attempt to create real counterbalancing centres of power would inevitably fail, unless

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[88] Eric Shragge, "The politics of community economic development" in *Community Economic Development* (Black Rose Press, 1993), pp. 9-10.

these centres of power are compatible with the logic and the dynamic of competitiveness. It is not desirable, because the problem of democracy today is not just how to force the present centres of political and economic power to delegate some of their power to local centres of power, something that would have simply reproduced at the local level, the present concentration of power at the centre. The problem is how we can create new forms of social organisation that do not presuppose centres of power at all, but, require, instead, the equal sharing of power among all citizens, i.e. true democratic forms of organisation and a return to the classical meaning of Politics. Such new forms of social organisation could only be created, as the supporters of a community-based society argue, by contesting local elections in order to develop "a new public sphere — and in Athenian meaning of the term, a *politics* — that grows in tension and ultimately in a decisive conflict with the State".[89]

Decision-taking in a community-based society

A common objection raised against a democratically run community-based society is that the "complexity" and the size of today's societies make such a society a utopian dream. Thus, Andre Gorz argues that a community-based society is impossible because it implies the "radical elimination" of industrial techniques, of specialised functions and of the division of labour:

> "It is obvious and generally accepted that a complex society can not exist without commodity relations and markets. The total elimination of commodity relations would presuppose the abolition of the social division of labour and specialisation and the return to autarchic communities or to a kibbutz type of society (...) The state should undertake defence and the general interest, including the existence of a market system."[90]

However, a community-based society presupposes nothing of the sort. Not only modern technology is perfectly compatible with such a society, as Murray Bookchin has shown,[91] but also, the talk about a return to autarchic communities or to a kibbutz type of society represents a total misconception of the proposals concerning the economic organisation of such a society. As I tried to show elsewhere,[92] a community-based society could

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[89] Murray Bookchin, "Communalism: The Democratic Dimension of Anarchism?" (In this issue).
[90] Andre Gorz, *Capitalisme, Socialisme, Ecologie* (Paris: Galilee, 1991), pp. 42-44 (page numbers refer to the Greek translation of the book, *Kapitalismos, Socialismos, Ekologia*, Athens, 1993).
[91] See his essay "Towards a liberatory technology" in *Post-scarcity anarchism* (London: Wildwood House, 1974).
[92] Takis Fotopoulos, "The Economic foundations of an ecological society".

function on the basis of a mix of democratic planning and an artificial "market", involving the use of personal vouchers issued to each citizen. Although communities are assumed to be self-reliant, still, a high degree of interchange between them is inevitable and, to some extent, desirable. This means that some important economic decisions will have to be taken at the regional and confederal levels, mainly, when a local decision is not possible or desirable.

In more detail, the allocation of economic resources at the regional and confederal levels is made, first, on the basis of the citizens' collective decisions, as expressed through the regional and confederal plans, and, second, on the basis of the citizens' individual choices, as expressed through the voucher system. It is obvious that a system like the proposed one neither rules out specialisation and division of labour, nor depends on a system of autarchic communities — a system which, today, is not feasible anyway. What therefore the proposed system does rule out is the market economy and the state, institutions that the "radical" thought of thinkers like Andre Gorz can not do without!

As far as political decision-making is concerned, again, though the basic unit of decision making is the community assembly, which delegates power to popular community courts etcetera, still, a lot of important decisions have to be taken at the regional or confederal level by delegates from the community assemblies, Murray Bookchin's description of the role of the regional and confederal councils is very clear:

> "What then is confederalism? It is above all a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies in the various villages, towns and even neighbourhoods of large cities. The members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves. Their function is thus purely administrative and practical one, not a policy-making one like the function of representatives in republican systems of government."[93]

To this I would add that today the technology that will make the above system of decision-taking functional is already available. An electronic network could connect the community assemblies at the regional or confederal level, forming a huge policy-making assembly's "assembly". This way, the confining of the members of the regional or

[93] Murray Bookchin, "The meaning of confederalism".

confederal councils to purely administrative duties of coordination and execution of the policies adopted by community assemblies is made even easier.[94]

The problem that arises with respect to democratic decision-taking is how the regional and confederal councils will not develop into new power structures that will start "representing" community assemblies. Here, again, what is possible, at the institutional level, is to introduce various safety valves into the system that will secure the effective functioning of democracy. Democratic practice itself, as always, is decisively conditioned by *paedeia*, which is not just education but character development and a well-rounded education in knowledge and skills.

Eco-communitarianism: an attack on democracy

It is one thing to explore the limitations of democracy in order to find ways to improve it, but quite another to attack democracy in order to promote an alternative individualistic and spiritualist view — one that, in effect involves no conception of democracy at all. This is the case with the "eco-communitarian" approach advanced by John Clark,[95] who seems to dissolve uniquely human communities in a hazy, often metaphorical "Earth community" so reminiscent of the pantheistic ideas advanced by the Catholic deep-ecology priest, Thomas Berry.[96]

The first step Clark takes in attacking any objective goal of democracy is to efface the very subject of a democratic life, namely the citizen, who, as Murray Bookchin observes, "embodies the classical ideal of philia, autonomy, rationality and above all, civic commitment".[97] Thus, Clark erodes the very concept of the citizen by converting it into a purely subjective, indeed idealistic being — a "citizen" of an ecosystem, of a bioregion, in fact of the "Earth" itself! In addition, as if this etherealization of citizenship were not

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[94] See Takis Fotopoulos, "Direct democracy and electronic 'democracy'," for a critique of a recent pilot scheme on electronic democracy, financed by the European Union, which in fact aims at the modernization of the existing oligarchic system of decision-taking that is being collapsing, *Eleftherotypia (*25/2/1995).

[95] John Clark, "The Politics of Social Ecology: Beyond the Limits of the City". Unpublished paper presented at the International Social Ecology Conference, Danoon/Scotland (August 14-19, 1995). As the author will not allow any quoting from his paper on the grounds that it is a draft copy, the references in this critique of eco-communitarianism will not be accompanied with quotes from the author's paper.

[96] See John Clark's review of George Sessions, ed. *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century,* in *Trumpeter*, 12:2 (Spring 1995), p. 98. See, also, Thomas Berry, *The dream of the earth* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club, 1988).

[97] Murray Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1987), p. 55.

enough, Clark has no difficulty with invoking an asocial, apolitical and basically abstract "person", so characteristic of the personalistic age in which we live today. His main reason for doing so is that the concept of citizenship preserves the idea of a self-oriented and particularistic interest, a notion that one can easily draw from the writings of individualistic liberals like John Locke and John Stuart Mill, not to mention Adam Smith et al.

Although it is true that the citizenry in a specific community may hold views that differ from those in other communities (indeed, even within the same community itself), still, the exact aim of democracy in general and of confederal municipalism in particular is to provide an institutional framework for the democratic resolution of such differences. Clark's endeavour to resolve the problems of differences between or within communities treads the well-worn path of a largely mystical idealism. Presumably, everything will be resolved, in Clark's view, if we create a virtually metaphorical condition called "Earth citizenship" that will somehow solidarize us with each other and with all forms of life. Or, as Clark puts it "we need a spiritual revolution more than a political platform and a regenerated community more than a political movement."[98] It is, therefore, obvious that Clark totally ignores the institutional conditions, in terms of the equal sharing of political and economic power among all citizens and the resulting abolition of hierarchical domination and class exploitation, which, however, are vital in fostering the very "spiritual revolution" and "regenerated community" he calls for. It is the fulfilment of these institutional conditions that could reasonably be expected to lead to a new dominant social paradigm which involves a harmonious relationship with the natural world (see below) and not the other way round, as deep ecologists — Reverend Thomas Berry and John Clark — believe!

The next step in Clark's attack against the goal of democracy is to denigrate the idea of the popular assembly, which is a crucial institution of direct democracy. Thus, the "affinity group",[99] the familial group, and some sort of community living are simplistically counterposed to and even privileged over popular assemblies which, supposedly, may very well lead to failure unless the appropriate "cultural and psychological preconditions" have been developed. In fact, he specifically refers to cases where "power to the popular assemblies" could easily lead to harsh anti-immigrant regulations, capital punishment

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[98] John Clark, "The Spirit of Hope", *Delta Greens Quarterly*, no. 39 (Summer 1995), p. 2.

[99] It should be noted that the "affinity group" (which today is appropriated by many New Agers and it is even promoted as a useful organisational form for "forward-looking" corporations), was created by the FAI or Iberian Anarchist Federation as an organizational unit, often for "action" purposes such as "expropriations", and not as an institution for a future anarchist society. See Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1972), p. 146.

and, who knows, torture and similar practices. But, apart from the fact that his conclusions can be applied just as easily to his own "cultural and psychological preconditions" which, in many respects, have unsettling affinities with current ecofascist notions that subordinate the individual to a chthonic "Mother Earth", and "bioregional" beliefs in the redeeming virtues of the soil, it is obvious that Clark does not seem to realize that problems like the explosion of crime, poverty, illegal immigration, and so on, with the resulting ideas they produce, have their objective roots in present-day inequities in the distribution of economic and political power.

The main reason why John Clark de-emphasizes — if not completely dismisses — popular assemblies is that he has no conception of democracy as a constellation of institutions (i.e. the structures and processes which, at the institutional level, secure the equal sharing of power), as well as of values. Hence forms of decision-making are simply irrelevant in Clark's treatment of democracy — to the extent that he deals with it at all. Indeed, democracy, in Clark's view, essentially becomes a system of values, a mere state of mind, where, as he puts is, every action in every sphere of life is a kind of legislating.

Not only does John Clark's eco-communitarian view lack any conception of political democracy; it is woefully lacking in any conception of economic democracy. Thus, Clark allows not only for privately owned enterprises (small partnerships, individual producers etc.), but even a market economy! Still, this does not prevent him from envisaging an economy where a cooperative sector would dominate the private sector — this under conditions of a market economy which inevitably must lead in the course of competition to the concentration of capital and formation of modern corporate conglomerates! It is clear that not only does Clark lack any knowledge of the dynamics of a market economy, he also ignores the past two centuries of economic concentration in which cooperative and similar experiments were marginalised or simply swept into the dustbin of history. Furthermore, it is obvious that Clark rejects economic democracy, that is the equal sharing of economic power in the framework of community assemblies which take the important economic decisions about the allocation of the municipalised resources.

The bioregionalist approach adopted by eco-communitarians like Clark has no relation to democracy and is easily compatible with any type of socio-economic system, even an eco-fascist one of the "Green Adolf" variety. Ecological values, divested of a democratic context, can easily be used to undermine any serious attempt to offer a liberatory alternative to the present society or be twisted freely into forms that lend themselves to very authoritarian ends. The establishment of various cooperative endeavours may be useful for cultural and experimental ends, but taken by themselves, they are grossly

inadequate for transforming society, as history, and even recent efforts such as the increasingly hierarchical Mondragon experiment, has shown. More often than not, such endeavours simply provide the system of the market economy with the facade of a benign and presumably humane image, when they simply do not degenerate into crassly capitalistic enterprises in their own right.

The question of human rights

Another common objection against democracy is that it may easily lead to the "tyranny of the majority", where various minorities — defined by cultural, racial, or even political, criteria — are simply oppressed by majorities. Thus, some libertarians declare that "the majority has no more right to dictate to the minority, even a minority of one, than the minority to the majority".[100] Others stress that "democratic rule is still a rule (...) it still inherently involves the repression of the wills of some people".[101] It is obvious that this objection, which usually confuses non-statist democracy with statist forms of it assumes, erroneously as we have seen above, that democracy involves a form of "rule". The fact that, in a non-statist conception of democracy, there is no conflict between democracy and freedom of the social individual, *since all social individuals equally share power* and take part in the decision-taking process, is simply ignored by libertarians adopting this type of objection against democracy. Furthermore, as Bookchin points out (in this issue), the alternative proposed by them, consensus, is "the individualistic alternative to democracy" — an alternative which, in fact, assumes away individual diversity, which supposedly is oppressed by democracy!

However, the question still remains of how minorities, "even of one", are protected against majorities and, in particular, how certain fundamental individual freedoms are safeguarded against democratically taken decisions by the majority. The historical answer given to this question by supporters of statist democracy has taken the form of "human rights". Thus, it was the liberal conception of human rights that was developed first by liberal philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries (John Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau) and the associated English, French and American revolutions. Liberal individualism and the economic doctrine of laissez faire constitute the pillars on which these rights are based. Furthermore, in consistency with the liberal conception of freedom, which is defined negatively as the absence of constraints in human activity, these rights are, also, defined, in a negative way, as "freedom from", their explicit objective being to limit state power.

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[100] Peter Marshall, *Demanding the impossible: a history of anarchism,* p. 22.
[101] L. Suzan Brown, p. 53.

Then, it was the turn of the "second generation" of human rights (social and economic rights), which originated in the socialist tradition, namely the socialist thinkers and the mass movements and revolts of the 19th and 20th centuries. Starting point here was the realisation that the liberal conception involved a complete abstraction of individual freedoms from their socio-economic base. "Equal right", according to Marx, "is still a bourgeois right", in the sense that it presupposes inequality. "It is therefore a right of inequality, in its content, like every right".[102] In consistency with the socialist conception of freedom which is defined positively, the socio-economic rights in this category are, also, defined positively; their aim is social equality, mainly in the form of an equitable participation in the production and distribution of the social product, achieved through state intervention. These rights are therefore "collective" in the sense that they belong more to communities or whole societies rather than to individuals (right to work, paid leave, social security, education, etc.).

Both the liberal and the socialist conceptions involve a view which sees political and socio-economic rights as separate from each other, a view that, as a Green activist put it, is a by-product of a conception that sees social existence as being truncated into separate — political, economic — spheres and which is incapable of perceiving that "notions such as group, feelings, relationships, sense, nature, culture — all that is undefinable, unquantifiable, sensual, but yet innately human —" could only be realised within a holistic view of human rights.[103]

However, a more fundamental characteristic that both the liberal and socialist conceptions of rights share is that they presuppose a statist form of democracy. Human rights are mostly rights against the state; it is only in forms of social organisation where political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of elites that many "rights" are invested with any meaning, whereas in a non-statist type of democracy, which by definition involves the equal sharing of power, these rights become meaningless. This is, for instance, the view adopted by Karl Hess when he states that "rights are power, the power of someone or some group over someone else (...) rights are derived from institutions of power".[104]

In principle, therefore, the issue of human rights should not arise at all in the case of a non-statist democracy as we defined it. Still, even in a democracy, the question remains of how best to protect the freedom of the single individual from the collective decisions of

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[102] Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Moscow: Progress Publishers,1966), p. 16.
[103] V. Ramaswamy, "A new human rights consciousness", IFDA Dossier 80 (Jan.-March 1991), p. 9.
[104] Karl Hess, "Rights and reality" in *Renewing the Earth, the promise of social ecology*, ed. by John Clark (London: Greenprint, 1990), pp.130-133.

the assemblies. Classical anarchists like Proudhon and Kropotkin, as well as modern ones like Karl Hess, look to contracts in the form of voluntary agreements to regulate affairs between people in a non-statist society. However, to my mind, the issue of protecting individual freedoms against majority decisions can not just be left to voluntary agreements, which could be easily broken. This is a very important issue that should be decided democratically like all other important issues. If a consensus requirement in establishing (or in annulling) such freedoms may be impractical or even morally wrong, this should not mean that such an important issue just could be left to be decided by the simple majority of a local or regional assembly. This is therefore perhaps an area where decisions have to be taken by confederal assemblies with the requirement of exceptional quorum and majorities.

Of course, institutional arrangements create only the preconditions for freedom. In the last instance, Individual and collective autonomy depends on the internalisation of democratic values by each citizen. Therefore, **paedeia** plays a crucial role in this connection. It is paedeia, which, together with the high level of civic consciousness that participation in a democratic society is expected to create, will decisively help in the establishment of a new moral code determining human behaviour in a democratic society. I suppose it will not be difficult to be shown that the moral values which are consistent with individual and collective autonomy are those that are based on cooperation, mutual aid and solidarity. The adoption of such moral values will therefore be a conscious choice by autonomous individuals living in an autonomous society, as a result of the fundamental choice for autonomy, and not as the outcome of some divine, natural or social "laws", or tendencies.

7. Democracy and Nature

Finally, the question that some critics of democracy raise refers to the guarantees offered by democracy that it would ensure a better relationship of society to nature than the alternative systems of the market economy and state socialism. The answer is, of course, that if we see democracy as a process of social self-institution, where there is no divinely or "objectively" defined code of human conduct, then, there can be no such guarantees. However, there are strong grounds to support the view that the relationship between a democratic society and nature should be a harmonious one. The factors supporting this view refer to both the political element of democracy (direct democracy) and the economic element of it (economic democracy).

At the political level, there are grounds for believing that the creation of a public space will by itself have a very significant effect in reducing the appeal of materialism, without

having to resort to spiritualism and religious dogmas. This is because the public space will provide a new meaning of life to fill the existential void that the present consumer society creates. The realisation of what it means to be human could reasonably be expected to throw us back toward Nature. Thus, as Kerry H. Whiteside points out referring to the work of Hannah Arendt:

> "Political participation is not just a means to advance a Green agenda. Nor is it simply a potentially fulfilling activity that would remain available in a world less given to material consumption. A community that takes pride in collective deliberation fosters a way of life that limits the appeal of labour and work (...) a world in which labour is seen as only one part of a meaningful life will find consumption less tempting."[105]

At the economic level, it is not accidental that, historically, the process of destructing the environment *en masse* has coincided with the process of marketization of the economy. In other words the emergence of the market economy and of the consequent growth economy had crucial repercussions on the society-Nature relationship and led to the rise of the growth ideology as the dominant social paradigm. Thus, an "instrumentalist" view of Nature became dominant, in which Nature was seen as an instrument for growth, within a process of endless concentration of power. It is therefore reasonable to assume that once the market economy is replaced by a democratically run community-based economy, then, the grow-or-die dynamics of the former will be replaced by the new social dynamic of the latter: a dynamic aiming at the satisfaction of the community needs and not at growth per se. If the satisfaction of community needs does not depend, as at present, on the continuous expansion of production to cover the "needs" that the market creates, and if the link between society and economy is restored, then there is no reason why the present instrumentalist view of Nature will continue conditioning human behaviour.

But, apart from the above political and economic factors, an ecological factor is involved here, which strongly supports the belief in a harmonious democracy-Nature relationship: the "localist" character of a community-based society. Thus, as Martin Khor of Third World Network argues, "local control, while not necessarily sufficient for environmental protection, is necessary, whereas, under state control, the environment

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[105] Kerry H. Whiteside, "Hannah Arendt and ecological politics", *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter 1994), p. 355.

necessarily suffers".[106] The necessity of local control becomes obvious if we take into account the fact that the environment itself, as Elinor Ostrom puts it, is local:

> "Small scale communities are more likely to have the formal conditions required for successful and enduring collective management of the commons. Among these are the visibility of the commons resources and behaviour toward them, feedback on the effect of regulations, widespread understanding and acceptance of the rules and their rationales, the values expressed in these rules (equitable treatment of all and protection of the environment) and the backing of values by socialisation, standards and strict enforcement."[107]

Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume and the evidence about the remarkable success of local communities in safeguarding their environments is overwhelming,[108] that when people rely directly on their natural surroundings for their livelihood, they will develop an intimate knowledge of those surroundings, which will necessarily affect positively their behaviour towards them. However, the precondition for local control of the environment to be successful is that the community depends on its natural surroundings for its long-term livelihood and that it therefore has a direct interest in protecting it — another reason why an ecological society is impossible without economic democracy.

In conclusion, the replacement of the market economy by a new institutional framework based on direct and economic democracy constitutes only the necessary condition for a harmonious relation between society and Nature. The sufficient condition refers to the citizens' level of ecological consciousness. Still, the radical change in the dominant social paradigm that will follow the institution of democracy, combined with the decisive role that paedeia will play in an environment-friendly institutional framework, could reasonably be expected to lead to a radical change in the human attitude towards Nature

8. A new kind of Politics

Today, the social democratic welfare state is in ruins and the accelerating internationalisation of the market economy at the economic level is met by the continuous decline of representative "democracy" at the political level. The impotency of

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[106] M. Khor, presentation at World Rainforest Movement, 1st March 1992, N.Y. — quoted in The Ecologist, Vol. 22, No. 4 (July/Aug. 1992).

[107] E. Ostrom, "The rudiments of a revised theory of the origins, survival and performance of institutions for collective action", *Working Paper 32* (Indiana University, Workshop in Political Theory and Political Analysis, Bloomington, 1985).

[108] For evidence, see *The Ecologist,* Vol. 22, No. 4 (July-August 1992).

the state to effectively control the market forces, in order to tackle the fundamental problems of massive unemployment, poverty, rising concentration of income and wealth and the continuing destruction of the environment, have led to massive political apathy and cynicism. Social democratic parties have now become indistinguishable from neoliberal ones, as all of them are unable, within the institutional framework of the internationalised market economy that they take for granted, to tackle the fundamental problems mentioned above. As a result, all parties today compete for the vote of the middle class which, effectively, is the only class still actively involved in the political process.

At the same time, the pipe dreams of some parts of the "left" for a democratisation of the civil society do not have any chance of success in the face of the internationalisation of the market economy, which, inexorably, leads to the establishment everywhere of societies as competitive — and consequently as sensitive to questions of social welfare and basic human rights — as those in East Asia, which are presently at the top of the competitiveness league. In other words, the internationalisation of the market economy is inevitably followed by the internationalisation of that form of civil society which is consistent with the political, social and economic liberties prevailing in the most competitive parts of the global economy.

Similar arguments could be put forward against the various "realo" green approaches aiming at a strategy that will involve the introduction of ecological objectives to the market economy. Such approaches, which take for granted the existing institutional framework of competitiveness and economic efficiency (as defined by economists), are bound to fail, for exactly the same reason that socialist statism has failed in the past to introduce social objectives to the market economy.[109] The reason is that all those approaches are characterised by a logic which contradicts the logic and the dynamics of the marketization process. As such, they are both a-historic and utopian.

Under these circumstances, the only realistic approach is to create a new society beyond the market economy and the nation-state, through the gradually increasing involvement of people in a new kind of politics and the parallel shifting of economic resources (labour, capital, land) away from the market economy. The ultimate aim in this approach is the creation of alternative political and economic structures based on direct and economic democracy. It is a realistic approach, because only by creating new self-reliant local economies, run as direct and economic democracies, it is possible to create a new public

[109] See Takis Fotopoulos, "The end of socialist statism".

space of citizens' direct involvement in decision-making and, at the same time, tackle the fundamental problems mentioned above.

Still, the question that arises here is what sort of strategy can ensure the transition to a democratic society. It is obvious that participation in national or federal elections, in the form of a traditional party organisation, creates a fundamental inconsistency between the aim of a democratic society, as defined above, and the means to achieve it. An alternative strategy that is proposed by some libertarians[110] involves no direct interference in the political and social arena and focuses, instead, on life-style changes, Community Economic Development (CED) projects, creation of "free zones" and building alternative institutions, from free schools up to self-managed factories, housing associations, LETS schemes, communes etc. However, such an approach, which has been criticised as individualistic in nature,[111] is, by itself, utterly ineffective in bringing about any radical social change. Although helpful in creating an alternative culture among small sections of the population and, at the same time, morale-boosting for activists that wish to see an immediate change in their lives, this approach does not have any chance of success — in the context of today's huge concentration of power — in building the democratic majority needed for radical social change. The projects suggested by this strategy may too easily be marginalised, or absorbed into the existing power structure (as it happened many times in the recent past), whereas their effect on the socialisation process is minimal — if not nil.

Radical social change can never be achieved outside the main political and social arena. Bookchin's communalist approach therefore, is, to my mind, the best strategy today for a new kind of democratic Politics. Contesting local elections, as a culmination of grassroot action, which can include direct action and activities like the ones described above (CED etc.), does provide the most effective means to massively publicise a programme for direct and economic democracy, as well as the opportunity to initiate its immediate implementation on a significant social scale. The immediate objective should therefore be the creation, from below, of "popular bases of political and economic power", i.e. the establishment of local public realms of direct and economic democracy which, at some stage, will confederate and create the new society.

This approach offers the most realistic strategy today to dismantle the existing power structures. A political programme based on the commitment to create institutions of direct and economic democracy, within the context of an ecological society, will

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[110] See e.g. Peter Marshall, *Demanding the impossible,* pp. 657-660.

[111] See, for instance, David Pepper, *Eco-socialism:From deep ecology to social justice* (London: Routledge,1993), p. 199.

eventually capture the imagination of the majority of the population, which now suffers from the effects of political and economic concentration of power: either through their exclusion from today's "public" realm, which is monopolised by the professional politicians; or through their deprivation of the possibility of controlling the way their needs are satisfied, which is now left to the market forces, or, finally, through the everyday worsening of the quality of life because of the inevitable deterioration of the environment, which the market dynamics imposes. Once such institutions of direct and economic democracy begin to be installed and people, for the first time in their lives, start obtaining real power to determine their own fate, then, the gradual erosion of the present institutional framework will be set in motion. A new popular power base will be created. Town by town, city by city, region by region will be taken away from the effective control of the market economy and the nation-state, their political and economic structures being replaced by the confederations of democratically run communities. This could be the first revolution in History won democratically and peacefully. Of course, at some stage, the ruling elites and their supporters, who will surely object to the idea of their privileges being gradually eroded, may be tempted to use violence to protect their privileges, as they have always done in the past. But, by then, the meaning of today's "democracy" will have been made clear and its legitimacy will have definitely been lost. In other words, an alternative social paradigm will have become hegemonic and the break in the socialisation process — the precondition for a change in the institution of society — will have occurred.

The implementation of such a strategy requires a new type of political organisation which will mirror the desired structure of society. This could not be the usual political party, but a form of "direct democracy in action", which would undertake various collective forms of intervention at the political level (direct action, creation of "shadow" political institutions based on direct democracy, neighbourhood assemblies etc.), the economic level (establishment of community units at the level of production and distribution which are collectively owned and controlled), as well as the social and cultural levels. All these forms of intervention aim at the eventual transformation of each municipality won in the local elections into a direct and economic democracy. The new political organisation could, for instance, take the form of a confederation of autonomous groups (at regional, national, continental and world levels) aiming at the democratic transformation of their respective communities. The members of this organisation are not committed to any closed philosophical system but only to the project of a democratic ecological society, based on a confederation of direct and economic, democracies. These activists function not as "party cadres" but as a catalyst for the setting up of the new institutions. Their commitment is to the democratic institutions themeselves and not to

the political organisation, or, as Murray Bookchin puts it, to "the SOCIAL forms, not the POLITICAL forms".[112]

The establishment of democracy is bound to be a long process involving a huge popular movement. As Castoriadis points out the setting up of democracy, can only come about:

> "From an immense movement of the population of the world and it can only be conceived of as extending over an entire historical period. For, such a movement — which goes far beyond everything habitually thought of as "political movement" — will not come about unless it also challenges all institutional significations, the norms and values which dominate the present system (...) as a profound psychical and anthropological transformation, with the parallel creation of new forms of living and new significations in all domains."[113]

It is therefore necessary that the new political organisation will be founded on the broadest political base possible. To my mind, this means a broad spectrum of radical movements, involving social ecologists, supporters of the autonomy project, libertarian socialists, radical feminists, libertarian leftists and every other current that adopts the democratic project.

I think that today, more than ever in the past, the choice we have to make is clear and can be described as "democracy or barbarism"? Democracy, however, does not mean the various oligarchic regimes that call themselves democratic today. It does not also mean an anachronistic return to the classical conception of democracy. Democracy today can only mean a synthesis of the two major historical traditions, namely, he classical democratic tradition (direct democracy), and the socialist tradition (economic democracy) with the radical version of the green movement expressed by confederal municipalism. In this sense, the development of a new broad radical democratic movement today would represent both the synthesis, as well as the transcendence, of the major social movements for change in this century. To my mind, the only realistic way out of the present multidimensional crisis is the creation of such a radical movement which, without any ideological preconceptions, will be committed to the arrest of the continuing — and lately accelerating — destruction of human life and natural resources and to the establishment of the realm of freedom.-

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[112] Murray Bookchin, *Post-scarcity anarchism,* p. 217.
[113] C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 204.