

How an Inclusive Democracy?

The transitional strategy of the Inclusive Democracy project*

THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE^

Introduction

The collapse of actually existing socialism and the parallel failure of Western social democracy and its replacement by today's neoliberal consensus, in combination with the rise of the ideology of postmodernism^[1] and the decline of antisystemic movements,^[2] have inevitably led to a corresponding decline of a discussion which was still flourishing a few decades ago: the discussion on a transitional strategy towards an alternative society. This was inevitable, because the abandonment by the Left (Old, New, and Green) of any vision for an alternative society in effect made such strategies redundant.

A basic criterion which we may use in distinguishing between the various transitional strategies which have been proposed in the past and the few being proposed today is whether a strategy aims at reforming the present institutions without proposing any alternative institutional framework, or whether, instead, it aims at replacing the present society's institutional framework, that is, the system of the globalised market economy and the complementary institution of representative 'democracy', as well as the corresponding system of values that constitutes the dominant social paradigm on which the present society is based. On the basis of this criterion we may distinguish between 'non-systemic' and 'anti-systemic' strategies.

Thus, 'non-systemic' are all those approaches which aim at reforming the present institutional framework and system of values through a variety of tactics ranging from the conquest of state power to pressures 'from below'. Here, we may classify the old socialdemocratic strategy and the new reformist strategies proposed by supporters of the civil societarian and radical democracy approaches, as well as by most supporters of the 'new' social movements and postmodern politics (Green, feminist, 'identity' movements and so on).

'Antisystemic' are all those approaches which explicitly or implicitly challenge the legitimacy of the socio-economic 'system', both in the sense of its institutions, which create and reproduce the unequal distribution of power (considered here as the ultimate cause of antisystemic social divisions^[3]), and also in the sense of its values, which legitimise the domination of a human being over human being, or of Society over Nature. Here, we may classify the old statist socialist and libertarian socialist strategies, as well as the more recent guerrilla strategy, the libertarian municipalism strategy and, finally, the inclusive democracy strategy.

An intermediate position between the nonsystemic and antisystemic strategies is occupied by the 'direct action' and what we may call 'lifestyle strategies'. Supporters of these strategies sometimes adopt them for overtly reformist aims but there are also cases, particularly in the past, when some of those strategies, like the general strike, were supported as a clearly antisystemic weapon. Today, however, the cases in which 'life-style' and 'direct action' strategies are proposed as antisystemic strategies are rare and, even if they are proposed as such, they are not accompanied by a coherent proposal for an alternative institutional framework. It is therefore clear that the 'mixed' nature of lifestyle and direct action strategies rules out the possibility of classifying them either as pure nonsystemic or as antisystemic strategies.

In what follows we shall consider the strategy for the transition to a confederal inclusive democracy^[4].

The transitional strategy of the ID project

Starting point in this approach is that the world, at the beginning of the new millennium, faces a multi-dimensional crisis (economic, ecological, social, cultural and political) which is caused by the concentration of power in the hands of various elites, as a result of the establishment, in the last couple of centuries, of the system of market economy, representative 'democracy' and the related forms of hierarchical structure. If we accept this premise, then the obvious way out of this crisis is the abolition of power structures and relations, i.e. the creation of conditions of equal distribution of power among citizens. One way that could bring about this sort of society is strategy proposed by the Inclusive Democracy^[5] project, which involves the creation of political, economic and social structures that secure direct democracy, economic democracy, ecological democracy and democracy in the social realm. It also involves the creation of a new social paradigm, which, for the reproduction of inclusive democracy to be secured, has to become dominant.

Furthermore, the Inclusive Democracy project offers not only a meaningful and realistic way out of the present multidimensional crisis, but also a way of building a new globalisation, which is based on really democratic structures. The creation of a new world order based on an inclusive democracy involves the building of confederations of local, regional and national inclusive democracies. This will lead to a globalisation which will not be based on the unequal distribution of power and the domination of human being over human being and Nature, as under the present globalisation, but on the equal distribution of all forms of power between autonomous human beings and the elimination of all forms of domination. It will also be founded on a sustainable economic system which meets the basic needs of the planet's population, through a mechanism of allocation of resources between the confederations, within a planetary confederal plan of allocation of resources. Finally, meeting the non-basic needs would be determined at the local level, in a way that secures freedom of choice, whereas exchanges of surpluses between confederations would be arranged through multilateral agreements.

A long-term strategy for a confederal inclusive democracy

The project for an inclusive democracy offers not only a realistic vision of an alternative

society, really missing today after the collapse of statist socialism, but also a long-term strategy and a short-term programme that will lead us to this society.^[6]

Thus, the ID strategy involves the building of a mass programmatic political movement, like the old socialist movement, with an unashamedly universalist goal to change society along genuine democratic lines, beginning here and now. Therefore, such a movement should explicitly aim at a systemic change, as well as at a parallel change in our value systems. This strategy would entail the gradual involvement of increasing numbers of people in a new kind of politics and the parallel shifting of economic resources (labour, capital, land) away from the market economy. The aim of such a strategy should be to create changes in the institutional framework, as well as to value systems, which, after a period of tension between the new institutions and the state, would, at some stage, replace the market economy, representative 'democracy', and the social paradigm "justifying" them, with an inclusive democracy and a new democratic paradigm respectively.

The rationale behind this strategy is that, as systemic change requires a rupture with the past, which extends to both the institutional and the cultural level, such a rupture is only possible through the development of a new political organisation and a new comprehensive political program for systemic change that will create a clear anti-systemic consciousness at a massive scale. This is in contrast to the statist socialist strategy which ends up with the creation of a clear anti-systemic consciousness only with respect to an avant-garde, or to the life-style activities which, if they create any antisystemic consciousness at all, it is restricted to the few members of various libertarian 'groupuscules'. However, the creation of a new culture, which has to become hegemonic before the transition to an inclusive democracy could be effected, is only possible through the parallel building of new political and economic institutions at a significant social scale. In other words, it is only through action to build such institutions that a mass political movement with a democratic consciousness can be built. Such a strategy creates the conditions for the transition, both the 'subjective' ones, in terms of helping the development of a new democratic consciousness and the 'objective' ones, in terms of creating the new institutions which will form the basis of an inclusive democracy. At the same time, the establishment of these new institutions will crucially assist here and now the victims of the concentration of power which is associated with the present institutional framework and particularly the victims of neoliberal globalisation to deal with the problems created by it.

Thus, people who today are alienated from all forms of power, particularly political and economic power, would have every incentive to be involved in such a movement and vote in local elections for the establishment of 'democracy in action' in their area. They will be fully aware of the fact that problems like unemployment and poverty could only be solved within the ID institutions (demotic enterprises, demotic welfare etc). They will also know that problems like air/water/food pollution could only be sorted out effectively, and at a massive social scale, if citizens start taking control of local power within the ID institutions rather than in the context of communes outside the main political and social arena. They will finally know that unless they get hold of political power at the local level and then, through confederations of local IDs, at the regional level, they will never be able to control their lives. In other words, people will be involved in a struggle for the establishment of the ID institutions not out of hunger for an abstract notion of democracy but because, through their own action, they will be able to see that the cause of all their problems (economic, social, ecological) has been due to the fact that power has been concentrated in a few hands.

The objective therefore of an ID strategy is the creation, from below, of ‘popular bases of political and economic power’, that is, the establishment of local inclusive democracies, which, at a later stage, will confederate in order to create the conditions for the establishment of a new confederal inclusive democracy. Therefore, a crucial element of the ID strategy is that the political and economic institutions of inclusive democracy begin to be established immediately after a significant number of people in a particular area have formed a base for ‘democracy in action’ –preferably, but not exclusively, at the massive social scale that is secured by winning in local elections under an ID program.

But, what sort of strategy can ensure the transition toward an inclusive democracy? A general guiding principle in selecting an appropriate transitional strategy is consistency between means and ends. Obviously, a strategy aiming at an inclusive democracy cannot be achieved through the use of oligarchic political practices, or individualistic activities. Furthermore, as we have seen above, it should not be restricted to the fight against the present system but it should also ‘prefigure’ the future one.

Thus, as regards the the fight against the present system, there should be no hesitation in supporting all those struggles which can assist in making clear the repressive nature of statist democracy and the market economy, i.e. all types of collective action in the form of class conflicts between the victims of the internationalised market economy XE "internationalised market economy" and the ruling elites, or the transnational elite which ‘manages’ the internationalised market economy, However, the systemic nature of the causes of such conflicts should be stressed at each step and this task can obviously not be left to the bureaucratic leaderships of trade unions and other traditional organisations. This is the task of workplace assemblies that form an integral part of a movement towards an inclusive democracy, which could confederate and take part in such struggles, as part of a broader democratic movement which is based on *demos* and their confederal structures. Also, activists participating in the ID movement should obviously take part in direct action activities against neoliberal globalisation, or against the serious undermining of political freedoms that has been institutionalised under the pretext of the ‘war against terrorism’, in alliance with other radical antisystemic groups – provided of course that, in doing so, they express the ID problematique and raise the demands which are consistent with it.

Similarly, as regards ‘prefiguring’ the future system, activities like Community Economic Development projects, self-managed factories, housing associations, LETS schemes, communes, self-managed farms and so on should also be supported – provided however, again, that they form part of a programmatic political movement with clear goals, means and strategies for systemic change, like the ID movement.

The significance of local elections

Contesting local elections does provide the most effective means to massively publicise a programme for an inclusive democracy, as well as the opportunity to initiate its immediate implementation on a significant social scale. In other words, contesting local elections is not just an educational exercise but also an expression of the belief that it is only at the local level that direct and economic democracy can be founded today, although of course local inclusive democracies have to be confederated to ensure the transition to a confederal democracy. It is because the *demos* is the fundamental social and economic unit of a future democratic society that we have to start from the local level to change society. Therefore, participation in local elections is an important part of the strategy to gain power, in order

to dismantle it immediately afterwards, by substituting the decision-taking role of the assemblies for that of the local authorities, the day after the election has been won. Furthermore, contesting local elections gives the chance to start changing society from below, something that is the only democratic strategy, as against the statist approaches that aim to change society from above through the conquest of state power, and the 'civil society' approaches that do not aim at a systemic change at all.

However, the main aim of direct action, as well as of the participation in local elections, is not just the conquest of power but the rupture of the socialisation process and therefore the creation of a democratic majority 'from below', which will legitimise the new structures of inclusive democracy. Given this aim, it is obvious that participation in national elections is a singularly inappropriate means to this end, since, even if the movement for an inclusive democracy does win a national election, this will inevitably set in motion a process of 'revolution from above'. This is because the rupture in the socialisation process can only be gradual and in continuous interaction with the phased implementation of the program for the inclusive democracy, which, for the reasons mentioned above, should always start at the local level. On the other hand, an attempt to implement the new project through the conquest of power at the national level does not offer any opportunity for such an interaction between theory and practice and for the required homogenisation of consciousness with respect to the need for systemic change.

If there is one lesson History taught us, this is that the basic cause of failure of previous, revolutionary or reformist, attempts aiming at a systemic change was exactly the significant unevenness in the level of consciousness, in other words, the fact that all past revolutions had taken place in an environment where only a minority of the population had broken with the dominant social paradigm. This gave the golden opportunity to various elites to turn one section of the people against another (e.g. Chile), or led to the development of authoritarian structures for the protection of the revolution (e.g. French or Russian revolutions), frustrating any attempt for the creation of structures of equal distribution of power. However, for a revolution, to be truly successful, a rupture with the past is presupposed, both at the subjective level of consciousness and at the institutional level. Still, when a revolution in the past was 'from above', it had a good chance to achieve its first aim, to abolish state power and establish its own power, but, exactly because it was a revolution from above, with its own hierarchical structures etc, it had no chance to change the dominant social paradigm but only formally, i.e. at the level of the official (compulsory) ideology. On the other hand, although the revolution from below has always been the correct approach to convert people democratically to the new social paradigm, it suffered in the past from the fact that the uneven development of consciousness among the population did not allow revolutionaries to achieve even their very first aim of abolishing state power. Therefore, the major problem with systemic change has always been how it could be brought about, from below, but by a majority of the population, so that a democratic abolition of power structures could become feasible. It is hoped that the ID strategy does offer a solution to this crucial problem.

Thus, once the institutions of Inclusive 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 dominant social paradigm and 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 statist forms of organisation (national or international), their political and

economic structures being replaced by the confederations of democratically run communities. An alternative social paradigm will become hegemonic and the break in the socialisation process –the precondition for a change in the institution of society– will follow. A dual power in tension with the statist forms of organisation will be created which ultimately may or may not lead to confrontation with the ruling elites depending on the balance of power that would have developed by then. Clearly, the greater the appeal of the new institutions to citizens the smaller the chance that the ruling elites will resort to violence to restore the power of the state and the market economy institutions, on which their own power rests.

The emancipatory subject in neoliberal modernity

The need for a new type of movement

Today, we face the end of ‘traditional’ antisystemic movements^[7]: the issue is not anymore to challenge one form of power or another but to challenge power itself, in the sense of its unequal distribution that constitutes the basis of heteronomy. In other words, what is needed today is a new type of antisystemic movement which should challenge heteronomy itself, rather than simply various forms of heteronomy, as used to be the case in ‘traditional’ antisystemic movements challenging the unequal distribution of economic power (statist socialist movements), political power (libertarian socialist), or social power (feminist etc) as the basis of all other forms of power. Therefore, the issue is to challenge the inequality in the distribution of every form of power, in other words, power relations and structures themselves.

It is this collapse of the traditional antisystemic movements which raises the need for a new type of antisystemic movement. A second reason which is related to the first one and justifies further the need for such a movement is the fact that today we face not simply the end of the traditional antisystemic movements but also of traditional Marxist class divisions. However, the fact that we face today the end of class politics does not mean that there is no ‘system’ anymore as such, or ‘class divisions’ for that matter. What it does mean is that today we face new ‘class divisions’.^[8] Thus, in the ID problematique, the phasing out of economic classes in the Marxist sense simply signifies the death of traditional class divisions and the birth of new ‘holistic’ class divisions, i.e. divisions which are located into the power structures of the socio-economic system itself and not just to some aspects of it, like economic relations alone, or alternatively gender relations, identity politics, values and so on. In other words, the present social divisions between dominant and subordinate social groups in the political sphere (professional politicians versus the rest of citizenry), the economic sphere (company owners, directors, managers versus workers, clerks etc) and the broader social sphere (men versus women, blacks versus whites, ethnic majorities versus minorities and so on) are based on institutional structures that reproduce an unequal distribution of power and on the corresponding cultures and ideologies, (i.e. the ‘dominant social paradigm’).

In today’s society, the main structures which institutionalise the unequal distribution of power are the market economy and representative democracy, although other structures which institutionalise the unequal distribution of power between sexes, races, ethnicities etc cannot just be ‘reduced’ to these two main structures. So, the replacement of these structures by institutions securing the equal distribution of political, economic and social

power within an inclusive democracy is the necessary condition (though not the sufficient one) for the creation of a new culture that would eliminate the unequal distribution of power between all human beings, irrespective of sex, race, ethnicity etc. Therefore, the attempt by Greens, feminists and other supporters of the politics of difference and identity to change culture and values first, as a way of changing some of the existing power structures, (rather than being engaged in a fight to replace all the structures which reproduce the unequal distribution of power and, within this struggle, create the values that would support the new structures), is doomed to marginalisation and failure, with (at best) some reforms being achieved on the way.

It is therefore clear that, although it is not meaningful to talk anymore about monolithic class divisions, this does not rule out the possibility that, when the social groups which belong to the emancipatory subject as defined below develop a shared consciousness about the values and institutions which create and reproduce structures of unequal distribution of power, they may unite, primarily, not against the dominant social groups as such but against the hierarchical institutional framework and those defending it. The unifying element which may unite members of the subordinate social groups around a liberatory project like the ID project is their exclusion from various forms of power —an exclusion which is founded on the unequal distribution of power that today's institutions and the corresponding values establish. This brings us to the crucial question facing any transitional strategy: the 'identity' of the emancipatory subject, or as it used to be called the 'revolutionary subject'.

The emancipatory subject in today's society

All antisystemic strategies in the past were based on the assumption that the revolutionary subject is identified with the proletariat, although in the last century several variations of this approach were suggested to include in the revolutionary subject peasants^[9] and later on students.^[10] However, the 'systemic changes' that marked the shift from statist modernity to neoliberal modernity and the associated class structure changes, as well as the parallel ideological crisis,^[11] meant the end of traditional class divisions, as mentioned above —although not the end of class divisions as such— as social-liberals suggest.^[12] Still, some in the radical Left, despite the obvious systemic changes, insist on reproducing the myth of the revolutionary working class, usually by redefining it in sometimes tautological ways.^[13] At the same time, writers on the libertarian Left like Bookchin^[14] and Castoriadis^[15] moved to a position according to which, in defining the emancipatory subject, we have to abandon any 'objective criteria' and assume that the whole of the population ('the people') is just open-or closed-to a revolutionary outlook. Finally, postmodernists replace class divisions with identity differences and substitute fragmentation and difference for the 'political system'. This has inevitably led to a situation where the systemic unity of capitalism, or its very existence as a social system, is denied and 'instead of the universalist aspirations of socialism and the integrative politics of the struggle against class exploitation, we have a plurality of essentially disconnected particular struggles which ends in a submission to capitalism'.^[16]

In the ID problematique, what we need today is a new paradigm which, while recognising the different identities of the social groups which constitute various sub-totalities (women, ethnic minorities etc), at the same time acknowledges the existence of an overall socio-

economic system that secures the concentration of power at the hands of various elites and dominant social groups within society as a whole. Such a paradigm is the Inclusive Democracy paradigm which does respond to the present multiplicity of social relations (gender, ethnicity, race, and so on) with complex concepts of equality in the distribution of all forms of power that acknowledge people's different needs and experiences. In fact, the main problem in emancipatory politics today is how all the social groups, which potentially form the basis of a new emancipatory subject, would be united by a common worldview, a common paradigm, which sees the ultimate cause of the present multidimensional crisis in the present structures that secure the concentration of power at all levels, as well as the corresponding value systems. In this problematique, given the broad perspective of the project for an inclusive democracy, a new movement aiming at an inclusive democracy should appeal to almost all sections of society, apart of course from the dominant social groups, i.e. the ruling elites and the overclass.

Thus, the economic democracy component of the ID project should primarily appeal to the main victims of the internationalised market economy XE "internationalised market economy", i.e. the underclass and the marginalized (the unemployed, blue collar workers, low-waged white collar workers, part-timers, occasional workers, farmers who are phased out because of the expansion of agribusiness), as well as the students, the prospective members of the professional middle classes, who see their dreams for job security disappearing fast in the 'flexible' labour markets being built. It should also appeal to a significant part of the new middle class which, unable to join the 'overclass', lives under conditions of constant insecurity, particularly in countries of the South as the Argentinian crisis showed .

The political democracy component of the ID project should appeal to all those who are presently involved in local, single-issue movements for the lack of anything better. As even the theoreticians of social-liberalism recognise, although confidence in professional politicians and government institutions is in drastic decline, the decay of parliamentary politics is not the same thing as depoliticisation. This is obvious by the parallel growth of new social movements, NGOs, citizens' initiatives etc. No wonder that the 'small group movement' (i.e. small numbers of people meeting regularly to promote their common interest) is thriving with 40 percent of the population in the USA —some 75 million Americans— belonging to at least one small group, while in the UK self-help and environmental groups have in recent years expanded rapidly.^[17] Although this celebrated expansion of the 'civil society' is concentrated in the new middle class, still, this is an indication of a thirst for a genuine democracy in which everybody counts in the decision-taking process. Furthermore, given that the scope for citizen participation is presently restricted to single issues, it is not surprising that it is single issue movements and organisations which flourish. In other words, one may argue that the expansion of the small group movement indicates, in fact, a move from pseudo-democracy at the national level--in which the system of representation nullifies collective participation-- to pseudo-democracy at the local level--in which important political and economic decisions are still left to the political and economic elites but at the same time, in a kind of 'sub-politics', citizen bodies in the 'active' civil society claim a right to take decisions on side issues, or local issues.

Finally, the ecological component of the ID project, as well as the one related to 'democracy at the social realm', should appeal to all those concerned about the effects of concentration of power on the environment and to those oppressed by the patriarchal and other

hierarchical structures in today's society.^[18]

A new type of politics and political organisation

A new type of Politics

Old politics is doomed, as the accelerating internationalisation of the market economy is met by the continuous decline of representative 'democracy'. The impotency of 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, has led to massive political apathy and cynicism, particularly among the underclass and the marginalized. As a result, all parties today compete for the vote of the middle classes which, effectively, determine the political process. At the same time, the pipe dreams of some parts of the 'left' for a democratisation of the civil society are, also, doomed. As mentioned above, the internationalisation of the market economy is being inevitably followed by the internationalisation of the civil society. In other words, competition imposes the least common denominator standards as far as social and ecological controls on markets is concerned. Therefore, that type of civil society is bound to prevail which is consistent with the degree of marketisation that characterises the most competitive parts of the global economy.

It is therefore clear that we need a new type of politics which would comprise the creation of local inclusive democracies, i.e. the creation of a new public realm that would involve citizens as citizens taking decisions on broad political, economic and social matters within the institutional framework of demotic assemblies; citizens as workers taking decisions on the running of demotic enterprises within the institutional framework of workplace assemblies; citizens as students taking decisions on the running of colleges and schools etc. This new Politics requires a new type of political organisation which will play the role of the catalyst for its emergence. So, what form should this new political organisation take and how can we go about to create it?

A new type of political organisation

It is clear that the new type of political organisation should itself mirror the desired structure of society. This would not be the usual political party, but a form of 'democracy in action', which would undertake various forms of intervention at the local level, always as part of a comprehensive program for social transformation aiming at the eventual change of each local authority into an inclusive democracy. These forms of intervention should extend to every area of the broadly defined above public realm and could involve:

- At the political level, the creation of 'shadow' political institutions based on direct democracy, (neighbourhood assemblies, etc) as well as various forms of direct action (marches, rallies, teach-ins and civil disobedience) against the existing political institutions and their activities;
- At the economic level, the establishment of a 'demotic' sector, (i.e. a sector involving demotic production and distribution units which are owned and controlled collectively by the citizens, demotic welfare etc) as well as various forms of direct action (strikes, occupations etc) against the existing economic institutions and their activities;

- At the social level, the creation of self-management institutions in the workplace, the place of education etc, as well as participating in struggles for worker's democracy, household democracy, democracy in the educational institutions and so on;
- At the ecological level, the establishment of ecologically sound production and consumption units, as well as direct action against the corporate destruction of Nature;
- At the cultural level, activities aiming at the creation of a community-controlled art (in place of the presently elite-controlled art activities) and alternative media activities that will help in making the value system which is consistent with an inclusive democracy the hegemonic culture in society.

The following is a general description of the steps that might be taken in building an ID organisation, although of course the concrete form that this procedure will take in practice will crucially depend on local conditions and practices.

The first step in building such an organisation might be to initiate a meeting of a number of people in a particular area who are interested in the ID project with the aim to create a study group for the discussion of this project and in particular of the aims of the international ID network (see below)^[19]. If general agreement with the principles of the ID network is confirmed then the group could come in contact with the cells of the ID network in the same country and also in other countries for the exchange of information, news etc. After a series of meetings between the people involved, and as a result of discussions on the matter, the group could formulate a minimum program expressing the basic goals, means and strategy of the local ID group. The group should also formulate its organisational structure along non-hierarchical lines, as well as its decision-taking process on the basis of direct democracy principles.

The next step might be the publication of a local newsletter, or in the case of big cities a local magazine, in which this minimum program would be published, as well as comments on local or national/international news from the ID perspective and brief theoretical texts on the goals, means, strategy of the ID project. News on relevant, local or not, activities should get particular prominence. At this stage, the ID group could begin getting involved in the organisation of public meetings in which issues of particular concern to the local people (economic, ecological, social etc) are discussed. All these issues should be introduced by members of the group who express the ID angle and full discussions with local citizens should follow.

As the number of people involved in the ID group grows, it may start taking part in local struggles (or even initiate such struggles on various issues of concern for the establishment of an ID) and also –in alliance with similar groups from other areas– in struggles on regional, national or international issues. With this aim, the group should liaise with similar local groups in the same region, country and other countries to form confederations of autonomous ID groups (at the regional, national and international levels) with the aim to coordinate the political activity of the groups involved. The creation of an ID electronic newsletter might play a significant role in this process. Alliances with other radical groups of the Left should also be encouraged on specific issues (e.g. to replace the present European Union of capitalists with a European Community of peoples) on which a consensus view on the demands to be raised could be reached.

Finally, once a sufficient number of activists has joined the group so that it can take the

form of an ID political organisation (with organisational structure and decision-taking process similar to the ones of the original group) the ID organisation may start expanding its activities and be involved in the creation of local institutions of political, and economic democracy as well as democracy in the social realm (workplace, educational place etc), cultural activities etc –see below. At the same time the ID organisation should start contesting local elections, Initially, with an educational aim, i.e. to familiarise citizens on a significant social scale about the ID project. Once however the ID organisation has won the elections in a particular area it should start implementing the transitional program for the building of an inclusive democracy. Needless to add that in all these stages the activists in the ID movement function not as ‘party cadres’ but as catalysts for the setting up of the new institutions. In other words, their commitment is to the democratic institutions themselves and not to the political organisation.

The Transition to an inclusive democracy

A New World Order based on an inclusive democracy is a form of social organisation that re-integrates society with economy, polity and nature within an institutional framework that secures the necessary conditions for the equal distribution of all forms of power. This involves the creation of institutions of:

- political democracy (direct democracy), which are based on processes securing that all political decisions (including those relating to the formation and execution of laws) are taken by the citizen body (the demos) collectively and without representation, as well as on structures institutionalising the equal distribution of political power
- economic democracy, in which the demoi control the economic process, within an institutional framework of demotic ownership and control of the means of production and distribution, beyond the confines of the market economy and central planning
- Democracy in the social realm, in which all public realm institutions in which collective decisions can be taken (e.g. workplaces, educational places, cultural institutions etc) are self-managed under the overall control of the demoi, whereas personal relations are based on a value system which is compatible with the overall democratic institutions of society, i.e. a value system based on the principles of individual and social autonomy and solidarity that rules out any form of domination based on sex, race, ethnicity, cultural differences and so on
- Ecological Democracy, in which the ID institutional framework and the value system which is compatible with it secure the necessary conditions for the reintegration of society and nature.

Therefore, the transition to an inclusive democracy should include steps to move society towards each of the above components of it. The local ID groups/organisation should formulate a comprehensive program for social change which would elaborate for their area the overall objective to create a different form of social organisation, based on an inclusive democracy. In other words, the program should make absolutely clear that the ultimate objective of the various proposals included in it is the replacement of the present oligarchic structure with an inclusive democracy, as defined above. This implies that such a program should be fought for not just as a kind of new politics but as the political structure itself leading to an inclusive democracy.

Transition to political democracy

The programme for the transition to an inclusive democracy that the local ID groups/organisation will formulate, starting from demands that mobilise people around their immediate concerns, should have the following basic aims:

- to develop an 'alternative consciousness' as regards methods of solving the political, economic, social and ecological problems in a democratic way. It should therefore connect today's multidimensional crisis to the present socio-economic system and the need to replace it with a confederal inclusive democracy; and
- to make proposals on how to start building the political, economic and social institutions themselves that would lead to an inclusive democracy. It should therefore propose measures that could lead both to greater political and economic self-reliance and to democratic procedures in taking decisions affecting the citizens' life.

Concerning to (a), that is, the aim of creating an alternative consciousness, the program should stress why representative 'democracy' has nothing to do with the original meaning of democracy and was in fact an American invention whose real aim was the dilution of popular power^[20] In representative 'democracy' people abdicate their power to elected (with the massive help of the economic elite and the controlled by it mass media) professional politicians who are committed to a few vague generalities (as regards the people) in contrast to the specific policies they promise to carry out (as regards the economic elite which effectively elects them). The only 'power' given to the people in such a system is to change every four years or so one gang of professional politicians with another to carry out the same in effect policies, particularly in today's system of neoliberal globalisation when even the old differences between political parties have effectively disappeared. As the May 1968 graffiti summarised representative 'democracy': 'it is painful to submit to our bosses; it is even more stupid to choose them!'

The program should show that not only political alienation but also problems like unemployment, poverty and work alienation, as well as poor quality of life, pollution and environmental destruction, and problems of gender/race etc discrimination and cultural homogenisation are all connected to a system based on the concentration of political, economic and social power in the hands of elites that represent a very small proportion of the population. The relationship of each of the main institutions of society to these problems should be particularly stressed. Thus, it should be shown for instance that the market allocation of resources leads to maldevelopment, unemployment and poverty; the private ownership of productive resources does not allow any economic democracy to flourish but instead leads to economic and political oligarchy, the alienation of the vast majority of people with respect to their jobs, as well as the perpetuation of inequality; and the hierarchical organisation of society, both at the 'macro' level (state) and the 'micro' level (hierarchical relations at work, family, school, etc.) is incompatible with democracy in the social realm, autonomy and freedom.

Thus, a comprehensive program for social change should make clear that, contrary to what the reformist Left suggests, the way out of the present multidimensional crisis is not by forcing the state to fight corporate interests but by creating a new public realm, a new pole of power, that would fight both the corporate interest and the state, i.e. both the market economy and representative 'democracy'. Then, citizens, for the first time in their lives, will have a real power in determining the affairs, albeit partially at the beginning, of their own community. All this, in contrast to today's state of affairs when citizens supposedly have the

power, every four years or so, to change the party in government but, in effect, they are given neither any real choice nor any way of imposing their will on professional politicians or economic elites. This becomes obvious, for instance, if one looks at the electoral programs of national parties, which are expressed in such broad and vague terms that they do not commit politicians to anything concrete.

As regards (b) the proposals on alternative political institutions, the ID groups/organisation, even before they have taken over power and established a *demos* in their area, but after they have become widely known locally (something that presupposes that they have already begun contesting local elections) should take various initiatives towards the establishment of a political (direct) democracy, such as:

- the organisation of demotic assemblies to discuss important local issues. In large cities these assemblies could take the form of neighbourhood assemblies that would confederate and form the ‘city-confederal assembly’ out of delegates from each neighbourhood assembly. This confederal assembly would simply carry out the decisions of neighbourhood assemblies and take complementary decisions for the implementation of such decisions. In other words, the fundamental principle has to be established that it is actually the demotic assemblies that take decisions and the delegates in confederal assemblies never ‘represent’ citizens and formulate policies ‘on their behalf’. Delegates to the city-confederal assembly may be elected on rotation basis but they have to be immediately recallable by the neighbourhood assemblies through the democratic procedures that they will establish. At this stage, the ID groups/organisation may also demand the official recognition of these citizens’ assemblies by the town/city council, as well as the assigning of specific powers to them.
- the election of a ‘**shadow town/city council**’, i.e. of a council that will ‘shadow’ the activities of the official town/city council and make alternative proposals on its agenda. The shadow council will consist of delegates from the demotic assemblies and will make proposals on the basis of the general principles discussed in the assemblies. The same principles that apply on the election/recall of delegates to the confederal assembly would apply here.
- The demand and fight for the greatest possible **decentralisation of political power**, as well as economic power (taxing/spending power etc) to the local level, given that decentralisation is the basis of organisation of an inclusive democracy. However, it should be stressed that all these steps, as well as those described below, do not aim to achieve some sort of reform of the existing institutions of political and economic power, i.e. the system of the market economy and parliamentary ‘democracy’. This is why each ‘transitional’ demand (e.g. for greater decentralisation) should be accompanied by a statement by the ID groups/organisation which would connect the particular demand to the long-term goal of inclusive democracy. The ID movement is an ‘antisystemic’ and not a reformist movement and it will attempt to achieve all its goals through peaceful means, although at some stage it may come under violent attack by the ruling elites, in which case of course it will have to defend itself. However, the more ‘hegemonic’ the ID social paradigm is the more difficult it will be for the ruling elites to impose their will by force.

Transition to economic democracy

As regards the aim of building alternative economic institutions leading to economic

democracy, the programme should make clear why the taking over by the ID movement of several town/city councils could create the conditions for:

- the drastic increase of the demos' economic self-reliance;
- the setting up of a demotic economic sector, i.e. a sector owned by the demos; and
- the creation of a democratic mechanism for the confederal allocation of resources.

As these conditions have been described in detail elsewhere^[21] we will only summarise them here.

Concerning self-reliance first there is significant Green literature on the matter, which however suffers from the basic drawback that it is reformist i.e. it aims to reform the market economy with the aim of greater self-reliance. However, an ID movement has to develop a transitional strategy for a radical decentralisation of power to the *demos* with the explicit aim of replacing the present political and economic institutional framework. Steps in this direction could be the effort (which will be made easier when local power has been won) for the increase of:

- **local financial power**, through the creation of *Demotic Credit Unions* (i.e., financial co-ops supported by the demos) to provide loans to their members for their personal and investment needs, as a first step in the creation of a *demotic bank network*; also *LETS*^[22] schemes could be introduced as a first step in the installation of a *demotic currency* (i.e. a currency controlled by the Demos rather than by a central bank which in turn is controlled by the ruling elites, as is the case with the US dollar and the Euro); finally, a *demotic credit card scheme* may be created with the aim of covering the basic needs of all citizens through the use of locally produced goods and services, as a first step for the establishment of a voucher system that would replace all currencies in an inclusive democracy .
- **local tax power**, through tax decentralisation, i.e. the shift of taxing power from the national to the local level. Initially, new local taxes could be complementary to state taxes but the ID movement should fight for tax decentralisation and the parallel introduction of a new *demotic tax system* (i.e. a tax system controlled by the demos) which could be used to: finance a program for the demoticisation of the local productive resources, providing employment opportunities for local citizens; finance a program for social spending that will cover the basic needs of all citizens; finance various institutional arrangements that will make democracy in the household effective (e.g. payment for work at home, for the care of children and the elderly etc); finance programs for the replacement of traditional energy sources with local energy resources, especially renewable energy (solar, wind, etc.); to penalise economically the anti-ecological activities of branches and subsidiaries of large corporations based in the area. So, the combined effect of the above measures will be to redistribute economic power within the community, in the sense of greater equality in the distribution of income and wealth. This, combined with the introduction of the democratic planning procedures (see below), should provide significant ground for the transition towards full economic democracy.
- **power to determine local production**, through, initially the provision of financial incentives to local producers/shops/citizens in order to induce them to

produce/sell/buy locally produced goods with the aim of breaking the chains of big manufacturers/distributors. At a later stage, the creation of *demotic enterprises* (i.e. enterprises owned by the demos) would give the power to the demos to increasingly take over production.

- **power to cover the welfare needs of local citizens** through the creation of a *demotic welfare system*, i.e. a welfare system controlled by the demos that would provide important social services (education, health, housing, etc.) locally, or regionally in cooperation with other demoi in the area. Such a system would not only maximise the use of local productive resources but, also, drastically reduce outside dependence.

Coming next to the creation of a demotic economic sector this is a crucial step in the transition to an inclusive democracy, not only because of its importance with respect to economic democracy but also because the establishment of self-managed productive units constitutes the foundation for workplace democracy. A demotic sector would involve new collective forms of ownership that would ensure control of production, not only by those working in the production units, but also by the demos. This could be achieved through the creation of:

- **Demotic enterprises**, i.e. productive units that could belong to the demos and be managed by the workers working in those units, while their technical management (marketing, planning, etc.) could be entrusted to specialised personnel. However, the overall control over such enterprises should belong to the demotic assemblies that would supervise their production, employment and environmental policies ensuring that the 'general social interest' rather than the particular interest of each demotic enterprises' employees is pursued. Such enterprises may be established even before supporters of the inclusive democracy project take over a city/town council through the use, for instance, of Land Trusts, although it will be after local power has been won that such enterprises can flourish.^[23] These enterprises should be clearly distinguished from both the bureaucratic socialist enterprises and the capitalist firms. This could be achieved by decentralisation of decision-making, within the framework of community-owned but independently run co-ops. Thus, the demotic assembly could determine social and ecological targets that the demotic enterprise would have to achieve whereas the enterprise itself could be run by its employees. Their survival in the transitional period would depend on how successful the new political and economic institutions are in creating a new consciousness, which will make citizens more resistant to purely financial incentives. An important step in this direction would be that demotic enterprises would produce exclusively for the local market, with the use of local resources. This presupposes that demotic enterprises, unlike similar Green or lifestyle activities, would be part of a comprehensive program to *demoticise* the economy—in other words, a program whose constituent elements are self-reliance, demotic ownership and confederal allocation of resources. The aim of this process is to gradually shift more and more human and non-human resources away from the market economy into the new 'demotic' sector of the economy that would form the basis of an inclusive democracy. At the end of this process, the demotic enterprises would control the local economy and would be integrated into the confederation of demoi, which could then buy, or expropriate, privately owned big enterprises.
- **a network of demotic bank co-operatives**, similar, for example, to the very

successful Basque network of the Caja Laboral Popular in Spain^[24], which supports the Mondragon co-ops could be established before local power has been won. But after local elections have been successfully contested in a number of cities/towns then the possibility arises for the creation of **demotic bank network** owned and controlled by the demos. Thus, each city/town could have its own demotic bank that could be integrated into a regional and later a confederal network that could be used: to absorb local savings so that local eco-friendly investment projects could be financed that maximise local employment; to offer other specialised services that would allow the establishment and running of demotic enterprises by any interested social group in the area, which would not necessarily possess the required specialised knowledge (e.g., workers of bankrupt companies, unemployed, low-wage people, etc.); to undertake research on the type of production units to be established in the area, on the basis of criteria which would aim at the maximisation of local employment, of local (and consequently of confederal) economic self-reliance and productivity, as well as at the minimisation of the effects on the environment; to provide specialised services on planning the production layout, designing the workplace, manpower training, accounting systems, et cetera.

Finally, as regards the transition to a Confederal Allocation of Resources, the fundamental problem that a strategy leading to a system of confederal allocation of resources faces is how to create such institutional arrangements for economic democracy that are compatible with an institutional framework that in the transitional stage is still a market economy. As the confederal allocation of resources was described in *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*,^[25] the system involves two basic mechanisms for the allocation of resources:

- a democratic planning mechanism for most of the macro-economic decisions, (social autonomy element) and
- a voucher system for most of the micro-economic decisions, which, by replacing the real market with an artificial one, would create conditions of freedom of choice (individual autonomy element).

It is obvious that the voucher system cannot be introduced before a full economic democracy in the form of a confederation of *demoi* has been introduced, although steps in this direction could be taken earlier (e.g. the demotic credit card scheme mentioned above) However, a democratic planning system is feasible even in the transitional period although, obviously, its decision-making scope would be seriously constrained by the market economy. Still, such a system could play a useful role in educating people in economic democracy and at the same time in creating the preconditions for individual and social autonomy.

But, for any democratic mechanism to be significant and to attract citizens in the decision-taking process, it is presupposed that the decisions themselves are important. It is therefore crucial that during the transition to an inclusive democracy the demos should be empowered with significant powers that would convert it into a coherent system of local taxation, spending and finance. Then, demotic assemblies could be empowered to make decisions affecting the economic life of the community, which would be implemented by the Town Council or some other relevant body, after it has been converted, formally or informally depending on the existing legal framework, into a body of recallable delegates.

Thus, the shift of tax power to the cities/towns, which should be a basic demand of an ID movement, would allow demotic assemblies to determine the amount of taxes and the way in which taxes would be charged on income, wealth, land and energy use, as well as on consumption. Demotic assemblies could, at annual intervals, meet and discuss various proposals about the level of taxation for the year to come, in relation to the way the money collected by the demos should be spent. This way, demotic assemblies would start taking over the fiscal powers of the state, as far as their demoi are concerned, although in the transitional period, until the confederation of demoi replaces the state, they would also be subject to the state fiscal powers.

Similar measures can be taken as regards the present state powers with respect to the allocation of financial resources. The introduction of a demotic banking system, in combination with demotic currencies, will give significant power to demotic assemblies to determine the allocation of financial resources in the implementation of the demos's objectives (creating new enterprises, meeting ecological targets etc.)

Finally, assemblies would have significant powers in determining the allocation of resources in the demoticised sector, namely, the demotic enterprises and the demotic welfare system. As a first step, demotic assemblies could introduce a voucher scheme with respect to social services. At a later stage, when a significant number of demoi have joined the confederation of inclusive democracies, demotic assemblies could expand the voucher system to cover basic needs of all citizens, initially in parallel with the market economy – until the latter is phased out.

Transition to democracy in the social realm

As mentioned above, the transitional strategy should involve steps in the development of institutions establishing a 'democracy at the social realm' (self-managed institutions in the workplace, the household, the place of education etc) and the values corresponding to it. This implies, that the ID groups, apart from participating in struggles for worker's democracy, household democracy, democracy in the educational institutions and so on, should initiate moves for the establishment of alternative institutions like the demotic enterprises, demotic clinics, schools etc, which will be self-managed as described above. Furthermore they should take steps to enhance self-management in existing institutions.

The creation of an alternative culture plays a crucial role in the process of creating a democratic *Paedeia*, i.e. a system of all round education which creates the character of a democratic citizen and at the same time promotes the value system that is consistent with an inclusive democracy so that it occupies a hegemonic position in society. This is a completely different system from today's system of education that constitutes a basic part of the socialisation process that produces disciplined individuals rather than free citizens. Similarly the free expression of artists – free from market or bureaucratic considerations – should be enhanced, in place of the present elite-controlled art activities

In this context, a system of alternative self-managed media should be established, even before local power has been won, with the aim to present the news from the people's rather than from the elites' point of view. The alternative media established as part of the ID program would play a crucial role in developing an 'alternative consciousness', as regards the methods of solving the economic and ecological problems in a democratic way. They should highlight the systemic nature of today's economic and ecological crisis and make

proposals on how to start building the new society. Once local power has been won, such alternative media should be converted into *demotic* media that will be under the overall control of the *demotic assemblies*.

In sum, a new culture for a democratic society should be promoted that will be characterised by very different values than those of a market economy. The values of heteronomy, competition, individualism and consumerism which are dominant today have to be replaced in a democratic society by the values of individual and collective autonomy, co-operation, mutual aid, solidarity and sharing.

Transition to ecological democracy

Finally, the transitional strategy should involve steps in the development of institutions and values which aim at the reintegration of society with Nature and the elimination of any human attempt to dominate the natural world. This implies, apart from participating in struggles against the activities of the political and economic elites which have resulted in the present ecological crisis, the initiation of moves for the establishment of alternative 'eco-friendly' institutions and renewable forms of energy. In fact, as it was shown elsewhere, [\[26\]](#) the establishment of the new political and economic institutions itself and particularly the drastic decentralisation that the new institutions involve is a crucial step in this direction, as it allows the development of new lifestyles, new patterns of work, production, energy use and consumption, which are perfectly compatible with the aim of an ecological democracy.

In conclusion, no one should have any illusions that the establishment of democracy will be a swift process or that the implementation of a transitional strategy program will not have a hard time from the elites controlling the state machine and the market economy. This process is bound to be a long one involving a huge popular movement and will extend over an entire historical period. However, without underestimating the difficulties involved in the context of today's perfected methods of brain control and economic violence, which, in fact, might prove more effective methods than pure state violence in suppressing a movement for an inclusive democracy, we think that the proposed strategy is a realistic strategy on the way to a new society.

* This article is based on an extended analysis of the problem of transition published in *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2002). ["Transitional strategies and the Inclusive Democracy project"](#).

[^](#) Pantelis Arapoglou, Takis Fotopoulos, Panayotis Koumentakis, Nikos Panagos, John Sargis.

[\[1\]](#) See Takis Fotopoulos, ["The Myth of Postmodernity"](#), *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No 1 (March 2001), pp 27-76.

[\[2\]](#) Takis Fotopoulos, ["The end of traditional antisystemic movements and the need for a new type of antisystemic movement today"](#), *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (November 2001), pp. 415-456.

[\[3\]](#) Anti-systemic social divisions are defined as those social divisions which explicitly or implicitly challenge the legitimacy of a hierarchical system that creates and reproduces the unequal distribution

of power see T. Fotopoulos, "[Class Divisions Today-the Inclusive Democracy Approach](#)", *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (July 2000), pp. 211-252.

[4] For a critical assessment of the traditional Left transitional strategies, as well some recently proposed ones, see T. Fotopoulos, "[Transitional Strategies and the Inclusive Democracy Project](#)", *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2002), pp. 17-62.

[5] See for a detailed description of an inclusive democracy Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, chs. 5-6.

[6] See for a detailed description Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, ch. 7. See, also, T. Fotopoulos, "[Mass Media, Culture and Democracy](#)", *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 1999), pp. 33-64 and "The limitations of Life-style strategies".

[7] See Fotopoulos, "The End of Traditional Antisystemic Movements."

[8] See T. Fotopoulos, "Class Divisions Today-the Inclusive Democracy Approach."

[9] See e.g. Mao Tse-Tung, "Report of an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan" (March 1927) in *Selected Readings from the works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967).

[10] See for instance Ernest Mandel, "The new vanguard" in Tariq Ali's (ed) *The New Revolutionaries* (New York: William Morrow & Co, 1969).

[11] See Fotopoulos, "The End of Traditional Antisystemic Movements."

[12] See, for instance, Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998).

[13] See e.g. Erik Olin Wright, *Classes*, (London: Verso, 1985/1997) and, D. Ames Curtis, "[On the Bookchin/Biehl resignations and the creation of a new liberatory project](#)", *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 163-74.

[14] Murray Bookchin, *Post-scarcity anarchism*, (London: Wildwood House, 1974), p. 191.

[15] C. Castoriadis' introductory interview in *The Castoriadis Reader*, edited by David Ames Curtis, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) pp. 26-27.

[16] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 262.

[17] See Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way*, pp. 80-81.

[18] See Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, chs 5-7; see also Murray Bookchin, "The Ghost of Anarcho-Syndicalism", *Anarchist Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1993), pp 3-24.

[19] A perfect example of such a formulation of the basic ID principles is given in the text prepared by the Athens group which publishes a magazine under the title 'Periektiki Dimokratia' (Inclusive Democracy); this text is repeated on every issue of the magazine.

[20] See T. Fotopoulos, "The myth of postmodernity".

[21] See Takis Fotopoulos, "[Outline of an economic model for an inclusive democracy](#)", *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1997), pp. 21-56; see also for further analysis, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, pp. 289-300.

[22] See for a description of the LETSsystem, Ross V.G. Dobson, *Bringing the Economy Home from the Market* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1993).

[23] See C. George Benello et al., *Building Sustainable Communities*, (New York: Bootstrap, 1989), Part I.

[24] See M. A. Lutz & K. Lux, *Humanistic Economics* (New York: Bootstrap, 1988), pp. 263-68.

[25] See ch 6, pp. 255-274.

[26] Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, pp. 213-16.