

# On the Crisis of Modernity and of the Antisystemic Movements – The Need for A New Liberatory Society

An Interview with Takis Fotopoulos\*

## On the meaning of the present multi-dimensional crisis

*Mika: What are the elements of the present multidimensional crisis and what kind of a change is needed to overcome it?*

**Takis:** The present multidimensional crisis encompasses every institutionalised structure and the corresponding values that are dominant in present society—a society which, at the institutional level, is summed up in the internationalised market economy, as far as the economic structure is concerned, and the so-called representative “democracy” (a kind of a liberal oligarchy) as far as the political structure is concerned. It is therefore:

- an economic crisis, in the sense of a huge and growing income and wealth gap between countries and social groups;
- a crisis in politics, in the sense of growing apathy with what passes as politics today;
- a crisis in the broader social realm, in the sense of a continuing crisis in the relations between sexes following the breaking down of patriarchy, or in the relations between educators and students, following the explosion of student movements, etc.;
- a cultural crisis, in the sense of the growing homogenisation of culture;
- an ideological crisis, in the sense of questioning the given “truths” of any ideology and last—but by no means least—
- an ecological crisis, in the sense of the growing threat to the planet and human life itself.

At the same time, the very values on which these structures are based are questioned today either implicitly—as shown by the attempts to develop alternative forms of economic organisation, the flourishing of various forms of self-organisation at the local level, the explosion of crime against property, drug abuse, etc.—or explicitly, as shown by the questioning of the very idea of Progress on which the growth ideology and the present growth economy are based.

As regards the kind of change needed to overcome the wide-ranging, deep and worsening crisis, this can be traced to its causes. If you look at every aspect of this crisis in more detail, you will find that the ultimate cause in each case is the growing concentration of power at the political, the economic and the broader social levels. The dynamics of the system of market economy and its political complement, representative “democracy”, both of which

emerged about two hundred years ago following the industrial revolution, have played a crucial role in this process of growing concentration of power at all levels.

At the same time, as far as development of the corresponding value systems is concerned, very important was the ideological justification of the concentration of economic power through **economic liberalism**, of political power through **political liberalism**, of the present destruction of the environment through the **growth ideology** and consumerism and so on.

Therefore, the change required to overcome the present crisis inevitably passes through the rupture of present structures and values –a change that can only come about from without rather than from within the present institutions and the values based on them.

## **On the institutions of modernity and the distinction between capitalism and market economy**

**Mika:** *You have emphasised the role of market economy and representative democracy in modernity. Can modernity be understood simply from the perspective of these two phenomena, or are there other important elements – for example new emphasis on subjectivity, secularization, disembodiment of social relations, the importance of order-building etc. – involved as well?*

**Takis:** Of course, modernity cannot be understood simply in terms of the market economy and representative democracy and in my article in *Democracy and Nature* on “The Myth of Postmodernity”, as well as in my writings on the present rise of irrationalism, I have stressed several other important elements characterising modernity –the most important being the re-emergence of rationalism and the flourishing of science, both representing a revival of the autonomy tradition, even though of course both rationalism and science have been subsequently used to serve the interests of the new elites which emerged following the rise of the system of market economy and its political complement in the form of representative “democracy”. However, it was the institutionalisation of the system of the market economy and its political complement which were the ultimate causes of the characteristics usually assigned to modern society, such as:

- the replacement of the group or the community (as the traditional basic unit of society) by the individual;
- the assignment of specific, specialised tasks to modern institutions within a highly developed division of labour in contrast to the traditional social or political institutions (family, community, king, etc.);
- the government of the institutions of modern society by ‘rules’ rather than, as in traditional society, by custom and tradition, and so on.

In fact, these two fundamental institutions (system of market economy and representative “democracy”) define modernity itself and, in their present universalisation, clearly show why we have not moved today to a new era of post modernity that supposedly represents a break with the era of modernity –as postmodernists argue– but just to a new form of modernity, i.e. neoliberal globalisation, following liberal modernity in the nineteenth century and statist modernity in the twentieth.

**Mika:** *You write about the distinction between market economy and capitalism. Could you elaborate on the differences of these two systems, and why should our efforts be directed, in the end, against market economy and not against capitalism?*

**Takis:** It would be a misunderstanding to assume that the Inclusive Democracy project, which I support, suggests that we should fight against market economy and not against capitalism! What I have maintained in *Towards An Inclusive Democracy* and also in the *Present Multi-dimensional Crisis* is that capitalism should not be identified with a market economy, as it usually happens, because “market economy” is a broader term than “capitalism”. Market economy refers to the way resources are allocated, whereas capitalism refers to property relations and although, historically, the market economy has been associated with capitalism, (i.e. private ownership and control of the means of production), a market allocation of resources is not inconceivable within a system of social ownership and control of economic resources. The distinction drawn between capitalism and the market economy is particularly useful today, when many in the self-styled “Left”, after the failure of the centrally planned economy, rediscovered the merits of a ‘socialist’ market economy, whereas several “communist” parties in the South and particularly in China have embarked on a strategy to build a “socialist” market economy. The inevitable result is a synthesis of the worst elements of the market economy (huge inequalities, lack of even basic social provision in health, etc.) and ‘socialist’ statism (authoritarianism, lack of any political freedom, etc.). So, what I have always stressed is that the objective of a new liberatory project, like the proposed Inclusive Democracy project, should not be simply the abolition of capitalist property relations, but of the market economy itself.

**Mika:** *You write that one of the main characteristics of modernity is that economy has liberated itself from the control of the political sphere. What is your response to those critics from the libertarian right who assert that we are actually living in a mixed economy, not capitalism (since capitalism, in its pure form, is capitalism only when it is laissez-faire), that the economy is not free, but regulated by the states, however weak?*

**Takis:** My response is based on the following three aspects of the ID project’s historical analysis.

- First, that one of the main characteristics of modernity is that the economy was separated from polity (which of course is not the same with state).
- Second, capitalism refers to the ownership of the means of production, which is a different issue from that of the allocation of resources (i.e. the question whether we have laissez faire or a socially controlled market, or even planning). This is why it is possible to have a “socialist” market economy (e.g. China today) or a capitalist “planned” economy (e.g. the war economy in Britain or the post-war indicative planning in France and elsewhere).
- Third, in my writings, I periodised modernity as follows: liberal, statist and neoliberal. In liberal modernity, state controls on the market were very few and sparse. In statist modernity, we had the kind of mixed economy those libertarians you refer to talk about —who presumably do not have a clue about the systemic change that neoliberal globalisation represents. In statist modernity the markets were indeed controlled by the states that directly or indirectly determined the level of national income, employment, etc., apart of course from the continuous expansion of the

welfare state. Present neoliberal modernity represents a sort of synthesis of liberal and statist modernity, as I described it in *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, ten years ago. So, the state does not control the markets anymore (it does not have the means for it anyway —particularly after the program of massive privatisations that all advanced states have introduced in the last 20 years or so, the effective dismantling of welfare state, etc.). All it does at the moment is to create the internal and external conditions for market stability, as well as the conditions for a “healthy” supply side of the economy through cutting the direct or indirect cost of production (low tax rates on corporations and investors, low employer’s contributions on social security etc.).

Therefore, the present controls are what I have called in the book **regulatory controls**, which have been usually introduced by the economic elites simply, in order to “regulate” the market, through the creation of a stable framework for the smooth functioning of the market economy, without affecting its essential self-regulating nature. Such controls have always been necessary for the production and reproduction of the system of the market economy. Examples of such controls are the various controls introduced at present by the World Trade Organisation, or by the Maastricht/Amsterdam treaties, which aim at regulating the world and the European markets respectively, in the interest mainly of those controlling the respective markets (multinationals, big Europe-based national and multinational firms, etc.) Such controls have always been very much in use throughout the history of the market economy and have nothing to do with real social controls on markets, either in the broad sense of aiming to protect domestic commodities and capital markets (i.e. tariffs, import controls, exchange controls, etc.) or in the narrow sense of aiming at the effective protection of humans and Nature against the effects of marketisation (e.g. social security legislation, welfare benefits, macro-economic controls to secure full employment, etc.). Controls of this kind are either drastically restricted or undermined in every way possible in today’s internationalised market economy. HERE

## **On the meaning of Inclusive Democracy in relation to socialism and anarchism**

**Mika:** *A small question on the concept of Inclusive Democracy. Do you mean “inclusive” in the sense that all citizens, and not only privileged elites, are active and equal participants in the political process, or in the sense that the political includes also the economical, ecological etc.?*

**Takis:** In both senses of the word but, also, beyond them. As it is well known, the exclusion of some people from the democratic process was the fundamental problem of classical Athenian democracy, i.e. the fact that a narrow definition of citizenship was adopted, which however was absolutely compatible with the ideas prevailing in the world at the time— we should not forget that slavery was abolished just two or three hundred years ago and that women gained voting rights only during the last century! On the other hand, the reason why today’s democracy is not inclusive is not simply the fact that it is not also economic democracy, or ecological democracy, or democracy in the social realm, but rather the fact that it is not democracy at all! Democracy implies all citizens taking a direct part in all kinds of decision-making affecting the political, economic, social and ecological aspects of social living, in other words democracy means the equal distribution of political, economic and social power in the broad sense. Any form of concentration of power is

incompatible with a genuine democracy —what we call Inclusive Democracy.

**Mika:** *How does your formulation of Inclusive Democracy differ from libertarian socialism, or can it be understood simply as libertarian socialism that emphasises the importance of direct democracy? On a more general level, how would you situate your ideas in relation to socialism and anarchism?*

**Takis:** The Inclusive Democracy project is not just a theoretical construction, but it aims to be a synthesis of the two main liberatory traditions, the libertarian socialist tradition as part of the anarchist tradition (excluding the liberal individualistic currents within anarchism which today tend to become dominant within what is left of the anarchist movement) and the autonomy/democracy tradition as well as the antisystemic currents within the ‘new social movements’, i.e. the feminist movement, the Green movement, the identity movements and others. The ID project however is not only a synthesis but it also aims to transcend all these traditions and movements in the light of historical experience, particularly of the last two centuries or so. So, there are important differences between the Inclusive Democracy project and all those traditions, as far as the historical analysis and the analysis of the present situation is concerned, the way in which a future liberatory society is envisaged and, finally, the strategy used to move from here to there.

As regards, first, the ID analysis, this is an analysis based on power structures and relations in general, rather than economic structures and relations (Marxist/ socialist tradition) or political structures and relations (anarchist tradition).

Second, as regards the future society, the Inclusive Democracy-based society is one which is self-managed at all levels, where citizens set their own laws and truths, unbound from any kind of externally given truth, either based on religion and tradition or, alternatively, based on a particular kind of reading of History (Marxism) or of the relation between Society and Nature, or of human nature (various forms of anarchism). Furthermore, it rejects the usual anarcho-communist myth of a post-scarcity society (which is seen by some anarchists and communists alike as the ‘necessary’ objective stage that we have to go through before we reach the realm of freedom and explicitly assumes instead, a scarcity society which, however, is institutionalised as a stateless, marketless and moneyless society, within which the communist principle ‘from each according to his/her ability to each according to his/her needs’ will apply as far as basic needs is concerned, and the principle ‘from each according to his ability to each according to his effort’ will apply as regards non-basic needs, within an economic framework that meets the need for freedom of choice.

Finally, as regards the transitional strategies, unlike both the socialist and anarchist movements which aim at a change in the institutions first, which will then be followed by a general change in values that will make the liberatory paradigm dominant, in the ID view, the liberatory project has to become hegemonic **before** the generalised change in institutions—something that requires not just a violent overthrow of the existing system followed by a change in ideology, as it was the case in the 1917 revolution with the well known authoritarian outcome, but the building of anti-systemic institutions and corresponding value systems (as alternative to the existing institutions and values) within the present society.

**Mika:** *Representative democracy has been defended from the criticism of the advocates*

*of direct democracy on the grounds that not only specialist knowledge but also considerable time and effort are needed to make responsible political decisions, and that only 'professional politicians' have enough time and resources to immerse themselves deeply enough into political problems. How can the citizens using political power in the context of direct democracy be guaranteed sufficient information and knowledge considering the decisions they must make?*

**Takis:** Since the time of classical Athenian democracy, people have recognised that politics, in the proper sense of the world, is not an activity requiring specialist knowledge and, in fact, up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Founding Fathers of the USA constitution literally invented representative “democracy”, the prevailing meaning of democracy was the classical meaning, i.e. the direct exercise of power by people themselves. Furthermore, as (Ellen) Wood, an American writer, has shown, representative democracy was not introduced by the Founding Fathers because they thought that population sizes were so big, or the problems were so complicated, that it was impossible to have direct democracy. On the contrary, their rationale was that the masses could not be left to their own devices to decide everything and that a system was needed, instead, in which it would be the elites, which had the knowledge and the expertise, to actually take decisions on important issues . In other words, they adopted a system of federal centralization, as against the direct democracy exercised by e.g. the Town meetings in New England, exactly in order to make direct democracy impossible and not the other way round, as supporters of representative “democracy” argue today. Furthermore, the argument of the specialist knowledge required, given the complexity of today’s problems, etc., is in fact deceiving, because assemblies could still take decisions on such matters that require specialist knowledge after hearing the advice of specialists expressing alternative viewpoints –as professional politicians do also today!

As regards the argument about the lack of necessary information, the precondition for a genuine democracy to be created is that the mass media would not of course continue playing the role they play today, i.e. directly or indirectly supporting the views of the political and economic elites who own and/or control them. Democratic mass media, functioning under the general guidance of the demotic, regional or confederal assemblies and the specific instructions of the assemblies of the people working in the media, will have as a basic aim to provide people with all the necessary information, so that informed decisions could be taken on all important matters.

Finally, as regards the lack of time argument, in fact, today there could be more spare time available to people for taking part in assembly work than, say, in classical Athens, since, at the present state of technology, only a few hours of work a day would be enough for the production of goods and services covering basic needs. But, when you mention this argument to supporters of representative “democracy” they resort to the usual argument that people might not be willing to spare the necessary time for assembly work. However, this argument, again, takes for granted today’s state of affairs, where citizens have been transformed into consumers and where politics is a means to satisfy certain ends rather than being an end in itself. In other words, the ID concept of democracy adopts a ‘participatory’ conception of active citizenship, like the one implied by the work of Hannah Arendt. In this conception, “political activity is not a means to an end, but an end in itself; one does not engage in political action simply to promote one’s welfare but to realise the principles intrinsic to political life, such as freedom, equality, justice, solidarity, courage

and excellence”. It is therefore obvious that this conception of citizenship is qualitatively different from the liberal and social-democratic conceptions which adopt an ‘instrumentalist’ view of citizenship, i.e. a view which implies that citizenship entitles citizens with certain rights that they can exercise as a means to the end of individual welfare.

**Mika:** *What would be the outlines of a new economy not resting on growth-ideology?*

**Takis:** To describe an economy not resting on growth ideology we have to outline what an economic democracy means. At the outset, to talk today about the equal sharing of political power, without conditioning it on the equal sharing of economic power, is meaningless. This means that in an economic democracy, as an integral part of an Inclusive Democracy, the *demos* becomes the authentic unit of economic life, since economic democracy is not feasible today unless both the ownership and control of productive resources are organised at the local (the ‘demotic’) level. Therefore, the following conditions have to be satisfied for a society to be characterised as an economic democracy:

- The abolition of the institutionalised concentration of power at all levels. This implies, a) that there are no institutionalised economic processes of an oligarchic nature, i.e. all "macro" economic 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, although "micro" economic decisions at the workplace or the household levels are taken by working people in the place of work and individual households/consumers respectively and, b) that there are no institutionalised economic structures embodying unequal economic power relations, i.e. the means of production and distribution are collectively owned and controlled by the *demos*, the citizen body directly. Any inequality of income is therefore 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. Thus, demotic ownership of the economy provides the economic structure for democratic ownership, whereas direct citizen participation in economic decisions provides the framework for a comprehensively democratic control process of the economy.
- Radical decentralisation (which initially may be just administrative and over time could become physical as well) within the context of a confederation of self-reliant *demoi*, which form a confederal Inclusive Democracy. This is, also, the precondition for the local control of the environment to be successful, i.e. that the *demos* is self-reliant, so 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. So, the much decentralised character of an ID might also be expected to enhance its environmentally friendly character. It is reasonable to assume —and the evidence about the remarkable success of local communities in safeguarding their environment is overwhelming— 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.
- The mechanism proposed to allocate scarce resources is a combination of democratic planning mechanism with an artificial “market”. This mechanism aims to replace

both historical methods of allocating resources i.e. both the market mechanism and the central planning mechanism, which have abysmally failed in using (rather than wasting) human resources in such a way that they meet the needs of all citizens. The general criterion for the allocation of resources is not efficiency, as is currently defined in narrow techno-economic terms, but effectiveness in satisfying human needs and not just money-backed wants. The democratic planning mechanism secures the satisfaction of the basic needs of all citizens on the basis of the principle “from each according to ability to each according to need” and the artificial “market” secures (through the use of vouchers or special credit cards) the satisfaction of non-basic needs on the principle of reward on the basis of effort. All this is achieved within the institutional framework of a stateless, moneyless and marketless economy. Thus, first, the citizens’ assemblies determine what constitutes a need –basic or otherwise. Then, each citizen chooses freely the kind of activity s/he wants to be involved in. Working people are then credited with the number of hours they have worked for the production of products needed to meet basic and non-basic needs. These vouchers or credit cards could be used to “buy” goods and services at whatever democratic enterprise they like –something securing freedom of choice. Therefore, this model, although does not depend on the prior abolition of scarcity, does secure the satisfaction of the basic needs of all citizens, and those non-basic needs they wish to work extra for without sacrificing freedom of choice.

- Meeting citizens’ needs (particularly those referring to the quality of life), replaces economic growth as the overall aim of production. However, the replacement of the market economy by a new institutional framework of inclusive democracy constitutes only the necessary condition for a harmonious relation between the natural and social worlds. The sufficient condition refers to the citizens’ level of ecological consciousness and one can only hope that the radical change in the dominant social paradigm that will follow the institution of an inclusive democracy, combined with the decisive role that a democratic Paedeia will play in an environmentally-friendly institutional framework, would lead to a radical change in the human attitude towards Nature. In other words, this problematique cannot go beyond defining the institutional preconditions that offer the best hope for a better human relationship with Nature. However, there are strong grounds to believe that the relationship between an inclusive democracy and Nature would be much more harmonious than any society-nature relationship which could ever be achieved in a market economy, or one based on socialist statism. The factors supporting this view refer to all three elements of an inclusive democracy: political, economic, and social.

***Mika:*** *The ideologists of the present system offer the concept of ‘innovation’ as the solution to the problem of the incompatibility of efficiency and creativity. Can there be real creativity when efficiency is the rule?*

***Takis:*** The answer depends on what we mean by efficiency. If efficiency is defined in terms of narrow techno-economic criteria of input minimisation/output maximisation, as is the case in both the capitalist system (which adopts an instrumental concept of rationality with the ultimate aim being maximisation of productivity and growth so that the profits of the capitalist elite could be maximised) or, as similarly was the case in actually existing socialism, (where the ultimate aim was the development of productive forces, so that collective welfare –as defined by the party elite– could be maximised), then efficiency and creativity are indeed incompatible. In that case, innovation does not in fact solve this



problem of incompatibility, unless you define creativity also in narrow instrumental techno-economic terms, e.g. creativity in designing a new computer model or a new car which is “better” because it is more productive etc, i.e. because it is more “efficient”! On the other hand, if we define efficiency in terms of the degree to which products, production processes, etc. satisfy human needs, as these needs are defined by citizens themselves, then there is no incompatibility between efficiency defined in this way and creativity.

In this connection, it is a myth that only capitalist markets can produce innovation, in the sense of new products or scientific advances and new technologies. Although an Inclusive Democracy will not of course be a growth economy (which is in effect a by-product of a capitalist market economy in the West, or the consequence of growth ideology in “socialist” East Europe), if experts advise that more investment is needed, for example, in order to produce something more economically, or perhaps in a way that satisfies better human needs, there is no reason why the assemblies, after listening to the advice of the experts, would not adopt such an advice. Today, experts suggest various innovations, which are realised or not, depending on how compatible they are with the motives of the capitalist elites. Tomorrow, experts would suggest again various innovations, and I can see no reason why assemblies would not decide for their adoption, as long as of course as they would not be perceived as damaging the environment or the quality of labour and life itself.

**Mika:** *Could this formulation by young Marx crystallise the idea of genuine or inclusive democracy as the free participation of every individual in political matters? “Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a species-being in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his ‘own powers’ as social powers, and, consequently, no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of political power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished”. (Marx: On the Jewish Question)*

**Takis:** Yes, although I would paraphrase it to give a greater perspective along the lines I described above, which take into account also problems like the ecological one, that of gender relations, race relations, ethnic relations, etc. I would therefore put it as follows” “only when a form of social organisation is created which re-integrates society with economy, polity and Nature, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished”.

## **On the meaning and possibility of rupture today**

**Mika:** *You write that today we have a historical chance to break away from the heteronomous tradition of inequality and concentration of power and to fulfil the hopes of the autonomist tradition. It is clear that this radical change presupposes a rupture in history. What kind of a rupture?*

**Takis:** Actually, I have not suggested that, today in particular, we have a historical chance to break away from the tradition of heteronomy. What I wrote was something a bit different, i.e. that the collapse of “actually existing socialism”, potentially, had indeed created the historical chance, that you mentioned, for a break with the tradition of heteronomy, but, in fact, exactly the opposite happened! Thus, although today what Marxists called the “objective conditions” for a rupture within the existing system are perhaps more ‘mature’ than, say, forty, or fifty years ago, given that the multidimensional

crisis is much worse today than at that time, the ‘subjective’ conditions, in terms of the level of consciousness for a rupture, in no way match the present state of the objective conditions. This, despite the fact of, or I would better say because of, the collapse of ‘actually existing socialism’. In other words, this historic event functioned negatively, not only with respect to the development of pessimistic expectations by the victims of the present system as regards the feasibility of a ‘systemic’ change, but also with respect to the Left in general, most parts of which moved to various forms of reformism, abandoning any idea of anti-systemic struggle. As far as the meaning of rupture is concerned, I suppose it is clear from my reply to your first question that a rupture means not just an institutional change, (i.e. replacing the present political and economic institutions, which institutionalise heteronomy and unequal distribution of power, with institutions institutionalising autonomy), but also a change in our values and ideas, namely a change in our world-views, so that we can create and adopt a new social paradigm based on the values that are implicit in autonomous institutions. In fact, institutional change is only the necessary condition for a rupture, the sufficient condition being the paradigm change I mentioned, which however has to take place simultaneously with the institutional change, not before it (as Greens and others suggest today), and not after it (as Marxists used to suggest).

**Mika:** *You write that the ID project should primarily appeal to the main victims of the internationalised market economy (students, occasional workers, low wage workers, farmers, women, etc.). But aren't these groups effectively silenced by the system by offering them possibilities to take part in a consumer-lifestyle despite their relatively low incomes?*

**Takis:** But, are they really offered such possibilities today? I think that before answering this question we should take into account two crucial facts.

- First, that poverty is not just absolute, as it was, for instance, the case in the Middle Ages, or in war periods since then. Unless, therefore, we accept an “objective” definition of human needs based on subsistence requirements (which is a highly controversial way of defining needs), the real meaning and significance of poverty, particularly in the kind of consumer society we live in today, can only be seen in relative terms. And, relative poverty, in terms of the income/wealth gap between privileged social groups and the rest of society has reached huge —and continually growing— dimensions in neoliberal globalisation.
- Second, that as the ecological crisis keeps worsening, the elites will have to resort to various authoritarian measures to restrict severely the present consumerist pattern of living because of the growing threat from the greenhouse effect. In fact, they have already begun doing so. In Britain, for instance, only privileged social groups, who can afford the hefty levy imposed, can use their cars during daytime to travel in the entire area of central London (and this measure is seriously discussed to be expanded to most parts of Britain in the future). Similar measures restricting car use are expected to be introduced soon to other parts of Europe, the USA etc. Furthermore, the continually rising price of petrol (which mainly reflects its growing scarcity) has already restricted car use. So, cheap-running cars, cheap flights and many other consumer goods characterising the present consumer society may soon be things of the past, and driving a car or flying may become again a luxury for the privileged social groups, as it used to be the case some decades ago.

**Mika:** *Apparently the marginalised groups or individuals have a special role in the criticism of the present system. Is criticism possible, in late-modern or 'post-modern' context, only from the perspective of the marginalised? Are there any truly marginal groups left in our present-day, highly pluralized societies?*

**Takis:** In today's neoliberal consensus, where social-liberal parties (the ex-social democratic parties) succeed in government neo-liberal parties and vice versa, every criticism to neoliberal globalisation is marginalised by the mass media and is consequently trivialized. The fact that marginalised groups are still allowed to exist (even though their activity becomes increasingly difficult in present-day societies, within the context of the war against 'terrorism', the resort to more and more draconian laws by the elites and the universalisation of various spying techniques –cameras, monitoring of emails, etc.) is just a pretext to create the impression of a democratic facade. Still, despite all this growing totalitarianism, sudden mini-insurrections go on all the time, not only in the South but even in the West, from Seattle to Genoa and from Paris to Athens. So, marginalised ideas, even though they are usually expressed just by marginalised groups, sometimes are encompassed by significant sections of the population, in our supposedly "highly pluralized" societies –or I would rather say, in societies like the present ones, in which the trivialisation of everything and the postmodern levelling out of all radical ideas by mass media and the highly sophisticated ideological mechanisms of the system (with the valuable help of the reformist Left –which is usually manned by yesterday's radicals) is the rule!

**Mika:** *You write that the new liberatory project must start from the recognition of today's realities. What are the main elements that anchor the ID project to the present realities and save it from wishful utopianism? What are the possibilities for the birth of a new antisystemic movement in an age that has lost altogether its impulse towards radical transcendence?*

**Takis:** The project for an inclusive democracy is not just a utopia, in the negative sense of the word. A social project is not a utopia if it is based on today's reality. And today's reality is summed up by an unprecedented multidimensional crisis of the 'growth economy'. Furthermore, a social project is not a utopia if it expresses the discontent of significant social sectors and their explicit or implicit contesting of existing society. Today, the main political, economic and social institutions on which the present concentration of power is founded are increasingly contested. Thus, not only basic political institutions are contested in various ways and representative "democracy" itself is questioned, but also fundamental economic institutions, like private property, are challenged in a massive way (e.g. explosion of crime against property) clearly reflecting the growing discontent with the rising inequality in the distribution of income and wealth –an inequality, which, within the context of the present consumer society, becomes unbearable. Similarly, other important social institutions like the hierarchical organisation of work, the patriarchal family, sexual stereotypes, the hierarchical school, etc. have also been questioned since May 1968. It is also important to note that whenever there was any kind of insurrection in the last forty years or so people have always been organised on the basis of principles similar to the ones proposed by the ID project: from the Hungarian Councils in 1956 to the assemblies of May 1968 –and since then in every factory, campus or school occupation– and from the Argentinean assemblies in the 2000s to the assemblies today in Venezuela, Bolivia, etc. This means that the trends expressed by the ID project are there, and it is out of these

trends that the project itself is inspired.

So, to sum up my argument, the objective conditions for the development of an antisystemic movement are more than fulfilled today. What is lacking is the subjective conditions because —especially after the collapse of “actually existing socialism”— frustration is the rule, a frustration which leads to deep apathy and privacy, particularly as far as what passes as politics today is concerned. The apathy and privacy are reinforced by the marketisation and commercialisation of everything in the era of neoliberal globalisation. But, it is significant that, whenever the occasion arises, (even if the occasion refers to defensive struggles, as is usually the case nowadays), people do take part in protest politics and —more encouragingly— they sometimes try to transcend the bureaucratic Trade Union leaderships or the reformist political leaderships and attempt to self-organise. The crucial, therefore, issue is how we can overcome the deep popular distrust (which is of course absolutely justified) towards the traditional political organisations of the Left, so that people could stop taking the present system for granted and begin organising themselves in new antisystemic movements like the one expressed by the ID project. Once this crucial rupture in the socialisation process is achieved, then the development of a mass antisystemic movement will be almost inevitable, given that the objective conditions keep worsening and people increasingly realise that no solutions can be really found to the enormous economic, political, social as well as ecological problems of today within the present system, whose dynamics have led to the present huge and growing concentration of power at all levels—the root cause of all these problems.

***Mika:*** *You write that there are no objective stages that we must go through to actualise the promises of the autonomist tradition. Do you think that there have been other historical chances in the past to fulfil the possibilities of liberation?*

***Takis:*** There have been several other historical chances to fulfil the possibilities of liberation. To mention just a few examples: Athenian democracy in 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Sections of the French Revolution in the 1790s, the 1871 Paris Commune, the first Soviets in the 1917 Russian revolution, the Spanish collectives in the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s, the May 1968 assemblies —not to mention the present Latin American movements for direct and economic democracy in Argentina, Bolivia, etc. In fact, the entire History can be read in terms of the juxtaposition of the autonomy with the heteronomy tradition. The dominant tradition of course in the past was the heteronomy one and, therefore, the heteronomous society has been the dominant form of social organisation. However, this is not indicative of its intrinsic superiority over an autonomous society. Contrary to the tautological pseudo-radical view promoted by Castoriadis and his supporters that all societies, autonomous and heteronomous alike, have been created and maintained by “society” —a class-undifferentiated concept— I think it is not difficult to be shown that heteronomous societies have always been created and maintained by privileged elites, who aimed at the institutionalisation of inequality in the distribution of power, through violence (military, economic) and/or indirect forms of control (religion, ideology, mass media). But, the very fact that the autonomy project turns up in history again and again, particularly in periods of crisis of heteronomous society, is not accidental: it indicates an underlying autonomy trend, which is in continuous conflict with the alternative heteronomy trend. Furthermore, the very fact that the attempts for autonomy I mentioned have taken place under very different “objective “ conditions of economic development, is a clear indication of the fact that there are no objective stages that we must go through to actualise the

promises of the autonomist tradition.

## On alienation, instrumental rationality and postmodernism

**Mika:** *You write about the transformation of human activity and natural resources into commodities. What is the role of the concept of alienation in your theory?*

**Takis:** The concept of alienation used by the ID project is much broader than the usual Marxist one –something that is reflected also in the broader conception of classes we use with respect to the Marxist one, which are redefined to denote power relations in general rather than just economic power relations. For Marx, *alienation* was basically the estrangement of the worker from his/her product –which in the capitalist market economy has become a commodity– as well as from the production process itself, given that work has also become a commodity within the same system. But, alienation also meant human self-estrangement of the capitalist class as well, although not in the same sense but in the sense that capitalists were also not autonomous with respect to the institutions, despite the fact that they have, of course, played a decisive role in their creation and reproduction. In both cases however, alienation is defined in terms of the lack of autonomy with respect to the **economic power** relationship. For the ID project, on the other hand, alienation is the inevitable product of institutions, which institutionalise the unequal distribution of any kind of power. In this sense, alienation does not just refer to alienation of people, workers and capitalists, from the economic institutions, but also to the alienation of people as citizens from the political institutions (given that, apart from the elites, they are not in fact taking part in the decision-taking process), the alienation of women from patriarchal institutions, (either institutionalised or imposed by tradition), the alienation of students from hierarchical educational institutions, the alienation of ethnic minorities from the cultural institutions of unicultural societies and so on. Finally, alienation is seen here a dynamic process, so, yesterday's revolutionary institutions may be alienating today, to the extent that they institutionalise, formally or informally, new power structures and relations.

**Mika:** *The Frankfurt School has emphasised the role of instrumental rationality in the process of modernity. What is the role of this concept in your theory?*

**Takis:** As I have already mentioned, both capitalist and “actually existing socialist” systems have adopted in fact an instrumental rationality, that is, a rationality which is defined in both cases as consistency between aims and means to achieve the aims. The rationality of the aims was not of course questioned, but instead was taken for granted. Thus, both systems were growth economies, albeit for different reasons, since both capitalist market economy and socialist statism shared the same goal, i.e., economic growth. This meant that the same principles played a decisive part in the organisation of production and in economic and social life in general, irrespective of whether the motive was private profit or some kind of ‘collective’ profit. This is why the principles of economic efficiency and competitiveness mark both types of socialist statism. That is both the ‘socialist’ growth economy and the social-democratic version of socialist statism adopted economic efficiency in the techno-economic sense I described before, as a necessary condition for maximising growth. It is the same adoption of instrumental rationality by

both systems that has led to the present situation of an impending ecological catastrophe. In both the ideology of the capitalist growth economy (based on economic liberalism) and that of the socialist growth economy (based on Marxism) an instrumental view of Nature is adopted, as part of the same instrumental rationality: Nature is seen as an instrument of growth, as a means to achieving better growth and not as an end in itself. The present ecological crisis is just a symptom of the adoption of this instrumentalist view of Nature, and ultimately, of the instrumental rationality characterising modernity.

On the other hand, in an Inclusive Democracy, of course, where there is no place for a growth economy and, therefore, for competitiveness and efficiency defined on the basis of the narrow techno-economic criteria I mentioned above, there is no place for instrumental rationality either. And this applies not just to the economic institutions but to political institutions as well. Today, the so-called representative ‘democracy’ is seen by citizens as a means to an end (e.g. improvement in welfare, etc.), whereas in an ID, direct democracy is an end in itself.

**Mika:** *You have made some critical remarks on postmodernism. What are, in your estimation, the basic errors of the post-modern movement and do you see any positive elements in it?*

**Takis:** The fundamental error of postmodernism, as a theoretical movement, is the very claim that the advanced market economies have entered a new era of post modernity (or a post-modern turn), which is untenable! Postmodernism cannot be justified on the basis of the changes at the economic, political, cultural, or scientific and theoretical levels of the last quarter of a century or so. These changes, as I showed in a long article entitled, “[The Myth of Post-modernity](#)”, in no way reflect a kind of break with the past, similar to the one marking the transition from ‘traditional’ society to modernity. Instead, as I mentioned before, advanced market economies, following the collapse of *liberal modernity* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that of *statist modernity* (in both its versions of social democracy and Soviet statism) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have, in fact, entered a new form of modernity that we may call *neoliberal modernity*, rather than a post modernity. The mainstream of postmodern theory —what has been called ‘deconstructionist postmodernism’— has its own ‘Right’ (what we may call ‘neoliberal postmodernism’) and ‘Left’ (‘oppositional’ postmodernism). As I argued in the same paper, it can be shown that “neoliberal postmodernism” is the ideology *par excellence* of the neoliberal form of modernity and, in this sense, it already constitutes the dominant social paradigm today, at least as far as politics and economics is concerned. This current of postmodernism, however, has to be clearly distinguished from another current, what has been called ‘oppositional’ or ‘reconstructive’ postmodernism which attempts to reconstruct Enlightenment values and socialist politics using the post-modern critiques of essentialism, reductionism, and foundationalism. However, despite the differences between the various currents of postmodernism, it can be shown that post-modern theory, in all its variants, plays the role of justifying either deliberately, (as in the case of neoliberal postmodernism), or objectively, (as in the case of mainstream and ‘oppositional’ postmodernism) the universalisation of liberal ‘democracy’ and the present marketisation of the economy and society. In other words, it plays the role of an emerging dominant social paradigm, which is consistent with the neoliberal form of modernity.

In order to assess the positive and negative elements of postmodernism we have to refer to the key themes of mainstream postmodernism that, to a significant degree, characterise

also oppositional postmodernism. i.e.:

- The rejection of an overall vision of History as an evolutionary process of progress or liberation. The end of the myth of progress is a generally accepted thesis today, although this does not mean, as postmodernists of all persuasions seem to believe, that we should resort to a kind of ‘political agnosticism’ according to which all historical periods and previous societies are of equal value;
- The rejection of totalising universal schemes and ‘grand narratives’ in favour of plurality, fragmentation, complexity and ‘local narratives’. Again, although it is true that a series of recent developments have indeed induced the double need to abandon ‘grand narratives’ and, also, to recognise the importance of social divisions beyond those of strict economic class divisions which marked the previous forms of modernity, still, this does not justify the stand adopted by many in the (post-modern) Left in favour of abandoning any ‘universal’ project of human emancipation. Such a stand leads to the acceptance of the ‘inevitability’ of the market economy and representative “democracy”, and, in the interest of the politics of ‘difference’ and ‘identity’, to the disposal also of any notion of class divisions;
- The rejection of essentialism and determinism in favour of uncertainty, ambiguity and indeterminacy. But, although Marxist essentialism is generally rejected today, this does not mean that there is no centre or essence of power in general. As I mentioned before, there is a unifying element which may unite members of the subordinate social groups around a liberatory project like the inclusive democracy project: this is their exclusion from various forms of power –an exclusion which is founded on the unequal distribution of power that characterises today’s main political and economic institutions and the corresponding values. So, the post-modern fragmentation and ‘localisation’ of social struggle around ‘local’ social divisions, namely, divisions determined by identities –something that inevitably leads to reformism and conformism– is neither necessary nor desirable;
- The rejection of closed systems, ‘objectivity’ and ‘truth’, in favour of relativism and perspectivism. I would not raise any objections concerning the rejection of closed systems and ‘objectivity’ in favour of indeterminacy, uncertainty, ambiguity, as well as of a transdisciplinary approach based on the assumption of a language and culture-conditioned truth (particularly as regards the interpretation of social reality) –this is obviously the core of the epistemological basis of the inclusive democracy paradigm. However, this does not imply that we have to adopt the post-modern relativism which equates all traditions and all kinds of reason, nor does it mean that, without some kind of ‘objective’ criterion, our choice for freedom becomes an arbitrary one, ‘a mere matter of opinion’. As I attempted to show in *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, the choice for freedom is not an arbitrary utopia, but is based on the chronic multi-dimensional crisis that has emerged since the rise of the modern society, as a result of the concentration of power to which the institutions of the market economy and representative “democracy” have, inevitably, led.

## **On socialist statism and the workers’ movement**

**Mika:** *You write about the decline of social democracy and the death of socialist statism. Why do you rule out the possibility of the return of socialist statism? Why is it so evident, in your opinion that the market economy is here to stay?*

**Takis:** I rule out the possibility of a return of socialist statism because, according to the ID analysis, socialist statism —and statism in general— is incompatible with open and deregulated markets. However, the institutionalisation of the opening and deregulation of commodity and capital markets (and the deregulation of labour markets) was not just a change of policy introduced by “bad” neoliberal governments (Thatcher and Reagan) and then adopted by “bad” social democratic governments (Blair, Schroeder, Mitterrand, etc.). In fact, it was the growing internationalisation of the market economy, as a result mainly of the vast expansion of transnational corporations’ activities all over the world since the 1960s, which led to the (initially informal) opening and deregulation of markets that was later formally institutionalised through Thatcher and Reagan. These developments coincided with other developments (information revolution, etc.) which, as I mentioned before, led to the decimation of the working class and its organisations and even more significantly to the phasing out of class struggles in the traditional sense of the word (i.e. the struggles which, though explicitly about reformist demands, implicitly, were questioning the class structure and the system itself). Today, if there are struggles of this kind at all in advanced capitalist countries, they are purely defensive struggles. Of course in the South where, as I mentioned before, a kind of industrialisation takes place, things are different and we have insurrections, like the recent Argentinean one, which quickly become aggressive but, due to the lack of a mass antisystemic movement, in the end, they are also phased out or marginalised.

So, the present neoliberal globalisation is a systemic change, in the sense that it refers to a change endogenous to the system of the market economy itself and its dynamics, and it is not just a change in policy due to exogenous factors (e.g. the decline of the Left, the betrayal of social democratic parties, the integration of communist parties into the system and so on) as argued by the reformist Left. In this problematique, neoliberal globalisation cannot be reversed from within the system, as the reformist Left argues, but only from without, that is, through the development of a mass antisystemic movement with its own analysis of the present situation, its own vision for a future society based on present trends that express themselves every time an insurrection takes place, and its own strategy to move from here to there — the ID project does make concrete proposals on all these fronts. Therefore, to answer your question, within the system, the capitalist market economy is here to stay.

As regards socialist statism, if by this term you mean the regimes of “actually existing socialism”, this system is impossible to come back too. The reason is that this system was brought about through revolution in the first place and I can’t imagine many people today to be willing to risk their lives to bring back a bureaucratic, if not totalitarian, regime, even if it could cover better the basic needs of all citizens than any capitalist system could. This is why I know very few people today in the Marxist Left who are prepared to fight for the return to a similar kind of regime.

On the other hand, if by socialist statism you mean the social democratic regimes of the early post Second World War period, given that these regimes do not rule out the system of the capitalist market economy and that any effective controls of the market, similar to the controls imposed by social democratic regimes in the 1950s-1970s, are impossible within open and deregulated markets, it is clear that the return of such regimes at the national or even the continental levels is also non-feasible. As regards the national level, there have been in fact attempts by social democrats like president Mitterrand of France or Oscar



Lafontaine in Germany and others to reverse neoliberal globalisation but they ended up with either a return to social-liberalism (Mitterrand) or the ousting of their authors from power (Lafontaine), since, obviously, no government would wish to create a currency crisis or a stock exchange crisis of the kind that would inevitably follow the massive outflow of capital in open capital markets, as a result of the adoption of market controls that would make a particular country “non-competitive” with respect to other countries. Similar arguments apply with regard to the other fantasy of the reformist Left that a kind of social democracy could return at the economic bloc level, e.g. the EU level. Again, as long as European markets are open with respect to the rest of the world (and the trans-continental economic links of Europe-based transnational corporations will make sure that they will continue to be open for as long as these corporations exist!) there is no chance for the imposition of significantly stricter controls for the protection of labour or the environment on European markets/capital than those prevailing in NAFTA, the Far East and so on. Unless of course European political and economic elites and the privileged groups around them wish to commit suicide!

**Mika:** *Was there any real liberatory potential in the social democratic movement or do you see it simply as a reformist movement that aimed at giving workers equal chances to take part in the bourgeois consumer culture? You have also made some critical remarks on the socialist answer of enhancing the civil society. But how does, exactly, the ID project differ from this idea? Isn't it on the level of civil society that the change from 'below' must start?*

**Takis:** I don't think that there was ever any real liberatory potential in the social democratic movement, and, even more so, in present civil societarian associations, for the following reasons:

- First, the social-democratic movement has never challenged the two fundamental institutions on which the present system of concentration of power is based, i.e. the market economy and representative “democracy”. It is no accident anyway that the motto of mainstream social democracy has always been social justice rather than autonomy. However, the conception of ‘social justice’ takes for granted the unequal distribution of political and economic power and implies the need for the gradual decrease of this inequality through the improvement of existing institutions. On the other hand, the conception of ‘autonomy’ explicitly rejects the existing institutions, which are considered to be the ultimate cause of concentration of power, and implies the need for their replacement with new institutions securing the equal distribution of political and economic power. It is also worth noting that even when some radical trends in early social democracy, e.g. the guild socialists within the British Labour party or the Swedish social democrats, pursued the objective of autonomy, this aim was still supposed to be achieved **within** the existing institutions of the market economy and representative “democracy”— through the socialisation of the means of production and the imposition of social controls on the market system, and through the ‘deepening’ of democracy, effected by the insertion of procedures of direct democracy within an essentially representative system;
- Second, the very problematique of reforms ignores the fact that the founding institutions of a social system form an integral whole, with its own logic and dynamic, which would not make possible any institutional reforms that fundamentally contravene this logic and dynamic. This implies that the present collapse of social

democracy should not simply be seen as the outcome of the corruption and degeneracy of social-democratic parties, but rather, as the outcome of a fundamental change in the present system, which has taken place in the era of neoliberal globalisation of late modernity. This is the only way one could meaningfully explain the crucial fact that not a single governing social-democratic party to date has resisted its conversion to social liberalism and even when such attempts were made, they had to be quickly reversed, as we've seen with respect to a previous question;

- Third, the radical democratic consciousness required for the creation of an antisystemic movement can not be created within reformist movements, like those constituting the civil societarian associations today. The civil society associations could hardly be organic parts of a wider movement for an Inclusive Democracy. Although, 'objectively', this might be so, because it is indeed possible that some of the citizens taking part in these organisations might form part of the popular base for such a movement, 'subjectively', as I have attempted to show elsewhere, the evidence of reformist struggles in the last century has clearly shown that political movements fighting for reformist demands could only lead to the creation of a reformist mentality. This is why the vast majority of those who supported social democracy in the past –in the belief that radical social change could also be achieved through reforms— did not move to the antisystemic Left when the reforms adopted by social democrats during the period of social democratic consensus were reversed in today's era of neoliberal globalisation. Instead, they either followed the old social democrats in their present conversion into social liberals, or they even switched to more conservative movements! As far as I am concerned, at least, I am not aware of any cases of reformist movements, which, when frustrated by the present reversal of social-democratic achievements, shifted to the antisystemic Left. Instead, even parts of the Marxist Left, which switched to postmodernism after the collapse of 'actually existing socialism', have presently embraced the present system!

**Mika:** *Do you see any possibilities for a new rise of workers' movement? Could a workers' movement striving towards co-operation on international level act as a counter-force to neoliberal policies?*

**Takis:** I don't see any possibilities for a new rise of workers' movement, in the traditional sense of the word. This is because the internationalisation of the market economy and the adoption of neoliberal policies in the last quarter of a century or so coincided with significant technological changes (information revolution) marking the move of the market economy to a post-industrial phase. The combined effect of these developments was a drastic change in the employment structure, which reduced massively the size of the manual working class. For instance, in the 'Group of 7' countries (minus Canada), the proportion of the active population employed in manufacturing fell by over a third between the mid seventies and the mid nineties –a fact which had significant implications on the strength and significance of trade unions and social-democratic parties. Thus, in the US, trade unions have been decimated in just two decades, their membership falling from about 35 million to 15 million, while in Britain, 14 years of Thatcherism were enough to bring down trade union membership from 13.3 million in 1979 to under 9 million in 1993. Similar trends are observed in union membership in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Norway and even Sweden. As a result of the decimation of the working class and its organisations, class identities, class ideologies and therefore class politics have been waning during the neoliberal phase. This is manifested by a series of events like the decline of class voting and

class-based alliance to parties, the decline of class based organisations like the Trade Unions, as well as the weakening of class consciousness, which is indicated by the eclipse of class conflict that followed the defeat of British miners in their conflict with Thatcher in the 1980s – an event that marked the last major industrial battle in the advanced capitalist world.

These developments make it obvious that classes in the Marxist sense are indeed phased out today, although class divisions in a broader sense are far from waning, as post-modernists and—surprisingly—supporters of the autonomy tradition like Castoriadis suggest. In fact, the growing concentration of power created by the present form of the internationalised market economy and representative ‘democracy’ have made such class divisions stronger than ever. Furthermore, it’s worth remembering that the Marxist class categories by concentrating on class divisions based on economic power only never adequately covered all class divisions in society. In particular, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality maintained their transclass character throughout the period following the emergence of modern classes. However, a new development, the ecological crisis, which was the inevitable outcome of the growth economy, added one more transclass problem: the problem of the environment and quality of life. This development and the parallel rise of the ‘new social movements’ (ecological, feminist, ‘identity’ movements and so on) made even more clear the inadequacy of Marxist class categories to incorporate the conflicts arising out of these transclass problems into the general scheme of systemic social divisions. Yet, there is almost overwhelming evidence that economic class divisions (not necessarily defined in Marxist terms) are still reproduced. Even education, which according to social democrats would ameliorate class divisions, can be shown that, far from ameliorating class divisions actually serves to reproduce them. Particularly so when access to education, especially good quality education, is differentially distributed according to class origin, so that education nowadays simply serves to reproduce class divisions. Finally, the present globalisation has not as yet led the countries in the South to such an advanced social, political and economic stage as to transcend classes, even in the Marxist sense. Therefore, class divisions are even more obvious in less developed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, which are still characterised by structures based on productive industrial property.

So, there is little doubt that class divisions still exist today, despite the significant developments of the last quarter of a century or so. This is not of course unexpected given that the fundamental divisions between society and economy, (which are perpetuated by the market economy institutions), and between society and polity, (which are reproduced by the institutions of representative “democracy”), not only are still maintained but in fact have been enhanced after the collapse of socialist statism. So, if classes are redefined to denote power relations in general rather than just economic power relations, they are still important categories in explaining today’s dominance and subordination. This is because today, the class struggle (which may perhaps be better called “the social struggle” to take into account the conflict arising from all forms of unequal distribution of power), is not anymore about ownership of the means of production but about control of oneself at the economic and, also, at the political and the broader social level – a matter which, directly or indirectly, raises the issue of democracy. So, the fact that there are no class parties in the Marxist sense anymore is due to the phasing out of **economic classes** in the Marxist sense of the word rather than to the disappearance of class divisions (in the sense of systemic social divisions) themselves. This means that we have to develop new concepts which, though not depending on the Marxist category of the mode of production, are

‘holistic’ in the sense that they locate class divisions into the power structures of the socio-economic system itself and not just into some aspects of it like gender relations, identity politics, values and so on – a practice which has rightly attracted the title of ‘single-issue’ movements to the corresponding movements. It is, therefore, obvious that 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 which 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.

## On the transition to a liberatory society

***Mika:** It is well known that punishments like the death sentence fare quite well in opinion polls. Do you see these statistics as a result of the exclusion of the majority of citizens from the political process, or do they reflect the genuine values of the majority? What do you think is the significance of these kinds of poll results for the idea of direct democracy?*

***Takis:** Of course the stand of majorities on such issues reflect their present values. Similarly, in countries like USA and also Greece, or Italy, irrational beliefs in God and religion in general, or in other countries, the new forms of irrationalism (New Age, etc.) appeal to significant parts of the population, if not to majorities. Clearly, it is impossible to establish a genuine democracy, i.e. an autonomous society, when the majority of citizens believe in such heteronomous “truths”. In a genuine democracy people create their own truths and do not simply repeat the “truths” in the Bible, the Gospels, or the Koran because then we do not talk anymore about autonomy. People taking part in the proceedings of the assemblies have to accept the basic democratic principle that **it is we, here**, that we take our own decisions, vote for our own laws, define our own truths and we do not take for granted any externally given truths. However, it would be a huge error to assume that because people today believe in God, or in the death penalty, or in other similar irrationalities, they are not capable of taking part in a direct democracy. Obviously, if you try to establish tomorrow an inclusive democracy in the United States, or in Iran, or in Israel for that matter, this will be impossible. Clearly, there is a long transitional process that we have to go through, and during this process we could expect that people would create a different kind of consciousness for a different kind of society. In fact, this is a basic element of the ID project’s transitional strategy; our aim is to achieve this kind of society, first, by educating people and, second and more important, by creating institutions within the present society which prefigure the Inclusive Democracy. It is, in other words, the interaction of education and practice that would lead to this new kind of society. So, we could expect, and this is what we aim at actually, that this kind of democratic consciousness should have become hegemonic **before** society changes into an Inclusive Democracy. In fact, I would argue that the basic flaw of the socialist strategy, the Leninist strategy and so on, was that they tried first to conquer power, and then, from above, to create a new consciousness. I think that, unless democratic consciousness has become hegemonic **before** we reach the new kind of society, this strategy is going to fail, as it failed in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. So, we expect that at least the majority of citizens, by*

the time we will have reached an inclusive democracy, would not be fundamentalist or religious or supporting irrational views in favour of the death penalty, etc.

I, therefore, think that the strategy leading to an inclusive democracy should basically pursue three important aims:

- First, to create a rupture in the socialization process, so that a new social paradigm for a genuine inclusive democracy becomes hegemonic, as I mentioned before;
- Second, to create a gradual involvement of increasing numbers of people in a new kind of politics where, in a new kind of organization, they would implement the principles and the values of an inclusive democracy; and
- Third, to create a parallel shifting of economic resources from the market economy, through the new institutions I mentioned, which, in effect, are new popular bases of political and economic power.

In fact, such examples are already at work both in Europe and in the United States, as well as in Australia and elsewhere. There are various groups attempting to achieve aims like the above. The problem with all these experiments, however, is that they are not integral parts of a new anti-systemic movement, i.e. of a new movement to replace the present system of market economy and representative “democracy” with new institutions. They are just individual cases of groups of people in various parts of the world trying, through example, to create the consciousness needed to move to a different society. However, I think this strategy is doomed to failure. This is because there has to be a political project, that is, there has to be an analysis of the present situation, an envisioning of the kind of society we want to build, and a strategy to move from here to there. These groups, however, do not meet these conditions and, as a result, they are usually marginalized or they’re even being used by the System itself, so that they could replace the lack of welfare services through similar services from below.

***Mika:*** *What is the role of civil disobedience in your theory? Since the institutions and laws of the current system are manipulated and controlled by the economic and political elites are they of any value whatsoever? Moreover, what is your view on the bank robberies and bombings committed by some ‘anarchist’ groups in Greece?*

***Takis:*** Both these two kinds of activity are not compatible with the ID approach on transitional strategies, as it would become clear from a brief description of it. The ID approach on transitional strategies envisages the following kinds of activity:

- first and foremost, activities aiming at ‘prefiguring’ the future system, as I mentioned before;
- second, as regards the fight against the present system, the ID project supports 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 and the ruling elites, or the transnational elite who ‘manage’ the internationalised market economy. However, the systemic nature of the causes of such conflicts should be stressed at each step, and this task, obviously, can 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 that is based on *demoi* and their confederal structures;
- finally, 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.

It is clear that, within this problematique, *civil disobedience* has no place in this strategy because it only refers to resistance within the system, whereas the ID approach refers to anti-systemic activity. Furthermore, the passive nature of the civil disobedience sort of action makes impossible the development of an antisystemic consciousness out of it. At most, it can achieve the granting of some rights or freedoms by the elites, within of course the existing socio-economic system. Similarly, within the same problematique, antisystemic counter-violence of the sort you mentioned (anarchist *bank robberies and bombings*) is also not compatible with the ID project, for the reasons I mentioned in my book on the war against “terrorism”, which I cannot expand on here. Briefly, this sort of counter-violence is part and parcel of the cycle of violence created by systemic violence. As I put it in the past, “building inclusive democracies at the local level, as an integral part of an antisystemic movement explicitly aiming at the institution of a confederal inclusive democracy, is perhaps the only way leading to the creation of a genuinely alternative society rather than an easily reversible variation of the existing one. It is also the first step towards the creation of a society with no systemic violence, in which the cycle of violence will, for the first time in History, become redundant”.

**Mika:** *You write that lifestyle changes and examples set by marginal groups cannot form a basis for a larger movement against present social realities. But isn't it self-evident that marginal groups have always played a crucial role in protests against conventional values and institutions of society?*

**Takis:** I think we have to make a crucial distinction here. It is one thing to talk about movements attempting to influence society at large as regards its values or institutions by example (e.g. by setting up a commune or a co-op or whatever), i.e. by changing their own life-style, and quite another to talk about political groups aiming to change society by creating a mass political movement, which, at some point, e.g. at a time of a major insurrection, will attempt to take over power. Clearly, what you say, “marginal groups have always played a crucial role in protests against conventional values and institutions of society” is true only with respect to the latter and never with respect to the former. I’ve never heard of any marginal groups or activists, of the kind Murray Bookchin called “lifestyle anarchists”, really playing any significant role in influencing society’s values and institutions. On the other hand, it is true that communist or anarchist movements in the past, which had also began their activity long time ago as marginal groups, belonged to the latter category and indeed played a significant role in social change —although, as I pointed out before, even these movements never became hegemonic, and this is why, in case their aim was to “conquer power from above” (as e.g. communist movements), they succeeded in their aim but at the expense of creating in the end totalitarian societies, whereas in case their aim was to “conquer power from below” (as e.g. the Spanish anarchists) they never succeeded even in taking over power.

Such trends of “life-style anarchists” have been rampant in countries like Britain since the 1970s, when the so-called ideas of *‘Anarchy in Action’* —in fields as diverse as town planning, housing, education and allotments— became influential. Similar trends are expressed today by various anarchist currents extolling, for example, the virtues of co-ops, which they consider as “anarchism in its latest practical manifestation (given that) they allow the practice of anarchism to be conducted within the larger capitalist economy”, or adopting a ‘pragmatic’ anarchism, which rejects the traditional antisystemic demands of anarchists to abolish the market economy and money! However, such activities not only are usually not related to radical antisystemic politics in the sense of promoting an alternative society —if indeed they are related to politics at all— but, they are also, often, so politically harmless that the political elites frequently use them for their own ends. In Britain, for instance, Tony Blair’s social-liberal government openly endorsed schemes like the LETS schemes (which aimed to replace monetary transactions with a computer-based barter exchange between unemployed etc.) with the obvious aim to alleviate the pressures created on the budget, as a result of the running down of the welfare state —a process which was initiated by Thatcher’s neoliberalism and continued by Blair’s social-liberalism.

As I pointed out elsewhere, these sorts of activities are utterly ineffective in bringing about a systemic change. Although helpful in creating an alternative culture among small sections of the population and, at the same time, in morale boosting of activists who 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— to creating the democratic majority needed for systemic social change. This is because the projects suggested by this strategy may be too easily marginalized, or absorbed into the existing power structure (as has happened many times in the past), while their effect on the socialisation process is minimal —if not nil. Furthermore, life-style strategies, by usually concentrating on single issues, which are not part of a comprehensive political program for social transformation, do not help in creating the ‘anti-systemic’ consciousness required for systemic change. Finally, systemic social change can never be achieved outside the main political and social arena. The elimination of the present power structures and relations can neither be achieved “by setting an example”, nor through education and persuasion. A power base is needed to destroy power and the only way in which this goal could be consistent with the aims of the democratic project would be, to my mind, through the development of a comprehensive political program for the radical transformation of local political and economic structures.

**Mika:** *Are there any groups or movements in present day Europe that would exemplify in their activities and structures the ideas and principles of the ID project?*

**Takis:** Yes, both directly and indirectly. Directly, there are autonomous Inclusive Democracy groups functioning within the International Network of Inclusive Democracy: [http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/ID\\_network.htm](http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/ID_network.htm)

Such groups exist at the moment, as far as Europe is concerned, in Greece, UK and Germany but there are also groups in USA, Latin America, Nepal and elsewhere. Then, there is the quarterly published *International Journal of Inclusive Democracy* <http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/>

This is an online journal (ISSN 1753-240X) dealing with theoretical and topical issues, and succeeded the well known journal *Democracy & Nature*, which was published for over ten

years by Aigis publications first and then Taylor & Francis:  
<http://www.democracynature.org/dn/index.htm>

There is also a Greek Inclusive Democracy journal called *Periektiki Dimocratia*, which also deals with theoretical and topical issues <http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/pd/>

Indirectly, the ID ideas have influenced larger movements (albeit of a monothematic nature) like the “Degrowth movement” which, after emerging in France a few years ago, has spread lately all over Europe, see e.g.

[http://mondediplo.com/2006/01/13degrowth?var\\_recherche=Serge+Latouche](http://mondediplo.com/2006/01/13degrowth?var_recherche=Serge+Latouche)

## On Health and the Drugs problem

**Mika:** *Can the present enthusiasm on questions of health be understood as a part of the ideology of neoliberals that tries to incite people to follow those values – efficiency, technical rationality, optimism – that are beneficial to its survival? Moreover, do you see any point in the idea that the present politics of drugs and alcohol are primarily used as a means to control the population and not to protect them from harming themselves? And, an additional question on drug policies. You have written a book in Greek on drugs. Obviously, the present war on drugs is misguided in several ways. What kind of rethinking do our drug policies need (especially in reference to the question on liberalisation/penalisation of drugs)?*

**Takis:** The present enthusiasm on questions of health is part of the neoliberal ideology insofar as the system’s real interest is not of course the health of the people. Particularly so, when at the same time the system is not bothered at all about damaging health in every way possible through the ‘normal’ functioning of the market, that is, through:

- The kind of commodities produced;
- The methods used to produce them, which are obviously harming human health;
- The exclusive reliance of health systems on treating the symptoms of diseases (through a hugely profitable medical technology) rather than on preventing them (through creating a healthy environment and a healthy food chain and pattern of living).

So, the system’s real interests in its ‘war’ against drugs, alcohol, smoking, etc. is to protect its efficiency and also to minimise the indirect cost of production, which is obviously increasing to the extent that the state’s health systems have to bear the cost of extra expenses to treat drug or alcohol addicts, etc. Having said this, however, I do not agree with the stand of supporters of the legalisation of drugs campaign, adopted also by liberals, neoliberals and libertarians like Chomsky and others, that the “war” on drugs is just a means to control the population. Clearly, the elites have too many other means to control the population rather than through a war on drugs, which is anyway utterly ineffective. In fact, the opposite is historically the case, with the elites using the spreading of drugs among the black ghettos in the USA or anarchist communes in Europe in order to control social movements through the spread of the drugs culture and drugs themselves rather than through the ‘war’ against them!

So, I don’t agree at all with the liberal thesis that it is the ‘war’ on drugs and the associated repressive policies, which are to be blamed for the present explosion of drug abuse, as I think this thesis represents a complete reversal of historical experience and a blatant



distortion of logic. As I attempted to show in the book on drugs you mentioned, what led to the flourishing of drug culture in the '60s, (a development which further intensified with the rise of neoliberal globalisation in the '80s) was a series of social and economic factors related to the present system of market economy and representative 'democracy' on which I cannot expand here. It was this mass spread of drug abuse which led to the 'war' on drugs and not the other way round, as some silly analyses of the problem suggest. In fact, today, even this so called 'war' on drugs is on its last legs everywhere, with the EU elites themselves, as well as the police systems in countries like Britain, taking a leading role in the struggle for the gradual phasing out of the 'war' on drugs and its replacement by a policy of 'limiting the damage'. Still, the massive abuse of drugs not only does not show any signs of significant decline but, instead, grows further, particularly as far as some 'hard' drugs are concerned. This is helped a lot by falling world prices—a prima facie paradoxical event, given that the demand for drugs in the last thirty years or so has gone on increasing. However, this fall in prices was, at least partly, the outcome of the invasion of Afghanistan by the transnational elite, which has led to a booming production of opiates—with the encouragement of the occupying powers— but, also the result of the fact that the 'war' on drugs has never been truly effective in suppressing the supply of drugs. This is of course hardly surprising if one notes that entire economies like those of Afghanistan, Colombia, Bolivia and Peru, effectively survive in today's internationalized market economy by relying, mainly, on the export of illegal drug crops.

Finally, as far as the sort of policies which could be adopted within the present system is concerned, what I said so far should not be taken to imply that the solution to the problem of drug abuse is the penalisation of use and the imprisonment of the victims of a system, which pushes them to addiction in the first place. As I have tried to show in my book, although no long-term radical solution to the problem is feasible within the system of the internationalized market economy and its political complement, representative "democracy", there are steps that could be taken in the right direction, even within the short to medium term, provided, however, that our aim is not simply the systemic aim of "damage limitation" (so that crime and the huge cost of imprisoning drug addicts can be reduced!) but, instead, drug treatment and prevention. These aims could well be achieved through a wide-ranging programme of drug prevention, which should be accompanied by society's moral disapproval of drug abuse. Such disapproval could be expressed through the imposition of non-penal sanctions against proven drug addicts, for instance, in the form of compulsory attendance of free "dry" drug treatment programmes that do not involve the use of drug substitutes like methadone, etc. (which do not work anyway), as well as through the expansion of specialised medical units within the health system to deal with critical incidents, so that deaths from drug abuse may be minimised. Therefore, the legalisation of drugs supported by liberals, neoliberals and some "libertarians" should be ruled out, even as far as soft drugs is concerned, which, as the latest scientific research has shown, are also potentially dangerous to mental health. But, without mental health, there can be no real democracy, which relies on the active participation in the decision taking process by each and every citizen.

In other words, there could well be a 'third way' of dealing with the drug problem, beyond the mafia-controlled black markets of today, or the suggested legal markets of tomorrow, which would simply offer new business opportunities to transnational corporations. According to this third way, which I described in detail in my book, drugs should be under the collective direct control of citizens, with the aim of restricting the spread of drug abuse—as far as this is possible within the present socio-economic system. Yet, it is ironic,

indeed, that many of the supporters of legalisation, referring to Friedman, the guru of neoliberalism, attempt to base their argument on the principle of self-determination and its violation by the present restrictive legislation. In this distorted logic, self-determination is identified with the classical liberal ‘negative’ conception of freedom, which refers to the absence of restraint, that is, the individual’s freedom to do whatever s/he wants to do (‘freedom from’), and not with the ‘positive’ conception of freedom which refers to the freedom ‘to do things’, to engage in self-development or participate in the governing of one’s society (‘freedom to’). Not accidentally, negative freedom is perfectly compatible with the existence of passive citizens, as required by the present neoliberal globalisation. As aptly put by a drug user: “with drugs you don’t feel anymore the injustice around you; it acts like a protective armour against it”.

## **Inclusive Democracy or Barbarism?**

***Mika:** A speculative question about the future: if there will be no significant changes in politics and if the movement against market economy and representative democracy fails to materialise, what will be the picture of democracy and society in, say, 2030?*

***Takis:** The question is not so speculative as it looks *prima facie*, because the trends are there and properly interpreted show clearly what the future will be in a society continuing the present catastrophic path at the very moment all aspects of the present multi-dimensional crisis get worse. There are several symptoms of the fact that the present system is fundamentally unstable:*

- Economic symptoms like the growing inequality between and within countries, which express themselves in various ways, e.g. even by the present credit crisis which could well lead to a major crash according to some analysts, or at least to a stagflation crisis; then, there are
- The symptoms of the crisis in politics (apathy, disintegration of mass parties, absenteeism, etc.);
- The symptoms of the social crisis (explosion of crime and drug abuse); and last but not least
- Last, but by no means least, the symptoms of an impending catastrophic ecological crisis.

However, the continuous deterioration of the multi-dimensional crisis does not mean of course that the system will fall at some stage *by itself*, as crude Marxists used to believe in the past with respect to the economic crisis. In fact, we are faced, as societies, with a crucial dilemma, which I call “Inclusive Democracy or Barbarism”. In other words, either we move towards a genuine democratic society, an Inclusive Democracy, which will deal with the root cause of these crises —the concentration of all forms of power in the hands of elites and privileged social groups— or we move towards some kind of authoritarian society. All signs at the moment is that we are moving fast towards the latter. This is clearly indicated, for instance, by the war against the so-called terrorism, which increasingly leads present society towards the abolition of basic human liberties, won after long struggles. However, what will happen in the end will depend, of course, on how people will react to these developments. If they passively accept everything, as at the moment many people seem to do, then, of course, we will move faster and faster towards barbarism. But, if they start reacting, then, you may see all sorts of new movements, like the Inclusive Democracy

movement, flourishing in the future.

**Mika:** *Can there be a return –a sort of “escape from freedom”– to heteronomy once society at large has adopted the autonomist ideas?*

**Takis:** Yes, such a return to heteronomy could indeed happen as a result of either external or internal factors. I suppose, however, you don't mean the overthrow of such a free society from external factors, which is of course always possible given the present overwhelming military and economic power of the transnational elite headed by the American elite—although even this would be immensely more difficult for them (for various reasons we cannot examine here), than overthrowing the Iraqi regime yesterday, or perhaps the Iranian regime tomorrow. So, ruling out military or—more likely economic interventions from outside in the form of embargoes, etc.—and, similarly, ruling out the possibilities of coups etc. “from inside”, which should not be possible in a properly functioning democracy, the only possibility left for such an “escape from freedom” as you call it, is the case where the face-to-face assemblies which govern such a society would decide by (perhaps an increased) majority their own abolition and the return to a regime like the present one, where political and economic elites take the main decisions affecting the lives of citizens, on their behalf. This is of course a possibility —not because the Castoriadian “social imaginary” might change in the future (I don't accept this sort of fancy, as well as untenable, approach, according to which we can somehow abstract from all objective conditions that “condition” the peoples' imagination)— but because such conditions might have been created “on the ground” that are conducive to a similar dramatic change of mind by the majority of citizens. In my view, this can only happen in either of the following two cases.

First, if, during the period of transition from the present to the future society and, while the institutional changes have been completed (i.e. the “objective conditions” have been created), the level of citizens' consciousness is still very uneven with only a minority having reached the required level of consciousness for such a dramatic social change. This level of consciousness requires the adoption of new principles of social organisation based on autonomy/democracy and community and the corresponding value systems. And by “value systems” I mean the set of values which are compatible with the democratic institutional framework and can be derived out of the two basic organisation principles of an ID-based society which I mentioned: the principle of autonomy and the principle of community. Thus, out of the fundamental principle of autonomy, one may derive a set of moral values involving equality, respect for the personality of every citizen (irrespective of gender, race, ethnic identity, etc.) and of course respect for human life itself and the quality of life of each individual citizen —something that would imply a relationship of harmony with Nature and the need to re-integrate society with Nature. Similarly, out of the fundamental principle of community we may derive a set of values involving not only equality, but also solidarity and mutual aid, altruism/self-sacrifice (beyond concern for kin and reciprocity), caring and sharing. However, as long as this unevenness in the level of consciousness has not yet been overcome, then, the majority may have not yet transcended the present individualistic values and/or the heteronomous values written in a Gospel, the Bible, the Koran, etc., —in which case, the regression to heteronomy is always possible. Particularly so, if the cultural revolution which should accompany the fundamental institutional change, has not become hegemonic in the mass media of the future society, with the gradual phasing out of individualistic or irrational values and beliefs.

Second, if the assemblies decide that a genuine democracy does not work and, instead of attempting to make the necessary amendments to make it work, they express a preference for alienation rather than for self-determination. But, such an “escape from freedom” would not mean of course that democracy and autonomy themselves had failed. It would simply mean that this particular kind of democracy failed because the objective and subjective conditions for its success (and a democratic *Paideia* will play a crucial role in a future democratic society with respect to the internalisation of its values) had not been met.

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\* - Takis Fotopoulos was interviewed (in writing) by Mika Pekkola in January 2008. Extracts from this interview are published (in Finnish) in the Finnish magazine *Niin&Näin. Filosofinen aikakauslehti*, Number 58, (Autumn 3/2008), pp. 81-85.