

Doug Lain's podcast interview with Takis Fotopoulos*

PART I

DOUG LAIN: Takis Fotopoulos you are the political philosopher and economist who founded the Inclusive Democracy movement. You are noted for your synthesis of classical democracy with libertarian socialism or anarchism, and you are the editor of the *International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, and you are also the author of the book *Towards an Inclusive Democracy*[\[1\]](#) —so, that is a very brief bio. Do you have anything you'd like to add to that?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: No. I would say, that's about okay, although you could add of course that, apart from *Towards an Inclusive Democracy*, I have also published a series of other books in other languages[\[2\]](#) and in English as well *The Multi-Dimensional Crisis*[\[3\]](#), and the latest one on the Iranian crisis.[\[4\]](#)

On Noam Chomsky's anarchism

DOUG LAIN: I was actually looking at that book about Iran online before I called you. I was reading about your views of Noam Chomsky's views of the Iranian election. And while I was not completely surprised, I was somewhat surprised to read that you were as critical as you were of people who are considered far left figures here in America. You're critical of people like Noam Chomsky and Slavoj Zizek...

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah, I don't agree at all with their approach on the matter. But anyway...

DOUG LAIN: No, no. Go ahead. What is the primary difference between your version of libertarian socialism and someone like Noam Chomsky's version of the same?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: First, I don't agree actually that Chomsky is a libertarian socialist. At least not in the sense that the term is usually defined. That is, Chomsky represents basically a kind of mix of liberalism and socialist Statism rather than libertarian socialism. And this is not my view only. Murray Bookchin argued about the same thing. That is, Chomsky's support for the State in order to sort out our problems and then move on to a different State and so on, this has nothing to do with libertarian socialism. Actually I've written a small book[\[5\]](#) criticizing both Noam Chomsky and Michael Albert for their kind of so called libertarian socialism, and the kind of libertarian theory used by Chomsky, as well as the Parecon theory developed by his friend and associate Michael Albert.

DOUG LAIN: What strikes me about Chomsky and other reformist anarchists like him is that they may espouse an anarchist position when talking about the things they'd like to see in the

world, but when it comes to practical everyday issues they tend to abandon their principles. It strikes me that the first hurdle one must overcome when proposing an alternative system to the current system is the idea that the current economic order is somehow natural and that it is unrealistic to try to go beyond the current order.

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah, in fact, as you know, anarchism was always a synthesis between liberalism and socialism. This is how it began and how it developed, and it is exactly this division within the anarchist movement between these two trends that has created also the corresponding currents within anarchism. That is why we had individualist anarchists and then we had libertarian socialists and so on. So the more somebody declaring himself an anarchist tends towards the liberal tradition then the more you'll see this kind of liberalism prevailing over the socialist principles and vice versa. I think this is why Chomsky is so much an admirer of liberal philosophers like John Stuart Mill. He is very much influenced by this kind of trend within the anarchist movement, and of course he's also influenced by Syndicalist trends, and this is the mix that he's trying to present. However, as you mentioned, this not only does not give us any transitional strategy of how to move from here to there, but also leads to blatant contradictions. That is, how you could support Obama, or previously whoever it was the democratic candidate...

DOUG LAIN: Kerry.

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah, how can you support these, even if you do so as the least evil, and still call yourself an anarchist? How you could call for the expansion of the State in order to sort out the present crisis, or even previous crises —as if the State is something different from the economic elites? As if, in other words, there is no clear interconnection between the political and the economic elites, when, in fact, the political elites are actually very much dependent on, or interdependent with, the economic elites. So how you can separate them and just say that through popular pressure the political elites will be able to fight the economic elites? Well, I don't think this kind of argument has anything to do with the libertarian tradition.

DOUG LAIN: Well, I would tend to agree with you. It's interesting to me though that when somebody makes the argument you're making, the general response is not to try to discredit the notion that there is a connection between the political and economic elites —even Chomsky would agree that there is an obvious connection. These are often the very same people.

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah, he would agree, but on the other hand he would continue saying that we have to press the political elites which could somehow play an independent role, or a relatively independent role, with respect to the economic elites and respond to the popular pressure. Now, when you say this, in fact, you accept the argument that political elites somehow are controlled, or could be controlled, by the people, which I don't think has anything to do with today's reality. True, sometimes the interests of political elites could be compatible with the interests of economic elites and to some extent with the demands of the people. This happened during what I call the Statist period, as I call it, between 1945 and 1975, when Keynesianism was dominant and when social democracy was flourishing both in Europe, and to some extent, in the United States. At that time, yeah, this coincidence, if you like, of the interests of the economic elites with the interests of the political elites and the demands of the people from below was there. But, this was only a very brief interlude within

capitalist history. If we look at the history since the beginning of the 19th century, the trend was always for the minimization of social control of markets, not the other way round. It was only in this period of thirty years between 1945 to 1975 that, what Chomsky and others argue for, was reality in the capitalist system. Not in any other period to such an extent, before or after. So why this? I think that the explanation for this is that once the capitalist market economy developed in the beginning of the 19th century then a new system was created which had nothing to do with the markets that were prevailing up until then. That is, a new market system, as we may call it, developed, a self-regulated system, which had its own dynamic and which led to a continuous pressure by the elites to minimize *social controls* on markets, —not *regulatory controls* (that is, not controls to stabilize the markets, etc., that's a different thing), but social controls. That is, controls imposed by the workers' struggles and other popular struggles in order to self protect from the effects of the market itself. So, a marketization process has begun, according to which the political and economic elites were pressing to minimize social controls, (for efficiency to be maximized and therefore for profits to be maximized), and on the other hand there was also a process of growth that started with this rise of the market system. This has led to the present growth economy and so on.

Now, Chomsky does not accept this sort of argument. He argues that the market system was working okay until about the beginning of the 20th century when corporations developed and took over power. In other words, all that we have to blame the capitalist system for is corporate capitalism. I don't agree with this. I don't agree that we can separate corporate capitalism from the market system itself. In other words, it was within the dynamic of the market to develop into a corporate capitalism (if you like to call it like this). There was, in other words, no mythical good capitalism which developed at the beginning and then, during the process, developed into corporate capitalism and that therefore what we have to fight against is corporate capitalism, as Chomsky argues. Namely, that if we can somehow take over power from corporations, and therefore we develop a kind of liberal capitalism, where the market works as it should work —as it was described by liberal philosophers and political economists of the 19th century— then, that will be okay. I don't agree with this. I think this does not see that there is a dynamic within the capitalist market system that once you have a market system developing, then, as a by-product of this dynamic, units would become bigger and bigger as they try to invest more in new methods of production and new products and so on, so that they can become more competitive. So it is this grow- or- die competition that creates the concentration of economic power. It's not something accidental, it's within the dynamics of the system itself to create the huge concentration of power that we have today. In fact, according to the approach I'm supporting in the Inclusive Democracy project, the ultimate cause of any kind of crisis we have today —i.e. of the economic crisis, of the social crisis, of the political crisis, and even more so of the ecological crisis— the ultimate cause of every aspect of the present multidimensional crisis is this concentration of power that has begun with the establishment of the capitalist market system at the beginning of the 19th century, and the parallel establishment of representative so called “democracy.” So, the two are complementary: on the economic level we have the market system, and on the political level we have the development of representative democracy, which played exactly the same role of securing the concentration of political power, as the market system did by securing the concentration of economic power. I have shown in the past why it is this concentration of power at all levels that has led to the present multidimensional crisis[6].

On the feasibility of overcoming the multi-dimensional crisis

through reforms

DOUG LAIN: You gave a great overview there of your position, and I tend to agree with it. What I find most troubling these days though, is not that I find people like Chomsky or others taking a position like the one you described, which ends up being sort of libertarian position —that is, if we could only have perfect markets without these State-created corporations interfering with the perfect market, then we'd have a better society. I don't actually think that's what liberal reformists like Chomsky tend to advocate. I think instead they just take the corporate capitalist free market system for granted, as something that can't be changed, even as they seem to be advocates for change.

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah, in fact, what I'm saying is exactly that there is no possibility of overcoming this multi-dimensional crisis that I mentioned, from *within* this system. It's only from *without* that this can be done.

[Break for [Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution Will Not be Televised"](#)]

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: OK let's take then the question of reforms and improvements of the economic system. First of all, these kinds of reforms are not feasible anymore. They were feasible up to 1975, when the market system was still based on national markets, but not since then and particularly since the present globalized system fully developed. In other words, today we live in a globalized market economy, (or I would better call it an internationalized market economy), and in this type of economy there is no possibility of any single state or even a block of states to impose measures to effectively control the market for social purposes. This is because if any state, or even a block of states like for example the European Union, attempts to introduce a kind of state control, (I mean effective state control of the kind suggested by Chomsky and others), to protect labor or to protect the environment, etc. then, given the present opening and deregulation of world markets, this country or block of countries would face an even more serious economic crisis. The currency would suffer, i.e. there would be a currency crisis, there would also be a crisis in the stock exchange —all this, simply because capital would start moving from this country or this block of countries to other countries, or various "work paradises" like China, or India or Brazil.

Given the present high flexibility of markets, (it's the first time in history that we've had such freedom of movement of capital, commodities, and to some extent labour as well), namely, given this almost complete opening and deregulation of markets, there is nothing to press the State in a particular country or block of countries to stay there, if conditions are not optimal, and this is actually, as you mentioned in the beginning, how the present financial crisis began.

Is the present crisis a crisis of overaccumulation?

I do not agree with the Marxist argument that we simply have a crisis of overaccumulation, I think this is not supported either theoretically or empirically. The data show anyway that this is not the problem. The GDP of the world was rising by 3% for the entire period from 1990 until 2006, until just before the crisis, and the same applies to world trade and so on. In other words, the problem was not one of overaccumulation and under consumption, as a result of the unequal distribution of income, which is the typical Marxist argument. Marxists today simply try to fit the present reality into a model that was developed for a very different kind

of situation: the capitalist market which was controlled by the State to some extent, in the sense that market controls could be effectively imposed by each nation-state, given that it was the internal, the domestic, market that was determining growth. But today this is not so anymore. In the last 25 years or so, since the present globalization developed, no State (Note: which is fully integrated into the internationalized market economy) controls or could effectively control its domestic market, simply because it has to have open and deregulated markets. Therefore, capital and commodities go in and out of the country without any effective control by the State.

Within this framework, you can explain, as I tried to do so elsewhere,^[7] that the capitalist crisis, which started about a couple of years ago, is a systemic crisis because it has been created by the system of the capitalist market economy —not in the sense of overaccumulation, but in the sense that it is a byproduct of the globalization process, which was set in motion by the vast expansion of the transnational corporations since the 70s. In other words, the neoliberal globalization is not just a policy change, as reformist Marxists, reformist libertarians and others suggest. It's a structural change, as it is an offspring of the dynamic of the market economy I mentioned before, and of course this dynamic was also interrelated with the fact that there was a near collapse of the trade union movement, the labor movement, and the socialist movement in general. So the combination of these two factors, the objective factor of the expansion of multinational corporations, and, on the subjective side, of the collapse of the old socialist and labor movements had the effect that this —informal at the beginning— deregulation of markets, that began by the transnational corporation, later was institutionalized, first by the Thatcher government in Britain, and then by the Reagan government in the USA, which introduced the various laws and regulations that institutionalized the previous informal opening and deregulation of markets. Now once this happened you can explain everything that is going on today.

Once, for example, the Chinese economy was integrated into this world system and opened its markets, and deregulated them as well to a significant extent, then, huge amounts of capital started moving from the west to the east, not only to China but also to India and so on. Why? Because these were paradises of cheap cost of production. As they were moving there, we had the process of deindustrialization here in the West, and on the other hand we had all this tremendous expansion of production and industry and so on in China and similar countries. It was this development (i.e. globalization) that created huge surpluses —and not, as Marxists argue, the usual underconsumption and overproduction (going on in any nation-state based on a capitalist market system)— that were then put into the financial markets creating the financial bubbles. That is, it was the huge amounts of capital that were invested by the Chinese, and the Indians, and multi-millionaires from Eastern European countries like Russia, etc. —all these huge amounts of capital that was invested in the West in stocks and bonds and so on— that created huge liquidity, that is, created a lot of money available for any kind of purpose and particularly financial purpose.

So, to explain the present financial crisis you have to refer to the entire set of changes that were created by Globalization. That is, the opening of and deregulation of commodity markets, of capital markets, and to some extent of the labor market as well. It was the combination of these factors that led to the creation of the speculative bubbles, and then to the present crisis we face. That means, to come back to your question, that you cannot today introduce any kind of effective social controls on markets in order to improve the system,

unless you overturn the entire system, in particular the globalized market economy that has been created because of the dynamics of the system, and also the institutions of representative “democracy” which, as I said, only secure the concentration of political power in a few hands. Therefore, only if you overturn the system, and create a new system where you secure at the institutional level (of course everything also depends on the level of consciousness but I am talking about the institutional level here) that the institutions which secure the equal distribution of economic power, political power, and generally social power are there, then and only then you can overcome the present crisis, and not only this, but you can also create a society where people can secure their individual and collective autonomy. And this is what the inclusive democracy project is all about.

DOUG LAIN: I think there are a few things to unpack there. First of all, what I want to differentiate, and you differentiated this a few times, is the difference between your perspective and the typical Marxist perspective about overaccumulation driving the crisis. Now you said that it was the financialization of the market, that basically was the investment of capital in the Western Stock Market and other financial ventures that led to a speculative bubble...

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah. What happened was that the elites of these new “economic miracles” as they were called, like China and India and so on, found themselves with huge surpluses created by the massive rise in their exports (because, as I said, there was deindustrialization in the West and capital from the West moved to China, etc., subsidiaries of transnationals moved there and so on), and this is how this huge business of “Made in China” and so on was created. China has been converted into a kind of assembly line of the West. Now this process has created huge surpluses in China because of the expansion of exports. Any subsidiary in China, etc. which exports to the West obviously creates local income in the sense of not only the wages they pay locally, but also in the sense of taxes they pay to the government etc. So this creates a kind of surplus in China and India, etc. but the local elites, instead of reinvesting this surplus say in improving the state of the health or education_of the population, i.e. creating some kind of social welfare system which is very much lacking now, especially in China since the collapse of the Maoist regime —instead of doing this— they simply reinvested the money that was coming into China. They invested it into the West, into the capital stock markets, etc. therefore creating this huge liquidity in the West, which was then the main source of the present financial crisis.

DOUG LAIN: Okay, but what I want to understand, is on the Western side, what drove the deindustrialization, other than the natural tendency of capital to seek cheap labor, and also how are we to understand how the surplus in China, creating this liquidity, isn't an example of overaccumulation. Maybe I'm not understanding the original Marxist concept well. Could you make that distinction for me?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: It's not a kind of overaccumulation neither at the regional level but not even at the world level —because that's what you mean now, i.e. whether we have at the world level a process of overaccumulation, where, instead of having overaccumulation only in the traditional capitalist metropolitan centers (the USA, Europe, and so on), we have an overaccumulation at the world level, if we take into account the accumulation going on in China, India, and so on. I don't think you can say that this is true at the regional or the world levels, because if there were an overaccumulation and a corresponding under consumption,

then you wouldn't have all of this very healthy growth of world Gross Domestic Production, and World Trade, etc. that was going on up to 2007 and 2008.^[8] In other words, according to the overaccumulation approach, once this process of overaccumulation starts and you have over production and under consumption because of the unequal distribution of income, then this creates a recession. However, far from having a recession we had a continuous expansion over the recent years and, in fact, the recession started as a result of the present financial crisis. That's a different thing. But up to a couple of years ago we did not have any world recession, so how you could talk about overaccumulation when instead of having recession at the world level, or even at the level of each particular country, we had continuous expansion? Therefore, you have to look at different causes of the present crisis, like the ones I mentioned, rather than just the traditional cause of overaccumulation which was valid when, as I said, capitalism was domestic and focused on the domestic markets, rather than at present when capitalism is not motivated anymore by the domestic market as the main motor of development and growth, but by the global market. That's a very different situation, which I think Marxists didn't realize because they tried to explain everything in terms of the theoretical tools developed by Marx in the 19th and Marxists in the 20th centuries, rather than by trying to develop a completely new theory to explain the present globalization. Instead, they see globalization just as a continuation of what was going on at the beginning of the 20th century. This is completely wrong, because at that time we did not have multinationals. It was only in the last thirty years or so that these phenomena developed. So that is why we need a completely different approach to explain present phenomena, but instead they go back to the original classical models, which I don't think represent today's reality.

On the emergence of neoliberal globalization

DOUG LAIN: You said earlier that in the seventies and eighties something changed in the way capitalism functioned, that there was a structural change with the rise of Thatcherism and Reaganism, and that we need to account for that structural change, and this change also accounts for why a Statist solution isn't open to us anymore. Could you explain a little more what that structural change was?

TAKIS FOTOPoulos: Yeah the structural change was that in the seventies we had a tremendous expansion of this new phenomenon that I mentioned: the multinational or transnational corporation, which in fact was not just exporting commodities to other parts of the world as was the typical example of what was going on in previous so called globalizations, as now we had a new kind of production unit, the multi-national corporation, which produces and distributes products all over the world. In other words, it has subsidiaries locating parts of the production process, or even the entire production process, wherever it's cheaper to produce, and also it has the means to distribute, to secure the distribution of these products. Now, this is a new phenomenon, which has tremendous implications because for this kind of expansion to continue you have to have open and deregulated markets. If, in other words, you were to have closed commodity markets and closed, or more or less closed, capital markets, as it was the case up to then, where both the movement of capital and the movement of commodities was strictly controlled, if you had these kinds of markets today, then obviously the process, within which transnational corporations could flourish, is impossible. So that's why they pressed —at the beginning informally, through the creation of the eurodollar market and so on— for the lifting of all these restrictions on capital markets

and commodity markets. As regards commodity markets in particular, the process of liberating markets had already started with the various rounds of tariff reduction through GATT (the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade created in the post-war period) and later on by the World Trade Organization. But apart from this, the transnational corporations pressed for the lifting of the capital controls because up to then, i.e. during the Statist period from 1945 to 1975, there were strict controls, exchange controls, controls on the movement of capital. In fact, this is how actually the social democracy was possible to achieve its desired aims. You cannot have a social welfare state in your country when the markets are open and liberated. But at that time when markets were controlled, of course there was trade, but again it was not as free as it is today, and also capital was strictly controlled. So to avoid these kinds of restrictions, transnational corporations pressed informally at the beginning, through the creation of these informal markets like the eurodollar market, to avoid the controls of the federal government in the USA and other governments in Europe, etc. Later on, Thatcher and Reagan simply institutionalized this process.

So, because of the objective and subjective factors I mentioned, the neoliberal movement developed first among academics at the Chicago School, and then at the political level, and neoliberal governments took over in the USA, Britain, and then all over the world, which began implementing the opening and the liberating of all markets. That was the essence of globalization, and in fact this was not reversed, as some people argued, because of the present crisis. That is, all this nonsense heard in Congress etc about the economy becoming socialized and so on because the Federal Government in the USA or governments in Europe had to take some action to overcome the effects of the present financial crisis, in fact, has nothing to do, of course, with any kind of socialization of the economy. What happened is that they socialized losses. There were massive losses within the huge financial sector and somebody had to pay for these losses —obviously, not the bankers, and not the speculators. That's why the State had to intervene in order to save the banking system, at the expense of taxpayers who had to pay for the huge amounts of money to create more liquidity within the banking system. That means that in the near future, for ten years or so, people in Europe and in the United States, will have to repay all these huge debts that have been created because of government borrowing, within this process of socialization of losses. This means that any hope of any kind of expansion of social provisions in terms of health or education, etc. is foregone. In Britain, for example, they have proposed huge cuts in public spending — education, health and so on— because this is the only way they can pay for the ominous debt they have created. Of course, it is the lower income strata, the lower social groups which are going to pay for the crisis. So this has nothing to do with any kind of return to Keynesianism, as is the myth promoted by some reformists, or the return of some kind of nationalization. It's just the nationalization of losses.

DOUG LAIN: It strikes me that it's the opposite of what is being claimed. It's not that the State is taking control of the banking system, but that the banking system is taking even firmer control of the State. But, what stopped Obama or anyone from taking a Statist position and nationalizing the banks, and actually writing down the losses and taking State control of the banking system? What would have happened if that had been attempted?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah. If this utopian state of affairs had been created and a president like Obama had attempted to nationalize banks then, unless he had in the meantime created the infrastructure for the rest of the economy to work, the economy would have been in an

immediate crisis. This is because of the fact that markets, particularly capital markets, are completely open, and unless at the same time he closes the capital markets and forbids or restores all of the financial controls, exchange controls, and so on that existed in the 60s and 70s —unless he does all this— then obviously this would create a serious crisis. A serious currency crisis, a serious stock exchange crisis, and so on...The result would be a much more serious crisis than the present crisis! So, if you can imagine a science fiction scenario where the president, at the same time that he nationalizes the banking sector, he also introduces strict controls on the movement of capital and the movement commodities, then this could be feasible. But can you imagine this happening?

PART II

On technology in an Inclusive Democracy

DOUG LAIN: Do you envision these confederated decentralized communities of shared power, these Inclusive Democracies, to be less technological than our current society? Do you see that there will be a shift to more hand-made, small scale, local production techniques within these Inclusive Democracies?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: The idea is that we have to move to new methods of production, and new technologies that could secure an effective kind of production system within smaller scale production units. What happens today is, as you know, an utter irrationality, where at your local supermarket you buy commodities which may have been produced in the next village or town, but the commodities go through the entire distribution network to reach your local supermarket and may come to you through Hong Kong or whatever! But, all this huge waste in terms of transport and production costs and distribution costs, which is created by the huge concentration of economic power, would be avoided if you had a decentralized production system where lots of products, especially in the agricultural sector but also in the manufacturing sector, could be produced at a local and smaller scale. However, I do not argue for any kind of return to conditions and technologies of the Middle Ages, I'm not supporting this kind of Utopian primitivism or anarchism. I think that what we have to do is to utilize the present state of advanced knowledge and create new technologies because the ability is there. It's only a matter of how we use this kind of knowledge and ability to create new methods of production and new kinds of production which are based on a human scale, in other words, on a smaller scale of production than the present one. Of course, there are areas where this would not be possible. You could not produce, say, electricity in an area of 50,000 people. There are problems that have to be sorted out at the federal or confederal level, but the basic production unit in the Inclusive Democracy project is one based on a local community of thirty up to fifty thousand people, because only at this kind of scale you could have direct democracy working. Then, you could have assemblies taking all the important economic and political decisions. And also you can have the kind of economic democracy and ecological democracy that is compatible with this kind of decentralized society.

On May '68 and its aftermath

DOUG LAIN: Now you consider yourself part of the anti-systemic left. Meaning you are against this market system, and you trace your struggle back to May 1968 and beyond, further back. But it strikes me that you might be the right age to have been profoundly

impacted by May of 1968. Is that correct?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah. Actually May '68 was in fact a kind of impromptu social explosion which was expressing the wishes and the desires of people who had overcome both the kinds of system prevailing then.^[9] In fact, I took part in the London version of "May 68," and I was aware of the fact that the main trends were what we can call anti-systemic trends, that is they were against both capitalism and state bureaucratic socialism, and the main demand was to have a new society where people would not be controlled by elites, either economic or political elites. Also another trend in May '68 was the anti-consumerist trend that was expressed theoretically very well by Debord and the Situationists and others. So, it was these two trends that were the main trends of May '68. The point is however that, later on, the demands and the slogans of May '68 were distorted by neoliberals and social liberals, and so on, who took over power, and the aversion of the students of May '68 against state power was taken as a means to promote the market! In other words, whereas in May '68 the students were calling for the abolition of both the State and the Market, the liberals simply monopolized the slogans against the State in order to support their view that for everything the State is to blame which has to be drastically cut to give "power to the people" —and by this they meant, of course, "power to the market". This is how the neoliberal movement emerged [i.e. the movement aiming to provide ideological justification to the institutional changes required for globalization that I mentioned before].

DOUG LAIN: Do you think that it is a commonly held view amongst people who still care about May 1968, i.e. that it actually validated the market economy? Do you think people believe that?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: What I'm saying is that the supporters of the neoliberal movement simply distorted the slogans and demands of May '68 for their own purposes. Of course, apart from this, there were also people who took part in May '68 and who joined the system later on and used those same arguments in order to support demands which had nothing to do with May '68.

On the integration of mainstream Greens and feminists into the system

DOUG LAIN: Is that what happened to Daniel Cohn Bendit? The Green party leader?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah, of course, that's one of them and there are also many others, like Joschka Fischer, et.al. That is, the Green movement began as a fundamentalist movement that was more or less libertarian and saw the ecological crisis as a systemic crisis, that could not be sorted out within the present system. But then it was the "Realos" who got the upper hand in the Green German movement and later on in the rest of the European Green movement, which had developed as a systemic kind of political party that supported improvements in the present system to sort out the ecological crisis. Of course, the results are well known. The ecological crisis has not been sorted out, instead it has been deteriorating every day and, also the Green parties took part (directly or indirectly) in all the criminal wars of the transnational elite all over the place. So, they have become supports of the system. Unfortunately the same happened also to other movements that emerged since May '68.^[10] The feminist movement for example in which, again, it was the libertarian and communist trends within the feminist

movement that were dominant at the beginning, and then it was the reformists within the movement, ("the insiders," as they were called) who dominated the movement. Then, it became a kind of movement to improve, effectively, the position of some elite women rather than of women themselves —apart, of course, from some general changes which happened in society that would have happened anyway, like for example, the freedom of women to be able to have their own income which was more or less the result, not of the feminist movement or their actions, but of the needs of the capitalist market economy to expand. That is why they introduced many women to labor and therefore to some sort of economic freedom — something that, on the other hand, created also many other side effects. So, what we have today is that the elites, the political and economic elites, have been expanded to include also women, black people, et. al. but this does not mean that the general position of the black population or women has been improved accordingly.

DOUG LAIN: Right. I can imagine a society without racism being a capitalist market economy, but I can't imagine a society where all women and minorities were free to participate in sharing power. That wouldn't work. The classless society wouldn't work under capitalism. Now, you wrote an essay about May '68^[11] in which you said that one of the problems in that spontaneous revolution, or attempt at revolution, was that it had a lack of any kind of political project behind it that there'd been no strategy or tactics, but it strikes me that there'd been about 20 years of development of strategy and tactics, within Socialism or Barbarism, the Letterist International, and the Situationist International. Do you think those groups failed to develop an adequate political project and strategy?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: No, I don't think those groups actually played any effective role in the explosion. They influenced the people who took part in May '68. I was influenced also by Socialisme ou Barbarie, but to say that all this explosion was somehow controlled, or, if not controlled, somehow being framed within a particular set of ideas, either Socialisme ou Barbarie or the ideas of Debord or others, I think it's an exaggeration. This was not the case. There were too many currents, political currents and movements, fighting each other within May '68. Apart from the mentioned movements or currents, there were also the old Trotskyites, Socialists, Communists, Maoists and other kinds of currents that were in fact also trying to dominate this movement. In fact, to some extent, May '68, particularly in France, failed because the working class followed these old movements, and also the CGT (the French Syndicalist Union) which was controlled by the Communist Party. The students indeed were actually expressing the ideas you mentioned, but you cannot say that there was any organized kind of revolt, in the sense that the majority of people taking part in May '68 had any concrete political program —apart from some general ideas and demands. They didn't have any concrete transitional strategy or any kind of thinking of how to organize society the next day. There was some beautiful demands and ideas expressed in a very nice way by students and others taking part in these events, but all this could not amount to an organized power that could take over the existing power. Don't forget we were talking about fighting a system that was tremendously organized, I mean its repression, its ideological repression and its physical repression, and you cannot overthrow a system like this just by putting up some barricades on the roads and having some mass demonstrations and effective slogans. Obviously, much more is needed than this. And that's why I'm stressing that any kind of spontaneous explosion is beautiful in the sense that it could create or expand rapidly the level of consciousness of people, but only as a precondition, or as a first step, in creating the conditions that would lead to a change in society. You cannot expect a real change in society

out of an insurrection. It has never happened in history. It was always various kinds of political organizations that were well organized that eventually took power. Take the Soviet revolution and so on. I'm not saying that you need a communist party, as highly organized and hierarchical as it was, because then you're going to create the kind of side effects that were created in actually existing socialism. What I'm saying is that you have to have the majority of people having the consciousness to function democratically. In other words, to function in a way —through the direct democracy assemblies— so that they could effectively take political and economic decisions, and, furthermore, you have to have the majority of people thinking this way. But, the only way the majority of people could start thinking this way is, according to our view^[12], by creating such institutions where people could start working and functioning within such institutions. This is the only way the level of consciousness will become appropriate for these institutions to function effectively. Otherwise, if you try to impose certain institutions from above, through a revolution and then through a political elite which takes over power, then, you're going to have the kind of totalitarian, or semi-totalitarian regimes that we saw. The only way that you can avoid this is by working for a high level of democratic consciousness to develop, which can only happen if we start developing new institutions so that, through the interplay of theory and practice within the functioning of these institutions and the people being actually involved in running these institutions, people could develop this level of democratic consciousness. Not by propaganda, not by shouting slogans, nor by distributing leaflets. It's the actual interplay of theory and practice that could create this type of consciousness and therefore the new society.

On transitional strategies

DOUG LAIN: Now, you're not talking about creating communes that are outside the every day society.

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: No, because the problem with communes is that most of them historically have been created outside society^[13]. They're not part of society, even urban communes are isolated usually experimental and run by a few people, and therefore you cannot create direct democratic institutions by communes. That is, okay you might have communes working perfectly as regards the democratic running of their own affairs, but the question is how you could involve people at a significant social scale in such institutions. Otherwise, you simply raise the level of consciousness of the people taking part in these experiments. But this is not the problem. The problem is how you can involve as many people as possible in the running of such institutions. And that is why one idea that was suggested also by Murray Bookchin, and I agree with it, is for taking part in local elections and then introducing the various institutions of local democracy through the decisions of neighborhood assemblies, etc... Otherwise, I can't see any other way for these kinds of institutions taking hold on a significant social scale.

DOUG LAIN: So the way I could go about it in my life is by joining say a neighborhood association with people of like minds and come up with some institutions that serve my little neighborhood, but doing it in a way that is run inclusively and democratically.

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah, but the problem with these neighborhood associations is that you could not involve the majority of people which is needed in an area. That is you can involve

some people who are interested and who are more conscious to take part in such institutions but on the other hand neighborhood associations are just pressure groups. That is you don't have any real power, but you try to press for changes, or to introduce small changes, whereas the real power belongs to the political and economic elites, so the only role that such bodies can play is, in effect, as some kind of pressure group. But this is not what we are talking about. For people to be actually interested in taking part in democratic institutions they have to feel that they have power, otherwise they're not interested. If you call tomorrow a direct democracy assembly in your area, very few people would attend because it would be known that it would just be a discussion club.

DOUG LAIN: Right. No, I was thinking of, say, a community center nearby with some County funding which is run by a County neighborhood association and you can join that and get involved in this, and you might be able to get enough people together to run classes, or run a community garden and then run it in a way that would be inclusive and democratic. But perhaps I need to reach a little beyond my grasp here. Would somebody like myself be better off running for City Council? Where would you start?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: You may start even without taking over the local power which is perhaps the last stage of this process. You may start with the various kinds of experiments like the ones you mentioned, or you may try the various Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETS), or the local currency schemes and so on which could involve people who would have an interest in taking part in such activities because they suffer from the lack of money—in fact, it was unemployed people who created the LETS schemes. And similarly, local currencies have been created exactly because of the fact that people realized gradually that they could not control their own lives unless they control them within the local level, and have some local means of power. So this can be done, but all these experiments, unless they become part of a political project which would aim at the creation of local centers of political and economic power—unless in other words they are part of a political project—I think they would be marginalized, or sometimes even used by the system. I know in Britain e.g. the Labour government of Tony Blair used effectively the LETS schemes and similar schemes in order to reduce social provision. In other words, he relied on the provision of social services—which is what these experiments were doing—on a voluntary basis, in order to save money from the actual social services run by the State, and therefore reduce the tax rates for the rich. In other words, the elites are using such voluntary experiments for their own purposes—unless of course such experiments are part of a political program and a political project which aims at the dissolution of the present political and economic institutions. So, the way out is starting at the local level, creating perhaps local institutions like the ones you mentioned, but being always part of a new political project and a new political movement which aims at taking over power at the local level through taking part in local elections when they feel they could take over power at a local level. This is the only way I can see such experiments being in a position to really challenge the present system.

DOUG LAIN: Do you think that the current multi-dimensional crisis is going to move people in that direction? Or do you think that it's creating a situation where that's more likely?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Yeah, I think that as long as people realize that the present multidimensional crisis is getting deeper and worse all the time, and at the same time see that they have to pay the price for this, there are two possibilities. If a significant number of

people begin thinking —and this is where the various movements and currents we were talking about could play a role— that it's only outside the system that we can sort out these problems, then we're going to move in that direction. That is, in the direction of creating and expanding local centers of political and economic power controlled by the people themselves. On the other hand, however, there is also the dark scenario. That is that some people —influenced by the brainwashing from the mass media, etc., may start blaming immigrants and various minorities and others as the cause of their troubles, while at the same time are being pushed into semi-totalitarian solutions. Actually, the present war against so-called terrorism has exactly this in mind, that is, to create semi-totalitarian conditions, like the ones which have already been created in Europe and the United States^[14]. It is not just that the elites control the mass media, as they used to, it's also that now they control everything from the internet up to your everyday movements ... in London for example, if you go out of your place and go to the supermarket, you're going to be filmed by dozens of cameras. So you have a situation where a semi-totalitarian society is gradually being created, and there is the danger that if people do not turn to alternative ways of thinking and alternative ways of organizing their lives, they may simply adjust to the present semi-totalitarian society that is being created.

Have we entered a terminal crisis?

DOUG LAIN: Some people who listen to my podcast are concerned that we may have reached a tipping point as far as the environment goes and as far as energy goes. People are concerned about peak oil, and that we're due for a Malthusian correction? Do you think that is a real danger?

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: I don't think that there could be a terminal, so called, crisis, that is I don't think the system would implode because of a rapid deterioration of any part of the multi-dimensional crisis, particularly the ecological crisis. I think for the system to collapse there has to be a combination of subjective and objective factors. In other words, there has to be the level of consciousness that would overthrow the system and which should be shared by the majority of the population —rather than waiting for any kind of objective conditions to be created that would do so. That is, the elites will always find ways to deal with the economic crisis or the ecological crisis, etc. —to a certain extent of course— but they would always find ways. The point is not this. The point is who pays? Who pays for the ecological or the economic crisis to be sorted out by the elites? Obviously, it's not the elites and their supporters who would pay the price. Usually, it would be the lower social groups who would pay the price of sorting out the crisis, a crisis brought on by the elites themselves. So, we should not expect that the deterioration of the present crisis would lead, somehow automatically, to a new society, unless a new mass political movement, which is very conscious of what is needed to change society —that is what is the cause of the present crisis and what is needed to change society— is created. Without that I'm pessimistic. I think that the elites would introduce various measures to deal with the crisis and people more or less would adjust. The majority would adjust to the semi-totalitarian solutions. Of course there are contradictions. For instance now they are trying to deal with the ecological crisis by abolishing, or if not abolishing, restricting consumer privileges like traveling by car, flying, etc. That is why they are introducing now taxes on flights, or congestion charges for using your car, and so on. Now all these measures simply mean that the massive use of cars, or the massive use of holiday flights, would become a luxury commodity, as it used to be twenty or

thirty years ago, and it would not be anymore the kind of commodity enjoyed by every consumer. The contradiction is, of course, that, on the one hand, you try to convince people that by having more growth, by expanding, they would participate in the consumer society, and, on the other, that in order to deal with the ecological crisis, in particular, you have to introduce various measures that would restrict the expansion of the consumer culture! This is a contradiction, but I don't think that any of this type of contradiction, by itself, would bring down the system.

DOUG LAIN: When I wrote to you I asked if you thought that there was a danger that the current system is creating a terminal crisis, and I didn't mean just for the system. I actually meant for the species. Do you feel that we are in danger of being destroyed by the market economy as a species.

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: I don't think so. I think that even if you take the most pessimistic projections of scientists on the possible effects of the ecological crisis —if you're talking about this because if you are talking of course about the nuclear crisis it's a different story— I don't think this is the problem. The problem is that some people, particularly in the peripheral countries, the so called South or the ex-Third World, would particularly suffer the effects of the ecological crisis. There you may have a significant loss of life and, people would have to move en mass from areas that would be flooded, or that would become deserts, etc., but I don't think we can talk about any danger to the species itself. Many species of course in the animal world would be abolished and are being already abolished, but not the human species itself. I think that the present system of concentration of power would work also in this direction: the elites or privileged social groups would find ways to minimize the effects of the ecological crisis on them.^[15] It's only the lower social groups who would pay the price and this is already happening. You don't see any significant flooding or masses of dead people because of natural disasters, among people living in luxury suburbs or in rich areas. You see them always in very poor areas, and in deserted areas where there are no social systems or infrastructure.

DOUG LAIN: So Takis Fotopoulos it was great talking to you. And thanks for being on the Diet Soap podcast.

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS: Okay. Thanks very much for giving me the chance to take part.

* This is a slightly edited version of the transcript of Doug Lain's interview with [Takis Fotopoulos](#) who was a guest on the Diet Soap podcast in January of 2010. You can find out more about the Diet Soap project at www.dietsoap.org. You can listen to the interview here: http://dietsoap.podomatic.com/entry/eg/2010-01-15T03_23_00-08_00 (Part I); http://dietsoap.podomatic.com/entry/eg/2010-01-21T17_36_06-08_00 (Part II)

[1] Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy* (London/N.Y.: Cassell/Continuum, 1997/98).

[2] see : <http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/fotopoulos/>

[3] Takis Fotopoulos, *The multidimensional crisis and Inclusive Democracy* (English

translation of the book with the same title published in Greek, Gordios, 2005), [PDF](#) (2.69 MB).

[4] Takis Fotopoulos, *The pink revolution in Iran and the "Left"* (Special Issue of the *International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Summer 2009).

[5] Takis Fotopoulos, *Chomsky's Capitalism, Albert's post-capitalism and Inclusive Democracy* (Athens, Gordios, 2004). For an English version of a critique on Parecon see "Participatory Economics (Parecon) and Inclusive Democracy", *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (January 2005) :

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol1/vol1_no2_IDvsParecon.htm

and for part of the critique of Chomsky's critique, see T. Fotopoulos, "Mass media, Culture and Democracy," *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 5, No.1 (March 1999) :

http://www.democracynature.org/vol5/fotopoulos_media.htm

[6] see Part I of *Towards An Inclusive Democracy* :

<http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/fotopoulos/english/brbooks/brtid/IDBook.pdf>

or part I of : *The multidimensional crisis and Inclusive Democracy*

[7] Takis Fotopoulos, "The myths about the economic crisis, the reformist Left and economic democracy", *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (October 2008) :

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol4/vol4_no4_takis_economic_crisis.htm

[8] The average annual growth rate of world GDP was 2.9% in the 1990s and 3.2% in the 2000s and that of high income countries (i.e. excluding the 'miracles' was 2.7% and 2.3% respectively. (World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2010*, Table 4.1).

[9] See Takis Fotopoulos, "May '68 Demystified", *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July 2008) :

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol4/vol4_no3_takis_may68.htm

[10] see Takis Fotopoulos, "The End of Traditional Antisystemic Movements and the Need for A New Type of Antisystemic Movement Today", *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (November 2001) : http://www.democracynature.org/vol7/takis_movements.htm

[11] See Takis Fotopoulos, "May '68 Demystified".

[12] See Takis Fotopoulos "The transition to an Inclusive Democracy", *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2010) :

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol6/vol6_no2_takis_ID_meeting_Barcelona_2010.

[13] See Takis Fotopoulos, "Is the eco-village movement a solution or part of the problem?", *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (June 2006) :

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol2/vol2_no3_Takis_eco_village.htm

[14] Takis Fotopoulos, "Systemic aspects of academic repression in the New World Order", *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (October 2008) :

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol4/vol4_no4_takis_academic_rep.htm.

See also ch. 4 of the book, *Academic Repression: Reflections from the academic industrial complex*, ed. by Steven Best, et. al. (AK Press, 2010), pp. 143-163.

[15] Takis Fotopoulos, *The Ecological Crisis as Part of the Present Multi-dimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy*, *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol.3, No.3 (July 2007) :

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