

Inclusive Democracy as a way out of the present multi-dimensional crisis*

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to raise a number of crucial to my mind questions about contemporary society and attempt to critically assess the answers given to these questions while proposing at the same time an alternative way of thinking. These questions are:

1. Does present society face a crisis? If yes, which are its main components or dimensions?
2. Which are the main political proposals to deal with the crisis in general?
3. What are the main theoretical approaches to deal with the ecological crisis?
4. Do we face a reform or revolution dilemma today?

1. Does present society face a crisis ?

As regards the first question I think very few people today will doubt that present society, which takes everywhere the form of a neoliberal market/growth economy and representative 'democracy', faces a profound and widespread crisis encompassing all spheres of social life—although there are of course too many explanations around about the causes of this crisis and what is to be done to get out of it .

Characteristics of the crisis

- A multi-dimensional crisis: The present crisis is a multi-dimensional crisis involving the economic, the political, the ecological, the social as well as the cultural levels.
- A universal crisis: It is precisely the universal character of this crisis that differentiates it from other crises in the past. It calls into question practically every structure and idea that supports contemporary heteronomous societies in East and West, North and South. Therefore, the present crisis calls into question not just the political, economic, social and ecological structures that emerged with the rise of the market economy, but also the actual values that have sustained these structures and particularly the post-Enlightenment meaning of Progress and its partial identification with growth.

Causes of the crisis

To my mind, this multidimensional crisis can be attributed to the very institutions of modernity which today have been universalised. It can be shown that it is the dynamics of the market economy and representative ‘democracy’ that have led to the present concentration of power at all levels which, in turn, is the ultimate cause of every dimension of the present crisis^[1]. But, let us see the dimensions of this crisis in more detail and why all these dimensions or aspects of the crisis could be traced back to the concentration of power at all levels—my main thesis.

Dimensions of the crisis

- The ecological dimension
- The economic dimension
- The political dimension
- The social dimension
- The cultural dimension

THE ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION

There is no doubt today that a major dimension of the present multidimensional crisis, which extends to the economic, political, cultural and general social level, is the ecological crisis, namely the crisis which concerns not the relations between social individuals, as the other dimensions of the crisis, but our interaction, as social individuals, with the environment. The upsetting of ecological systems, the widespread pollution, the threat to renewable resources, as well as the running out of non-renewable resources and, in general, the rapid downgrading of the environment and the quality of life have made the ecological implications of economic growth manifestly apparent in the past 30 years.

Ecological crisis and concentration

Almost everybody agrees today that there is a definite relationship between the ecological crisis and economic growth or what I would prefer to call the ***growth economy*** and by this I mean the system of economic organization which is geared —either ‘objectively’, through its own dynamics (as in the case of the capitalist market economy) or deliberately (as in the case of the now defunct ‘actually existing socialism’)— toward maximizing economic growth.

It is no accident that the destruction of the environment during the lifetime of the growth economy, in both its capitalist and state socialist versions, bears no comparison to the cumulative damage that previous societies have inflicted on the environment. The fact that the main form of power within the framework of the growth economy is economic, and that the concentration of economic power involves the ruling elites in a constant struggle to dominate people and the natural world, could go a long way toward explaining the present ecological crisis.

In other words, to understand the ecological crisis we should not simply refer to the prevailing system of values and the resulting technologies (as the environmentalists and the deep ecologists suggest) nor exclusively to the capitalist production relations (as eco-Marxists propose) but mainly to the growth economy itself and the instrumentalist view of Nature implied by it (Nature seen as an instrument to human welfare and economic

growth.

Let's take the **greenhouse effect**, which is now widely accepted as the main symptom of the ecological crisis, in order to illustrate why the ultimate cause of every aspect of the multidimensional crisis and therefore of the ecological crisis as well is the process of concentration of power.

As we know, the greenhouse effect is already leading to catastrophic climatic consequences, even worse than those predicted by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in their 2001 report^[2]. In fact, their latest report, which is still in draft form, stresses that Earth's temperature could rise to levels far higher than predicted under the impact of global warming^[3] and, just two weeks ago, Professor David King, the UK's government chief scientific adviser, calculated that the world is likely to suffer a temperature rise of more than 3C during the present century EVEN IF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED ON LIMITING EMISSIONS (which was supposed to stabilise the climate at an increase of no more than 2C)^[4]. According to his report's estimates this would put up to 400 million people worldwide at risk of hunger because of the expected drastic reduction in cereal crops.

It is not difficult to be shown that the cause of the greenhouse effect is the very pattern of living implied by the growth economy, which in turn has been determined by the dynamic of the market economy and, in particular,

- the concentration of income and wealth between and within countries,
- the consequent urban concentration,
- the car culture and so on.

This means that effective action against the greenhouse effect would require a complete change in today's' pattern of living, a process of radical decentralisation in production, consumption and living itself, which would require a systemic change rather than just a technological change or a change of values etc. So, it is not simply the resistance of some powerful corporate interests that prevents the political elites from taking effective action to deal with the problem, as some suggest. I would argue instead that, in reality, this is just a symptom of the political crisis today rather than the main cause of the ecological crisis.

Another example, which is also a by-product of the same concentration process is **industrial farming**, which is clearly the outcome of intensive agriculture as part of the same process of economic growth. Industrial farming has already led not only to the elimination of small farmers and the need to industrialise farming further through genetic engineering (supposedly, in order to solve the looming food crisis due to the growth in population), but also to the spreading of diseases like the 'mad cow' disease and according to some recent reports even to the present spread of the bird flu epidemic which threatens to mutate into a pandemic with catastrophic consequences for the human race.^[5]

It is therefore clear that the environmental effects of globalisation are due to **systemic causes** that refer to the system of concentration of power, which is institutionalised by market economy and representative 'democracy', rather than to 'bad' economic policies and practices. In this context, humanity is faced today with a crucial choice between two radically different proposed solutions:

- "sustainable development" and what we may call
- the "eco-democratic" solution.

Sustainable development seeks the causes of the ecological crisis in the dominant system of values and the technologies used and naively presumes that a massive change in them is possible, if only we could persuade people about the need for such a change in order to "green" capitalism. This solution is supported not just by the mainstream green movement but also by the 'progressive' parts of the transnational elite, as it takes for granted today's institutional framework of the market economy and representative 'democracy'.

Alternatively, **the eco-democratic solution** seeks the causes of the ecological crisis in the social system itself, which is based on the concentration of power as a result of the dynamics of the system of the market economy and the implied idea of the domination of nature by society (instrumentalist view of Nature). Clearly, this solution requires alternative forms of social organisation that are based on the equal distribution of political and economic power and a process of radical decentralisation in production, consumption and living itself which would require a systemic change rather than just a technological change and/or a change of values.

THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

As regards the economic dimension of the crisis, it can easily be shown that it is the concentration of economic power, as a result of commodity relations and the grow-or-die dynamic of the market economy, which has led to a chronic economic crisis—a crisis that today is expressed, mainly, by a huge concentration of economic power.

This is shown by the enormous and constantly growing income/wealth gap that separates not only the North from the South, but also the economic elites and the privileged social groups from the rest of society in every single society all over the world. In fact, even the statistical tricks used by the World Bank and other similar organisations to show the supposed significant reduction of poverty in the world as a result of neoliberal globalisation can not hide the fact that the huge income gap between North and South and within them is constantly growing in the era of neoliberal globalisation.

The North, in particular, has yet to recover from the crisis that surfaced in the mid-1970s, as a result of the fundamental contradiction that was created by the internationalisation of the market economy and the parallel expansion of statism, in the sense of active state control aiming at determining the level of economic activity, as well as providing an expanding welfare state.

The transnational elite, which began flourishing in the context of the internationalisation of the market economy process, embarked in an effort to shrink the state's economic role and to free and deregulate markets—a process, which has already had devastating consequences on the majority of the population in the North. This drastic reduction in statism turned the clock back to the period before the mixed economy and Keynesian policies were used to create a 'capitalism with a human face'. The result was an initial huge upsurge of open unemployment followed by today's period of massive low-paid employment due to both the liberalisation of labour markets and to a determined effort by the political elites to reduce

open unemployment, which carried a high political cost and completely discredited the market/growth economy.

Thus, in the USA, the ‘new economy’ par excellence, more than 43 million jobs had been lost between 1979 and 1995. Although most of these jobs have been replaced, an analysis of the US labour statistics showed that, whereas in the ‘60s and the ‘70s the vast majority of the people who were laid off found jobs that paid as well as their old ones, now only about 35 percent of laid-off full-time workers end up in equally (or better) paid jobs resulting in “the most job insecurity since the Depression of the 1930s”.^[6]

The USA experience has already been reproduced all over the North, particularly after the collapse of the alternative “Rhineland” model of ‘social market’ capitalism in Germany. The fierce competition among the countries in the two main economic blocs i.e. EU, NAFTA, and China, Japan —also increasingly India— can safely be predicted to create everywhere conditions, not so much of massive *open* unemployment, but of low paid employment in the context of ‘flexible’ labour markets. In Britain, for instance, as Steve Fleetwood^[7] of Lancaster University points out, ‘what the UK’s flexibility generates are poor jobs, maybe even a new kind of underemployment...The UK is not so much solving the problem of unemployment as transforming it into a different one: the problem of poor quality employment’.

However, to my mind, the crisis of the market/growth economy in the North does not constitute the decisive element in the economic crisis. As long as the “2/3 society” (or, I would say the 40% society) is somehow reproduced, the system may be stabilised when it moves to a new equilibrium resting on the exploitation of the technological advantages of the North and the low production cost of the new South. I think the decisive element in the economic crisis consists of the fact that the system of the market economy is not *inherently* capable of transforming the market economy of the South into a self-sustaining growth economy, similar to the one already established in the North.

Therefore, the outcome of the present universalisation of the market/growth economy in its present neoliberal form, necessitated by the opening of the markets due to the massive expansion of transnational corporations in the last quarter of a century or so, is the marginalization of a very significant part of the world population. This development, in turn, forces millions of people to emigrate from their countries of origin, risking their lives in the process, in a desperate attempt to enter illegally into the North. The inherent incapability of the North to create self-sustaining consumer societies in the South is the direct result of the fact that the concentration of economic power and the parallel growing inequality all over the world are not just consequences but also, as it can be shown, preconditions for the reproduction of the market/growth economy. In other words, there is an absolute natural barrier that makes impossible the universalisation of the North's capitalist type of growth economy.

To give an indication of why this is impossible let us make some simple calculations. It is estimated at present that the world population will be over 7 billion people by 2015.^[8] For the inhabitants of our planet to reach the per capita energy use rates that those living in the rich countries enjoy now, the world energy production would have to quadruple (or increase by 6 times for everybody to enjoy the US consumption standards).^[9] Similarly, as Ted Trainer^[10] has shown in a similar exercise for the year 2070, if we were to try to

increase production to the point where all people expected on the planet by 2070, perhaps 10 billion, were each to enjoy the present per capita consumption levels in rich countries, then, all fuels and one-third of the mineral items, would be totally exhausted by about 2040. At the same time, renewable energy sources are very unlikely to be able to fill the gap. This means that there is no possibility whatsoever for all people rising to the per capita resource consumption typical of the rich countries today.

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

But, it is not only economic power which has been constantly concentrating at the hands of economic elites since they emerged about two hundred years ago, as a result of the grow-or-die dynamics of the market economy. A similar process of concentration of political power at the hands of political elites has also been going on during the same period, as from the last quarter of the 18th century, when the ‘Founding Fathers’ of the US Constitution, literally invented representative ‘democracy’ — an idea without any historical precedent in the ancient world since, until that time, democracy had the classical Athenian meaning of the sovereignty of *demos*, in the sense of the direct exercise of power by all citizens. It was the dynamics of representative ‘democracy’ that had led to a corresponding concentration of political power.

Thus, the concentration of political power in the hands of parliamentarians in liberal modernity, has led to an even higher degree of concentration in the hands of governments and the leadership of ‘mass’ parties in statist modernity, at the expense of parliaments. In the present neoliberal modernity, the combined effect of the dynamics of the market economy and representative democracy has led to the conversion of politics into statecraft, [\[11\]](#) with think tanks designing policies and their implementation. Thus, a small clique around the prime minister (or the President) concentrates all effective political power in its hands, particularly in major market economies that are significant parts of the transnational elite.

Furthermore, the continuous decline of the State’s economic sovereignty is being accompanied by the parallel transformation of the public realm into pure administration. A typical example is the European Central Bank, which has taken control of the Euro and makes crucial decisions about the economic life of millions of citizens, independently of political control. So, a ‘crisis in politics’ has developed in the present neoliberal modernity that undermines the foundations of representative ‘democracy’ and is expressed by several symptoms which, frequently, take the form of an implicit or explicit questioning of fundamental political institutions (parties, electoral contests, etc.). Such symptoms are the significant and usually rising abstention rates in electoral contests, particularly in USA and UK, the explosion of discontent in the form of frequently violent riots, the diminishing numbers of party members, the fact that respect for professional politicians has never been at such a low level, with the recent financial scandals in countries like USA, UK, Italy, France, Spain, Greece and elsewhere simply reaffirming the belief that politics, for the vast majority of the politicians —liberals and social democrats alike— is just a job, i.e., a way to make money and enhance social status.

The historical cause of the present mass apathy can be traced back to what Castoriadis called “the radical inadequacy, to say the least, of the programs in which (the project of autonomy) had been embodied—be it the liberal republic or Marxist-Leninist ‘socialism’”.

[12] In other words, it was the inadequacy of representative 'democracy' to create genuine democratic conditions which may be considered as the ultimate cause of the present apathy. However, the question still remains why this crisis has become particularly acute in the last decade or so. To my mind, the answer has to be found in the cumulative effect of the changes in the 'objective' and 'subjective' conditions which have marked the emergence of the internationalised market economy since the mid-seventies and in particular:

- the growing internationalisation of the market economy that has undermined effectively not only the state's power to control economic events but, by implication, the belief in the efficacy of traditional politics.
- the acute intensification of the struggle for competitiveness among EU, NAFTA and the Far East which, in turn, has resulted in the collapse of social democracy, the establishment of the 'neoliberal consensus' and the consequent effective elimination of ideological differences between political parties.
- the technological changes that have led to the present post-industrial society and the corresponding changes in the structure of employment and the electorate, which, in combination with the massive unemployment and underemployment, have led to the decline of the power of the traditional working class and the consequent decline of traditional politics.
- The collapse of 'actually existing socialism', which has led to the myth of 'the end of ideologies' and further enhanced the spreading of the culture of individualism that has been promoted by neoliberalism.

Thus, in the context of the present neoliberal consensus, the old ideological differences between the Left and the Right have disappeared. Elections have become beauty contests between "charismatic" leaders and the party machines backing them, which fight each other to attract the attention of the electorate, in order to implement policies constituting variations of the same theme: maximisation of the freedom of market forces at the expense of both the welfare state (which is phased out) and the state's commitment to full employment (which is irrevocably abandoned).

The fact that the South of Europe (France, Italy, Greece) and to some extent Germany too are still resisting (Scandinavian countries have already adopted various forms of social-liberalism) is simply due to the strong resistance of the peoples there to the attempts of their elites to introduce similar reforms. However, these are just defensive struggles and it is a matter of time before these struggles fade away —unless they are transformed into antisystemic struggles. The German Ifo Institute put the problem blatantly in a recent paper when it stressed that "Europe's welfare system... will not survive globalisation. It may take another decade or two for politicians to understand this, but in the end they will. There is no way to turn back the tide of history". [13]

In fact, today's electoral contests are decided by the "2/3" 'contended electoral majority', [14] whereas the 'underclass', which has been created by neoliberalism and automation, mostly does not take part in such contests. Therefore, the growing apathy towards politics does not mainly reflect a general indifference regarding social issues, as a result, say, of consumerism, but a growing lack of confidence, especially of weaker social groups, in traditional political parties and their ability to solve social problems. It is not accidental anyway that the higher abstention rates in electoral contests usually occur among the lower income groups, which fail to see anymore any significant difference between Right and Left,

i.e. between neoliberal and social-liberal parties respectively.

The decline of the socialist project, after the collapse of both social democracy and ‘actually existing socialism’, has contributed significantly to the withdrawal of many, particularly young people, from traditional politics. Thus, the collapse of ‘socialist’ statism in the East, instead of functioning as a catalyst for the building of a new non-authoritarian type of politics which would develop further the ideas of May 1968, simply led to a general trend — particularly noticeable among students, young academics and others— towards a post-modern conformism and the rejection of any ‘universalist’ antisystemic project. The rest, including most of the underclass, who are the main victims of the neoliberal internationalised economy, have fallen into political apathy and an unconscious rejection of established society —a rejection that usually has taken the form of an explosion of crime and drug abuse, and sometimes violent riots.

Still, Seattle and Genoa yesterday, as well as Paris a couple of weeks ago, are clear indications of the fact that today’s youth is not apathetic towards politics (conceived in the classical meaning of the word as self-management) but only with respect to what passes as politics today, i.e. the system which allows a social minority (professional politicians) to determine the quality of life of every citizen. In other words, it is the growing realisation that the concentration of political power in the hands of professional politicians and various “experts” (as a result of the dynamic of representative ‘democracy’) which has transformed politics into statecraft and turned many people away from this sort of ‘politics’.

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

The growth economy has already created a growth society, the main characteristics of which are consumerism, privacy, alienation and the subsequent disintegration of social ties. The growth society, in turn, inexorably leads toward a “non-society”, that is, the substitution of atomised families and individuals for society —a crucial step to barbarism.

The social crisis has been aggravated by the expansion of the market economy into all sectors of social life, in the context of its present internationalised form. It is, of course, well known that the market is the greatest enemy of traditional values. It is not, therefore, surprising that the social crisis is more pronounced in precisely those countries where marketization has been well advanced. This becomes evident by the fact that neither campaigns of the ‘back to basics’ type (Britain), nor the growth of religious, mystic and other similar tendencies (United States) have had any restraining effect on the most obvious symptoms of the social crisis: the explosion of crime and drug abuse that has already led many states to effectively abandon their ‘war against drugs’.^[15]

In Britain, for instance, it took 30 years for the crime rate to double, from 1 million incidents in 1950 to 2.2 million in 1979. However, in the 1980s, the crime rate has more than doubled, and it reached the 5 million mark in the 1990s to approach the 6 million mark at present! The ruling elites respond to the explosion of crime by building more jails. Thus, the prison population in England and Wales increased from 64,000 at the beginning of the decade to 77,000 last year, while the most recent Home Office projections forecast a jail population of up to 90,000 by 2010.^[16] Similarly, it took the United States 200 years to raise its prison population to a million, but only the last 10 years to raise it to

almost two million, with 680 people in jail for every 100,000 — a quarter of the world's total prison population! In fact, the explosion of crime, as Martin Woolacott^[17] points out, tends to take the form of an insurgency in urban conglomerations all over the world, and is treated as such by the ruling elites. So, the concentration of economic power, as a result of the marketization of the economy, has not only increased the economic privileges of the privileged minority. It has also increased its insecurity. This is why the new overclass increasingly isolates itself in luxury ghettos.

At the same time, marketization and in particular the flexible labour market, has increased job insecurity—a phenomenon that today affects everybody, apart from the very few in the overclass. No wonder the *International Labour Organisation Report 2000* has found that the stress levels in advanced market economies have reached record levels because of the institutionalisation of flexible labour markets that increased employers' pressures for greater labour productivity.

THE CULTURAL DIMENSION

The establishment of the market economy implied sweeping aside traditional cultures and values. This process was accelerated in the twentieth century with the spreading all over the world of the market economy and its offspring the growth economy. As a result, today, there is an intensive process of cultural homogenisation at work, which not only rules out any directionality towards more complexity, but is in effect making culture simpler, with cities becoming more and more alike, people all over the world listening to the same music, watching the same soap operas on TV, buying the same brands of consumer goods, etc. The rise of neoliberal globalisation in the last quarter of a century or so has further enhanced this process of cultural homogenisation. This is the inevitable outcome of the liberalisation and de-regulation of markets and the consequent intensification of commercialisation of culture. As a result, traditional communities and their cultures are disappearing all over the world and people are converted to consumers of a mass culture produced in the advanced capitalist countries and particularly the USA. In the film industry, for instance, even European countries with a strong cultural and economic background (like Italy) had to effectively give up their own film industries, unable to compete with the much more competitive US industry. Thus, the recent emergence of a sort of “cultural” nationalism in many parts of the world expresses a desperate attempt to keep a cultural identity in the face of market homogenisation. But, the marketization of the communications flow has already established the preconditions for the downgrading of cultural diversity into a kind of superficial differentiation akin to a folklorist type. Finally, one should not underestimate the political implications of the commercialisation and homogenisation of culture. Thus, the escapist role traditionally played by Hollywood films has now acquired a universal dimension, through the massive expansion of TV culture and its almost full monopolisation by Hollywood subculture.

Last, but not least, a few words about the related ideological dimension of the cultural crisis. The changes in the structural parameters marking the transition to neoliberal modernity were accompanied by a parallel serious ideological crisis which put into question not just the political ideologies, (what postmodernists call ‘metanarratives’), or even ‘objective’ reason^[18] in general, but reason itself. This is shown by the present flourishing of irrationalism in all its forms: from the revival of old religions like Christianity and Islam etc. up to the expansion of various irrational trends, e.g. mysticism, spiritualism,

astrology, esoterism, neopaganism and "New Age", rejection of scientific medicine in favour of various forms of alternative therapies which use methods that usually have nothing to do with reason and testable hypotheses etc.

The rise of irrationalism in particular is a direct result of the crisis of the growth economy in both its capitalist and 'socialist' versions. As I attempted to show elsewhere,^[19] the collapse of the two main projects of modernity, i.e. the socialist and the development projects, in combination with the parallel 'credibility crisis' of science that developed in the last quarter of a century or so, were crucial to the present flourishing of irrationalism.

In sum, the following developments were instrumental in the rise of irrationalism in the North and the expansion of various fundamentalisms in the South:

- the growing realization of the social effects of the rise of the consumer society,
- the ecological implications of growth,
- the economic effects of neoliberal globalisation in terms of increased poverty and insecurity,
- the failure of 'development'
- the cultural homogenisation .

On top of this, the credibility crisis of science has systematically undermined many scientific 'truths' and especially those on the basis of which we used to justify our 'certainty' concerning the interpretation of social and economic phenomena. But, as science plays a double role with respect to the reproduction of the growth economy, (a functional role in the material reproduction of the growth economy, through its decisive contribution to the effort to dominate the natural world and maximise growth and an equally important ideological role in justifying 'objectively' the growth economy) this crisis was particularly significant..

Thus:

- first, the realisation of the effects of economic growth upon Nature and, subsequently, upon the quality of life, called into question the functional role of science in advancing Progress and,
- secondly, when the credibility of scientific truths themselves was also challenged, whether those truths originated in orthodox social science, or in the alternative science of socialism, Marxism^[20], then, the moment of truth for the growth ideology had come.

Still, it is not science itself and rationalism in general that have to be blamed for the present multi-dimensional crisis, as irrationalists of various types usually assert. Like technology, applied science is not 'neutral' to the logic and dynamic of the market economy. Science belongs to the autonomy tradition from the point of view of the methods it uses to derive its truths and, sometimes, even from the point of view of its content (e.g. demystification of religious beliefs). Therefore, what is needed today is not to jettison rationalism altogether in the interpretation of social phenomena, but to transcend '**objective' rationalism** (i.e. the rationalism which is grounded on 'objective laws' of natural or social evolution) and develop a new kind of democratic rationalism, as I attempted to show elsewhere^[21].

Furthermore, as I have already mentioned, the collapse of socialist statism and the rise of neoliberalism had the effect that the radical critique of 'scientific' socialism, statism and authoritarian politics did not function as a catalyst for further development of the non-authoritarian left thinking. Instead, the critique of scientism was taken over by post-modernist theoreticians and was developed into a general relativism, which inevitably led to the abandonment of any effective critique of the status quo and to the consequent theorisation of conformism.^[22]

So, the present era of neoliberal modernity has already developed its own dominant social paradigm^[23]. The events of May 1968, as well as the collapse of Marxist structuralism, played a crucial role in the development of the postmodernist paradigm with its main themes of rejection of :

- an overall vision of History as an evolutionary process of progress or liberation, ('grand narratives') in favour of plurality, fragmentation, complexity ('local narratives');
- closed systems, essentialism and determinism, in favour of uncertainty, ambiguity and indeterminacy and
- 'objectivity' and 'truth', in favour of relativism and perspectivism.

As a result of these trends, and particularly of the influence that the postmodernist rejection of universalist project had on the 'new social movements', today, we face the end of the old type of antisystemic movement, which was the main expression of the social struggle for the past hundred and fifty years or so.^[24]

2. Which are the main political proposals to deal with the crisis in general?

- The liberal proposal
- The proposal of the reformist Left
- The proposal of the anti-systemic Left

Several, if not all, of the dimensions of the present crisis I mentioned are acknowledged by both the Right and the Left. Not surprisingly, in terms of this analysis, the proposals made by both ends of the political spectrum, despite appearances, do not in effect differ significantly as both the Right and the reformist Left take for granted the existing institutional framework of the market economy and liberal democracy.

The proposal of the Right: more liberalisation

On the part of the Right, the New Right's^[25] solution to overcoming the present multi-dimensional crisis is further marketization, i.e. further privatisations, opening and deregulation of the markets etc. (what we call further liberalisation).

But, if we consider the possible effects of further marketising the economy, it becomes obvious that none of the aforementioned aspects of the multidimensional crisis is amenable to market solutions. Therefore, the Right's proposals for freeing completely the market forces, further privatisations and a minimal state amount to nothing less than the rational

organisation of inequality.

In particular, the New Right's claim that the liberalisation of markets brings about a decentralisation of economic power is obviously false. In fact, the opposite is true: the more liberalised the markets are, the greater the concentration of economic power in terms of income and wealth.

- The fact that the US has always been the model of a market economy is not irrelevant to the fact that it is also "the most unequal industrialised country in terms of income and wealth".^[26]
- Furthermore, not only the market economy has no inherent mechanism to avert ecological damage but, in fact, any effective social controls to protect the environment are incompatible with its logic and dynamic.

The Reformist Left's answer: enhancing the 'civil society'

On the part of the reformist Left (i.e. the Left which takes for granted the present system of market economy and representative democracy and suggests only ways to improve the functioning of the system), the way out of the crisis is expressed in terms of the proposal to enhance 'civil society', i.e. the various networks which are autonomous from state control (unions, churches, civic movements, cooperatives, neighbourhoods, schools of thought etc.). This tendency, thanks to the theoretical work of modern social democrats of the Habermas School,^[27] today exerts considerable influence among social democrats, eco-socialists, even social-liberals, as well as supporters of the 'radical democracy' project.

The civil societarians' way out of the multidimensional crisis seems to be radically different from the one proposed by the Right:

- Instead of further marketization, they argue for limits (i.e. social controls) to be imposed on markets and the state by the civil society networks.
- Instead of privatisations, they propose a kind of 'market pluralism' which can encompass a variety of market agents: family businesses, publicly owned or municipal companies, worker co-ops, consumer co-ops, non-profit organisations etc.^[28]
- Finally, acknowledging the fact that "civil society left to itself, generates unequal power relationships which only state power can challenge" they conclude that "only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society."^[29]

It is therefore obvious that the civil societarian approach involves a high degree of statism, exercised either at the national or transnational level. It is also clear that the civil societarians, who castigate radical socialists and supporters of the democratic project as utopians, are in fact much less realistic when they suggest that the clock could be moved back to the period of statism, i.e. to a period when the market economy was characterised by a significantly smaller degree of internationalisation than at present.

To my mind, the civil societarian approach is both utopian, in the negative sense of the word, and a-historical.

- It is utopian, because, in effect, it is in tension with both the state and the internationalised market economy "internationalised market economy". It is in

tension with the state because, as neoliberalism has shown, it is fairly easy for the state to undermine effectively the institutions of the civil society (see, for instance, the effective demolition of trade union power in Britain). And it is in tension with the internationalised market economy, because it is well known that there is an inverse relationship between the degree of competitiveness and the level of development of the civil society's institutions: the less developed or powerful these institutions are (e.g., trade unions) the higher the degree of international competitiveness, as the case of USA, Ireland, China etc. have shown. So, given that neither social democrats nor their fellow travellers in the Green movement see the outcome of the inevitable tension between the civil society, on the one hand, and the state and the market economy, on the other, in terms of the replacement of the latter by the former, it is not difficult to predict that any enhancement of the civil society will have to be compatible with the process of further internationalisation of the market economy and the implied role of the state.

- Also, the civil societarian approach is fundamentally a-historical, since it ignores the structural changes which have led to the present neoliberal consensus and the internationalised market economy. In other words, it ignores the fact that the tendency to minimise social controls on the market, which today is dominant everywhere, is not simply a matter of policy but it reflects fundamental changes in the form of the market economy. This implies that every attempt towards an effective social control of the market necessarily comes into conflict with the requirements, in terms of competitiveness, for the reproduction of today's growth economy.

The civil societarians' problem is not, of course, that they do not base their strategy on an effort to seize state power (the traditional statist tactics) but rather on a strategy of social transformation 'from below'^[30]. The problem lies in the fact that their approach takes for granted the entire institutional framework of the market economy, representative democracy and the nation-state and therefore is as ineffective as that of the Right in dealing with the multi-dimensional crisis.

Thus, first, the adoption of the market economy means that every attempt by autonomous institutions (for example, labour unions, ecological movements, etcetera) for an effective control of the market—in order to achieve social, ecological and other aims—is in dire contradiction with the logic and dynamics of the internationalised economy. Inevitably, any attempt to introduce similar controls will lead to the adoption of insignificant half-measures, which will be compatible with the institutional framework (see e.g. the fiasco of the world conferences to control the greenhouse effect).

Secondly, the adoption of representative democracy means that the direct democracy 'injections' proposed by the advocates of this tendency, will, in fact, function as inoculations against direct democracy. The fundamental pre-condition for the creation of an active citizen's consciousness is that the citizens themselves (and not others 'on their behalf') should manage the political process. Hence, the supposed 'democratic' proposals merely reinforce citizens' passivity, misleading them to believe that they exercise political power, when, in fact, the latter remains firmly the privilege of the few, and the many are relegated to the role of 'pressure groups'—now baptised as 'counter-powers'!

In conclusion, enhancing the civil society institutions has no chance whatsoever of either

putting an end to the concentration of power, or of transcending the present multidimensional crisis. This conclusion may be derived from the fact that the implicit aim of civil societarians is to improve the functioning of existing institutions (state, parties, market), in order to make them more responsive to pressures from below when, in fact, the crisis is founded on the institutions themselves and not on their malfunctioning!

But, in the present internationalised market economy, the need to minimise the socio-economic role of the state is no longer a matter of choice for those controlling production. It is a necessary condition for survival.

- At the economic bloc's level, European capital has to compete with capital blocks, which operate from bases where the social-democratic tradition was never strong (the United States, the Far East).
- Even at the planetary level, one could seriously doubt whether it is still possible to enhance the institutions of civil society within the context of the market economy. Given that the fundamental aims of production in a market economy are individual gain, economic efficiency and growth, any attempt to reconcile these aims with an effective 'social control' by the civil society is bound to fail since, as historic experience with the statist phase has shown, social control and market efficiency are irreconcilable objectives.^[31]

By the same token, one could reasonably argue that the central contradiction of the market economy today is the one arising from the fact that any effective control of the ecological implications of growth is incompatible with the requirements of competitiveness imposed by the neoliberal globalisation process.

The anti-systemic Left's answer: developing a new liberatory project

Still, despite the huge crisis we examined, which has already led to a situation in which the economic system cannot meet even the basic needs of at least a quarter, and possibly a third, of the world population,^[32] the internationalised market economy is not widely questioned—not even by the World Social Forum and its branches which clearly question only neoliberalism but not the market economy system itself and policies but not representative democracy as such.

It is obvious that the collapse of the 'socialist' growth economy and the consequent integration of the "left" into social-liberalism has functioned as a decisive pacifying factor at the subjective level. This makes the need for a new liberatory project, which will transcend both the market economy and 'socialist' statism, even more important. To my mind, therefore, there is an urgent need today to develop a new liberatory approach that sees the causes of the present multi-dimensional crisis in terms of the concentration of power, which is implied by any non-democratic institutional framework, either of the market economy or of the socialist statism variety. This will open the way for the development of a mass consciousness similar to the one that led to the collapse of 'actually existing socialism', and, consequently to a movement for new forms of social organisation.

I think therefore that, today, we have to transcend both the neoliberal internationalised market economy and socialist statism in order to put an end to economic misery, which

oppresses the majority of the world's population, and to arrest the ecological destruction, which threatens us all.

Failure to create alternative democratic forms of social organisation means that, as the present multidimensional crisis intensifies, the measures that will be enforced by the transnational elite to get out of the crisis in the future will, inevitably, be increasingly authoritarian and/or class-oriented in character. The signs are there. In both USA and Britain, for instance, the events of September 2001 in N.Y. and July 2005 in London, gave the elites the pretext to launch a massive attack against civil liberties and indirectly against radical political movements which were protesting and organising against the present multidimensional crisis. Also, in Britain, instead of forbidding the access of private cars to city centres in order to reduce congestion and pollution, they simply tax them heavily, making car use a privilege of the rich. The direction towards which present society moves could not be more clear.

3. What are the main theoretical approaches to deal with the ecological crisis? Reformist and systemic approaches compared

- Reformist approaches: towards an eco-compatible capitalism
- Systemic approaches: Centralist and decentralist approaches
- The ID approach to the ecological crisis and the meaning of Inclusive Democracy

A useful way to classify the various approaches on how to deal with the main components or dimensions of the multidimensional crisis will be to distinguish between reformist and systemic approaches.

- Reformist approaches, as the definition of the reformist Left I already discussed implies, are all those approaches that take the present system of the capitalist market economy and representative 'democracy' for granted and seek a way out of the various aspects of the crisis through reforms, i.e. through changes in this system which do not affect the basic political and economic structure of it.
- Systemic approaches seek to find out the systemic causes of the various aspects of the crisis and seek a way out of it through changes in the economic and political structure of the system itself.

Reformist approaches: towards an eco-compatible capitalism

There is no lack of proposals to deal with the ecological crisis through a process of 'greening capitalism'. Given that no scientist or technologist at the moment, even the most enthusiastic ones, suggest that technological fixes alone could sort out the growing ecological crisis, ecologists and others suggest things like:

- drastic changes in our consumption patterns,
- the end our love affair with the private car and cheap flights all over the world,
- the end of intensive farming,
- the stopping of moving food over huge distances,

in a word, the rapid deceleration of growth, if not a de-growth process.

However, apart from the fact that nobody could seriously suggest to the billions of people in the world who are starving or just surviving that they do not need growth, the fact is that it is the very structure and dynamics of the present system that prevents such changes from being introduced—even if the continuous worsening of the ecological crisis increasingly persuades more and more people about the imperative need to change their pattern of living.

It is the dynamics of the market economy itself which inevitably lead to more and more growth, since expansion means more income for those owning and controlling the means of production, it means new and more efficient methods of production and therefore even more income for them and so on. Therefore, growth leads to growing concentration of economic power and greater inequality.

But consumer democracies of today are dependent on growth, for without the prospect of mass consumption, the inequalities would be unbearable. So, it is not only multinationals and those controlling them who aim at growth but the people themselves who demand more growth since, as Serge Latouche^[33] observes, inequalities are only temporarily tolerated on the basis of the ideological myth that the luxuries of today will be accessible to all tomorrow, as also many goods that were once reserved for the privileged are now widespread.

It is clear that the same growth process which leads to further concentration of economic power leads also to concentration of production, on the grounds of ‘efficiency’ —as defined by narrow techno-economic criteria. And this happens both at the level of primary production (large-scale farming etc) and also at the traditional level of secondary production. Furthermore, the vast expansion of services in the present post-industrial era leads to even greater urban concentration, despite the decentralisation that information technology supposedly creates, which however is bound to be minimal for several reasons.

Therefore, one may argue that developments like the following ones make impossible the drastic changes required to even slow down the present crisis within the present economic system:

- the very patterns of living that have been created today, where people and goods have to travel significant distances to reach their destinations,
- the fast way of life that has developed in present society and
- the constant bombardment by the advertising industry in its systematic effort to create more new ‘needs’, so that production and incomes of those controlling it could further expand

Rightly, Latouche again, recently stressed that “eco-compatible capitalism is conceivable in theory, but unrealistic in practice. Capitalism would require a high level of regulation to bring about the reduction of our ecological footprint...a society based on economic contraction cannot exist under capitalism.”

Systemic approaches: centralist and decentralist approaches

As regards the systemic approaches to the ecological crisis and the ways out of it, we must at the outset rule out the irrational trends which, after condemning industrialism and Progress itself, usually end up with a primitivist call for a return to pre-industrial societies.

We could then classify the main systemic approaches to the ecological crisis using the fundamental criterion of whether they see the way out of it in terms of a centralist sustainable growth economy (“Centralist” approaches) or alternatively in terms of a decentralised ecological society (“Decentralist” approaches)

Centralist approaches

We could classify under the label “**centralist**” **approaches** the various versions of socialist, ecosocialist^[34] and eco-Marxist^[35] approaches, which emphasize the significance of production relations and production conditions in the analysis of environmental problems and as such represent a synthesis of Marxist economic theory and environmental analysis. Here also belongs the Participatory Economics (Parecon)^[36] approach which, like socialist planning and the market economy systems, shares the same overall objective of economic growth, (though presumably of a sustainable kind) as well as the implied meaning of efficiency, treating ecological problems as a case of externalities, (exactly as orthodox economists and environmentalists do!) which can supposedly be solved by involving more consumer councils and the like.

Decentralist approaches

Also, we could classify in the **decentralist approaches** those approaches supporting a radically decentralised ecological society, i.e. the social ecology and Inclusive Democracy approaches.

- The social ecology^[37] approach sees the causes of the present ecological crisis in terms of the hierarchical structures of domination and exploitation in capitalist society and, as such, represents an explicit attempt for a synthesis of libertarian socialism or anarchism with environmental analysis. On the other hand,
- The Inclusive Democracy approach sees the causes of the ecological crisis (which is considered as part of a multidimensional crisis), in terms of the present huge and growing concentration of power at all levels that, in turn, is seen as the inevitable outcome of the dynamics of the market economy and representative democracy and of the related hierarchical structures. In this sense, the ID approach represents an explicit attempt for a synthesis of the two historical traditions, the classical democratic tradition with the socialist tradition as well as with the radical currents within the new social movements (feminism, ecological movement, identity movements and so on)

The differences between centralists and decentralist approaches are not just theoretical, since they have very significant practical implications as regards the proposals on how to transcend the ecological crisis. For centralists, the way out of this crisis could be found through the creation of a sustainable growth economy and with the help of socialist or democratic planning in which workers’ councils, as well as consumers’ councils, would be involved. On the other hand, for decentralists, the ecological crisis could only be

transcended in a radically decentralised ecological society based on local communities according to Social Ecologists, or on the demos according to supporters of Inclusive Democracy, i.e. a direct political, economic, ecological and social democracy, of say 25-30,000 people, which would be part of a broader confederation of *demoi*. Therefore, the proposed institutional changes by ID supporters in terms of:

- the radical decentralization within confederated self-reliant local *Demoi*
- the abolition of the institutionalised concentration of power at all levels,
- the changing of the overall aim of production from economic growth to meeting the citizens' needs (particularly those referring to the quality of life)

explicitly aim at the fundamental aim of the ID project: the reintegration of society to nature the economy and polity. However, in contrast to the social ecology approach, an Inclusive Democracy is seen not just as an utopia, or as an objectively rational society (in the sense that there are objective trends in nature which involve the objective potentiality for such a society) but as a project, the product of political will, and as a way of transcending the multidimensional crisis.

THE ID APPROACH TO THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

But, let's see in more detail the ID approach to the ecological crisis. As I said, the ultimate cause of this crisis according to this approach is the concentration of economic and political power and, concerning the importance of the concentration of power with respect to this crisis, it is sufficient just to mention the fact that the poorest 37% of the world population today are responsible for just 7% of carbon dioxide emissions, whereas 15% of the world population living in high income countries are responsible for more than half of the total emissions.^[38] Similarly, the energy use per capita of high income countries is today more than 10 times higher than that of low income countries!^[39]

In a nutshell, the ID's thesis is that the present concentration of economic power is the inevitable outcome of a process which started about two hundred years ago with the rise of the system of the **market economy**. It was the rise of this system which has led, through different processes and for different reasons, to the two types of the growth economy, i.e. the now defunct 'socialist' version of it (what used to be called 'actually existing socialism') and the presently universal capitalist growth economy. As we all know, both versions of the **growth economy** have been responsible for the greatest damage to the environment in all of History and a corresponding huge concentration of power. Of course, concentration of economic power does not constitute a new phenomenon. What is new is the fact that the reproduction of the social system itself, as well as of the power of the elite controlling it, crucially depends on the realisation of the growth objective which, in turn, is 'justified' through its identification with Progress. So, economic growth functions not just as a fundamental social and economic goal, but also as a basic means to reproduce the structures of unequal distribution of economic and political power, which characterises modern hierarchical society, as well as a central element of the ideology that supports it.

However, the fact that modern hierarchical society relies for its reproduction on the maximisation of economic growth constitutes, also, its fundamental contradiction. This is not because, as it is usually argued, the continuation of the growth economy has serious environmental implications, but, because the necessary condition for the reproduction of

the growth economy is the concentration of its benefits to a small section of the world population, in other words, the huge inequality in the distribution of world income. The present, for instance, rapid growth rate in countries like China, whose GDP per head rose by an average rate of 8.5 percent in 1990-2003,^[40] is physically sustainable only if the parallel huge increase in inequality continues. In fact, as various reports show^[41] the faster the country has grown, the more the gap has opened up between the urban rich on the east coast and rural poor in the western interior. Furthermore, the universalisation of green technologies would not be possible, given their cost and the concentration of world income. And, this, without taking into account the fact that it is at least doubtful whether after the universalisation of such technologies their beneficial impact on the environment will remain the same.

So, as I already mentioned, concentration of power and ecological disintegration do not simply constitute consequences of the establishment of the growth economy, but also fundamental pre-conditions for its reproduction. Contrary to the neo-Keynesian argument of 'civil societarians' who hope that the transnational elite, facing the threat of an inadequate demand because of growing inequality, will be induced to introduce a world mixed economy,^[42] in fact, the opposite is the case. The growth economy in the North not only is not threatened by the growing inequality of the present "internationalised market economy", but, instead, depends on it. Thus, just as the production of the growth economy is not possible without the plundering of nature, its reproduction is equally impossible without further concentration of economic power.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the present concentration of economic, political and social power in the hands of the elites which control the growth economy is not simply a cultural phenomenon related to the values established by the industrial revolution, as significant currents within the ecological movement naively believe. Therefore, the realisation of ecological balance is not just a matter of changes in value-systems (abandonment of the growth logic, consumerism etc.) which would then lead to an eco-friendly way of living and we all live happy ever after. The market/growth economy and the concentration of economic power are opposite sides of the same coin. This means that neither the concentration of economic power nor the ecological implications of the growth economy are avoidable within the present institutional framework of the internationalised market/growth economy.

But – and here is the contradiction – the increase in the concentration of economic power inevitably leads to the realisation that Progress, in the sense of improvements in welfare through growth, has a necessarily non-universal character. Therefore, the moment of truth for the present social system will come when it will be universally acknowledged that the very existence of the present wasteful consumption standards depends on the fact that only a small proportion of the world population, now or in the future, will be able to enjoy them.

THE MEANING OF INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY

If we now accept the thesis I have put forward so far, i.e. that the cause of the ecological crisis, as part of the present multi-dimensional crisis, is ultimately the concentration of power at all levels which is implied by the present socio-economic framework, the obvious conclusion is that the only way out of the crisis is the creation of the subjective and objective conditions which will lead to a new society. A society which, at the institutional

level, will create the necessary conditions for the abolition of concentration of power and, by implication, for the re-integration of nature and society. Such a society is what I call an **inclusive democracy**. So, let's see briefly what we mean by Inclusive Democracy.

We may distinguish between four main types of democracy that constitute the fundamental elements of an inclusive democracy: political, economic, ecological, and 'democracy in the social realm'. We may then define, briefly, political, economic, and democracy in the social realm as the institutional framework that aims at the equal distribution of political, economic, and social power respectively, in other words, as the system which aims at the effective elimination of the domination of human being over human being. Similarly, we may define ecological democracy as the institutional framework that aims at the elimination of any human attempt to dominate the natural world, in other words, as the system which aims to reintegrate humans and nature.

The preconditions therefore for an inclusive democracy are the following:

- political and economic democracy are inseparable in the sense that political or direct democracy—in which political power is shared equally among all citizens—is neither feasible nor desirable, unless it is accompanied by economic democracy in the sense of equal distribution of economic power.
- political and economic democracy do not, by themselves, secure an inclusive democracy, given that political and economic power are not the only forms of power, i.e. an inclusive democracy is inconceivable unless it extends to the broader social sphere to embrace the workplace, the household, the educational institution and indeed any economic or cultural institution which constitutes an element of this realm through various forms of self-management.
- ecological democracy is an indispensable part of inclusive democracy since the attempt to dominate Nature and the attempt to dominate other human beings are integral parts of the relation of domination itself which characterises every hierarchical society.

Of course, an Inclusive Democracy cannot offer any guarantees that the vertical relations of domination will finally be replaced by the horizontal relations of equality and respect for other human beings and Nature. This is because if we see democracy as a process of social self-institution where there is no divinely or 'objectively' defined code of human conduct, such guarantees are by definition ruled out. There is therefore no guarantee that an Inclusive Democracy will be an ecological society. 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 Paideia^[43] will play in an environmentally-friendly institutional framework, would lead to a radical change in the human attitude towards Nature.

So, a democratic ecological problematique cannot go beyond defining the institutional preconditions that offer the best hope for a better human relationship to 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.

At the political level, one could reasonably expect that the establishment of a political or direct democracy will by itself have a very significant effect in reducing the appeal of materialism—the precondition of consumerism— as it will provide a new meaning of life to fill the existential void that the present consumer society creates.

At the economic level, the establishment of an economic democracy would mean that once the market economy is replaced by a confederal ID, the grow-or-die dynamics of the market economy will be replaced by the new social dynamic of the new society: a dynamic aiming not at growth per se but at the satisfaction of the Demos' needs, as expressed by the democratic decisions of the citizens taken either collectively (as regards basic needs) or individually (as regards non-basic needs). But, if the satisfaction of community needs does not depend, as at present, on the continuous expansion of production to cover the wants that the market creates, and if the link between society and economy is restored, then there is no reason why the present instrumentalist view of Nature in which Nature is seen as an instrument of growth will continue conditioning human behaviour.

At the **broader social level**, the establishment of a democracy at the social realm, it is reasonable to assume that with the phasing out of patriarchal relations in the household and of hierarchical relations in general should create a new ethos of non-domination which would engulf both Society and Nature.

Last, but not least, the very 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 environments 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. However, the precondition for the local control of the environment to be successful is that the demos is self-reliant i.e. 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. One should not also forget that the economic effectiveness of the renewable forms of energy (solar, wind, etc.) depends crucially on the organisation of social and economic life in smaller units. Such a solution is impossible within the framework of the internationalised market economy, precisely because it is not compatible with today's concentration of economic, political and social power. This is why the alternative solutions which are being advanced today are solutions which supposedly concentrate many advantages of renewable energy and at the same time do not require any radical changes in the market/growth economy.

In this problematic, it is clear that 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, as we have seen, 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. I think that after the collapse of the state socialist project, democracy may represent the only way out of the multi-dimensional crisis.

Thus, roughly 100 years after the adherents to socialist statism attempted to create a new kind of institutional framework in place of the market economy and representative ‘democracy’, it is becoming increasingly clear today that the autonomy of the social individual can only be achieved in the context of democracy. It is also clear that democracy does not mean the various oligarchic regimes in the North that call themselves today democratic, let alone the despotic regimes in the South. Needless to add that democracy also does not mean an anachronistic return to the classical conception of democracy. Democracy could only mean a genuine, comprehensive democracy in all spheres of life, i.e. what I called an Inclusive Democracy, i.e. a structure and a process which, through direct citizen participation in the decision-making and implementing process, ensures the equal distribution of political, economic, and social power among them.

4. Do we face a reform or revolution dilemma today?

The last question we have to answer refers to the historical dilemma of the Left : reform or revolution? This is the question raised as early as the end of 19th century by the Marxist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, who, replying to the German reformist Bernstein, argued that reforms within the capitalist system and representative democracy could only improve the system’s image but never replace it with a socialist society which can only be achieved through a revolution. Since then, both these two strategies have been tried and both failed.

The failure of state socialist strategies

In the East, the 1917 revolution established a new form of society which managed, at a much lower level of development than that of advanced capitalist countries, to meet better the basic needs of all citizens and achieve a more fair distribution of income than them^[44] —without leaving a very significant part of its population with no proper health, education and sometimes even food and housing! The price paid however was heavy, as the concentration of political and economic power in the hands of the communist party bureaucracy meant that the effect of socialist statism in Eastern Europe was just a change in the personnel of the ruling elites, rather than the elimination of the elites themselves. The growing contradiction between the requirements of efficiency that a growth economy imposed and those that the socialist aims of the official ideology necessitated led eventually to the economic collapse, which was precipitated by the vast expansion of armaments by the Reagan administration.

Similarly, in the West, a social democratic statism in the form of Keynesian policies and the welfare state was established almost everywhere in the North during the post-war period. Reformism seemed to be succeeding in not just changing capitalism’s image but even its essence, through an expansion of the economic role of the state and a corresponding decrease in the power of the market economy. However, the golden age of social democracy

lasted for only a quarter of a century or so since the end of the war and, as neoliberal globalisation took hold, the growing contradiction between the requirements of competitiveness that globalisation imposed and the expansion of statism which was necessitated by the expanding welfare state the inevitable outcome was a radical shrinking, not just of in general but of 'socialist' statism in particular. This implied, among other developments that:

- the full employment objective has been replaced by 'flexible' labour relations, part-time etc,
- the comprehensive welfare state has been replaced by a kind of 'safety network' for the very poor,
- the objective of a fair distribution of income through a progressive income tax system has been replaced by a drastic cut in the taxes for the rich and a consequent increase in inequity.

Faced with this development, social democrat reformists have now adopted a new argument according to which social progress could still come, through the reforms achieved by the pressures "from below" of the civil society. However, as we have already seen, traditional politics has entered a stage of serious crisis, as the accelerating internationalisation of the market economy is met by the continuous decline of representative 'democracy'. At the same time, the pipedreams of some parts of the 'left' for a democratisation of the civil society are doomed since it is clear that the internationalisation of the market economy is being inevitably followed by the internationalisation of the civil society and competition would surely impose the least common denominator standards, as far as social and ecological controls on markets is concerned.

The reform or revolution dilemma transcended

The major problem of any antisystemic strategy, (i.e. a strategy aiming to replace the system of the market economy and representative 'democracy' with new democratic institutions) is the uneven development of consciousness among the population. It is now clear that systemic changes in the past had always taken place within an environment in which only a minority of the population had already broken with the dominant social paradigm, allowing various elites to use the revolutionary outcome in order to create new heteronomous forms of society.

It is not, in other words, the adverse objective conditions alone which led to the degradation and final collapse of 'actually existing socialism' and not just the hierarchical structure of communist parties, the ideology of 'democratic centralism' etc —although all these factors did contribute significantly to this outcome.

History has confirmed that the Marxist-Leninist strategy could only lead to new hierarchical structures, as the vanguard of the working class becomes at the end the new ruling elite^[45]. This was the main lesson of the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' which has clearly shown that if the revolution is organised, and then its program carried out, through a minority, it is bound to end up with new hierarchical structures rather than with a society where concentration of power has been abolished.

In fact, the combination of the Marxist conversion of the socialist project into an 'objective' science with the Leninist strategy of organising the vanguard on the basis of 'democratic centralism' (a principle ensuring the power of a small party elite over the entire movement) proved lethal, as it decisively contributed to the establishment of new hierarchical structures, initially, in the socialist movement and, later in society at large^[46].

Similarly, more recent antisystemic approaches, like the Libertarian Municipalism approach suggested by social ecologists^[47] could, at best, create a consciousness for political democracy and not for economic and ecological democracy, as well as a democracy in the social realm. The creation of such an 'inclusive' consciousness requires citizens to experience for themselves an inclusive democracy in practice and this can only be achieved if they take active part in the establishment and in the running of alternative political, economic and social institutions, rather than simply political institutions, as this strategy suggests.

The crucial issue, therefore, is how a systemic change, which presupposes a rupture with the past both at the subjective level of consciousness and at the institutional level, could be brought about by a majority of the population, 'from below', so that a democratic abolition of power structures could become feasible. To my mind, the only way to transcend the historical dilemma of reform vs. revolution is through a political strategy that comprises the gradual involvement of increasing numbers of people in a new kind of politics and the parallel shifting of economic resources (labour, capital, land) away from the market economy. The aim of such a transitional strategy should be to create changes in the institutional framework and value systems that, after a period of tension between the new institutions and the state, would, at some stage, replace the market economy, statist democracy, as well as the social paradigm "justifying" them, with an inclusive democracy and a new democratic paradigm respectively^[48].

The immediate objective should therefore be the creation, from below, of 'popular bases of political and economic power', that is, the establishment of local public realms of direct and economic democracy which, at some stage, would confederate in order to create the conditions for the establishment of a new society. This could be done through a combination of practices, involving not only the usual defensive struggles in support of the victims of the neoliberal globalisation, but also the creation of new institutions at the local level which prefigure a future society.

This process could be helped enormously by contesting local elections—an activity that does provide the most effective means to massively publicise a programme for an inclusive democracy, as well as the opportunity to initiate its immediate implementation on a significant social scale. In other words, contesting local elections is not just an educational exercise, but also an expression of the belief that it is only at the local level that direct and economic democracy can be founded today. Thus, contesting local elections gives the chance to start changing society from below, which is the only democratic strategy, as against the statist approaches, which aim to change society from above through the conquest of state power, and the 'civil society' approaches, which do not aim to a systemic change at all. It is because the *demos* is the fundamental social and economic unit of a future democratic society that we have to start from the local level to change society.

Therefore, the main aim of direct action, as well as of the participation in local elections, is

not just the conquest of power but the rupture of the socialisation process and therefore the creation of a democratic majority "from below", which will legitimise the new structures of inclusive democracy. This is because the rupture in the socialisation process can only be gradual and in continuous interaction with the phased implementation of the program for the inclusive democracy, which, for the reasons mentioned above, should always start at the local level. On the other hand, an attempt to implement the new project through the conquest of power at the national level does not offer any opportunity for such an interaction between theory and practice and for the required homogenisation of consciousness with respect to the need for systemic change.

However, I should emphasise that gaining local elections will have no effect whatsoever in radically changing society if this is not an integral part of a new political movement with a clear social project, i.e. its own analysis of the present multi-dimensional crisis and a relatively concrete view of the form a new society should take beyond the boundaries of both the capitalist market economy and statist socialism. It is only a political programme based on the commitment to create institutions of an inclusive democracy which could eventually capture the imagination of the majority of the population that presently suffers from the effects of the political and economic concentration of power. Alternatively, if building alternative institutions at the local level is not part of such a political project and, instead, the movement is restricted to the goal of a local ecological democracy, then, it will simply be assimilated and eventually emasculated by the existing system, as it so frequently happened in recent history with similar movements.

To my mind, this approach offers the most realistic strategy today to tackle here and now the fundamental social, economic, and ecological problems we face and at the same time to dismantle the existing power structures.

* This article is based on a lecture given at the University of Turin on May 2006.

[1] See T. Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy* (Cassell/Continuum 1997), *Per Una Democrazia Globale* (Eleuthera, 1999 and *Vers une democratie generale*, (Seuil, 2002)

[2] See the report on global warming by the UN group of scientists which met in Shanghai in January 2001, Tim Radford and Paul Brown, *The Guardian* (31/1/2001).

[3] See David Adam. 'UN scientists issue dire warning on global warming', *The Guardian* (28/2/2006).

[4] Andrew Grice, "'Millions at risk' from escalation in global warming", *The Independent* (15/4/2006).

[5] Jonathan Brown, 'Factory farms in Asia blamed for pandemic', *The Independent* (8/4/2006).

[6] Louis Uchitelle and N.R. Kleinfield, *International Herald Tribune* (6 March 1996).

[7] Steve Fleetwood, 'Less unemployment, but more bad employment', *The Guardian* (13/9/1999).

[8] UN, *Human Development Report 2005*, Table 5.

[9] Calculations on the *World Development Report 2000/2001*, World Bank, Tables 1 and 10.

[10] Ted Trainer, 'Where are we, where do we want to be, how do we get there?', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (July 2000), pp. 267-285.

- [11] Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanisation to Cities*, (Cassell, 1995) Chapt. 6 and Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, (Oxford Univ. Press, 1991) Chapt. 7.
- [12] Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Retreat from Autonomy" in *World in Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) p. 43.
- [13] Hamish Mcrae, 'Why there will be many more angry voters and hung elections in Europe', *The Independent* (12/4/2006).
- [14] J.K. Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993)
- [15] See T. Fotopoulos, *Drugs: Beyond penalisation and liberalisation* (in Greek) (Athens: Eleftheros Typos, 1999)
- [16] Sam Jones, 'More than half of jails in England are too full', *The Guardian* (13/8/2005).
- [17] Martin Woolcott, "The March of a Martial Law", *The Guardian* (20 Jan. 1996).
- [18] See, e.g., Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Imre Lakatos, *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1975).
- [19] See Takis Fotopoulos, '[The Rise of New Irrationalism and its Incompatibility with Inclusive Democracy](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 4, Nos. 2/3 (July/November 1998), pp. 1-49.
- [20] For extensive bibliography, see *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, ch 8
- [21] Ibid.
- [22] C. Castoriadis, "The Retreat from Autonomy."
- [23] See T. Fotopoulos, '[The Myth of Postmodernity](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 2001).
- [24] T. Fotopoulos, '[The End of Traditional Antisystemic Movements and the Need for A New Type of Antisystemic Movement Today](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (November 2001), pp. 415-456.
- [25] See, e.g., Henri Lepage, *Tomorrow, Capitalism, The Economics of Economic Freedom* (London: Open Court, 1982); Nick Bousanquet, *After the New Right* (London: Heinemann, 1983), Mark Hayes, *The New Right in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1994).
- [26] Edward Wolff, "How the Pie Is Sliced: America's Growing Concentration of Wealth", *The American Prospect* (summer 1995).
- [27] See John Ely, "Libertarian Ecology and Civil Society"; and Konstantinos Kavoulakos, "The Relationship of Realism and Utopianism: The Theories of Democracy of Habermas and Castoriadis," *Society and Nature*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1994).
- [28] Michael Walzer, "The Civil Society Argument", in *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*, ed by Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1992) p. 100.
- [29] Walzer, "The Civil Society Argument", p. 104.
- [30] See, for instance, Hilary Wainwright, *Arguments for a New Left, Answering the Free Market Right* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), Chapt. 3.
- [31] *TID*, Ch 2; see also, M. Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1988).
- [32] At the beginning of the millennium, 24 percent of the world population lived in absolute poverty or, alternatively, 32 percent lived in relative poverty (World Bank, World Development Report 2000/2001, Tables 1.1. & 1.2)
- [33] Serge Latouche, "The globe downshifted", *Le Monde diplomatique* (January 2006).
- [34] For a useful description of eco-socialism and its differences from eco-anarchism and other green tendencies, see David Pepper, *Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice* (London: Routledge, 1993), and *Modern Environmentalism* (London: Routledge, 1996).

- [35] See James O'Connor, "Capitalism, Nature, Socialism," *Society and Nature*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1992), pp. 174-202.
- [36] Michael Albert, *Parecon, Life After Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2003)
- [37] See the works of Murray Bookchin, for instance, *Remaking Society* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1989), *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1995), *From Urbanization to Cities: Toward a New Politics of Citizenship* (London: Cassell, 1995).
- [38] World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2005*, Tables 2.1 & 3.8
- [39] *ibid.* Table 3.7.
- [40] UN, *Human Development Report 2005*, Table 14
- [41] see e.g. Jon Watts, 'A tale of two countries', *The Guardian* (9/11/2004).
- [42] Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalisation in Question*, p. 163.
- [43] T. Fotopoulos, '[From \(mis\)education to Paideia](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 2003).
- [44] See for analysis and references, T. Fotopoulos, "[The Catastrophe of Marketization](#)", *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (July 1999).
- [45] See Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, Ch 2.
- [46] See Takis Fotopoulos, '[Transitional strategies and the Inclusive Democracy project](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2002).
- [47] Janet Biehl, *The Politics of Social Ecology*, (Montreal: Black Rose, 1997) ch. 7.
- [48] For a detailed description of this strategy, see *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, ch. 7 and 'Transitional strategies'.