

Crisis Culture and the Waning of Revolutionary Politics*

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Since the election of George Bush in 2000 (and his re-election in 2004), the tragedy of 9/11, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and ever more indicators of human-induced global climate change, the crisis in the social and natural worlds has sharpened considerably. The deterioration of society and nature demands a profound, systematic, and radical political response, yet in recent decades Left opposition movements have grown weaker in proportion to their importance. As the globe spirals ever deeper into disaster, with all things becoming ever more tightly knit into the tentacles of global capitalism, and as oppositional voices propose programs of reform and moderation at best, there is an urgent need for new conceptual and political maps and compasses to help steer humanity into a viable mode of existence. Karl Marx's 1843 call for a "ruthless criticism of everything existing" has never been more pressing and profound than in contemporary times of predatory global capitalism, neoliberalism, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the demise of social democracies, the police states of George Bush and Tony Blair, the assault on liberties and the criminalization of dissent, species extinction, rainforest destruction, resource wars, and global warming.

Given the advances of capitalism and the cooptation and retreat of radical politics, it is urgent that genuine oppositional viewpoints be kept alive and nurtured in intellectual, public, and political forums. When one considers the paucity of radical viewpoints that still survive, the project of Inclusive Democracy immediately comes to mind as one of the few, if not the only, coherent and comprehensive theoretical and political frameworks for systemic social change. Inclusive Democracy aims to develop a radical theoretical analysis of -- and political solution to -- the catastrophic social and environmental impact of the market economies spawned by Western capitalist nations. This approach is *inclusive* in two senses. First, it seeks to transform all realms of public life, economic, political, legal, cultural, educational, and so on. Second, it aims to incorporate a wide diversity of social voices (or at least those legitimate expressions of difference not dedicated to ending difference and democracy by imposing authoritarian, elite, and fascist systems onto others) into revitalized public spheres. It is a form of radical *democracy* in its synthesis of classical Greek and libertarian socialist outlooks, a perspective that seeks to abolish all hierarchies and dissolve power into confederated local direct, economic, social and ecological democracies.

Cultures in Crisis

The Inclusive Democracy project was developed in the 1990s by Takis Fotopoulos in the pages of *Society and Nature* and *Democracy and Nature*. These journals were dedicated

to analyzing the broad social crisis, the ecological crisis, and their interrelationships. In 1997, Fotopoulos systematized his ideas in a landmark work entitled, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy: The Crisis of the Growth Economy and the Need for a New Liberatory Project* (London/New York: Cassell/ Continuum)^[1]. The international character and influence of Inclusive Democracy is evident in the publication of Fotopoulos' book in Italian, Greek, French, Latin American, and German editions (with Chinese and Arab editions also on the way), and debates and contributions generated by theorists throughout Europe, the UK, the US, and Latin America.^[2]

The immense crisis that Inclusive Democracy seeks to analyze and solve is two-fold, defining both the realities of global capitalism and the numerous failed attempts to oppose it. Inclusive Democracy theorizes a multidimensional crisis (political, economic, social, ecological, and cultural) in the objective world which sharpened after World War II. Fuelled by new forms of science and technology, military expansion, and aggressive colonization of Southern nations, capitalism evolved into a truly global system, one inspired by neoliberal visions of nations as open markets that flow and grow without restrictions and regulations, driven by multinational corporations such as ExxonMobil and Monsanto, anchored in transnational institutions and courts like the WTO, and homogenizing nations into a single economic organism through arrangements such as NAFTA. As formulated by Fotopoulos, and developed in dialogue with radical theorists throughout the world, the Inclusive Democracy project considers the ultimate cause of the present multidimensional crisis to be the concentration of economic and political power in the hands of various elites. This power is maintained and reproduced by the dynamics of the global market economy and its political complement, representative "democracy" – a mystification that Fotopoulos dismisses as a form of "liberal technocracy" which disempowers citizens in the name of representing their interests.

Yet, where one might expect this multifaceted crisis to generate an appropriate political response, another crisis has formed. Theoretical and political opposition to global capitalism – in any significant and truly radical form embodying democratic social and political alternatives -- has collapsed. Elitism, bureaucratic domination, and the destruction of nature was grotesquely replayed in various "communist" or "socialist" states that intended or alleged to present an "alternative" to capitalist systems. The European tradition of Social Democracy, dating back to Edward Bernstein and the German Social Democratic Party in the early 20th century, presented itself as an alternative to both capitalism and bureaucratic socialism, but unavoidably succumbed to the failed logic of reformism that attempted to repair rather than radically transform a system with inherent structural flaws. Social Democracy mounted no effective alternative or opposition and today is little but a museum piece amidst increasing the privatization and market domination of European nation states.

Inclusive Democracy seeks to show how the discourse of democracy has been distorted and perverted in order to build empires, dig graveyards, and wage wars in the name of "freedom, democracy, and progress" – three of the most distorted concepts in the modern lexicon, to which in the post-9/11 era we must also add "security." Yet no discourse or concept is more important today than that of *democracy*, and so Fotopoulos tries to clarify its real meaning and redeem the concept from limitless forms of corruption. In Western "liberal" form, for instance, Fotopoulos notes that "democracy has become a spectator sport in which the general public chooses sides among contending groups of experts."^[3] It is

urgent, he insists, to recover the authentic meaning of democracy, such as relates to autonomy, citizenship, education, and the self-management of people.

Since the 1960s, more current forms of critique and resistance have emerged, but none proved to be significant or enduring forces of opposition and radical change. From the “new social movements” and subsequent “identity politics” formations (feminism, civil rights, gay and lesbian liberation, multiculturalism, anti-nuclear groups, and so on) to apolitical, reformist, and esoteric postmodernism; from the Green movement to the mystical tendencies of deep ecology, Fotopoulos finds organizations and political expressions that are reformist, subjectivist, irrational, or co-opted, leaving a barren political scene devoid of significant resistance to ever-destructive forms of capitalist domination. Beginning in the 1990s, a far more promising approach – variously described as “anti-globalization,” “alter-globalization,” or “globalization from below” (as opposed to “globalization from above”) -- has emerged to challenge transnational capitalism. Unlike the fragmentary nature of identity politics, alter-globalization movements often advance radical visions and have crossed various political lines and geographical boundaries to form alliances against global capitalism. While recognizing potential in these movements, Fotopoulos nonetheless finds that they lack an “anti-systemic” perspective (i.e., a holistic and radical critique of the totality of capitalist systems) and a viable democratic alternative to market domination and manifold social hierarchies.

For Fotopoulos, a truly “radical” or “anti-systemic” viewpoint has a social not individual emphasis. It upholds the importance of rational debate and criticism over mystical and subjective turns, avoids utopian fantasies in order to focus on real challenges and possibilities for change, links environmental problems to social and political problems, and understands capitalism and hierarchical social systems as interrelated problems that require overarching and coherent solutions. Moreover, such a standpoint insists on the crucial importance of articulating compelling alternatives to capitalism and of building transitional strategies. Its key objective is to tackle the most crucial and basic problem of all – the unequal distribution of political and economic power – and to solve it in favour of genuine democracy, rather than leaving corrosive and destructive arrangements intact so that the social and ecological crisis can deepen still further.

Where some people concede defeat, others declare this to be the best of all possible worlds (I'd hate to see the worst) with the entrenchment of Western “liberal democracy” (Francis Fukuyama). And while these self-ascribed prophets announce the “end of history” with the “death of the masses” (Jean Baudrillard), others fight for meaningless reforms and lesser evils (liberals, labor bureaucrats, democrats, et. al). Against the prevailing forms of complacency and nihilism, one of the first conditions of change is the realization that things could and must be profoundly different than as organized by the prevailing social prisms/prisons. Whereas Inclusive Democracy diagnoses crises, one of the gravest and most fundamental problems today is a *crisis of the political imagination*. Social critique and change in the slaughterhouse of global capitalism needs to be guided and informed by powerful descriptions of *what is* – the degraded forfeiture of human potential in a world where over a billion people struggle for mere existence. But social transformation must also be inspired by bold new visions of *what can be*, by imaginative projections of how human beings might harmoniously relate to one another and the living/dying earth.

Radicals such as Herbert Marcuse and Murray Bookchin have recognized that so-called “utopian” visions are not -- when authentic -- starry-eyed dreams of abstract ideals, but

rather can be empirically grounded in actual social tendencies and existing potential for a rational, egalitarian, and ecological society. It must be emphasized, however, that Inclusive Democracy explicitly differentiates itself from the “objective” rationalism of the Enlightenment, such as both Marcuse and Bookchin adopt, since “the project for a democratic society cannot be grounded on an evolutionary process of social change, either a teleological one (such as Marx’s dialectical materialism) or a non-teleological one (such as Bookchin’s dialectical naturalism).”^[4]

Still, as Fotopoulos emphasizes, “the fact that no grand evolutionary schemes of Progress are supported by History does not mean that we should overemphasise the significance of the ‘social imaginary’ (in the Castoriadian terminology) at the expense of the ‘systemic’ elements.”^[5] On this basis, the Inclusive Democracy project sees History “as the continuous interaction between creative human action and the existing institutional framework, i.e., as the interaction between the ‘imaginary’ and the ‘systemic’ elements, the outcome of which is always unpredictable.”^[6] Similarly, Inclusive Democracy envisions a true democratic society to be “a rupture, a break in the historical continuity that the heteronomous society has historically established.”^[7]

The Genealogy of Marketization

Beginning with the premise that capitalism is a grow-or-die system antithetical to democracy, human needs, and ecological sustainability, Fotopoulos provides a valuable overview of the restructuring of global capitalism. In his genealogy of the modern state and economy, he traces the “marketization” process (which transforms all goods and services into commodities as it transmogrifies the citizen into the consumer) through three phases: liberal, statist, and neoliberal. In the classic *liberal stage*, the market became separated from society for the first time in history, as competition within capitalist nations played out with little or no social control. In the *statist stage*, which in the U.S. emerged after the depression of the 1930s, the economy is partially managed by the state, and social welfare institutions are set in place. Finally, in the current *neoliberal stage*, which unfolded rapidly since the recent internationalization of the market economy and the conservative revolutions in Britain and the U.S. during the 1980s, marketization processes increasingly are universalized and the long-sought goal of the maximal role of the market and minimal role of the state is attained.

On Fotopoulos’ reading, because of the growing globalization of the market economy and the triumph of commodity logic, capitalism has already passed through its “statist” phase of organization, where nation states intervened in the market in order to control its crisis tendencies and fashioned a social welfare state designed to secure full employment and allocate resources to those most in need. Forebodingly, Fotopoulos argues that the neoliberal stage is not merely a temporary phenomenon, but rather represents “the political consequence of structural changes in the market economy system that could lead to the completion of the marketization process – a historical process that was merely interrupted by the statist phase.”^[8] Marketization dynamics have knitted capitalist nations into a global system dominated by institutions such as NAFTA, the European Union (EU), the Association of South-East Asian nations (ASEAN), the Southern Cone Common Market in Latin America (MERCOSUS), and the WTO. Nations still have interests and powers independent from transnational forces, but Fotopoulos insists that in a global competition

among various economic blocs, this role is diminishing, while citizenship and democracy themselves slide into decline.

The implications of the neoliberal stage of capitalist marketization are enormous, as capitalism co-opts and defeats its enemies and thereby perfects itself through the autonomization of the economy from society. According to Fotopoulos, "A neoliberal consensus has swept over the advanced capitalist world and has replaced the social-democratic consensus of the early post-war period."^[9] Not only have "existing socialist societies" been negated in the global triumph of capitalism (and Fotopoulos provides a lengthy and acute analysis of how socialist statism mirrored its capitalist "other" and dissolved through its own contradictions), so too have social democratic movements.

In support of this thesis, Fotopoulos observes that national governments such as Sweden increasingly have abandoned government regulation of the economy and attempts to provide effective social services, while social democratic parties themselves ignore or parody the social dimensions of their tradition in favor of neoliberal policies. If statism is now obsolete, the social democratic project becomes unrealizable and there cannot even be moderate reforms able to withstand the assault of privatization and demand to conform to global market imperatives. Thus, Fotopoulos insists, "no national government today may follow economic policies that are disapproved by the capital markets, which have the power to create an intolerable economic pressure on the respective country's borrowing ability, currency value and investment flows."^[10] Every "socialist" leader who has tried to maintain an effective social welfare system or any kind of protectionist policies – whether Francois Mitterrand in France or George Papandreou in Greece – has been forced to surrender to transnational capitalist policies or be completely bulldozed by the juggernaut of marketization.^[11]

Thus, Fotopoulos diagnoses troubled conditions where both bureaucratic socialist countries and social democracies have failed to overturn capitalism, let alone to reform it in any enduring and substantive way. Fotopoulos shows how Marx himself fetishized growth, industrialism, and science and technology (which Marx argued would almost automatically bring human liberation when fully developed), and how Marxists and dependency theorists alike fail to challenge the socially and ecologically destructive logic of a growth-oriented economy. In *Towards an Inclusive Democracy*, the consequences of such a system become staggeringly clear when Fotopoulos takes the reader on a tour of Southern nations caught in the ravaging grip of debt, export, structural adjustment programs, poverty, hunger, disease, and environmental degradation, all of which he argues are inevitable consequences and by-products of neoliberal policies.^[12]

Fotopoulos relates a crucial *grand narrative* of the life and death of social democracy and Leftist traditions, a story that is quite different from the *metanarrative* rightly criticized by Jean-Francois Lyotard and other postmodernists.^[13] For whereas a grand narrative is an empirically-grounded story of social change, a metanarrative is a metaphysical tale of unfolding social improvement and perfection. With postmodernists, Fotopoulos criticizes metanarratives as ideological mystifications that promote the modern ideology of Progress as attained through the development of science, technology, free markets, and the cult of expertise. Fotopoulos is relentless in his criticism of the unregulated (by society at large rather than only by elites) advance of these forces and the catastrophic social and environmental impact of economic growth and profit imperatives. He shows that the

Western tradition of “heteronomy (i.e., the tradition of non-questioning of existing laws, traditions and beliefs that in a hierarchical society guarantee the concentration of political and economic power in the hands of elites), has never in fact led to a tradition of autonomy, and that the forms of freedom and democracy created remained partial, distorted, and wholly inadequate to the social forms human beings require for an autonomous existence with one another and a viable existence with the natural world.

Unlike most postmodernists, however, Fotopoulos describes the current global situation as one of advanced capitalism, as a new form of modernity, rather than as a vague and rootless “postmodernity.” Whereas postmodernists emphasize breaks and discontinuities, Fotopoulos highlights the continuity of the last few centuries of capitalist social development in terms of privatization and market domination.^[14] And whereas postmodernists typically espouse a relativism that disables normative and political criticism, Fotopoulos insists that ethical and political values can be grounded in non-arbitrary conditions. As he points out, “the type of general relativism, which is adopted by post-modernism, simply expresses the latter's abandonment of any critique of the institutionalised social reality and a general retreat to conformism.”^[15] Moreover, as he stresses in another passage, “once we have made a choice among the main traditions, in other words, once we have defined the content of the liberatory project in terms of the autonomy tradition, certain important implications follow at the ethical level, as well as at the interpretational level”^[16]—a position that rules out any kind of subjectivist arbitrariness.^[17] Fotopoulos rejects the individualism and fragmented identity politics of multiculturalists and postmodernists in favor of emphasizing the need for social-institutional change and a global anti-capitalist politics of alliance. Finally, Fotopoulos finds that some explicit attempts at postmodern politics, such as the “radical democracy” of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, are simply fetid reformist wine repackaged in shiny new theoretical bottles.^[18] Despite its one-time flair and flourish, postmodernism, for Fotopoulos, is just another dead-end road unable to carry humanity toward democracy and autonomy over and against domination and heteronomy.

The Road to Democracy

Either the vision of a radical democracy must die, and we acquiesce to something like Fukuyama's notion of the “end of history” (i.e., the triumph of capitalism at the alleged endgame of human moral and political evolution), or we radically reconstruct the democratic project.^[19] Fotopoulos of course takes the latter path, unwavering in his insistence that reform and social democratic projects are obsolete and doomed to failure. Given the power of neoliberal, neoconservative, reformist, and pseudo-subversive ideologies, much debris has to be cleared out of the way, and thus Fotopoulos critically engages Social Democracy, communitarianism, deep ecology, postmodernism, Greens, and various alter-globalization approaches.

In his examination, Fotopoulos finds various competing political perspectives to be both “ahistorical and utopian.” They are *ahistorical* in that they fail to recognize the magnitude of the neoliberal restructuring of capital (and typically replicate its individualist and market-based ideologies). And they are *utopian* because they ignore the grow-or-die logic of the market economy, the universalization of this process, and the irreversibility of the

post-statist phase of capitalist reconstruction which nullifies any attempt to return to social democracy policies for state protection of labor, various social groups, and the environment. The irony, Fotopoulos observes, is that Social Democracy and reform approaches in general are the real “utopian” project, because these perspectives believe that meaningful changes can emerge within neoliberal institutions that are antithetical to anything but crass market objectives and brute power politics. Inclusive Democracy, however, frankly recognizes the need for the complete transformation of the global capitalist system, as well as to offer *concrete alternatives and proposals* for rebuilding society along the lines of autonomy and ecology.

Fotopoulos draws inspiration from the classical democratic tradition which was born in classical Athens and libertarian socialism, along with their theorization by, among others, Castoriadis’ autonomy project, and Bookchin’s social ecology/communalist project. Also engaging various modern social movements (radical Green, libertarian, feminist), Fotopoulos seeks to develop a new liberatory synthesis. On the hypothesis (argued throughout the first part of *Towards an Inclusive Democracy*) that inequality and hierarchy are the sources of crises in culture, politics, economics, and ecology, Fotopoulos seeks the abolition of the unequal distribution of political and economic power, as well as the elimination of all hierarchical relations in society.

Fotopoulos shows that the new democracy is *necessary*, given the multidimensional nature of the crisis which stems from the concentration of economic power that inevitably results from a market economy and its attendant representative “democracy.” He also suggests some key institutional preconditions that can be constructed to abolish concentrated systems of power. Only in, decentralized, self-governing, interconnected communities can individuals realize the necessary and sufficient conditions of an inclusive democracy (conditions which Fotopoulos notes never have been realized historically), since only on a local scale can people participate meaningfully in society as citizens and attain “demotic” (or, community) ownership of productive resources and govern their allocation. Post-capitalist society, sprung from the political and cultural organization for a new economy and polity, begins with the transformation of city governments into inclusive democracies and their linkage into confederations.

Since political democracy requires economic democracy (as money creates hierarchies and controls votes), the contemporary liberation project must be rooted in a new theory of economics. Key to Fotopoulos’ political position is the assertion that “the objective of a new liberatory project should not merely be the abolition of capitalist property relations but that of the market economy itself.”^[20] Whereas emphasis on confederalism is common among social anarchists and left libertarians, a distinguishing feature of Fotopoulos’ analysis is his concrete emphasis on producing and exchanging goods in a non-market economy and democratically allocating scarce resources in a way that reconciles the social and individual dimensions of human life. This is what makes economic democracy necessary in the Inclusive Democracy project, in contrast to anarchists and social ecologists who, starting from an objective definition of human needs, believe in the communist myth of a “post-scarcity” society (rightly criticised by Hannah Arendt) in which no problem of democratic allocation of resources arises. Fotopoulos’ approach, therefore, radically differs from Bookchin’s notion of a “post-scarcity” anarchism and the economics of social ecology,^[21] which he criticizes for lacking specifics on alternative economics and systems of resource allocation (which Bookchin phrases in the vague terms of a new “moral economy”).^[22]

Fotopoulos rejects attempts to reconcile capitalism and socialism by creating a "mixed economy" or market institutions democratically governed. For Fotopoulos, a "socialist market" is an oxymoron, since markets are growth mechanisms and commodity logic breeds uncontrollable expansion. Seeking to meet fundamental aims in satisfying human needs (both essential and non-essential) and to synthesize collective and individual decision making, Fotopoulos roots his vision of a decommodified economy in a voucher system.^[23] There would be a social allocation of work, along with rotating functions, where necessary.^[24] By placing heavy emphasis on freedom of choice and localized institutions, this theory differs significantly from socialist views of "economic democracy" and "participatory economics"^[25] that fail to minimize the dangers of a new bureaucratic system of planning emerging.

No theory will be convincing if it does not offer realistic alternatives to the present set of arrangements that are so entrenched as to seem unshakeable or subject only to minor improvements. Thus, as Fotopoulos emphasizes: "all the proposed strategies for political and economic change and the transitional projects involved are useless unless they are part of a comprehensive program for social transformation that explicitly aims at replacing the market economy and statist democracy by an inclusive democracy."^[26] Fotopoulos offers positive, constructive, and fairly detailed visions of how the future can come about and what it might look like, while trying to avoid the problem of dogmatism dictating to the future what its society should be.

Thus, Inclusive Democracy seeks to construct a new form of decentralized democracy based on confederations of local inclusive democracies. This approach aims to reintegrate society with economy, polity, and nature by striving to achieve the equal distribution of power at all levels. Such a society can exist only in contradiction with capitalist institutions, rather than in compromise or accommodation to it. Inclusive Democracy seeks a break and rupture with capitalism, technocracy, bureaucratic domination, and, indeed, the entire classist, statist, and heteronomy tradition of the Western world. The primary values of Inclusive Democracy are autonomy (in the original sense of the word that involves "self rule") and democracy (the direct rule of citizens over their social life). For Fotopoulos, democracy has only one genuine meaning, and this entails the active involvement of informed citizens in the regulation of their own lives, without mediation of "experts" or elites of any kind.

Equally as important to the vision of a new society is a theory of how to get there, or, a transitional strategy. Fotopoulos opposes the Marxist-Leninist insurrectionist vision of precipitating a sudden and cataclysmic "revolution." One problem with this approach is that change unfolds too rapidly and new objective conditions are brought about without appropriate new subjective conditions. Moreover, this method invariably depends on a "vanguard" concept that involves elitism and authoritarianism, and thereby is a betrayal of progressive political ideals of equality and democracy. Through the critical education method of *paideia* and actual experience with building democracy, Inclusive Democracy envisions a manner in which people can create vital democracies uncontaminated with elitism and the cult of expertise. Against the criticism that people are fundamentally lazy, apathetic, and apolitical, Fotopoulos argues that people are capable of building democracies, new social forms they will identify with, value, and thus defend against inevitable reaction and counter-attacks. As for the ever-present threat of violence,

Fotopoulos claims that it will be a real threat only when it is too late, already after the democratic “paradigm” would have become hegemonic in the Gramscian sense. These new democratic communities, of course, will be constructed in as many local bases as possible, but they must ultimately be interconnected into federations at the national and international levels. Just as “socialism in one country,” “Inclusive Democracy in one country” is an oxymoron, for capitalism is global and isolated communities are highly vulnerable.

Thus, in place of antiquated and problematic visions of insurrection, convulsive revolution, and storming the barricades (or centers of power that no longer exist in a rhizomatic global capitalist world), Inclusive Democracy emphasizes the need for preparatory transitions. To be sure, the radical vision here is optimistic, but it is grounded in existing historical possibilities and concrete ideas for new social forms. Fotopoulos believes that a revolutionary project is “realistic” to the extent local economic and political bases of Inclusive Democracy can take root, interconnect, nourish new cultures and subjectivities, and win over a majority of the population. Subsequently, “an alternative social paradigm will have become hegemonic and the break in the socialization process ... will have occurred.”^[27]

Fotopoulos' vision, then, is creating and securing a counter-hegemonic inclusive democratic culture, stage-by-stage, until a new global economic, political, and cultural order is achieved. He offers a resolute, militant, holistic insistence on the need to negate hierarchies and power structures in order to comprehensively rebuild society from below: “Town by town, city by city, region by region will be taken away from the effective control of the market economy and the nation-state, their political and economic structures being replaced by the confederations of democratically run communities.”^[28]

Fotopoulos offers the kind of radical insights to be truly visionary, to be “utopian” in the best sense of the term which seeks to identify existing potentialities for systemic change. Inclusive Democracy thereby is not the *u-topos* of a non-society that cannot possibly exist, but rather the *eu-topos* of a good society existing *in potential*, to be born through radical struggle in building a new democratic society. The approach of Inclusive Democracy shows that humankind must find a way beyond the Charybdis of an internationalized capitalism and the Scylla of socialist statism, between the false options of individualism and collectivism. Inclusive Democracy maps out a third way, one predicated on building a federation of self-organized political and economic institutions at local levels. With no guarantee of success, and few historical examples of genuine democracies, the Inclusive Democracy project is an experiment in human possibilities.

Whatever choices human beings make, they are not capricious; steering clear of the false dilemma of objectivism and relativism, Fotopoulos' *Toward an Inclusive Democracy* brings into play some elaborate philosophical machinery to demonstrate that while human choices cannot be justified or “proven” through appeal to Divine mandates, historical “laws,” or “objective tendencies,” neither are they arbitrary or of equal value. Laying claim to freedom as the highest human value, the task becomes to justify it as such, work through its implications, and struggle for the institutional mechanisms best able to realize it.

About This Volume

This book seeks to collect some of the most significant statements and critical reviews of the Inclusive Democracy project. *Global Capitalism and the Demise of the Left: Renewing Radicalism through Inclusive Democracy* is diverse in viewpoints and perspectives, yet it is thematically consistent in that all essays scrutinize the current social and environment crisis and critically engage the resources of Inclusive Democracy for diagnosing the predicament and proposing an alternative mode of social and political life. These perspectives raise numerous important issues about human nature, the need and possibilities for radical democracy, and Fotopoulos' readings of various theorists and historical traditions.

While many writers affirm, develop, and apply the theoretical and political insights of Fotopoulos' work and Inclusive Democracy, others express scepticism and raise fundamental objections. In the spirit of the Inclusive Democracy project, there is no dogma laid down here, no party line to follow. The reader will find, rather, the exposition and application of a powerful and provocative new theory of hierarchy and domination, of historical development and social organization, of the relationship between society and ecology, and of democracy uniquely conceived apart from all markets and relations of domination and subordination. *Global Capitalism and the Demise of the Left* features fruitful dialogues that are dynamic and ongoing.

Part One begins with "Our Aims," whereby the Inclusive Democracy International Network lays out its basic theoretical and political positions which other essayists develop and/or respond to. This is a succinct but eloquent statement of the traditions Fotopoulos seeks to advance, and those he works to renounce. Next, in "Ecofascism or Ecodemocracy? Towards De-growth," Serge Latouche provides an excellent example of the emerging new ways of thinking and acting theorized by Inclusive Democracy. As corporate leaders and politicians try to chant the mantra of "Growth!" above the roar of mounting ecological devastation, Latouche urges "a drastic reduction of humanity's ecological footprint" and the need for a counter-policy of "de-growth." For Latouche, capitalism is incompatible with an ecological society, but nevertheless has imposed growth and profit imperatives virtually everywhere through globalization. Whereas some are sceptical of the belief that any quasi-democratic management of the environmental crisis is possible, and suppose instead that only an "ecototalitarian" form of capitalism could enforce major changes in the production and consumption systems, Latouche champions building ecological democracy at local levels as a viable and realistic alternative. Rejecting the homogenizing vision of a "universal democracy" or world government, Latouche instead affirms the need for a diversity of approaches, and draws inspiration from the example of Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas in Mexico, who mounted a formidable resistance movement and took the first steps towards a decentralized and democratized society.

In "Market and Society," Takis Nikolopoulos, although he has some reservations on Fotopoulos' rejection of the civil society approach on the grounds that citizens' movements could yet form the organic "systemic" parts of a wider movement for a radical change aiming at the inclusive and genuine democracy, applauds Inclusive Democracy as a new model of "democratic rationalism" and interprets it as a liberating and historically plausible proposal. His conclusion is that although the Inclusive Democracy project includes elements of utopia, in the positive sense of the word, still, Fotopoulos "does not refer to an idealist kind ideal society, as he takes into serious consideration reality." His model is rather based on realistic utopia (and) after all, "utopias may have died but utopia (as a vision) is still alive." Rafael Sposito's essay, "Towards a New Vision for Global Society,"

draws from recent trends in contemporary social theory (particularly the postmodern break from foundationalism) to redefine categories such as human nature, freedom, and democracy and free them from ideologies of domination. Sposito addresses how such normative claims are no longer tied to timeless "truths," but rather must be rethought as thoroughly historical and embodied in social relations. He shows how this move helps to challenge power itself, and thereby promotes Fotopoulos' project of democratizing all existing social institutions.

In "The Argentinean Insurrection and Inclusive Democracy," Latin American author, Guido Galafassi, analyzes how the popular Argentinean rebellion of December 2001 illustrated crises in the institutions of representative "democracy" and the capitalist market economy. These crises prompted the creation of neighbourhood assemblies which constituted embryonic mechanisms of direct democracy and a new integral vision of society. Galafassi shows that three of the main components of an Inclusive Democracy had been attempted in practice in Argentina: direct political democracy, economic democracy, and democracy in the social realm. According to Galafassi, a new form of confederal democracy emerged in Argentina which was based on nearby communities organized into a territorial network at a local and regional scale, and this event provides an important concrete example of the possibilities for Inclusive Democracy and how it might work in an actual social setting.

Rounding off this section is Panayotis Koumentakis' reflections on "The Market Economy and the Biological Crisis." Koumentakis explores the lived effects of market capitalism on the body, as profit-oriented food and agricultural industries poison both external and internal environments. Mediating between macro and micro-dynamics, he steers our attention to a "biological crisis" in the human body that is an effect of the same dynamics degrading, exploiting, and polluting the earth. In the "developed" Western world, the biological crisis afflicts both body and mind in forms such as obesity, chronic disease (cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and so on), mental illness, and Alzheimer's. While the "undeveloped" world suffers from want and hunger, large numbers of citizens in Western nations grow obese from excess consumption, such as made available through ubiquitous fast food chains and eateries. The foundation of the Standard American Diet (SAD) is the toxic commodities of the meat and dairy industries which promote disease, befoul the air and water, contribute to global warming and rainforest destruction, and supply food "products" through barbaric methods of confining and slaughtering billions of animals each year. This, on top of employing immense areas of fertile land for harmful products and destroying immense quantities of good quality foods, in order to produce products of poor quality as well as unhealthy, processed and refined, disease-producing foods. As "health care" is nothing but profitable disease management, and the prevailing paradigms promote mechanistic rather than holistic concepts of the body, Koumentakis urges that new outlooks, lifestyles, and medical systems need to be adopted, such as cannot possibly grow and thrive in the profit-oriented institutions of capitalism. He thus concludes that, "Only a society of Inclusive Democracy will ensure the objective and subjective conditions that are needed for the basic needs and the cultural requirements of the masses to be fully covered. Such a society will offer access to knowledge and information, as well as the ability to make good use of such knowledge, in order for the people to be able to organise their lives on sound biological and ecological foundations."

Part Two focuses on a crucial concern of Inclusive Democracy: *paideia*, or, "education." Inclusive Democracy theorists employ the Greek term "paideia" in order to recall and

reconstruct the classical Athenians' intimate linkage of education, autonomy, and democracy. Education is crucial to revolutionary change and social reorganization in that schooling systems at all levels socialize youth into capitalist ideologies and promote strictly utilitarian and careerist goals within the corporate job market. Radical methods of pedagogy, conversely, seek to break this ideological grip and to promote the forms of critical consciousness necessary for radical change. The nature and importance of paideia is vividly illustrated in John Sargis' essay, "Education or Paideia? The US experience." Sargis reveals how the functionalist nature of the US (mis)education system, riddled with class and race biases, is designed to produce mindless, docile producers and consumers who serve the interests of the ruling elite. In direct contrast to the repressive and hierarchical schooling institutions that prevail throughout Western nations, Sargis sketches an outline of how genuine education might work in an autonomous society. For Sargis, "The highest goal of paideia is to create the democratic consciousness of explicit self-determination at the social and individual level –and this presupposes the equal distribution of power among citizens. A radical break with the present is needed to make room for new social domain."

David Gabbard and Karen Anijar Appleton analyze the strengths and implications of Fotopoulos' arguments as they relate to education in "The Democratic Paideia Project: Beginnings of an Emancipatory Paideia for Today." With Fotopoulos, Gabbard and Anijar note that the functionalist and hierarchical character of current institutions render authentically democratic education and autonomy impossible, and so one must theorize what necessary and sufficient conditions must exist in order for emancipatory education to become possible in the future. Yet, they seek to correct what they claim to be Fotopoulos' misreading of Ivan Illich and his ideas for "deschooling" society, in order to show how Illich's writings can contribute to the conversation on Inclusive Democracy and strengthen Fotopoulos' own arguments for paideia. In addition, they investigate the potential contributions that "critical pedagogy" can make in helping the Inclusive Democracy project formulate an emancipatory theory of education.

Part Three, continuing the critical themes initiated by Gabbard and Appleton, features authors who pose questions and challenges to the Inclusive Democracy project. In "Inclusive Democracy and its Prospects," David Freeman begins with the familiar question: "Why has anarchism not attracted a greater following, especially given the manifest failures of capital, the state, and 'actually existing socialism'?" Freeman gives the frequent scholarly response that the problem is not that anarchism cannot work, but that "its proponents have not demonstrated that it can, especially in societies of scale." Freeman aptly draws the conclusion that the Inclusive Democracy project "fills in a number of these gaps, proposing with clarity, thoughtfulness and originality the key mechanisms that might enable and sustain such a polity." Yet he also points out that after the nightmare of the twentieth century and the debacle of "utopian" visions of various sorts, one must greet the social transformation project of Inclusive Democracy with healthy suspicion, as it may share roots with the pathological nature of much twentieth century political radicalism. Arran Gare's essay, "Beyond Social Democracy?" demonstrates how Fotopoulos' work merges Karl Polanyi's characterization of the relationship between society and the market and Cornelius Castoriadis' philosophy of autonomy. Giving a different interpretation of Castoriadis' concept of autonomy, however, Gare argues that Fotopoulos' "dualistic" revolution/reform logic diminishes the contributions the social democracy tradition can make to democracy and autonomy. Gare calls for a synthesis of a radically reformed social democracy and Inclusive Democracy as the best way to challenge neo-liberalism and the emerging liberal

fascism taking hold in nations such as the US, Britain, and Australia.

In his second contribution, “Can Democracy Solve All Problems?” Serge Latouche interprets Inclusive Democracy as an original and important contribution to radical democracy, but he raises doubts regarding the desirability of direct democracy and the rejection of representation in all possible forms. Latouche voices numerous objections to universalist projects – including, he claims, Fotopoulos’ own version -- as manifestations of Western ethnocentrism. “Inclusive Democracy and Left Libertarianism,” shows author Michael Levin sympathizing with Fotopoulos’ aspirations, while rejecting what he takes to be his view that the Greek definition of democracy is a transhistorically valid notion and the “one meaning” of democracy. Like Freeman, Levin uses historical examples from the Left to warn that the transition to Inclusive Democracy is likely to be more difficult than Fotopoulos suggests. Subsequently, in “Recent Theoretical Developments in the Inclusive Democracy Project” John Sargis and Panayotis Koumentakis undertake a critical analysis of issues and debates relating to Inclusive Democracy, such as emerged in the dynamic conversations following the publication of Fotopoulos’ seminal work, *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*. Such issues include the development of a democratic conception of science and technology, the rise of a new irrationalism and its incompatibility with Inclusive Democracy, the role of mass media and culture in a democratic society, the Inclusive Democracy approach to present class divisions, postmodernism and globalisation, an attempt to develop a new democratic liberatory ethics, a critique of traditional antisystemic movements, and a presentation of concrete proposals on developing transitional strategies.

Fotopoulos appreciatively responds to the reservations and criticisms raised against Inclusive Democracy. His essay, “Is Inclusive Democracy Feasible and Desirable?” takes up themes such as the meaning of democracy, the plausibility and need for Inclusive Democracy, the relationship between Inclusive Democracy and the social democratic and libertarian traditions, and the formidable problems of transition to a post-capitalist society devoid of market institutions and hierarchical relations. Fotopoulos’ essay clarifies the overall outlook of Inclusive Democracy, and sets the context for further debate and deepening of radical theory and politics, such as play out in the *International Journal of Inclusive Democracy* and other forums.^[29] Finally, the two short essays in the appendix – “*Democracia incluyente*,” by Jorge Camil, and “*Vers une démocratie générale ?*” from Jean-Claude Richard – introduce the Latin American and French editions of *Toward an Inclusive Democracy* and demonstrate the international character and importance of Fotopoulos’ work and the Inclusive Democracy perspective.

The Need for a Renewed Radicalism

On the whole, *Global Capitalism and the Demise of the Left: Renewing Radicalism through Inclusive Democracy* is a significant and compelling contribution to social theory and political philosophy that deserves to be widely read and debated. Critics may disagree with key particulars and assumptions of Fotopoulos’ theory, but nonetheless concur, in this era of severe social and ecological crisis, that without the kind of revolutionary changes envisioned by Inclusive Democracy, the future will become increasingly bleak. The social and environmental crises haunting global capitalism inevitably will deepen and darken, as evidenced in the disastrous US invasion of Iraq, the fascist administrations of George Bush and Tony Blair, failed neoliberal projects for spreading “democracy” to the Middle East, struggles over diminishing resources such as oil and water, “terrorism” and increasingly

volatile geopolitical conflicts, global climate change, and environmental chaos such as portended by the destructive power of Hurricane Katrina.

More than ever before, the choice for humanity is between libertarian socialism and barbarism, democracy or authoritarianism, sustainability or collapse. In the audacious vision of Inclusive Democracy, the goal must be to create what never existed before, but which is more necessary than ever if there is to be a viable future whatsoever -- a direct, decentralized, confederal democracy, one that aims to reintegrate society with economy, polity and nature by striving to achieve the equal distribution of power at all levels. The essays in this volume are offered in the spirit of renewed radical thought, dialogue, and politics. They are beams of light in troubling, dark times.

* This article is a pre-publication from *Global Capitalism and the Demise of the Left: Renewing Radicalism through Inclusive Democracy* (under publication in English and Greek); An abridged version of this article was published in Vol. 3, No. 2 of this journal.

[1] A concise version of the book is [online](#).

[2] See also the entry on Inclusive Democracy in *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of International Political Economy*, 2001.

[3] "The Inclusive Democracy Project – A Rejoinder." Takis Fotopoulos, *Democracy and Nature*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (November 2003), p. 436.

[4] . Takis Fotopoulos, "[The ID project and Social Ecology](#)", *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (May 2005).

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, p. 145.

[9] *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, p. 39.

[10] *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, p. 42.

[11] On the collapse and defeat of Social Democracy and Eurocommunism, see Carl Boggs, *Social Movements and Political Power* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). One recent example of the co-optation of Left resistance through neoliberal ideologies and global capitalist structures involves the return to power of former Sandinista leader and President of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega. An avowed enemy of the US and capitalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s (before the US destabilized the country by funding fascist "contra" forces), Ortega was re-elected President in November 2006, but this time ditching Marxist-Leninist posturing to affirm global markets as key to national prosperity. See "Ortega, Again," *The New York Times* (November 11, 2006).

[12] *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, pp. 110-139.

[13] On this distinction, see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991).

[14] One significant counterexample to this would be David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), which roots postmodern analysis and historical periodization in political economy and social theory. In this vein, also see the [trilogy of postmodern works](#) by Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations; The Postmodern Turn: Paradigms Shifts in Art*,

Theory, and Science (Guilford Press, 1997), and *The Postmodern Adventure: Science, Technology, and Cultural Studies at the Third Millennium* (Guilford Press, 2001).

[15] Fotopoulos, *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, p. 348.

[16] Ibid.

[17] see Takis Fotopoulos, '[Towards a democratic liberatory ethics](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 8, No 3 (November 2002).

[18] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso Press, 2001).

[19] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993).

[20] *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, p. 6.

[21] See Janet Biehl, *The Politics of Social Ecology* (Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1998), Chapter 12.

[22] See Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004).

[23] *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, pp. 257-262.

[24] *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, pp. 262-6.

[25] See Takis Fotopoulos, '[Participatory Economics \(Parecon\) and Inclusive Democracy](#)' *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, vol. 1 no. 2 (January 2005).

[26] *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, p. 275.

[27] *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, p. 285.

[28] *Toward an Inclusive Democracy*, p. 285.

[29] See: <http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/>. Also, see [Fotopoulos' archive](#) of writings.