

# **The Ecological Crisis as Part of the Present Multi-dimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy\***

**TAKIS FOTOPOULOS**

The aims of this article are the following:

- a. To examine the rapidly deteriorating ecological crisis and the myths about it, as well as to assess the main approaches to deal with it, including the Inclusive Democracy approach.
- b. To consider the other dimensions of the present multi-dimensional crisis and show the inter-relationships between them.
- c. To discuss ways in which we may move from the present crisis society to a new society.

## **1. The rapidly deteriorating ecological crisis: the myths about it and the main approaches to deal with it**

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.

Furthermore, it has now been established beyond any doubt that the ecological crisis and particularly the greenhouse effect – as well as the consequent climate change – which is the most important manifestation of this crisis, worsens daily. In fact, the recent publication of the report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) finally brought the ecological crisis to the status of universal front-page news. The catastrophic climatic change threatening us all because of the greenhouse effect becomes obvious once we take into account that, even if we take the best-case scenario of a 2.2C rise in temperature this century (while a 4.4C rise is much more likely!), this would mean – according to the European Commission – that an extra 11,000 people in Europe would die within a decade, and from 2071 onwards there would be 29,000 extra deaths a year in southern Europe alone, on top of 27,000 extra deaths in northern Europe.

However, the publication of the IPCC report was also accompanied by an entire mythology

in the international mass media on the causes of the deepening ecological crisis and the ways out of it. This mythology is being reproduced, not only by the political and economic elites, but also by reformists in the Left and the Green movement, who declare, "the crisis belongs to all" (governments and civil societies alike). It would, therefore, be well worth examining the main ecological myths, taking for granted the shocking conclusions of the report, which simply confirms – using indisputable evidence– the worst predictions of the anti-systemic Left and ecologists which, until now, have been dismissed by the elites and the reformists as “scaremongering”!

It is, therefore, significant to examine this mythology in order to understand not only the causes of the ecological crisis, but also the ways out of it.

## ***The Myths about the ecological crisis***

### *The myth that humanity in general has to be blamed for the crisis*

According to the main myth reproduced by the system, it is “human activity”, or “man” in general, that are responsible for the greenhouse effect. Now, it is of course a sign of progress to recognize that the ecological crisis in general and climate change in particular are not acts of God or “normal climate phenomena”. However, blaming “human activity” for the greenhouse effect is still a daft tautology, given that humans are the only members of the animal kingdom who have the capability to create it anyway. Furthermore, human beings do not just live like Robinson Crusoes on their isolated islands, but within societies, which are organised in particular ways that may be environment-friendly or otherwise. However, blaming humanity as a whole for the crisis is not only silly; it is dangerous too. It is not surprising, therefore, that today, following the eco-fascist trends which had developed in the past – mainly among deep ecologists who were blaming overpopulation for the crisis and even were discussing the idea of compulsory sterilisation– various organizations have emerged arguing that, as mankind is at the heart of every environmental problem facing the planet, it should now commit biological hara-kiri. An organization for instance with thousands of subscribers calling itself “The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement” is campaigning for the phasing out of the entire human race as the only way to save the planet!<sup>[1]</sup>

In fact, it is now generally recognised that although Homo sapiens first appeared on Earth some five hundred thousand years ago, as the IPCC report points out, concentrations in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide (the principal greenhouse gas responsible for global warming) are presently at their highest levels for at least 650,000 years. Furthermore, they show that these concentrations began rising only with the birth of the Industrial Revolution 250 years ago. The evidence therefore, clearly indicates a close connection between not just humanity and the crisis but between society and the way it is organized, i.e., the kind of socio-economic system that has been established since the Industrial Revolution, and the present ecological crisis.

In other words, the fact that the present ecological crisis began developing since the Industrial Revolution is indisputable now and is further confirmed by the IPCC report. Thus, carbon dioxide concentrations ranged between 180 and 300 ppm (parts per million) over the previous 650,000 years, reaching 278 ppm on the eve of the Industrial Revolution. From then on, carbon dioxide concentrations began to rise at accelerating rates,

particularly since the universalisation of the growth economy after the Second World War, (by growth economy we mean the system of economic organisation whose basic aim is the maximisation of economic growth, whether this aim is ‘objectively’ determined – as in the case of the capitalist market economy, whose dynamic inevitably leads to it– or not, as in the case of the ex ‘actually existing socialism’, where the development of productive forces was an ideological aim). The outcome of this process was that carbon dioxide concentrations increased from 315 ppm 50 years ago to 382 ppm today. Furthermore, the growth rate of such concentrations has lately been rising rapidly, as the IPCC stressed, with hardly disguised disquiet. Thus, whereas the average annual growth rate of concentrations was 1.4 ppm in the period between 1960 and 2005, it reached 1.9 ppm in the last decade (1995-2005) – a 36 per cent rise! At the same time, the planet’s temperature kept on rising, accompanied not only by catastrophic heat waves, but also by devastating droughts and consequent water shortages, storms, etc.

So, it is now indisputable that the ecological crisis has not been caused by human activity in general but by the human activity of the last two hundred years or so since the Industrial Revolution. But then, another question arises: can we say then that the cause of the ecological crisis is the Industrial Revolution itself? This is the object of the second myth:

*The myth that the Industrial Revolution has to be blamed for the ecological crisis*

According to this myth, which is adopted mainly by various irrational (religious and spiritualist) currents, deep ecologists, primitivists, et. al., it is the Industrial Revolution, as well as industrial civilisation and its values that are to be blamed for the current crisis. Similarly, others, influenced by Castoriadis’s thought, blame the imaginary of development, which emerged at the same time as part of the ideology of Progress that dominated modernism in the aftermath of the Enlightenment.

However, as I have tried to show elsewhere,<sup>[2]</sup> the Industrial Revolution assumed the particular form that we are familiar with, simply because it took place in a society in which control of the means of production belonged to minorities (merchants, landowners, etc). Had the means of production belonged to communities as a whole, technological progress would have led to a very different kind of Industrial Revolution, which in all probability would not have led to a growth economy and the present ecological crisis. Thus, the Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century became an integral part of the system of the capitalist market economy that emerged at the same time, the dynamics of which inevitably led to a continuous economic growth and development, consumerism and a growing concentration of income and wealth. This was inevitable because of the paramount need of those controlling the means of production to maximise profits – through improvements in economic efficiency (narrowly defined<sup>[3]</sup>) and competitiveness– which was ensured, also, by the minimisation of social controls over the market protecting labour and/or the environment. It is, therefore, obvious that the rise of the growth economy was not simply the result of changes in values, the imaginary, or ideology, but that it constituted, instead, the result of the dynamics of a concrete economic system in interaction with the outcome of social struggle. This is why the growth economy that developed in the countries formerly of “actually existing socialism”, although sharing several characteristics with the capitalist growth economy (and leading to a similar environmental disaster) was very different from it, as it was not the result of the dynamics of the market economy<sup>[4]</sup>.

### *The myth that the ecological crisis affects all equally*

According to this myth, which arises from the ignorance (deliberate or not) of the "systemic" character of the ecological crisis and its origins in the rise of the capitalist growth economy, the greenhouse effect does not make class and race distinctions, equally affecting rich and poor, white or black. This myth clearly ignores the fact that the basic aim of the capitalist growth economy is not to cover human needs, but to reproduce the present concentration of economic, political and social power in general at the hands of the privileged social strata. The ecological crisis is neither caused by global "civil society", nor does it affect everybody equally. On the contrary, according to recent World Bank data, the poorest 37% of the world's population is accountable for only 7% of carbon dioxide emissions, whilst the 15% of the world's population that lives in rich countries is responsible for half these emissions<sup>[5]</sup> something hardly surprising, of course, if one takes into account that the energy use per capita of high income countries is, today, more than 10 times higher than that of low income countries!<sup>[6]</sup> In terms of the consequences of the greenhouse effect, it is precisely the victims of the system who pay the heaviest price, whether they live in New Orleans or in the favelas of Rio, and not those living in luxurious villas in the affluent suburbs of America, Western Europe or other continents.

Similarly, another example clearly showing that it is the market economy and its offspring the growth economy that led to concentration and the present pattern of living and consequently to the ecological crisis we face today is **industrial farming**. This 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.<sup>[7]</sup>

From all these myths, which share the characteristic that they all take for granted the present socio-economic system of the capitalist market economy and its offspring, the growth economy, there arises a series of proposals, which supposedly will help us to transcend the deteriorating ecological crisis. The common element of such proposals is that the crisis can be overcome as long as, on the one hand, governments take various measures to restrict the greenhouse emissions, encourage renewable sources of energy and adopt various technological fixes and, on the other, global civil society changes its values and way of life.

So, to sum up our conclusions up to now:

- a. There is a definite relationship between the ecological crisis and economic growth, or what I would prefer to call the **growth economy** as I defined it.
- b. It is now confirmed 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.
- c. 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.

- d. So, 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.

However, although almost all experts (apart from, those in the service of the system) agree today that we are at the edge of an ecological catastrophe, there is no corresponding consensus on the causes of the crisis. So, what are the main theoretical approaches to deal with the ecological crisis?

### ***The main approaches on the ecological crisis***

We may distinguish between two types of approaches: reformist and systemic approaches and within them we may distinguish between centralist and decentralist approaches. Reformist approaches 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 that do not affect the basic political and economic structure of it. Systemic approaches on the other hand 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 as well as many systemic approaches are centralist in the sense that they see the way out of the crisis in terms of a centralist sustainable growth economy whereas some systemic approaches are decentralist in the sense that they see the way out of the crisis in terms of a decentralised ecological society.

#### *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, suggests 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, those not relying on technology to fix the ecological crisis are in fact suggesting some kind of restrictions on growth, particularly as far as the growth of countries like China and India is concerned which, because of the huge population sizes involved, (these two countries alone, between them, share 37% of world population) threatens world energy resources and constitutes a further serious ecological burden. 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 therefore

preposterous for advanced countries, whose growth led to the present ecological crisis, to demand from such countries like China and India not to do the same for the sake of the planet, i.e., for peoples in rich countries to continue living happily ever after and peoples in poor countries to remain more or less in the present condition.

Furthermore, the argument becomes even more ridiculous if one thinks that most if not all of growth in China and India is not even induced and financed by China and India-based transnational corporations, but, instead, by such TNCs based in the USA, the EU or Japan, which aim to exploit the vast resources of cheap labour and the miserable working conditions in these countries! It is in other words, the dynamics of the market economy itself which inevitably lead to more and more growth, even in China and India, since expansion means more income for those controlling the production, distribution, research and development world networks; 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.

Also, consumer democracies of today are dependent on growth, for without the prospect of mass consumption, the present 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<sup>[8]</sup> 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 many goods that were once reserved for the privileged are now widespread.

It is, therefore, 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 we cannot expand on here.

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, “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 couldn’t exist under capitalism.<sup>[9]</sup>”

### *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.

Starting with “**centralist**” **approaches**, we may classify under this label the various versions of socialist, ecosocialist<sup>[10]</sup> and eco-Marxist<sup>[11]</sup> 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)<sup>[12]</sup> 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.

As far as the **decentralist approaches** is concerned, we could classify under this label those approaches supporting a radically decentralised ecological society. The differences between centralist 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 eco-villages and eco-cities according to supporters of the Simpler Way and De-growth projects respectively and, finally, based 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*.

The main approaches belonging to this category are the following ones:

**The social ecology**<sup>[13]</sup> **approach** (Bookchin) 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. However, although this is an important approach in stressing the systemic character of the crisis and in proposing a systemic change as a way out of it, it shares the drawbacks of 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy by assuming the existence of a rational process of social evolution, i.e., the view which sees History as a process of Progress, the unfolding of reason – a view which assumes that there is an evolution going on towards autonomous, or democratic, forms of political, economic and social organisation – that, to my mind, is both untenable and undesirable. No wonder that this approach adopts the communistic fiction of a post-scarcity society in which no economic-decision taking about the allocation of resources is, in effect, required. This is why the Social Ecology project, in contrast to Parecon and the Inclusive Democracy project, does not propose any mechanism for the allocation of resources.<sup>[14]</sup>



***The de-growth approach (Latouche)***,<sup>[15]</sup> the development of which was a significant development in Green politics and thought. This is because it showed that the Green movement, after its rise as an antisystemic movement in Germany in the 1970s and its subsequent integration into mainstream politics as a kind of reformist Left party or lobby (taking part in the process –or supporting in various degrees– the criminal wars of the transnational elite in the 1990s and beyond), could still play a role at the boundaries between a reformist and an antisystemic movement. At the same time, the degrowth project shows significant similarities, both at the theoretical and the strategic levels, with the ***“Simpler Way” approach*** (Ted Trainer)<sup>[16]</sup>, which, like the degrowth approach, involves “mostly small, highly self-sufficient local economies; economic systems under social control and not driven by market forces or the profit motive and highly cooperative and participatory systems”, as well as the associated “eco-village movement.” However, the degrowth project stresses that the transition process involves not just the creation of “eco-villages”, mainly outside the main society, but, instead, the creation of “urban villages,” which involve the development of a high degree of decentralisation within the main society itself. In other words, unlike the supporters of eco-villages who, even when their aim is the creation of a new social movement and not just a life style change, aspire mainly to a movement based on communities outside the main society, supporters of the degrowth project explicitly aim to create a new social movement within the main society –as the traditional Green parties have always attempted to do. Therefore, the aim pursued by both approaches is the same –a non-growth society to replace the present growth society. But, for Latouche, degrowth does not also imply any move towards abolishing the market economy system –only reducing its scope. Similarly, the degrowth project adopts a similar stand of a not outright rejection of the market economy’s political complement: representative ‘democracy’. Therefore, as I attempted to show elsewhere,<sup>[17]</sup> given the non-rejection by the degrowth project of either the system of market economy or its political complement, representative ‘democracy’, it is clear that the cultural revolution imagined by it does not imply a systemic change. Localism, either it takes the form of urban villages and participatory democracy (Homs), or even of a confederation of demois within a reformed market economy and representative ‘democracy’ (Latouche), clearly could not lead to a degrowth society on the basis of the above analysis. In other words, this sort of “ecological democracy” in no way solves the problem of concentration of economic and political power—the root cause of the present multidimensional crisis.

As the approach we shall examine next stresses, the ID approach, an ecological democracy, or more generally, an inclusive democracy could only become possible if the change of values is the outcome of a parallel and interacting gradual change in the political and economic institutions replacing the present institutions of concentration of political and economic power with institutions of equal distribution of each form of power.

### ***The Inclusive Democracy approach on the ecological crisis***

The ID 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 explicit aim of the ID project is 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 main institutional changes proposed by ID supporters are:

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

### *The ID approach on the causes of 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. 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,<sup>[18]</sup> is physically sustainable only if the parallel huge increase in inequality continues. In fact, as various reports show<sup>[19]</sup> 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,<sup>[20]</sup> 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.

### *Inclusive Democracy as a way out of the deepening ecological crisis*

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. That is, 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 horizontal relations of equality and respect for other human beings and Nature will finally replace the vertical relations of domination. 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 Paedeia<sup>[21]</sup> will play in an environmentally-friendly institutional framework, would lead to a radical change in the human attitude towards Nature. In other words, this problematique cannot go beyond defining the institutional preconditions that offer the best hope for a better human relationship 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.

### *Society's crucial dilemma*

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 happily 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.

In this context, humanity is faced today with a crucial choice between two radically different proposed approaches and therefore solutions to the ecological problem:

- ***The Sustainable development approach*** (which is adopted by all the reformist approaches we have seen before) 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 and the reformist Left 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’. All these establishment currents, taking for granted the growth economy and consumerism, suggest a series of supposedly “realistic” half-measures to avert a possibly dramatic deterioration in the ecological situation within the next century or so. However, not only can some of the panaceas they suggest be shown to be utterly incompatible with the growth economy and consumerism (like, for instance, the vast expansion of renewable sources of energy<sup>[22]</sup>), but also many of them would hit the lower social strata particularly hard, turning things that have become necessities within the present pattern of life (private cars, flying, etc.) into luxuries. Furthermore, if we accept the premise I used that both our values and our way of life are crucially determined by the prevailing socio-economic system, which is defined by the market economy and the growth economy, then it is clear that neither a radical change in our values nor in our way of life are feasible, unless both are accompanied by a parallel change in the socio-economic institutions defining the present system.
- Alternatively, what we may call ***the eco-democratic approach*** seeks the causes of the ecological crisis in the social system itself. Most of the decentralist systemic approaches we saw before belong here, i.e., Serge Latouche’s degrowth project, Murray Bookchin’s social ecology/communalism project, and to some extent even Ted Trainer’s Simpler Way, despite the fact that democracy is not the main aim of this project. All these approaches accuse the reformist approaches of the sustainable development thesis that they have an instrumentalist view of Nature, seeing Nature as an instrument for growth and development. The concentration of power—an inevitable outcome of the dynamics of the market economy—is the ultimate cause of the ecological crisis, as well as of any other dimension of the present multidimensional crisis. It is therefore clear that the cause of the greenhouse effect is the pattern of living itself implied by the growth economy. The living pattern, in turn, would be determined by the dynamics of the market economy and mainly by the concentration of income and wealth among countries as well as within them, the consequent urban concentration, the car culture, and so on. Clearly, therefore, transcending the present multidimensional crisis —an essential part of which is the ecological crisis— is not simply a matter of changing policies or values, as the reformist Left and Greens assert, but a matter of changing the very system of the

capitalist market economy, which leads to unlimited growth and further concentration of economic power. The ecological crisis could not be overcome without changing the very pattern of life characteristic of present society. This means that effective action against the greenhouse effect would require 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.

In case now we adopt the second approach, then, 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 in the Left 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. This brings us to the other dimensions of the present multi-dimensional crisis.

## **2. The other dimensions of the present multi-dimensional crisis**

### ***The political dimension***

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 18<sup>th</sup> 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, [23] 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 and even more so in those governed by a two-party political system (US, UK, Germany, Australia etc). 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 the inadequacy of representative 'democracy' to create genuine democratic conditions, which may be considered as the ultimate cause of the present apathy.<sup>[24]</sup> 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 remaining 'pockets of resistance' to this process have been disappearing fast: from Germany and now to France which is set, irrespective of whether Sarkozy or Royal win in the presidential elections, to follow the same path. *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".<sup>[25]</sup>

In fact, today's electoral contests are decided by the "2/3" 'contended electoral majority',<sup>[26]</sup> 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 last year, 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, what has transformed politics into statecraft and turned many people away from this sort of ‘politics’ is the growing realisation of the concentration of political power in the hands of professional politicians and various “experts” (as a result of the dynamic of representative ‘democracy’).

### ***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 cannot 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 ‘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, several studies in the USA, the 'new economy' par excellence, have shown 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 a small proportion of laid-off full-time workers end up in equally (or better) paid jobs, something that resulted in "the most job insecurity since the Depression of the 1930s".<sup>[27]</sup> 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 and 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<sup>[28]</sup> of Lancaster University pointed 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'.

At the same time in the South an even greater concentration is created between the privileged social groups that benefit from globalisation, (as a result of their position in the developing local division of labour which is now an integral part of the international division of labour), and the rest of society. This is particularly obvious in the new growth 'miracles' of China and India, where inequality is now bigger than ever.

I, therefore, think the decisive element in the economic crisis consists of the fact that the system of the market economy is not *inherently* capable of creating an economically even world. In other words, it is the dynamics of the market economy itself<sup>[29]</sup>, in association with the role of the state<sup>[30]</sup> in supporting this dynamics, which has led first to the historical concentration of economic power within each country and then to the present internationalised market economy characterised by a gigantic concentration of economic power at the world level, mostly in the hands of the TNCs, and a corresponding concentration of political and economic power in the hands of the transnational elite.<sup>[31]</sup> 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 creation of a **bipolar world** consisting of:

- one world which includes the privileged social groups created by globalisation, either in the North or the South and
- another world which is left out of the supposedly 'universal' benefits of neoliberal globalisation and which includes the marginalised majority of the world population, either in the North or the South.

It is for this reason that, as I stressed elsewhere,<sup>[32]</sup> the traditional division between North and South does not make sense anymore and it is much more appropriate to talk about a "New North" and a "New South" defined as follows:

Thus, the 'New North' could be defined as all those social groups that benefit from the neoliberal globalisation process, whether they live in the old North or South. In general, we may say that this New North consists of the "two-thirds society" in the old First World and a small minority in the old Second and Third Worlds. The beneficiaries from the marketisation process in the old First World do not just include those in control of the means of production, which constitute the bulk of the ruling elite, but also the large middle classes that have flourished in this process (professionals, skilled workers, etc.). Similarly, the beneficiaries in the old Third World include not just the ruling elites (big landowners, importers and so on), but also a rudimentary middle class of professionals, top state employees, etc.). Finally, the beneficiaries in the old Second World include the new ruling elite, which has been emerging in the marketisation process (usually, ex-members of the old party nomenclature) and a very small middle class of professionals.

The inherent incapability of the market economy system and its political complement, representative 'democracy' (which is the State form developed in modernity as the most compatible with the market economy system), to create an economically even world 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 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 consumption standards which have been created in the North during the capitalist growth process.

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.<sup>[33]</sup> 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)!<sup>[34]</sup> Similarly, as Ted Trainer<sup>[35]</sup> 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 in the planet rising to the per capita resource consumption typical of the rich countries today.

## ***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 marketisation 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’.<sup>[36]</sup>

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 new jails. Thus, the prison population in England and Wales increased from 64,000 at the beginning of the decade to 77,000 a couple of years ago, while the most recent Home Office projections forecast a jail population of up to 90,000 by 2010.<sup>[37]</sup>

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 (also caused by the criminalization of major sectors of the population, e.g. in the USA African-Americans are about 12% of the population , but represent half the prison population), as Martin Woolcott<sup>[38]</sup> 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 marketisation 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, marketisation 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, or , even worse, attempt lately to make films that would attract money and/or distribution from the American networks.

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 marketisation of the communications flow has already established the preconditions for the downgrading of cultural diversity into a kind of superficial differentiation based on folklore and likeable by tourists as well! 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<sup>[39]</sup> 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,<sup>[40]</sup> 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<sup>[41]</sup>, 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<sup>[42]</sup>.

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.<sup>[43]</sup>

So, the present era of neoliberal modernity has already developed its own dominant social paradigm<sup>[44]</sup>. 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:

- the overall vision of History as an evolutionary process of progress or liberation, ('grand narratives') in favour of plurality, fragmentation, complexity ('local narratives');
- the 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 projects 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.<sup>[45]</sup>

## ***Conclusions on the multi-dimensional crisis***

Few, outside the system's ideologues, would doubt today 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. The main characteristics of this crisis are:

- First, that it is a multi-dimensional crisis involving the economic, the political, the ecological, the social as well as the cultural levels.
- Second, that it is a universal crisis in the sense that it envelops all parts of the world

that are integrated in the New World Order established by the internationalised market economy and its political complement of representative 'democracy'. In fact, 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.

- As far as the causes of the crisis are concerned, as I tried to show, this multidimensional crisis can safely be attributed to the very institutions of modernity, which today have, been universalised. In other words, 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<sup>[46]</sup>.

### **3. How do we move from 'here' to 'there'?**

The last question we have to answer refers to the question of the transition to a new society, given that the present society is bankrupt and most people simply tolerate it, as long as the multidimensional crisis is also tolerable. However, the deterioration of the ecological crisis, which in the near future is certain now to become even more intense as the half-measures expected to be taken within the framework of the market economy are bound to have an insignificant effect, and the continuing worsening of the economic and social aspects of the crisis, as a result of the growing concentration created by neoliberal globalisation, raise the crucial question whether we still face the historical dilemma of the Left: reform or revolution? This is the question raised as early as the end of 19<sup>th</sup> 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<sup>[47]</sup> 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 statism 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', not even alone 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<sup>[48]</sup>. 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<sup>[49]</sup>.

Similarly, more recent antisystemic approaches, like the Libertarian Municipalism approach suggested by social ecologists<sup>[50]</sup> 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<sup>[51]</sup>.

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* are 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 also 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.

### ***The role of direct action-The "Commons" movement***

I've already mentioned that local elections, as well as direct action, could play a significant role in rupturing the socialisation process. An important instance of direct action today is the global 'Reclaiming the Commons' movement-- instances of which we saw some years ago in the British "Reclaiming the Streets Movement", or at present in Italy, where movements reclaiming the control on water, land, energy, knowledge, institutions, etc. are being reclaimed from the area of marketisation and commercialization. In fact, this movement aims to protest against the disappearance of public space and the privatization of resources such as water, but also energy, knowledge, etc. that were once considered a human right. So, we have an extension of "commons" from its traditional meaning of common land or water to include 'public goods' such as public space, public education, health and the infrastructure that allows our society to function (such as electricity or water delivery systems).

The question which arises here is: how useful is such a movement within the context of an antisystemic strategy? To my mind, assessing this movement in light of the British experience, the picture emerging is not encouraging. Thus, the Reclaiming the Streets Movement, up to a few years ago, could manage to attract thousands of people in its activities, until eventually the draconian measures taken by Blair's police state, in combination with some degradation of the movement itself whose activities increasingly have taken the form of "happenings", led to its effective phasing out. In other words, the lesson is that if such a movement takes simply the form of a protest movement aiming to educate people on what is private and what should be public then, to my mind, is bound to fail and would either be assimilated by the system or simply marginalized by it. On the

other hand, if such a movement is seen as part of a broader political movement, with its own analysis of the present situation and the causes of the multidimensional crisis and a fully developed long and short-term strategy to really reclaim the commons, (through e.g. gaining local power at the municipal level), then it could play a significant role in the rupturing of the socialization process and the creation from below, of 'popular bases of political and economic power'.

To my mind, the Inclusive Democracy approach developed here 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.

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[1] See Guy Adams, "How to save the planet", *The Independent*, 19/4/2007 see also the site to which the article refers at: <http://www.vhemt.org>

[2] See T. Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy* (Cassell/Continuum 1997), [ch 1](#); see also *Per Una Democrazia Globale*, (Eleuthera, 1999) and *Vers une democratie generale*, (Seuil, 2002). For an online version see *The Multidimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy* (2005).

[3] Efficiency in a market economy is defined on the basis of narrow techno-economic criteria of input minimisation/output maximisation and not on the basis of the degree of satisfaction of human needs, which is supposed to be the aim of an economic system. The usual definition of *economic efficiency* in terms of *technical efficiency*, *production efficiency* and *exchange efficiency*, although supposedly 'neutral', in fact assumes away distributional aspects, so that it is perfectly possible for a particular allocation of resources to be 'efficient' and at the same time incapable of meeting adequately (or at all) even the basic needs of many citizens.

[4] See *The Multidimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy*, [ch 5](#).

[5] See World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2005*, Tables 2.1 & 3.8.

[6] *ibid.*, Table 3.7.

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

[8] Serge Latouche, "The globe downshifted", *Le Monde diplomatique* (January 2006).

[9] *ibid.*

[10] 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).

[11] See James O'Connor, "Capitalism, Nature, Socialism," *Society and Nature*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (1992), pp. 174-202.

[12] Michael Albert, *Parecon, Life After Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2003).

[13] See the works of Murray Bookchin "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).

[14] See T. Fotopoulos, "[The ID project and Social Ecology](#)", *The International Journal of Inclusive*



*Democracy*, Vol.1, No. 3 (May 2005).

[15] see the articles by Serge Latouche and Clement Homs in *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 2007); see also Latouche, "The globe downshifted".

[16] Ted Trainer, "[Renewable Energy: No Solution for Consumer Society](#)", *ibid.*

[17] See T. Fotopoulos; "[Is degrowth compatible with a market economy?](#)" *The International Journal of INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 2007).

[18] UN, *Human Development Report 2005*, Table 14.

[19] See e.g. Jon Watts, 'A tale of two countries', *The Guardian* (9/11/2004).

[20] Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalisation in Question*, p. 163.

[21] T. Fotopoulos, '[From \(mis\)education to Paedeia](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 2003).

[22] *ibid.*

[23] Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanisation to Cities*, (Cassell, 1995) Chapt. 6 and Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), Chapt. 7.

[24] See e.g. Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Retreat from Autonomy" in *World in Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 43.

[25] Hamish Mcrae, 'Why there will be many more angry voters and hung elections in Europe', *The Independent* (12/4/2006).

[26] J.K. Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment* (Harmondsworth:Penguin, 1993).

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

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

[29] see *The Multidimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy*, (2005), [ch 1](#).

[30] This is in contrast to ill-conceived modern 'anarchist' treatises, which blame for everything the state, ignoring the crucial role of the dynamics of the market economy itself in bringing about a particular form of social structure, which then led to the concrete form of modern state whose main role is to promote and reinforce this dynamics. For this approach, indirectly also adopted by Chomsky, it is only 20th century corporate capitalism that has to be blamed for the present situation and not the free market! For a critique of Chomsky's view of capitalism see T. Fotopoulos, *Chomsky's capitalism, Albert's meta-capitalism and Inclusive Democracy* (Athens, 2004) (in Greek) and for an economistic type of 'anarchist' analysis blaming exclusively the state for the present situation and adopting a "free market anticapitalism\_(sic!) see e.g. Kevin A. Carson, *Mutualist Political Economy* (2006).

[31] see T. Fotopoulos, 'Globalisation, the reformist Left and the Anti-Globalisation 'Movement'', *Democracy & Nature*, (vol. 7 no. 2, July 2001).

[32] see *The Multidimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy* (2005), [ch. 8](#).

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

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

[35] 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.

[36] See T. Fotopoulos, *Drugs: Beyond penalisation and liberalisation* (in Greek) (Athens: Eleftheros Typos, 1999).

[37] Sam Jones, 'More than half of jails in England are too full', *The Guardian* (13/8/2005).

[38] Martin Woolcott, "The March of a Martial Law", *The Guardian* (20 Jan. 1996).

[39] 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).

[40] 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.

[41] For extensive bibliography, see *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, ch. 8.

[42] *ibid.*

[43] Castoriadis, "The Retreat from Autonomy".

[44] See Fotopoulos, '[The Myth of Postmodernity](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (March 2001).

[45] 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.

[46] *ibid.*

[47] See for analysis and references, T. Fotopoulos, '[The Catastrophe of Marketisation](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (July 1999).

[48] See Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, ch 2.

[49] See Takis Fotopoulos, '[Transitional strategies and the Inclusive Democracy project](#)', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2002).

[50] Janet Biehl, *The Politics of Social Ecology*, (Montreal: Black Rose, 1997), ch 7.

[51] For a detailed description of this strategy, see *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, ch. 7 and 'Transitional strategies'.