

# De-growth, the Simpler Way and Inclusive Democracy

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Although, of course, I agree with many of the points raised by Ted Trainer's useful contribution to the de-growth debate, as this was hopefully made clear by both my older debate on the matter with Serge Latouche<sup>[1]</sup> and, also, my "stirring" paper to the Barcelona Conference this year<sup>[2]</sup>, yet, I think there are certain important points which need further clarification.

## Market and growth

At the outset, his claim in the extract below, according to which I support the view that growth and the market are "separate things," is false:

Fotopoulos rightly criticises the de-growth school for not realizing that one cannot scrap growth without scrapping the market. However, I believe the case for this claim is stronger than he makes it seem. He can be taken to be saying that growth and the market are separate things, for instance when he says growth and the market are "(...) the two fundamental components of the system."<sup>[13]</sup> and "(...) opposite sides of the same coin."<sup>[14]</sup> It seems to me more appropriate to say that there is basically only one factor here, the market, because it logically entails a commitment to growth.

However, apart from the fact that the above text (I suppose inadvertently) misquoted me, in fact, I did not claim that growth and the market are "(...) opposite sides of the same coin," but exactly the opposite! Namely, that "the market/growth economy and the concentration of economic power are opposite sides of the same coin." The very fact that I deliberately used the term "market/growth economy" to describe the present system signifies that, far from seeing them as "separate things," I see the growth economy as identical with the market economy. This is of course in accordance with the view I always expressed in my writings that the growth economy is simply the inevitable outcome of the dynamics of the market economy<sup>[3]</sup>. Furthermore, as the following extract from the "stirring" paper mentioned above shows, I use exactly this argument to show why "de-growth could not be seen as just a matter of changing values and imaginary significations":

The question is: has there ever been a system of market economy, in the Polanyian sense, whose dynamic had not led to maximisation of economic growth—barring the periods of unwanted economic crises like the present one— whether this was a capitalist market economy, or even a "socialist" market economy like

the one in today's China? If the answer is negative —as it should be— then this is a strong indication that de-growth could not be seen as just a matter of changing values and imaginary significations, or of “abandoning a faith system, a religion,” [4] and that, instead, de-growth is simply non-feasible within a system of market economy (...). It is, therefore, obvious that a degrowing market-based economy and society is non-feasible, not only because de-growth deprives it from its basic dynamics on the production side, but also because it deprives it from its justification in the eyes of citizens, who, today, have been transformed into consumers.

In other words, in my analysis, economic growth is just the main symptom of a catastrophic (economically, socially and ecologically) system of allocating resources, and not the cause of it. The cause is the market system itself.

Having said that, I do not agree of course, as Ted does, with the usual Marxist analysis of over-accumulation as the cause of the chronic as well as the present deep capitalist crisis. As I tried to show elsewhere,[5] this approach has hardly any relationship to the present reality of an internationalised market economy. For a start, although it is true that the unequal distribution of income and wealth and, therefore, of economic power is at the root of the economic crisis characterising a market economy, the cause of this crisis is not that inequality creates a crisis of under consumption or overproduction —the traditional Left argument. As the consumerist boom in the West has shown in the last half of a century or so, underconsumption is not the problem of capitalist societies at the centre (for various reasons transcending the scope of the present article), and in fact it is not even the problem in the capitalist periphery, with the creation of a “new North” in the South, as part of the globalisation process we have seen in the first section. Second, it is not true that the surplus produced and appropriated by capital cannot find outlets in production and spills over into financial speculation where it is absorbed in speculative bubbles. Although this may be true in the case of a nation-based market economy it has very little to do with an internationalised market economy. In fact, most of the surplus which is used today for financial speculation comes from the sovereign funds of such capitalist “miracles” like China and India, as well as Russian, Arab and Latin American billionaires —i.e., from countries in which the extreme inequality in the distribution of income and wealth, in combination with the overexploitation of their labour forces (or their natural resources) and the effective absence of welfare states has created lots of surpluses, which their elites, instead of investing them domestically for an improvement in the “social wage” of their impoverished workers, prefer to invest in Western financial markets (particularly US ones) and speculative bubbles.

On the other hand, the ultimate cause of the chronic economic crisis for the ID project is the growing concentration of economic power in fewer and fewer hands, an event that results in a huge and growing concentration of income and wealth. At the same time, the immediate cause of the present crisis is the opening and liberalisation of markets for the needs of the internationalised market economy, which led to the financial bubbles and the almost bankruptcy of the private banks and financial institutions that was averted by the massive flow of taxpayers' money to their vaults, destroying the remnants of the welfare states, if not leading to the informal bankruptcy of some states in the semi-periphery (Ireland, Spain, etc.). This, in turn, has led to the “austerity” programs in one country after another to reduce the huge budget deficits and debts created by the massive outflow of state receipts towards

financial institutions and a growing recession in the West, while the Eastern paradises of China, India, etc. still enjoy high growth because of the huge surpluses they have accumulated in the past twenty years or so, which they still use to further boost US demand (by buying state bonds, etc.) and also for infrastructure projects domestically to match any decline in world demand because of the recession.

So, contrary to the Marxist view of overaccumulation adopted by Trainer, in the present internationalised market economy, the more capital surplus a country has, the higher its growth rate is and far from any shortage of outlets for investment, in fact, there is a shortage of funds for investment, both for real investment as well as financial investment. This is another reason why the de-growth project which does not rule out the capitalist market system is completely incompatible with it, not only because the market's dynamic necessarily leads to more growth, as we have seen above, but also because the masses of unemployed and low-wagers that a de-growth policy would create in a capitalist market economy will lead to a social insurrection against de-growth, which could be much bigger than the emerging mass social unrest against the capitalist system that is blamed for its inability to create more growth —not less!

Similar arguments could be brought forward about the Simpler Way, particularly as it also adopts private firms, which can never be effectively controlled by the community or society at large, as long as the means of production and distribution are not owned and controlled by the community itself, as it happens in the case of *demotic enterprises*, owned and controlled by the *demos* (the citizens' assembly) and the worker's assemblies, envisaged by the ID project.

## **Direct Democracy and Inclusive Democracy**

Next, Trainer identifies the “classical Anarchist conception of radically participatory democracy” with Inclusive Democracy:

Despite their significant differences, Fotopoulos, Bookchin, the Eco-feminists and Chomsky centre their critique of society and their recommendations for a satisfactory society on power and the domination by elites, and thus they argue for what Fotopoulos refers to as “direct democracy”. This seems to be simply the classical Anarchist conception of radically participatory democracy, whereby all citizens have an equal say in decisions, no individuals or agencies have power over the citizen level, and issues involving larger regions or groups are dealt with via delegations and federations without citizens relinquishing power.

However, the identification of the ID project with “the classical Anarchist conception of radically participatory democracy” is simplifying and wrong. First, the classical conception of democracy, and likewise the anarchist conception of direct democracy has nothing to do with various versions of “participatory democracy” promoted today by sections of the Left, including supporters of the de-growth project, which imply some sort of mix of direct democracy with representative “democracy” —a contradiction in terms! Second, these classical conceptions of democracy represent only a component of the Inclusive Democracy project, as we shall briefly see below. In other words, direct democracy, as understood by Trainer is either just a procedure for taking decisions or, at best, a kind of political system

which aims to integrate polity into society but which does not imply anything as regards the society-economy, and the society-Nature relationships.

On the other hand, the Inclusive Democracy project explicitly attempts to integrate but also transcend the classical democracy/autonomy tradition, as well as the socialist tradition that aims to integrate the economy into society, and the “new social movements” among which is the ecological movement, which aims to integrate society into Nature. This is why it talks not just about direct (or political) democracy but also about:

- economic democracy, which implies not just citizens having an equal say on economic decisions but also collectively owning and controlling the means of production,
- democracy in the social realm, which implies self management at the factory, office, university levels by working people, students and teachers, etc., and
- ecological democracy, which implies that the democratic institutions themselves create the necessary conditions for the abolition of the instrumentalist view of Nature according to which Nature is seen as an instrument for growth and development, i.e. the view which prevailed in modernity as an inevitable ideological by-product of the rise of the market economy and, through its dynamics, of the growth economy.

## What is the rationale for a new society?

An even more important point raised by Ted’s analysis concerns the rationale for a new society. For him, “the case for radical political transition derives primarily from an understanding of our ecological/sustainability problem” and he then goes on to describe how the characteristics of the form of society required for this transition (what he calls “The Simpler Way”), in fact, coincide with several of the main features of an Inclusive Democracy:

From The Simpler Way perspective the crucial need for this political form can be seen when the coming ecological situation is understood. In the conditions of intense scarcity ahead, a viable and satisfying society will *have to be* based on principles of frugality, self-sufficiency, simplicity, localism, mostly small firms and farms, cooperation, many low-technologies (hand tools, earth building, crafts, gardening...) and non-material satisfactions. It will have to have per capita GDP and consumption of resources that are *a small fraction* of those taken for granted in rich countries today. It will have to be made up of mostly small local economies drawing on local resources to meet local needs. None of this will be viable unless the economy is under local control and run to meet needs as distinct from being run to make profits.

However, to my mind, it is historically, theoretically and politically wrong to conclude that “the case for radical political transition derives primarily from an understanding of our ecological/sustainability problem,” and not from the realisation of the role of the main institutions of modernity, the capitalist market economy system and its political complement in representative “democracy,” in creating corresponding power structures and relations which inevitably led not only to the present catastrophic ecological crisis but also to a multidimensional crisis in general, i.e. a crisis which is also political, economic and social.<sup>[6]</sup> It

is obviously this wrong conclusion that leads Trainer to criticise writers like myself, as I mentioned above, on centering our “critique of society and our recommendations for a satisfactory society on power and the domination by elites”.

Thus, first, such a conclusion is historically wrong, because it does not provide any explanation of the historical causes of the ecological crisis. Clearly, it is not accidental that this crisis began developing only with the parallel rise of the capitalist market system, about two hundred years ago, and its political complement, representative “democracy”. In other words, the ecological/sustainability problem is only the inevitable consequence of the dynamics of the capitalist market system and its political complement and not the cause of the present crisis. It was the drive to profit, through maximising economic efficiency and competitiveness, which led to the continuous need for expansion and economic growth. This is how economic growth became the main motive of the ruling elites in modernity, whereas, of course, economic growth has never been the main motive of any pre-capitalist ruling elite. And it was within the context of the development of the capitalist market economy into a growth economy, which culminated in the post-WWII period with mass production and mass consumption, that the growth ideology flourished, which was shared also by the statist form of modernity (Soviet statism as well as Western social democracy), through the Enlightenment idea of Progress, common in both liberalism as well as socialism.[\[7\]](#)

Second, this conclusion is theoretically wrong, because it assumes away the role of the hierarchical structures and of the ruling elites in determining (either directly, through their control of the means of production, or indirectly, through their control of the political process, the mass media, culture and so on) how we produce, how we consume and even how we think. In other words, if we accept this conclusion, the political motivation to change society and move from the historically dominant heteronomous society to a new autonomous society, which would institutionalise people’s self-determination (the implicit or explicit aim of all previous major revolutions), is simply reduced to the need to re-organise production and consumption and do the corresponding changes at the political and social levels, so that we can deal with the ecological threat, the energy scarcity problem, etc. However, the ecological crisis as well as all other aspects of the present multidimensional crisis, are only symptoms and not the causes of a much deeper problem: the problem created by the fact that in a heteronomous society it is not society itself that takes all important political and economic decisions (which affect also our relation to the environment) on the basis of a democratic rationalism, namely, a rationalism founded in democracy as a structure and a process of social self-institution. Clearly, there are rational ways to organise our production and consumption, our society in general, in a way that does not create blatant irrationalities like the ecological crisis, or the chronic economic crisis created by an irrational economic system that innately creates inequality and poverty, with most of the Earth’s inhabitants being unable to meet even their basic needs. However these fundamental irrationalities are structural, i.e. are created by the system itself and not by some aberration of it, as a result of the fact that its basic institutions, i.e. the capitalist market system and representative “democracy” have a dynamic that leads to accumulating over time concentration of power at all levels. This means that it is the system itself which is the ultimate cause of every aspect of the multidimensional crisis, and therefore of the ecological crisis, since it always promotes, by its own structure, the partial interests of elites rather than the general interest. On the other hand, if we accept the argument promoted by Ted Trainer, which on this it is similar to the argument promoted by the de-growth supporters, we can

sort out all irrationalities of the system and even open the way to a new society, just by understanding the importance of the ecological problem and what has to be done to sort it out.

Finally, it is politically wrong because once one assumes that the case for radical political transition derives *primarily from an understanding of our ecological/sustainability problem* then one is bound to end up with wrong (to my mind) political conclusions, both on how this “understanding” will be brought about (i.e. “the transition problem”) and also on what the aim of such a transition should be.

## The transition problem

As regards first the transition problem, the implicit idea in such a social “understanding” of the ecological crisis, which —according to this approach— should lead to a new society is that once “people” realise the magnitude of the threatening crisis they are bound to adopt the principles of frugality, self-sufficiency, etc. and start building alternative institutions like the ones described by Ted which look similar to the ID institutions. Similarly, supporters of the de-growth project, influenced by Castoriadis’s thought, blame the “imaginary of development,” which emerged at the same time as part of the ideology of Progress and dominated modernism in the aftermath of the Enlightenment.

However, as I have tried to show elsewhere<sup>[8]</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.). Thus, it 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 (technocratically defined)<sup>[9]</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>[10]</sup> All this implies that the transition to a new society is not just a matter of “understanding of our ecological/sustainability problem” —something that leads us directly to the issue of a transitional strategy that I will consider briefly below.

Similarly, the transition to a new society is not a matter of changing our “social imaginary,” which implicitly assumes that the rise of the present sort of economy and society is just the outcome of domination of specific imaginary significations or values, as the de-growth approach suggests. Instead, as the ID project suggests, the present socio-economic system is the outcome of social struggle on the one hand and technological (including organisational) and socio-economic developments on the other. Furthermore, the whole idea that there is some kind of a class undifferentiated “social imaginary” which determines the way we think

and behave, is wrong. The very claim that the ecological crisis does not make class and race distinctions —equally affecting rich and poor, white or black— is a myth, arising 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. 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. Therefore, as I put it elsewhere,<sup>[11]</sup> instead of thinking in terms of a single social imaginary we should think of a multiplicity of social imaginaries expressing class divisions:

in every society characterised by class divisions, and at every historical “moment,” various “social imaginaries” co-exist side-by side, expressing the main class divisions, and particularly the division between ruling and ruled classes and groups, with dominant in each case the imaginary of the ruling classes and groups, which is then formulated accordingly in the “dominant social paradigm” and is legitimised through the socialisation process (education, mass media, economic and physical violence, etc.).

It is, therefore, clear that moving to an ecological democracy and de-growth or to a Simpler Way is not just a matter of “a paradigm shift to a concept of “right-sizing” the global and national economies” as de-growth supporters claim,<sup>[12]</sup> or just of a change in culture in the form of a cultural revolution, a change in the legal system, etc. In fact, a change in culture at a significant social scale is impossible within the present institutional framework of a market economy and its political complement of representative “democracy” because the institutions themselves, and the way of living implied by them, have created a corresponding kind of culture. Such a change in culture at a significant social scale can only take place within the context of a new 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 (labor, capital, land) away from the market economy, and this presupposes a universalist political project, like the ID project, which explicitly questions both the capitalist market economy and representative “democracy” —something that the de-growth approach never does.

So, if we accept the ID premise that the ultimate cause of every aspect of the present crisis is the concentration of power at all levels, then the obvious way out of this crisis is the abolition of power structures and relations, i.e. the creation of conditions of equal distribution of power among citizens. One way which could bring about this sort of society is the strategy proposed by the Inclusive Democracy project that involves the creation of political, economic and social structures, which secure direct democracy, economic democracy, ecological democracy and democracy in the social realm. It also involves the creation of a new social paradigm, which has to become hegemonic for the reproduction of Inclusive Democracy to be secured. Furthermore, the Inclusive Democracy project offers not only a meaningful and realistic way out of the present multidimensional crisis, but also a way of building a new globalisation, which is based on genuine democratic structures. The creation of a new world order based on an Inclusive Democracy involves the building of confederations of local, regional and national inclusive democracies. This will lead to a globalisation which will not be based on the unequal distribution of power and the domination of human being over human being and Nature, as under the present globalisation, but, instead, on the equal distribution of all forms of power

between autonomous human beings and the elimination of all forms of domination. It will also be founded on a sustainable economic system, which meets the basic needs of the planet's population, through a mechanism of allocation of resources between the confederations, within a planetary confederal plan of allocation of resources. Finally, meeting the non-basic needs would be determined at the local level, in a way that secures freedom of choice, whereas exchanges of surpluses between confederations would be arranged through multilateral agreements.

The starting point in the ID transitional approach<sup>[13]</sup> is the recognition of the fact that the major problem with systemic change has always been how it could be brought about, from below, but by a majority of the population, so that a democratic abolition of power structures could become feasible. The ID strategy does offer a solution to this crucial problem. The two main forms of activity suggested by the ID project are: direct action and participation in local elections, whose main aim however is not just the conquest of power, but the rupture of the socialisation process and therefore the creation of a democratic majority "from below," which will legitimise the new structures of Inclusive Democracy.

Given this aim, it is obvious that participation in national elections is a singularly inappropriate means to this end, since, even if the movement for an Inclusive Democracy does win a national election, this will inevitably set in motion a process of "revolution from above". 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.

Thus, the ID strategy involves the building of a mass programmatic libertarian political movement, with an unashamedly universalist goal to change society along genuine democratic lines, beginning here and now. Therefore, such a movement should explicitly aim at a systemic change, as well as at a parallel change in our value systems. This strategy would entail the gradual involvement of increasing numbers of people in a new kind of politics and the parallel shifting of economic resources (labor, capital, land) away from the market economy. The aim of such a strategy should be to create changes in the institutional framework, as well as to value systems, which, after a period of tension between the new institutions and the state, would, at some stage, replace the market economy, representative "democracy," and the social paradigm "justifying" them, with an Inclusive Democracy and a new democratic paradigm respectively.

This is because, as systemic change requires a rupture with the past, which extends to both the institutional and the cultural level, such a rupture is only possible through the development of a new political organisation and a new comprehensive political program for systemic change that will create a clear anti-systemic consciousness at a massive scale. This is in contrast to the statist socialist strategy, which ends up with the creation of a clear anti-systemic consciousness only with respect to an avant-garde, or to the life-style activities which, if they create any antisystemic consciousness at all, it is restricted to the few members of various libertarian "groupuscules". However, the creation of a new culture, which has to

become hegemonic before the transition to an Inclusive Democracy could be effected, is only possible through the parallel building of new political and economic institutions at a significant social scale. In other words, ***it is only through action to build the new institutions that a mass political movement with a democratic consciousness can be built.***

Such a strategy creates the conditions for the transition, both the “subjective” ones, in terms of developing a new democratic consciousness and the “objective” ones, in terms of creating the new institutions which will form the basis of an Inclusive Democracy. At the same time, the establishment of these new institutions will crucially assist here and now the victims of the concentration of power and particularly, the victims of neoliberal globalisation in solving the problems of inequality created by it.

Thus, people who today are alienated from all forms of power, particularly political and economic power, would have every incentive to be involved in such a movement and vote in local elections for the establishment of “democracy in action” in their area. They will be fully aware of the fact that problems like unemployment and poverty could only be solved within the ID institutions (*demotic* enterprises, *demotic* welfare, etc.). They will also know that problems like air/water/food pollution could only be sorted out effectively, and at a massive social scale, if citizens start taking control of local power within the ID institutions rather than in the context of communes outside the main political and social arena. They will finally know that unless they get hold of political power at the local level and then, through confederations of local IDs, at the regional level, they will never be able to control their lives. In other words, people will be involved in a struggle for the establishment of the ID institutions not out of hunger for an abstract notion of self-management or democracy but because, through their own action, they will be able to see that the cause of all their problems (economic, social, ecological) has been due to the fact that power has been concentrated in a few hands.

The objective, therefore, of an ID strategy is the creation from below, of “popular bases of political and economic power,” that is, the establishment of local inclusive democracies, which, at a later stage, will confederate in order to create the conditions for the establishment of a new confederal Inclusive Democracy. Therefore, a crucial element of the ID strategy is that the political and economic institutions of Inclusive Democracy begin to be established immediately after a significant number of people in a particular area have formed a base for “democracy in action” —something that, most probably, could only be achieved at the massive social scale required through winning in local elections under an ID program.

## **The aim of the transition**

Finally, Trainer raises the all important aim of the transition to an alternative society and concludes:

when one focuses on the sustainability problem one realizes that much more has to be done than just get rid of elite power and we could eliminate elites and domination and have a perfectly just and equitable world economy, while still destroying the planet.

However, one could also say, paraphrasing this conclusion, that:

when one focuses on the autonomy/democracy problem one realizes that much more has to be done than just get rid of the ecological problem and we could eliminate the aspects of the ecological crisis which are destroying the planet, while still destroying any meaning of life for the vast majority of the world population which may well continue living lives they do not in any way control and still destroying millions of lives of others.

In other words, it is not inconceivable that the technological and organisational changes required to stop the ecological catastrophe could perfectly be achieved even within a world heteronomous society in which an enlightened elite controls the economic process in a way that gives it the power to implement the necessary changes to avoid an ecological catastrophe, while still concentrating all economic and political power in their hands. Whether this will be a new version of the internationalised market economy in which competition and growth are controlled at the planetary level with the aim to avoid an ecological catastrophe, or a different kind of a heteronomous society altogether, does not matter. What matters is that this will be yet another form of a heteronomous social system in which people will not be individually or collectively autonomous, in other words, free. But, freedom is the highest human objective, even higher than mere survival! So, an Inclusive Democracy could not just be the by-product of the choice for a viable society. Even if an unequal society has created (technologically) a sustainable society, the demand for an Inclusive Democracy would still be there because it is associated with the need for autonomy and freedom not just sustainability!

Furthermore, the above extract from Trainer's paper makes clear that for him the creation of a society based on collective and individual autonomy, as the society envisaged by the ID project is, does not guarantee that it would also be an ecological society. However, as I replied to a similar argument put forward in the past by David Pepper,<sup>[14]</sup> this is a clear misconception of what democracy is about 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. In other words, 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. No guarantee therefore 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>[15]</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. In this context, it does not seem right to argue, as Ted does, "it is not the case that by getting rid of the dominant elite or the disposition to dominate we would have got rid of the obsession with affluence." However, the obsession with affluence far from being irrelevant to what the dominant (economic) elite does, is very much induced by it. The meaning of life promoted by the (elite-controlled) TV channels everyday, by videos, news reports, even indirectly by education is that success in life is measured by wealth, i.e. by affluence. So, it seems reasonable to assume that by getting rid of an economic system which innately promotes growth and of a political and social system which promotes affluent standards of living, as well as of the elites which thrive on growth and affluence, we would have indeed taken a decisive step towards their elimination.

At the broader social level, the establishment of a democracy at the social realm 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.

Finally, 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 conclusion**

I do not agree that the need “for scrapping representative democracy, as well as the market, as well as growth, and as well as current levels of affluence” could just be derived from “a more thorough critique of consumer-capitalist society” as Ted argues.

The need for scrapping representative “democracy” and the market and growth could only be derived as the critical implications of the quest for individual and collective autonomy, i.e. the quest for freedom itself. In other words, they can only be the crucial demands of a universalist antisystemic project and movement, and not of a monothematic project and movement aiming at averting the threatening ecological catastrophe. In this sense, the de-growth project is completely inadequate to deal with the present deep multidimensional crisis which gets worse every day. Furthermore, despite the fact that The Simpler Way is definitely much more advanced in this direction than the de-growth project, as it explicitly raises the issue of non-compatibility between the market economy system, growth, and representative “democracy”, still, it suffers, also, from the fact that it is a monothematic movement and this is why it raises the issue of replacing the main institutions of the present system that has led us to the present crisis as a kind of “far-reaching **implications**” derived from the understanding of our ecological/sustainability problem and not as the fundamental demands of a universalist antisystemic movement.

This has important practical implications. It is exactly because of the monothematic character of movements like the de-growth movement or the Transition Towns movement that such movements have always been reformist movements and usually end up by being integrated into the system, as it happened with the Green movement which is at present another appendage of the system itself to support it even to its criminal wars! In this sense, Trainer’s hope that, by helping them to try to deepen their vision and extend their goals, they may assume an antisystemic nature, is completely unrealistic.

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[1] Takis Fotopoulos, “Is degrowth compatible with a market economy?”, *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 2007) :

[http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol3/vol3\\_no1\\_Takis\\_degrowth.htm](http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol3/vol3_no1_Takis_degrowth.htm)

[2] See Takis Fotopoulos, “Direct Democracy and De-Growth” (in this issue).

[3] See e.g., Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards an Inclusive Democracy: The Crisis of the Growth Economy and the Need for a New Liberatory Project* (London/NY: Cassell/Continuum, 1997/1998), pp. 62-63.

[4] Serge Latouche, “Why Less Should Be So Much More: De-growth Economics,” *Le Monde diplomatique* (December 2004).

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

[http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol4/vol4\\_no4\\_takis\\_economic\\_crisis.htm](http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol4/vol4_no4_takis_economic_crisis.htm)

[6] Takis Fotopoulos, *The Multidimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy* (2005), ch. 9 :

[http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/fotopoulos/english/brbooks/multi\\_crisis\\_id/ch9.htm](http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/fotopoulos/english/brbooks/multi_crisis_id/ch9.htm)

[7] Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards an Inclusive Democracy*, ch. 2.

[8] Takis Fotopoulos, *The Multidimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy*, ch. 1.

[9] Efficiency is defined in a market economy 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.

[10] *The Multidimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy*, ch. 5.

[11] See Takis Fotopoulos, “The Autonomy project and Inclusive Democracy: A critical review of Castoriadis’ thought,” *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 2008) :

[http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol4/vol4\\_no2\\_takis\\_castoriadis.htm](http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol4/vol4_no2_takis_castoriadis.htm)

[12] See e.g., Declaration of the Paris 2008 De-Growth Conference.

[13] See T. Fotopoulos, “The transition to an Inclusive Democracy,” *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2010); The Barcelona Talks (April 11, 2010) :

[http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol6/vol6\\_no2\\_takis\\_ID\\_meeting\\_Barcelona\\_2010.htm#\\_ftn13](http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol6/vol6_no2_takis_ID_meeting_Barcelona_2010.htm#_ftn13)

[14] David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 324.

[15] T. Fotopoulos, “From (mis)education to *Paedeia*,” *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 2003) :

[http://www.democracynature.org/dn/vol9/takis\\_paideia.htm](http://www.democracynature.org/dn/vol9/takis_paideia.htm)