

# The Tradition of Democratic Socialism – A Critique of Liberal Realism

## Towards a Politics of Governance and Popular Sovereignty

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### Introduction

Liberal realism has had a great impact on political theory in the 20th century, especially the ambition to develop an empirically based realistic model of how democracies actually work as modern nation states (e.g. Schumpeter, 1987 [1942]). Schumpeter accepted as given the tendency for power in a mass society to concentrate in the hands of a skilled minority. Therefore, he concentrated his energies on developing a formal political method for protecting society against the potentials for tyranny and mob rule inherent in centralization. Recent developments, particularly in Eastern Europe, have once more contributed to the re-vitalization of Schumpeterian themes, especially his central argument that democracy cannot mean that the people is capable of governing but only that they are free to choose among competing political elites operating within a system of formal rules and regulations.

This paper shall challenge the relevance of Schumpeter's procedural and elitist model of democracy.<sup>1</sup> Before the whole world 'goes liberalist', we should reconsider whether Marxism could be correct when arguing that the isolation of the state from civil society constitutes the problem of democracy rather than its solution. The antistatism of classical Marxist thought need not be read as an attempt to 'melt down' the political system into civil society. When released from its conception of historical effectiveness, it might be viewed as manifesting an attempt to demonstrate that there are no *a priori* reasons why this system must always assume the form of a pyramid with the few 'wise' and 'powerful' on the top and the many 'unwise' and 'powerless' at the bottom. By repoliticizing the notion of civil society, democratic socialists could challenge liberal realism for neglecting the crucial relation of the power of authority to the ontological potentials for decision and action that all agents share equally in common (Bang, 1990). They could show how Schumpeter's formal democratic method does not only empty democracy of its popular content, handing over the (re)production of social policy to a network of circulating elites in history, but also undermines the autonomy of political institutions in society, narrowing them down to comprise only those structures that allow a central authority control over associated individuals.

Our task shall consequently be to uncover the *unpolitics* of Schumpeter and his successors that excludes authorities and ordinary citizens from structuring and organizing the polity on the basis of their political difference rather than according to a principle of superordination and subordination. We shall hold that a re-assessment of the Marxist tradition in political terms will reveal a fallacy of misplaced concreteness in liberalism. The liberal realists identify the emergence of a political system in society with the occurrence of the state as a form of administrative domination claiming command over a given territory. As such they attribute to a property of the political system, namely its particular regime structure, the concreteness of this system itself as a set of decision-making processes, which are 'ongoing' in time (cf. Easton, 1991).

### The Socialist Critique of Liberalism

As a liberal realist, Schumpeter accepted the elitist equation that politics = the study of changing value hierarchies = influence = elite (Easton, 1950). State socialism has provided no alternative to this equation, which is perhaps why it stands on the brink of extinction. However, the democratic potentials of socialism are far from exhausted. Liberalism still owes socialists an answer to the question of how it is possible to introduce democracy as a genuinely popular form of control into a modern society dominated by a system of administrative domination underpinned by economic exploitation (Hoffman, 1991; Rustin, 1991). The New-Right focuses as never before on the state as a barrier to liberty and free enterprise. But its attempt at constructing a 'small' but 'strong' state merely seems to add to the concentration and centralization of effective political power in the hands of fewer and fewer actors or groups (Jessop et al., 1988). It hinders rather than furthers the spread of political and economic power beyond the networks of a dominant minority.

The heart of the matter in liberalism is, and has always been, the goal of freeing private individuals in civil society from political interference without simultaneously undermining the state's sovereignty and contribution to social order (cf. Held, 1987). The essential argument of democratic socialism is, and has always been, that *if the state really is a barrier to self-government and self-regulation, the people should try to get rid of it*. As Marx noted about the state, there can be no popular control where democracy means "the preservation of the life conditions of its rule: *property, family, religion, order!*" (Marx, 1973 [1850], I: 252). Since one cannot both have one's cake and eat it, the liberal project is doomed to fail. Liberals must decide whether the goal is to change the state into a non-hierarchical and non-oppressive form of political action or to maintain its class rule and absolute power *over* the citizenry in the decision-making process. In accepting unconditional 'surrender' and 'Herrschaft' as 'a fact of life', they merely separate citizens from their own political means of (re)production, thus rendering it impossible for them to become free.

If "[p]arty and machine politicians are simply the response to the fact that the electoral mass is incapable of action other than a stampede", as Schumpeter insists (1987 [1942]: 283), it is inconsistent to hold that individuals can become

autonomous from the state. Obviously, citizens cannot possibly hope to acquire the faculty of ruling themselves as long as their society is dominated by the deep desire of some rich and influential few to remain in charge of the situation (Enzensberger, 1991: 19). Then they do not make any real political difference at all, not even in their limited role as voters in liberal democracy.

Hence, liberalism is actually pulling the wool over our eyes in proclaiming the need for human freedom, equality and self-control while placing the responsibility for fulfilling this need in the hands of a hierarchical and coercive state. Democratic socialism, in contrast, does not suffer from this "progressive advance of the schizoid malady", as a young and critical David Easton so aptly put it (1949: 18). It demonstrates explicitly that if democracy is but a form of administrative domination with a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, as Weber, Schumpeter and their modern successors presume, then clearly the people 'as a whole' cannot be said to rule the political system in any significant sense of the term.

From the point of view of democratic socialism, the isolation of the state from civil society is not the solution to the issue of political domination and freedom. This merely places the exercise of authority *in opposition to* the exercise of citizenry, which is why so many democratic socialists reject *étatisme* in favor of an 'anti-statist' position. Not because they want to replace political hierarchy by a social anarchy that ignores the necessity of political leadership for society. Rather because they do not abstract from the real possibility of linking the coordinating capacities of political leaders to the novelty creating capacities of 'ordinary' citizens within the boundaries of a responsive and self-transforming democratic polity (cf. Gamble, 1991). Few anti-statists from the Marxist traditions are actually 'anarchists' in its original non-leadership sense. Most of them just want to emphasize that the democratic idea of self-government by the people depends for its realization on the formation of symmetrical relations of autonomy and dependence between political leaders and 'ordinary' citizens.

### Politics as an Ontology of Potentials

Democratic socialism springs from the insight that no matter how high and solid the wall between state and civil society becomes, it will never be able to conceal that boundaries, far from being barriers, are the actual locus of political relationships; and that it is therefore our relation to these boundaries, including our discovery and creation of them and their discovery and creation of us which surely make us all what we become (cf. Wilden, 1972). Thus democratic socialism means exactly what it says; namely, that democracy depends for its existence upon the transformation of the existing barriers between the state and civil society. Of course, in advanced liberal democracy, lay-actors are not generally and unqualifiedly oppressed and exploited. Yet they cannot really be free and equal in shaping the conditions of their own lives, as long as their society is built upon the presumption that the political system can change only in extent and to a degree but *never* in its essential order as a mode of domination

(cf. Isaac, 1987). Democratic socialists set themselves against any such attempt to use political authority to sustain asymmetries of resources in the going political system (cf. Therborn, 1991: 300; Sassoon, 1991; Wainwright, 1991). They know from bitter experience that democracy can thrive and develop only in a societal formation whose members respect *both* the difference between *and* the unity of the political tasks of leaders and 'ordinary' citizens.

Although Schumpeter was correct in saying that the extension of democracy to larger sections of the citizenry owes a good deal to capitalism, his elitism blinded him to the fact that democracy is 'in the last instance' linked to equality and thereby to socialism as an organizational *possibility*. Therefore, when the 'old' Marxists wanted to 'get rid' of the state, it was not merely because this state distorted their vision of the coming classless society. It was above all because it obstructed the democratic development of a political community comprising all the members of society. The liberal-democratic state denies citizens in the political community access to partaking in the articulation of social policy, except as 'supports' of the political leadership. As such it virtually conceals the integral relation of political authorities to lay-actors in the political community in terms of which any political regime (like the modern state itself) is constituted.

The depoliticization of citizens in the modern nation-state as 'private' individuals, we shall argue, generates a false picture of politics as 'communityless' and as comprising (a special kind of) authorities and regime only. However, as figure 1 illuminates, politics 'goes on' everywhere, what the nation-state certainly does not, and it comprises everybody in their political role, not just the highly centralized authorities brought into being by modernity. Even a stateless society with no bureaucratic power and clear-cut boundaries, such as the international system or a wandering nomadic band, has a political decision-making process (incorporating authorities, a regime and a community) for settling differences that cannot otherwise be autonomously resolved, whether

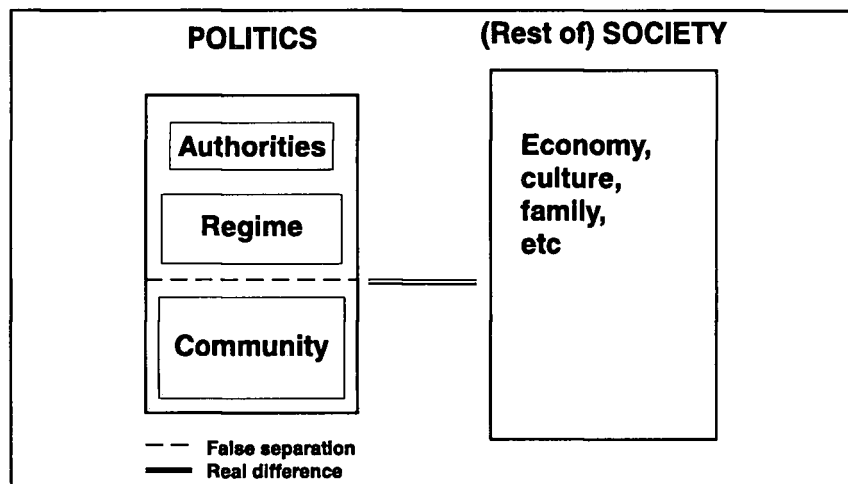


Figure 1. The false separation of politics from society.

privately or socially. That is to say, the relationship of authority that ties leaders and lay-actors together in a political division of labor need neither be legitimated nor hierarchical in order for it to integrate society. It is contingent on domination and freedom and may be sanctioned by *both* coercion (in the sense of threats) and inducement (cf. Easton, 1953; 1955; 1990; Wrong, 1988).

The political dimension of the political economy has a profound critical edge. It demonstrates that when the liberal realists can find only a limited role for lay-actors in the political constitution of society, it is because they *reduce* political decisions and actions to comprise only the operations of a formally organized *governmental system*. In liberal realism, social policy is made into the property of the kinds of regime and authorities that we usually associate with the modern nation-state. As a result, lay-actors in the political community are separated from the political leadership by a ditch. Marxism, despite its tendency to identify *self-government* with the disappearance of class rule, does at least indicate that this is simply to rob the citizenry of their own means of production (that is, the rules and resources of the going regime). It carries a potential for making the *Polity* whole again in terms of the power-knowledge complexes of authority that bind leaders and lay-actors together in time and space. These are conceivable in ontological terms and operate in conjunction with one another to constitute the actual states and episodes of political life (cf. Cohen, 1989).

Democracy is an openended process with no pre-given direction. It does not have its roots in an actual or future state of affairs but in the trans-historical potentials for decision and action that constitute politics as a domain of inquiry. These potentials can be articulated without regard to their concrete empirical manifestations. Therefore, *a new statism need not always replace the old*, as Schumpeter maintained, by reference to the February Revolution in Russia, when writing that "democracy does not mean and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any obvious sense of the terms 'people' and 'rule'". Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them" (Schumpeter, 1987 [1942]: 284–285). Political authority does not *ipso facto* manifest a state of elite domination corresponding to it. It is not the property of a dominant minority but a *potential* which belongs to everybody. This was probably why the 'young' Marx in his critique of the Gotha Programme found that "it is possible to speak of the "present-day state", in contrast with the future, in which its present root, Bourgeois society, will have died off" (1973 [1875], III: 26). He surely recognized that the task of research is not to impose a pre-given goal on the processes and properties characteristic of political life but to uncover how they operate and appear in any given context.

Democratic socialism considers the quest for self-government *irrefutable on empirical grounds*. The faculty of governing society is not a thing or a quality that can be possessed by some few 'specially selected' agents. It is communal potential that may be activated or realized by any one group in various ways in diverse circumstances and for different reasons (cf. Cohen, 1989: 17). Hence, the democratization of civil society as a barrier against the hegemony of liberal

democracy is scarcely enough to satisfy the needs of democracy (Keane, 1988; Held, 1987). In fact, the citizenry can never find the possibility to govern themselves in an 'expert' democracy, manipulating social policy and material welfare behind a veil of secrecy and economic autonomy. Since lay-actors are necessarily involved in generating and shaping the course and outcomes of social policy, "nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the Commune than to supersede universal suffrage by hierarchy investiture" (Marx, 1973 [1871], II: 221).

Marx himself often tended to forget that a state cannot get rid of the state, since hierarchy cannot fight hierarchy without replacing it. But he *also* helped to make us conscious of the fact that democracy is tied to the ongoing struggles of social movements for converting existing asymmetries of class, race, and sex into a set of nonsubmissive relations of autonomy and dependence between actors or collectivities on every level of the societal 'totality'. As distinct from Schumpeter, he refused to treat political power as either the 'dark' or the 'bright' side of the individual. Domination and freedom were considered the property of the organizing of institutions rather than of human nature. On his view, political power rested with the (political) community and not with the formal rules and procedures governing individual action. Although admittedly ideologically misused and abused, Marx's distinction between domination and emancipation *does* render it distinct that 'the masses' "are naturally *politically-minded*" (Engels, 1973 [1872], II: 425) and thereby necessarily involved in the formation of social policy through their integral relation with authorities.

#### Towards a New Policy of Authority and Citizenry

If the masses are naturally politically-minded, it must be because political power is a feature of every society. Once we recognize this, it becomes evident why the identification of political power with class exploitation has proved itself so fatal in *Praxis*. To presume that political power, together with the kind of domination and freedom associated with it, will disappear with the disappearance of classes, is simply to neglect *both* the risks *and* the opportunities provided by authority in the coming classless society. The threats of political disciplining and regulation do not disappear just because capitalist class exploitation disappears, as state socialism demonstrated. But this does not mean that liberal realism is correct in supposing that the "psycho-technics of party management and party advertising, slogans and marching tunes [...] are of the essence of politics. So is the political boss" (Schumpeter, 1987 [1942]: 283). No bossing relation needs exist between leaders and lay-actors, investing the power *of* authorities with the purpose of appropriating domination *over* citizens. The prospects for self-regulation and political freedom are always present in history as real organizational possibilities facilitated by the power of authority. The struggle for political freedom will never come to its natural 'end'. It is something citizens must permanently strive for in their practical knowledge of how to 'go on' in the various practices constituting a political system (cf. Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 1990).

The "battle cry" of "The Revolution in Permanence" (Marx & Engels, 1973 [1850], I: 185) should be read in connection with the argument "that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances" (Marx & Engels, 1973 [1845–46], I: 42). Connecting democracy with the mutability and historicity of all societal forms, we could show that the necessity of a knowledgeable and capable citizenry for 'bending the stick' of authority in society is independent of how small an amount of rationality and control citizens may actually possess at any given moment in time. The conditioning of democratization by political authority precisely illuminates that "[t]o preach to the workers that they should in all circumstances abstain from politics is to drive them into the arms of the priests or the bourgeois republicans" (Engels, 1973 [1872], II: 425). Dilemmas of political integration and control will always occur, precisely because social policy is not the product of circulating elites but of associated individuals acting on the ground of their common potential for decision and action.

A re-assessment of Marxism in political terms will demonstrate that there is room for much more ambiguity in 'reading Marx' than ordinarily believed. An intrinsic quality in the 'young' Marx is exactly his rejection of the modern state as a model of democracy, which is why democratic socialism should not be content with making the state more responsive to social movements (Held, 1989; Jessop, 1990; Keane, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Rustin, 1991). Marx obviously was aware that as long as authority is falsely identified with hierarchy as long will political power be opposed to political freedom.

The attempt to distinguish the difference between authorities and citizens from all hitherto existing rulers/ruled oppositions, we shall see, lies dormant in the debate between Lenin and Kautsky on council democracy and parliamentary democracy. As such their discussions may help to illuminate why in Eastern Europe neither force nor manipulation can compensate for the authority of political leadership or do away with the transformative capacity of the citizenry when it comes to designing a viable and democratic political community. The democratization of Eastern Europe clearly indicates that just as the central place of political authorities in a political system need not be a barrier to the quest for self-government and popular control, so citizens can only assert themselves as individuals by getting rid of the strongly centralized state which inverts and symmetrizes their relations to the political leadership. Indeed, the processes may once again assume the form of a rulers/ruled opposition. But this would not be able to conceal that political power is constitutively two-way and is in principle open to a continuum of authority relations ranging from government by one to government by all.

### **Forms of Democracy in Marxism**

Until recent developments in Eastern Europe and what used to be the Soviet Union, the Russian Revolution of 1917 was regarded as "a world revolutionary moment whose effect no subsequent event or development has undone, and

[...] therefore a threshold in the history of the modern world-system" (Wallerstein, 1982: 31–32). But today, after the events of 1989 and 1991, the Russian Revolution of 1917 can still be regarded as a "threshold in history", viz. in the history of the development of political strategy and theory within the socialist and Marxist tradition. All of a sudden, Marxists had to produce practical answers to questions that so far had been discussed theoretically or as long term strategic questions. And the answers still have great influence on the conceptions of capitalism, socialism, democracy, and their interrelationship. Important questions were then whether and how the revolutionary process could and should be organized, whether the transition from capitalism to socialism was compatible with democratic forms of organization, and if so *what* form(s) political democracy should have during the transitional period and in the coming socialist society. The discussions crystallized in a debate on parliamentarism vs. council democracy.

Two important participants in this debate were, on one side, Karl Kautsky, who until that moment from all sides had been generally acknowledged as *the* interpreter of Marxism and as the most important theoretician of the socialist labour movement, and, on the other side, Lenin, who in the years after the Russian revolution gained a similar position within the communist movement and in the general public. Conversely, Lenin's critique of Kautsky made "an increasing number of Marxist intellectuals [...]" believe that Kautsky "[...] had betrayed the heritage of Marx" (Geary, 1987: 78).<sup>2</sup> Well known figures such as Trotsky and Bucharin sided with Lenin, while the menshevik Martov and the Belgian socialist Vandervelde among others sided with Kautsky in the subsequent international debate (cf. Bergounioux, 1981).

#### Organizations of Russian Revolution and Bolshevik Theory

A short look at historical-empirical developments during the Russian revolution, which here means the whole political process from the February Revolution to the constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in July 1918, with its nodal points of Lenin's arrival in Russia in April 1917, the Bolshevik conquest of political power in October 1917, and the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918, will provide a background and context for the discussion of the two opposed Marxist views of the relation between political organizations and social movements.

The February Revolution and the fall of the Tsarist regime can be characterized as an object lesson in the novelty creating potentials of popular risings. Beginning with a number of strikes, growing into greater and greater demonstrations, ending up in armed insurrection in Petrograd, the February Revolution consisted in a number of *spontaneous* acts made by the masses without being planned or anticipated by any political party or organization. Only after the insurrection was a fact, was it given an *organizational* form. This complicated and unsettled balance of forces between the actors have rightly been termed a 'dual power' situation.

On one side, workers, soldiers, and the committees of the socialist parties formed a number of councils. During March 1917, councils were established



in most of Russia. The estimated number of councils was 400 in May, 600 in August, and 900 in October. Already on the 28th of February elections for the Petrograd Council started – it remained the most important body in the Russian revolution and the centre of council power. Later on, the different and widespread councils were associated through the *All-Russia Congress of Soviets*, when it first met in June 1917. On the other side, liberal members of the dissolved *Duma* formed a committee which on the 2nd of March formed a provisional government to be in office until a constituent assembly could be elected and gathered. Thus, the situation of 'dual power' meant that it was the workers and soldiers who formed the councils that had overthrown the monarchy but had handed over the formal power of government to the liberal bourgeoisie, who could not implement any decision without the acceptance of the councils.

As with other parties, the Bolshevik party did not play any role in the 1917 February Revolution. The party's central committee tried, in accordance with its traditional strategy of revolution, to make up a "provisional revolutionary government" in a coalition with other socialist parties, but failed. Instead, a party conference in the beginning of March sanctioned support for the liberal provisional government until a constituent assembly had been elected and formed a new government.

This situation changed when Lenin on the 3rd of April 1917 returned from his exile in Switzerland and announced his main slogan for the revolutionary struggle: "All power to the soviets". Lenin presented in his so-called *April Theses*<sup>3</sup> an analysis of the situation and a strategy for the struggle of the Bolshevik party: the bourgeois revolution in Russia ended with the February Revolution, and now the socialist revolution was on the agenda. Concerning the question of state power and the form of political democracy, Lenin argued that the Bolsheviks must "preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power" to the soviets, and that the "masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers' Deputies are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government", while "to return to a parliamentary republic [...] would be a retrograde step" (LCW, 24: 23). Likewise, several of the characteristics of a council republic that Lenin explicates later in 1917 in *The State and Revolution* are already found here in his *April Theses*.

From his exile, Lenin had followed actual developments in Russia. In the period prior to the outbreak of the revolution, he had been studying writings of Marx and Engels on the question of the state. He then tried to combine his new theoretical insight with his knowledge of the concrete situation. The results of Lenin's theoretical studies can be followed step by step in his so-called *Blue Notebook*<sup>4</sup>, which was published for the first time in 1931. This contains Lenin's quotations and comments from his readings of Marx and Engels and of Kautsky, Bernstein, and Pannekoek, as well (Lenin, 1978 [1917]). Prior to the *April Theses*, Lenin's attempt to combine theory and reality can be read from his five *Letters From Afar*, written between the 7th and 26th of March. A central theme in these writings is the aspect of form and the linking of form with the actual conjuncture – the situational type labelled 'revolutionary times': "[...] the workers have realized that in revolutionary times they need

not only ordinary, but an entirely different organization” (LCW, 23: 324). Another characteristic are the many references to Marx’s work on the Paris Commune of 1871 (*The Civil War in France*), which also was written in and on a revolutionary situation.

In *The State and Revolution*, where Lenin summarizes his writings from the beginning of 1917 and elaborates on the questions of the organizing principles of the revolution and socialist society, he defines the task of the socialist revolution as one of “smashing” the existing “state machine”. The bourgeois state is to be replaced by a power of a “new type”, a “semi-state” which functions in a transitional society, as the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. Eventually, the state ‘as such’ will ‘wither away’ on the road to communism. The principles of organization and the form of the socialist state Lenin describes by summing up Marx’s characteristics of the Paris Commune:

- 1) The council consisted of members elected by universal suffrage and responsible and revocable at any time.
- 2) The standing army and the police – instruments of the government and outside the sphere of democratic control – were to be replaced by an armed people, the new basis of state power.
- 3) Judges and other officials were to be elected, responsible and revocable, to be deprived of privileges and to do their work at “workmen’s wages”.

In conclusion, *The State and Revolution* and Lenin’s other writings on proletarian democracy show, contrary to the widely held opinion that Lenin was preoccupied with the (class) contents of democracy, that the discussions of democracy and of the state are dominated by the aspect of form.

#### Socialist Critique of Bolshevik Practice and Theory

The Bolshevik strategy during 1917 and 1918 and Lenin’s theory of council democracy were met with criticism from within and from outside the country. Karl Kautsky was one of the first international socialists who criticized developments in Russia, and, because of his authoritative position in the movement, his critique may represent the reactions from ‘classical Marxism’ as such. Kautsky’s most comprehensive critique of Bolshevism was presented after the official adoption of the constitution of the Soviet republic in *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (Kautsky, 1918c). This book became the “opening gun” (J.H. Kautsky, 1964: xi) in a lengthy dispute between Kautsky and prominent Bolshevik leaders, who in the midst of the turmoil of the Russian revolution, foreign intervention, and civil war, took the time and energy to answer the critique in order to neutralize it. Lenin responded in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (written in September – November 1918), which was answered by Kautsky in *Terrorismus und Kommunismus* (1919b). Now Trotsky responded, in *Terrorismus und Kommunismus. Anti-Kautsky* (1920), which was met by Kautsky’s *Von der Demokratie zur Staatssklaverei* (1921). Although the debate concerns specific developments during the Russian revolution, it can also be viewed as a general theoretical discussion of the concept of democracy and its relation to capitalism and socialism.

Kautsky's specific critique of the Russian revolution and Bolshevik practice emphasized that the socio-economic pre-conditions for socialism – a developed capitalist mode of production and a working class forming the majority of the population – were non-existent in Russia. The Bolshevik trend in Russian Social Democracy is characterized as differing from other socialist trends due to its belief in "the omnipotence of will and power" (Kautsky, 1918c: 27). Although the Bolsheviks had been capable of making a 'political revolution', Kautsky did not believe that they would be able to accomplish a 'social revolution' in a "backward" Russia due to the absence of the pre-conditions for socialism.<sup>5</sup> In his view, the Russian revolution was by its very nature a "bourgeois" revolution. To hold political power in these conditions the Bolsheviks were forced to use dictatorial instead of democratic methods.

Kautsky criticized the Bolsheviks for (a) not having tested their support from the population in universal, equal, direct and secret ballots; (b) turning the soviets into organs of government instead of establishing a parliamentary republic; (c) illegalizing criticism and opposition; and (d) depriving the population as a whole of democratic rights, confining these to the proletariat alone. This sort of dictatorship, he maintained, is understandable considering the peculiar conditions in Russia, but since only democracy can produce a socialist society, this dictatorship is by its very nature contradictory to Marxism and incapable of accomplishing the goals of socialism as such.

Kautsky rejects the argument that the Bolshevik regime is a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. In effect, it is the Bolshevik party's dictatorship, and consequently a dictatorship of one part of the proletariat over other parts of the proletariat and over the rest of the population. For Kautsky, the concept of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is not a form of regime at all; it is defined as "a condition" ("ein Zustand") resulting from the existence of democracy in a society where the proletariat forms the majority (cf. Kautsky, 1918c: 21). Therefore, as Kautsky states at the beginning of the book, from his point of view socialism is "not merely social organization of production, but democratic organization of society as well". This he summarized in the slogan: "No socialism without democracy" (Kautsky, 1918c: 5). In this way Kautsky can criticize the violations of generally accepted forms of democracy, and at the same time escape the Schumpeterian tendency to treat democracy as implying no more than a method of decision-making. For Kautsky, democracy as an ongoing process has an intrinsic value that cannot be reduced to a means which is or is not adequate. It is not merely a guide to decision-making but a way of life.

Lenin's rather brusque answer to Kautsky's criticism sheds further light on the conception of form and contents of democracy. Lenin does not share the Kautskyian view of democracy as having an intrinsic value. To Lenin democracy is nothing but an instrument that may or may not be usable in a specific situation. Democracy is always subordinated to the interests of the revolution: the interests of "the proletarian class struggle are supreme" (LCW, 28: 268). Hence, also democracy must be seen in a class perspective: "[...] we cannot speak of "pure democracy" as long as different *classes* exists; we can only speak of *class* democracy" (LCW, 28: 242). This is even the case when it

comes to single elements of a democratic political system, for instance the vote: "[...] the form of elections, the form of democracy, is one thing and the class content of the given institution is another" (LCW, 28: 269). Consequently, one must differentiate between bourgeois democracy and proletarian democracy. But one must also differentiate between forms of democracy, since parliamentarism is a form of capitalist democracy, parliaments are "*instruments for the oppression* of the workers by the bourgeoisie" (LCW, 28: 247), and council democracy is the adequate form of socialist democracy, and furthers "an immensely higher form and type of democracy" (LCW, 28: 301). In conclusion, we must maintain that even if contents are important to Lenin the form of democracy is more important since a specific form furthers interest that otherwise would have been opposed and oppressed.

Debates on relations between class interests and specific forms of democracy or specific democratic institutions were neither new in the history of labour and Marxist theory nor to Kautsky. When in the 1890's a demand for "*Volksgesetzgebung*", i.e. direct legislation through the people, was raised within the labour movement as a specific proletarian form of democracy, Kautsky rejected the idea that any kind of direct democracy at state level in modern mass societies should be preferable to representative democracy, and he rejected the idea that the latter should be intrinsically bourgeois. Generally, Kautsky considers parliaments 'battle grounds' for the struggle between the classes. It is therefore in the interest of any class to increase the power of parliament in society and its own power in parliament. He defends the principle of representative democracy by stating that the representative system is a political *form*, and the *contents* of that form can be and has actually been of "the most different sort" (Kautsky, 1893: 90). The class character of parliament is determined by its actual class content, which again is determined by the actual social and political conjuncture, and not by the form as such. As a form, parliament can function as a neutral means to the accomplishment of the goals of any class.

This also was Kautsky's answer in 1912 to the critique put forward by Anton Pannekoek (cf. Jakobsen, 1990). Later, when he was more of a genuine 'council communist', Pannekoek formulated a general conception of the relation between classes and forms of representation in diametrical opposition to Kautsky's and that of 'classical Marxism', maintaining that differences between classes and their goals also would render the representative institutions different (Pannekoek, 1976 [1946]: 88). In this respect, Lenin's view in 1917–1918 was more in conformity with the later council communism than with classical Marxism before 1914.

#### Socialist Alternatives: Combination of Council and Parliament

What is relatively neglected in the literature (cf, however, Weber, 1978: 6), is the fact that Kautsky does not simply dismiss council democracy but actually puts forth the idea that parliamentarism may be complemented with institutions of direct democracy – though *not* at the level of direct political leadership.

In the light of the role played by the councils in the Russian Revolution, it is puzzling that council organization is not mentioned by Kautsky before August

1918 in *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. An explanation might be that the Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets in July 1918 by passing the Constitution for the USSR makes it clear to Kautsky that councils are significant and enduring elements in the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik model for state building. However, although councils are integrated into his theory after the German revolution in November 1918, in which the workers' and soldiers' councils also play an important role, they do not have the same significance as does parliament. Nor do they have the same theoretical significance to Lenin as does the party. The councils are integrated into the theory simply because of their actual existence. This is not surprising since the decentralized nature of councils are hard to fit into the traditionally centralized framework of Marxism.

Marxist thinking employs the concept of council in several contexts. Normally the genesis of councils are tied to revolutionary situations, as constructs of a certain class or social segment which are formed by the desire to obtain the highest degree of direct democracy. At least three different types of councils can be detected, identifying whether councils function as organs for 1) the articulation and representation of interests, 2) struggle and political insurrection, 3) societal leadership (state apparatuses) (cf. Anweiler 1976 [1958]: 11–13; Schneider & Kuda, 1968: 34–41; Gottschalch, 1968: 32–46). These three functional types can be studied as aspects of the situation, of class, and of democracy.

Kautsky explicitly connects the genesis of councils with a revolutionary situation. They emerged in the Russian Revolution of 1905 (Kautsky, 1918c: 31) and reappeared in 1917, but in his view they would not have emerged if unions and other traditional mass organizations had been present and functioning (cf. Kautsky, 1919a: 11). There is only a very thin dividing line between council organization and the unorganized masses, and the former is basically categorized as organs for interest aggregation, articulation and representation as well as organs for mobilization, struggle and insurrection (cf. Kautsky, 1918d: 9).

As regards the class aspect, Kautsky emphasizes that the original working class foundation is missing in the councils of 1917/1918 in Russia. Consequently, they cannot form the basic element in a socialist strategy since their members need not necessarily be committed to socialism.

As to the third aspect, Kautsky indicates a distinction between democratization, as the exercise of citizenry in the political community, and hegemony as the exercise of leadership within a given regime form. Internally, the councils shall secure the highest degree of participation and serve to break down the wall between leadership and citizenry. At the level of political authority, the councils may have a mobilizing function and help to increase the level of political activity of the masses. But the councils cannot in themselves guarantee the democratic organization of the regime – precisely because of their nature as councils. Councils as a type of movement and arena for the election of delegates have their point of reference in the occupational status of the actors. Therefore, they cannot serve as formalized media for aggregating societal interests.

By definition councils serve sectional interests rather than generalizable ones. They contribute to a greater differentiation in society and to less equality. However, this inequality and differentiation become a negative force only when disconnected from parliament and its formal rules and procedures which apply equally to all the members of society. That is to say, the relations between councils and parliament must be institutionalized in such a way that the authority between councils at different levels and between councils and parliament can be demarcated.

The opposition to Lenin is clear. Kautsky views councils as secondary to parliament. Lenin sees parliaments as secondary to councils. Kautsky argues that councils do not contribute with something genuinely new to democracy. Lenin considers parliaments a bourgeois construct that will become redundant in socialist society. Is there a way of connecting parliament and council without denying the relevance of either the one or the other for the continuing deepening and expansion of democracy? We believe there is, if only we would distinguish the role of formal organizations from the role of social movements in the political decision-making process. Formal organizations are best viewed as guides to decision-making. They are necessary to aggregate demands, coordinate societal activities and to see that things actually get done. Social movements, on the other hand, are better seen as novelty creating entities, as inevitably disturbing elements in the present. They have the task of hindering organizations from fossilizing and of keeping them on the right track through their articulation of new discursive practices for the permanent democratic revolution.

Then why in Marxism are organizations and movements normally perceived as mutually hostile entities, obstructing each other's political tasks? Why do movements appear as a crisis of democracy rather than as a challenge to democracy (cf. Dalton & Kuechler, 1990). Why is decision-making in small-scale political subcommunities considered either a threat to the proper workings of political institutions or as the cloak behind which the dictatorship of the proletariat assumes power? (cf. Held & Pollitt, 1986; Gamble, 1991). Why do formal organizations appear as a barrier to expanding the autonomy of movements as capable of never saying anything but no? Because, we shall answer, Marxism has never really come to terms with the fact that there is not only a social and economic community in civil society but also a political one. Furthermore, the political community does not occur merely as a reaction against state power (Held, 1987; Keane, 1988). It is integrally connected with political authority which is its ultimate condition of existence.

### **Modernity versus Late-Modernity**

In our view, the state/civil society dichotomy blocks for an understanding of the potentials in Marxist thought for bridging the gap between hegemony from above and democracy from below. Those Marxists who are more or less in concert with Lenin's modern 'scientific' approach to history and his hostile

feelings towards parliamentarism are often rightly accused of evolutionism, determinism, essentialism and society centrism in their conceptualization of the relation between the state and civil society (cf. March & Olsen, 1989; Giddens, 1981; 1985; Jessop, 1990; Knorr-Cetina & Cicourel, 1982; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The inspiration is here above all the three volumes of *Capital*, where the 'mature' Marx announces that "the specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself, and, in turn reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers – a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity – which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state" (Marx, 1973 [1894], III: 791).

The unpolitical and 'unfolding' view of history is also characteristic of the "Manifesto of the Communist Party", stating that "[p]olitical power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another" (Marx & Engels, 1973 [1847–48], I: 127). Emancipation from domination here signifies the 'end' of politics and the realization of the stable and classless structural form which lies there 'in' modern history just awaiting the emergence of the 'mature' working class which shall finally bring it about. Liberal realism is in accordance with this modern manifesto in the sense that it employs science to 'demonstrate' how political power is opposed to both social order and individual freedom. Like modern Marxism, it situates politics between the needs for economic effectiveness and social support, thus denying the political any lasting significance and power in itself as such. It participates in the modern flight from political influence, associating political existence with 'schism', with 'disorder', with a 'will' to be subdued (cf. Giddens, 1984).

Viewing the political 'outside-in' and 'top-down', modern science comes to neglect the constitution of politics and society 'bottom-up' and 'inside-out'. In Marxist thought this tendency to neglect the political community as the basis of authority in society and to trace the emergence of political form to socio-economic forces and relations appears in at least four different disguises. There is the 'ultra hard' reductionism, according to which the entire state apparatus with all its different agencies is but an instrument in the hands of a powerful and exploitative economic cabal (Lenin). There is the 'hard' essentialist version, where the modern state is necessarily driven to maintain, strengthen and advance the interests of capital in its own interest, because of its more and more intimate alliance with an increasingly monopolized capital ('Stamocap' theories). There is the 'soft' derivation, according to which the survival and expansion of capitalist society presumes a state structure separately constituted from the market to keep the success orientation of single capitals in line by

non-economic coercion so that it does not undermine the interests of capital as a whole (e.g. Altvater). And there is finally the 'ultra soft' view of 'the last instance', which conceives of the class struggle itself as played out within a 'relatively autonomous' capitalist state that can dominate society according to its own organizational rules of intervention (e.g. Poulantzas).

Despite their internal differences each of these views is open to the same kind of criticism: (I) they neglect the unique multidimensionality of modern society at the level of institutions, in making human history appear as having an overall direction, governed by general dynamic principles of socio-economic growth; (II) they invest particular political structures and processes with invariant socio-economic 'needs' by means of one or the other mechanistic or organic analogy; (III) they imply a derogation of the lay-actor, discounting their own reasons for their doings and refrainings in order to discover the forces that operate 'behind their backs' as 'real' stimuli to their activities; (IV) they conceal the historical specificity of political domination and freedom, seeing political power as a negative characteristic of class societies which will pose no specific threats or opportunities to the anticipated communist society of the future, in which class division and struggle will be transcended (cf. Giddens, 1982; 1984; 1990).

In recent years, modern Marxism has come under stronger and stronger pressure from late modern socialists working for "the *dissolution of evolutionism*, the *disappearance of historical teleology*, the recognition of *thoroughgoing, constitutive reflexivity*, together with the *evaporating of the privileged position of the West*" (Giddens, 1990: 52–53). In their view, "if we consider today that all truth is relative to a discursive formation, that all choice between discourses is only possible on the basis of constructing new discourses, 'truth' is essentially pragmatic and in that sense becomes democratic" (Laclau, 1990: 196). This argument almost reverses the arguments of modern Marxism, placing the temporal before the universal, power before norms, politics before society and popular control before solidarity. The focus is no longer on the universal and abstract mode of production in civil society that underlies the rationalization and legitimation of the state. The focus is rather on the logic of contingency and appropriateness at play in the authority relations that further the state's political integration and control of society (cf. March and Olsen, 1989).

The new state-democracy centred perspective in radical thought provides us with a new perspective on the Marxist analysis of the link between the state and civil society. The growth in the administrative resources of the modern nation-state now appears as a pre-condition of the expansion of capitalism throughout the world. Democracy is no longer the rule of the bourgeois class as "*the Party of order*" (Marx, 1973 [1850], I: 252). The intensification of surveillance, which is the basis of the development of formal organizations in modernity, nationally as well as internationally and globally, is on the contrary, "*the condition of the emergence of tendencies and pressures towards democratic participation*" (Giddens, 1985: 314). On this late-modern view, socialism cannot play innocent in the modern world and close its eyes to capitalism's 'victories',



whether with respect to civil rights or to general welfare. Nor can it go on legitimating its own dictatorships by an appeal to 'true consciousness' or the 'logic of history', when 'taking command' in civil society. For the intensifying of surveillance operations is *also* what made totalitarianism possible in the first place and thereby the Party's control of political power, bolstered by monopolistic access to the means of violence, as an instrument of terror (Giddens, 1990: 172).

According to the late-modern socialists, institution building has to be considered a process of uneven development that fragments as it coordinates by continuously introducing new kinds of relationship between the nation-state, systematic capitalist production and the social lifeworld. The result is that time is separated from space, social relations are removed from the immediacies of context, and the reflexive appropriation of knowledge is enhanced on every level of the social totality. Thus a new radicalized concept of modernity emerges which claims to be unfettered by the old concepts of liberalism and Marxism which both prevent us from knowing our complexly organized reality and from posing those questions which are appropriate to account for the extreme dynamism and globalizing scope of contemporary Western society. This emphasizes the discontinuity of modernity from earlier social formations by reference to the ability of modern institutions to connect the local and the global in ways which earlier would have been unthinkable (Giddens, 1991; Held, 1987; Keane, 1988). The analysis of institutions, comprising both actors and structures here becomes the key to understanding all those new mechanisms that provide means of precise temporal and spatial zoning, that reorganize human relations across large time-space distances, and that roll society away from the fixities of tradition (cf. Giddens, 1990; Held & Thompson, 1989).

In late-modern socialism, the notion of institution is a nodal point for deconstructing modern Marxism as a plurality of 'story-lines', spiralling in and out of 'history', (cf. Carroll, 1987; Gane, 1986; Poster, 1984; Ryan, 1982). Institutions are said to embody the *double hermeneutics* that forges the bond between the discursive practices of societal research and the knowledge of tradition which actors must possess in common in order to make sense of what they and other actors *do* in their daily life (Giddens, 1991; Norris, 1985). They are claimed to persist in virtue of the lay-actor as a competent human being whose knowledge is not incidental to the operation of society, but is necessarily involved in its constitution via the *duality of structures* as both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize (Giddens, 1987; Cohen, 1989). They are also presumed to tie leaders and citizens together in the *dialectic of control*, which exists even in the most totalitarian system, and which reveals the capability of even the weakest agent to manage resources in such a way that this weakness can be turned back against the strong (Giddens, 1984; Isaac, 1987).

#### Bringing the Political System Back In

Although sympathetic to the notion of institution or *Praxis*, we do find that it raises a range of old, critical questions which have always been central to

modern Marxism: How do we justify the universal claim that *all* institutions are historical in nature and in principle mutable in form (relativism)? How can we localize the active interventions of corporeal human beings in the ongoing processes of events in the society *before* having localized the properties of those processes that inform these interventions with an economic, cultural, political, etc. aspect (actionalism)? How are we to defend and develop the practices of self-government and self-regulation, if all there is to the discourse of democracy is the reproduction of a *hegemony* which shows the way in which all strategies of control employed by superordinate individuals or groups call forth counter-strategies on the part of subordinates (elitism)? (cf. Habermas, 1987; Bang, 1987a).

These unresolved puzzles in late-modern socialism probably explain why many modern Marxists see it as not being Marxist at all (cf. Jessop, 1990; Held & Thompson, 1989). In their view, the new state-democracy approach makes concessions to liberal realism, neglecting the most basic of all facts, namely that the roots of real freedom lie in civil society and not in the hierarchical and highly centralized entity called 'the state'. As Poulantzas put it in an interview with Stuart Hall and Alan Hunt in 1979: "One must know whether one remains within a Marxist framework or not; and if one does, one accepts the determinant role of the economic in the very complex sense; not the determination of forces of production but of relations of production and the social division of labour. In this sense, *if we remain within this conceptual framework*, I think that the most one can do for specificity of politics is what I have done. I am sorry to speak like that. [...] [T]he determinant role of relations of production, in the very complex sense, *must mean* something; and if it does, one can only speak of "relative autonomy" – this is the only solution" (Poulantzas, 1979).

As our analysis indicates, the modern Marxists are justified in maintaining that popular control becomes an absurdity, if the "existence of power presumes structures of domination whereby power that 'flows smoothly' in processes of social reproduction (and is, as it were 'unseen') operates" (Giddens, 1984: 257). Citizens certainly cannot enjoy the freedom of self-government and popular control where "domination is expressed in and through the institutions that represent the most deeply embedded continuities of social life" (Giddens, 1985: 9). This is probably why Poulantzas allows the state a 'relative autonomy' only. However, when his critique will not bite, it is simply because his derivation of the rulers/ruled opposition from the capital/work opposition makes him conceal the kind of political domination that results from the 'smooth' operations of political surveillance and discipline operating below the formal framework of the state in the political community. Hence, his quest for emancipation from domination appears to have the task of removing not only the state but every conceivable form of politics as such.

Yet, as our political interpretation of Marxism indicates, we should not be too hasty to write off the whole of modern Marxism as just one more version of "the mythical assumption that complex social systems can be brought to order, pacified and emancipated from conflict by annulling the division between social and political power" (Keane, 1988: 52). For modern Marxism, as

we have noted, is much more ambiguous and open to change than ordinarily assumed. Even Poulantzas himself explicitly demonstrates this ambivalence. On the one side, he *does* describe political power as domination and as a property of *the state*, that is as "a field inside which, precisely because of the existence of classes, the capacity of one class to realize its own interests through its practice is in *opposition* to the capacity and interests of other classes" (Poulantzas, 1978 [1968]: 105). On the other side, in the very same moment, he *also* describes authority as a structural feature of *the political system* as such, stating that where the "division into classes is non-existent [...] and where therefore these relations cannot be specified by this struggle as relations of domination or subordination of classes, a different concept should be used, which would ultimately be that of *authority*" (1978 [1968]: 105–106).

Poulantzas's contrasting of state repression to system authority has serious practical consequences in that it produces the idea that once we get rid of the class struggle, authority will pose no specific threats to societalization. This was precisely the issue in Kautsky's critique of Lenin: The pretence that authority will pose no special problems, as a form of domination, to the classless communist society of the future in which *economic exploitation* is no longer permitted does not only undermine the permanency of council democracy. It was also heavily misused by state socialism to legitimize its *political oppression* of the 'masses'. Nevertheless the distinction between domination and authorization in modern Marxism has a critical edge. For it shows that real political freedom can never come from a state of *domination*, however legitimate this state may actually be.

Poulantzas indirectly confirms that the issue of democratic socialism is political through and through and has to do with the lack of a concept of political system to connect the governance function of political authorities with the citizenry's ongoing quest for self-government and popular control in the political community. The problem is that both modern Marxism and the new socialism tend to mistake the existence of a political system for the maintenance of the state. The political system, comprising both authorities, a regime, and a political community, does not disappear simply because the state disappears. Consequently, it is inconsistent to maintain that the centralized state is a necessary condition of democracy whether as a hegemonic regime form or as an open-ended political community.

Once we distinguish authority from hierarchy it becomes obvious that both the 'old' and 'the new' democratic socialism is in need of deconstruction with respect to social value and reconstruction with respect to political power. If the intensification of surveillance and administrative domination in modern times has been important both to the consolidation of the world system and to the internal ordering of states, the expansion of capitalism is as much the result of the expansion of the state, as the other way around. This is the crucial message of the new socialism. It demonstrates that if we think "it is obvious that we are hemmed in more and more tightly by a State whose most detailed practices demonstrate its connection with particular, and extremely precise, interests" (Poulantzas, 1980 [1978]: 12), we merely miss the point that "the expansion of

surveillance necessarily increases the reciprocal relations between those who govern and those who are governed" (Giddens, 1985: 202). But although "'Domination' and 'power' cannot be thought of only in terms of asymmetries of distribution" (Giddens, 1984: 31), this does not mean that both power and domination "have to be recognized as inherent in social association" and that "domination [cannot] be transcended in some kind of putative society of the future" (Giddens, 1984: 32). This is not for theory but for history and its various agents to decide, as the modern Marxists indicate (Arrighi, 1991; Blackburn, 1991).

The only thing that *can* be decided by theory *a priori*, as we have tried to show, is that, although freedom from economic domination does not automatically lead to freedom from political domination, without freedom from *both* kinds of domination citizens cannot find the autonomy to do things for themselves (Hoffman, 1991). This is the important distinction between 'freedom from' (emancipatory politics) and 'freedom to' (life politics) in modern Marxism which easily disappears because of its tendencies to evolutionism, determinism, essentialism and society centrism. It shows us that socialism is still a viable alternative to liberalism and its view of political power as 'nothing but' a universal threat to freedom.

#### The Democratic Potential of Socialism

From the point of view of late-modern socialism, it may seem as if the Schumpeterian view of procedural democracy is not much different in form from Marx's modern conception of the role of the masses in capitalism. Schumpeter also tends to impose an uni-dimensional notion of order on the jumble of political happenings, via the argument that "modern democracy is a product of the capitalist process" (Schumpeter, 1987 [1942]: 297). He also gives little attention to the lay-actor's active and informed contributions to political stability and change in capitalist society. Yes, he even ridicules them, seeing them as evidence of "the ordinary citizen's ignorance and lack of judgment in matters of domestic and foreign policy" (ibid.: 261). He furthermore treats *state* power as an obstacle to the freedom of the masses, assuming that "as a broad rule at least, the ability to win a position of political leadership will be associated with a certain amount of personal force and also of other aptitudes [...] which are not entirely ineffective in barring the progress of the moron or the windbag" (ibid.: 289). However, the modern Marxists dissociate themselves from Schumpeter in viewing bourgeois democracy as "the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation" (Marx, 1973 [1871], II: 219). Under these circumstances, liberalism may be the best possible safeguards against the threats of totalitarianism and mob rule. But this does not mean that the citizenry can never acquire the faculty of governing society and thereby that "the reins of government should be handed to those who command more support than do any of the competing individuals or teams" (Schumpeter, 1987 [1942]: 273).

As Schumpeter sees it, "the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field" (ibid.: 262). This

is not the view adopted by the modern Marxists. They do not want to enforce the citizenry to surrender their judgments and potentials for self-regulation to a uniform political authority (cf. Althusser, 1968; Poulantzas, 1987 [1968]; 1980 [1978]). Nor do they intend to limit the exercise of leadership to the single goal of appropriating command *over* all the 'subjects' to authority. They acknowledge that domination is a function of the organization of institutions rather than of human nature, and that a democracy in which citizens function exclusively as 'supports' of the leadership is therefore no real democracy at all. They know that liberal democracy is not the end of democracy, since their studies of, say, the Civil War in France told them that "[t]he multiplicity of interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected, and the multiplicity of interests which construed it in their favour, show that it was a thoroughly expansive political form, while all previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive" (Marx, 1973 [1871], II: 223).

In contrast to Schumpeter, Marx appreciated that although the Commune did not succeed, its failure does in no way disturb its reality as an organizational possibility. It merely confirms that "[t]he political rules of the producer cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery. The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economic foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule" (ibid.). However strong the notion of historical effectiveness here may be, one essential democratic quality stands out sharply. This is the argument that lay-actors can and do have a contribution to make to the political constitution of society which is as important to personal and societal development, perhaps even more, than the activities of leaders.

By imagining a leadership that had no citizenry over which it could rule, Marxists could easily draw the valuable lessons from the Civil War in France to enlarge their understanding of what is meant by saying that citizens do contribute a large share to the evolution of society (cf. Easton, 1949). Real issues, the emergence of the Commune showed them, only arise when individuals become citizens injected into society via their participation in the political community. The citizenry poses the issues that the leadership is called upon to solve and also help to shape the methods that this leadership will use. Failure to achieve an appropriate solution and to get the relevant things done will disturb the way citizens routinely incorporate the grounds for what they do as an integral way of doing it, hereby increasing the chance for arousing them to revolutionary action. In the end, the leadership will have to account to the citizenry even if for a moment in history their use of coercive power may upset the day of reckoning. But whether the leadership will ever be called to account and whether they will have to change the whole procedure according to which its decisions are made and implemented, depends not on the individual wills of the governors alone, as liberal realism would have it, but largely on the citizenry's will to decision and action (cf. Easton, 1947).

### The Third Way between State and Civil Society

By focusing on the *political* Marx and Engels, we have here sought to disconnect their community model from their universalizing aspirations on behalf of the working class, seeing the former as a constituent of both the state and civil society. This we have done in order to be able to fuel new life into the old discussion of council democracy versus parliamentary democracy between Lenin and Kautsky. When disconnected from the pretence of the neutral universality that has contributed to the concrete, historical subordination and marginalization of large parts of the citizenry in modern history (cf. Showstack Sassoon, 1991: 100), this classical dispute in Marxism can be used to highlight why the necessary 'both-and' difference between authorities and citizens need not assume the form of a bilateral 'either/or' opposition between the rulers and the ruled.

What we have indicated is that the distinction between parliamentary democracy and council democracy is capable of much more profound development as a challenge to liberal realism than has been achieved in any society to date (cf. Miliband, 1991). On the one side, Kautsky's discovery of parliamentary democracy as a guide to decision-making and implementing action implies that formal organizations need not only act in the interest of the minority, of the owning classes, but are essential to get things done in day-to-day political life in an appropriate manner, increasing the level of flexibility and reversibility of social policy (cf. Keane, 1991: 14). On the other side, Lenin's experience of council democracy, as a form of life founded on self-government and popular control, illuminates that informal movements do not just appear in times of crisis and change but are inevitably disturbing elements in the present, intrinsic to counteract tendencies toward etatization or unlimited participation in any given political and social order (Sawka, 1991; Dalton & Kuechler, 1990).

In combination, therefore, Lenin and Kautsky, may enable democratic socialists to find a 'third way' between communism and statism – one which does not convert the differences between modern Marxism and late modern Marxism into a struggle between opposed identities. Emphasizing the integral relation between authority and citizenry, it becomes evident that political power is not universally linked to either division of interest or active struggle, and that it cannot be 'tamed' and parcelled out by adopting the policy that "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter, 1987 [1942]: 269). For democracy is not just a method but a way of life grounded in the ontological potentials for decision and action that we all share equally in common in virtue of our communal membership of a political system.

Perhaps Marx himself was thinking about the systemic nature of authority when saying that "[i]n spite of all the tall talk and all the immense literature, for the last sixty years, about Emancipation of Labour, no sooner do the working men anywhere take the subject into their own hands with a will, than up-

raises at once all the apologetic phraseology of the mouthpieces of present society with its two poles of Capital and Wages Slavery, [...] as if capitalist society was still in its purest state of virgin innocence, with its antagonisms still undeveloped, with its delusions still unexploded, with its prostitute realities not yet laid bare" (Marx, 1973 [1871], II: 223). At least this is the dialectic that we perceive in Lenin and Kautsky who both acknowledged, despite all their avowed weaknesses, that council democracy stands between the organized and the 'formless' masses as does our practical consciousness of 'what has to be done' between our discursive consciousness and the unconscious. Nowhere did they make concessions to the assertion that "producing government practically amounts to deciding who the leading man shall be" (Schumpeter, 1987 [1942]: 273).

Just as Lenin's notion of council democracy can be employed to criticize competitive elitism of freezing the opposition between the rulers and the ruled in a universalizing form, Kautsky's conception of parliamentary democracy can be used to show how liberal realists empty the formation and implementation of social policy of all its practical content. As Lenin puts it, council democracy is a way of counteracting class rule and engaging 'ordinary' citizens in the decision-making process. As Kautsky stresses, parliamentary democracy does not lose its political significance and relevance in a classless society. Therefore, recognizing that the political unity of organizations and movements lies in their real and necessary difference, we can invert Kautsky's negative view of both Bolshevik practice and Lenin's theory as a set of positive Marxist rules for the institutionalization of democratic socialism.

As to the aspect of form, the focus should be on representative and parliamentary democracy. The delegates are to be elected through universal, equal and secret ballots. Parliament shall constitute the central democratic institution. As to the aspect of contents, democracy should be majority rule with minority rights on vital issues. Power or sovereignty is to lie with the political community whose members should possess the freedom to participate to varying degrees in the constitution of their political system for the sake of enhancing the political capacities of themselves and their society as a whole. Democratization is to be considered an ongoing process, as significant in times of stability as in times of revolutionary change. Democratic rights, both formal and actual, have to comprise the whole of the population and no class, grouping, or social strata should be allowed any constitutional or real priority. This positive, *socialist* version of democracy and pluralism is not after all coterminous with liberal democracy, as even some radical pluralists today would have it (Held, 1989; Keane, 1988; 1991). It still carries the truly revolutionary argument that real democracy cannot be achieved in a political community in which employers enjoy the unconditional right to discipline, manage, and survey employees, where colour is considered a marker of exclusion or inclusion, and where men are granted a privileged place in the decision-making process (cf. McLennan, 1989).

The real significance of Marxist theory today, however strange this may sound in the ears of East Europeans, lies in its implicit recognition of the fact

that although citizens must obey *authority* if their society is to survive as a differentiated unity, they certainly do not have to surrender their power and judgements to the *state*. Authority need not be vested in a hierarchic and oppressive state. Surely, as a capable and knowledgeable citizen, one can consider oneself bound by authority without simultaneously accepting that this authority is put to use exclusively for the purpose of appropriating control over oneself and others. This is merely a question of distinguishing political difference from political opposition, the power *of* authority, as an ongoing relationship, from the established asymmetries of resources generating command *over* a subject population. Democratization is not just a matter of minimizing and modernizing state domination, handing more and more political issues over to private settlements via the 'free play' of the market forces, as the New Right will have it. Rather it is one of transforming both 'private' and 'public' policy-making into a community of balanced and extended co-operation between leaders and lay-actors on every level of society – even though there can be *no* guarantee that a new mode of domination will not arise to replace the old.

Governability *and* popular control should consequently be considered the key to establishing a political community tearing down the existing wall between state and civil society. Political life is not just choice but also interpretation and the control of political outcomes crucially relies on the ability of communal agents to find their way about in the various practices constituting a political system (cf. March & Olsen, 1989; Giddens, 1987). Hence, to reduce the political knowledgeability and capability of the citizenry to a matter of their passive acquiescence with the existing rules of the game trivializes what otherwise should be obvious, namely that leaders could not make and implement their decisions unless citizens in the political community *would* consider themselves bound by them and actually *could* obey, that is act upon, them in *Praxis* (cf. Easton, 1955; Isaac, 1987):

- 1) *Societal political power is to be considered a relational concept.* It does not refer to a specific kind of political practice, but is implicated in all political practices. It concerns the relation of the integrative power of authority to the basic political capacities for decision and action that all human agents share equally in common (cf. Easton, 1957; Isaac, 1987: 75).
- 2) *Societal political power is to be understood as reciprocal and as open to negotiation.* However wide the asymmetrical distribution of allocative and authoritative resources involved, all power relations express autonomy and dependence in both directions (Giddens, 1982: 39).
- 3) *Societal political power is to be viewed as contingent on freedom and domination.* It does not only cover relations of opposition, deriving from the asymmetrical distribution of resources, but also relations of difference, constituted by mere interdependence between actors or collectivities with various tasks (Bang, 1990).
- 4) *Societal political power is to be treated as present even in the absence of a conflict of interest.* Power and interest are only contingently related. When they often appear together it is not because of a logical (necessary) relation but simply because wo/men's interests often fail to coincide (Poster, 1984).



Democratic socialism thus puts 'the last instance' in its place, namely in the hands of the citizenry, by acknowledging that political authority is indivisible, inalienable and inviolable. For citizens are not only sources of tension and stress that 'experts' are called upon to analyze, mediate and neutralize. They may identify those aspects of modernity that have been poorly analyzed in the social sciences and are badly dealt with by bureaucrats and politicians in *Praxis* (Giddens, 1987: 48). Lay-actors are not the irrational creatures feared by liberal realists. They are active but 'decentred' subjects who continuously employ their practical knowledge to identify previously, undiagnosed threats and opportunities within the given institutional order. There simply could not be generated any valid statement about political activity at all unless researchers were able to 'go on' in that activity, knowing what its constituent actors know in order to accomplish what they do (Giddens, 1987: 66).

Democratic socialism is tied to Marxism via the argument that "society, whatever its form may be [is] [t]he product of men's reciprocal action" (Marx, 1973 [1846], I: 518). Unlike the New Right, it presumes "that as men develop their productive faculties, that is, as they live, they develop certain relations with one another and that the nature of these relations must necessarily change with the change and growth of the productive faculties (ibid.: 522). Democratic socialism does not deny that the emergence of modern democracy with its special emancipatory logic was linked to the expansion of capitalist enterprise throughout the world. But distinct from liberalism it takes this relation to be contingent and far from necessary. Marx knew that capitalism indirectly threatens the hegemony of the powerful and the rich in demonstrating that the state is artificial and conventional and neither natural nor ordained. He was implicitly aware that there is *nothing* 'in' the political *as such* that can effectively prevent citizens from controlling the way decisions are made and implemented for their society.

It is far from evident that the general failure of state-socialism expresses liberalism's 'victory' in the Cold War and thereby capitalism's necessity as a means of 'taming' the state and of securing representative democracy. When state socialism finally lost its grip, it was, in our view, because *both* leaders *and* citizens began to act upon the generic political capacities and fundamental conditions through which the course and outcomes of societal processes and events are generated and shaped in manifold ways. Hence the downfall of state socialism may be claimed to illuminate the transformative capacity of political agents and the corresponding change in the over-all political structure that determines, limits and facilitates the various modes in which they interact. As such it is still an open question whether the political 'power to be' in these countries will go on constituting a mighty threat to 'life, liberty, and estate' or whether it will rather be employed to lay the foundation of a truly open society "in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Marx & Engels, 1973 [1847–1848], I: 127).

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the workshop on 'Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy' at the *European Consortium for Political Research's* Joint Sessions of Workshops at the University of Essex in 1991. We would like to thank all participants, especially David Beetham, Richard Bellamy, Joseph Femia, Keith Graham and Darrow Schechter, for their valuable criticism.
2. The question whether or not Kautsky as a consequence of his critique of Bolshevism can be judged a 'renegade of Marxism' has been discussed – and rejected – in Jakobsen, 1987.
3. *The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution. Theses*, in *LCW*, 24: 19–31.
4. Cf. *Marxism on the State. Preparatory Material for the Book The State and Revolution*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978.
5. The concept of 'political revolution' is here defined by Kautsky as "a sudden dislocation in the relative power of the classes in the state, whereby a class hitherto excluded from the political power possesses itself of the governmental apparatus [...] a sudden act, which can be rapidly concluded" (Kautsky, 1918c: 26), while the concept of 'social revolution' is defined as "a profound transformation of the entire social structure, brought about by the establishment of a new mode of production [...] a process that can last for decades and for which no definite boundaries can be drawn for its conclusion" (Kautsky, 1918c: 25).

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