

# GAY LEFT

A Gay Socialist Journal

Number 10

## Democracy, Socialism & Sexual Politics

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Overseas Airmail £1.50 or \$3 (Sterling, US or  
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#### HOMOSEXUALITY

Power and Politics

Edited by  
Gay Left Collective

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## Chantal Mouffe Democracy and the New Right

'The tide is turning' declares Milton Friedman in the conclusion of his new book *Free to Choose*, whose main themes were also presented in a television series shown during ten weeks in Britain and in the USA. The whole operation very clearly had the objective of contributing to the transformation of public opinion, particularly in relation to the welfare state, announced by Friedman. According to him, after several decades of government intervention in all fields of social life and the failure of Western governments to achieve their proclaimed objectives, the people are beginning to recognize the dangers of an overgoverned society and the threat to human freedom represented by the concentration of power in the hands of the bureaucracy. This widespread reaction against 'big government' is causing the defeat of social-democratic parties and policies in many countries and is contributing to the emergence of a new climate of opinion clearly at odds with the ideas of Fabian socialism and New Deal liberalism which had been dominant for the last fifty years.

Very few people will deny today that the advanced capitalist countries are in crisis. There is indeed a surprising agreement among marxists, conservatives and liberals about the existence of such a crisis. The diagnosis might be different but (except for the orthodox marxist who always believes that we have at last arrived at the moment of the final economic crisis of capitalism) the other analyses: crisis of the state (Poulantzas), crisis of legitimation (Habermas), cultural crisis (Bell), crisis of democracy (Huntington), are all pointing out, despite their differences, a basic common feature: a lack of correspondence in advanced capitalist societies between their political and their economic structures. That lack of fit is the result of an overload of demands that the state cannot absorb without creating inflation and jeopardizing the profitability of capitalist enterprises. The interventionist state of the last decades is therefore faced today with a dilemma that Claus Offe presents in the following way:

The capitalist state suffers from an overload of demands and requirements which it cannot satisfy without destroying the capitalist nature of the economy nor ignore without undermining its own institutional set up and the regulation of class conflict provided by it.

It is that conflict between the twin imperatives of accumulation and legitimation which according to James O'Connor<sup>2</sup> are the two basic and often contradictory functions that the capitalist state must try to fulfil, that are at the root of the 'ungovernability' of Western democracies today. This conflict, intensified by the impact of the economic recession, is destroying the fragile basis of the dominant ideology of liberal democracy through which the post-war consensus had been cemented. In *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* C.B. Macpherson has analysed the slow processes through which, since the early 19th century, the articulation between liberalism and democracy took place, whose aim was to reconcile the moral principles which constituted the attraction of the democratic ideal with the realities of a class-divided bourgeois society. That long and complicated transformation, whose motor was the class struggle (the aspect not sufficiently stressed by Macpherson), by which the liberal state is going to be democratized and democracy liberalized, culminates in the 20th century with the 'equilibrium model' first formulated in 1911 by Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* and later developed by Dahl and the pluralist school.<sup>1</sup>

The many critiques of 'democratic elitism' have been quick to point to the impoverishment that such a theory imposes on the notion of democracy by defining it as mere competition between elites.<sup>3</sup> But such a conception of democracy, which postulated not the real participation of the masses but their passivity, was necessary for the capitalist system to work. And it did work during the subsequent decades in the context of the post-war economic recovery while the state was intervening along Keynesian lines to maintain full employment and to ensure economic growth. Indeed, in 1960 Daniel Bell ventured to announce 'The End of Ideology' and the beginning of a new era in which pragmatism will dominate in the field of social reforms and no space would be left for the rhetorics of revolution.

Nevertheless, the book had only just been published when the civil rights movement in the USA and a bit later the student revolt worldwide completely contradicted those hasty predictions. Since then the development and multiplication of the new antagonisms created by the growing intervention of the state at all levels of social reproduction in conjunction with the economic recession have led to that overload of demands which has provoked 'the crisis of democracy' diagnosed by the experts of the Trilateral Commission. For them the present crises renders manifest the dangers inherent to the functioning of the democratic system itself, in which political parties tend to promise too much in order to win votes, and they declare that the only solution is a reduction in the level of expectations and in the political participation of the masses.

We are in fact witnessing today a crisis of liberal-democracy which puts into question the profoundly contradictory character of an ideology which has tried to articulate two opposite principles. We agree with Alan Wolfe when, after defining 'liberalism' as an ideology designed to create, protect and promote the market system and all that goes along with it and 'democracy' as a political ideal which combines the principle of social equality with political participation, he concludes: 'The predicament of liberal democracy is that liberalism denies the logic of democracy and democracy denies the logic of liberalism, but neither can exist without the other.'<sup>4</sup> In a period of expansion and growth, the articulation could be more or less managed and the system could remain stable.

neutralized, but the time has come when it has become necessary to dissociate the ideal of liberalism from the dangers of democracy. Huntington in his report for the Trilateral Commission is quite open about that need and specifies that in order to protect the achievements of American liberalism it is today necessary for the liberals to turn to conservatism. It is indeed in the arsenal of conservative thought that liberalism will find the arms that it needs to get rid of, or at least to neutralize, its cumbersome partner by undermining the two pillars on which lay the ideal of democracy: social equality and political participation.

#### FROM LIBERAL DEMOCRACY TO LIBERAL CONSERVATISM

What is at stake is a reorganisation of the dominant ideology whose objective is to transform the ideological parameters of advanced capitalist societies in order to adapt them to the new social and political strategy called for by the crisis and to create a new common sense among the masses better suited for the hard times that await them. That reorganisation is taking place through a redefinition of the existing elements of the dominant discourse and through an articulation of the fundamental themes of liberalism with especially selected conservative themes so as to form a new ensemble that we can call 'Liberal Conservatism'. In the process of emergence and elaboration of that new ideology we can distinguish three main ideological sources: the neo-liberals, the neo-conservatives and the new right. The labels are rather imprecise and not always accepted by the individuals involved, but are useful to differentiate three movements whose theses and orientations are in many respects specific and even sometimes opposed, but which provide the dominant themes which are being articulated in a new problematic.

#### The neo-liberals

The first exigency is to redefine *liberalism* which, because of its association with democracy, has acquired several dangerous radical connotations. Here the main inspiration is provided by the neo-liberal school of the social market theory. That group was created in the 1940s as a reaction to the rise of communism and fascism, and its international membership has been organized around the journal *Ordo* and the Mont Pèlerin Society.<sup>5</sup>

One of its most influential figures is Friedrich Hayek, whose work has been particularly important in restating the principles of liberal political economy. According to Hayek, Liberalism is the doctrine which insists on the need to reduce to the minimum the coercive powers of the state in order to maximize the highest political end: liberty. By 'liberty' or 'freedom' (he uses the words interchangeably) Hayek understands 'the condition of men in which coercion of some by others is reduced as much as possible in society',<sup>6</sup> or more specifically as the condition 'in which a man is not subject to coercion by the arbitrary will of another or others'.<sup>7</sup> That is for him the real meaning of the term freedom and he calls it 'individual freedom' in order to distinguish it from the other definitions of the term. Two other meanings are indeed more frequent: freedom as 'the power to satisfy our wishes, or the choice of alternatives open to us' or freedom as

power'), according to which poverty, lack of education, unemployment are deprivations of freedom because they restrict the alternatives offered to individuals. Another important meaning is freedom as 'the participation of men in the choice of their government, in the process of legislation, and in the control of administration' ('political freedom'). But Hayek declares that 'political freedom' is not a necessary component of 'individual freedom' and needs to be distinguished from it, and that 'freedom as power' is a very dangerous conception that ought to be resisted because it could lead to the justification of the unlimited intervention of the state and therefore to the destruction of 'individual freedom'. Now, this is precisely what liberalism is trying to avoid and for that reason it is necessary to protect individual freedom from the constraints of the state through the delimitation of a sphere completely free from government interference.

Defined in that way, liberty refers of course in the first place to economic liberty, i.e. a system of free enterprise regulated by the market and in which government intervention should be strictly limited to handling those matters 'which cannot be handed through the market at all, or can be handled only at so great a cost that the use of political channels may be preferable'.<sup>8</sup> Such a conception, which is at the core of the social market economy, implies that the government should abandon almost all its welfare and regulatory functions and limit itself to secure stable money by controlling the money supply, and guarantee free competition and the security of property and contract. In Keith Joseph's words:

Governments can help hold the ring, provide an infrastructure, maintain a stable currency, a framework of law, implementation of law and order, provision of a safety net, defence of property rights and all other rights involved in the economic process.<sup>9</sup> According to the neo-liberals a free market economy is the necessary (and, as it turns out, sufficient) condition to guarantee 'individual freedom'. Their argument is that, as liberty is indivisible, it is not possible 'to have political and spiritual liberty without also choosing liberty in the economic field and rejecting the unfree collectivist order'.<sup>10</sup>

In *Capitalism and Freedom* Milton Friedman has attempted to demonstrate that a 'free private enterprise exchange economy' provides for a developed society the only form of social organisation that respected the principle of individual liberty because it was the only kind of economic system which was able to coordinate the economic activities of large numbers of people without coercion. His argument consists of showing that in a model of simple exchange between direct producers, exchange only takes place when the two parties benefit from it, and is therefore achieved without coercion. He thus moves on to the more complex model of competitive capitalism and declares that:

As in the (simple) model, so in the complex enterprise and money-exchange economy, co-operation is strictly individual and voluntary, provided: (a) that enterprises are private, so that the ultimate contracting parties are individuals and (b) that individuals are effectively free to enter or not enter into any particular exchange, so that every transaction is strictly voluntary.<sup>11</sup>

In a devastating critique of Friedman's argument Macpherson proved how his demonstration rests on an elementary con- he

does not take into account what distinguishes capitalist economy from the simple exchange model: the existence of a group of individuals without capital who are obliged to sell their labour power in the market in order to survive. In consequence, argues Macpherson, Friedman's attempted demonstration fails, because in the case of capitalism 'the proviso that is required to make every transaction strictly voluntary is not freedom not to enter into any particular exchange, but freedom not to enter into any exchange at all'.<sup>12</sup>

In Hayek, the defence of free market capitalism results much more from a critique of the consequences of state intervention than from an apology for the positive effects of the 'invisible hand'. The protection of individual freedom requires according to him a very strict limitation of the coercive powers of the state which need to be grounded on the 'rule of law'. By that Hayek does not mean 'a rule of law, but a rule concerning what the law ought to be'.<sup>13</sup> It is in fact a meta-legal doctrine concerned with the attributes which laws should possess to be 'true' laws and which does not apply to all the functions of government but only to the limitation of its coercive activities. He establishes a sharp distinction between law and bureaucracy, and argues that the state must be forced to respect a series of laws, and that the power of the bureaucracy must be severely restricted so as to prevent it from using the law to increase its power. This is because, once this threshold has been crossed, there is no way to stop the attribution of discretionary powers to the government, and the society enters on 'The Road to Serfdom'. A collectivist system (by that he means any kind of interventionist state including the New Deal and the welfare state), is therefore always the first step towards totalitarianism and the destruction of individual freedom. There lies the fundamental reason for his opposition to any kind of planning and his defence of the market as the regulatory principle.

With respect to democracy, neither Hayek nor Friedman are opposed to its existence in principle, but they are far from being committed to its defence. As we have already indicated, political freedom is for Hayek not a necessary component of individual freedom, and democracy ought not to be considered as an end in itself because it should only be considered as 'a means, a utilitarian device for safeguarding internal peace and individual freedom'.<sup>14</sup> If it comes to the stage where democracy is putting individual freedom in danger there is no doubt that it is the latter that must be defended. And Friedman, who establishes a distinction between authoritarian regimes (with economic liberty but without democracy) and totalitarian regimes (without economic liberty or democracy), declares bluntly that the first type could be acceptable to a liberal in certain circumstances, while the second type would never be.<sup>15</sup>

#### *The neo-conservatives*

Once liberalism has been restated in terms of the defence of free enterprise and individual freedom, the next step is to redefine democracy in such a way as to neutralize its potential antagonism with the existence of a capitalist order. That transformation is taking place via a critique of the two main tenets of the democratic ideal as it is formulated today: social equality and political participation.

Here the principal role is played by the theorists of the group that is called in the USA the neo-conservatives. The intellectual origins of this group are very different from those of the neo-liberals. It is mainly composed of intellectuals and professors in prestigious universities who have moved from a left-liberal position towards a conservative critique of American society. They are in general not hostile to the welfare state, but they are very critical of the project of the 'great society' which led in the 1960s to placing too much emphasis on welfare and resulted in overloading the state and thus causing a crisis of authority which is now threatening social stability. The neo-conservatives believe that it is the democratic system which is to a large extent responsible for that overload of the state. The 1975 Trilateral Commission Report on the *Governability of Democracies*, which expresses many themes of neo-conservative thought, declares in its conclusion that

Quite apart from the substantive policy issues confronting democratic governments, many specific problems have arisen which seem to be an intrinsic part of the functioning of democracy itself.<sup>16</sup>

Constant demands for increased social equality are singled out as one of the main factors in the present crisis, because they have led American society to the verge of the 'egalitarian precipice'.

What has happened since the 1960s is a double shift in the meaning of equality: (1) a shift from equality of opportunity to equality of results; (2) a shift from equality between individuals to equality between groups. That 'new egalitarianism' threatens, according to Daniel Bell, the true ideal of equality whose objective is not an 'equality of results' but a 'just meritocracy'.<sup>17</sup> As for Irving Kristol, he considers that an egalitarian conception of equality goes against the natural order of things because 'human talents and abilities ... distribute themselves along a bell-shaped curve, with most people clustered around the middle, and with much smaller percentages at the lower and higher ends', and he affirms that American society is exemplary because both the distribution of income and the distribution of political power follows that bell-shaped curve.<sup>18</sup> We can see here very clearly how, behind the pretext of re-stating the 'true' ideal of equality against the distortions of egalitarianism, what is really at stake is the acceptance and justification of existing inequalities.

It is not enough, according to the neo-conservatives, to defuse the subversive potential of the notion of equality; it is also necessary to narrow the field of political participation. Zbigniew Brzezinski, when he was the director of the Trilateral Commission, proposed to 'increasingly separate the political system from society and to begin to conceive of the two as separate entities'. The idea is to withdraw more and more decisions from political control and to make them the exclusive responsibility of the experts. Such a measure aims to depoliticize the more fundamental decisions not only in the economic field but also in the social and political ones. This argument is based on the contention that government and democracy stand in opposition to each other and that if complex industrial societies are going to function they need, as Huntington puts it, 'a greater degree of moderation in democracy'.<sup>19</sup> For Brzezinski, such a society would be democratic 'in a libertarian sense; democratic not in terms of exercising fundamental choices concerning policy-making but in the sense of maintaining certain areas of autonomy for individual self-expression'.<sup>20</sup> As P.

Steinfelds has pointed out in an excellent study on the neo-conservatives: For the neo-conservative, democracy does not seem to mean much more than the Founding Fathers meant by a republic: a government deriving its powers ultimately from the consent of the people but exercising them through delegated representation operating within a constitutional framework that preserves the kind of liberties enumerated in the Bill of Rights.<sup>21</sup>

On this aspect neo-conservative thought meets one of the central themes of the neo-liberals, who have a profound distrust of politicians and political institutions, which they consider to be unable to secure the management of public affairs with the necessary competence and independence. They insist on the need to remove from democratic control the functions of government and to hand them to apolitical agencies. Such measures, in conjunction with the ones aimed to limit the field of intervention of government and to reinstate the regulatory role of the market, should relieve the state from the overload of demands from which it is suffering. By releasing its responsibility for major social questions, they would also help to undermine the dangerous conception which has become dominant with the growth of the welfare state, according to which the state is seen as the principal agent of social and economic progress with a direct responsibility for the realisation of social equality.

Both the neo-liberals and the neo-conservatives are critical of the notion of distributive justice, the former because it implies a conception of equality that they question, the latter because it would justify the attribution to the state of a series of coercive powers that they wish to reject. Besides, says Hayek, such a notion is absolutely unintelligible because we do not have any objective criteria to determine the moral merit of an individual and the material reward that should correspond to it. In consequence all decisions concerning the 'proper' reward are bound to be determined by the arbitrary will of a given government.<sup>22</sup> The opposition of the neo-conservatives to the notion of distributive justice explains their violent criticisms of the work of John Rawls, whom they consider to be one of the theorists of the 'new egalitarianism'. According to Frankel we find in *A Theory of Justice* the fundamental premise of this position when Rawls asserts that the character of a man 'depends in large part upon fortunate family and social circumstances for which he can claim no credit'. And he argues that such a conception has to be rejected because

A theory of justice which treats the individual as not an active participant in the determination of his fate, and which is guided by the model of life as a lottery, is unlikely to strengthen people's sense of personal responsibility.<sup>23</sup>

Friedman declares that 'fair shares for all' is the modern slogan that has replaced Karl Marx's 'To each according to his needs, from each according to his ability'.<sup>24</sup>

#### The New Right

The same attack on the idea of equality takes place on the other side of the Atlantic in the writings of the group which in France is called 'La nouvelle droite'. The movement is organized around a centre of the study of European civilization (G.R.E.C.E.), two journals, *Elements* and

*La Nouvelle Ecole*, and a publishing house, 'Les Editions Copernic'. It has close contacts with the Club de l'Horloge, a grouping of higher French civil servants and technocrats, and since 1977 has won an audience of half a million readers with the emergence of *Le Figaro* magazine under the editorship of Louis Pauwels, one of their open supporters, who brought with him the leading theoretician of the group, Alain de Benoist.

The French New Right is much more radical than the neo-conservatives in their critique of the 'egalitarian utopia' which they see as causing the death of Western civilization by destroying every type of diversity in society. Reproducing one of the main themes of 1968, they proclaim the 'right to the difference' and assert that difference = inequality = liberty, while equality = identity = totalitarianism. Alain de Benoist declares:

I call on the right the attitude which consists in considering the diversity of the world and, therefore, the relative inequalities which are its necessary product, as good, and the increasing homogenization of the world defended and realized by the discourse of the egalitarian ideology, as evil.<sup>25</sup>

The New Right, which has perfectly assimilated Gramsci's conception of hegemony (considered as a fundamental contribution by de Benoist) has decided to fight for intellectual supremacy and has waged a 'cultural war' whose slogan is 'Against totalitarianism, against egalitarianism, against racism. For a new culture'.

It might seem a bit surprising that a right-wing movement will present itself explicitly as anti-racist and it is very interesting to analyze the roots of this position. Our cultural warriors are preaching that men ought to recognize that they are different from one another and that they must accept the importance of heredity and the revelations of psychometrics and sociobiology (they believe that biology should be in the future as important in politics as economics has been until now). It is this respect for human differences that allows them to present their views as anti-racist. But once that respect for the differences is located in its anti-egalitarian context, as Jean-Francois Kahn has pointed out:

What the spokesmen of GRECE really mean is, for example, that a six-year-old child who has been singled out through tests as being especially gifted should in no way belong to the same class and receive the same type of education as a child of the same age who is not as gifted; it is that the elites must be selected very early and radically differentiated from the non-elites; it is that inherited cultures should not be mixed because it would pervert them; it is finally that all types of differences ought to be carefully preserved and defended, inclusively against any tendency to integration. Now that is done very efficiently in South Africa and it is called 'apartheid'.<sup>26</sup>

Their crusade against equality leads the ideologues of the New Right to challenge the whole Christian European tradition. Indeed for them at the root of the egalitarian utopia we find Christianity, called by Alain de Benoist the 'Bolshevism of Antiquity'. Quoting Nietzsche's assertion that 'Christianity has robbed us of the fruits of ancient civilization', he proceeds to argue that the cult of weakness and humility spread by the Christians caused the downfall of the Roman Empire and is at the root of the myth of equality which has proved so destructive.<sup>27</sup> For Robert de Herte

According to the classical process of development and degradation of cycles, the egalitarian theme has moved from the stage of myth (equality in front of God) to the stage of ideology (equality in front of men) and then to the stage of scientific pretension (affirmation of the 'egalitarian fact') - to be precise: from Christianity to democracy and later to socialism and marxism.<sup>28</sup>

As we can see, it is not only the ideal of equality which is in question, it is also democracy which is directly challenged. Indeed the French Revolution is presented as a landmark in the process of deterioration of Western culture, and de Benoist proclaims that it is against the spirit of the Declaration of Human Rights of 1789 that we ought to revolt. For the ideal of democracy, with the determinant role attributed to universal suffrage, puts all the individuals on the same level without recognizing the very important differences between them. It results in a uniformity and massification of the citizens upon whom a single norm is imposed, hence the totalitarian character of democracy. To respect human differences, declares Louis Pauwels, society should be organized in the following way: 'To the brains ought to correspond the function of sovereignty; to the muscles the function of defence; to the mouth the function of production'.<sup>29</sup>

Ideas so openly and radically hostile to equality and democracy might still (for how long?) be seen as too extreme to become the dominant ideology, but they certainly play an important role in the transformation of the ideological parameters prevailing in advanced capitalist societies and in the emergence of the new ideology of Liberal-Conservatism. As we have seen, through the redefinition of a series of fundamental notions like liberty, equality and democracy, and their rearticulation in a discourse whose central principle is the affirmation of 'individual freedom' as 'the ultimate goal in judging social arrangements',<sup>30</sup> liberal-democratic ideology is being severed of its links with the defence of democracy and social justice and is being turned into a 'New Individualism' spreading the old gospel of self-help, thrift and individual responsibility. The aim of that ideological offensive is to transform the existing common sense articulated around social-democratic values so as to reduce the expectations of the people, to destroy their sense of solidarity and responsibility towards the underprivileged and to prepare them for the more authoritarian type of society which is already being installed in many places. That process is beginning to bear its fruits and a new definition of reality has emerged according to which ideas considered as unacceptable ten years ago seem today almost taken for granted.<sup>31</sup> Such a shift in attitudes has certainly played an important part in the rise to power of a new brand of conservatism in Britain and in the United States.

#### RIGHT WING POPULISM

In 1970, in an article in *The Public Interest*, Irving Kristol drew attention to the fact that the liberal-conservative ideal of a 'free society' was completely divorced from the ideal of a 'just society' and he argued that in consequence such an ideal could never appeal to the masses in modern society.<sup>32</sup> Ten years later, the victory of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the USA (on the basis of programmes strongly influenced by the theories of the social market

economy) seem in glaring contradiction to that prediction. Do we therefore need to conclude that the masses have been converted to the virtues of the market by the abstract thinking of the neo-liberals? Obviously the phenomenon is much more complex and deserves careful attention.

First, as we have already indicated, since the end of the 1960s the social-democratic common sense in which the notion of 'social justice' played an important role has been consistently undermined by the shift in the dominant ideology from Liberal-Democracy towards Liberal-Conservatism providing a new ideological terrain more favourable to the success of right-wing movements. On the other side, the crisis of the welfare state and the popular frustration which accompanied it have been at the origin of an outburst of anti-state reactions and feelings which the radical right has been able to translate in the terms of the neo-liberal critique. The arrival in power of right-wing populism is far from being the result of an accident. It has been prepared since the mid-1960s by the development, both in Britain and the USA, of a series of right-wing pressure groups and organisations tending to organise popular reaction against the 'counter-culture', the 'permissive society' and the 'collectivist state'.<sup>33</sup> The results began to be felt around 1974/early 1975 with the arrival of Margaret Thatcher to the leadership of the Conservative Party, and in the first popular backlash against the campaign of the 1960s in Boston with the riots for the preservation of the racially segregated schools. Since then the power of the radical right has steadily been growing, especially through its capacity to link into a national network a series of groups organized around single issues, culminating in their victory in the elections in both countries.

Several analyses of 'Thatcherism' have shown how its growth had been facilitated by the genuine popular discontent with the bureaucratic and corporatist way in which the welfare state had been implemented in Britain. In his path-breaking article 'The Great Moving Right Show', Stuart Hall writes:

The state is increasingly encountered and experienced by ordinary working people as indeed not a beneficiary but a powerful bureaucratic imposition. And this 'experience' is not misguided since, in its effective operations with respect to the popular classes, the state is less and less present as a welfare institution and more and more present as the state of 'monopoly capital'.<sup>34</sup>

The close identification of the welfare state with social-democracy has obviously been a powerful trump in the hands of the new conservatives, but they needed to know how to play it and one must recognize that they have been especially successful in articulating to the right a very wide spectrum of popular responses so as to create a polarization in which 'Labour is undividedly "with" the state and the power bloc - and Mrs. Thatcher is undividedly out there "with the people"'.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore by a deliberate attempt to colonize for the right the very real antagonisms which have emerged as a result of the development of late capitalism, utilizing for that end the rich repertoire of anti-statist and anti-egalitarian themes provided by the various trends of neo-conservative ideologies, that Thatcherism has become a popular force.

The characteristics of the radical right in the United States are remarkably similar to the British case, and behind the most obvious differences due to the specific conditions in each country one can recognize a common attempt to organize a reaction against the growth of right-wing populism. The state is increasingly encountered and experienced by ordinary working people as indeed not a beneficiary but a powerful bureaucratic imposition. And this 'experience' is not misguided since, in its effective operations with respect to the popular classes, the state is less and less present as a welfare institution and more and more present as the state of 'monopoly capital'.<sup>34</sup>

attack on 'big government' is combined with a forceful reassertion of the traditional values concerning the family, role of women, abortion, homosexuality and other social questions. Indeed one of the most striking characteristics of this movement is that it tries to unite people across party lines and class divisions on the basis of social and moral issues. If in their war against state intervention and their campaign for big tax reductions they draw their ammunition from the neo-liberals (especially the monetarism of Milton Friedman and the Californian school of Arthur Laffer, the theorist of Proposition 13), in their moral and cultural offensive they have found a very important source of inspiration in the work of neo-conservative scholars like Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol with their persistent attacks on the 'adversary culture' and their proclaimed need for religion.<sup>36</sup>

A very important element in the US brand of right-wing populism is their defence of the patriarchal order. In a seminal article, Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter have shown that a new element has recently been added to racism which used to have the central role in American right-wing politics:

Racism has not diminished as a political force, but has been joined - and the whole right thereby strengthened - by a series of conservative campaigns defending the family, a restrictive and hypocritical sexual morality, and male dominance.<sup>37</sup>

The recent years in the USA have witnessed an important backlash against the development of the women's and gay movements expressed in the multiplication of single-issue organisations campaigning against the Equal Right Amendment for women, against abortion and against the rights of homosexuals. The radical right has been able to articulate all those 'pro-family' operations (of which the most powerful is the Evangelical Church of the Rev. Jerry Falwell); the defence of traditional patriarchal forms and of the male-dominated system of heterosexuality has proved to be a powerful ideological cement for the regrouping of the 'moral majority' as the Reagan victory has testified.<sup>38</sup> In Britain a similar patriarchal component is present (even if less pronounced at the moment) in Thatcherism which, as Tricia Davis and Catherine Hall have argued, is not simply an attack on the rights of women but a much bigger attempt to rework old ideologies into a new consensus about the role of women and the nature of femininity as one of the ideological lynchpins for the restructuring of society.<sup>39</sup>

Since Liberal-Democracy has historically constituted a specific articulation of private property, family and democracy, at the moment when the need is being felt to underplay the role of democracy it is not surprising to see a growing importance attributed to the family and I would venture to predict that defence of the patriarchal family is going to play an increasing role in the emerging ideology of Liberal Conservatism.

#### IN DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY

The development of monopoly capitalism since the Second World War and the growing intervention of the state at all levels of social life have led to a profound transformation of Western society and to the rupture of the traditional conception of politics. Indeed in all the fields where the state intervenes: health, housing, education, energy,

etc., social contradictions have become political ones and new antagonisms have emerged in which the state is perceived as the oppressor. At the same time already existing contradictions based on the sex/gender system and on race have become more acute and the whole realm of civil society, of what was traditionally considered as 'private', is now recognised as a terrain for political struggle. But neither the old forms of party politics nor the more recent forms of tripartist corporatism are able to cope with that 'democratic upsurge'. We have therefore the release of an enormous potential challenge to the existing order which does not find institutional channels to express itself. Hence the proliferation of the new movements and single-issue groups. In themselves most of these contradictions do not have a specific class content and can be articulated into many different discourses as the recent success of right-wing populism has proved. On that terrain the left is very far behind the right indeed, and is only beginning to realize the crucial importance of that terrain of struggle.

It seems to me that the shortcomings of the socialist forces in this field stem from two main sources: (1) their prevailing economism which prevents them from taking seriously contradictions other than the class ones, and from recognizing that ideological issues can provide a powerful factor in the constitution and unification of social and political forces; (2) their statist conception of socialism and the fact that they do not seem yet to have fully come to terms with the transformations of bourgeois politics which have accompanied the implementation of Keynesian policies. They go on as before presenting the intervention of the state as the remedy for all social evils, without realising that the bourgeoisie has robbed them of their flag. No wonder that the crisis of Keynesianism found them absolutely unprepared to offer a real alternative, since their only strategy is one of left Keynesianism. That is why in many countries the crisis of the welfare state has first been capitalised by the right. Fortunately that swing to the right has not yet been consolidated, and signs indicate that the situation may still be reversed.<sup>40</sup> But in order to gain a real long-term victory, one that would provide a left solution to the present crisis based on a thorough democratisation of society, we need a radical rethinking of the socialist ideal and strategy.

What is definitively on the agenda today is the elaboration of a strategy that could unite around a socialist project all the 'fragments' of the democratic movement. Such a project requires a profound transformation of the dominant conception of socialism. For, as long as it is only conceived in terms of the socialisation of the means of production, it has very little to offer to satisfy the demands of the 'new movements'. The struggle must be waged at a much deeper level than it is usually conceived by the left, and the elaboration of a socialist alternative must engage with all the contradictions existing in society and not only those located in the field of the economy. To end contradictions located in the sex/gender system or based on race must be considered as important in the building of socialism as to end the contradiction between capital and labour.

The elaboration and implementation of such a strategy is far from easy, and it is not my intention to underplay the major difficulties that need to be solved. But I would like to suggest some elements of this process. It is sometimes said that there is no basis for a unity between the different parts of the democratic movement. The first

sight their demands seem so different and even particularistic that, without postulating a pre-given unity, based on a common source - the existence of the capitalist mode of production - it might appear very difficult to justify the assertion that unity can and should be built. Nevertheless one can recognize the presence of a common element because all those demands are in some way or other the expression of a struggle for equality and participation and against oppression and exclusion. They point towards the need for a real democratization of society at all levels and such a common objective could provide the principle of an alliance between the fragments. However, for that to become a real possibility we need a much wider conception of democracy than the one at our disposal at the moment. Our present concept of democracy is too limited and has suffered a lot from its articulation in the liberal-democratic discourse. In order to transform it into a tool appropriate for the framing of a new socialist project it is urgent to reformulate it in such a way as to allow us to use it to advocate not only a real participation of the people in all the decisions concerning the organisation of social life, but also for a real equality among human beings irrespective of their sex, race or sexual orientation. To the offensive of Liberal-Conservatism to redefine to the right the dominant ideological parameters, it is necessary to answer with a stronger ideological and political offensive to reaffirm and extend democratic values. Because the problems that we face today are not due to an excess of democracy, as the neo-conservatives would have us believe, but to a lack of it, the problem will only be solved by more democracy.

## NOTES

- 1 Claus Offe, 'Notes on the Future of European Socialism and the State', *Kapitalistate*, No.7, 1978, p.33.
- 2 James O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1973.
- 3 See for instance Henry S. Kariel (ed.), *Frontiers of Democratic Theory* (New York, 1970) and Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, *Power and Poverty. Theory and Practice* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1970).
- 4 Alan Wolfe, *The Limits of Legitimacy*, New York, Free Press, 1977, p.57.
- 5 The thought of the group, especially its German members, is analysed by C.J. Friedrich in 'The Political Thought of Neo-Liberalism', *American Political Science Review*, 1955, pp.509-25.
- 6 Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1960, p.11.
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, University of Chicago Press, 1962, p.25.
- 9 Keith Joseph, *Conditions for Fuller Employment*, CPS, 1978, p.20. Quoted by Andrew Gamble in a very useful article on the social market economy and its followers in Britain: 'The Free Economy and the Strong State', *The Socialist Register*, 1979.
- 10 Willem Röpke, *A Humane Economy*, quoted in Noël O'Sullivan, *Conservatism*, London, 1976, p.159.
- 11 Friedman, *op.cit.*, p.14.

- 12 C.B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1973, p.146.
- 13 Hayek, *op.cit.*, p.206.
- 14 Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1944, p.52.
- 15 Andrew Gamble in the article referred to above (note 9) has shown the intellectual dishonesty of Friedman, who classified Nazi Germany as totalitarian despite the fact that the regime did not interfere with the economic freedom of private capital.
- 16 Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: A Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, New York University Press, 1975.
- 17 Daniel Bell, 'On Meritocracy and Equality', *The Public Interest*, Fall 1972.
- 18 Irving Kristol, 'About Equality', *Commentary*, November 1972.
- 19 Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Democratic Distemper', *The Public Interest*, Bicentennial Edition, 1976.
- 20 Quoted by Pierre Dommergues, 'Les Etats-Unis à la recherche d'une nouvelle idéologie', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 1980.
- 21 Peter Steinfelds, *The Neoconservatives*, New York, 1979.
- 22 Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, pp.59-60; *Constitution of Liberty*, pp.231-33.
- 23 Charles Frankel, 'The new egalitarianism and the old', *Commentary*, September 1973.
- 24 Milton Friedman, *Free to Choose*, London, 1980, p.134.
- 25 Alain de Benoist, *Les idées à l'endroit*, Paris, 1979, p.81.
- 26 Jean-François Kahn, 'Ne pas se laisser prendre au piège des mots', *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 27 September 1979.
- 27 de Benoist, *op.cit.*, pp.167-84.
- 28 Robert de Herte, Collectif du G.R.E.C.E., *Dix ans de combat culturel pour une renaissance*, Paris, 1977.
- 29 Louis Pauwels, in *Matastra, Renaissance de l'Occident*, Paris, 1979.
- 30 Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, p.12.
- 31 It is interesting to note for instance that many themes of Reagan's campaign, considered as quite acceptable today, were felt as outrageous when formulated by Goldwater in 1964.
- 32 Irving Kristol, "'When virtue loses all her loveliness" - some reflection on capitalism and the "free society"', *The Public Interest*, No.21, Fall 1970.
- 33 For an analysis of that process in Britain see Stuart Hall *et al.*, *Policing the Crisis*, London, 1978; in the United States, Bertram Gross, *Friendly Fascism*, New York, 1980, and Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, New York, 1980.
- 34 Stuart Hall, *Marxism Today*, January 1979, pp.17-18.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p.18.
- 36 Especially in Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, New York, 1978, and Irving Kristol, *On the Democratic Idea in America*, New York, 1972.
- 37 Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter, 'Sex, Family and the New Right', *Radical America*, November 1977.
- 38 A very good analysis of the network of the New Right in America is provided by Alan Crawford, *op.cit.*
- 39 Tricia Davis and Catherine Hall, 'The Forward Face of Feminism', *Marxism Today*, October 1980, p.15.

- 40 The difficulties encountered by Mrs Thatcher in implementing monetarism and the growing popular reaction to her policies are leading to a radicalization of the Labour Party that might create the conditions for an emergence of a completely new type of socialist politics in Britain. On the other side, the Mitterand victory in France is very likely to provide an alternative model of solving the crisis that will undermine the conservatives' claim that theirs is the only solution, and act as a powerful ideological weapon against the rise of the new right.
- 41 One should not restrict democracy to a formal mechanism of collective decision-taking, as does Barry Hindess in his otherwise important article in *Politics & Power* 1. As Bob Jessop has pointed out in his critique of Hindess (*Politics & Power* 2), one must also engage in struggle to interpellate 'democratic subjects'. But that requires a new conception of democracy that is urgent to elaborate.