

## THE IDEOLOGY OF CAPITALISM AND THE ALTERNATIVES

### I. INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the global economic crisis in the summer of 2008, many voices, have been raised in favour of a “new” capitalism, a compassionate, regulated, honest incarnation of a somewhat tarnished product. These voices recognized some of the errors of the three neo-liberal decades, but were convinced that capitalism had to be preserved or disaster would ensue.

If all that was meant was that a considerable degree of private enterprise would remain in a reformed world, these voices were indubitably correct. No one wants to return to the inefficiency, the brutality and the absurdity of Stalinism or to try to create a new form of command economy. The presence of a vibrant private sector is a feature also of democratic socialism or social democracy and not only of capitalism. Indeed, a regulated market economy is more typically described as social democratic than as capitalist. By its nature, pure capitalism cannot be open, totally transparent or compassionate.

The reason for calling the future reformed society “new capitalism” rather than “new social-democracy” is the propaganda victory won by conservative think-tanks and ideologues since 1970. In the past many people, including some who did not like socialism, such as Schumpeter, were convinced of its inevitability. Now, even those instinctively hostile to capitalism have embraced the myth that only capitalism can produce growth and that no viable alternative exists. The constant repetition of this in our media led to a situation where many feared to be ridiculed if they demurred and people often fear ridicule more than repression. Thus a new near-unanimity has been forged, not always at the highest academic spheres but, more ominously, in living rooms, in the popular press and on the street.

We can see this tendency in the dismissive attitude taken towards labour leaders whenever they challenged the dominant dogmas. Businessmen, on the other hand, were taken seriously. However, in our system of collective bargaining, both are equally representative of “special interests” – persons promoting their own groups. In Quebec, the conservatives who issued the manifesto of “Quebec lucide” in 2007 were viewed as objective, when they called for sacrifices on the part of everyone, except the business lobby, so that Quebec could remain competitive. The left-wing response of “Quebec solidaire” was given short shrift. The majority no longer believed those who advocated its interests, but rather those who called on it to tighten its belt and to give up the attainments won during the social-democratic era between 1950 and 1980. Since the crisis of 2008, deficit “hawks” have, if anything, become stronger, at least in the English-speaking world, despite the weakness of their argument. For instance, the British Conservative/Liberal Coalition under David Cameron has embarked on a course of fairly extreme austerity which goes beyond what Mrs. Thatcher could implement in the 1980s.

The ideology of capitalism that has been generally adopted is based on its supposed rewarding of hard work, thrift and innovation. The myth of America was that anyone can win and that winner takes all. This type of thinking is in part descended from Weber’s and other thinkers’ embracing of the protestant ethic, from the popular notion that Protestantism and Judaism are particularly suited for entrepreneurship, unlike Roman Catholicism. In our time, this has sometimes been identified with the “Anglo-Saxon” model, developed in Thatcherite England and Reagan’s America, inspired by Milton Friedman and Raymond Aaron.

The fundamental premise is that those who work hard and who are clever succeed for the most part and that the world is most efficient when winners are fully rewarded. It is implicit that, if there are to be winners, there must also be losers, and it became a dogma that we must ignore compassion in order to promote overall efficiency and growth. By creating wealth, capitalism would ultimately make everyone better off.

Even in the early days of capitalism, David Ricardo, who did not share modern capitalists’ ebullient optimism about infinite growth, nevertheless thought that welfare would only make the lower classes more miserable. With today’s triumphalism, this type of thinking has become endemic, even if it

lacks Ricardo's intellectual basis or rigor or his ultimate pessimism.

It therefore became a common view that successful businessmen were generally the best and the brightest, who deserved their success, that the "bad eggs" who cheated would eventually be weeded out and that the dishonest were a miniscule percentage of businessmen who should be punished in an exemplary fashion in order to promote personal integrity and a high standard of "governance". In fact, "governance" became a major preoccupation in the last 20 years, just as standards of honesty declined everywhere in the west.

This thinking persists, especially in the U.S., even though it is now clear that the upper echelons of businessmen form an incompetent, ruthless, self-seeking *nomenclatura*, always ready to vote itself bonuses, astronomic profits and separation packages and to plead ignorance when the books do not balance or the company's plans turn out to be disastrous. Indeed, this *nomenclatura* is no better than the one overthrown in 1989 in formerly communist countries. In both cases, it must be added, there were some high-minded, brilliant, devoted men, trying to do good work within the limits of their system, but they were the minority. Clearly we would have been better off had we confided administration of business affairs to a combination of small businessmen, academics and public servants than to this *nomenclatura* of big business.

Moreover, the reason for the behaviour of big business is not, as so many say, the unfortunate greed of a few. Capitalism necessarily relies on greed as its primary engine and the conduct of businessmen today is no different than in the past.

It is simply not true that honest, hard work reaps rewards or ever did. We have forgotten the lessons of Balzac or Zola about what most often happens to honest people and to inventors in the system and how they are almost always shunted aside by speculators. Once again, there are exceptions such as Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, who made their fortune through talent, but it is difficult to think of many fortunes honestly made or kept. Artists, athletes and actors can occasionally become very wealthy because of their unique ability, and that is what was called an "economic rent" in classical economics. It is not a significant factor. "Dog eat dog" is the essence of capitalism and ruthless drive towards victory is the only possible method. The speculators and the robber barons win every time. The expansion of corruption, contraband trade, international bribery, poaching and pollution after the "revolution" of 1989 is simply not an accident, but a natural consequence of untrammelled capitalism.

That is why honest, transparent capitalism is a pipe-dream. Success depends on hoodwinking and out-manoeuvring the competition and therefore one cannot require open books and regulated conduct without transforming the system into something very different.

It is not the appearance on the scene of a few transgressors like Madoff which led to a perception of corruption. The system always functions that way and "open", honest capitalism is as likely as vegetarian lions. The way to defeat the competition is to pay less to workers, to avoid unionization, to evade taxes, to cover up pollution, and to bribe third-world potentates. Anyone who tries to act differently will be out of business very quickly even if, in the long run, his more enlightened policies prove wiser. It is to be noted that, under capitalism, as under the law of the jungle, the short-run advantage almost always prevails over long-run wisdom, because survival is first and foremost a short-term issue. You do not come back after you have been eaten.

During the 2012 U.S. election, Republican vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan expressed great interest in Ayn Rand who, he stated, had influenced his thinking. Despite her very weak skills as a novelist, Ayn Rand did indeed describe faithfully the necessarily rapacious nature of capitalism. She has been a cult figure for some participants in the revival of right-wing thinking that took place since the 1960s. While she was accurate about the essence of capitalism, her boundless enthusiasm for it was an indication of a lack of moral compass and an inability to empathize with the weak.

Another aspect of capitalism is its tendency towards the concentration of wealth. Marx made this point and, as on so many issues, he has turned out to be a prophet. Left unchecked, the system leads to a disparity of wealth and gives undue economic and political control to the wealthy. One of the most telling statistics of the 30-year old “Anglo-Saxon” model is that virtually all of the increase in wealth during these decades accrued to the richest half percent of the population. The average man is no better off and, if one includes the non-pecuniary disadvantages of two-income households, and the almost universal loss of security, is probably worse off than before.

Most of us are aware of these perfectly natural qualities of capitalism. Sayings like “nice guys finish last” abound, even among children. We have developed a cult of success rather than knowledge or goodness. There is also a sublimated anger in our society which expresses itself in vigilante attitudes towards criminal law and a certain pervasive conformism, harshness and pettiness. People sense the odds against them in their lives, yet they continue to repeat the discredited credo of capitalism – that the deserving succeed and that hard work usually brings reward. In short, people cling to the notion that, although rewards may be unequal, our society is fundamentally just. Many attribute their own failures to their own inadequacies, which explains their anger and frustration and their readiness to condemn others.

A third, problematic side to capitalism is its relentless expansionism. In order to win one has to take risks and use capital one does not have. Moreover, it is necessary to create “needs” so that people can keep spending money that they do not have. Advertising techniques have turned this into an art. It is also necessary to keep finding supplies of cheap materials and to give priority to development over conservation. It is clear that the hope that many commentators have expressed that the 2008 recession will end soon is based on the conviction that the old spending habits will revive among consumers. This would, of course, increase the already alarming household debt and set the stage for an even more catastrophic economic melt-down coupled with environmental degradation in a few years.

The expansionism which is usually based on virtual money makes an occasional collapse inevitable, just as Marx thought. Economists deluded themselves that they could avoid recessions through fiscal and above all, monetary policies. One can delay them but, in the end, confidence is lost and a crash occurs.

The reckless expansionism of capitalism has been known almost from its beginning. Zola was particularly masterful at describing speculation, for instance in *L'Argent* and in *La Curée* but other writers, such as Dreiser and even Trollope showed how growth is almost always anchored in a house of cards.

To diminish the force of the ecological argument against endless expansion, some advocates of capitalism resorted to a notion of “climategate”. In their opinion, the climate crisis has been invented by the left for ideological purposes. Further studies have shown, on the contrary, that the climate change is real, although it is possible to debate the degree of blame to be attached to human activity. Moreover, other environmental threats such as pollution, waste disposal, and depletion of resources have not seriously been challenged.

Since Rachel Carson’s “Silent Spring”, alarmist books have regularly appeared, diagnosing an environmental threat to humanity’s very survival. We now see that much of the alarm was justified in substance, if not always in detail or in the immediacy of the predicted collapse. Recent publications like Bill McKibben’s *Earth: Making a Life on a Tough Planet* can hardly muster any optimism about the future, at least under an expansionist capitalism.

It stands to reason that constant expansion leads to various dangers. In the past, change usually occurred gradually and when sudden modifications occurred, they were usually disastrous. Now we change population levels, emission levels, and food production levels drastically in the space of decades, yet we expect our standard of living to improve constantly. Sudden change has become the stuff of

everyday life, as have expectations of ever-increasing individual wealth, even though this has not happened in the west in recent decades.

In biology, mutations are disadvantageous and only occasionally does a major change have an immediate, positive effect. Constant expansion means juggling massive, rapid changes very quickly. It means the constant destroying and recreating of equilibrium. A society which depends on constant, drastic change will ultimately collapse very much as the Tower of Babel went down in the Bible. Our capitalist society is obsessed with “innovation” and “growth”; it is therefore constantly in peril of collapse if, one day, a necessary innovation proves elusive or arrives too late or has an unforeseen but lethal consequence.

In recent years, capitalism’s expansionism has therefore become particularly risky. Not only does it cause crashes which destroy lives and families before the economic rebound, but it worsens the ecological disaster. This was not a significant concern before 1970, but it is now a major issue, and it is often one shared by people of different outlooks and backgrounds.

If the new capitalism continues unabated, it will inevitably lead to a new, even more flagrantly unjust class system because of growing inequality of distribution, to insecurity, to poverty and to ecological catastrophe. The damage to individual lives caused by the last recession in terms of homes lost, medical coverage lost for people who become ill, children unable to obtain an education for which they had been preparing, old-age security disappearing will likely never be repaired for many citizens, even if the expansionist frenzy returns briefly, creates a new bubble, new millionaires and brings about theoretical growth. One of the most sinister aspects of the system is how easily we forget the victims of the last wave of capitalist folly, although so many of them never succeed in rebuilding their lives.

Market worshippers believe that the markets ultimately produce lasting equilibrium by weeding out the incompetent and the irrational. While some people may make irrational decisions, it is assumed that the majority will act in their enlightened self-interest and that the markets will reach a desirable equilibrium.

Many have pointed out that self-interest is clear only in hindsight and that the result is ultimately unpredictable. It is not only the incompetent and weakest, but many of the best were who were defeated. Keynes and his followers have demonstrated that the rationality of markets and the achievement of an ultimate equilibrium is anything but certain. Moreover, rational decisions in the short run tend to be irrational in the long run. For instance, a reasonable investor might invest, in the short run, in Israeli settlements on Palestinian occupied territory. Such investment is, at best, highly risky in the long run. Yet, it is short-term benefits that usually prove alluring. A crazy, irrational risk is precisely what might lead to the limitless rewards and life-long success that proponents of capitalism hope to achieve. We forget that a career or a company can be destroyed by one error and, anyone, however bright, can make a mistake.

The most obvious flaw in the belief in rational markets is the assumption that economic decisions are rational while, quite evidently, political, social and moral ones are not. Would a rational Hitler have used his scarce transportation resources to move millions of potentially productive persons to be incinerated? Would a rational America take such a strongly anti-Islamic, anti-Palestinian stance when it needs the oil and other resources found in Islamic countries and a pro-Indian, pro-Chinese stance when these countries threaten America’s leadership in the world? Would rational, educated Europeans of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, have killed and tortured each other over the real or symbolic nature of communion? Can one justify in any rational way the preference for male babies which leads so many people in China and India, some of them highly educated, to practice selective abortion, infanticide and desertion of babies? The answer seems obvious. There are historical, philosophical, and biological explanations, but hardly rational ones. Reason is only a small part of human life. It influences decisions,

but is not the dominant element in them. In *The Righteous Mind*, Jonathan Haidt shows in great detail the non-rational considerations which determine moral choice and it is difficult to disagree with much of this part of his thesis, even though we do not have to accept his moral relativism about desirable outcomes.

Why then would we think that prejudices, emotions, and hates affect every type of judgment humans make but do not affect economic decisions? There is no reason to think that these decisions are different. Thus, market economics fails not only because of the moral considerations, because of the inherent inequality, because of its reckless expansionism, but also on its own terms. The market is not rational or predictable and trust in the market mechanism as a solution to economic problems is unfounded, even in terms of capitalist economics. Occasional spectacular successes only serve to underscore the long-term perils of relying on the rationality of human judgment. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Hume pointed out that passion is stronger than reason in most minds. Even in economics, doubts about rationality have been exposed. For instance, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky have illustrated the weakness of the rational part of the human mind in many types of decision-making. While these theories have not always been used to further a more planned economic system and indeed were sometimes presented as reasons to be sceptical about any centrally planned solution to economic crises, they at least bring out the fundamental weakness in conservative economic assumptions and their quasi-scientific basis. Some have countered that while individual decisions are irrational, there is a rational aggregate, but that is difficult to justify. It is also far from evident that the existence of a rational aggregate in certain circumstances will help us make decisions when we face problems. The aggregate is typically known only after the decisions have been made.

The issue of the rationality of decisions is a different one from the related question whether selfishness is the sole rational criteria for decision-making. Amritya Sen makes a convincing case for the existence of other, generous considerations and for the proposition that rational decision-making is not, by definition, predatory. However, the presence of the irrational in all human endeavours, makes this response highly imprecise and, indeed, the question is virtually unanswerable because some will view “selfishness” as present, *by definition*, in any decision we make, even a self-sacrificing one. However we deal with the notion and pervasiveness of selfishness, it is clear that capitalism will not be able to demonstrate its objective rationality, either in the short run or in the long run.

## II. THE CURRENT CRISIS

Since 2008, a crisis of unprecedented strength is shaking confidence in the new capitalism. It was preceded by warning signs – small recessions, the Asian collapse, and partial financial collapses. Indeed, the so-called “successes” of neo-liberalism were a mixture of devastating crises and years of very questionable and badly distributed growth. Both Thatcher and Reagan provoked periods of unemployment and loss of solidarity which were blamed on the preceding social-democratic governments, followed by uneven growth which was quickly trumpeted as the proof of the virtues of the new capitalism. In Chile, neo-liberalism was brought in through torture and murder, and the eventual “recovery” did little to cure the inequality and social injustices created by it. When they got a chance, the Chileans voted for the left, which tried to soften capitalism but did not have the power needed under Pinochet’s reform. Israel, once a social-democracy which tolerated massive injustice only towards the Palestinians, became one of the most unequal and polarized developed societies in the world. The successes of neo-liberalism, like those of communism, required considerable propaganda to make them believable and they did not withstand any serious analysis.

However, after 2008, the failure of neo-liberalism became quite evident. Naturally, some resorted to the usual scapegoat – human greed or error in a single sector of the economy, such as

banking or real estate, forgetting these are the primary materials of which capitalism is made. Others suggested a return to regulation and government stimulation – a reluctant concession to Keynes and Keynesianism. By 2011, the era of drastic cuts and destruction of social systems had arrived. A few people, notably John Gray and Christopher Higgins, saw the crisis as an inevitable and natural result of the system, but most continued to view the problems as temporary anomalies caused by specific, curable weaknesses. In particular, the theory that the damage all came from the banking sector or from the real estate or housing market is no more than a dubious attempt to mask the inherent defects of capitalism.

We have been immersed in a cult of growth. It is true that 17<sup>th</sup> century French thinkers were wrong when they affirmed that there was a constant amount of wealth in the world. Although growth has turned out to be possible, it does not follow that infinite growth will always occur. There are no perpetual motion machines and, at some point, any system cannot continue to expand.

It was often suggested that technology would not lead to the loss of jobs. It always dislocated employment but, in the past, always created more work through increased demand, greater efficiency, and the appropriation of resources by dominant countries. But it would be foolish to believe that technology alone can serve the capitalist world. Some expect the present crisis to blow over because of new demand from the rising middle class of China, India and Brazil. This may indeed happen for a short period of time and it will undoubtedly spawn a fatuous, temporary complacency. However, the crisis is likely to continue.

The surprising resilience of conservative movements which, for many reasons, have not attracted the full blame they earned, is bringing down the welfare state. Under Thatcher and Reagan, many had predicted that a combination of low taxes, mobility of capital and free trade could make the social justice and cultural subsidies current in the west untenable. This did not happen right away. Conservative regimes, notably Reagan's, Bush's and Mulroney's increased the deficits but maintained most of the social programmes. Even the fiscal prudence of the 1990s did not bring these programmes down altogether. Those who predicted the destruction of most of the social systems were labeled alarmist and the bubble economy continued. Whenever attempts were made to control it – as with Prime Minister Jospin's 35-hour working week – they were attacked as “old-fashioned” and counter-productive.

Yet now, we are clearly reaping the harvest that Reagan and Thatcher sowed. In Greece, in Portugal, in Ireland, in Spain, in Italy, in the UK, throughout Europe and more gradually, in Canada and the United States, social justice is declining. The solution is the same as before – one must either limit the globalization or regulate it more vigorously to maintain social justice. Only now one can no longer mask the situation by borrowing or by deficit spending.

One could argue that the conservative revolution had two phases. The first de-legitimized taxation in the eyes of the middle class which was pressed for funds, reduced the influence of trade unions, destroyed what was left of the socialist alternative, increased militarization and surveillance, imposed general free trade, but, on the whole, maintained the social safety net. This made great public indebtedness inevitable. During the “truce” of the 1990s those trends continued together with a new preoccupation with indebtedness which explains the prudence of leaders like Clinton, Chrétien and Blair in fiscal matters. The nineties also created the ill-fated expansion of the poorer EU countries – Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain and the frenetic new capitalism in countries like, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary. Now the consequences of this are becoming clear. The social system and the safety net cannot survive indebtedness, low taxes, high degree of military and security expenditure and free trade at the same time. The inequalities which the system created are now going to be visible to all and the result for many citizens, probably for most, will be disastrous. Moreover, adopting the Euro deprived the weaker countries of a number of remedies – devaluation, inflation, and fixed exchange rates. While these remedies are all problematic, the alternative has wiped out autonomy and the possibility of creating a

different economic system.

It is not necessary to accept that all of this was a nefarious conspiracy, although some of the conservative thinkers were surely aware of the likelihood of such consequences and delighted to undo the welfare state nevertheless. In many cases, governments maintained the social programmes because they could not be re-elected otherwise. They cut taxes and imposed free trade at the same time, because their friends who financed them requested this as recompense and also because some of it was popular, particularly the tax cuts. They increased security and military spending because of the anti-Islamic hysteria and the panic about terrorism even though there was no more of it than in the past. Then they stumbled into the present predicament without planning it. But the predicament is real and, in the long run, cannot be solved by capitalism as we know it. We cannot refuse to raise taxes, insist dogmatically on free trade and want balanced budgets at all costs without sacrificing social justice.

The reality is that the new technology may be able to produce almost infinite quantities of manufactured goods without jobs. We may well be reaching the point where the Luddites will prove at least partially correct and technology will make traditional labour obsolete. The link between employment and output of goods will disappear. Moreover, whatever jobs remain may well be exported to cheaper states. However, ferocious competition will continue for services such as health, education and culture and these cannot easily be provided in large quantities. Resources and food will also continue to be limited.

There are also serious environmental concerns with the creation of consumer societies in the Third World. Can we possibly triple the number of automobiles in use? Can we increase radically the available energy? If we cannot, counting on the “new rich” like China, India and Brazil to save capitalism is doomed. The terrible quality of air in Beijing is an indication that the limits may not be far off. This means that if the crisis ended and growth resumed briefly, the long-term effects would be worse than if we realized now that we are in an impasse and looked for more innovative solutions. For instance, if the new discoveries of oil and gas in the United States make energy relatively inexpensive for a few years, the long-term prognosis will not improve at all.

Finally, certain things cannot be increased except in science fiction. Space is the best example of this. If capitalism succeeds in creating almost limitless consumer goods and gadgets despite the environmental problems, such things as space and services in health, education and culture cannot be multiplied as easily. If capitalism remains, a fierce competition over space, the few remaining jobs and the services can be expected, with resulting wars and economic battles.

It is possible, but doubtful, that technological progress will provide at least partial solutions such as settling other planets. However, the type of technological progress needed even to attempt to solve the environment problem and start a new expansion will lead to the frightening reality of power falling into private hands. The losers in the competition for goods and services who will be in the majority, will not accept defeat except if subjected to terrible repression or perhaps medication to make them docile. If capitalism remains, it will certainly be neither liberal nor benevolent and there is no guarantee that technology can indeed solve the myriad problems in time to stave off disaster.

The only alternative to the increasingly ferocious and uncontrollable capitalism will be a state-led redistribution and the creation of a state which does not worship growth as an absolute good. Yet, as we shall see, such a solution is very difficult to put into effect.

Whether or not a solution is found, it is clear that the crisis is not an accident or a result of the actions of a few unprincipled men. Rather, it is a harbinger of things to come – loss of employment due to technology and globalization, a world without the myth of constant growth, tension between ethnic and national groups which seek to tilt the scale in favour of their group, a constant need for more radical technology and a fear of its unavoidable frightening side. Its one possible positive effect will occur if

there emerges a new willingness to question the assumptions of capitalism and the political correctness of identity politics and that is far from a safe bet at this point.

### **III. THE “SMALL GOVERNMENT” DEFENCE OF CAPITALISM**

Conservatives also make another claim for capitalism – that any attempt to create a socialist society will lead to big government, cumbersome bureaucracy and, ultimately, the loss of freedom. Hayek’s celebrated work, *The Road to Serfdom*, is a masterly exposition of this current of thought which can be traced back to Burke and to British empiricism. Some of the “tea-party” arguments in recent American politics, despite their lack of sophistication, do raise this theme. Right-wing Americans tend to see the government as infinitely powerful and invariably destructive of freedom.

There is some substance to this critique of socialism and social democracy. Most power leads to abuse of power and creating a new type of society requires both power and discretion in the hands of the reformers. Both social-democratic and communist societies showed tendencies towards excessive bureaucracy and even internal critics of communism, such as Trotsky in his last years and Milovan Djilas, at the beginning of his rebellion against Tito, often insisted on this as the major flaw in the system. A new bureaucratic class did appear in most socialist countries and it succeeded in diverting much of the progress or economic gain to itself, both during the socialist years and in the aftermath of the collapse. To a lesser extent, this phenomenon occurred in social-democracies.

However, the argument, in the end, leads more readily to the conclusion that especially great care must be taken to protect freedom and personal integrity under democratic socialism or social democracy, and not that no attempt should be made to create such a new society. All major change has unfortunate, sometimes calamitous side-effects, but this does not mean that creaky conservatism is the only viable solution.

We must keep in mind that recent conservative regimes, for instance those of George W. Bush and Stephen Harper, have also been predicated on big government and heavy government spending. However, the spending has been on the military or on security measures, for instance, on building prisons and fortifying borders. The difference between the left and the right, to the extent to which it can be simply established, has not been the notion of spending or not, but rather the spending priorities. The left prefers health, education and culture and the right opts for defense and security.

Deficits have been as common in conservative times, under Reagan or George W. Bush for instance, as under left of centre governments, which, in fact, have frequently proven frugal. For instance, the province of Saskatchewan, after 1944, had a socialist government which was both quite radical in its social reforms and financially sound throughout its two decades of power.

Further, there is no evidence that socialist or communist bureaucrats were less honest than the leaders of capitalism and the administration of big business. Today we are made keenly aware of the problems of so-called governance in the global society. Those who promote small government offer no assurances that the abuses by leaders of big business will be easier to accept. It is true that there existed a “small, decentralized government” stream in conservative movements in the past, as there were social democratic movements with similarly frugal ideas about de-centralization. Today’s more radical conservatives are firmly in the camp of “big government” or at least “big military spending” and massive control of the population for security reasons. The smaller government, anti-taxation argument comes to the fore only when social spending is to be reduced.

It is also evident that government spending on useful projects such as infrastructure, health and education has not generally been harmful for the long-run future. The deficits incurred must indeed be faced one day, but the problems associated with them can be solved or attenuated by inflation, by growth, by a moderate dose of protectionism or by re-payment at a particularly propitious time. The fear



of deficits that is spreading like wild-fire in our times is simply not justified.

Countries which do not do engage in sufficient public spending or which spend mostly on the security concerns, create a human deficit. They produce an under-educated, under-medicated generation of citizens, a large portion of which suffers from the perception of being poor, which is a major cause of the demoralization caused by poverty. A “human deficit” cannot be repaired except through natural aging and mortality. Such countries also suffer from infrastructure deficiencies or else they place the essential infrastructures such as roads and water-works in private hands, with insufficient regulation and therefore insufficient control and uncertain quality.

The examples are countless. Portugal under Salazar and Romania under Ceausescu both feared indebtedness and denied facilities to their population in the name of sound finances. Most western European countries did the opposite, as did Poland and Hungary in the east. In retrospect, we can see that the penny-pinchers accomplished nothing for their countries. This is especially clear in Eastern Europe where Romania has been a particularly unpleasant place since the fall of communism, much more so than Poland or Hungary, at least until recent electoral victories by the far right in Hungary.

It therefore follows that spending on social programmes and culture while cutting on military and security budgets is the optimal policy. Some caution in spending is required at all times, but not to the point of creating a human deficit or destroying cultural, health and educational institutions.

The decentralization argument put forward by some conservatives can thus be accepted by the left as a reasonable one, but only to a certain degree. Programmes created by public spending should, in many situations, be administered in a decentralized manner with many models coexisting in one system in order to weaken and divide bureaucrats. Frequent judicial review can also destroy bureaucratic arrogance and complacency. Finally individual freedom can be enhanced automatically by the trimming of the military and security spending and powers. However, many programmes require a certain scale to be effective and they are not enhanced by decentralization. Often, decentralization is an indirect way to make social programmes more difficult to create or maintain. In short, de-centralization is not a panacea.

The essential role of the state cannot be negated in modern society, whatever its ideological stance. We have seen that both conservatives and the centre-left practice “big government”. Only the priorities differ. Therefore, while the anti-bureaucratic argument succeeds at many levels, it does not constitute an effective apology for capitalism or a prescription for a new period of prosperity on a market basis.

Some would want to save capitalism by dividing it into two camps. Following the fiasco of 2008, it has become fashionable to detest the speculators and the bankers, but to continue to praise entrepreneurs and advocates of frugal decentralized administration. This argument is also ineffective.

Obviously, once we concede that there will be considerable presence of private enterprise in a future egalitarian society, we accept that positive side of much entrepreneurship. However, a total dichotomy between entrepreneurs and speculators ignores the dynamics of capitalism. Things always start with enterprise. Very quickly, the need for constant growth, the fact that the more ruthless do better, and the inevitable creation of inequality lead to the conditions for a bubble and for generalized speculation. When a catastrophe such as a plague or a major war occurs, one can restart the enterprising capitalism to satisfy new demand, only to see a new bubble form a few years later. In the forty years after World War II, communism, despite its horrific drawbacks would undoubtedly have gained support, if state intervention and democratic socialism had not permitted decades of progress and relative justice without a major depression. It is therefore time to consider these lessons of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### IV. DOES THE HISTORY OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY VINDICATE CAPITALISM?

Many argue that the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century establish the magnificent potential of capitalism. Under such theories, the technological progress, the increase in wealth, life expectancy, and social justice and the trend towards equality (which was reversed to some extent at the very end of the century) are all attributable to capitalism, which naturally and properly defeated all of its rivals because of its simplicity and its superiority.

This analysis is deeply flawed. In the first place, such an optimistic view can only be justified if one ignores and minimizes the horrors and atrocities that occurred repeatedly between 1914 and 1945 and sporadically at other times during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One cannot look at one aspect of history in isolation.

Two leading historians, Eric Hobsbawm, on the left and Niall Ferguson, on the right, have given us descriptions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which make this period utterly unsuitable as a model for progress.

The first half of the century was marked by wars, ethnic cleansing, genocide, artificial famines, extreme nationalist frenzy and massive violations of human rights. Few epochs have been as cruel and as irrational. The second half was somewhat less macabre, but the experience of China, Africa, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Yugoslavia show that horror was never very far away.

In *The Magic Mountain*, Thomas Mann contrasted the views of a naïve, rationalistic liberal Settembrini with the darker, less humanistic Naphta. While this work was written in the 1920s, the subsequent events in Germany certainly would lead us to consider Naphta as the more realistic of the two protagonists. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was certainly not entirely a product of the enlightenment as Settembrini thought, but also of darker forces represented by Naphta.

One way in which defenders of liberal capitalism deal with these calamities without destroying their visions of a beneficial capitalism is through Hannah Arendt's classification of regimes as "totalitarian" or not. This conflates the dictatorships of the left and the right into one category and contrasts them with democracy. Then one blames the totalitarians for the horrors and credits the democrats with the successes. However, this analysis is unsatisfactory and, in the end, untrue.

The economic statistics for Nazi Germany show that this regime was fundamentally capitalistic. Differences in wealth between classes grew. The big industrial monopolies flourished and wielded great influence. They even profited from the genocide by manufacturing the gas and the other necessary equipment. Anti-socialism, anti-syndicalism and anti-communism were central aspects of the official ideology. Despite numerous attempts in recent years to portray National Socialism as a "socialist" phenomenon, it is clear that it was quite the opposite, despite its name. Any initial "socialism" in it was clearly overwhelmed by the nationalism and the Nazi regime must be categorized not only as capitalist but as profoundly reactionary, quite apart from its genocidal and terroristic side.

This does not mean that the word "totalitarian" has no meaning whatsoever and that there were no similarities between the Nazi and the Stalinist regimes. The word totalitarianism aptly describes regimes where the attempt to control goes beyond the political sphere and invades every aspect of everyday life, and particularly academic and cultural life. Military dictatorships are usually satisfied with political control but ideological ones go beyond this. The term "totalitarian" applies to Nazis, to Soviet and Chinese Communism, and to today's neo-liberal "democracies" which may well be seen as "totalitarian democracies". It means that the ideology extends to cultural, philosophical and social matters and is not limited to the control of government and other levers of power.

It is often overlooked that the democracies also participated in the atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, in some cases (e.g. segregation in the U.S.) inflicted tremendous suffering on innocent persons for several generations. One can argue that because of segregation, the U.S., in 1950, presented a more

systematic violation of human rights than countries in Eastern Europe outside Russia. Recent scholarships have ascribed a man-made famine in Bengal in the 1940s to the British who also have to answer for mass killings in Kenya during the Mau Mau rebellion. Essentially, it is not possible to insulate capitalism or democracy from the horrors which took place and pretend that a mythical “totalitarianism” was the cause of the atrocities. In fact, if the word “totalitarian” may still be useful to describe regimes which invade all aspects of subjects’ lives, its clearest current application today will be to current neo-liberal “democracy” even if, so far, there has been limited direct repression in the form of killing or imprisonment. Since totalitarian control is greatly helped by technology, one can safely predict that it will be more effective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Yet the rise in the standard of living, in life expectancy, in sanitary conditions was also real throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite occasional famines and the present threat of new food shortages and climate disasters, many more people lived decently as the dreadful century went on than ever before. We became capable of sustaining a far larger population, which explains why the absolute number of the poor did not always decline, despite the growth of middle classes. Everyday life became far more pleasant on the whole, even if punctuated by frequent outbursts of vicious savagery.

Capitalism, at least in its liberal form, should not be credited with much of this improvement, despite its vociferous, self-serving claims. The most significant economic change as the 20<sup>th</sup> century rolled on, was government intervention, taxation, social spending, the nationalization of health care and education and technological improvements.

There were many varied reasons for this success – fear of communism and the need to forestall it, the gradual acceptance of Keynesian economics, the presence of a large, organized working class ready to unionize and to vote for the left, the election of many socialist governments, the reaction to the recurring atrocities and a growing awareness of basic human rights. Whatever the motive, this massive government interventionism succeeded beyond all expectations. The second, more peaceful half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century should most aptly be considered the golden age of social-democracy and socialism, at least in Europe and North America.

After 1945, the western countries and, to a large extent, eastern Europe, succeeded in reducing substantially the inequalities between citizens in integrating minorities, without, unfortunately, wiping out identity politics forever and in producing a large, new middle class made up of those whose parents had had no opportunities, but who now lived well.

Could one argue that the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also demonstrated the impracticality and inefficiency of socialism? Certainly soviet communism, which had proclaimed its ultimate victory as inevitable, failed abjectly and a lesson must be learned about “total” socialism and other messianic attempts to build heaven on earth. Just as efforts to construct a virtuous world based on a sombre Protestantism failed during the Reformation, so the idea of a world without markets at all turned out to be unworkable and undesirable. Yet, just as the puritan ideas influenced the enlightenment and the resulting revolutions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of the socialist ideas now form an integral part of our conception of the world. Christopher Hill’s masterly book *The Experience of Defeat*, demonstrated the rich legacy of Puritanism and religious egalitarianism which was passed on despite their apparent defeat. Modern Socialism did even better. The social-democrats, with their mixture of limited market economics and redistribution provided the only ideal of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which is still alive in people’s minds, even if it has become weaker in recent years. Furthermore, as time passes, historians will come to acknowledge the undeniable achievements of the communists despite the repugnance which Stalinism or Maoism will surely continue to inspire. From the point of view of health care, education, culture and social mobility, eastern Europe and Cuba accomplished much which was positive and which will eventually be recognized. In western Europe, communist parties made a priceless contribution to

defeating fascism. That is why arguments about the moral equivalence of communism and Nazism do not pass muster, although they are now often advanced as evident and incontrovertible truths. Rather, the tendency to visceral anti-communism should be seen as an unfortunate reflection of our conservative times, not as a fair assessment of the communist experiment or of history. Communism was anything but a success, but a comparison with Nazism is simply wrong.

Despite the presence of new technology, which some had feared would cause unemployment, the labour market grew rapidly in the second half of the century and this probably was the reason for the exponential growth of women's rights and opportunities and for the improvement in the status of African Americans. When their labour became essential to the economy, their personal value was recognized and rights were granted to them, although often with reluctance. Of course, if technology were ultimately to reduce drastically the number of jobs, these human rights gains could be put in peril once again.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the best growth figures come from socialist Sweden and from the Eastern Bloc, but all of the new social democracies did well in terms of production of goods and services. After 1960, the eastern block faltered and declined, partly because it failed to adjust to new technology for political and often paranoid reasons such as fear of photocopy machines because of their potential for "samizdat". The disappearance of the real threat of communism set the stage for the capitalist reaction and the creation of the "Anglo-Saxon" model of capitalism around 1980.

In retrospect, the period of 1945-1980 in Europe and North America will surely retain a golden aura for those who remember it. During this time, large numbers of people were liberated from economic necessity and traditional ways of life, from their class and from religion. Despite many violations of human rights and numerous set-backs during these years, progress was made in human rights, in health and in education. In the west most of this was done without sacrificing the autonomy and the importance of the individual.

The reaction to this "golden age" after 1980 was, in certain ways, normal and natural. The persons liberated from their parents' limitations and from traditional ways of earning a living nevertheless retained many of the prejudices of the past. For instance, racial and social prejudice did not disappear overnight. Further, a move to the right, at least on fiscal matters, became attractive to many beneficiaries of the social reform, as they started to perceive themselves as middle class. They no longer wanted to invest in the emancipation of those who had not yet risen. It is also true that the liberation did have a price in terms of family stability, security of well-entrenched religious and social beliefs and alienation from nature and land. Moreover, a large group in society, often led by the business classes, never fully accepted social-democracy and was waiting for a propitious time to attack it. Finally, the social-democratic states had real flaws and made egregious errors especially with respect to bureaucracy and to careless spending. A certain degree of correction was not undesirable. However, the return to liberal economics and the exaltation of the private sector, the whole-sale destruction of eastern-European socialism and the decline of social justice which occurred everywhere and which is still continuing, turned out to be a disaster and a set-back to human progress.

This does not mean that social-democratic parties always held the key to success. During the period of 1945-1980, conservatives, liberals and communists also made valuable contributions, sometimes by acting as a brake and sometimes by initiating new, more radical programmes. In years following 1989, formally social-democratic governments and post-communist governments were as ready to privatize and cut programmes as conservative or liberal ones. In the economic crisis after 2008, socialist governments of Greece and Spain adopted the same draconian solutions as conservative ones. It is not the colour or the name of the governing party, but the spirit of the times which often determined policy. It is important to avoid blind partisanship in analyzing history and we should neither

idealize nor demonize political movements except for the most obvious cases like Nazism, when there is no good to be said at all.

Despite all of the reservations, that “golden age” was a period in which we could reasonably see our world as evolving towards a better future. Many terrible events still happened, especially in the third world and under Stalin and Mao, and there was an ever-present threat of nuclear war, but the progress was palpable. Since then we have lost our way. But, whatever party held power, social-democracy and, in the east, socialism were the dominant trends which characterized the post World War II political climate in Europe and North America. It is therefore incorrect to credit capitalism or even some bland concept of “democracy” with these achievements.

That social-democracy, if not socialism, retains some of its capacity to combine prosperity, freedom and efficiency can be seen in the progress made in recent years in South America, in countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Equator, where the moderate left took power and promulgated education and health reform as well as anti-poverty programmes. Although many problems remained, inequality declined and the ranks of their middle class swelled. The centre-left did particularly well in Brazil. Clearly, the decades following World War II were not a flash in the pan, and progress could still be made through investment in social justice and through government-led programmes.

The challenge today is not to recreate the lost “golden age”. That is sometimes the daydream of those who are nostalgic for communism in the east and for the old social-democracy in the west, who realize that something important had been lost and who want it back. However, one can never return to the past. To return would be both impossible practically and would mean glossing over the very real faults and flaws of the societies of the 1950s and 1960s on both sides of the iron curtain. Moreover, the problems we face, such as pollution, demographics and the cultural changes brought about by information technology are very different from the traditional issues of poverty and class which dominated political thinking after World War II. It is a new system which is needed, not a return to the past.

The history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century remains nevertheless very instructive, both as a cautionary tale of the human capacity for baseness and atrocity and as an illustration that, through reasoned state intervention, planning and collective action, we can improve the world, and can obtain better and more just results than those which evolve if we leave market forces free from regulation and do not redistribute wealth. Laissez-faire in all spheres of life, but especially in the economy, leads to injustice and failure. The true lesson of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that we can act collectively to improve the world, to defeat tyranny and obtain positive results over decades and that inaction inevitably produces an unjust society. Another lesson, unfortunately, is that such collective action is difficult to organize and to realize that a reaction is always possible. What is achieved can always be undone and there is reason to fear that this is happening in our times. A final, essential lesson is humility. Reformers with the best intentions can stumble into terror and abuse and safety mechanisms are an essential part of our ambitious project.

## **V. CAPITALISM AND SOVIET MARXISM**

At first glance, capitalism and its former great rival, Soviet Marxism seem to be opposites. Yet a closer analysis shows that they shared a certain crass materialism and a naïve belief in technologically driven “progress” which are particularly pernicious in times which call for conservation and restraint.

Under Stalin and his successors, Soviet analysts measured their progress in terms of crude production figures. If the amount of steel produced doubled, there was proof of success, regardless of the quality of the steel, the need for so much of it or the effect on the environment. There were indeed real successes, and it is possible to argue that the brutal industrialization of the 1930s imposed from the top by Stalin helped save the world from Nazism. Nevertheless, by the time communism fell, Eastern

Europe was an ecological cesspool and the production had become backward and of poor quality. The Soviets often skewed their figures by counting only products and not services, but even in terms of this type of production, the last thirty years of the experiment were a failure.

The extreme materialism and the obsession with production also meant that the attempt to produce a “new man” was doomed. Despite the excellent education system and the availability of impressive cultural resources, the New Soviet Man turned out to be petty, cowardly, conformist, given to squealing and, in the end, susceptible to racism and to far-right propaganda.

Modern capitalism also tends to evaluate its success in growth figures, although it always counts services as well as goods. Once again, the growth figures do not evaluate qualitatively what they measure. Prostitution, speculation, and gambling have the same value as medical services, teaching and protecting the weak and vulnerable. Indeed, one of the shocking aspects of our world is the fact that teachers and nurses are generally poorly paid while speculators and brokers of all sorts do well. There is no attempt at moral distribution of the fruits of our society and the market ideology destroys any idea of “value” based on considerations of justice. Whatever the market pays is deemed to be the “just” price.

Capitalism has adopted much of the communist “progressive” vocabulary, only it stood it on its head. Regulation and taxation became “reactionary” while dismantling the safety net and all forms of personal security became “progressive” and “forward-looking”. In its language, at least, conservatism became revolutionary. Like communists, some of its advocates foresaw an “end to history” with a perfect liberal system providing prosperity for all. In reality, the capitalist decades were arguably more disastrous than the previous years of communist/capitalist rivalry and the failure of neo-liberalism became evident more quickly than the failure of communism.

By letting the market commoditize everything, capitalism made all things, for instance, sex, love and culture objects of commerce in the same way as more conventional subjects of trade. The result has been an almost total destruction of individual security. In the 1950s an American worker had a pension plan which appeared solid and a family which usually did not fracture into pieces. Today, none of these institutions provide reliable security, either economic or emotional. However, because of our obsession with growth figures, we attach infinite importance to the consumption of almost useless consumer goods and gadgets, and none to the loss of security and culture or the decline of marriage. Our “prosperity” calculations would change drastically if we accounted for the devastating losses in personal security by attaching a value to them.

The commoditization of culture and the need to find something new to sell has all but destroyed the classical culture which had been the mainstay of the west. The classics are not much taught or discussed by the young. Classical music is almost dead and it may perhaps be too late to revive it, although an attempt should be made. In this, capitalism has been more destructive than regimes like East Germany which maintained the great institutions of culture in style, although they dampened creativity by the doctrine of socialist realism and by an attempt to control the content of artistic creations.

While awareness of the environmental problems has risen, almost nothing has been done about it. How can one resist pollution, when the central part of one’s ideology is growth and the principal adepts are China and India whose frenetic growth depends on the absence of meaningful environmental controls? It must be repeated that the former communist governments, obsessed by industrial production, caused even more environmental damage than many capitalist ones and left eastern Europe as a cess-pool. It must also be admitted that China and India have expressed environmental concerns in recent years, but how much of this concern is serious remains to be seen.

Of course, some things have improved in recent decades. Medical technology and the rise in life expectancy is a prime example. It is, however, difficult to attribute this to capitalism since there were

countries such as Cuba and the State of Kerala in India which have done as well as the west with regard to life expectancy by providing universal Medicare, hygiene and promoting literacy and the education of women.

There has been a noticeable decline in racism and homophobia in most western countries.

However, this, too, happened as much in Cuba as in western countries and, in any event, it is difficult to know if these changes are permanent or are a mere interlude in the long saga of human intolerance. Certainly the recent successes of Europe's neo-fascists and the Republican reaction to President Obama, for instance with respect to immigration and the treatment of illegals, should remind us that the frustration citizens face under capitalism might well lead to a fascist and not to a liberal or social-democratic solution.

Scientific progress has been stupendous both for good and evil. While science is essential for human survival and must be cherished and nurtured, and while it is inspiring as pure knowledge, it is dangerous to indulge in science fiction speculation which assumes that all problems will ultimately be scientifically solved. Both communists and the new capitalists were tempted to believe that science would always provide miracles in time to stave off disaster. Yet the scientific solution to any problem may come too late or may unleash new unforeseen evils. Science is more properly a form of study, not a religion and treating it as a religion or an automatic solution to all difficulties is manifestly unscientific.

The materialist calculus employed both by communist and by capitalist growth theorists left no room for assessing virtue, beauty, nobility, honour, compassion or love. That is perhaps why both systems failed to produce a better man despite their stress on education. Education often meant more "career training" than learning and in neither system was sufficient importance given to humanistic values and to knowledge or study which had no immediate practical applications. Under both systems, the decline of idealistic virtues led to an increasing cynicism and pessimism.

Like the communists, the capitalists failed utterly to produce a "new man". The natural result of a system which depended on constant spending and material expression was the consumer – a selfish pleasure-seeker who believes himself to be entitled to constant stimulation and immediate fulfillment and who measures success in terms of social status and accumulation of goods. When threatened, he is prey to vigilantism, harshness and intolerance. This phenomenon occurred everywhere, both under communism and under capitalism, although the consumerism was more characteristic of the West.

Of course, one has to avoid absolute judgments about 20<sup>th</sup> century governments or people. The communist regimes produced some true idealists and considerable numbers of artists and writers. So did capitalist regimes. In recent years we have seen many young people utterly devoted to preserving nature and very concerned with the threat to the earth and with inequality and injustice. Yet there is relatively little left of the idealism of the 1960s, either of the belief that a better world can actually be built or of romanticism in private or public life. Cynicism, scepticism and insecurity dominate the landscape.

Thirty years after its triumph under Reagan and Mrs. Thatcher, the new capitalism is as empty of ideas or idealism as the moribund communism it proposed to replace was in the 1980s. An alternative is urgently needed.

## **VI. THE NEW MAN**

On the issue of the new man, which both systems have failed to produce, more must be said.

The communist attempt was grounded in the theory that the human being is infinitely malleable and that nurture is more important than nature. Thus, if we eliminated competition and poverty, we would wipe out sneakiness, self-promotion and greed. Ultimately, this type of thinking culminated in Lysenko's anti-scientific genetics which postulated the potential inheritance of acquired characteristics.

During the years when Skinner was the dominant psychologist, the west, too, considered that

nurture prevailed over nature. Recent studies have shown that, while education is important, genes are probably more so. The perfectibility of man through social legislation has turned out to be impossible.

Both socialism and capitalism had to come to terms with the fact that, while there may not be an absolutely immutable human nature, society has to accept human beings as it finds them, with their foibles and weaknesses as well as their astounding capacities. Attempting to create a new species means simply trying to favour the characteristics currently in fashion through engineering, education or other means.

However, in the modern west, new theories about an improved man have surfaced. It has been suggested, notably by Pinker and Haidt that humanity is evolving to favour features such as co-operation and intelligence rather than the once useful warrior qualities. Thus Pinker finds people more peaceful and more gentle than before and therefore suggests that evolution may be quicker than we think.

How, a mere seventy years and two generations after Hitler, we can indulge in sentimental theories about the existence of a better man is difficult to understand. As for the speed of evolution, its advocates forget that even if this were true in nature and biological changes evolved quickly, in modern human society the unsuccessful tend to reproduce as much as the successful, perhaps more so, and therefore belief in a rapid improvement of man is not credible.

It is true that today there is less violence on a daily basis than in many past societies. Jared Diamond, who does not hid his beliefs that “primitive” societies have much to teach us, nevertheless accepts that such societies have much more warfare and a much higher casualty rate than ours.

Once societies become “civilized” and acquire a class structure, there always exist classes which have an interest in maintaining the peace. Also, in such societies, qualities such as brute strength, an ability to give back easily and frequently and so on become less important compared to intelligence and technical skills. One could perhaps predict a very slow evolution of a person better adapted to the new circumstances, subject, however to the caveat that most civilized societies allow all to reproduce, both those who have the advantageous qualities and those who do not.

The last century was not less violent than previous ones, but the violence was more concentrated in several frightful outbursts. The violence was also hidden from view. If 18<sup>th</sup> century London presented the spectacle of executed criminals hanging from gallows, this was absent both in Berlin and in Moscow in 1938, although the violence and horror were greater. The evolution of a less violent man is a very forlorn hope for humanity, at least in the short or medium run.

One can understand theories that elites are evolving because the wealthy and educated are marrying each other; that, however, happened to elites in virtually every society in the past and, in the end, no new man evolved as quickly as modern optimists think.

There has undoubtedly been too many attempts to apply Darwin to society, ironically at the same time as large portions of American society reject evolution on no basis at all other than religious dogma.

It follows that even though education can make a society more gentle and more understanding, it will not quickly transform man and that no political upheaval will do this either. The Soviet experiment is the best evidence for this.

In short, the new socialist and the new capitalist man are both unattainable myths. Only developing genetic or pharmaceutical controls over the human intellect can change that, and it is far from certain that we would be happy with them. We must assume that the human being in our world is still the same one who ruled the Third Reich and who created Stalinism, as well as the one who promoted health and education in the social-democratic era. Improvement of society is possible but it cannot be based on purely theoretical theories of perfect worlds or a naïve faith in the essential goodness of human beings.



## VII. INTERNATIONALISM AND GLOBALIZATION

Another striking resemblance can be found between Soviet communism and neo-liberalism in the insistence of each on a false internationalism. In the case of the communists, the expression used was “proletarian internationalism”. Now we are presented with a notion of “globalization”. While both systems rejected nationalism as retrograde and parochial, they both favoured various forms of collective identity which made a mockery of their internationalism and led to narrow identity politics.

In the early days of Marxism, there existed a true internationalism, led by people like Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourgh, who maintained that “a worker has no homeland”. Class loyalty would be substituted for all national ties. This turned out to be unrealistic because people simply did not accept it. By the time Lenin had established his regime, national identity was back in the saddle. In fact, each citizen of the new socialist state was given an “internal nationality” and this later became a way of denying equal rights to ethnic Germans and Jews, although initially there had been little discrimination against anyone. Moreover, the internationalism was often put in terms of friendship between different collectivities. Individuals were supposed to live largely within their own “nation or federation”. Indeed, the Soviet Union manifested an inexplicable reluctance to allow their citizens to marry foreigners and impeded contact with the outside world in many ways. Through most of its existence, the communist states paid lip-service to internationalism while appealing to national and ethnic instincts. For instance, Poland’s anti-Semitic purge of 1968 cannot be explained by Marxism or internationalism, but only by old-fashioned chauvinism.

One of the best-known examples of false communist internationalism was the obsession with international competitions, mostly in the realm of sports, but also in music and in cinema. The Russians and the East Germans were determined to win at any price – even occasional cheating or the diversion of excessive resources to these competitions. Clearly, such occasions allowed a certain amount of international contact, but always within a rigid national context in which nations, not individuals, competed.

Soviet internationalism did, of course, have a positive side. Few countries translated foreign literature with the assiduousness of the Soviet Union. Equality of races and national groups was taught with ardour, even if sometimes ignored in practice. However, there was much hypocritical chauvinism under this internationalist mask.

Part of the reason nationalism was retained under communism, was undoubtedly caused by the realization that nationalism had greater mass appeal than class loyalty. The establishment of a socialist state and the repudiation of racism did not mean the worker ceased to notice that many leaders were Jewish or members of other minorities or to dislike this. The desire to maintain a certain level of acceptance or popularity therefore led governments towards nationalism. Certainly, during World War II, an appeal to “holy mother Russia” was more likely to bolster the defence than an appeal to a socialist future. The communist leaders learned the sad fact that the masses are not always progressive or moral and that prejudice often trumps reason.

The new capitalism reproduced some of these tendencies, mostly in sport, since the cultural events have declined in importance. The Olympic Games have become a source of national pride and aspiration and victory or defeat can become a significant political issue. The reasons for this are surely very similar to what they were in Eastern Europe. Somehow, Global Capitalism cannot replace traditional loyalties which continue to play an important role for individuals.

Globalization as an ideal is even more false and empty than proletarian internationalism. Its purpose is not to empower the individual or to break down barriers, but rather, to facilitate the flow of capital and to weaken local government which, at least in theory, could legislate against business

interests. Seemingly open and modern, globalization is a powerful tool in the defence of property and privilege.

Communism's internationalism failed to break down the barriers between nations living under one system and even in the same state, as the events in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s show. Today's Russians and Chinese are often particularly nationalistic by comparison with members of other nations and the fact that so many formerly Soviet Jews joined nationalistic, anti-Arab parties in Israel is a sad statement about Soviet education and Soviet internationalism which clearly failed in the case of those students.

Globalization has been equally a failure, both in economic terms and in terms of the break-down of barriers. Whenever attempts were made to "globalize" industry, a privileged elite emerged in the countries with cheap labour. The majority did not benefit substantially, and there is now evidence that the average Mexican is not better off than he was several decades ago, while a class of privileged workers has sprung up in special zones. In fact, Mexico, once hailed as the new, potential economic "tiger", is quickly becoming a failed narco-state, although some claim that it is possible to be both a narco-state and a "tiger" at the same time. The usual tendency of capitalism to create inequality has manifested itself in spades.

The two initial "tigers", India and China are developing quickly and creating expectations of progress among their citizens, much as Tsarist Russia did during the 20 years before World War I. They are not yet delivering either prosperity or social justice for most citizens as inequality is growing and poverty remains endemic. Indeed, as the agricultural revolution of the 1970s and 1980s gave way to stagnation, the percentage of malnourished children in India has become staggering. Now many are forecasting global food shortages in the relatively near future. Despite predictions that India and especially China will become the superpower of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both "tigers" appear very fragile.

Nor have cultural differences waned. Anyone who visits China will sense a westerner's complete isolation from the Chinese population. This is only marginally better in India because of greater knowledge of English in that country. Moreover, commercial and "global" values have failed to wipe out superstitions such as the caste system and the preference for male children in Asian societies. If, contrary to the negative indicators, China and India do become the leading powers, the life of western social-democrats will not be pleasant in a world dominated by them.

Culturally, emerging countries have been subjected to the flow of very unsophisticated western cinema and music. They have adopted little of the west's humanism and liberalism, which is on the decline, even in the west. At the same time, instead of sharing their very impressive cultural traditions with us, they have been abandoning them, ravaging old cities and removing any significance from the study of the humanities. Only commerce and a form of emotional, ethnic, national or religious allegiance seem to matter.

It is instructive to note that globalization has generally cleared the way for the movement of capital, not labour. While recent years have seen a vast movement of population towards the western countries, this has made immigration very unpopular with the local population. Any government in the west that proposed free movement of persons would likely be swept away by popular indignation. The very same people who advocate economic globalization bristle with anger at the thought of sharing their country. Moreover, countries that are internally particularly nationalistic, ethnic and capitalist, such as Israel, are often among the keenest enthusiasts for economic globalization. Clearly, globalization does not mean integration or equality of individuals across the globe.

It is true that citizens from various countries can now "chat" on their computers and play games together and that pidgin English has become the tool which enables them to understand each other. This is rather similar to the international conferences or meetings organized by the communist regimes

in their heyday, to facilitate certain exchanges but only in the context of clearly-defined collective groups and with ideological limits to the exchanges.

In short, globalization has become a way for companies to relocate to havens which have no unions, no social legislation and little taxation. It has in it little true internationalism, which requires the breaking down of barriers. Globalization is simply one of the slogans to be abandoned in the same way as people abandoned proletarian internationalism.

However, some will say that we cannot give up free trade or globalization without causing unemployment, upheavals and injustice which would affect precisely the poorest areas of the globe. The new, anti-globalization left will be portrayed as selfish and unfeeling as opposed to the “selfless” right, which declared itself willing to share the wealth with developing countries.

This argument loses all of its force when we consider that the majority in the developing countries has not been the main beneficiary of the false boom. The multinationals and local elites are the real winners. Further, there are other more reasonable paths to development than frenetic development through globalization which, in fact, is surely the path towards a future economic collapse and environmental disaster. Finally, no one has suggested an abrupt and total cutting of trade ties, only a diminution of the boundless faith in free trade.

Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen points out that the State of Kerala in India, which traditionally elected left-wing governments, succeeded in creating a literate and educated population by concentrating on social development rather than on market growth. The same could be said of Cuba and, despite Cuba’s many problems, its social successes are unquestionable.

As a general proposition, there is serious doubt about the affirmation which has become an article of faith to many, that free trade always makes everyone better off. David Ricardo proposed this idea early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but, despite enthusiastic support from most economists, history has not proved it right at all times. In particular, his theory of “relative advantage” may not apply in an economy which, through technology, can give a total advantage in everything to low-cost countries.

Since the beginning of 2010, a series of economic crises has shaken Europe. The reaction, both of politicians and even the public has been to tighten the belt and to cut government programmes. While some of the pressures are demographic in nature, because of the aging of the population, some are undoubtedly the result of globalization and the export of good jobs. Free trade has not been kind to the west, just as it has not benefited most of the people in the third world. Only certain elites, notably the corporate elite have gained.

This does not mean that the dogmatic opponents of free trade are always right either. History demonstrates that, *all things being equal*, free trade is probably better than protectionism. For one thing, commercial links facilitate personal contacts and cultural exchanges and may, at times, reduce the attraction of narrow nationalism and insularity. However, societies have often prospered by refusing to open themselves. The best example is Japan in the period between 1650 until 1850. Japan was at that time, the most hermetically sealed of countries. Yet it was both relatively prosperous and relatively educated. Economic free trade is not a panacea, but something which happens naturally in countries which are roughly equal. If free trade continues to be used to maximize profits for multi-national corporations, then its abandonment will be a natural way to bring these corporations under the legislative control of local governments and to restore mankind’s control over its economy. The barriers will tend to disappear once relative equality is reached.

Internationalism undoubtedly remains a noble and worthwhile goal. However, the internationalism should be of an individual and not collective variety. It should represent freedom from nationalism and from ethnicity, unlike the “national” internationalism of the communists or the current multiculturalism of neo-liberalism. It should enlarge each individual’s choice in matters of culture and, if

achieved, it should bring about freedom to each citizen and not subject him to Hollywood, Bollywood or other multi-national cultural economic giants. For instance, sports and cultural competitions should concentrate on the individuals' participation without regard to their nationality, not on competition between nations.

The issue of free trade and globalization is especially poignant today. When the recent economic crisis broke out in 2008, everyone, even conservatives, were clamouring for the regulation of capitalism and for public investment to prevent a collapse. A year later, most governments, notably Greece, Spain, Ireland and Great Britain began diluting the social-democratic model by savage cuts. They convinced most of the public that there is no other way because, in the end, debts incurred must be paid back and certainly cannot be increased forever. While this sounds like good, common sense, it is erroneous, for there exists another way to face the crisis. One could decide to increase taxes and expand the public sector, including public spending at the expense of the private. It is possible to favour health, education and culture over consumer goods such as clothing, automobiles and high-technology gadgets. Unfortunately, in a world of free trade, capital will simply move away and any country that tries this programme will be severely punished. Most western European countries have an additional problem, because they have abandoned their monetary independence to Brussels or, more realistically, to Berlin. The result is that both countries run by conservatives such Italy and those run by the left, such as Greece and Spain, had almost no room to manoeuvre when the crisis started. However, there would be some room if countries were able to place some barriers to trade and to devalue their currency when expedient.

This is an excellent example of a situation where barriers to trade would be desirable, perhaps not permanently, but until the institution of social justice such as pensions, Medicare and free and accessible education have survived the crisis and until big business has learned that it is still subject to local legislation and will not be allowed to refashion the world to its advantage.

Urgent consideration of selective protection is needed because social programmes will be infinitely more difficult to rebuild once the institutions which deliver them have wilted, declined or been largely privatized. The further we get away from social-democracy, the more it will be impossible to return to it without a violent and unpleasant jolt which could bring back many of the grave faults and errors of 20<sup>th</sup> century communism or else lead to a new form of fascism or authoritarianism. It is therefore obvious that free trade and globalization must be desacramentalized, even if they are not always the wrong policy.

To question the inevitability or desirability of present-day globalization does not imply retreating into narrow materialism or particularism nor is it economically suicidal. Protectionism is simply an optional tool, sometimes useful and sometimes not.

### **VIII. THE ALIENATED MAN**

Marx's theory of alienation is helpful in exposing the reality of modern capitalism. Alienation means loss of control by citizens over the means of production but also, in an extended sense, over the institutions which are supposed to reflect them. Democratic theory postulates an executive, a legislature and a judiciary all theoretically controlled by the people. Under modern capitalism, all of this is simply a pernicious myth.

The economy, as we have seen, falls under the control of international big business which exploits it in its own interest. Our skills, our talents, our seniority, and all our other attributes matter little before the imperative of short-term profits. In general, neo-liberals take economic democracy out of the realm of the legislature through free trade, guaranteed free movement of capital and an irrational belief in market forces as a beneficial tool for production and distribution. Thus, the little man, although

he has the power to vote in his country, is automatically alienated from the means of production and has no control over the economy. He can do nothing to preserve his profession, his way of work or his security, both during his employment and in old age and nor can the Parliament elected by the people. Legislative powers without economic ones are simply an empty shell, a sham.

The little man is equally alienated from the courts. The cost of justice is extraordinary because the legal profession everywhere caters to the big and the rich and, at least in North America, is dominated by gigantic law-firms whose task is to ensure that privilege prevails. This does not mean that there is a nefarious conspiracy and that each participant knows what he is doing and in whose interest. Nor does it prevent occasional and edifying victories for justice. Rather, the complex court system, the arcane procedures, the excessive reliance on expert evidence and the undue importance given to contracts, whose content is usually dictated by the stronger party, and the way in which judges are selected all contribute to the inaccessibility of civil justice for most citizens. In fact, the developments in the system of justice mirror closely the evolution of capitalism as a whole.

Even in areas not usually of supreme interest to big business, such as criminal law or family law, the cost of justice puts the little man into a very difficult position and has taken away any possibility of fair litigation.

Firstly, the government, which participates in criminal cases has many of the same advantages in litigation as big business, vastly amplified by its power to legislate anew if it dislikes the result of a case and to name judges who may be favourable to its positions. Certainly, in the United States, the nomination of judges has become overtly political and highly controversial, but the problem of nomination is present everywhere. Secondly, once the general cost of legal services has been established, family lawyers and lawyers in other disciplines are forced to work and charge by the same standards as others.

Whenever administrative alternatives to the courts have been set up, they too have tended to lead to long and costly trials and have generally assisted collective interests (e.g. organized labour and business) but not the little man, unless he is represented by a collectivity.

The recent reaction against “activist” judges has made things worse. Everywhere, “democratic” theory finds repugnant the making of major policy decisions by unelected judges. Even though it has long been understood that judges can only intervene marginally within the limits of what the society will tolerate and even though the individual has almost no way of influencing the legislative process, it has become a dogma, especially in the United States, but also in Canada, that judges should defer to the elected officials and content themselves with interpreting the law and not modifying it, because otherwise they usurp the role of the people.

A short history of the brief period when U.S. judges were interventionist (1950-1980), which coincided with the west’s social democracy, will show the fallacy of this argument. In fact, the courts changed only those things which absolutely had to be modified and which no legislature could have touched. Most importantly, it de-segregated the country and declared that its citizens of African descendants had the same formal rights as others. No one admits wanting to undo that today, although some are undoubtedly still uncomfortable with it. However, it is generally conceded that legislators, especially in the U.S. south, could never have ended segregation without the intervention of the Supreme Court. They would have been swept out of office. In fact, the Democrats have left the south because of their support for court-led desegregation and they never regained it even though no person solicitous for his career, would admit to being a racist today.

Secondly, the courts effectively legalized abortions. That is still controversial, but surely the courts’ religious and moral opponents on that issue would neither want to submit it to a popular referendum nor accept the result if the pro-abortion forces won as they likely would today. There are

certain issues in every society which affect the conscience of citizens and which divide them. Neither judgments nor laws can create utopia on such issues but courts can at least determine how society is to manage the social split and ensure that both sides are given a respectful hearing.

Thirdly, the courts ensured a certain degree of procedural justice for persons accused of crimes. If it is true that populist majorities tend to be hardline about criminal law, it is difficult upon reflection to disapprove of the Warren Court in this regard and especially difficult to do so in the context of the draconian sentences now meted out in the U.S. It is only natural to provide protection for those whose entire future or lives may be in peril.

In Canada, jurisprudence under the Charter has performed many of the same functions as that under the U.S. Bill of Rights – protecting vulnerable groups, such as homosexuals and language minorities, ensuring fair trials, decriminalizing abortion, and bringing about relative language peace. Despite the attractiveness of most of the *Charter* decisions, it too has become very unpopular and the notions of judicial restraint and democracy and the new and frightening word “deference” have gained much ground. Very little judicial activism can be seen after 2010.

One of the results of a deferential judiciary is further alienation of the ordinary citizen from justice. If justice is expensive and if, at the same time chances of winning decrease drastically for the little guy, who but the very secure will be willing to risk their money in such a lottery? How many citizens will spend much of their life-savings to present their claims of innocence of a crime to a crown-minded court, deferential to the authorities and perhaps even to the police? The number of guilty pleas in exchange for lower sentences will clearly multiply and civil litigation will decline as well for similar reasons.

Despite the widespread acceptance of the pseudo-democratic view that unelected judges should not rule, the ordinary citizen disenfranchises himself if he opposes judicial review. He is less able to resist big business, the government and indeed any other powerful lobby which can easily raise the funds to defeat him unless he has a somewhat unpredictable judiciary to help him. If we wanted to make justice more accessible, we would try to prevent the formation and maintenance of international giant law firms as well as try to avoid the transformation of law into big business. We would promote an open, relatively activist attitude towards the practice of law and towards judging and would drastically simplify procedure, even at the cost of some quality. We would not, however, limit the scope of judicial review. This will be the subject of further discussion when we debate the type of new system which might be created.

It is clear, however, that despite the highly political process of judicial nominations and the considerable rigidity that all legal systems tend to acquire, there is still more chance for justice for the weak before the courts than through political channels, at least in individual cases.

The alienation of the little man is complete when we realize how little effect the average man can have on government despite the constant praise heaped on the notion of “democracy”. Politics is costly business. Politicians, even more than judges, defer to the powerful and the rich because they have to raise the funds to fight the costly campaigns. The decline of ideological government and the withdrawal of most governments from fundamental economic decisions increase the degree of alienation. Politics becomes the distribution of jobs and contracts, and the little man has little crack at both and therefore, very little at stake. Public scandals dominate the headlines of the day, but most know that the system continues unabated, despite the occasional sacrifice of one of its actors, usually not one of the very powerful ones.

To make matters worse, the media are largely controlled by the powerful and most citizens hear a constant repetition of the fundamental mantras of capitalism. How else could so many acquiesce to the proposition that unelected judges should not make significant policy decisions but unelected

businessmen should do so at will? Why would they perceive unions as selfish and greedy but business as civic-minded and generous? Why would they think that free trade helped them when in fact, it exported their jobs? Why do they believe that conservatives make better managers than liberals or socialists, when their record is disastrous?

The problem of the media is a particularly intractable one. Partially, the trouble is the usual, irresistible power of money and that fact that newspapers and radio stations can be a form of big business. However, the technological forces which have led to the relative decline of the newspapers are also to blame, because the newspaper – whoever controls it – can yet provide a complex analysis from which different options may emerge. The visual media bring information in short bites which discourage analysis. Control of media by capital is thus only one of several problems. The lack of any popular medium for complex discussion is clearly another one and it is difficult to imagine an effective remedy for it, although maintaining a state-owned broadcaster may mitigate the damage.

It follows that the neo-liberal pseudo-democracy presents a classical illustration of alienation. Most citizens are caught in the system and have no way of defending themselves, politically, judicially or economically. Yet they can see no other way of structuring the society.

The alienation is evident in the chasm between the apparent purpose of the legislation and results obtained. In Canada and in many other western countries there has been a proliferation of labour laws favouring employees since 1970. Yet the share of salaries and the distribution of income has continued to fall and the gap between rich and poor has widened. There have been Charters of Rights adopted, in part, to ensure a fair criminal law. Yet sentences have become longer and the position of the defence, both in the courts and in public opinion has become weaker. The salutary insistence on the equality of races in the U.S. has not significantly narrowed the income gap or the social gap between the races. We are witnessing a gradual divorce between the ideology of equality and the practice of modern democracy.

Of course, it is a commonly-held myth that our society is fundamentally just and provides remedies to those unjustly treated. American cinema, for instance, abounds in films like *Erin Brockovitch* and *The Firm* where justice triumphs against the powerful. European art films are a little more sophisticated about this but they are much less popular and they reach fewer persons. Triumphs of justice do happen from time to time. However, we must remember that they are very much exceptions to the rule and that this also occasionally occurred under communism, which almost no one praises today. Moreover, we find more miscarriages of justice than triumphs and vindication for the weak. In *Pericles*, Shakespeare described the world with the words: “the big fish eat the small”. (*Pericles*, II, i.27). This is still true today and is becoming more so.

## **IX. ALIENATION AND FAMILY STRUCTURE**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a revolution against Victorianism and puritanism. The early attempts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to make certain that women’s wages were not expropriated by their husbands, followed by suffragettes’ struggle for the vote and by the liberation of human sexuality, culminated in an ideology of integral equality between men and women, sometimes taken to a farcical excess, but usually salutary and even exhilarating. However, one of the secondary effects of these developments was a decline in the security and in the stability of the family. To deny the link is to put one’s head in the sand.

In the past, a person’s family was permanent. There did exist very narrow possibilities of divorce and, of course, there were many separated couples since an immutable marriage was certainly no guarantee of happiness. It was not an accident that so many 19<sup>th</sup> century novels – *Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary*, *Effie Brist*, *Fortunata and Jacinta* - dealt with adultery and its consequences. Marriage without any possible legal relief was a recipe for widespread misery, as was the denial of the strength and importance

of women's sexual desire which was part and parcel with this immutable marriage, since men were allowed to seek solace elsewhere, but women were not. Thus, the permanent family provided some stability, but did not bring about justice between the spouses or happiness.

The model of an immutable marriage survived until recent times in certain very Catholic places like Quebec, Argentina and Ireland. However, with the growing economic independence of women, the bonds of marriage were gradually loosened. Frederick Engels predicted in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that once women ceased to be considered property, people of both sexes would tend to have several, successive monogamous relationships of moderate length during their lifetime. This prophecy seems to have been correct to a very large degree.

Since 1965, divorce has become available virtually at will in most western countries. Much later, marriage was authorized between same-sex couples in many jurisdictions and cohabitation without marriage acquired a new respectability. At present, the very concept of monogamy is being challenged on religious and cultural grounds and attempts are underway to legitimize various forms of polygamy, especially the Mormon and the Moslem types.

The taboo on sexual relations outside marriage disappeared almost completely as did virtually all restrictions on depicting or describing sexual relations. The American judiciary was particularly liberal on this issue, but, in Canada as well, cases like *R. v. Butler*, reduced the scope of any potential censorship to truly outrageous pornography. Many western European countries, especially in northern Europe, became known as centers for pornography.

Most of these developments were liberating in nature and they repaired some of the flawed visions of traditional marriage. However, they all inevitably created a new solitude, an uncertainty which added to the solitude and uncertainty of an aggressively capitalist world in which one could lose one's job, one's profession, one's status or one's family overnight. It appeared that the idea of constant competition now applied to personal life as much as to one's economic activities. One of the most sinister developments has been the conformism to the new "desirable" looks, especially thinness. This has plunged many into misery which they have often not dared to express.

Moreover, the new freedom has induced many, but not all, to indulge in promiscuity, in an absolute separation of love from sex and in an anti-romanticism based on the desire for constant gratification without worrying about the other. However, most people, including those who indulge in the kaleidoscopic successions of partners continue to dream of finding romantic love. Certainly, if we consider our literature, novels such as Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music*, Jeffrey Eugenides', *The Marriage Plot*, Almudena Grandes's *The Frozen Heart*, to name only a few, continue to show characters seeking an overwhelming, permanent love whether or not it necessarily leads to marriage. Our cinema, both in the U.S. and in France has perfected the romantic comedy which produces frequent variations on the theme of Shakespeare's Beatrice and Benedict about characters who start by disliking each other and then fall passionately into love. Usually these films permit the public to enjoy and appreciate the happy ending. Clearly, although it has been exhilarating and liberating, the new freedom has had by-products which have caused unhappiness and frustration and has led many to adopt a way of life they do not really enjoy and to day-dream of something more. It follows that the new family structure and the possibility of radical restructuring at any moment have contributed to the alienation of the little man and to his isolation. One would not want to undo the sexual revolution, or individual sexual freedom, but the negative aspects should be understood and palliated as much as possible and the link with the new capitalism should be understood. Any attempt to create a better society must include consideration of the structure of the family and of sexual relations as well as of more traditional economic and political issues. However, we must be wary of any new form of puritanism which would reduce further our threatened liberties and which appears quite imminent in Europe and North America because of the



convergence of the positions of social conservatives and strong feminists. The challenge is to reconcile sexual freedom with romantic love, not to create new, puritanical restrictions.

## **X. CAPITALISM AND DEMOCRACY**

One of the boasts of the victors of 1989 was that democracy and freedom had triumphed and that the era of human rights had arrived. This was an idle boast and what we have seen is a steady decline in human dignity and security and a perversion of the ideal of human rights to promote indefensible causes – the Iraq War, the Rwandan and Cambodian genocide, the occupation and colonization of Palestine, and embargos on Cuba.

If the triumph of liberal capitalism has not produced a democratic utopia, it has succeeded at turning the word “democracy” into a universally popular mantra. Everyone, left or right, insists that he is, above all, a democrat. It is impossible to question democracy as an ideal without being marginalized. Yet the word is practically meaningless. For some, it simply means majority rule. For others, it is a combination of elected government as well as Charters and other safeguards against oppression by the majority. For still others, it implies total decentralization and the making of decisions at a community level. Finally, for those in power in most western countries, it means majority rule, so long as economic decisions are left to big business.

President Reagan’s circle had a cryptic definition of democracy – free elections and free markets. Unfortunately, the two slogans contradict each other. It would be closer to the truth to state that, in the long run, democracy is only possible where there is relative equality of means. Otherwise, the rich rule.

In *The Republic*, Plato showed the natural descent of democratic regimes into corruption, plutocracy and rule of factions. Capitalist democracy has proved Plato’s warnings to be largely true.

Firstly, totally free markets require that one take the economy out of the legislative sphere and let the market run its course. Yet, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the economy was by far the most important preoccupation of elected governments. It is difficult to imagine free governments without the power to change economic reality and even more difficult to see the purpose of such governments. That is why financial regulations, like national banks, independent of government are problematic as Joseph Sliglitz noted in *Freefall*.

Such peaceful revolutions as Attlee’s, Roosevelt’s, Blum’s or Quebec’s Quiet Revolution were essentially economic movements. If you cannot change the economy, you can do very little except, in the case of great powers, wage war. Politics becomes a matter of distributing jobs to friends or enriching yourself, of peddling your country’s businessmen’s products across the globe and attending summits with like-minded, self-important people. In the case of the United States, it also became a matter of unnecessary wars, military contracts and the reduction of freedom in the name of security. Eventually in such circumstances, social policy-making, so prevalent in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ceases to be a major part of the equation and even becomes impossible or, as the debate about Obamacare showed, very difficult and very limited.

Corruption in one form or another becomes the very essence of politics and it replaces all idealistic goals. This is a danger under all human systems. However, modern capitalism makes money and growth the only ideals. The years since the triumph of the new capitalism have effectively diluted every other ideology. In such a society, the temptation to be corrupted is almost irresistible for most. Some try to benefit themselves, others favour friends, supporters and parties.

Many places such as Quebec, Italy, the United States have been discovering scandals, abuses of power, and new areas of influence for organized crime. Citizens often express shock because, until this discovery, they remained convinced of the fundamental integrity of the system. However, whether or not they became horrified or disgusted by the corruption, there is almost nothing they can do about it

because virtually any alternative government will turn out to be the same. Further, because money is so important as a measure of happiness and prestige, that people will continue to take risks to obtain it even if draconian laws are adopted.

We have mentioned the nature of capitalism to favour inequality. In the long-run, the rich get richer and the poor become at least relatively poorer if the market forces are not regulated. This has certainly happened since 1980 and it has had a marked effect on the quality of democracy everywhere. Those with money have undue influence. Politicians who do not have money are constantly on the lookout to acquire it.

A regime of inequality requires force to maintain itself. In the major countries of the west, the profound and naïve belief held by most, in the benign nature of electoral democracy has made revolt unlikely in the short run and the force should remain virtual at least for a while.

However, a rebellion brewing in the third world, especially the Muslim world, a growing disaffection in the under-classes in the west which often no longer believe in the possibility of change and tend not to vote and an increasing number of dissenting voices even in the west, has necessitated the creation of a gigantic mechanism of repression aimed at producing conformity and obedience.

Across the world, new anti-terrorist laws have facilitated imprisonment without trial and investigation without warrant. Massive searches and control of currency transfers are all part of the arsenal of control, as are “no-fly” lists and frequent, and even more invasive, identity controls. What is particularly disturbing is the broad definition of “terrorism” which extends the term to fairly routine matters and, potentially to civil disobedience.

Technology has made this oppression both more elegant and less visible than before. Constant recording, videotaping, computer checks of expense records have made it possible to dispense with awkward and inefficient human agents who staffed the “Stasi”, East Germany’s secret police. The scandal about Stasi files only erupted after East Germany was gone, which showed that the Stasi did not normally use most of the information it collected. Can we be certain that, if the east had won the Cold War, our security forces would not have been shown to have kept similar, extensive files? Certainly, the record-keeping is now achieving new levels of refinement.

The presence of monitoring technology means that one can never escape from one’s personal history. Our society has become one of the most inexorable, if not the most physically cruel. Once one has fallen into the system of punishment and retribution, there is virtually no way out.

In fact, criminal law is now one of the principal instruments of social control and repression. In the United States, the percentage of citizens imprisoned is staggering by any standard. Even in other countries, there has been an irrational trend towards the criminalization of more and more actions and the imposition of heavier sentences. This is the case even though criminality fell both because of demographic forces and because of new scientific methods of solving crimes, methods which make Sherlock Holmes appear amateurish. Prisons are a growth industry everywhere.

Unfortunately, the new severity appears to attract considerable political support. Opposition parties hesitate to criticize it as frustrated citizens, alienated from power and influence, living in declining infrastructures and an increasingly barren landscape, enjoy taking out their frustrations on those who get caught breaking rules or are simply accused of bending them. The slogan of “law and order” takes for granted the efficiency and morality of our justice system and denies the possibility of frequent wrongful convictions. Anyone who closely examines the system learns better.

The criminal law system is creaking at the seams, like all public institutions in a period of restricted public spending. There is no time for the many lengthy trials and the cost of defense is in any event prohibitive for most people. Prosecutors are underpaid and overworked. Ironically, only the real criminals or the very rich can afford a complex trial. Only the high cost of imprisoning people appears

to have any restraining effect on public opinion, especially in the U.S. where some states are now looking for ways of lessening the burden of incarceration.

There is necessarily a vast number of guilty pleas by people who do not know their rights or the consequences, but only know that they can afford a \$500.00 fine more easily than a \$25,000.00 legal bill. Moreover, many of those who resist, are convicted, in any event, after an inadequate trial in which undue deference is given to the police and to self-proclaimed victims. In the United States, the conviction rates are outrageous, but even in Canada, they are dangerously high and they are rising in Europe.

What no one tells the person facing the criminal justice system is that, if they plead guilty or are convicted, they will join a new under-class, even for a minor matter, and even if they are not imprisoned. Belonging to it has serious consequences - limited travel abroad, virtual impossibility of public employment ever, restricted possibility of running for office even in the distant future. One's name will show up in every policeman's and border guard's computer when he takes down a license number or passport number. Every prospective employer can check one's record in a few seconds and thus, employment becomes permanently problematic. Equality is no longer possible for them, perhaps for as long as they live. Given the trends towards greater repression, their conditions are likely to worsen with time. It is an interesting fact, recently noted by Canadian publisher and author Conrad Black, whose experience with American justice, has made him a liberal on this issue, that one in six or one in five Americans have a record and the disabilities that go with it.

In Theodore Dreiser's novel, *The Financier*, the hero makes a fortune in the Philadelphia Stock Exchange but takes illegal risks, loses all and goes to jail for five years. After his release, he moves to Chicago and, in *The Titan*, makes an even greater fortune. This story takes place in the 1860s and 1870s. Today, there would be no return from the Philadelphia debacle, because the former convict could never trade again in any organized stock market. We live in a society which is singularly unforgiving. While criminal law is one obvious example, other areas of human endeavour also suffer from excessive record-keeping. One cannot escape stupid or unpopular remarks one has made. The old trick of not disclosing a disastrous year in another university, when applying somewhere else, is no longer possible. Immigration authorities can and do revoke admission on the basis of a white lie made decades earlier. This insistence on absolute truthfulness by the weak is in contrast with the general mendacity exhibited by politicians and representatives of big institutions. Private peccadilloes, adulteries, disciplinary misadventures in professional law are all irrevocable and usually irredeemable. Privacy, protected by many laws and regulations, has been eroded to the point that nothing important is truly private.

The consequence of this long-term trend will undoubtedly be a society of very cautious conformists, which is what a repressive regime always wants. The conformism will increase when people realize what most do not yet know – that anyone can record your words and any adversary will. Formal democracy will be of no assistance as has been illustrated in Jean-Christophe Rufin's chilling, prophetic novel *Globalia*, where democratic elections and constant popular celebrations coexist with a total lack of freedom.

A conformist society always condemns those with passion – sexual, political, or religious. The future will belong to those who obey all rules, calculate, never lose control, who neither love nor hate too much. Passion has always been dangerous to those who feel it, as the tragedies of Shakespeare and Racine illustrate. Now, it will become positively deadly. The United Kingdom, which once pioneered freedom, is becoming the leader in repression with ubiquitous surveillance and a proliferation of enforceable, petty rules of politeness and manners. Those who do not always exhibit self-control and who at times act in an emotional or angry way are likely to be severely disadvantaged.

It is unfortunate that the movement towards equality has itself become repressive. All of the

lobbies - ethnic, feminist, sexual orientation - which claim *Charter* protection when promoting their very admirable goals have proved disturbingly quick to call for limits to freedom of expression or of association when they conflicted with their ideas. Nothing is more dangerous for one's career in our society than a remark about women, an ethnic joke or, in some spheres, expressing strong criticism of Israel. In Canada, the statutory human rights commissions have developed an illiberal streak which is often very disturbing and which discourages politically incorrect speech by draconian measures. A chance remark can cripple a career or ruin a business. Ironically, only the conservatives, so repressive on other matters, seem to notice this and speak out for free speech.

The undoing of democracy as it was once understood has many other features. Firstly, people have lost interest in elections and the voting percentage has generally declined despite some exceptions. Many think, not without some justification that nothing can be changed at the ballot box as long as the market rules and therefore do not wish to waste their time.

There has, in any case, developed a science of advertising which has proved particularly pernicious to the democratic process. Those with money now know how to influence and change public opinion and they tend to own the media and to be right-wing or at least conservative. It is a fact that conservative movements and lobbies everywhere have a financial advantage over social-democratic ones. So far, internet has not been a democratizing factor, except, perhaps in President Obama's fundraising campaign in 2008 and even that may be a mere anomaly. What has become apparent is that the forces of the right can usually win a protracted battle. With time they can use their superior means very effectively. They have not found the effective antidote to a sudden surge – Ontario in 1990, France in 1997, and Quebec in the federal election of 2011. It is not impossible that, with time, the techniques for controlling an unexpected surge will be discovered.

We have learned that fear-mongering works. A stampede can be created by the repetition of negative, panic-creating ads. People can and do vote out of fear or resentment artificially instilled in them even though they are unmoved by promises of reform or appeals to justice, mercy and decency. The electoral triumph of the Nazis was an early warning that those who spread fear viscerally get further than those who appeal to hope.

The claim to moral superiority of democratic countries has also been put forward with great hypocrisy. Somehow, human rights abuses in certain countries do not lead us to question their "democratic" character. The unacceptable rate of incarceration, the dreadful prison conditions, the abhorrent three-strike rule, the practice of capital punishment, the lack of social services or access to justice, the frightening security laws and the aggressive foreign policy in the United States never put the country's status as a democracy in doubt. Similarly, no amount of torture, imprisonment, colonization of territory belonging to a small, helpless neighbour, and privileges given to one ethno-religious group can affect Israel's status as a democracy, if not in everyone's eyes, at least with the establishment in North America. Yet Russia, Venezuela and many other countries which observe democratic forms and hold relatively free elections, are constantly denied democratic status; due to the ubiquitous propaganda, our population is convinced that they are less free, that Chavez's press restrictions are somehow more immoral than the U.S. Patriot Act, and that the U.S. incarceration system is less brutal than Russia's.

A more rigorous process would be to question the democratic nature of the system in all of these countries. Democracy is more form than substance and true freedom is in decline everywhere. It is important, if one is to define democracy in a meaningful way, that it provide real access to government, to justice, and to social services for the ordinary citizens and not be purely formal and offer theoretical rights. At present, citizens in most countries have little access to assemblies or politicians and know that those with money and class advantage will always beat them.

It is even more catastrophic that, as we have seen, the average man cannot afford justice. He is

ruined by divorce, by a criminal or disciplinary accusation or by a civil suit. If the citizen is alienated from both government and from justice, where then is the democracy? What is the good of this type of democracy for the average man?

As we have seen, the years since 1989 have been marked by terrible human rights abuses – a total disaster in most of Africa, including major genocides in Rwanda and Sudan, wars in the Middle East, reduction in women’s rights in Muslim states, nuclear proliferation, Yugoslav civil strife, and environmental decline. Of course, abuses existed before and were, at times, more severe in terms of number of deaths. It is particularly distressing, however, to note how many of the recent abuses were committed in the very name of democracy and human rights. For instance, with the West’s help, secular, somewhat progressive tyrannies in the Arab world were replaced by Islamism, despite what this meant for women. This hypocrisy is a new twist to the string of injustices and atrocities that have marked the history of the human race.

In his masterful history of World War I, *The Pity of War*, Niall Ferguson has pointed out that democratic countries can violate human rights as much as dictatorships. We should not be naïve about the “goodness” of the majority. Majorities have voted for Hitler, for narrow nationalists, for Likud, and Hamas. Slavery in the U.S. coincided with a considerable degree of democracy. “Vox populi, vox dei” is a perilous slogan indeed. As we shall see, there is a certain natural advantage for meanness and selfishness and official democracies often bring it out.

Yet there exists a recipe for creating a somewhat more meaningful democracy – relative economic equality and strict limits on electoral fundraising and spending. As we shall see, even that may not necessarily be enough, but it would be a very good start.

The forces of the right which have had power for the last 30 years speak copiously of “equality” – except for economic equality. Indeed Republicans and Canadian Conservatives and Europe’s far right have posed as “egalitarians” against “liberal elites”. They rail against privilege, snobbish culture and all the other advantages which, in the past were bestowed by class and education and which, in their view, characterize their liberal or social-democratic opponents. Sarah Palin is particularly strident in making these claims, and in denouncing the supposedly privileged “liberals” and their elitist ways. The “tea-party” group has also manifested this kind of populism.

There is nothing attractive about privilege or snobbery. However, one can hardly imagine a more nightmarish society than one in which there are no distinctions, no favouritism, no exceptions – except for money. Not only is such a society disgustingly crass and unjust, but it has in it the germ of total uniformity and permanent class-barriers. Equality without social justice is worse than a many-layered society based on past customs, culture and special rights, in which exceptions can be made when needed. The conservative “egalitarian” society eliminates sympathy, friendship, education as a source of privilege because every service provided must be paid and those with wealth can always bid up the price. The almighty dollar holds sway. In the December 2010 edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, in his article *Défendre les prestations sociales contre l’équité*, Serge Halimi points out how pseudo-egalitarian ideas are being used to destroy the welfare state and social justice across the West. Decidedly, it is better not to promote equality at all, than to advance it without an important economic component. Capitalist “equality” is to be feared even more than the usual capitalist privileges. This is why writers are questioning democracy altogether, as can be seen in Evelyne Pieille’s article *Dans la Caverne d’Alain Badiou* in January 2011’s edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique* and in Slavoj Žižek’s *In Defense of Lost Causes*. It is indeed arguable that “capitalist democracy” is a cruel sham.

It follows from all of this that the new capitalism has not and will not breed true democracy, which is in relative decline everywhere, because capitalism is inherently unequal. Only a society with a narrow maximum financial gap between top and bottom and with a high degree of social justice can

hope to achieve democracy or freedom. Only in such a society could access to improve power and to justice be given to all. Only in such a society could we break the stranglehold of the rich over the media.

It is particularly important not to be fooled by the slogans of free elections and free markets. Clearly free markets are not compatible with human freedom in the long run. However, free elections, although they are an important feature of most modern democratic states, also do not suffice. In terms of human development, societies like Cuba far outrank countries like Mexico, despite the periodic Mexican elections. Mexico features disappearances of individuals, criminalization of power, impoverishment, failure to educate and so on. Cuba is far more decent, despite the absence of any semblance of free election or free speech and despite the terrible shortages which plague it, especially since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Democracy works well as a *form only*, within the limits of an established system and not as a way to change the system. No one can seriously believe that the U.S. or even Western Europe would allow the far left to win if it was poised to do so. Algeria certainly did not permit the creation of an Islamic state through the election process in 1989. Hitler was given power only after his party lost votes and while the communists gained in the second election of 1932. One could suspect that Germany's economic establishment wished to see a strong anti-communist in power or at least acquiesced in his rise. In short, democracy allows governments to alternate and policies to be moderately modified, although we must add that economic policies appear to be less and less the province of elected governments and therefore economic change is difficult unless it is approved by the business lobby. One can hope that there will be occasional seminal elections which will lead to substantive change. Examples in the past, would include Britain in 1832 and in 1945, the U.S. in 1860 and 1932, France in 1936 and Quebec in 1960. Democratic form alone, however, will not permit major change without an underlying social tendency which facilitates a transformation.

If the current conservative hold on public opinion weakens, western countries will need considerable nuance in evaluating degrees of freedom in order not to fall into simplistic or reductionist views like the one proposed by the conservatives and in order not to confuse free elections with earthly paradise. No matter who is in power, majoritarianism and populism are dangerous.

In the end, it is better to think of "democracy" not as a defined system for running the state, but as a very efficient means of assuring an orderly transfer of power within *any* system. While it effectively ensures a peaceful transfer between individuals, which is important, it is not an efficient tool for regime change. There are few examples of radical regime changes carried out through the democratic process. Democracy is a form, and it sometimes occurs in places where the substance is anything but admirable. When combined with social justice and relative equality, it can produce a result which, while still imperfect, is probably the best that we know or can imagine. However, the notion of "democracy" by itself as a goal to be sought independently of economic content is naïve and often leads to the acceptance of injustice.

Because of the effectiveness of democracy as a form, it would be wonderful to be able to give it sufficient content to make it a full-fledged system of government. To do so, we would have to postulate a "platonian form" of democracy – free elections, relative equality, social justice, individual freedom and subsequently judge regimes on how closely they approach it. One could then see that, on this kind of "democratic" model, Tito or Castro may be closer to the platonian form than formal democracies such as modern Mexico or Israel. But democracy, in such a calculus, is a measuring stick and not an actually existing model.

## **XI. THE DOUBLETHINK OF CAPITALISM**

In his dystopian nightmare, *1984*, George Orwell invented the concepts of doublethink and doublespeak

– using terminology to convey a meaning opposite of what the words suggested. By verbal manipulation, the feared secret police became the Ministry of Love, and the things people liked the most such as sex, and personal fulfillment were soon denounced.

Orwell based his vision in large part on Soviet and Nazi governments and their propaganda. The constant repetition of falsehoods, idiotic slogans and endless exhortations to loyalty created a legitimate fear that freedom of thought would disappear altogether. Yet it must be admitted now that Soviet and Nazi propaganda was a failure. People were made to acquiesce by terror or, in more benign communist countries, by social pressure. However, almost no one came to believe the propaganda.

By 1944, every German knew who was winning the war despite hysterical claims by Hitler that he would turn the tide with secret weapons. In Eastern Europe under communism, all people, even those not particularly hostile to the system, were aware of its economic short-comings and, towards the end, of its political instability and of its absurd features. It is because of their failure to convince that these governments used force to restrain expression of opposing views.

One of the greatest successes of modern capitalism, with its vast resources, its right-wing think-tanks, its control over major media, and its psychological research about the forming of public opinion, is to have created a myth of freedom that people really do believe, to the point of acting and voting against their own interest.

Doublethink manifests itself in at least three areas. First is the creation of a standard and almost unanimous school of thought which accepts economic liberalism as the only possible economic ideology. The French use the elegant expression “*pensée unique*” to describe this phenomenon. The second form of double-think is the co-option of leftist ideas of compassion and equality to create an obligatory form of “niceness”, often called political correctness, which is used to stifle debate and to repress non-conformism. The third form of doublethink is the notion of “values” – such as “family values” and “conservative values”, used to reconcile the two, contradictory strands of conservatism – the economically liberal plutocracy and the socially conservative and threatened “little guy”.

The creation of the “*pensée unique*” is effective because it is done in a muted way. It has proved much easier to convince by leaving small amounts of doubt and well-insulated pockets of dissent than through the extreme, histrionic rant of past Nazi and Soviet propagandists.

In any event, the propaganda machine of modern capitalism is made up of more than biased think-tanks and media. Much of it is, in fact, private advertising that creates consumer needs and uniform aesthetic standards.

What is crucial for the establishment is not to convert citizens to passionate neo-liberalism, but to instil a widespread belief that there is simply no viable alternative and that any other view is ridiculous or laughable. As mentioned before, people are often more afraid of ridicule than of repression and whenever those personally tempted to dislike the system are convinced that it cannot be rationally questioned, there is little room left for fundamental debate.

Private advertising whets the appetite for consumption, so that those who are not very wealthy are almost always short of cash. Given the prevailing scepticism about viable political alternatives and the urgent need for short-term cash felt by most, high levels of taxation have become anathema. As government powerlessness and corruption becomes more evident, the allergy to taxes increases to the point that virtually any attempt to inform citizens of the need to raise taxes or of the folly of proposed tax cuts is likely to lead to electoral defeat.

The private advertising adds to the uniformity by creating new, universal standards of beauty and an inexorable peer pressure to enforce them, especially among the young. For instance, our society’s irrational and irresistible obsession with thinness of body is clearly an example of regulation of thought through advertising. The same can be said of hyper-sexualization and the expectation of so many people

of constant and total sexual gratification.

The tendency of many western countries towards considering themselves “the best country in the world” further depresses the level of discussion. This applies very much to Canada and, more surprisingly, also to the U.S. where the levels of social injustice, inequality and the rates of incarceration should make the society’s failings obvious to all or at least to all liberals and progressives. However, even they yield to the pressure to worship America.

In general, the “pensée unique” has made the new totalitarian “democracy” far more successful than 20<sup>th</sup> century dictatorships, not so much in stopping discussion, something even the dictatorships could not achieve, but in reducing its scope and its effectiveness, at least for long periods of time. There are signs, however, that since 2008 the unanimity is wearing thin.

The second type of successful doublethink is the standing of the left’s ideas on their head and incorporating them into political correctness, mostly with the left’s support.

Compassion for the weak and equality, the major components of past progressive thinking, have been converted into the sterile dogma of political correctness. We now have to be very careful about any controversial statement because, if a strong lobby declares itself “hurt” or “offended”, we risk serious consequences, regardless both of the merits of what we seek or say and of its relatively anodyne nature.

When President Obama reacted verbally to the arrest of Professor Gates, an African American, by questioning the tradition of racial profiling by police, an outcry forced him to backtrack, despite the fact that he was clearly correct. He was perceived to have been unfair to policemen across the country and Americans tend to identify with their police.

Similarly, during his 2008 campaign against Senator Hilary Clinton, President Obama’s attempt to point out the existence of a certain yahoo culture and social indifference among some white workers nearly cost him the nomination. Yet his intent was clearly to awaken people, not to castigate them. It is equally ill-advised to raise the issue of possible inherent differences between men and women or to attack vehemently any religious or ethnic practice, other than those, like female circumcision, which political correctness permits us to attack.

It is no longer safe for anyone who hopes to advance in his career, to target frankly the failings of multiculturalism, extreme feminism, the excessive preoccupation with sexual orientation or the new vigilantism against crime. It is, for instance, clearly dangerous to point out that proportional representation of the sexes, religion or ethnic groups in appointed or elected positions is tantamount to making the barriers permanent rather than levelling them.

While most of these dogmas of political correctness originated with the left, they clearly strengthen the new status quo and thus objectively favour the forces of conservatism. There is no more of the compassion which fuelled the original movements for equality. In fact, violators of political correctness are punished and their careers wrecked with no remorse and in a manner completely disproportionate to their fault, even if a fault were conceded. For instance, an academic who expresses ideas perceived as sexist or racist may be dismissed and excluded from consideration by other institutions. Compassion, it seems, does not apply to them, only to their so-called victims. Moreover, there is almost no talk of aggregate economic equality, only of fair representation for each group in the elite. Thus doublethink has allowed harshness to be called compassion and elitism to stand for equality.

Most important, political correctness has the effect of narrowing even further the possibility of meaningful debate. One of the best examples is Canada’s state-subsidized human rights industry. While Canadians congratulate themselves on their high standards of human rights, it is clear that the spokespersons of the human rights industry are not encouraged to discuss controversial issues affecting Canada, such as labour relations, health, poverty and language. Instead, they debate foreign abuses especially those in countries which do not have a powerful lobby to defend them, or else they enforce



the edicts of political correctness. In reality, human rights are truly important only when they are controversial or when they are opposed by powerful lobbies. The presently established practice of defending only uncontroversial or established human rights and of refusing to contemplate invoking them against our perception of political correctness illustrates perfectly Orwell's concept of doublethink.

The third form of doublethink applies to the conservative movement itself. It is composed of two very different groups, the liberal business lobby who are the real beneficiaries of neo-liberalism and the frightened, ordinary people, who resent the loss of security and traditional values. Promotion of "family values" is the sop given to the second group in exchange for the loss of stability and security and the acceptance of stark inequality.

It is the commoditization of sex and the family which has caused much of the degradation of values. Yet this was the work of the same capitalism which now frequently suggests a return to family values and which deludes some of its supporters with promises of a more traditional moral world.

The rise in divorce rates and the increasing lack of discipline among the young are only a danger when the new liberty is immediately turned into a commodity for market profits. Allowing people to end terrible marriages, undoing convention and class prejudice, allowing people from different social and ethnic groups to marry, permitting sexual freedom, and making homosexuals equal members of society were developments which enhanced individual liberty and improved the quality of life. It is only when the total commercialization occurred during the neo-liberal decades that a danger arose from these essentially positive developments. For instance, when "good sex" becomes a product that everyone is entitled to at all times, and the orgasm becomes a goal in itself, marriages of middle aged couples are put under pressure.

The emergence of family values as a slogan for the right is therefore very disturbing. Indeed, its proponents do not intend to end the use of sex and love as commodities. Instead, they seek to eliminate what is left of individual freedom. They imagine an insipid world, in which arid rules are enforced, such as against adultery or "cheating" and against non-conforming groups, and in which educators impose discipline in order to train people for the work force but without humanism or culture. However, the economic laissez-faire continues and therefore, sexuality and love remain objects of commerce with the constant selling of gadgets, with the enforcement of artificial standards of beauty and with the encouragement of the myth that each is entitled to constant sexual satisfaction. In short, we get the worst of all worlds – everything is a commodity for the purposes of commerce, but in order to placate a section of angry conservatives, freedom, romanticism and non-conformism are taken out of the equation and replaced by insipid, rather traditional notions exemplified by our society's rather silly celebration of St. Valentine's Day.

One of the principal targets of those who wish to change society must be the "pensée unique". It is important to speak out, to say things that shock and offend, to accept some ridicule and to have neither fear nor respect for the common wisdom or for political correctness. Debates, internet exchanges, articles and books are all to be welcomed.

Restrictions on freedom of expression have always served as a defence for the status quo. While there may be some justification in very special cases, such as limits to electoral spending, most of the restrictions imposed by law or custom should be contested and quashed.

It is sad that so many have lost sight of the importance of freedom of expression. Ethnic groups want to prohibit hate speech, at least as applied to them. Many feminists believe that expression of sexism or of obscenity should be banned. Others want to protect children from learning things deemed inappropriate for them. It is now clear that all of these restrictions have become an instrument of thought control and that, the ultimate result is to suppress protest and non-conformism. A true social-democracy should have an almost absolutist approach to free expression. Freedom of expression is a

way to resist both the new security state and the political correctness which surrounds it. It is a tool for limiting the influence of ethnic and religious lobbies and for resisting the temptation to create new forms of repression by all those who wield power. Fostering free speech in controversial areas should rank very high in the evaluation of a state's political system.

The attack on free speech has a private side as well as a public one. In many countries, libel laws have been applied with a vengeance creating at times a more effective barrier to expression than occasional state repression. Paradoxically, the United States which is generally less protective of human rights than other western countries has been less guilty in this regard. Canada, for instance, has constant, sometimes highly publicized libel cases and, despite a few cautionary warnings from the Supreme Court, the tendency shows no signs of abating. Sometimes injunctions against publication are issued despite the strong argument made by John Milton, and echoed ever since, that prior restraint is even more dangerous than condemnations after the remark or opinion has been expressed. The libel laws allow the rich and the powerful to silence their opponents whether or not the action succeeds because of the cost of litigation. Rather than ban free expression, we should work to diminish the importance of reputation in a person's life and career, thus palliating the effect of outrageous remarks.

Without free speech and with the continuation of political correctness, we shall develop the ultimate doublethink called "newspeak" which was the invention of the Party in Orwell's 1984 – a language in which there are no longer words or expressions which permit citizens to dissent. This is particularly threatening given the decline of written style and its replacement by email and other internet slang. Moreover, in many parts of the world, a form of English dialect composed of a few hundred words is becoming the principal language of commerce. Such a patois cannot, without a drastic transformation, produce either literature or dissent. Whether it is a dead-end or can be transformed over time into a new cultural language, it is, in the short run, a source of doublespeak in the Orwellian sense. One can also fear a form of newspeak emerging from the suppression or abandonment, in the name of equality, of feminine forms or from their introduction where they did not exist before, such as the use of "la juge" or "la ministre".

Further, the neutralization of titles, such as chairperson, is both ugly and completely unnecessary to attain the equality of women. All of these changes, together with the normal but very quick evolution of vocabulary puts a gulf between future generations and literary classics, which may prove difficult to bridge. In French, the decline of the *passé simple* might make some classics difficult to read for grammatical reasons. These linguistic changes increase the perils of newspeak as the leading form of communication.

The resistance to doublethink and to newspeak underscores the role that language and literature play in the creation and preservation of individual freedom. The decline in the teaching of literary classics, the promotion of local dialects, the changing of our language to conform to the gender demands of political correctness and the attempt to make writing easier and simpler are a threat to the ability of future generations to resist oppression and to respond to propaganda. It is therefore easy to see why freedom of expression should be given a pre-eminent place among human rights and why it should extend not only to political discourse but to cultural and economic spheres as well and not only to making popular statements, but also to ones that seem outrageous and hurtful. It is equally easy to see why opponents of the status quo will insist on the teachings and discussions of the classics of literature which are an essential tool in the opening of minds.

## **XII. CULTURE AND CAPITALISM**

In recent years, traditional western culture, based on literature, a musical tradition, fine arts and, since 1900, cinema, has been experiencing great difficulty. It is, of course, important not to assume that,

without the neo-liberal capitalism, everything would be perfect. It is particularly dangerous to believe that a new flowering of literature, music, and fine arts would occur automatically, after a change in economic or social direction.

Creativity is not always politically determined and some of the greatest periods of literary, musical and artistic productions - in Inquisition-controlled Spain of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in 17<sup>th</sup> century France and in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia for example – happened under notably despotic regimes. The 19<sup>th</sup> century, the epoch of capitalism, was, in fact, particularly fruitful in many countries. Why then would one blame the new capitalism for any of the recent difficulties for culture?

The explanation is two-fold. Firstly, the commoditization and the need for new products every year has undermined the type of stability needed for new products to become classics. Instead we have a feverish quest for the new and the striking and an ephemeral, eminently forgettable product to be invented at frequent intervals and then replaced by newer substitutes. The obsession with innovation, so persuasive in our economic thinking, has permeated our culture.

In addition, the problems of financing artistic production have come back. Before the French Revolution, artists characteristically needed “patrons” to survive. Caravaggio needed the Pope and was destroyed without the patronage. Haydn accepted the livery of the House of Esterhazy. Mozart broke with the Archbishop of Salzburg but never succeeded in finding a secure place for himself. It was the new system after the French Revolution which allowed Beethoven to become the equal of his “patrons” and to maintain himself without relying on them as much as his predecessors.

Freedom from patrons - noblemen, popes and princes - increased the freedom to protest and to challenge society. It is not an accident that some of the most risqué earlier works had been for the theatre, because then a traveling company could eke out a living without direct subsidy from the powerful.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this relative independence of creative artists continued. Not that there were no starving poets and painters or that the phenomenon of the patron was unknown, but many artists could make their own way. The splendours and miseries of artistic life were particularly well described in French literature for instance by Balzac, the Goncourt brothers, and Zola. However, the suffering of many artists did not diminish the successes and achievements of the century.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the production costs, notably in cinema, in television, in theatre and in opera rose to the point that some assistance became necessary. The state became the major source of funding. The Soviet experience shows that political interference often occurred. However, most western countries found ways of distributing these funds without much or total blatant political partisanship and with certain safeguards to avoid direct pressure from politicians.

Indeed, if one considers eastern European cinema in the era of 1956 to 1989, one sees that even the communist regimes opened the door to considerable protest with the state’s financial support. As well, Penderecki’s and Gorecki’s religious works did not affect their security and the funding for the works in communist Poland.

The new capitalism has created a parsimonious state that fears taxation and therefore constantly cuts down on spending. Culture is usually expendable especially in view of the fact that the false egalitarianism of neo-liberalism refuses to make value judgment about cultural products and often caters to an anti-intellectual populism. For instance, in Canada, Steven Harper’s conservative government has set up sports as the main beneficiary of subsidy. The presence of corporate patrons has become more palpable and often pernicious. While it is true that great works continue to be produced, especially in literature, there is serious cause for worry about the future.

One can put into question the entire modernist movement, the constant experimentation with form. One of the potential casualties of deconstruction, of the waning of realism has been the decline of

social criticism and the divorce between great artistic achievements and the majority of citizens. Shakespeare, Dickens, Pushkin, and Beethoven could move most people without much preparation. Today's composers, painters and many writers are more isolated from most citizens and do not always speak to them. Very often, they are completely inaccessible.

The idea that we should prefer Lawrence to Joyce, Yourcenar to Robbe-Grillet and Hemingway to Faulkner is not a hopelessly old-fashioned one. One of the most intriguing novels of 2011, *Eugenides' The Marriage Plot* asks the question directly. Is literature better off without the "marriage plot" of early 19<sup>th</sup> century literature and with the textual analysis of the deconstruction or not? The two sides should not be exclusive because many artists fit on both sides of the line or have some characteristics of both sides – Henry James, Marcel Proust, Pablo Picasso, Alban Berg for instance. Moreover, 19<sup>th</sup> century novels did not all display the "marriage plot" although, like 19<sup>th</sup> century society, they bestowed a great importance on marriage. Many novels ended in death or disappointment instead of marriage. The marriages were not all ideal, as the last glimpse of the characters in *War and Peace* shows us, and as George Eliot demonstrated in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. However, the "marriage plot" novel allowed a depiction of society, as it was with its faults and attractions, to be brought to readers who did not have personal knowledge of most of this material.

Nevertheless, the relative accessibility of the great pre-modern works, allowed them to express ideas which changed the society. Not only Dickens and Zola, where this is obvious, but also Wagner and the impressionist painters affected the way future generations saw the world. There is some doubt whether modern, and what is now called post-modern art, can do this as easily.

However, whether or not we wish to promote a return to realism, tonality and accessibility, there can be no question of a Stalin-style imposition of artistic criteria. That strangled much creativity and only produced social effects when the artist succeeded in disguising a large measure of protest in his work – the very opposite of what Stalinist bureaucrats wanted.

Because of this type of protest, the Soviet period was not as barren as some western critics have presented it. Shostakovitch, Pasternak, Bulgakov and Akhmatova are among the major creators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, most of the great works in Soviet literature, music and cinema were created in protest and helped discredit the stifling regime. It thus fulfilled one of the principal goals of art, but fortunately not of the Stalinists. On the other hand, the regime promoted much that was junk or sheer propaganda and has fortunately been forgotten.

No way exists of predicting what periods will be great in terms of creative production. One interesting hypothesis is that the more mixing of cultural groups, the more vigorous the product. That could explain the flowering of art, literature and music under the Inquisition in Spain, under Louis XIV in France and under 19<sup>th</sup> century tsars in Russia. All of these countries had absorbed several cultures. Social-democracy alone may not have the desired effect on culture, but the breaking-down of traditional ethnic and national barriers will likely prove fruitful. This is one more reason to object to ethnicity, nationalism and the quest for authenticity.

However, if we can free creativity from the frenzy to innovate and from the influence of corporate or other sponsors this will be, in itself, a noble achievement and it will reduce the degree of alienation of ordinary citizens.

It would also be possible to change our attitude towards education which is perceived as a job-training service both for the young and the corporation and to direct more resources to culture and social activities. That could probably increase dramatically the demand for artistic products and the increased demand would undoubtedly stimulate creativity.

There are also structural reasons for state intervention. Although intellectual property law has become more stringent and often excessively restrictive in order to protect business interests, it has also

become clear that in certain fields, it will be impossible to prevent widespread piracy of artistic materials on the internet. The remuneration of artists will have to become the duty of the state or, preferably, independent public bodies. Without this, the vast majority of creators will have to find other means of existence and create only in their free time. Of course, the present tendency is to strengthen the protection of intellectual property and there are rumours that a draconian secret treaty is being negotiated by the major powers which will permit the defence of such property rights to trump civil liberties, privacy or scientific freedom. Not only is this undesirable in itself, but it is virtually certain that the protection will benefit the great corporate interests, not usually the individual creator. In any event, such a development must be viewed with great scepticism.

It follows that the state must maintain the role it achieved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a dominant source of funds for the arts. Particular care must be taken in the days of the security state to avoid the repression of dissenting or unconventional views and, as always, it is wise to be sceptical about artistic fashions and trends when distributing funds. Decentralizing the awards of grants and creating overlapping agencies is a good idea. However, the transfer of the role of patron to the corporations in order to cut taxes or save money is not an acceptable solution. The corporations simply pocket the tax cuts and give a portion back with strings attached.

### **XIII. THE “CONTRACT” DEFENCE OF CAPITALISM**

One argument, implicit in our legal system which favours capitalism, is the belief in the sacredness of contract. This belief has certain superficial attractions.

It is easy to argue that a solution to conflicts or to economic relations worked out by the parties themselves will give them greater satisfaction than one imposed by the courts or by the state. Also, a free, contractual consent is more likely to be respected by those who gave their word than obligations created by force. It is also possible to argue that free contractual reactions increase human autonomy and human dignity and allow each citizen a major role in determining his economic rights and duties.

Our legal system puts great store on what the parties wanted, or agreed to not only in purely economic spheres but also in more problematic areas as family law and criminal law.

In Canada, the Supreme Court has ordered the enforcement of family law agreements with respect to property even if they are unfair, so long as they were not the fruit of false disclosure or of fraud or were not shockingly unjust in the result. With respect to children, agreements are subject to more scrutiny, but are also usually respected.

It is accepted that criminal law would collapse under its administrative weight were it not for plea bargaining. Yet, the public order aspect of criminal law demands that the judge have a residual power, to be exercised only in unusual cases, to reject a bargain as being too clement or too severe and the public is particularly worried about undue clemency.

It would be hard to envision a society functioning without contract altogether and even visionary and frightening communist societies in China under Mao Tse Tung, in North Korea or in Cambodia did not go so far as to abolish trade or contracts altogether. Defending basic principles of contract law is not at all tantamount to defending modern capitalism. All realistic alternatives to capitalism will retain most of the basic rules of contract.

Yet, in a striking parallel with globalization and free trade, freedom of contract has moral limits, especially if the co-contractors do not start from equal positions. There were almost always limits on contracts based on public order and good morals, such as the unenforceability of contracts to prostitute oneself or to maim oneself. Indeed most stipulations of physical performance of an obligation, as opposed to the payment of damages, are subject to considerable scepticism. Specific performance exists, of course, but it is not always possible.

However, even where contracts are not a questionable tool from the outset, it is not safe to make them more than one factor among others in determining what is just. They are not a transcendental expression of human autonomy. Granting that respect for the parties' will as expressed in a contract has a moral value, it can be outweighed by other moral considerations.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we have known that in labour relationships, the employee must be protected from the usually more powerful employer. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we understood that the tenant's right to a decent home or to his place of business must transcend contractual relations with his landlord. We have also protected consumers, clients of professionals, and the weaker party in family contracts who were often the women. Unfortunately, in banking law, the banks succeeded in obtaining privileges which override contract rules. In bankruptcy law, some creditors are treated better than others. It should be clear that, while contract remains an essential part of the legal system and will retain this position under virtually any conceivable regime, its rules are not synonymous to any extent with human dignity or freedom and cannot constitute an effective defence of capitalism. Moreover, they are not sacred and untouchable.

Indeed, our society should be less concerned about what the parties signed and more about the just result and about the relative strength of the parties at the time of the contract. When parties are more or less equal, respecting a contract is better than not doing so, unless an egregious injustice results. Where equality did not exist at the time of the formation of the contract, the reduction of the gaps between rich and poor and the promotion of social and human justice in the result should be given more weight than formal respect for the words of a contract or consent. Therefore contracts should be disregarded or interpreted so as to favour the weaker party more often than is done today. If a person made a terrible error in an economic arrangement, saving his family and his children's future may outweigh the sanctity of the contract in many situations.

The relative unimportance of contract as opposed to just results invokes a more theoretical, philosophical debate. Certain thinkers, some liberal, some less so have grounded the legitimacy of the state in a contract, real or assumed. John Rawls, in particular, postulated that reasoned debate would inevitably lead to a social contract around certain institutions. This appears both naïve and inadequate.

It is naïve because it presumes a degree of rationality in human beings that is rarely observed in life. If the social contract is a purely imaginary one, excluding automatically from the debate anger, envy, greed and so on, it is not really a contract but a term used to justify a liberal result, without any resemblance to an existing contract.

It is inadequate because Rawls assumes that a rational indigent man would consent to results that perpetrate inequality or even increase it so long as he was somewhat better off. However, poverty being largely a relative concept, a rational man would not consent to this. The result would be to bid away from him the most coveted and limited items in society such as space, good services in health and education and social prestige.

It follows that contract does not provide a convincing rationale for society. Justice and just results do, whether or not there was or one imagines an initial consent. Freedom to contract may therefore be a very significant freedom but the duty to carrying out a contract or keep one's word is not a transcendental value. In many circumstances, one must abandon a contract, even one voluntarily formed, for pressing demands of justice.

#### **XIV. THE POSITIVE SIDE OF LIBERAL CAPITALISM**

The criticism that can justly be aimed at the resurgent capitalism of our times does not justify total repudiation or the down-playing of capitalism's historical achievements. Capitalism was not an isolated historical phenomenon but was an important stage in the development of the west. Marx, for instance,

understood that a capitalist society was an improvement over past societies. Jacques Attali has recently stressed this aspect of Marx. From the birth of humanism in Renaissance Italy, through the Enlightenment and the capitalist era, there was a growing appreciation and development of human freedom and dignity, unparalleled in recorded history.

This freedom was at all times fragile and had to contend with religious fanaticism during the era of the Reformation, with royal absolutism, with nationalism, with various forms of collectivism and now, with global corporate power. Nevertheless, the libertarian strain of western history is both significant and precious.

The issue is not so much the great aesthetic achievements under capitalism, because aesthetic achievements occurred under many types of regime and in all cultures, and often under unattractive rulers such as Hapsburg Spain, Bourbon France, Romanov Russia.

What was unique and remains important to retain is the idea that, the individual, and not the collective, should be the measure of all things. In the west, individual freedoms, while often threatened, were allowed to grow in importance. Some of this was undoubtedly spurred by the economic decentralization produced by capitalism. Certainly, during the French Revolution, liberal economic slogans mingled with calls for freedom. Freedom of expression, for instance, was usually associated with capitalism and with the English-speaking world and to some extent, with France.

The freedoms are not all attributable to capitalism. Pre-capitalist thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and Hume repudiated notions of a collective ideology which transcends the individual and can be imposed on humanity for its good. Indeed, some, like Paul A. Rahe, Paul Carrese and Margaret Michelle Barnes Smith have attempted to trace this back to Machiavelli because of his stress on human selfishness and self-seeking, despite his affirmation that some can and should be sacrificed for the state. The individualistic streak in capitalism was thus something that developed alongside capitalism and was often found in capitalist societies.

No society, capitalist or non-capitalist, ever postulated total selfishness as the only proper attitude. If the novels of Ayn Rand do that, it is rather a proof of their naiveté, comparable to the naiveté of those who want to create a collectivist utopia. Collective action has remained important in the west, as shown by the major social projects of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which ultimately led to social democracy. What the west did not do is impose an ideal of collective happiness in which the individual ceased to be the beneficiary of the social reforms. For that reason, it permitted considerable freedom to the individual.

All of this should not be exaggerated. If Victorian England permitted more political criticism than other European states, its censorship on sexual matters was particularly repressive, and such novels of Turgenev, Flaubert and Tolstoy and even the works of Hardy ran into problems in Britain they would not have encountered on the continent. Yet, compared with Asia or Africa, various freedoms were unquestionably more advanced.

It is also not an accident that liberal capitalism has allowed groups which were traditionally victims of discrimination – African Americans, women, homosexuals – to achieve a measure of equality. Their previous inequality was usually based on forms of economic exploitation such as slavery, feudalism, the treatment of women as property and so on. Capitalism in its expansionist logic wants to tap the resources of all of these groups without recourse to laws which limit their potential. Economic exploitation replaces all other forms. Many capitalist countries like Nazi Germany and 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan displayed great nationalism and favoured one group over others, but this is often for non-economic reasons. The debate about free and slave labour in the U.S., before the Civil War, echoed in discussions in Uncle Tom's Cabin, pitted a slave society which used slavery to obtain labour theoretically below market price against a capitalist one which exploited through the laws of contract. Unquestionably, the

society of free labour was both economically and morally preferable.

The simplicity of the laws of contract renders otiose the legislated and other restrictions on the freedom and status of portions of the population. Racism and other forms of prejudice are still possible but, if anything, they run counter to the economic interest of the society.

A social-democratic or socialist society also has no objective interest in discrimination. Yet racism and nationalism can also infect such societies and many crises in the 20<sup>th</sup> century should alert students of history to the fact that “objective economic interests” do not provide a guarantee against injustice. However, liberal capitalism, social democracy and democratic socialism all have the potential of avoiding race, gender, national or religious stratification and liberal capitalism, which came before the other two, did help eliminate inequality.

These freedoms faced challenges, both on the left and on the right. There was always present a strain of fanaticism on the left, ready to repress the individual for some “common” good. Such very different writers as Dostoevsky in *The Devils* and Zola in *Germinal* illustrated this and showed the personality traits of the fanatics. Even in our times, sometimes on the left or among various nationalists, we find those who want to favour collective, common goals over individual freedom. Such notions are always dangerous and are usually also unclear and indefinable.

Collective goals do not exist except in the imagination of those who promote them. There is no collective health, collective education, collective culture or collective will. Rather, there are collective *movements* to secure *individual* goals. That is how one can explain collective elements in legislative measures to protect workers, minorities or to provide health and education. The essence of social-democracy was to use collective means to secure individual ends and to shun all claims by the nation, the class or the faith.

It is undeniable that some of the extreme left-wing movements, such as Maoism, totally lost sight of the individual with horrific results. Even among more moderate leftists, the “cultural” claims of women, native and language groups pose serious problems. Multiculturalism can, at any time, degenerate into collectivism. Modern feminism, having become a dogma, is also showing signs of danger.

In recent times, as economic legislation becomes more difficult for a national state, because of globalizations, a new “cultural” or “collective” left has emerged. Instead of redistributing from rich to poor, we redistribute between groups and we promote a form of diversity in the place of a common culture. This type of ideology, which weakens individual notions of morality, honour, responsibility in favour of collectivist notions and which attempts to distribute jobs and other rights on this basis is a distinct decline from early 20<sup>th</sup> century liberalism.

This is why, when looking for alternatives to capitalism, it is important not to ditch the positive accomplishments of the capitalist era such as freedom of expression, religion and conscience, the stress on the value of each individual, the right not to belong to groups, and the relatively independent judicial system which, even if they are not necessarily linked to capitalism, developed in that period.

In fact, the waning of the neo-liberal extreme capitalism should make it easier to promote individual rights, because citizens will be more equal and the economic pressure for recognizing privileges will be less powerful.

At the present time, capitalism itself has come to favour many forms of anti-individualism, through worship of the results dictated by the market, however unfair, through the unhealthy influence of Zionism and other forms of nationalism or ethnicity and through the revival of religion, notably in Russia, in China and in the U.S. Satisfying the demands of powerful lobbies may, in fact, be an effective way of maintaining support and avoiding more fundamental change.

It is therefore important to exempt western freedom from the critique of capitalism. Any new society worth living in will have to place the human individual at the centre of its preoccupation. It is



economic organizations that must change, not humanism and not fundamental freedom and the belief in the “pursuit of happiness” that was recognized by 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers and that developed, for various reasons, under liberal capitalism.

## **XV. INSTITUTIONAL TAKE-OVER**

Every revolution creates new institutions or transforms existing ones. The social-democracy revolution after World War II led to the founding of countless hospitals, universities and cultural institutions. It also took over and effectively nationalized private universities, health institutions and cultural institutions, since they could no longer operate without state subsidies.

Elections and parliament were now elected with universal adult suffrage and were made more accessible and were becoming accessible to the majority.

Trade unions were a pillar of the new systems, whether in concert with the other forces in the running of the state, as in Germany, or as an advocate for its membership as in most English-speaking countries.

The new media such as radio and television were in many cases owned by the state, but were, in any event, regulated and somewhat immune from partisan politics. The written media were often tied to particular parties and were thus capable of covering most points of view.

The neo-liberal years have sapped the power of these institutions. Many of them have lost power, freedom and influence. Some are in a deep financial crisis and their survival is uncertain.

The concentration of wealth has allowed the right to acquire a near stranglehold on the media. If cuts in state-owned media continue, the problem will be exacerbated even further. The reduction of state funding has forced cultural institutions too to become corporate beggars, much like artists of the past who depended on patrons.

The privatizations have doomed other institutions to partisan interest. As for unions, they are in decline almost everywhere, and, as a result of the right’s propaganda victories, are very unpopular among the public, which should appreciate their achievement yet, which is often bothered both by the inconvenience of strikes, and by the relative affluence of unionized workers, especially in the public service.

Private and expensive hospitals, schools, universities, arbitration tribunals are springing up everywhere, reducing the average man’s access to essential services and creating a new class system and closed network of influential men and women.

One of the most interesting trends is the corporate take-over of universities. As a result, universities are turning into very luxurious appendages of capitalism and are concentrating on those things which are useful for a capitalist economy. Their independence is increasingly tenuous as is their devotion to disciplines which do not attract corporate sponsorship.

The political institutions such as parliament, the courts and municipalities are all drifting away from the world of ordinary people and are falling under the influence of those who hold wealth. The trend may be imperceptible at first, but in the long-run, institutional impotence will further reduce the opportunity for resistance and independent action.

## **XVI. CAPITALISM AND THE TOWER OF BABEL**

Prophecy is a very risky enterprise. It can prove wrong because of one variable, one invention or one error. Those who have tried prophecy have all failed to one degree or another. Yet it is part of political thought to try to predict future consequences. One could argue that abstention from speculation about the future is impossible for those who care about it and it would stop us from trying to prevent the worst scenarios. It is therefore an interesting and important exercise to try to imagine the future if

modern capitalism continues to dominate.

The first casualty of capitalism will surely be the solidarity which caused the first eclipse of capitalism after World War II and its replacement by a system of social justice.

In a world of declining public welfare structures, growing distance between the rich and poor, and a class structure which cannot readily be escaped, it must be each man for himself, each man resenting the other. As the alienation from power and judicial structures become obvious to each citizen, all will become vigilantes to make sure someone else does not get an advantage.

There will, of course, be a small, international elite dedicated to maintaining itself by increasingly brutal means, and the majority, ready to revolt but not having either an ability to organize or a programme.

There will undoubtedly be attempts to revive growth and consumerism but, as we have seen, they will likely fail as jobs disappear, space becomes limited and the environmental situation worsens.

Undoubtedly, protest movements will arise. One can expect messianic religion, forms of fascism, forms of socialism, forms of populism all competing for attention at the margins. Culture will decline to become a kaleidoscope of constantly changing novelties. The loyalties toward ethnic cultures and religions would strengthen because of the generalized isolation and solitude.

After some years of this loss of cohesion and of increased poverty and alienation, the environment would deliver a coup de grace with a series of disasters.

At that point, either a move would be made towards greater state control and control over the market and over the environment or the society would collapse. No other alternative would remain. In all likelihood, humanity would suffer one of the periodic setbacks which would reverse scientific and cultural achievements and reduce drastically the number of humans. These historical setbacks have been enumerated recently by Ian Morris and it is folly to think that we have now become immune to them.

Undoubtedly, descendants of survivors would tell stories of flying machines, calculating machines and magic potions which caused disease. Sooner or later, a new form of complex society would start to emerge and growth would resume.

All of this would, in a poignant way, illustrate one of our great myths – the Tower of Babel. By making solidarity impossible, capitalism will ultimately fracture society. By an unjust globalization, it will bring about parochialism. By frenetic growth, it will ensure collapse.

While some of the environmental damage has already occurred, it is probably not too late to avoid disaster. Nor does the task of avoiding chaos require a powerful or radical revolution. Rather, a new system based on more control over the economy, respect for individual freedom and creativity and disparagement of ethnic and religious loyalties could be set up in several major countries at the same time, almost certainly through lawful means. It is true that, if the attempt is made only in several decades, after much of the ecological damage has occurred and most ordinary jobs have been lost, there may be revolutionary attempts to turn the tide. At present that is neither needed nor desirable. A change can be envisaged without such dislocation and the suffering it would cause. Of course, it is far from certain that it will occur. There are many formidable obstacles.

## **XVII. THE NEW SYSTEM**

From the outset of this essay it was postulated that the new model of society, whether we called it a renewed socialism or renewed social democracy, would retain a considerable amount of private enterprise. Indeed, the fully public sector of any state would undoubtedly be small by comparison with the private and the mixed.

It must be understood that criticism of capitalism is not a repudiation of the laws of economics nor notably, of supply and demand. These laws are part of what is really observed in virtually all

societies. Socialist thinkers like Karl Marx were followers of Adam Smith and David Ricardo as much as capitalist ones. The difference between the left and the right is that, for the left, these laws are not sacred. Supply and demand can be modified to achieve a better result. However, everyone agrees that systematically ignoring these laws will produce black markets, disaffected populations and social injustice. The laws of supply and demand are here to stay.

If that is so, then many of the features of capitalism such as the profit motive, hiring and firing labour, market pricing, differences in remuneration would be part of the new world. Labour conditions would have to be regulated, as they are today, in order to prevent exploitation. Given the predominance of private property in land, some municipal regulations would remain crucial. Private activity would continue to dominate in most areas of human endeavour. However, there would be five major differences between the new system and the present one.

Firstly, certain services such as health, education, social security and environment would, without compromise, be placed in the public domain. No “two-track” system or public private partnerships can be contemplated because such things, invariably, create two classes of product, one for the elite and one for the others. The terrible state of the present-day system of justice is an eloquent illustration of the perils of two-tier systems.

Not that private administration of health or education could never be contemplated. The Swedish system, in which private hospitals compete with the public system, might be very attractive – as long as both the state remains the predominant payer and the patient is treated for free. In education, the sheltering of institutions, especially institutions of higher learning, from government meddling is one of the guarantees of academic freedom, without which education degenerates into mere training, or, as Jane Jacobs suggested, into an exercise of accreditation. Therefore private administration is often attractive. We have already examined the desirability of decentralization in order to frustrate abuse of power.

A decent society must ensure that, whatever differences in wealth are tolerated, they do not extend to health or educational opportunities. Classes are formed by the existence of separate institutions for different groups of citizens and this must be discouraged. Moreover, no society should accept separate education for ethnic and religious groups because this creates permanent ghettos and leads to a multiculturalism and communitarianism that are both undesirable.

So far, the rules of the new society are not that different from the social-democracy of the post World War II period, although there may be more zeal in the insistence on public health and education, less direct nationalization and far less alacrity for multiculturalism or notions of diversity. There is perhaps more scepticism about the ability to operate outside the laws of supply and demand. However, on the whole, this proposal is not far from what was tried in most western countries between 1945 and 1980.

The second proposed innovation is, however, new and radical, especially in its intensity. The taxation system is needed to raise money for social democratic projects, but it has the additional equally important function of reducing income inequality. Taxing *excess* income and property is reasonable, even if there is no shortage of funds for social programmes. Equalization is a noble goal in itself.

The neo-liberal decades have increased considerably the gap between rich and poor. Indeed, virtually all of the somewhat questionable gains in total wealth in the last twenty years have served to enrich the wealthy. In the long run, the present system will create new, impermeable classes served by separate schools and health institutions. Catching up will become virtually impossible.

To counter this, we should determine the maximum tolerable income differential between richest and poorest and tax excess amounts for the express purpose of sustaining relative equality.

Some will no doubt object to the attack on high salaries for the elite. They will argue that the

possibility of high salaries contributes to the creation of wealth and jobs, despite evidence that there is little common measure between merit and reward. They will see the possibility of reaching fabulous summits as the most exhilarating part of the American dream. Finally, they will argue that the redistribution of the high corporate salaries would put very little into the average man's pocket.

The very rich have profited inordinately from all of the gains in production since 1980 and the wealth held by the top 1% is staggering. Taxing them would now really assist public finances. However, the argument against high differentials in income is far more compelling than a dispute about the amounts such taxes will raise.

In the first place, as a model for young persons, the American dream of fabulous wealth is sterile. It depends on the notion of constant expansion which is increasingly dangerous for humanity and it expresses the materialist values which are not admirable. It places no weight on goodness, creativity, generosity and other great virtues. It relies on a false relationship between merits and enrichment.

In the second place, relative poverty has most of the social disadvantages of poverty just as much as absolute poverty. Only the issue of satisfying basic creature needs is absent with relative poverty.

In his celebrated work, *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls suggested that a reasonable man who is offered a real increase of \$100.00 in his income while everyone else gets \$200.00 will accept because he too will benefit. Rawls's conclusion is incorrect and naive.

What Rawls forgets is the demoralizing effect of relative poverty, exacerbated by the materialism of our society which attaches supreme importance to material possessions. Relative poverty breeds insecurity and destroys the poorer person's self-esteem.

It may be that in a society which recognizes elites based on other values than material wealth, one can create academic or artistic classes which have prestige without wealth and where the destructive effect of relative poverty is, for such classes, less clear. Our society's populist rejection of elitism leaves no room for this type of phenomenon. A person's prestige is inextricably bound to his means.

It is possible to salvage Rawls's idea by putting a value on the prestige or relative position and counting it as one of the factors which the reasonable man will consider in deciding whether or not he is better off. However, in doing this, we are stepping away from the theory so widespread among American Republicans today that income disparity matters little and that the total production of a society is what determines its quality.

The third problem with high income is that it allows those with relative wealth to monopolize the desirable and scarce commodities, notably access to health, education and culture. Even if, in absolute terms, the relatively poor person will continue to be able to afford most material goods, he will be excluded from the elite schools, the private hospitals and the special cultural institutions which will serve the new ruling class. After a generation or two, this class will indeed appear to be superior, more refined, and more cultured than those left behind.

This is why it is necessary to have the government tax the wealthy and then redistribute precisely those things which the market forces would limit to the elite.

Obviously, the "profit motive" for small business would be *somewhat* more modest under the new system with the making of a fabulous fortune becoming impossible. As the Cambridge Keynesian economist Joan Robinson wrote, people will strive as hard for modest gains such as, extra trips, a slightly classier car, a marginally bigger house as they will to make mythical fortunes. Moreover, international corporations and big business as we now know them would either disappear or become partly public and very heavily regulated. It would not be possible to make a great fortune in business and people would not face pressure to do so.

Both in order to avoid a black market and the accumulation of secret cash, certain luxury items such as yachts, sports cars, and private airplanes should simply become unavailable or available only through clubs and other communal organisms. In any event, possessing such items would constitute virtual proof of tax evasion, especially if each child were allowed a generous tax-free bequest from its family but, beyond that generous amount, the steep tax rates would also operate in the sphere of succession. It would become impossible to explain the possession of fabulous wealth.

This is the flip side of not tolerating profound poverty – that great riches not be tolerated either. To think that a decent minimum can be guaranteed without the imposition of a maximum is a pipe-dream. The dream of social justice can only be achieved at the expense of the old American dream that anyone can become rich through hard work and wise investment. In short, there is no great change without a price tag and we cannot keep both the benefits of primitive capitalism and of social justice. However, we must remember that the sacrifice is not great, because in reality the American dream does not work for many people and pursuit mars the lives of many.

The neo-liberal propaganda has convinced large numbers of people that one should not discourage great personal wealth and that it is a legitimate and laudable goal. This debate clearly should be re-opened. Great wealth implies considerable poverty of many others, at least in the relative sense. However, it is also undesirable in itself. It is undesirable in the materialism and in the crassness which it fosters and its negative effects on even those who succeed in amassing it.

Despite the deafening propaganda in favour of wealth, the call on a limit to wealth has been heard before. In the United States, the hand of the capitalist dreams that everyone can become wealthy and that wealth goes to the deserving, Felix Adler called for a limit several decades ago. Further, in December 2011, The New York Times published an article by Ayres and Edlin entitled “Don’t Tax the Rich. Tax Inequality Itself”. In it they suggest a percentage cap on high-end income. *Le Mode Diplomatique*, a more plausible forum for left-wing polemics, has taken up this cry in February 2012. What is important is to link the limits on wealth to the third innovation. Together, the proposals would alley the frenetic competition, which is the essence of capitalism.

The third feature, common to most social-democrats would be the high degree of economic regulation. Joseph Stiglitz pointed out how the deregulation of the financial markets led to what he called the “free-fall” of 2008. In general, economic deregulation has provided opportunities for the wealthy to acquire even greater financial power, to influence policy-making and to reduce the level of democracy and equality. It must also be said that excessive respect for market results for instance, in the establishment of prices, leads to distortions and injustices. This is striking with respect to services which invariably become too expensive. It is therefore necessary to use regulatory structures to modify prices as established by the market.

It goes without saying that the financial sector, banking, pension planning, interest rates, inflation, creation of currency will have to be guided by the state. It already is to a large extent, and the disastrous attempts to deregulate it in the U.S. under Clinton and Bush should make us very reluctant to try again. Indeed, this is one area of the economy where a certain amount of direct public ownership might well be appropriate.

The high degree of regulation would pose a threat to individual freedom. This should be countered to a decline in non-economic regulation. The notion of personal romanticism, described further down in this section will expound on the liberating, almost anarchic side of the new society.

The fourth innovative feature of the new society would be the stress on leisure such as culture, free time, and family vacations. When France’s socialists, under Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, limited weekly working hours to 35 in the late 1990s, they were pioneers in what should surely be the wave of the future.

No more protestant ethic of hard work and austerity. Instead – honest, but temporally limited work and a premium on personal culture and on leisure activities that imply a high level of education but do not require a great degree of wealth; this includes reading, theatre, opera, cinema, tourism, and travel by public transport

This type of policy does not produce lazy workers. Indeed, per hour the French work-force is more efficient than the American, but its output is less because it works fewer hours. Moreover, professionals, artists, and scientists whose work is part of their cultural activities would undoubtedly work as hard as ever because of their inner motivation. But the pressure to perform would be gone. Life would become more evenly balanced between career, work on the one hand, and enjoyment and learning on the other.

The leisure should start with a humanist and scientific education not directed towards employment efficiency or market training. Students should be encouraged to travel in groups, to read independently and widely and to favour their intellectual and social development over their practical skills. The time will surely come to learn a skill or a profession, but that should not be the primary goal of education. There should be no confusion between education and accreditation.

There is now considerable evidence that generous holidays and frequent rest increase productivity and that the attenuation of the extreme pressure of the “protestant” model will not lead to a decline in output. This thinking can be found, for instance, in Tony Schwartz’s article “Relax! You’ll be More Productive”, published in the New York Times in February 2013.

The relative equality of income should reduce the histrionic competitiveness of modern education. Parents who start preparing their children for the elite school admission process from birth would have no elite schools to choose. The strain of the competition for professional schools and good universities, while it cannot be completely removed, would obviously subside as income becomes more evenly distributed.

There would surely be prestigious schools and academic honours to be won, but the influence of wealth would decline to almost nothing in the distribution of admission and rewards and as business sponsorship wanes. Academic merit could be its own reward, as would be academic freedom, freed from obsessive grant writing for “sexy” topics of research.

A word must be said about technology. At various times, people have expressed fears that technology would reduce available jobs. In the last few years, clerical and blue-collar jobs have certainly tended to disappear, at least in first-world countries.

However, in many fields technology has not reduced the work-load. In law, for instance, it has led to an exacerbation of court requirements of disclosure and presentation of materials which have put professionals under pressure and increased, instead of lowering, the high price of services. This is partly why law is now priced beyond what an ordinary man can pay. The same applies to most professional fields, although high price is not always the result of technology.

It may be that the time has come to use technology improvements to reduce work-time and increase leisure, rather than to augment the quantity or improve the quality of the product.

It is this stress on leisure and the definitive abandonment of the capitalist dreams of wealth through hard work and frugality that tips the suggested new model towards socialism or social-democracy rather than capitalism. Many features of capitalism will remain but the society will work on the basis of a philosophy which is not capitalist in its goals and which values equality and freedom over financial success.

Some fear that the world so organized would be an insipid, heavily controlled one and that it would eventually create a new form of soft totalitarianism in which conformism becomes the path to success. These types of fears have dogged democratic socialism since the days of Hayek and Schumpeter

and they cannot be completely discounted.

Of course, in our time, it is neo-liberalism that has produced a soft totalitarianism of surveillance, harsh criminal law and enforced conformism. Social democracy in the 1950s and 1960s offered much more freedom and clemency to citizens. However, the danger of creating a similar result with a left-wing slant is a real one. Freedom, especially individual freedom, would need to be carefully tended and protected from being sacrificed on the altar of currently fashionable ideas.

Trotsky spoke of freedom from material necessity as a precondition for real freedom. He did have a serious point, but mere freedom from poverty does not suffice to guarantee liberty. Future social democrats would have to be more solicitous of individual freedoms and less preoccupied by the facilitation of collective projects.

Individual freedom can be restrained by many factors. Poverty, but also religious and ethnic allegiances of one's parents or of society, excessive zeal in enforcing the law, and an undue respect for those in authority are some of the most obvious. Clearly, great care would be necessary to prevent an eclipse of liberty.

The elimination of wealth and poverty, of ethnic schools and, hopefully, the waning of multiculturalism and of ethnicity would leave individuals more free to make their own choices. A personal romanticism and non-conformism would ensure that citizens benefit from the freedom.

The fifth, and most difficult freedom of the new system is this "romanticism". This means individual freedom in family relations, career, and everyday life. It also means freedom from ethnic, linguistic and religious groups and pressures to which we are constantly exposed. A romantic attitude in which one is free to travel anywhere, to marry anyone regardless of origin, to change professions and lifestyles several times during a life-time and to ignore the norms of current fashion would surely be liberating. So would sexual and religious freedom. In many ways, the romanticism means freedom from convention.

The relative decline of gender inequality and the empowerment of women promotes romanticism by making sexual relations take place between equals. Moreover, the removal of gender, ethnic or racial barriers to sexual activity, the disappearance of the moralism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century bourgeoisie and the weakening of financial incentives in the selection of partners in conditions close to equality would all enhance the romantic portion of human existence. But romanticism and non-conformism are attitudes which have applications in all aspects of life, not only in law or in personal relations.

Since the new economy would be more regulated than the present one, it would, we have seen, present certain dangers to freedom. There should be less regulation of non-economic activities and less zealous application of rules. The neo-liberals deregulated the economy and imposed rules everywhere else. The opposite is the better solution. *Every rule and regulation which is not economic or redistributive should be open to question at all times.* Moreover, all rules, including economic ones, should be applied flexibly. The law should never be inexorable. This means a less orderly, perhaps less predictable society – something capitalism usually opposes.

Excessive and casuistic municipal and state regulation, so common in our times, should be substantially lightened. Professions should be less standardized. A more accessible justice system would reduce the powers of bureaucratic despots. An almost absolutist approach to freedom of expression would end the tyranny of political correctness. A compassionate criminal law system would reduce the number of prisoners to the bare minimum of those who cannot safely be released and would wipe out totally the effects of a criminal conviction several years after the event. The reduction of surveillance and the relaxation of the overwhelming panic about security would create more privacy, more room for dissent and indeed, for eccentricity.

Despite all of these possibilities, the problem of individual freedom in the new system would remain a legitimate and permanent preoccupation. No perfect utopia will ever be reached and we shall never be safe from tyranny. Tyranny takes a different form in each period of history and is therefore not immediately recognized. Nor is it possible to vanquish completely the tyranny of fashion and political correctness because so many are conformists by nature. There would therefore have to exist institutions dedicated to challenging power, even under the best system; the courts are surely the most important of these institutions. Countries with very problematic human rights records, such as the United States and Israel are sometimes redeemed by the courage of some of their judges. Corrupt countries such as Italy and India, exhibit far less venality in the justice system than elsewhere. The independent judiciary is therefore a necessary condition of individual freedom and a bulwark against the conformism and the obedience to rules that all majorities inevitably seek to impose and thus, it must be given particular attention.

### **XVIII. POLITICAL STRUCTURE IN THE NEW SYSTEM**

Much of this essay has been an attempt to demystify and desacramentalize the concept of “democracy”. It is not a system of government at all, and certainly not an instrument of regime change. Its best function is to change government inside a system. It does not provide a guarantee against human rights abuses, war, or racism. In some cases, non-democratic governments may be morally preferable to democratic ones.

Despite all that, it would be unthinkable to suggest undemocratic structure of government for the new system or to try to run it with some sort of “hyper-democratic” notions of direct, popular decision-making.

For one thing, one of the biggest dangers which lurk in western democracy, the hijacking of the state by the wealthy, would be less serious in a world without great differences in wealth.

For another, in its narrow field, the rotation of political leaders, it is the most efficient system and it often, but not always, is preserving individual liberty a little better than its more authoritarian or “hyper-democratic” rivals. Since the new state would have to choose and change leaders, representative democracy presents the best structure.

Particular care must be taken to avoid hyper-democracy and populism and considering majority opinion as necessarily the good one. Such notions impose limits on freedom worse than most dictatorships and they enforce conformism and obedience not only to legal rules but to societal ones. In many cases like Maoism, hyper-democracy is the flip-side to brutal tyranny.

Even in representative democracy, there is danger of populism and majoritarianism and, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century right-wing populism is making gains in much of the world. It is therefore necessary to provide against it through a constitution which is difficult (although not impossible) to change and which enshrines an independent judiciary.

In the new system, a constitution should shelter a number of core principles from the vagaries of popular opinion. Universal Medicare, universal and virtually free education, social security and protection for culture should be protected in the same way as basic freedoms and as fundamental equality, most likely through a constitutionally entrenched Charter of Rights. Collective rights must not be allowed to dilute the basic individual guarantees of freedom and relative economic security and the Charter should be explicit about this.

Other safeguards will be needed. In some cases, federalism reduces the perils of the concentration of power. The judiciary certainly does. The “romantic individualism of the new society should make citizens less obedient and less conformist and therefore less susceptible to acquiesce in abuses of power.



Subject to all of these caveats, a parliamentary structure with a voting system that reflects the popular vote directly or with very little distortion will have to be created. It will have safeguards both against power-hungry individuals and against righteous majorities and populism. However, the use of power by some over others is always dangerous and nothing will ever make it totally safe.

## **XIX. THE NEW SYSTEM AND INDIVIDUAL HAPPINESS**

It cannot be stressed too strongly that the new system is designed to provide security, dignity and relative equality to citizens. It is not intended as a formula for personal happiness.

In recent years, it has become fashionable to imagine a happiness calculus and then to ask people how happy they are and derive statistical conclusions from this. In part, this started as an answer to the purely arithmetical arguments by the United States that Americans enjoy the highest living standards. Looking at factors permitted arguments that, on the whole, people are “happier” in Canada, western Europe and Australia than in the U.S. This result seems to be intuitively correct, but the entire enterprise is notoriously error-prone and unscientific.

The answers on a “happiness” quiz are often culturally determined. French respondents might have a history of complaining behind them, while in the eyes of the Chinese, one should not criticize one’s group or nation or appear too critical in general.

Some of the answers depend on subjective personality traits, possibly genetic in nature. There have been studies that show that those predisposed to happiness may be happy in adversity and those whose natural outlook is gloomy, will be unhappy at the moment of their greatest success.

It is telling that, in most sociological studies, 70% of those who are married say they are happy, but half of the marriages end in divorce. Are these figures easy to reconcile?

In any event, it is not the subjective happiness of the citizens that can be politically assured. Such a purpose would be inconsistent with the individualistic purposes of the new system and with the free will that it seeks to foster.

To manufacture artificial happiness through “happy” drugs or through genetic modifications as with the “Children of Crake” in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* is the antithesis of the new system. This would require a collectivist project which would redirect thinking into “happy channels”, as in more mystical forms of Maoism or in the *1984* language newspeak, and would create a progressive inability to think dark thoughts.

The new system proposed here is firmly rooted in Christian doctrines of free will. The removal of pressure to succeed financially may lighten the mood of many citizens. However, it cannot guarantee a subjective “happiness”.

Ultimately, for most people, happiness is mostly a result of their private life and their disposition. We tend to be happier in youth than in old age, in health than in sickness, in love than out of love. Political and economic causes are quite unimportant except where there is total oppression or privation.

How often older people look back with fondness to being 20 years old, forgetting that they are reminiscing about Berlin or Moscow in 1937. For those who did not personally suffer from the terror, those years appear beautiful, bathed in the light of youth and exciting. The 19<sup>th</sup> century American painter, Thomas Cole painted a series of paintings depicting a man’s journey through life. The beautiful colours and images of childhood and youth show how, in retrospect, those periods of life appear attractive in part, independently of the epoch.

While the new system may attempt to palliate health problems through universal coverage, private life woes with less commoditization of sex and so on, it cannot cure the anguish and frustration of those who perceive themselves as unintelligent or unattractive. Nor can it nurture in its citizens

happiness because they are participants in a collectivity or as a reward for virtue.

The New Testament warned that the sun shone and the rain fell on the good and the bad indifferently. No modification of this is either possible or desirable. The major issues confronting human beings – life and death, love, the inexorable passage of time, good and evil will continue under the new system whose sole assistance in these matters will be the removal of certain pressures and, to a large extent, of social injustice.

It is not impossible that technology will improve life in very significant ways such as longevity, overcoming handicaps and illness and increased comforts. It is predictable, however, that, even after such scientific, objective improvements, the subjective sense of “happiness” will remain unaffected. Some will proclaim they are happy and some will not.

## **XX. COURTS AND JUDICIAL REVIEW IN THE NEW SYSTEM**

The reason why freedom is always insecure is rooted deeply in the human urge to dominate and to have one’s way. While it is not necessary to agree with the forces of the right that capitalism itself is natural and cannot be substantively modified, it is naïve to adopt a view that economic differences alone are to blame for loss of liberty.

The tendency of idealists who try to save mankind in the name of an ideal, and in the process, to destroy liberty is too well known to need much debate. Only four years separated the radiant beginning of the French Revolution from the Reign of Terror. If Russia waited a little longer to descend to hell, it sank deeper and for a longer spell than revolutionary France. Moreover, the various religious and secular groups which withdrew from society and tried to share everything, including sexual partners, frequently ended in power struggles and oppression inside the new communities. This happened several times during the Reformation and regularly afterwards. None of the efforts to build a private utopia bore fruit.

Those of us who are veterans of the student revolt of the 1960s often forget, in our sentimental recollections of a time when we were younger, that the attempt to enforce a new left “dogma” and to condemn or exclude non-believers became both very unpleasant and bizarrely stupid. A reading of Flaubert’s *L’Éducation Sentimentale* shows that the same bovine stupidity was rampant in the ranks of radical students of the 1840s who were dreaming of a repeat of the French Revolution. It is therefore folly to believe that if we overcome the present totalitarian “democracy” which is the principal threat to freedom in our times, the day of perfect individual liberty or eternal prosperity will dawn. It is a pernicious myth to believe that any party has the keys to earthly paradise.

Nor can we rely on “democracy” or majority rule as the safety valve. It is not working today and may never be a reliable safeguard. This is evident both from our consideration of the institutions of democratic government and the alienation from them caused by capitalism and from the opinions held by the majority of their citizens. Majority rule is both difficult to achieve and disappointing in the result.

There is a great chasm between individual liberty and majority rule or populism. While societies often pay lip-service to liberty, the elites in all political systems become impatient and frustrated with dissenting voices, especially if they are effective in blocking their plans. The impatience frequently becomes anger when the criticism comes from former allies whose unbending support was taken for granted. It turns out that, all too often, majority opinion comes out in favour of conformism and respect for the rules.

It is therefore virtually certain that any new society would continue to need strong protection for individual freedom and that the protection would have to be aimed at the new elites as well as at any populist ideology put forward by them.

Moreover, a social-democratic society, with many social schemes and programmes, would have countless temptations to want to repress inconvenient protests. For instance, how understanding is

today's left towards those who oppose new programmes aimed at eliminating sexual harassment on the ground that they impact freedom of expression? How would religious dissent, for instance, on abortion, fare at the hands of a secular feminist state? The potential for impatience and repression is very great indeed.

It follows that an impartial unaccountable, non-elected arbiter is necessary and would continue to be necessary in any imaginable society. Political majorities, leaders and the bureaucrats empowered by them are simply not trustworthy, at least not with respect to fundamental rights. Nor are majorities. The arbiter would have to exist and it could well be an independent court or an arbitrator subject to the supervision of the court who could fulfill this function. There may be other possible institutions, such as mediators, but such institutions could only supplement, not replace an independent court.

The courts and judicial review already play a major role in protecting freedom. However, the legal system is not functioning well anywhere. It is failing in this most crucial role as well as in most others. It is not helping the ordinary man obtain justice.

Accessibility, practically non-existent today, is essential for the judicial system to carry out its proper tasks. The cost of litigation must be reduced by cutting the number of experts heard at trial, shortening trials and eliminating procedural refinements that give such an advantage to the wealthy and to powerful law firms which have the work force to address those ever increasing refinements. It would also be necessary to promote greater independence and discretion for judges since the nomination process as it stands now favours the naming of fairly conservative individuals. Nevertheless, once they are named and once they have nothing to fear from further government action, judges do sometimes challenge the system.

Of course, in a social-democratic society, it would be the left which would usually manifest its impatience with meddling judges, and not the right which is often unhappy with them today. The natural impulse on the part of any dominant group to invoke "democracy" in order to silence judges must be resisted. As mentioned, it is exactly what the neo-liberals do today.

The creation of safeguards to prevent abuse of authority in the new system is obviously both a delicate and a sensitive proposition. Judicial review, that is, the power to set aside administrative and legislative decisions by an independent judiciary, is a very important tool without which, no system can protect the individual from bureaucrats and from swings in the majority's mood. However, it does affect the efficiency and swiftness of government activity and it also has limits which must be observed in order to avoid a society run principally on the basis of judicial precedent.

The challenge is to rehabilitate judicial review in the eyes of citizens. As discussed previously, during the neo-liberal years, much pseudo-democratic verbiage has appeared, arguing that unelected judges should defer to elected legislators. In the United States this has become a dogma which neither major party can afford to doubt. According to this dogma, the role of a judge is to apply the rules and not to make or modify them. Implicit is the untenable assumption that rules of law can generally be objectively determined. Legal philosophers know that this is not so and that it is not possible to eliminate questions about the morality of law, about its practicability or about the principles behind the exercise of discretion.

Successive Republican governments have packed the courts with advocates of "restraint" who refuse to assist individuals on the ground that policy decisions must be made by the legislator at the expense or without a thought to individuals. If one analyzes the decisions of the Republican courts, one sees little restraint when it comes to helping big business. It is only the individuals who are supposed to turn to the legislator. Indeed, the Roberts Court has been more consistently pro-business than socially right-wing. After all, the real beneficiary of conservatism is big business, not the social right.

Never mind that, to those with no money, the legislature is as difficult to access as the courts,

that powerful lobbies tend to get their way and that majorities, even when they are real, can be immoral and unjust. Public opinion has come to view judicial activism as elitist and undemocratic and everyone repeats the mantra that activist judges are dangerous and anti-democratic.

The theory that everyone must somehow be “accountable” is one of the culprits. While judges are not “accountable” in the usual sense of the word, except for truly egregious acts, unlike the legislators and the executive, they are also not accountable to big business and other lobbies and are not subject to electoral pressures. As was pointed out by no less an authority than in *The Federalist Papers*, judges’ power is very limited and they cannot step outside what is acceptable and possible in a society without being repudiated. However, they are the branch of government which faces the fewest consequences from a courageous, unpopular act.

The left in power has a bad record in this respect. The excessive reaction to judicial review in the labour field in the 1950s and 1960s came from the left. The same arguments of democracy and accountability so favoured by the right were raised by progressive thinkers in support of judge-bashing. The impulse to use populist notions of democracy in order to silence judges is one of the most dangerous temptations of power and also one of the most natural.

The attitude towards judicial review has not been divided along left/right lines. The establishment “right” usually opposed review because of its distrust of contestation by students, prisoners, prospective immigrants, and individual employees and various types of idealists (e.g. environment activists) of its tendency to trust those in authority and defer to them. On the other hand, they liked and used judicial review against organized labour and against economic regulations often put in place by left of centre governments.

The established “left”, on the other hand, was impatient with judicial interventionism in the field of labour on the side of the employees and other economic regulations. While it tepidly supported some contestation by students and other pressure groups, the established left, on the whole, was distrustful of judicial review.

On the other hand, both the maverick right, especially libertarians, and the maverick intellectual and individualist left tended to support considerable judicial review. On this issue, a welfare conservative like Lord Denning and a liberal like Professor Ronald Dworkin might often find themselves on the same side. It is submitted that, within the limits of common sense, the proponents of judicial review were correct.

In fact, one of the ways to destabilize power-hungry bureaucrats and other would-be tyrants is through frequent judicial review. Sometimes, judicial decisions get in the way of policy and slow down reform; at other times, however, this forces those with power to reconsider their position and to exercise their power with more consideration and care for those affected by it.

If successful judicial review is too rare in a society, ordinary people will not invest money in contestations which will necessarily be very long shots. They will simply become alienated from the judicial system. As mentioned, this is what has happened in recent years. Of course, if judicial review is too common, it paralyzes government and leads to a clash between the judiciary and the executive, which the judiciary almost always loses.

The notion of deference to officials and lower courts, which has become fashionable, is particularly pernicious. Certainly appeal courts should, in most cases, defer to those who heard the evidence on issues of credibility because of the importance of non-verbal clues in establishing veracity. A transcript is not a good substitute for a hearing. However, deference on moral matters is simply an abdication and a refusal to entertain challenges to the existing order. The quintessential “deferential” trial was that of Jesus before Pontius Pilate. The new, fashionable deference is also often a moral abdication or desire not to review and to tolerate a considerable degree of injustice in order not to make

controversial decisions.

Any society which cherishes individual freedom, whether the prevailing winds blow left or right, should institute a system of judicial review as one of the most significant protections from imposed views and from majority whims; further, it would encourage a certain degree of judicial activism, even if one would approve deference on questions of fact and avoid the extreme result of government by judicial decree.

## **XXI. PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE AND MORALITY IN THE NEW SYSTEM**

One of the more bizarre aspects of Soviet socialism and of most 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxism was the insistence on the scientific nature of socialist teachings. It is true that, in the case of Karl Marx himself, there was great erudition and impressive logic in most of his writings. Yet it is clear that his purpose was often normative and not descriptive and that it was different in nature from the theory of evolution which Marx admired and which he thought he was reproducing in social sciences. In any event, the type of rigorous verification of his theory that physical science would demand was neither possible nor necessary. As for Marx's Soviet followers, their position was manifestly non-scientific in that, in all of their studies of Marxism, they were not prepared ever to entertain the possibility that the theory was simply wrong. Yet it is a fundamental characteristic of any scientific hypothesis that it can be disproved and must be abandoned or modified if this happens.

The myth of scientific status should never form part of political dogma. The place which this myth occupied in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in several ideologies should be assigned instead to moral fervour. If capitalism is no longer acceptable, it is because the inequality, self-interest, exploitation and the apotheosis of commerce which it produces are morally wrong. Old and respected values, such as honour and indignation, should inspire the change, not belief in scientific inevitability. Further, in the western world, the centrality of Christian morality – love, forgiveness, self-sacrifice – should be recognized and reinstated.

The eclipse of these fundamental positions of Christianity in western civilization has opened the west to foolish moral relativism and to an untenable multiculturalism. The new society can only be built on the moral foundations of Christianity, even though espousing the Christian religion is no longer a requirement and indeed, Christianity should have no state privileges, public position or any legal advantage over other faiths or over disbelief.

The proposition put forward here is certainly not a return to organized religion but rather a return to philosophy alongside science.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century attempts to create a socialist world were frequently based on the theories of Karl Marx. Marx's influence was not the only important one because social-democracy, especially in English-speaking countries, was often philosophically explained by reference to John Stuart Mill and the utilitarian school of thought. Further, the influence of August Comte was also present in many countries. One of the strands of reform was represented by Christian democracy and this meant that progressive theologians and Christian philosophers also played a significant part. Finally, one cannot overlook the contribution of moderate conservatives who often helped decentralize the state and remove dangers to individual liberty inherent in a state-run project. The input of the conservatives meant that Machiavelli, Hobbes, Burke, Jefferson, Madison and Tocqueville also played a role. However, Marx was clearly the pivotal political philosopher for 20<sup>th</sup> century reformers both for those who followed his teachings and those who wanted to reject them.

The paradox is that so many of his followers, including virtually all who lived in the communist world, and were not dissidents, did not see him as a philosopher at all, but as some sort of scientist who could not be wrong and whose incorrect predictions had to be explained away. Marx himself at times

criticized “philosophy” and did not want to engage in metaphysical speculation as to the nature of what exists. Perhaps we could portray him as an early phenomenologist who “bracketed” what could not be explained and moved on to other things. However, his materialism and his vocal dislike of religion could lead one to think that he rejected the metaphysical traditions from Plato to Kant and simply assumed that the world in which we see as well as the notion that all ethical and religious ideas can be explained by dialectical materialism and related to the economics of production and social organization.

Yet Marx’s goal was the liberation of man from economic necessity and the development of his potential through freedom. How can this be reconciled with mechanical determinism and with a rejection of transcendental values?

A better view is that Marx joined three disparate strands - British political economy of Smith and Ricardo, French enlightenment with Rousseau’s liberation politics and German romanticism and theory of knowledge, especially metaphysics and reasoning as exemplified by Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel. He did not reject freedom and good as transcendental values, but thought that one could not, on that issue, go beyond Kant and Hegel. In a very controversial and contested way, Nietzsche would show that the debate could continue, but Marx was seeking a different type of liberation from Nietzsche and hoped that everyone could share it.

In our times, it is clear that Marx must be accepted as one of the great western philosophers. He was an Aristotelian, rather than a Platonist, in that he was interested in “becoming” rather than “being” and in empirical knowledge rather than a priori principles. He was not the first to discuss social change and the nature of history – Vico and Hegel had done it before him. However, he established more convincing arguments that man’s economic condition cannot be separated from his ideological and cultural traits. Even conservatives who express no admiration for Marx often exhibit Marxist influence when they recognize the link between culture and methods of production.

Marx’s stature as a great and pivotal philosopher does not justify quasi-religious acceptance of his views or dogma. Just as we can be Platonists or Aristotelians without turning their works into scripture, reliance on Marx does not require that it turn out that he was correct in every word he wrote. Indeed, it would be highly improbable that, two hundred years later, the details of his observations remain applicable to details of economic and social problems.

Yet Marx still speaks to us. One important aspect of Marx’s writing was his theory of history and the relationship between economic and class structures on the one hand, and the progress of history and the evolution of culture on the other. Another feature which has not aged is the call for liberation from economic necessity, effectively a plea in favour of free will. Marx is thus a liberator from necessity and determinism. This whiff of Rousseau gives the lie to those who think that he does not believe in justice or freedom. In recent years, so many writers have espoused scientific determinism and Darwinism as social philosophy. It is ironic that Marx – an early champion of Darwinism – can be the antidote to this bleak vision of humanity.

After the triumph of neo-liberalism in 1980, Marx fell out of fashion. Those who cited him were called out-dated dinosaurs and some probably saw them as dangerous radicals. This is another example of the convergence of the stultified Soviet Marxism and of the ascendant neo-liberalism. Both saw in Marx nothing but a recipe for the failed socialist experiment. The possibility of applying Marx for a second and more humanistic social transformation did not occur to either group. Yet Marx is making a come-back and increasing numbers of thinkers, wearying of the mantras of neo-liberalism are beginning to appreciate the “liberation” side of Marx. In February 2013’s edition of *le Monde Diplomatique*, Antony Burlaud, in his article *Marx et le XXI siècle*, discusses the new and numerous discussions about Marx and his work in modern France. In the United States, Terry Eagleton has published a book entitled “Why Marx was Right”. There is much more every year. The period of Marx’s eclipse is clearly

ending.

There is, of course, nothing surprising about Marx's temporary eclipse in the 1980s and about the beginnings of a renewal. All great philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, were at times more important and at times less important in current intellectual thought. That Marx should be subjected to the same ups and downs is a salutary sign that he is no longer being treated as a gospel or as a subversive and is simply taking his very important place in the history of human thought.

Marx was somewhat different from many of his philosophical predecessors because he acted also as a political organizer and revolutionary. Today's renewal will surely concentrate more on Marx as a thinker than on his particularly 19<sup>th</sup> century political activism. However, Marx's activism cannot simply be written off because it demonstrates his conviction that political ideals and actions were inseparable and that political ideas have a place in the "real" world.

Of course, Marx is not the sole philosopher whose works can help us justify change. Marx sought to change the world but many philosophers before him did the same. Plato went into politics and emerged a sadder, wiser man. Cicero, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius were examples of the attempted political application of stoicism. Attempts were made to apply Confucius and other philosophies in China. The philosophical base of the Reformation and counter-Reformation are not difficult to see.

Today, when the avid and deterministic doctrines of neo-liberalism are being challenged, the philosophical basis of a return to humanism can be found in the New Testament, in much progressive theology, in Tolstoy, in existentialism, in Kant, in Hume and Mill.

We need a basis on which one can embrace free will and divorce socialism or social-democracy from science, without discarding science or technology or embracing obscurantism - a great fear of McGill philosopher Mario Bunge.

The divorce between socialism and science would at the same time add credibility to socialism and buttress science from dogmatic assaults, such as that launched by Stalin on genetics when scientists contradicted his theory of the perfectibility of man. Science knows no ideology and is not restricted by political requirements. Its success since the 16<sup>th</sup> century has had as its basis not in asking certain types of questions about the purposes of things and not promoting moral fervour, but only dispassionate verification. Whenever science acquires an ideology, it endangers its future effectiveness.

Inappropriate though moral fervour may be for science, it is absolutely essential for political thought and especially for practical politics. The general level of corruption, cynicism, and lack of interest in most western countries is a direct result of the lack of moral fervour and of the spirit of disinterested service. It is therefore unnecessary, indeed counter-productive, to seek scientific proof of political theories. Instead, political theories must appear as right and as good, and they must provide a convincing answer to a culture in which any appeal to morality is viewed as either naïve, ultra-conservative or as misguided. The importance of moral fervour is part of the new romanticism which has already been discussed as a necessary element to take human relations outside commerce. In fact, the claim to scientific status is what allowed Soviet Marxism and Hitler's crackpot racial theory to acquire the status of established dogma and then to cause so much harm.

Of course, a modern political theory, based on a notion of moral good, must appreciate the role of science and its contribution to human welfare. Views which refuse to acknowledge scientific data because they contradict scriptures or because they contradict political dogmas promote ignorance and superstition. Science is an essential part of our world and of learning.

Moreover, science, despite its striving for objectivity, is also influenced by social and ethical beliefs. This is particularly true in psychology and is always true in sociology, anthropology and economics, to the extent to which we concede scientific or quasi-scientific status to them.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, supposedly scientific studies tended to show less intellectual acuity in women

than men, at least in logic and math. Such views persisted until recently when, suddenly, no difference was found.

Proof of the superior or inferior intelligence of certain groups, including blacks, Asians, and Jews, exists or not in accordance with the perception of the group by a given society. Whenever such beliefs are prevalent for a while, they are inevitably exposed as utterly wrong.

The nature of homosexuality as an illness, perversion or as an equal, alternative sexual orientation also depends in large part on social perception. It is not surprising that psychiatry textbooks have removed homosexuality from the list of diseases in the past 40 years, when homosexual rights have been accepted as morally necessary. However, the presence of ideology in science does not discredit scientific methods or endeavours, nor does it take away from the extraordinary achievements of science since the Renaissance.

The ideological influence on scientific beliefs has been a feature of many regimes. The novel doctrines of Galileo and Harvey were opposed not only by the Church, but also by traditional scientists who were unwilling to part with their life-long beliefs. Evolution had a similar “rough ride” in conservative circles and is continuing to be questioned in increasingly inept, ideological arguments.

The Stalinist attack on genetics and the Soviet refusal to accept modern psychiatry were excellent examples of the unscientific positions taken by many scientists. Lysenko, a geneticist, based himself on a misinterpretation of social studies by Pavlov and Michurin in an attempt to prove the infinite malleability and perfectibility of man. All of this was ultimately proved to be nonsense, but for more than a decade, the Eastern Bloc parted company with the scientific world under Lysenko’s influence and with Stalin’s blessing. At the same time, and for similar reasons, Freud and most modern psychiatrists were excluded from the Soviet Union and, in addition, Stalin approved a peculiar and mostly indefensible theory of linguistics. The claim that Soviet socialism had scientific status helped establish these false theories. Today some research does point either to transmission of certain acquired traits, or to very quick evolution, but this has nothing to do with the political repression of science during the Lysenko episode.

In the United States, during our times, a new peculiar species of Republican science is emerging. Evolution is only one of the many competing theories and is not to be taught in school. Global warming is not happening or is not influenced by man. Women who are victims of “legitimate” rape cannot conceive. Jews, after centuries of vilification as inferior beings, are, it turns out, more intelligent than others, and this is proved by counting Nobel Prize winners. Ideology and science are not, it seems, very far from each other.

There is, of course, no danger that any of these theories will be ultimately accepted, although some of the currently held scientific knowledge will also be modified by further studies. However, it is probably wise to eschew a belief in the total objectivity of the science of any period, or of the politics or economics that are accepted by most.

It is to be noted that the problems would remain even if today’s left were in power. For instance, modern feminism is often absolutely closed to any notion of an inherent difference between men and women, even if studies seem to point in that direction. Other politically incorrect scientific discoveries would also not be readily accepted if they disturbed people’s complacency. What is clear is that certain aspects of the scientific method such as quantification, statistical analysis, and verification of hypotheses are very useful in the social “sciences” and in political theory. They should continue to be used, even though we should probably avoid granting the status of “science” to these disciplines. Economics in particular uses scientific methodology without becoming fully scientific. Certainly, the decline of the reputation of Keynes and the rise in the stature of Milton Friedman were more ideological than scientific.



The call to moral fervour is not a cry of the heart, opposed to study and analysis of data and wishing to ground a new socialism in faith alone. Rather, it is a call to caution and a certain scepticism with respect to social, psychological and economic theories and with respect to statistics. The importance both of the theories and of statistics cannot be denied. The dangers they present are numerous and significant unless tempered by moral fervour, by idealism and by a considerable degree of doubt and scepticism.

Promoting moral fervour is also a declaration of war on moral relativism, the idea summarized by Hamlet that “there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (Act 2, scene 2, 239 – 251). In its haste to admire other cultures, social science and certain liberal politicians have attempted to banish evaluation and indeed all moral terms from their disciplines. Resurrecting concepts like good, evil, virtue, honour and compassion is a precondition to the adoption of a political theory with moral fervour. It does not mean the acceptance of intolerance or superstition but rather, the abandonment of a false and pernicious neutrality on moral questions.

Thus, the withdrawal of the claim to scientific status is not at all an endorsement of the total subjectivism of the deconstructionism of Foucault or of Derrida or of the irrational streak permeating modern philosophy since the days of Kierkegaard, through Heidegger and existentialism. If science is largely a combination of empiricism and mathematical reasoning with some, but very limited scope for intuition, the new moral socialism should be somewhat more open to intuition. It would nevertheless remain both rational and sensitive to empirical data. Without claiming that it can be totally proved or disproved, it would nevertheless remain sceptical of purely subjective speculation and of all attempts to show that anything can mean whatever we desire it to mean. A stress on relatively objective ethical norms is incompatible with the fashionable philosophy of total relativism. As we have seen, McGill University’s celebrated philosopher Mario Bunge warned of the dangers of “obscurantism” and, despite the role reserved for intuition, this danger must be heeded.

In recent years, anti-scientific dogmatism has not been the sole province of Stalinists, Nazis or the anti-evolution religious dogmatists in the U.S. The attempt to take science beyond what it can teach us by the “neo-evolutionists”, such as Dawkins and Hawkins, who believe that atheism can be demonstrated to be true, are also unscientific and ultimately based on subjective belief.

In fact, both those who attempted to prove the existence of God, such as St. Anselm and Descartes and those now trying to disprove it are bound to fail. One can rail against organized religion with much justification, but God remains always a possible but unproven hypothesis which each person has to consider individually.

Science has succeeded by limiting itself to observation, computation and, to a large extent, eliminating existential or ethical questions from its scope. One cannot help concluding that scientific methods can help us clarify political and ethical questions, but that the results of any political or ethical analysis cannot be “scientific” in the way in which evolution or relativity can be.

## **XXII. WHY NOT “REAL” SOCIALISM?**

Some, more radical, voices sometimes ask why “full” socialism, with widespread public ownership is not the solution. A number of reasons militate against the imposition of that kind of socialism.

Firstly, public ownership is no longer necessary to finance social programmes. Taxes and joint ventures with the private sector are even more efficient and spare the society some of the bureaucracy that almost inevitably accompanies public ownership.

Secondly, the tax system and regulation can also effectively prevent income inequality and the creation of impenetrable class barriers. Inequality would indeed be a sufficient reason to extend public ownership if the other methods failed, but experience of social-democratic societies is to the effect that

the gap between rich and poor decreases if the society functions properly, without the need for total socialism.

Thirdly, there does indeed exist a danger of abuse of power if a single employer or supplier services an entire society. There are ways of attenuating this issue such as through decentralization, independent co-operatives, federalism, and judicial review. However, humanity has demonstrated a disturbing tendency to tolerate abuse of power and restrictions on liberty. The fears of people like Hayek and Schumpeter that socialism would lead to loss of freedom were probably much exaggerated but it is not wise to discredit them altogether or to assume that all would be well.

Fourthly, socialism has not proved efficient for all purposes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If those who see the state as necessarily less efficient than the private sector are wrong and one-sided, those who think that there is no disadvantage to petty planning in all areas of the economy are equally wrong-headed. It is likely that technology could make planning easier and more effective, as the Polish Marxist economist Oskar Lange thought. Nevertheless, in providing consumer goods and non-essential services, complete socialism is likely to lag behind private endeavours in terms of efficiency. It has done so whenever tried, and its relaxation has normally improved the lives of citizens, at least with regard to the supply of consumer goods. At the same time, the privatization of social goods and services such as health and education has normally hurt the average man and the state has appeared more apt to provide these services.

It is therefore a matter of common sense to reject a totally planned economy and to decline to erect a gigantic bureaucracy when no clear advantage can be demonstrated and when several serious defects have emerged whenever this was tried in the past. A significant but limited public sector is essential to any system; total socialism would only make it less effective. This may change one day, but almost certainly not in our times. Therefore, complete socialism can serve a useful purpose as a theoretical idea, but not as a political programme.

### **XXIII. HOW IS A NEW SYSTEM TO BE CREATED?**

Global capitalism is clearly immoral and it threatens both freedom of thought and long-term survival of humanity. Yet it possesses innumerable weapons which permit it to survive; this includes money to fund its advocates and to bribe its adversaries, control of technology to brainwash much of the population, to detect potential enemies and to isolate those who cannot be neutralized and the ability to manipulate the economy so as to punish and brand as “rogue” or “terrorist” any state which attempts to buck the system. Global capitalism can also exploit particular loyalties to nations, genders, ethnic groups and religions in order to break the solidarity of its opponents. Finally, capitalism’s response to perceived threats such as communism and Islamism, which had no serious chance of supplanting it, leaves no doubt that, if the regime were truly in peril, the degree of repression would make, say, East Germany, look like a picnic. This is now obvious from the knowledge about individuals which can be gathered from all of our computers credit card purchases and all telephone conversations. There has probably never existed a system with greater capacity for control and repression than global capitalism. Its aggressiveness and self-righteousness make the use of these tools inevitable in a crisis.

It is quite obvious that today’s capitalism would not accept a massive and decisive electoral victory for the left. We have seen repeated Mexican vote frauds, CIA sponsored coups and even “popular”, but clearly arranged uprisings, for instance in the Ukraine and in Georgia, to believe that a sudden defeat at the polls would end neo-liberalism. In Greece in 2011, European presence prevented a vote on drastic austerity measures that, in a real democracy, would surely require popular approval. In Italy as well, the austerity measures were imposed. In short, if the two conflict, capitalism prevails over democracy. In the old days, a colonel would have been placed in charge of both countries. Now, an

“economist” would be named. Plus ça change...

Yet well-entrenched systems do fall, as the communists and advocates of apartheid have learned in recent years. There comes a time when the decline inevitably turns into collapse, when the regime’s hard-liners and moderate defenders part ways, and when the truths which were almost unmentionable a few years earlier become evident to everyone. These things can happen almost suddenly, within a few months or years.

As the examples of past transformations show, those who deny the possibility of peaceful transformation and who urge total and immediate struggle and revolution are simply wrong and are often indifferent to the moral consequences of their policies and to the human suffering it would inflict.

For instance, advocates of an attack on the Soviet Union before it developed the atomic bomb were hot-heads who would have sacrificed millions of people to overthrow Stalinism, when Stalinism fell anyway only a few years later. Another instructive example is the first Palestinian intifada, fought with stones and bottles, not with bombs, which achieved more for the recognition of Palestine than the earlier or subsequent bloody wars or than terrorism. Moderate measures often achieve more than dogmatic or vehement ones.

Moreover, those who advocate revolution should remember how persistent the violence always turned out to be, once used. In Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Prospero breaks his magic wand as soon as he has achieved his just purposes. In real life, Robespierre, Stalin, the current Iranian regime, who were the inheritors of revolution, never wanted to break the wand and always used it for their own and not the society’s purposes, and usually in a frightening, ruthless manner. Revolution unleashes cruelty and that is a genie very difficult to put back in the bottle once he has established himself.

It is, of course, impossible to eliminate a priori all use of force as a means of effecting change. Nelson Mandela spent many years in prison, in part, because he refused to eschew violence in all circumstances. Even in these times, so sensitive to any suggestion of terrorism, he is generally held to be a hero. There are situations of such extreme oppression, that resistance becomes an attractive solution. Nazi Germany is the quintessential example of this, but we must also remember how completely exceptional Nazi Germany was. Resistance does not always mean bombs and bullets. Civil disobedience, use of non-lethal force like that used during the First Intifada or boycotts can all be legitimate at certain times. However, force always attracts the wrong people and always presents great risks. It cannot become an everyday tool for reform, only an occasional and very rare solution when the alternative is too horrible to contemplate.

Hence, despite the occasional exceptions which are so special and unusual as to be quite evident when they occur, force is to be avoided. In fact, most attempts at revolution produce the opposite result from the one intended by the original, naïve revolutionaries. It can, for instance be argued forcefully that the revival and success of global capitalism was spurred by the student revolt of 1968, although the revolt was clearly not the only cause of the rebirth of capitalism. The most devastating criticism of revolutionary fervour and naïveté is found in Flaubert’s *L’Education sentimentale* where we see that the 1848 revolution produced no beneficial results at all, but instead produced the very conservative Second Empire. This analysis was continued by Zola in *Le Débauché* where he showed that, despite the moral bankruptcy of the Second Empire, the uprising of 1871 was a terrible error, both morally and tactically. Flaubert did not believe in the possibility of transforming human society while Zola did. However, they both agreed on the futility of most violent upheavals.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the type of mild civil disobedience that helped end the Vietnam War, racial segregation in the U.S. and communism in Poland and other countries and which was the principal tool of the 1968 student and worker uprisings would be branded as “terrorism”. Certainly, in this conformist, conservative epoch, the definition of terrorism in most anti-terrorist legislation is broad

enough to encompass all of these activities, as well as the tactics of Gandhi, Mandela, the Boston Tea Party and virtually any overt act of disobedience. The heartless U.S. system of criminal justice and the other western systems which are moving in the same direction, would undoubtedly hand out sentences which would break the back of any movement daring to dream of revolt. There is little use for individual conscience or resistance in our times, and the notion of democracy, far from effecting liberation, is used to justify crushing dissent.

For all of these reasons, it is therefore clear that, without excluding the *very rare* justified use of force and the more acceptable and more frequent but also increasingly risky resort to civil disobedience, the change of regime would have to be effected almost entirely through peaceful and lawful means.

Many anti-globalization activists have given up on electoral politics. They point out correctly, that once elected, opponents of present-day capitalism are often co-opted by it and by the pressure of winning a re-election and, in any case, they cannot change much when in power. True though this might be, it is not a rational justification for abstention from political action or from participation.

The election of social-democrats, even when the whole system cannot be changed during their term of office, can have many welcome results – the slowing down of privatization of the dismantling of social services, the ability of the left to influence the structure and curriculum of schools, the nomination of progressive judges, the softening of the criminal law, and the strengthening of environmental protection.

Those who react angrily against President Obama because he has not transformed the world in four years, are displaying the type of “all or nothing” mentality which has contributed to the eclipse of the left in most western countries. A single election in any country, even the U.S., cannot cure the failures of the last decades and the inadequacies of a system; it remains, however, infinitely better to run and participate in the public discussion than to walk out in a righteous huff, leaving the field open for various types of conservatives or opportunists to dominate. In fact, the debacle of the Democrats in the mid-term election in 2010 can in part be blamed on those who failed to support the President because of his moderation. Had the president failed to win a second term, the misguided leftist “purists” would have learned a hard lesson. This does not mean that Obama should not be criticized when he deserves it, for instance with respect to securing the use of drones and the maintaining of Guantanamo. However, describing him as equivalent to Bush is both unfair and silly.

Certainly the limits of electoral politics are clear and the chances of ultimate success in transforming society through elections are uncertain. A number of factors indicate how unlikely the system is to change drastically unless the entire mentality of the electorate undergoes radical transformation.

Firstly, politics is increasingly expensive, it becomes more and more a part of show business and the right always have an overwhelming advantage in collecting funds. Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down limits on election expenses, but even without that judgment, the right-wing think-tanks and the business lobby will always have more funds than anyone else. Moreover, because of the lobbies, they will have more funds even if spending limits are enforced for campaigns.

The situation is exacerbated by the gradual, but constant decline of trade unions and the subtle corporate take-over of the universities. It is clearly unlikely that the money imbalance will be reversed in the near future and therefore, the right’s relative advantage will continue and indeed will grow, although in some countries, notably in the U.S., it may be diminished by demographic change in the population.

It is demonstrated that well-rehearsed, well-financed campaigns work, especially when rooted in fear. In recent years, the right has been able to reverse any major left-wing spike in the polls, as long as it has enough time to frighten the voters. The example of British Columbia in 2013 is striking. It is only when a left lead is created suddenly during a campaign, as in France in 1997, in Ontario in 1990, or in

Spain after the terrorist bombings, that existing campaign techniques are not sufficiently subtle to reverse it in time. If a way were found to counter sudden electoral changes in mood very quickly, the right's stranglehold would become almost total.

However, to blame all of the left's defeats on financial inequality is altogether too simple and too comforting. There are other structural reasons, ones very difficult to change.

One structural problem is that the conservatives need not build or construct anything to create capitalism. Once they legislate rules of contract, exchange and security, capitalism exists in its purest form. Even dyed-in-the-wool conservatives rarely accept this form integrally and they do legislate certain other rules to make society more just. However, they do not need to create a capitalist system. It is there and they simply abstain from what they consider excessive regulation or redistribution. In our times, the conservative forces, coming back to power after years of social legislation, sometimes adopted by their nominally conservative predecessors, have to proceed gradually in the achievement of their goal of dismantling the social system and they have to provide for a slow transition, without which they would likely face a surge of anger at the polls. However, dismantling is not as difficult as the construction of new programmes.

The left, on the other hand, has the herculean task of building systems and finding the funds. This involves a compromise between the more radical elements in the left with the progressive centre. It means working out agreements on details on which specialists will differ, often very emotionally. It is infinitely harder for a left of centre government to carry out its promises and avoid, on the one hand charges of cowardice and, on the other, the perception that they are marginal radicals. The chances of electoral defeat after a single term are very high and are augmented by the high expectations the left creates at the moment of victory.

That, however, is still not the most dispiriting obstacle to the creation of a better society. There are certain additional sad truths which so many prefer to ignore, because they bring into direct conflict their social beliefs with their democratic instincts.

Before the 1960s the psychological techniques of directing voters were not well-known. Indeed, polling was in its infancy, was very inaccurate and, unlike today, election results were frequently surprises. However, even in those days, it was clear that right-wing programmes often succeeded better than left-wing ones, especially with frustrated and angry electorates. For instance, Nazism, a quack, anti-scientific racial theory had more genuine success than communism, with its subtle theory of history and more than socialism, despite the decency and the moderation of Germany's socialist party. There occurred, of course, important left-wing victories from time to time, such as in Britain in 1945 with a triumphant, perhaps euphoric electorate, in the wake of total victory and, more surprisingly, in France and Spain in 1936, at the height of Europe's economic and social crisis. Yet there is no doubt that the majority is, on the whole, more sensitive to populist, hard-fisted, conformist proposals than to ones rooted in individual non-conformism or social justice. Recent far-right and centre-right successes in Europe and the rise of the far right in America are poignant reminders of this.

In *The Righteous Mind*, Jonathan Haidt describes the conservative natural advantage. People have a stronger sense of ethnic and group loyalty, a greater drive to conform than a thirst for liberty or a liking for people very different from themselves. Although these preferences might at times be overcome to produce a swing to the left, the average result will be fairly conservative, even before we take into account the inequality of means between left and right.

There may be many reasons for this. One, put forward by Haidt, is a non-judgmental one. How can we be sure the conservatives are wrong and their attitudes unjustifiable? He, certainly, sees a certain attraction in them despite his liberal youth.

Of course there may be some advantages to group loyalty, to respect for law and for convention

which Haidt considers the principal conservative trait. Indeed, it could be said that the very cultural traits which made Germans so dangerous in the hands of Hitler are the same ones which explain their economic efficiency and their technological and scientific success.

However, moral relativism and support for one's group or nation, right or wrong, are not attractive positions and once we embark on an economic or political expedition with no moral compass, everything is permitted. Ethnocentrism, particularism, strong loyalty to authority or to religious bodies, and mechanical obedience to law are mostly negative traits which almost always have tragic consequences.

One could also try to explain the conservative advantage through different forms of socio-biology. In the days of hunting and gathering, when human personality evolved, there was limited food supply and other groups were viewed as enemies, useful only to supply some women through capture in order to prevent inbreeding. Loyalty, obedience to selfish group-interest, and lack of interest in the "others" were advantageous traits.

The existence of a minority which is naturally progressive can also be explained in this way. In those very hard, cruel times, it was useful to the group to have a few members more open to the "others" when negotiation became essential, for instance when a strange third group appeared in the area. Therefore, an "open" minority and a larger "majority" would have been the optimal mix.

Socio-biology is always fascinating and never quite convincing. It would take much more evidence than that which has been presented to make such an explanation entirely plausible. There is some truth and some common sense to it, but does not serve as a reasonable or comprehensive explanation of voting tendencies in the modern world.

Rather, the conservative advantage is the result of many causes and it can be, to a large extent countered with a solid classical education. The tendency towards group loyalty and slavish obedience to law and rules will always be there and will pose a danger in every regime. How many Russians, nostalgic for the security they lost when the USSR fell, fixate on Stalin, the regime's most authoritarian symbol, rather than on Lenin or on the social programmes? Clearly, law and order, good in small doses, have an attraction far beyond their utility and lead to unpalatable opinions becoming popular and to the weakening of the influence and independence of the individual. But the battle is not lost from the start.

Some will suggest that, if the majority naturally leans towards the right, the dictum "vox populi vox dei" should be applied and the left should reconcile itself to opposition most of the time. But that position leads us to uncomfortable conclusions, for instance that, in 1933, Hitler was right and the left was wrong because he won an election. An equation between majority opinion and just results simply cannot be made. It is possible to interpret Rousseau as suggesting the latter. However, if we view him that way, we have simply put our finger on a weakness in his philosophy. Most likely, even Rousseau's relative optimism did not go so far as to state that majority opinion was by definition morally right. Rousseau did criticize naïve writers who believed that majority rule produced ever-lasting virtue and he was aware of the nasty aspects of human personality, as his *Confessions* illustrate. Even if electorates do tend to the right, opposition to right-wing programmes must continue.

We are constantly reminded of the electorate's lack of generosity. While a wave of sympathy can be sparked by an earthquake or a tsunami, foreign aid is never a popular subject during a campaign, however pressing the need. Nor is the admission of refugees from countries where they are persecuted or an amnesty for illegal immigrants. People simply do not want to give away money or share their resources.

For instance, when he was trying to save his medical reforms, President Obama was forced to promise that no illegal aliens would ever benefit, however great their contribution to the economy and however unjust the idea of denying health care to a neighbour might be. Opinion polls show similar

reluctance to educate even American-born children of illegals. Once again, meanness prevails both over any sense of “justice” and over all logic.

Welfare cheating, Medicare frauds and other similar and usually minor transgressions make people more angry than much larger corporate misdeeds, mostly because the “little man” sees himself in the same position and is upset that someone else got an advantage. The same thinking explains the mass electoral approval of harsh criminal laws, until, of course, the voter or his family is directly affected, which is when he realizes the injustice.

The average man is often ready for draconian treatment of those he perceives as slightly above him – his professional, his immediate supervisor – but is far more tolerant of those far above. For instance, in the Soviet system, citizens hated local Party functionaries and applauded their fall, but the myth of Stalin’s goodness was widely believed for decades, and in fact, subsists to this day, despite the overwhelming evidence that he was a paranoid killer and that the instructions for terror came from him and his clique at the top.

One particular worrisome tendency is for the forces of conservatism and meanness to win in hard times. The false perception that conservatives somehow know how to manage an economy and a distinctly ungenerous anger lead electorates under pressure to vote against social justice, even when that hurts the majority. This phenomenon was evident in the 1930s and it has caught up with us again, as the victories of the right in most elections in 2010 and 2011 illustrate. For instance, majorities have bought the facile but clearly incorrect dogma stating that countries must, at all costs, balance their budget. Most of all, voters have proved amenable to arguments based on fear of financial melt-down. They have, however, proved rather impervious to fear of environmental disaster and to loss of labour security. However, one must keep in mind certain exceptions – France, and South America, for instance. There is a tendency to vote for the right in hard times, but it is not inevitable and there are jurisdictions which do not always act in accordance with these principles. Even the United States did not vote for the right in the 1930s or in the recent times of economic difficulty. President Obama’s re-election is proof that even conservative electorates can be persuaded and turned around.

All of this explains voting patterns in a way very different and less sanguine from those who believe all would be well if only campaign funds were equally distributed. In fact, only a part of the left’s problems would be solved by equal funding of left and right. The potential for meanness, tight-fistedness and indeed fascism would remain intact, although it would not always decide the result of elections. After all, racism and hate survived forty-five years of very decent socialism in Yugoslavia. Further, Nordic countries with their legendary social systems are nevertheless prey to far right movements. One could heap example upon example.

This tendency to be right-wing sometimes seems very difficult to understand for those of different views. Why would a middle class voter vote for a tiny tax cut and a corresponding dilapidation of Medicare, when all studies show that, in the long run, he is better off and lives longer with Medicare?

If we view Medicare as largely a re-distribution – from the rich to the poor, from the healthy to the ill – we see that from the point of view of a healthy, relatively young person, a tax cut may seem more attractive, even if in the long run it is in his interest to maintain Medicare. He will be better off in the *immediate* future. Just as businesses under capitalism make their decisions egoistically and in the short run, so do individuals. Such a decision is relatively painless because the privatization of Medicare occurs over decades, without an immediate jolt or total loss of services. Since Medicare is redistribution from the majority who are healthy to a minority which is not, it may appear less valuable than a tax cut to most or at least to that large slice of the electorate who feel young and healthy and therefore vote for an immediate advantage to themselves. This applies to education, welfare and indeed to most social programmes.

There is another structural impediment to left-wing forces, moderate or radical, to win elections in western countries. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there were large concentrations of workers, which were relatively easy to organize and to lead in elections. Today, people tend to work alone or in small groups, usually in front of a screen. Those unions still powerful in the public sector are not popular because they are perceived with some justification as privileged and willing to sacrifice the public for the parochial interest. Thus, the forms of labour and production no longer favour tilting to the left.

To this must be added many irrational aspects of voting decisions – this includes the desire to vote for the winner, the preoccupation with charisma of candidates as determined by the media, or with their sex appeal, with nebulous concepts of “leadership”, with family and class voting traditions, and with questions such as abortion or support for Israel or Palestinians which trump all other issues in the mind of some voters. This is an illustration of a certain irrationalism in the making of all decisions – economic, political and personal.

Finally, we have to come to terms with sheer indifference. Many feel their vote changes nothing, and that is one reason for indifference; there is, however, another explanation. The vast majority of citizens spend their time looking for ways to advance their own personal interests and of amusing themselves, and electoral politics offers little attraction or personal gain to anyone other than the participants. Therefore, they do not bother with it very much and accept without thinking about the majority views of their times. Dissent, after all, requires a bigger investment of time in order to think about the issues.

Education is surely the answer to much of this, yet one must not be naïve about this either. Many areas which have the most abysmal voting records such as pre-war Germany, Alberta and Texas are in fact highly educated and, in the case of Germany, often humanistically educated. The same can be said of modern-day Italy which seems to find the antics of Berlusconi acceptable and of Israel whose electorate has turned from at least formal and at times an idealistic social-democracy to ultra-nationalistic and right-wing in one generation. Most studies today show that conservatism has a hold on some of the more educated, younger North Americans. Unlike in the 1960s when student hotheads turned to idealistic socialism, zealous campus groups are now frequently conservative. A part of this situation can be remedied through more humanistic education and through ardent campaigning, but it is also due to the strength of egotism and conformism in the make-up of the human being. Education is so important that the following section will be entirely devoted to it.

It has been pointed out by writers such as Steven Pinker and Jonathan Haidt that political views are in part based on our genetic make-up, not in the sense that we might be programmed to vote for a particular party, but that we may have a conservative or a radical pre-disposition. For instance, studies of separated identical twins show considerable similarity in their political positions. This could explain the presence of a “conservative” and “mean” predisposition in most populations. We do not have to accept this as “right” any more than we have to accept as “good” other genetic pre-dispositions, for instance towards diseases. However, a naïve belief that social democrats would win every time if the political situation were fairly presented in the media and if political financing were fair, is both presumptuous and incorrect.

This less than idealistic view of the voter could be seen as nothing more than an application of the writings of Machiavelli and Hobbes to modern politics. The fundamental selfishness, the strength of envy as an emotion, the power of emotion over reason and hence the level of short-term gains have been pointed out by many of the greatest figures of political theory – Hobbes and Hume for instance. However, it is as much an exaggeration to think that there is an immutable and predatory human nature as to believe that man is well-disposed and can be perfected by rational argument. Machiavelli’s “truth” is as partial and incomplete as Rousseau’s opposite one and even if one added to the equation the



findings of modern psychology and the cautionary experience with attempts to improve the world, both successful and unsuccessful, one can only suggest prudence and scepticism about a general assessment of man. Continued effort to improve society are in order and pandering to the lowest instincts is not; we should, however, have modest expectation and mitigated beliefs. Everything is not possible but despair and despondency make things worse.

Since revolution is neither practical nor desirable and since the present voting system will lead to a few victories for the left but many more disappointments, education and missionary activities remain the privileged tools to help effect change.

However much many fear ridicule or deleterious effects on our careers, they should preach, write, agitate, and explain. For instance, the healthy young family man who wants a tax cut to help him buy a house, must be shown vividly the ruin that almost inevitably awaits him if Medicare becomes largely privatized, and the terrible services he will receive if it becomes half-private and half-public. The courage to speak in both the private and in the public is the first essential quality for those who want claims.

#### **XXIV. EDUCATION**

Education, even more than individual courage, is an essential component of major change. But education immediately presents us with a paradox. One might hope that it will produce a shift in opinion, but any attempt to manipulate it for political purposes is likely to make things worse.

Teachers, at all levels, have an obligation not to turn their courses into propaganda, to be sure, but also, to reject pseudo-objectivity and make certain that their students know where they stand. This applies to teachers of all political and religious views although we hope that less false objectivity will undoubtedly help foster a climate of debate and frankness which will at least get the left's message across. At the same time, the education system must provide a forum for all thought, even that which one might find distasteful and offensive.

Education also means combating secondary identities, in particular, ethnic, natural or gender ones and promoting a universal solidarity. But, this too is very tricky, as it cannot be done through disrespect or obligatory assimilation. It necessarily means defending classical culture and the literary classics. In fact, fighting against identity politics is one area where the left may have an edge in winning over the majority. Most people do not like multiculturalism, at least not for groups other than their own. A greater stress on solidarity and voluntary assimilation would probably win votes. Quebec, with its special problems brought about by a relatively insecure majority, is an excellent illustration of the natural distrust of multicultural solutions imposed by the rest of Canada.

The stress on classical culture is not only to combat false identity. It is also because the classics in all areas such as literature, music, art, and philosophy are effective instruments for stimulating serious thought and also for inspiring a profound and often instructive understanding of life and the world. The classical education may have an ideological side, but it is desirable even without any political program.

The "new left" of the 1960s and 1970s has much to answer for. Together with the right, it systematically destroyed the excellent education system which had served the elite instead of extending it to the newly emancipated classes which benefited from social-democracy.

Not only was the curriculum diluted to make it easier, but it was modified to suit the political correctness of the moment and current notions were assumed to be both absolutely right and permanent. The desire to teach the works of women writers, black writers, native writers, even if inferior, to popularize the music taught so as to make it "relevant", to remove works such as "The Merchant of Venice" or "Oliver Twist" from the curriculum if there was any suspicion of "inappropriate" views and in particular, anti-Semitism, meant that the classics ceased to be important.

What mattered was the propagation of fashionable ideas. In some ways, this was similar to Soviet socialist realism where “correct opinion” prevailed over quality.

To this was added the commercialization of education promoted by the right. The importance for the right, often supported by parents, anxious about their children’s future, was to prepare the young for the employment market. Thus Mrs. Thatcher’s England closed departments of fine arts and other humanities and favoured corporate involvement in education in order to provide a work-force for the corporations. Moreover, the right joined certain feminist movements in promoting sexual puritanism, wanting to protect children from exposure to undesirable sexual material, to sex education, even as sex was being peddled in the media and in certain types of businesses. This too, meant a departure from the principles of truth and frankness in favour of current views of political correctness of both left and right. The content of all education was diluted and made more “practical”. This trend has continued during the entire neo-liberal period.

The significance of education in changing the system must therefore not be confused with the use of education as a political instrument for promoting causes. Rather, education should stress humanistic culture which teaches students to think for themselves. The classics must return to the forefront, and art and music education resumed. To understand the world since 1900, serious cinema should also be taught from the beginning of high school, because in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cinema became one of the crucial forms of social analysis and criticism. This means teaching, without hesitation or reserve, very conservative works, such as those of Dostoevsky and Céline. As many, even Trotsky and Lukacs, have pointed out, great works stimulate independent thought which transcends one own author’s political ideas and often lead the reader to the opposite conclusion. But even if this were not so, the great books with a conservative bias should be taught without hesitation.

It is important that the school system remain public, free and accessible to everyone from pre-school to university. Corporations and advertising must be denied special status in the system. It may be considered contradictory to imagine a seemingly conservative, humanistic content and to want to teach it to everyone who can learn it, but that is precisely the challenge. No institutions create class barriers more readily than private schools and false identities more easily than minority schools. The popularization of education was a major gain of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now we have to reverse the dilution of the content while keeping the doors open to all.

On the issue of a classical education another nuance must be made. The explosion of scientific and technological knowledge in the last century means we cannot keep the entire classical curriculum, such as Latin and Greek, because room must be made for the new knowledge and for such things as cinema. There is a limited amount of time for lectures or for studying and students must be given significant leisure time to digest the knowledge and to develop themselves. It is therefore a new, adapted classical course that is needed with considerable stress on science and technology and not the same one which was gradually abandoned in the past decades.

## **XXV. DISOBEDIENCE AND WITHDRAWAL**

Important though all of the activities to promote education and advocacy might be, it may not be enough. Each of us must win his or her own internal freedom from consumerism, from peer pressure, from the commercial rat race which surrounds us. Personal dissent and the creation of parts of civil society free from economic constraints is both possible and necessary. The works of Tolstoy or Thoreau can show us how, without constant illegality or a total rejection of society, we can create a space for our own freedom and lucidity, for true romance, for kindness and goodness. Shakespeare, too, by portraying the exiles in *As You Like It* living a frugal, but free life in the forest of Arden showed that personal secession may, in many circumstances, be right and ultimately bring about change and a restoration of

decency.

It is possible to use certain institutions for these purposes. For instance, we could either reclaim universities from the corporations which are coming to dominate them or form new institutions of knowledge. Literary, cultural and artistic circles already exist and political clubs, similar to those which were formed at the beginning of the French Revolution and similar to those which are active on the right, could be created. Even if a quick end to global capitalism is not likely, many can be encouraged to live outside its immoral sphere and to assert their own freedom. This can take the form of partial secession from society, but it can also contain elements of what Dimitrios Roussopoulos and C. George Benello called “participatory democracy” in a book of the same name, working for better public transport, local facilities and schools. Strangely, as conservative a writer as Joshua Ramo, came to rather similar conclusions in *The Age of the Unthinkable*. He called for “empowerment” of workers and for decentralization as a way of developing the resilience needed for a globalized society of which he mostly approved.

Mild civil disobedience is often necessary despite the growing brutality of the state and its potential reaction and the serious consequences to individuals convicted of a minor offence. What is even more important is *conscientious refusal*.

John Rawls made the distinction between civil disobedience where one goes out to break a law which, in itself, is not offensive, for instance, a traffic law, in order to score a political point and conscientious refusal which is a refusal to obey a law which imposes an immoral or otherwise unacceptable obligation, such as a draft law, an obligation to report on another person’s activities or to apply unjust laws to others. When confronted with a legal obligation to act immorally, it is imperative to refuse and to disobey. For instance, any obligation imposed by the state to denounce or to squeal should be ignored and those who comply should face social disapproval sufficiently unpleasant to make others hesitate.

Morally grounded refusals to obey would probably weaken the system in the long run and would certainly help those who want to secede from it spiritually while formally continuing to work inside in order to identify each other and to build a humanistic alternative.

Disobedience of established rules is, in any case, a necessary aspect of any serious moral system. If we consider what makes certain human activities transcendently good, we shall see disobedience as a major element. Great love, for instance, as exemplified by Tristan and Isolde, Anthony and Cleopatra and Romeo and Juliette, necessarily involves breaking the taboos established by society or family. Moral leadership, as personified by Jesus Christ or Socrates, involves a refusal to comply with the existing order. The capacity to refuse to accept majority opinions, technically legitimate judgments, and the rules of socially- sanctioned conduct is a pre-requisite to moral decision-making. The idea that man-made rules can be applied mechanically and equally to all people, is anathema to morality. Finally, forgiveness, which is a crucial element in western morality necessarily implies not applying the rules.

Moreover, true morality often means refusing to apply rules which one accepts and not only the questionable rules. Neither the law nor social rules can be applied without exceptions. The refusal to accept exceptions is one of the hallmarks of modern, populist egalitarianism which wants all people treated in the same way. This type of egalitarianism inevitably leads to injustice.

During the controversy about the extradition of Roman Polanski to face criminal charges, many refused to consider the possibility that, in special cases, unusual clemency must be shown. The problem of creating exceptions to laws which we support in principle or with moral duties which we generally accept is well-illustrated by Corneille’s *Le Cid*. This play, which waned in popularity in recent years, should be restored to its past position in French literature and taught in all high schools for its depiction of the triumph of love over duty. In the same way, Goethe’s *Iphigenie in Tauris* shows the moral limits of

obedience to law and to duty.

The problem of wholesale obedience to law, the injustice of many laws and the circumstances favouring or justifying disobedience have been an important part of German literature. The works of Kleist, such as *The Prince of Hamburg* and *Michael Kohlhaas* have grappled with these dilemmas without finding a universal solution, either obedience or disobedience.

Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* is a tragedy about obedience to duty and its consequences. Firstly, the gods honour the contract with the giants and give up the ring when they should have repudiated their contract, however much they were to blame for it. Then, and most importantly, Wotan yields to his wife, the goddess of marriage, and kills his hero Siegmund because he has eloped with Sieglinde, who is married and is also his sister. Brunnhilde, who is his better spirit, urged him to disregard the law. He was, to the gods' misfortune, unable to shake off the law's shackles and played right into the hand of the forces of evil. There is an important lesson there for our times – not that one must always disobey, but that there are times when one must. The reasons must be serious, the situation must merit such a course of action, but the option must always be considered. Goethe, unlike Wagner, avoided tragedy when he allowed Iphigenie to disobey a savage law. This was clearly the right thing to do. It is difficult not to conclude that Wagner also thought the law should have been broken.

In the end, freedom and justice depend to a great degree on the willingness of individuals to disobey the law. This does not mean generalized anarchical disobedience, but it does necessitate refusing or questioning all discipline or conformism on fundamental, moral questions. Principled disobedience would shelter society from oppression not only in times of right-wing predominance like the present, but also would palliate the inevitable abuses by a resurgent left. Failure on the part of most citizens to understand this is what makes the conformist, law-abiding ethic of our times so sinister.

Following the economic crisis of 2008, different and unorganized protest movements have sprung up – Arab “democratic movements”, Islamist ones, Spanish anti-politics protesters, anti-globalization and anti-Wall Street contestations. Some of the spirit of the 1960s appears to be reviving.

Many of the new movements appear initially appealing. However, a number of factors must be weighed and some of the naïve enthusiasm dampened. Clearly, some of the protests, notably the religious ones, are extremely dangerous and the spate of anti-Christian riots in Egypt following President Mubarak's fall, is an excellent example of the risks. Another is the dominance of Islamic parties, which we often call “moderate” to console ourselves, but which contain the seeds of a new potential repression.

Further, many of the so-called democratic revolutions in countries like the Ukraine and Georgia turned out to be attempts by the U.S. to increase its influence. Some of them, notably in the Ukraine, were repudiated in subsequent elections. It is very difficult to see the logical connection between imposing democracy on third world countries which are not able to exercise it effectively and lobbying hard to make certain that established democracies like Greece do not put socially disastrous measures of fiscal restraint to a free vote. Why is democracy good for Libya and Egypt, but not for Greece or Venezuela?

Secondly, the types of protests which are taking place across the globe often provoke a massive reaction. Occupying Wall Street could provide ammunition for Republicans, for “law and order” advocates, and for those unwilling to consider the possibility that our system is not a well-functioning democracy to argue that strong regimentation is indeed necessary.

It follows, that great caution is necessary and that such measures, while not always to be excluded, are not to become everyday tactics and normal channels for dissatisfaction. Nor can one assume that a highly successful or mediatized demonstration or occupation is the beginning of major change. We learned the contrary in Paris and in the U.S. in 1968.

Thus a combination of participation in electoral politics, high quality education and publication, mild civil disobedience and personal secession from the unpalatable aspects of society, can start a non-violent movement which would aim for the creation of a better world and greater personal responsibility in a future society. Its success would be uncertain, but at least it would be there.

## **XXVI. REFORM OF THE LEFT**

If a political, spiritual, world-wide movement for change is to arise on the left of the political spectrum, the left must also change. It must face the fact that part of the blame for the present state of affairs falls on its shoulders and that the sterile debates which, in recent years, have occurred in many western countries between those who think that the left is too slow to embrace the market and those who think it is not radical enough, will not lead to a revival.

No movement can avoid errors and controversy. The left's faults have been many and contradictory – excessive radicalization, a permanent temptation to please the elites and become like them, an all too frequent brutality and authoritarianism, and a penchant for supporting nationalistic tyrants in poor countries. It is evident that the left is sometimes too left and sometimes too timid. A debate between “moderate” and “radical” solutions is not undesirable and cannot always be avoided or covered up by vague language.

Right and left are very broad terms, often so devoid of true substance that many would like to scrap them, although they still have a certain utility. One cannot expect monolithic movements unless one chooses to police them as Stalin did, in which case they lose all attractiveness. Therefore, inconsistency is a natural state of affairs and is not in itself worrisome.

The issue of nomenclature is an example of necessary inconsistencies. The “left”, born during the French Revolution when the radical deputies sat down on the left of the Chamber cannot stand for the same thing from generation to generation, unless we want it to become a symbol of immobility and indeed conservatism. What makes the term “left” still relevant is the underlying belief in “left-wing” movements that the world can be made better through collective action and that economic equality is a morally imperative aim, not that a particular programme will bring it about.

“Socialist” is a term still dear to many but it bears the burden of the Stalinist and is therefore suspect to others. Moreover, it is too closely tied to public ownership of the means of production. While some public ownership is not to be excluded, for the future, a dogmatic programme of nationalization would not be either practical or useful. “Social-democratic” is therefore a compromise term which remains quite popular and has not been completely discredited, even by the Thatcherite “New Labour” of Tony Blair and by the failures of many other social-democratic governments in recent years to reverse the growth of corporate capitalism.

Both “socialist” and “social-democratic” are utterly unacceptable to large portions of the U.S. electorate which has come to see them as effectively synonymous to communism. They may be useful in Europe or even in Canada, but in the United States, any politician uses them at his peril except in a few, very progressive areas such as New York City and Vermont.

This brings up the other vexed term - “liberal” – which is always inconsistently employed and which has also become anathema to much of the United States.

Liberalism in the United States and Canada and perhaps Great Britain has a “progressive” but somewhat slippery tinge. It implies support for civil liberties, but also for collective, cultural rights which normally seek to violate civil liberties. On the other hand, “liberalism” in continental Europe often means *economic liberalism* and non-interventionism, best translated as “fiscal conservatism” in American terms. Many right-wing parties call themselves “liberal”. Still others used to see themselves as “centrist”, in the middle between the conservatives and the socialists, usually “socially” permissive, but fiscally

orthodox. The use of the word “liberal” is thus riddled with ambiguities.

There is probably no need to create a single nomenclature on the left. On the contrary, it is best to use words such as “socialism” to describe plans to redistribute goods and services and “social liberalism” to indicate the “cultural progressives” in the U.S. with their stress on collective rights. Yet it cannot be denied that a certain degree of precision is needed on the part of everyone, so as not to confuse very different concepts by the employment of similar-sounding terms.

For instance, this writer intends to convey no sympathy at all for the “cultural” warriors in the United States who are engaged in identity politics or for the notion of collective rights. If one did not draw attention to the various and confusing terminologies current in our time, this might not be totally clear, especially because of the varied meanings of the word “liberal”.

With “liberalism”, one should always distinguish between “economic liberalism” “civil liberalism” and “cultural liberalism”. A case might also be made for the elaboration of a new and nuanced terminology so as to do justice to all currents of thought. One might, for instance, give thought to previously popular words such as “democratic socialism”.

The distinction between the “cultural” left and the “economic left”, although often difficult to make, is important for another reason. Even if one sympathized with both – and this writer has limited sympathy for the “cultural” left – it is often necessary to make painful choices in the real world. The “left” as such is rarely in the majority and it must make alliances. Should we be more open to alliances with, say, progressive Catholics in South America, which will require compromises about abortion or with “liberals”, which will mean closer relations with the business lobby? Should there be alliances with “welfare” Islamic parties or, once again, with pro-western, business-oriented ones? Of course it is impossible to have a simple, knee-jerk reply. One has to look at shades of Christian or Islamic movements and at the type of liberalism espoused by political allies. However, it is useful to think about the hierarchy of those issues even if every case will have to be judged on its merits. It would seem logical to think that certain economic issues such as the reduction of the gap between rich and poor, Medicare, free or nearly free education, and environmental protection are more universal questions that are more difficult to sacrifice than particular issues, dear to each lobby. The issue of groups and lobbies invites particular caution.

In recent decades, perhaps since the birth of the “new left” in the 1960s, a persistent problem has become endemic in all forms of “leftism”, whatever nomenclature is used; that is, a reliance on and support for collectivities and lobbies which are perceived as friendly to them. The constant support for ethnic groups, gender and sexual orientation movements, unions, and strident lobbies have diverted attention from the two fundamental issues which deserve the most attention, namely economic equality and individual liberty. It is true that these categories must be broadened somewhat. For instance, both economic equality and individual liberty must include the creation of a healthy environment. Liberty must encompass the need to maintain peace and to avoid war in all its forms. However, the arbitration of competing claims of groups, often to the detriment of individual dissent, does not help change the nature of our society and does not result in social justice.

Not that support for the disadvantaged groups is not sometimes absolutely necessary. The successes of recent decades in reducing legally enforced racism and in opening the working world to women were in part the result of support by the left for movements dedicated to equality. Similarly, the moderation of capitalism would not have happened without unions and to this day, despite all their faults, unions remain crucial in trying to counter the seemingly irrepressible rise of capital.

Yet there is a difference between support for or electoral alliance with groups which are promoting “liberation” and the support for identity politics. It is dangerous to adopt as dogma the demands of groups merely because their claims to equality are or were initially well-founded.

Calls for gender quotas or parity in every employment or political forum, for supporting a separate “African” or “native” culture in the United States, repression of freedom of expression or sexual repression in order not to offend certain well-organized supporters, automatic support for every strike or labour protest, attempts to re-write our cultural history in accordance with contemporary values by reducing the importance of works by “dead, white males” are both genuinely ridiculous and, if that were not enough, counter-productive. They often create innocent victims among the poor or in the middle class who cannot fulfill their career or educational dreams. Further, they reduce our knowledge and understanding of the world by imposing current slogans and fashions as eternal wisdom.

Just as it impoverished Soviet students to live with obstacles to reading Dostoevsky, it impoverishes modern scholars and readers to have to obey the principles of political correctness and to accept the limits it places on their expression and sometimes on their thoughts.

The divisive nature of identity politics becomes clear when one listens to a debate between supporters of Israel and Palestine. No matter how close they may be on all other political or economic matters, the irrational loyalty on both sides gets in the way of true debate or of a just solution. This particular debate has split the left and the right across the world with disastrous results. Reasonable voices such as Edward Said, Tony Judt, the Israeli revisionist historians and cinematographers and Avi Raz have been heard, but how can one puncture the cocoon of those who hold visceral, radical views?

It is easy to link extreme identity politics to many bad causes. What is harder is to see that all identity, other than individual integrity and family bonds, is best avoided. Despite the hapless efforts by certain right-wing social scientists determined to find that there are more able or better groups than others, usually on the basis of I.Q., it is obvious that all human groups or nations are roughly alike and that attempts to create a hierarchy are doomed to failure. People benefit from shedding and repudiating their particularism and seeking security in personal individual culture and morality and in social solidarity with fellow citizens. There would be more variety and diversity if individual differences were encouraged rather than if groups competed for resources and attention.

Those who idealize identity and difference forget the incredible suffering caused by national, linguistic and religious difference throughout history, but particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both those who identified and those who did not were engulfed by periodic outbursts of savagery and endured fairly constant discrimination. Identity also closes minds and makes otherwise intelligent, thoughtful persons accept one-sided dogma and historical falsehoods.

The danger that groups pose to societies is real and, at least in the case of racial, ethnic and religious groups is best solved by massive intermarriage. When England united Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians, Celts and Normans and France did the same for Gauls, Germanic Franks, and Romans, they avoided the disaster that the so-called peaceful coexistence of Spaniards, Arabs and Jews brought about in Spain after 1400. For gender groups, the answer is not elimination of the difference but rather its disappearance as a form of political identity shared with other members.

This can be explained in moral, individualistic terms. There are many people, perhaps most, whose temperament is to look after their own interests and to promote their own interests. Such people tend to espouse their “own” cause – their collectivity, their religion, their ethnic group, their class, their sport team. Indeed, Jonathan Haidt demonstrates that people more consistently embrace their group’s position than their own interests. The essence of the left is to promote universal moral goals including, notably, equality with impartiality and without pre-ordained loyalties. Individual liberty, independence and intellectual courage create this type of impartiality. It must be added that peace, one of the important goals for humanity, would be far more attainable if people lost national and religious loyalty and if they did not transform one’s natural love of the poetry or music of one’s childhood into an allegiance which can obscure the truth and can bring men to kill. As for religion, it can remain as a

question of faith for some and disbelief for others, but not as an excuse for political programmes or militancy in the enforcement of religious dogma. Religion may well motivate believers to espouse social justice and then it can be a positive force. However, believers should never lose sight of the dangers which absolute faith creates when channelled into an organized form of worship.

It is true that many movements of national liberation have contributed to social programs, to education and to emancipation. Many “national” leaders like Garibaldi, Gandhi, and Mandela turned out to be open to other groups and, at times, particularly generous towards them. It is natural to include such “national” movements in any umbrella of progressive forces. However, a serious degree of caution is indicated.

Most European national movements started as a form of liberation after the French Revolution. When people like Nemcova and Shevchenko revived the Czech and Ukrainian languages which had been giving way to German and Russian, when Mazzini dreamed of a Europe made up of liberal, democratic, peaceful states, when Bolivar and Jose Marti wanted to bring individual freedom and equality to the Spanish-speaking Americans, one could see the tremendous potential in these movements. Yet, in order to conquer power, most of these political movements had to seduce much of the bourgeoisie and thus, they quickly moved to the right. The east European “national” governments in the inter-war period were mostly right-wing and often hostile to minorities. When a nationalist movement took power earlier than usual in its evolution, because of a particular historical situation – Zionism in 1948, Algerian revolutionaries in 1962, the Parti Quebecois in 1976, there was a flurry of progressive reforms for several years. However, the movement’s natural slide to the right continued and today’s Israel and Algeria attest eloquently to the danger inherent in nationalism.

It is in the nature of groups to prefer their parochial interests to universal ones. They can always be seduced by the funding of special schools or other institutions and the awarding of honour to their leaders. In a world where money rules, groups ultimately serve the powerful and the wealthy. It is an interesting observation that since the 1980s we have been obsessed with diversity and the participation of all groups in society on a proportional basis, and yet overall equality has tumbled, and the gap between rich and poor has grown, despite the very real increases in the number of women and visible minorities in high places. Egalitarianism of groups is not always tantamount to individual equality.

Perhaps this is natural. If the essence of capitalism is ruthless competition for scarce resources, one of the obvious ways to get ahead is uniting with others with similar interests to promote one’s cause. This appears to be businessmen seeking to fix prices, workers defending themselves through unions, ethnic groups asking for a share of the pie and so on. It is not always unjustified, on the contrary, but the most powerful justification at present is the unshakable status of capitalism in our world. Thus collective bargaining is an adaptation to capitalism, making it less unfair to employees in the result, but not changing its fundamental nature. Those seeking a different system have often imagined the end of the identities – an egalitarian, racially mixed, secular society. Of course, in such a society the competition between groups would cease or at least decline substantially. Whether such a society is possible is an open question and a difficult one but even if, in the end, success can only be partial, this should not discourage those who want to diminish significantly the role of identities and groups in our world.

There exists a natural conflict between groups and their members. The interest of groups and the community institutions is to survive in order for the leader of the groups to continue to benefit from subsidies, prestige and influence. It is in the interest of the group members, as opposed to the leaders and organizers to use relatively tolerant periods of history to disappear into the society as a whole, to have no self-proclaimed intermediaries between themselves and the government, no artificial barriers to marriage and no need to conform to any tradition. The group leadership invariably uses the instinctive loyalty and irrational fears of discrimination to convince members to remain in the fold despite their



own clear interests to leave as soon as possible. While no free society can promote forced assimilation in the way in which Tsarist Russia did and while individual religious and ethnic claims to special treatment should be accommodated when possible, there is no need to promote group rights or to facilitate the maintaining of barriers inside a society.

Groups like the Jews, who have historically sought to maintain their identity at all times, frequently become the victims of this periodic break-down of multi-ethnic societies. It is the constant defence of identity rather than any other feature of Judaism which accounts for the recurrent persecution.

It follows that all forms of communitarianism should be rejected. While Charles Taylor certainly presents communitarianism in a form compatible with social justice, the result of the recognition of identity claims inevitably strains both social justice and social solidarity. In the long run, communitarianism aids privilege and special interests and then, as in the case of the Jews, exposes the groups which live as a community to discrimination and persecution. Equality of origins together with integration and gradual loss of identity would yield a far better result for most.

Canada, with its official multiculturalism policies is a cautionary tale. It is likely that, when multiculturalism was adopted as the national ideology in the 1970s, it was not because leaders like Pierre-Elliott Trudeau believed in it, but because a sop was needed for the western provinces in order for bilingualism, without which Canada would have fallen apart, to be accepted. Since then, multiculturalism has become firmly entrenched in Canada's elites. Ideals like "diversity" have been repeatedly used to justify unnecessary affirmative action. Indeed, it is contrary to political correctness not to pay lip service to multiculturalism and diversity. Yet, it is impossible to think of anything that these ideas have brought which has improved the lives of citizens. The strong ethnic groups are an obstacle to integration. Moreover, it has been demanded that there is no way to maintain a vibrant foreign-language culture in a society where schools operate in English and French. Multiculturalism tends to be much more folkloric than literary and it is not associated with increased creativity.

One more point must be made. Groups have no right to survive. Rather, the concept of freedom of association grants individuals the right to belong or not belong to them. There is no reason for regret if, over time, native American culture or Judaism or any other ethnicity disappears or becomes very rare, so long as the individuals who made up those groups left voluntarily, without undue pressure and without lingering discrimination against them in the host society. As we have seen, multiculturalism simply encourages the groups to make a collective attempt to survive to their members' detriment. Enforcing or encouraging diversity and taking for granted the survival of groups is harmful to a free society. In fact, the history of humanity and of progress has been one of conquest, of mixing of groups, and of linguistic and identity loss. Progress and cultural advance have usually been the result of such change.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of multiculturalism is its ultimate, inevitable failure and descent into prejudice. There inevitably comes a time, when economic difficulties or other conflicts give demagogues a chance to turn groups against each other. Because of the strong, irrational sense of identity, people remain loyal to the groups despite the evident weaknesses of all of their claims. A republican Irishman will be lucid about Yugoslavia or Israel-Palestine but will not apply the same reasoning to Northern Ireland. An even more ominous development is the transformation of Jewish communities everywhere from varied but distinctly liberal lobbies to right-wing nationalists, blinded by Zionism. In all groups, even those who are not moved by the national or ethnic "cause", find it hard to support the other side and to turn their back on "their" group. The conclusion is surely that a stable society must surely seek to integrate minorities to the point of the loss of identity and not just seek the weak, economic integration of multiculturalism.

Religious identity is a particularly thorny issue. Religion is a guaranteed right in virtually all human rights codes and charters and any attempt to suppress it is morally unjustifiable. The attempts by some early Bolsheviks and later by Enver Hoxha in Albania and by Maoists led to terrible suffering but did not eradicate religion at all. It seems that speculation of a religious nature is natural in human beings and no society has failed to display some form of it.

In many situations, religion is protected alongside with conscience. This is especially so in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*; and this was interpreted in the Amselem case to mean that an individual's personal beliefs are protected and not the dogma of the religion which he claims he is professing.

When religion becomes a form of identity, it is rarely because of the conscience of the believer but rather because of the claims of his religious group. That makes religion rather close to ethnicity as a divisive force in society. Religious groups are quick to claim the protection of secular human rights institutions but, when they can, they tend to impose their views on the state. All religion, when in the majority have this tendency – Islamists in the Middle East, orthodox Jews in Israel, Russian orthodoxy in post-communist Russia, and Catholicism in Poland and Ireland.

That is why a progressive society should treat organized religion, as opposed to conscience, with the same distrust as ethnicity. It can never be forbidden or persecuted to be sure, but it should also not have any particular status. Education, in particular, is best if it advocates mixing and discourage dogmatism. Conscience, on the other hand, is one of the best qualities in human thinking and refusal based on individual conscience should always be respected and should be tolerated so long as it does not put an unbearable burden on society. Finally, religion as identity should be treated as other manifestations of group identity, protected against injustice, but never trusted.

Abandoning identity politics would not and should not end debates within the left, between socialists and progressive liberals, between those who want immediate results and those willing to wait, between those who like centralized planning and those who want more local autonomy. However, the notion of belonging, of “us” and “them”, of inclusion and exclusion are ones to avoid. The vanquishing of the loyalties which lurk in our sub-conscious and sometimes inside our conscious nature is the first step to personal freedom and an open-minded debate a better, more egalitarian society.

## **XXVII. LABOUR UNIONS AS A SPECIAL INTEREST LOBBY**

Labour unions are in a unique position as a special lobby. The union movement was an essential element in the growth of the left in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The presence of large concentrations of men in factories and mines allowed for their mobilization and their political organization. Initially, the unions were viewed as illegal conspiracies and were often brutally repressed. We see the difficulties of the early union movements in Dickens' *Hard Times*, Gaskell's, *North and South* and Zola's *Germinal*. By the end of the century the unions were generally accepted both as a factor in negotiations and as a political force, although sporadic suppression continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The United States had a rather shameful record with the murder of Joe Hill and with many instances of repression. By the middle of the century this was largely history.

The decline of social democracy since the 1970s is also clearly connected to the relative decline of unions. This has taken away the ability to counter the business lobby's infinite means in campaigns and has reduced the attraction of traditional socialist programmes, anchored in the interest of the working man, rather than that of usual business or consumers.

Both the rise and the decline of the left bring out the tremendous significance of organized labour. However, it is not correct, politically or morally, to bind the cause of unions completely to that of social justice and the battle to temper the deleterious effects of capitalism.

From the start, the union movement had several purposes. The first and foremost was to equalize the bargaining positions of employer and employees.

During the Industrial Revolution, the imbalance was flagrant. There seemed to be an infinite supply of relatively unskilled labourers and the employer controlled the conditions and the hours of wage workers and could remove anyone who caused him trouble. Labour organizers were frequently singled out for dismissal.

The apparently endless supply of workers led Ricardo and Malthus to postulate alarmist projections of pauperization which, so far, have not proved accurate although both of these thinkers must still be kept in mind. Marx, on the other hand concentrated on the owner's control of the manner of production and notably the hours required and in this he proved prescient.

It is true that labour shortages can sometimes reverse the balance of negotiating power. The rise of wages in the aftermath of the Great Plague of 1348 and the market pressure exerted in our times by workers who possess rare skills provide examples of this.

However in the greatest number of cases, the owner of the business maintains many major advantages over unorganized workers. This was why collective forms of bargaining were crucial for the labour movement throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The result fits neatly into a market model of economics, and therefore into capitalism. The parties use their bargaining skills and their market power to achieve advantages, save that the total domination by one side is diluted by the collective nature of the bargaining process and by the possibility of a strike with resulting loss of profits if negotiations fail.

As with any market process, injustices can easily arise. On the one hand, the superior knowledge of company finances and the superior ability of many companies, as opposed to their employees, to survive a strike can often lead to unsatisfactory results for the union. On the other hand, an excessively militant union can sometimes destroy or seriously harm a weak business. Yet, despite these possibilities, a world of collective bargaining is infinitely better than the exercise of arbitrary power by the employer. Although enlightened employers who realize that a satisfied work force is best do exist, and they appear in the works of such progressive writers as Dickens (the Cheeryble brothers in *Nicholas Nickleby*) and Zola (*Le Bonheur des Dames*), it would be hopelessly naive to expect justice to be achieved by such exceptions. It follows that, at least with respect to private employees, unionization was a necessity and a beneficial step, but it did not modify the nature of capitalism, only the relative balance of forces within it.

The second task undertaken by early unions was a social and social welfare one – providing health and education services, summer holidays for workers' children, organizing recreation and so on. While some vestiges of those very effective endeavours remain, most of them have been taken over by the state, especially during the period 1945-89.

The state take-over was a measure of the success of the unions' third purpose, which was the changing of society in great part through social-democratic parties, closely allied with the unions. Even those unions which formally supported communism such as France's CGT, influenced the policies of western countries. In many countries, notably in Great Britain and West Germany, the union role was overt and union influence was exercised in public view. Even in the more conservative USA, the Democratic Party relied on unions to capture the vote of industrial workers, although this forced many unions to participate in some unsavoury activities, notably anti-communist witch hunts.

It was the success of the political transformation that created certain contradictions and inconsistencies in union goals.

The social democratic state created an immense public sector which was promptly and unquestionably unionized. However, union agitation is not the same thing in a public enterprise and a

private one and very different considerations quickly arose.

In the private sector, unions negotiate in the traditional way, albeit collectively. If the bargaining process breaks down, workers lose salary and employers lose profits or contracts or customers. Each party has an interest in settling.

In the public sector, the employer is not negotiating with his own money. He is influenced by political considerations – appearing “strong against the union” or avoiding an unpopular strike at an electorally delicate moment. The strikers aim to hit the public not the public employer who, paradoxically, might balance his books through a month without payroll, but who may be hurt at the polls if services are not provided.

This means that moral support for a strike cannot be as unconditional in the public sector as in a private employer/employee setting. Even there, the phenomenon of a strong union breaking a weak employer does exist. But in the public sector the merits vary widely from case to case. Are postal workers a more important cause than small businessmen relying on the mail to get the money to pay their rent and their employees? Are health workers to be given priority at all times over patients and non-unionized workers? Do teachers always have a better case than working parents who cannot quickly place their children when a strike occurs? The answer is never simple.

Obviously, in some cases, the workers are right but in others they may not be. Moreover, there is a certain conflict of interest when unions, which are part of the government, directly or indirectly, negotiate with themselves. The more politically powerful the union, the stronger its claims to a bigger share, often against weaker unions.

The conflict of interest does not compare with that which occurs when the business lobby influences a conservative government and gets subsidies which are often unpopular with the public or tax cuts which, unfortunately, are popular. That is why the argument based on conflict of interest is not too convincing. However, the moral ambiguity is clearly both real and significant.

This is exacerbated by the privileged position of many unionized public workers in terms of salaries, benefits and security as compared to other workers, not taking away from the privileged one, as is happening so often in our conservative times. A healthy workplace and job security should be extended to all employees, as it has been in Quebec. However, one should avoid creating privileged classes and a rigid class structure.

Another factor remains. One of the problems in social-democratic countries which led to the neo-liberal reaction was the complacent and egotistical position adopted by some unions. During the Labour years between 1964 and 1979, it is obvious that the positions of the unions were not always fair, sometimes not beneficial to Great Britain and not flexible. The series of strikes which started when Leon Blum took over the government of France in 1936 decreased his ability to set up the Front Populaire as the sworn enemy of European fascism. In Quebec, the powerful unions have often defended privilege and excluded workers not lucky enough to have a union card from their industry, notably, construction. Finally, Israeli trade unions which formed the back-bone of the labour governments of the 1950s and 1960s consistently excluded Arab workers in the pre-independence days. This should put an end of any idealization of trade unions. They act in their members’ interest most of the time, as they should, but they are not infinitely good or wise or generous.

All of this should put in question the pertinence of collective “negotiation” in the public sector. This was an excellent model in private battles to distribute profits. When turned on the public or on other unions or on a public project, the weapon of strike is far less appealing. It would surely be an attractive proposition to look to forms of arbitration and across the board adjustment of wages in countries with a strong public sector.

The communist world banned union activity altogether, except for organizers of social benefits

or activities. There was a certain logic to abolishing union negotiations in a fully socialized system. However, the communist system removed basic rights and removed all protection for working men against the new class of bureaucrats.

It is unthinkable to violate freedom of association in the ruthless way in which Eastern Europe did. However, it is also important to remember that unions are a lobby, that they often fight to protect their turf against other employees and that the positions taken by them are not always in the public interest.

Above all, while unionized workers should and surely will participate in any attempt to modify capitalism, it would be a mistake both tactically and morally to base the movement on an unquestionable alliance with unions and knee-jerk support for any individual strike action.

## **XXVIII. MULTICULTURALISM AND CULTURE**

There is a clear link between the ascendancy of multiculturalism and identity and the evolution of our culture in literature, music, art and cinema. Earlier in this essay, this author expressed his doubts about “modernism” and even greater doubts about “post-modernism”. The world according to Foucault, Derrida, some of the more radical artists and musicians appears to be grounded in a limitless relativism. Who is to say what is beautiful or what is meaningful? And if no one has the monopoly, then “expression” of what one is becomes the only test.

Exaggeration is dangerous here. Excellent novels by John Irving, Vikram Seth, Jean-Christophe Ruffin and many others are published every year. Some of the art and music since 1950 and certainly much of the popular music like the works of The Beatles will undoubtedly survive.

However, extreme subjectivism takes away from the universality of the aesthetic expression, from the ability of people to live earlier lives and see earlier worlds, to understand history, to escape from what has been called “presentism” – seeing every issue from the point of view of this year.

The excessive “identity” makes Shalom Aleichem, excellent though he is, a less compelling writer than Chekhov or Maupassant. It makes Faulkner and Joyce less universal than their contemporaries Hemingway and Lawrence.

Part of the deconstruction in recent years has affected understanding of history and of universal trends about life, death, love and knowledge.

It is not surprising that the multicultural debates in Canada have led to the questioning of authenticity when men write about women, whites about natives, Anglophones about Francophones and vice versa. Have we forgotten Flaubert’s self-identification with Emma Bovary, the power and beauty of Porgy and Bess and the earlier, more surprising identification with the others in Aeschylus and Euripides?

This does not prevent distinctive forms from different traditions. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, many composers, notably most of the Russians, but also Chopin, Duorak and Verdi drew inspiration from these particular traditions. The same can be said of art and literature. However, the ultimate goal was a universal experience which can provide knowledge and wisdom beyond what one can acquire from direct experience.

Modernism and post-modernism deconstruct aesthetic experience, to diversify it and to allow equality to everyone’s subjective sensibilities.

While one cannot legislate on this subject and any coercion quickly turns to tyranny, it is likely that any removal of social and political idealism will be accompanied by a new return to realism, universalism and universal standards in aesthetic creation.

## XXIX. CULTURE AND DEMOGRAPHY

The perils of multiculturalism and cultural relativism are accentuated by the demographic issues. Many western countries, especially in Europe, are declining in population and the only segments of the citizens registering increases are visible and religious minorities. Moreover, despite the unpopularity of immigration, there is considerable economic pressure to admit more immigrants and in the long run, the admission of immigrants is inevitable. It is also good for everyone and, unless completely unforeseeable technological improvements occur, is the only way to maintain relative prosperity.

The history of humanity had been marked by waves of migration. Between 1000 B.C. and 1500 A.D. tribes came out of the east to occupy the west. Attempts to divert them, bribe them or force them not to come has always proved impossible in the long run. The efforts of numerous Roman emperors proved useless against the energy of the tribes in motion. Between 1500 and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the west burst out of its confines, colonizing the Americas, Australia, Siberia and, less successfully, a few other places which they later lost. Now, the third world is converging on the west.

The advantages for the west are considerable. Not only would the new immigrants provide labour for a period when the local population will age rapidly, but they would maintain the know-how without which significant manufacturing could occur in the west. Further, they would contribute the cultural products from many lands and thus modify and enrich the common culture of the west. These social and economic factors would indicate a generous immigration policy, despite the unpopularity of such a policy in most western countries.

The difficulty and perhaps one of the causes of the unpopularity is multiculturalism. If newly arrived immigrants are encouraged to maintain their language and traditions beyond the first generation, the benefit of mixing may be lost. Further, it is possible that, under multiculturalism, western culture may be eclipsed or that, at best, it will be one of many, even in western countries. Most westerners of today do not want their children to live under such conditions. This permits far right movements, like France's National Front and anti-immigration lobbies like many U.S. Republicans attract considerable support.

There is nothing shameful about wanting to maintain a basically western way of life or the western humanist tradition, even if they cannot be fully defined and differentiated from other cultures. The main features of western culture include a stress on individual autonomy, monogamy tempered by individual sexual freedom, for both sexes, secularism as the dominant attitude towards religion, admiration for western musical, artistic and literary traditions, which are only loosely defined and are open to additions and influences from outside and promoting western science, but always regulated and held in check by humanism. These were not always western attitudes, but they have become firmly established. Even without the new arrivals, some of these are difficult to maintain in a world of popular culture and moral relativism and given certain anti-humanistic traditions that have evolved alongside mainstream western culture. If immigration continues, as it must, integration of immigrants into a fundamentally western mould is surely a legitimate and desirable goal. This point is made eloquently in the context of modern France by Jean-Pierre Le Goff in *La gauche à l'épreuve*. Many voices like Le Goff's are now being raised against the imposition of multiculturalism and cultural neutrality.

This is not to downplay the achievements of other societies. Chinese and Japanese literary and artistic achievements certainly rival the west's and we shall return to this issue. From the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Arab culture was far more advanced than the west's and, indeed, it contributed to the preservation of Greek and Roman classical works at a time of chaos in the west. Moreover, all cultures have provided important insights, even ones, such as aboriginal culture, which are not well adapted to modern life. However, history teaches us that if groups remain separate from each other in the same

community, a breakdown in relations happens sooner or later and that a common culture is best in any society.

Moreover, we know that certain parts of the western lore, notably science and engineering are desired by everyone today across the globe. It is at best hazardous to accept the technology without the humanism that attempts successfully or not to set out certain moral limits.

Some of the new right-wing movements in the west are an unsophisticated expression of a justifiable reluctance on the part of western majorities to accept the multiculturalism which is often promoted by well-meaning members of liberal elites. A departure from multiculturalism might well shift the political scene to the left to some extent as the debate centers again on social justice, on universalism and on humanism.

Of course, western ideas are no guarantee of morality or humanism. Nazism constitutes incontrovertible evidence of the darkness inside the western psyche. Nevertheless, western attitudes towards individual liberty and towards knowledge, offer the best hope for humanity to get out of its current predicament and the best way to avoid the perils of moral relativism which make good and evil infinitely flexible concepts. The integration of the new wave of immigrants in a new but fundamentally western culture is incompatible with multiculturalism which typically refuses to evaluate cultures and insists on diversity as a good in itself.

It is important to avoid western chauvinism or the belief that only western ideas are worth discussing. As we have seen, China, Japan, India and the Arab world have a rich literature some of which, for instance Lady Murasaki's *Tales of Genji* and the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, written in China in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, matches the accomplishments of the west. Ian Morris in his *Why the West Rules – For Now* talks of “axial” works such as Confucius, Buddhist Scripture, The Bible, The Koran, which address the same fundamental questions. No doubt, Morris is right in pointing out that the questions of life and death and good and evil are universal to humanity and know no artificial boundaries of east and west. Amritya Sen makes very effective use of Indian traditions and philosophy in *The Idea of Justice*. Once we agree, as we must, that all groups of human beings are fundamentally equal and have a similar distribution of intelligence and moral fibre, we cannot maintain that the west has a monopoly.

But Morris's claim of equal value goes too far. The conservatism and conventionality of Confucius, the fatalism of Buddhism, the over-simplifications of Islam do not take away their value or spiritualism but these weaknesses mean that, in order to suit modern society, each of them would need an overhaul or a “Reformation”. No doubt this is feasible just as it was, in the past, feasible for Christianity, for humanism and for many forms of Judaism. By adding western traditions, we may indeed be precipitating this Reformation and injecting into western traditions much of what non-western thinkers, writers and artists produced. This would be a clear gain for the west. Another quibble with Morris – is Islam really western? It is of western origin to be sure and Islamic philosophers were instrumental in preserving ancient western works, but it does not fit well with modern western thought.

Thus, western education must not be ashamed of teaching mostly our classics, and communicating to students our attitude toward religion, family and sex and our stress of individual freedom even against tradition and family. This is especially so because not all of the students in our classrooms will come from western traditions. However much it may shock some members of minorities and many of their parents, the children must be shown the social benefits of interpretation even when there is a direct and irreconcilable clash with the parents' values on such issues as mixed marriage. Naturally, those who refuse integration must be tolerated and benefit from basic freedoms and from our social programmes. Common sense tells us that if educated in common culture, very few of them would choose to secede and those that do would be part of a small percentage of persons who cannot integrate and who are found in every society – monks, nuns, Hutterites, Hassidim, for instance.

This phenomenon will always be with us and must be accepted and treated both with respect and genuine benevolence.

At the same time as they teach our western traditions, our schools should also teach and explain the great works of other cultures, both because of their great intrinsic value and because of the need to guard our students against notions of racial or ethnic superiority and to reassure those from other lands that we are not rejecting their culture, but rather fusing it with ours and producing something novel. In other words, the western culture provides the basic form, but the content can come from everywhere.

It is therefore important to avoid the pit-falls of multiculturalism and particularly of separate institutions such as courts, hospitals, and especially schools. They are unhealthy in any society, but absolutely catastrophic in one which seeks to attract, welcome and integrate immigrants and to create a common culture for its citizens. Nor is it indicated that we, in the name of pluralism, attenuate the family further by recognizing polygamy as a legitimate choice of family structure. Our society guarantees sexual freedom, which includes the right to many partners. We clearly tolerate adultery as a question of individual freedom and should not condemn or stigmatize those who engage in it. There is no need to turn polygamous marriage into an institution.

It is also important for the left to continue to champion traditional western culture – literature, music, the fine arts, cinema and our philosophical, historical and scientific traditions. Too often, left-leaning individuals succumb to the temptation of idealizing the “authentic” and the multicultural and of participating in the cult of the novelty. A careful reading of the classics would increase understanding of history and of life. This idea is not a partisan idea. Niall Ferguson, a conservative thinker, is advocating it as well, as are proponents of many political tendencies. Western society as a whole would be better off if the great debates of the last five hundred years continued unabated and untrammelled. Moreover, it would be essential to banish political correctness and to read the classics unadulterated by current fashions. For instance, modifying *A Merchant of Venice* or *Oliver Twist* to fit modern, positive notions about Jews is nothing short of absurd. Repudiating *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* because it offends some African Americans is equally indefensible. It would also be tragic to leave the development of our literary, musical and artistic traditions in conservative hands only, although it is clear that conservatives also have insights that merit both respect and study. Yet the left’s political correctness could make that happen.

Our notions of literature, music and film cannot ever be permitted to become propaganda, as happened so often under Stalinism. The importance of the aesthetic in creating self-awareness and an understanding of fundamental human issues, such as life and death, and good and evil is so great that no political goal can ever justify to hijack the arts.

### **XXX. A BOOT IN THE FACE OF MANKIND FOREVER**

During Winston Smith’s imprisonment towards the end of Orwell’s *1984*, the secret policeman O’Brien informs him that there is no way out of the Orwellian dictatorship. It is a “a boot stamping on a human face - forever” (1984, Chapter 3).

What O’Brien means is that the intensity of the surveillance is such that no rebellion has a chance of success. Even such a small protest, as the love affair between Winston and Julia, are doomed to be discovered within a very short period of time. But even more significant is the rapid growth of newspeak, the language that will make it impossible to think rebellion or at least to formulate it.

While the modern security state does not make use of brutality comparable to *1984*, the increasing perfection of the surveillance and the growing conformism of our language, and our culture do have some common features with *1984*. If our traditional literature becomes out-dated and even unintelligible, if no misdemeanour can go undetected or unpunished and if the moral notion of honour, courage, and dignity which have led us to resist injustice are replaced with competition for instant



gratification, how can the new capitalism be changed?

Of course, nothing is eternal, not even mankind. Pandemics, ecological or astronomical disasters, climate change can all destroy human life or return us to a much earlier period in our history. But short of such a disaster, is there a path to change?

This is the preoccupation of many. In recent years, books and essays have appeared, on all political sides, warning of potential disaster in a very few years. Most, notably Jared Diamond and John Gray express some faint but not certain hope that the worst will not occur.

All of this may be wishful thinking. Yet it is difficult to accept that we have as the only alternatives, an eternal capitalism or total chaos or destruction.

In Shakespeare tragedies, evil often attains its purpose. Cordelia and Desdemona die, Antony, Cleopatra, Hamlet and McDuff's family are destroyed. Yet evil does not remain in power. The worst does not happen. Rather, the calculating or the indifferent, the uncomplicated - Fortinbras, Octavian, Malcolm take over from both the passionate and the flawed – whether positive or not.

It is therefore not impossible to think or at least to hope that the system can be changed and that the boot in the face of mankind is not forever or at the very least that the worst consequences which we fear will not materialize. It is in any event to adopt the bleakest view and then to wallow in the bleakness and do nothing.

However, it is foolish to let hope blind us to the very real dangers and to the fact that Orwell's nightmarish vision, originally conceived as a result of hyper-Stalinism may yet prove even more true for capitalism.

### **XXXI. CONCLUSION**

It is not possible to be cheerfully optimistic about the modern world? It is about to face extraordinary challenges of environmental change, energy depletion, population growth and aging and the increase in the gap between rich and poor. At the same time, corporate capitalism is strengthening its stranglehold on the world economy and technology is assisting in reducing the space left for privacy and liberty. Ethnic and religious identity is on the rise after a period of steady decline. Selfish, self-serving lobbies are rising both on the left and the right, but they are especially powerful on the right and their defeat is increasingly hard to imagine.

In the result, we see with the return to ethnicity and the organized religions, a resurgence of racism and narrow nationalism, and a decline of humanistic culture and its universal appeal. Even if humanity rebelled against the tyranny of the market, its revolt might take a religious, fascist or nationalist form which would be anathema to most western critics of the new capitalism.

In "False Dawn", John Gray states flatly that the neo-liberal revolution is irreversible even though it was wrong. The best we can hope is to develop several forms of capitalism across the world, with the extreme Anglo-Saxon model not necessarily in the ascendant and with governments retaining some power to influence and temper capitalism.

Some of these views may differ from those put forward here only in the definition of capitalism. Since everyone agrees that a large part of the economy is to be private and that full socialism cannot be contemplated in the present world or perhaps in any world, it is possible that John Gray would view the proposed "social democracy" as one variant of his diffuse capitalism.

However, the most fundamental difference with John Gray is his unwillingness to contemplate the creation of trade barriers and the partial retreat from globalization. He is resigned to a loss of western dominance and not so frightened by the prospect of life outside the perspective of western humanism and culture which, as he points out correctly have spawned capitalism, communism and neo-liberalism and are not always and necessarily beneficial. In John Gray's world one can strongly criticize

the imposition of neo-liberalism, but it is dangerous to harbour illusions about creating a successful alternative and about reversing long-term trends. Since Karl Marx, historians have understood how little a political programme or ideology can do to affect economic, geographic or demographic trends. Therefore a dogmatic belief in any solution, including the one proposed here, is wrong-headed and, to that extent, John Gray makes a strong case.

Yet it would be wrong to give up and to retreat into a righteous self-satisfaction tinged with contempt for a declining humanity or a declining west. Other periods, notably the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the 1930s also presaged a grim and short future for mankind, yet humanity managed to survive and progress. Dire predictions do not always come true, even if Panglossian ones also merit scepticism. Moreover, even if long-term tendencies elude our control, we can influence short term and even middle term developments and promote freedom, security and dignity in our life-time and for the generations immediately following us. That surely is a sufficiently important goal.

The replacement of global, consumer capitalism and its pendant, the security state, by an idealistic, humanistic socialism or social democracy, which values individual freedom and autonomy, permits considerable economic freedom and discourages all forms of collective identity, is likely the only conceivable way out of the conundrum. Neither traditional socialism with its reliance on public ownership and heavy-handed bureaucracies, nor the “cultural” left of gender, ethnic and religious lobbies can possibly succeed in bringing about a better world. The traditional socialism would bring back all of the inefficiencies and absurdities that plagued the communist experiment. The “cultural” left would sap whatever is left of our moral fibre and destroy universalism and human solidarity. Whether or not the new social-democratic solution proposed here is feasible, the attempt to bring it about is worthwhile and even partial successes can improve the quality of life for mankind.