

## BEYOND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

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In this paper I shall be concerned more with objections raised by liberal democrats to the possibility of a socialist democracy than with socialist criticisms of liberal democracy. The latter are well known, though no less valid for that, and will be merely touched on in what follows. The former still await convincing reply. Ultimately they can only be answered by history itself. Unlike liberal democracy, which is variously established in practice, there are no convincing examples of socialist democracy to point to as models, except for some relatively short-lived moments of transition, or as interstices in wider non-democratic structures. While these can serve as *prefigurations*, they still have to be shown to be generalisable, across both time and space: to be sustainable in routine as well as revolutionary times, and for whole societies not just elements within them. This can only be conclusively demonstrated in practice. A precondition for such practice, however, is that enough people should seriously believe in its possibility. Socialist democracy cannot therefore simply be theorised *ex post facto*; it has to be anticipated and defended in the present.

Such an enterprise can expect to be attacked from two opposing directions. On one side are the hard-headed 'realists', for whom the fact that socialist democracy has nowhere established itself is sufficient evidence that it never can be; who equate contingent failure with permanent impossibility. For them all theorising about socialist democracy belongs in the realm of Utopian fantasy. Against these sceptics it is necessary to insist that 'impossibility' cannot simply be asserted as self-evident truth, but has to be argued; and it is precisely the aim of the present paper to engage some of the arguments. On the other side are the equally hard-headed 'determinists', for whom the scientific inevitability of the proletarian victory renders all reflection on the shape of the future society unnecessary. It will be what it will be. For them theorising about socialist democracy is also Utopian, but in a different sense: not an unattainable dream, but a mistaken attempt to mould life into the pre-conceived categories of abstract thought. Against this band of sceptics and

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their charge of 'idealism' it is necessary to insist that what might count as a proletarian victory has to be argued and cannot merely be assumed; that it will only be won by people to whom a socialist future appears both desirable and possible; and that this involves having some idea of the shape that such a future might plausibly take, even if this idea is only provisional, awaiting correction by future circumstance and practice.

That such theorising is necessary does not make it easy. A narrow course has to be charted between assuming too much and presuming too little; between constructing an ideal future in which all realistically constraining factors are wished away on the one hand, and remaining bound to an unreconstructed present on the other. Most obviously is this so in regard to conceptions of human nature. Those socialist futures are rightly criticised which assume a completely reconstituted human character as premise for their realisation. Yet it is not impossible, accepting a postulate of limited altruism, to identify in present contexts and social structures elements which set one person's interest against another's, and to consider alternative social formations which might realistically encourage forms of collective as opposed to individual self-interest. Again, the different elements in such alternatives have to be shown to be compatible and not inconsistent with each other. The grounds for these judgements have inevitably to be sought in existing experience, and in plausible extrapolations from it. What is required is a conception of future arrangements whose practicability can be argued on the basis of evidence drawn from the past and present, or at least on assumptions which are not wildly incompatible with what has already been experienced.

This is a large undertaking. The present paper does no more than identify some of the opposing arguments and outline the sort of answer that might be made to them. The first part seeks to establish the main differences between liberal and socialist democracy. The second part examines objections raised by the former against the possibility of the latter, and in the process seeks to fill out the definition of socialist democracy that the first part contains.

Liberal democracy, whether in theory or practice, I take to be a socio-political formation which embodies two different tensions:

1. Between democracy as a principle of popular rule and popular control of decision-making on the one hand, and the principle of private property rights in the means of production, distribution and exchange on the other. This tension can be expressed in many different ways. One can say that the equal citizenship implied in the idea of popular rule is restricted by the relationships of control and subordination constituted by ownership rights in the sphere of production, and by the unequal weight these guarantee to a minority in the sphere of politics. Or that the range of popular government is limited by the resource-allocating and distributive functions of the

market, whether this is conceived in its classical or its oligopolistic form. Or that what is distinctive about liberal democrats is that their commitment to democracy ends at the point where democratic decision threatens to encroach too far on private property rights (how far is 'too far' is naturally a matter of debate amongst them). Common to all these different formulations is the general point that the principle of private property rights which is central to liberalism imposes a decisive limitation on the principle of democracy.

I say that liberal democracy embodies a tension between democracy and private *property* rights rather than individual rights in general, because certain rights are intrinsic to democracy itself, and it would be inconceivable without them. Without the freedom to express and communicate opinions, to assemble, associate, etc., democracy would simply not exist. A majority, however large and representative, which sought to deprive individuals or minorities of these rights, would not be attacking freedom alone, but the principle of democracy on which it was itself constituted. It is important to insist on this in the face of those who see democracy as being in systematic conflict with individual freedom, or who ascribe to liberal democracy alone (as the term indeed implies) a special concern for those freedoms that are intrinsic to democracy itself. The liberalism that I associate with liberal democracy is one which assigns a central role to the exercise of private property rights, in securing individual identity and possibilities for its self-development, as well as in providing for society's economic needs; i.e. it offers an essentially individualist definition of fundamental rights.

2. The second tension within liberal democracy is a more specifically political one, between democracy as a principle of popular control of decision-making, and a conception of representation which assigns to the representative a competence to decide public issues according to his or her own conception of the public good. This competence goes beyond the reciprocal influence between leader and led to a concern to protect the position and prerogatives of the representative against encroachments from below. The elected representative thus embodies essential elements of the liberal ideal of the independent individual, capable of freely assuming responsibility for his or her decisions. The context here of course is one of public decisions, which have to be openly justified in terms of a public and not merely a private good. The basic conception, however, is the same. It is one that is in conflict with, and has to be defended against, claims by the people to determine how their representative shall vote—a conception which threatens to erode individual responsibility, to replace long-term with short-term interests, etc.

Just as with the other source of tension mentioned above, so here there are differences of emphasis within both liberal democratic theory and practice, and it would be mistaken to present it as all of a piece. The

contrast between participatory and elitist emphases is well known. Even the most participatory theorists, however, do not propose to abolish the tension between the different elements, but to strike the balance between them at a different point. Thus they do not propose the abolition of private property in the means of production, with its attendant subordinate-ness. And their argument for participation, in terms of its educative function, is essentially paternalist and tutelary. It is not an argument that could be used to justify participation for oneself, only for others (presumably less **enlightened**); and its aim of extending people's range of consciousness and developing a more positive **self-image** is compatible with the main control of events remaining outside the reach of the 'participators'. In this sense the emphasis keeps within, rather than goes beyond, the confines of liberal democratic theory.

Given the two major sources of tension I have described (which are not unconnected with one another), liberal democratic theorists have varied widely in the degree of explicitness with which they have admitted them. At one extreme are those who simply confuse the two terms in the portmanteau construct '**liberal democracy**', and treat them as interchangeable. These are those who call any restriction on the rights of property owners to do what they like with their property an infringement of their '**democratic rights**', and any challenge from below to the privileges of elected representatives a '**threat to democracy**'. We could call these the confused apologists of liberal democracy. Socialist democracy to them is simply unintelligible: it is a contradiction in terms.

A little more clear-sighted are those who recognise the differences between the elements in liberal democracy, but see no conflict or tension between them, because each is allocated to an entirely separate sphere. Thus the political domain is sharply demarcated from the economic, and each is assigned its appropriate **principle**: popular rule to the one, private property rights to the other. So too, in the sphere of politics, a division of labour is proposed between the representative, whose task it is to determine policy, and the people, whose competence it is simply to decide who the decision-makers shall be (as in the theory of democratic elitism). Democratic equality is confined to a formal equality to compete for positions of power, not an equality of power itself. By means of such divisions these theorists are able to accept the coexistence of incompatible principles with complete equanimity. These are the pigeon-holders of liberal democratic theory. Socialist democracy to them involves a confusion of spheres and competences that should be kept firmly separate: it is not so much a contradiction, more a persistent category mistake.

A third group of theorists sees not only that the elements which make up liberal democracy are distinct, but that they are in conflict with one another. To them liberal democracy involves a trade-off between incommensurate principles. Not only is democracy not '**all things bright and**

beautiful'; its scope has explicitly to be restricted in the interests of other, equally important values: the preservation of individual initiative in the sphere of production and in society at large, the defence of enlightened government, and so on. Such theorists are the self-conscious arbitrators between liberalism and democracy. To them the advocates of socialist democracy are, at best, guilty of a lack of proportion or **balance**; at worst, they are convicted of the dangerous belief that all good things are ultimately compatible with one another.

This brings us to the final group of liberal democratic theorists. They see the tension between liberalism and democracy, but argue that it is necessary in order to preserve any democracy at all. Democracy in modern society can only be *limited* democracy; liberal democracy is the only possible form that it can take. Two familiar kinds of consideration are appealed to here. The first has to do with the focal position that property rights are held to occupy in the protection of those other rights (of expression, association, etc.) which are intrinsic to democracy. Without the one, the other cannot in practice be sustained; without the separation between the economic and political spheres, democratic freedoms become untenable. What is involved here is the characteristic liberal insistence on pluralism: on the limitation and balancing of power as a necessary condition for its control. The concentration of economic as well as political power in a single set of institutions (party or state) which, so it is argued, is entailed by socialism—such a concentration is in practice inconsistent with the maintenance of democracy.

If one part of the liberal justification for limited democracy rests on a theory of pluralism, the other rests on a theory of mediated power. Democracy works, they argue, and can only work by a process whereby mass demands on government are channelled through a set of institutional intermediaries, not asserted directly in mass demonstrations and other forms of direct democracy. The liberal theory and practice of representation is one of the essential forms of this mediation (interest groups with their respective leaderships are another). A system of democracy in which the representative was merely the delegate of his or her constituents, or had to operate alongside parallel institutions of direct democracy, would eventually come to subvert itself: because of the unmanageability of its processes, because of the inconsistent character of its decision-making, or because of the excessive demands it made on its citizens. Ultimately they would themselves concur in its demise.

Such arguments have no doubt frequently assumed an exaggerated, even hysterical form—the fear of the 'masses', the spectre of 'hyper-democracy', the 'tyranny of the majority', etc.—as well as more recently being dressed up in the pseudo-scientific language of functionalist analysis. No doubt, too, the reality of liberal democracy has not matched its own favoured self-description. Yet the grosser forms of apologetic should not

be allowed to obscure a serious contention that underlies them. This is not based (as is the first position above) on an unthinking confusion of liberalism with democracy, but on a thesis about their empirical relationship: conceptually distinct, they are nonetheless argued to be contingently interconnected. Democracy limited by the principles of liberalism is the only kind of democracy historically possible; socialist democracy, though theoretically conceivable, is unworkable in practice. Such a conclusion accords well with the characteristic liberal political temper. The best is unattainable; the task of politics is to protect us against the worst.

Before considering these objections it is necessary to establish what socialist democracy is over against the liberal democracy that has been described above. The first thing to be said is that, where the concept of liberal democracy in a juxtaposition of two different terms which define and limit each other, the concept of democratic socialism is a pleonasm: socialism without democracy is a contradiction. Socialism both entails and requires democracy; it also promises to remove the limitations imposed by liberalism on democracy, and so to provide a more thorough democratisation of society. The following section will seek to establish these propositions.

That socialism entails democracy can be shown by spelling out what is involved in the idea of a society in which the producers are no longer subject to exploitation by a dominant class. 'Exploitation' I am using here in the general Marxian sense of the compulsory extraction and appropriation of a surplus from their labour. Since the means for such extraction and appropriation can be, and historically have been, political as well as economic—as a necessary adjunct to political functions as well as through private ownership—it follows that the abolition of private property in the means of production and exchange can be no more than a necessary condition for socialism. What is required beyond that is the democratisation of all those social agencies and institutions which determine the amount and the uses of the surplus product. Where control by the producers themselves is absent, it makes no difference to the fact of exploitation that those who determine the use of the surplus may be restricted in their private enjoyment of it, or cannot transfer their right to control it to their offspring. Grandiose public works, trips to the moon or Mars, the accelerating development of destructive weapons systems, the apparatus of repression and bureaucratic power itself—all these can require as oppressive a system of exploitation as any that is devoted to conspicuous consumption by private individuals. Wherever a surplus is extracted from the producers under compulsion, and wherever they do not control the uses to which it is directed, there exists a system of exploitation, however varied may be the means and legal forms of that compulsion, and however diverse the uses to which the appropriated surplus is put.

The concept of exploitation thus specifies a power relationship which is only historically terminated when the producers control their own processes of production. Democracy is therefore not an optional extra, to be pursued once exploitation has been overcome, but something intrinsic to that process. To specify the criteria for non-exploitative social relationships is to specify the criteria for the collective control by the producers of the conditions under which a social surplus is produced, the extent of that surplus, and the uses to which it is put. Socialists may differ as to the precise form such arrangements might or should take, and the precise balance to be struck between the respective claims of those who work within an individual unit of production or industry and the claims of the community as a whole. Yet the principle that the rules and policies for production have to be agreed by democratic institutions at each level is inescapable.

If socialism entails democracy in the realm of production, it also requires it in the sphere of collective consumption. Individual consumers in a competitive market can ensure some responsiveness of provision to their requirements by their freedom to shop around. Socialist principles require the restriction of this freedom in the areas of basic social provision, (health, education, etc.) in the interests of equality of condition and provision according to need. In the absence of extensive communal control over this provision, the consequence can only be the bureaucratisation of the services with all its attendant defects: lack of responsiveness and the frustration of the immediate consumers; experience of the service as an external force which does not meaningfully belong to the community; resistance to the levels of taxation necessary to provide an adequate level of service, and so on. There are only two possible alternatives to bureaucratisation: the market and democracy. The first is the characteristic liberal solution. Whenever bureaucratisation threatens, as it does when the state takes over sole responsibility for the provision of basic services, the liberal demands the right to opt out via the restoration of the **market**—a right whose exercise in practice is of course limited by the personal ability to pay. To the individualistic demand for 'exit' the socialist opposes the alternative of collective 'voice': the participation by the users of the service alongside the providers in determining its **form**—students, teachers and parents in schools, the tenants of public housing schemes, the various groups involved in the provision and use of health services, **etc.**—again within a framework of rules agreed by the wider society. The point can perhaps best be formulated in a general proposition: the more that individual choice via the market is restricted, the more extensive the range of democratisation has correspondingly to be.

Socialism, then, requires as well as entails democracy. It also promises the removal of the limitations that liberal democracy sets upon the extent of democratisation. Ending the regime of private capital removes a major

source of undemocratic and unaccountable power within the political process, as well as within the sphere of production itself. And the arrangements with which a socialist society would replace this power would be animated by a more thorough-going democratic spirit than characterises those of liberal democracy, committed as socialism is to the extension of forms of direct and delegated democracy. Over against the liberal conception of the representative assuming individual responsibility for decisions taken on behalf of his or her constituents, socialism posits an ideal of collective and shared responsibility. Of course pressures of time and circumstance may compel elected representatives to act independently from those they represent. But from a democratic perspective this is always a regrettable necessity rather than an ideal to be applauded. The basic congruence between the liberal theory of representative government and its ideal of individual responsibility thus has its counterpart in the congruence between the fraternal and communitarian values of socialism and the democratic ideal of collective decision taking and shared responsibility for a common life.

I hope these arguments are sufficient to establish that socialism is in principle inseparable from democracy. It follows that the concept of authoritarian socialism is self-contradictory, just as it is self-contradictory to suppose that socialism is perfectly compatible with liberal democracy. Certainly it is possible for socialist features to exist, and for socialist measures to be pursued, within both capitalist and statist societies; but they will always remain circumscribed and their purpose blunted by the dominant position of the market in the one and of the official bureaucracy in the other. Of course there is nothing to stop proponents of authoritarian or paternalist statism from describing their system as socialist, or latter-day protagonists of liberal democracy from calling themselves democratic socialists. But such language is essentially parasitic upon a more authentic conception of socialism, which embodies the aspiration for a qualitatively different social order, of which a radical democratisation, going beyond the limits of liberal democracy, is an essential part.

The first stage of the argument has been to define what liberal democracy and socialist democracy respectively are. The second stage is to consider objections raised by liberals against the possibility of socialist democracy. Even those who accept the characterisation of socialist democracy given above may well feel that it suffers from a familiar defect: it is fine in theory, but unworkable in practice. It promises much, but can it deliver its promise? Considering some of these objections will also provide a way of filling out the admittedly sparse account of socialist democracy that has so far been given.

The first objection I want to consider concerns more the philosophical basis for socialist democracy than its practicability, but since the question

has important practical consequences it is proper to consider it here. The socialist emphasis on the collectivity rather than the individual, on the values of solidarity and fraternity as opposed to individualism, leads, so it is contended, to a readiness to sacrifice the individual to society, and to subordinate individual interests to the interests of the whole. Such an emphasis must undermine the liberties on which democracy depends. Without a theory of individual rights there can be no protection for minorities who dissent from the majority view; and, since today's minority may become tomorrow's majority, such a situation must ultimately undermine the freedoms available to all.

It has to be conceded that the philosophical basis of socialist democracy has been sadly undertheorised. The lack of a systematic moral philosophy in the Marxist tradition has often been pointed out. That tradition embodies a clear commitment to proletarian democracy and a rich exploration of democratic forms as an alternative or complement to Parliamentarism. But it offers no sustained justification for democracy. Such justifications as are to be found (Luxemburg is perhaps the only consistent exception) are mostly of a utilitarian kind: proletarian advance depends on the assertion of collective power; the best policy will result from considering all points of view; there is wisdom in the masses; democracy will most effectively promote class interests; and so on. These justifications suffer from the weakness of all utilitarian arguments, that if there are grounds for believing that the desired goal—proletarian class interests—can be secured or promoted by non-democratic means, there is no reason for not immediately adopting them. This is not to say that there can be no occasion when some urgent principle or interest might not justify compromising democratic procedures. But there is all the difference between a principled commitment that is *overridden* under pressing need, and a contingent one whose significance is instrumental to some future goal, and is therefore readily *abandoned* when in contradiction to the goal, or made redundant once the goal is reached.

It seems to me that the only sustainable justification for democracy is one based upon equal *rights*, to share in determining the rules and policies under which one lives, and that this in turn has to be underpinned by a tough conception of personal autonomy as well as of equal human worth. A condition in which rules and policies are systematically determined for a person by others (even if he or she has consented to such an arrangement) is a condition of *heteronomy*; such a person is not free, not responsible for his or her existence, not fully human. Some socialists shy away instinctively from the conception of autonomy because it smacks of bourgeois individualism. It is therefore important to insist that autonomy should not be confused with ideas of self-sufficiency, or independence from others in the basic conditions of life. Personal autonomy in a political (as opposed to a private) context is a condition of being free to decide along

with others the rules and policies of the common life. Respect for the equal autonomy of others also means, in contrast to the anarchist position, accepting a majority verdict on matters where a collective decision is necessary, provided that the rules of debate allow all positions to be heard and so to influence the final outcome.

Democratic rights thus have a dual character. They are rights which are guaranteed to individuals, but which can only be exercised collectively. They recognise together both the autonomy of the individual person as an unconditional value, and the interconnectedness of his or her life with others as a basic condition of existence. To put the matter in this way is to refuse to accept any antithesis between the socialist values of fraternity, solidarity, etc. and individual rights. The difference between liberalism and socialism is not that the former recognises individual rights in the political, civil, economic, social and private spheres, whereas the latter does not. It is rather a question of where the boundaries are to be drawn between these spheres, what the precise content of the rights in question (and their corresponding obligations), and what kind of priority should be assigned to them. Socialism entails a limitation on the private acquisition and use of property where liberalism does not; on the other hand it extends the right to share in the determination of its collective appropriation and use. This involves redrawing the boundary between the public and the private, a re-definition, but not an abrogation, of individual rights.

The concept of private property is open to a similar confusion. Liberals characteristically argue that private property is necessary to secure individual freedom. A private space to do as one likes in, where neither society nor state can intervene, is essential, they argue, to the development of individual character and personal capacities. A political order which interfered in this would generate conformism and servility. This argument, when applied to socialism, confuses different senses of property. The property rights that socialists seek to abolish are those that guarantee to a minority the private command and disposal of socially generated wealth, and the appropriation of the product of others' labour. Such rights can never in practice be universalised, however general the terms in which they are formulated. Yet abolishing them need not eliminate all personal initiative in the provision of goods and services, nor individual choice in consumption. Even less does it entail the abolition of private property in a personal living space, whether this takes the form of ownership or the title to exclusive use. Socialist principles as much as liberal ones recognise an area of the private which is none of the law's business, and which is a matter for personal, not public, decision, however democratic the arrangements for that public decision may be.

It is easy to see how misunderstanding should have arisen on these

questions. Liberals have an interest in presenting private property rights as all of a piece, and as coterminous with individual rights in **general**; a threat to one as a threat to all. Those socialists who lump them all together dismissively as 'bourgeois rights' are merely acquiescing in this confusion. Hence the credence given to such assertions as that liberal democracy has a particular tenderness towards the rights of minorities, whereas socialism, by implication, rides roughshod over them. Such judgements are altogether too indiscriminating. Certainly a socialist majority would not allow minority interests in the ownership of capital to stand in the way of the collective determination of production and economic life. But to remove the democratic rights of the same minority would be to undermine its own position. It is the capitalist's private monopoly of a public function, not his civic persona, that is offensive. Such distinctions may not always be easy to draw in practice, but it is essential to be clear about them in principle. The liberal suspicion that to remove democratic rights from one group is to undermine them for all is well founded. But what socialists seek is to *extend* such rights, by freeing them from the limitations imposed by private capital.

The conceptual confusion involved in some of the above arguments can be avoided, as we have already seen, by reformulating the connection between property rights and democratic liberties as an empirical relationship. It then becomes an argument about the separation of power between the economic and political spheres, and the necessity of a pluralism of power centres to ensure the liberties intrinsic to democracy. It seems to me that in a very general form, though not in the precise content which liberals assign to it, this argument is incontestable. That is to say, I take it to be a general law that the greater the concentration of decision making authority, the more difficult it is to subject it to democratic control, and the greater the threat to the freedoms which are central to a democratic society. It does not follow from this, however, that there has to be a rigid separation between an 'economic' and a 'political' sphere, or that the division of powers has to take the form it takes in liberal democracy. What is at issue, in other words, is the need for a theory of socialist pluralism.

There are five main dimensions that one can envisage pluralism assuming in a socialist democracy: division of power between centre and locality; division within the economic sphere between plan and market; separation between different sectors or functions of public administration; division between political authority and the legal system; division between political authority and the means of communication. These are not all mutually exclusive dimensions, but overlapping or intersecting ones. The list may appear at first sight not all that different from a list of forms of liberal pluralism, but the difference emerges as soon as one penetrates beneath the surface; in particular the fact that under socialism the division

of powers would involve a division between democratic, popularly elected bodies. What follows is a sketch of possibilities, not a blueprint for implementation.

The division of powers between centre and locality states the most general form of pluralism, whether one is referring to the organisation of a school vis-a-vis the national system of education, of a factory vis-a-vis an industry or the economy as a whole, or to the activities of government in general. The chief means for securing a measure of local autonomy against the centre are: legally enforceable spheres of competence; an independent source of income; the democratic legitimacy that comes from a strong popular power base. A combination of the three obviously ensures the strongest position. Any measure of independence for the local body offers a potential source of friction with the centre as well as the basis for a rational division of labour; it also necessarily implies diversity from one place to the next according to local circumstances and initiatives, a diversity which may come to conflict with the principle of equality and uniformity of citizenship. Yet it is important to insist, in face of the secular tendencies making for centralisation which socialism would no doubt reinforce, that democracy starts with the immediate locale. It is in the face to face relationships of a spatially limited context that people learn the procedures, the techniques, the rationale of democracy. There can, however, be no general formula for determining the right balance to be struck between centre and locality.

The division between plan and market can be seen from one point of view as a special case of the division between centre and locality, but it raises further issues that are particularly contentious for socialist theory. The alternative of market or democracy that was posed in an earlier part of this paper was posed in the context of the provision of basic social services, not of consumer goods. Among other factors which would justify a difference of treatment between the two are the social significance of the provision of the former and the much more damaging consequences of allowing individual choice; on the other side the sheer difficulty of collecting information and allocating production centrally for the whole range of individually variable consumption requirements. I find myself convinced by the arguments for the maintenance of a market and price mechanism under socialism, not least because of the increased scope it provides for self-management at factory level and the realistic possibility it offers of linking individual incentives to a collective self interest (that of co-workers at plant level rather than that of the abstract community at large). In the sphere of social production, in other words, the market can contribute to democratisation. The issues at stake here are obviously too complex to be dealt with in a brief space, but it is important to emphasise that the use of the market under socialism would take place within a framework of central planning far more extensive than is possible under capitalism, i.e.

its role would be a genuinely subordinate one, rather than dominant as it is even in the so-called mixed economy.

The third dimension of a possible socialist pluralism is the sectoral or functional one—the institution of democratic and representative processes in each of the different areas of public provision independently. The idea of the general representative as the sole or dominant form of representation is one of the chief defects of liberal democracy from a democratic point of view. That one person should represent others on every conceivable issue—such an idea is in itself guaranteed to frustrate any possibility of popular accountability or control. It establishes a monopoly of the role of representative. It also presumes a level of omniscience in the individual which is totally unrealistic. The characteristic consequences of these inadequacies in the liberal democratic system of representation are the emergence of a pluralism of pressure groups on the one hand (often self-selected and unrepresentative), and the increase in the equally unaccountable power of the civil service on the other. A lively sectoral or functional democracy, genuinely representative of the relevant interests at the grass roots and reaching up to the national level, would be a distinctive feature of socialist democracy. Of course there would be a place for the general representative, as there would for the major issues of allocation: assigning priorities for legislation and the distribution of the social product, determining the overall economic plan, etc. But one could envisage a directly elected general assembly cooperating with an indirectly elected assembly from the various sectors in deciding these major issues of social priority.

The independence of the judicial system and of the media are forms of the sectoral division of power that are especially salient for any democracy. The traditional liberal argument for the separation of powers between the judicial and other branches of government, and its associated conception of the rule of law—that the judgement of individual cases should be made according to formally established laws, not according to immediate administrative convenience or political pressure (including popular pressure)—is surely valid. Socialist attacks on this principle have usually been misdirected attacks on a different target: the content of the law itself, the social prejudices of the judges applying it, the mumbo-jumbo which makes the process unintelligible to the layman, etc. The fact that the principle may justifiably be overridden *in extremis*—e.g. by the revolutionary abrogation of existing law where attempts to change it legally have been undemocratically blocked—does not make the principle any the less essential for the working of a socialist democracy. Socialism attacks not the principle, but the undemocratic way it is applied in liberal society; it seeks to democratise the legal system, through the reform of legal training, equal accessibility to the law, election of the judiciary, extension of the jury system, and so on. A similar conclusion applies to

the independence of the media from government control: it is not so much the principle that is at fault as the way it operates in liberal society to ensure the control of the means of communication by unrepresentative private capital. The best way of financing newspapers, etc., in a socialist democracy is again a matter of debate, but the principle of independence from political control is incontestable.

These, then, are some of the forms that pluralism might take in a socialist democracy. They exemplify the two main dimensions of the concentration of power—vertical and lateral: centralisation, and monopolisation of function—and the corresponding strategies for its dispersal, by extension of local autonomy on the one hand, and the division of power between bodies with a large element of functional autonomy on the other. It would be a mistake to pretend, however, that either are entirely unproblematic from a socialist viewpoint. Forms of local autonomy in particular are inseparable from a measure of inequality between one locality and the next, between one industrial unit and another. Certainly this constitutes a more acceptable form of inequality than class inequality—an inequality of advantage, rather than a system of power relations—and it is one of the tasks of the centre to set limits to its extent by legislation and redistribution. Short of a complete transformation of human nature, however, or the equally improbable inauguration of an era of universal plenty in which labour becomes unnecessary, the demands for democratisation and for the attainment of complete economic and social equality must remain in tension with one another. Here presumably lies the main difference between socialist and communist society.

Both dimensions of pluralism raise the further problem of coordination, and the execution of nationally determined priorities without excessive time-lags. This problem can only be posed and not resolved here. It goes without saying, however, that the existence of a monopolistic party as chief instrument of coordination is incompatible with the perspectives outlined above. A pluralism of publicly defended viewpoints and of candidates for election is by definition a necessary feature of democracy. (Pluralism of decisional choice is obviously even more basic to democracy than the separation of power discussed throughout this section). In most contexts a pluralism of parties as permanent institutions for structuring choice is necessary to secure this end. But it is worth adding that the liberal democratic conception of party is also inconsistent with some of the perspectives advanced above. Such parties are a major source of exclusivity and elitism, which arises necessarily from their self-confessed aggregative function, and also as a by-product of a system in which politics is defined as the province of a few. Perhaps this is the point to add a genuinely Utopian touch, and look forward to the ultimate withering away, not only of the state, but of parties as well.

At this point the liberal critic is inclined to raise more insistently the original objection about the practicability of the arrangements envisaged. Could they possibly work? At one level there is a perfectly straightforward answer to the objection. If a fraction of the experience and practical intelligence were devoted to solving the problems of democratisation that is currently devoted in capitalist society by business consultants and others to solving problems of managerial efficiency, arrangements would no doubt in due course be devised to overcome obstacles that at present appear insuperable for lack of practical consideration and experiment. All that this reveals is the lack of serious concern with democratisation as a goal within capitalist society. The critic, however, means more than this. What he or she is questioning is whether the degree of involvement from the citizen body necessary to make such arrangements work would ever be forthcoming.

The question of popular involvement resolves itself into three different aspects: time, capacity, inclination. As to the first, it is evident that a socialist democracy would require a considerably greater amount of time devoted to politics, to the discussion and decision of collective affairs, than is required from the average citizen of liberal democracy. Such involvement requires a considerable surplus of time available from the activities of direct production. It was partly for this reason that Marx and Engels regarded an advanced level of industrialisation as a necessary condition for socialism. The division of labour, whereby managing the collective affairs of society became the monopoly of a special group, was for them one of the prime sources of class division. It is a problem for the socialist theory of development how far this assumption is valid, and whether the strategies available to the developing world amount to a choice between more or less progressive forms of exploitation. This need not be answered here. It is sufficient to point out that the industrialised West has long since reached levels of productivity which make a progressive erosion in the division of labour a serious possibility.

It is important to be clear what sense of the erosion in the division of labour is necessary to democratisation. A socialist economy and society would depend upon the exercise of specialised skills and on people trained in these skills. A socialist democracy would require a corps of trained administrators; the point that it is the people who decide *policy*, while its execution is entrusted to a special staff is a distinction basic to democracy. There are of course strong arguments for a citizen militia, because of the crucial role that the armed forces play in the polity. But Lenin's dictum that everyone should be their own bureaucrat makes no more sense than the postulate that everyone be their own doctor (after allowance has been made for a shift of emphasis to preventive medicine). The parallel between administration and medicine, however, makes clear what it is about the bourgeois division of labour that a socialist society would seek to

overcome. This is not the exercise of skill or specialist expertise in itself, but those features which are inseparable from the concept of a profession: the monopolisation of knowledge as a source of power, the guarantee of a superior status over those who are served and the internal determination of rules of entry and recruitment. These features take an extreme form in a bureaucracy. They are not functional for the efficient execution of administrative tasks in every conceivable society, though they no doubt are in a social order where skill is equated with profession, and where the administrators expect to be treated in an appropriate way. This is to say that these features are culturally specific, and do not have the universal significance for modern society that is accorded them by the Weberian model.

What is required for socialist democracy, therefore, is a model of a non-bureaucratic system of administration. The openness of its operation and the availability of its expertise would be one of its cardinal features. This would imply guaranteed access not only for probing news media but for a relevant public also. It would also imply a massively extended system of continuing education available to citizens as well as representatives, to enable them to acquire expertise in areas appropriate to their democratic activity. Here the question raised about the *capacity* of people to run a socialist democracy resolves itself largely into the question of time and opportunity, unless an extreme position is to be taken on the innateness of the capacities relevant to democracy.

This leaves us with the question of inclination. Supposing that people had the time and the capacity to make a socialist democracy work, where is the evidence that they would want to spend their time in public activity rather than digging their gardens? (This is the alternative usually offered, though I can think of others.) There are two different forms in which this argument tends to be posed. One is that any kind of political activity involves a cost which a rational actor will not incur if others will do it for him. In its original Benthamite form this argument was part of the argument from the division of labour: most citizens just had to devote their time and energies to an economic occupation. It has since become generalised. Like work to the economist, so is political activity to the *politologist* something which a rational actor avoids if he can (presumably he gets someone else to dig his garden as well. Does he ever leave his chair?). The massive hole in this argument—that manifestly not everyone regards political activity in this way—is filled by a second: some people have a taste for politics just as others have for becoming vegetables. The latter, however, should not be forced to conform to the tastes of the former. Just as the demand for socialist equality is the projection of personal envy, so the demand for socialist democracy is an attempt to foist a purely personal taste for political activism on to an unwilling population.

That the privatisation of life implicit in the above argument is a

historically specific product, not a universal human attribute, is demonstrated by the existence of cultures in which public involvement has been much more widespread. The conception of Periclean Athens, that someone who had no concern for politics did not properly belong in the city, is only the most obvious example. What it suggests is that a society with a real democratic culture, into which the young were socialised, and with strong informal pressures towards participation, would be a perfectly viable society. No social system, after all, is neutral about its basic values, not even a socialist one.

A socialist has, however, to pose the argument in stronger terms than this. That a socialist democracy could be self-sustaining, *once* it were instituted, may be all very well, but provides no credible link between present and future. If it is true that it will only come if enough people want it to, then socialist theory has to provide plausible grounds for expecting the need for it to be felt in the privatised world of the present. Such grounds are in fact only too apparent, in the increasing inability of people in either capitalist or statist societies to control their lives in matters that are important to them, or to experience the reality of their interdependence in ways that are subjectively satisfying. The need for the democratisation of economy and society in order to satisfy basic economic requirements is perhaps most obviously pressing in the statist societies of Eastern Europe, just as the bureaucratic deformation of social interdependence is also most apparent. Yet the crisis in capitalist societies is awakening wider strata of the population there to the lack of control they have over their economic life, while governmental decisions over a range of issues from civil rights to nuclear weapons policy expose the absence of guarantees for popular debate and control within liberal democracy. It is around such issues that the awakening of the demand for a more general democratisation has to be based.

This brings the argument finally to the question of the transition to socialism. The issues involved here are complex, and properly form the subject of a different paper from the present, though they are also relevant to it. Enough to say that the road to socialism is a long haul, and there can be few illusions left about that. All the more reason, therefore, to insist that liberal objections to the practicability of socialist democracy remain unconvincing, and the argument that we should put up with the defects and limitations of liberal democracy because it protects us against something much worse is not merely unadventurous, but wearing increasingly thin.