# Democracy, Capitalism, and Transformation

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## I. Democracy and the World-System Up to Now

Democracy has become everyone's slogan today. Who does not claim that democracy is a good thing, and which politician does not assert that the government of which he is a part practices it and/or the party that he represents wishes to maintain and extend it? It is hard to remember that not so very long ago, in the period from the French Revolution up to 1848 at least, "democracy" was a word used only by dangerous radicals.[1] "Democrat" was the label of multiple extreme left organizations in the 1830s and 1840s.[2] For the powers that were in the period of the Holy Alliance, to accuse someone of being a democrat was a bit like accusing someone in the post-1945 Western world of being a communist.

When, after 1848, Giuseppe Mazzini (who called himself a democrat) fell into a major quarrel with the socialists, the latter added the term social to their slogan; they talked of being "for a universal democratic and social republic."[3] This is probably the origin of the later name Social-Democrats, the distinction now being deemed necessary because "democrat" alone no longer denoted radical, having been appropriated by others as well whose politics were more centrist. It would take another half-century at least before conservatives also appropriated the word.

Of course, as we know, it all depends on the content we put into a word, any word. One possible usage of "democracy," one widespread definition today, is freedom from arbitrary political power. In this definition, democracy is more or less the realization of an individualist liberal political agenda. Its outward measures become whether or not there are free elections in which multiple parties contend, whether or not there exist communications media not under the direct political control of the government, whether or not one can pursue one's religious faith without state interference — in short, the degree to which all those things that are usually summarized as "civil liberties" are in fact practiced within the bounds of a particular state.

Using this definition, the historical development of democracy tends to be described as having followed a linear curve. The usual theoretical model starts implicitly with the moment of an "absolute monarch" or its equivalent. Wresting decision making away from the chief executive, or at least forcing him to share his powers with an elected legislature, is part of the story. Limiting the degree to which the state is permitted to intrude in the so-called private arena is another part of the story. Ensuring that critics are neither silenced nor punished is still another part. Employing these criteria, we find that the picture seems to be brightest today in the pan-European world (Western Europe, North America, Australasia) and less good (to quite varying degrees) elsewhere in the world. One part of the furor raised by the inclusion of Jörg Haider's party in the Austrian government was the fear that Austria would begin to look less good on this kind of scorecard.[4] When today Western politicians talk about how democratic a particular country is, this is usually how they are measuring it. Indeed, the US government annually issues formal scorecards of other governments using precisely such criteria.

To be sure, civil liberties are important. And we know exactly how important whenever they are seriously constricted. Under regimes that constrict civil liberties, which we usually label "dictatorships," there is always a certain amount of resistance, particularly by persons who wish to speak out publicly (intellectuals, journalists, politicians, students), an opposition which may be deeply underground if

the repression is sufficiently severe. When for whatever reason the regime becomes weaker, and is somehow overthrown, one of the things that people tend to celebrate is the end of such kind of repression. So we know that such civil liberties are valued, appreciated, and utilized when and where they exist.

But we also know that, for the average person, while civil liberties are seen as desirable, they are seldom at the top of his/her political agenda. And in those states in which a regime largely respects civil liberties, these liberties seldom seem to be enough to fulfill the average person's sense of what should define a democratic society. If they were, we would not have so much political indifference and so much political abstention. When we look at the so-called liberal states, those with relatively high levels of civil liberties, we discover a whole series of other issues which are of concern to most people, give rise to their complaints, and inflect their political priorities.

The complaints, it seems to me, can be grouped in three major categories: complaints about corruption; complaints about material inequalities; complaints about the inadequate inclusiveness of citizenship. Let us start with corruption. There is an incredible amount of cynicism on this subject, as well there might be. It would be hard to name a single government in the world in the last hundred years that has not known one, several, many corruption scandals. Of course, here again, it is a bit a matter of definition. If we mean by corruption the private purchase of the services/decisions of a public figure (politician or civil servant), this of course occurs all the time, often in the form of "kickbacks" from government contracts. This is possibly more frequent in poorer countries, or more frequently reported. In the case of the poorer countries, the corrupters are quite often noncitizens, persons from wealthier states, both capitalists and representatives of other governments. However, overt bribery is the least of the story.

A much more fundamental issue is the degree to which money buys access. This kind of corruption is pervasive in the operations of the regimes of the wealthier states (precisely those with the better records on civil liberties). Politics in a multiparty system is an expensive game to conduct, and it is getting more expensive all the time. Most politicians, most political parties have financial needs that go far beyond what can be supplied by the relatively small contributions of the mass of their supporters. We all know what happens as a result. Wealthier contributors (individuals and corporate groups) offer large sums of money, sometimes to multiple competing parties at the same time. And in return, they expect a certain amount of tacit sympathy for their needs and explicit access for their lobbying.

In theory, capitalists operate via the market and wish governments to stay out of market operations. In practice, as every capitalist knows, the governments are crucial to their market success in multiple ways — by making possible or impossible relative monopolies, in being large-scale near-monopsonistic purchasers of expensive items, as manipulators of macroeconomic decisions (including, of course, taxation). No serious capitalist can afford to ignore governments, his own and those of any other country in which he operates. But given that politicians must give priority to getting into power or remaining in power, and have great financial needs, no serious capitalist can afford to ignore this obvious source of pressure on governments, or he will lose out to competitors or to hostile interests. Therefore no serious capitalist does ignore governments, and all serious capitalists have in the forefront of their consciousness the fact that politicians have great financial needs. Consequently, corruption is absolutely normal and unexpungeable from the ongoing political life of the capitalist world-economy.

Still, corruption is not merely illegal; it is against the norms, regularly proclaimed, of honest government and a neutral bureaucracy. When a major norm is violated daily, the only possible result is widespread cynicism. And that is what we have. Of course, cynicism can lead to quite different responses.

One response is to get our guys in there. Another is to wage battle to limit the damage of corruption. A third is to withdraw from active participation in politics. Each response has its limitations. The problem with "getting our guys in there" is that it seldom changes the gap between norm and reality. The problem with seeking to limit the damage is that it is so difficult to do, so nearly impossible, that it often seems not worth the trouble to try. And this leads more and more people to opt for the third response, withdrawal, which leaves the corrupt to reign undisturbed.

Another possibility, however, is to redefine what one means by democracy, enlarging on it, and insisting on substantive results in addition to mere electoral process. The electoral process of course has known an important evolution in the last two centuries. We have arrived, in virtually every state, at a norm of universal adult suffrage. Considering where the world was 200 years ago, this is a major structural change. And as we have already noted, this is regularly celebrated as the advent of democracy. If we look at the history of the expansion of suffrage, [5] we see immediately that it was always the result of a political struggle. And we see also that the widening of suffrage tended to be a concession by those in power to movements conducted by those who lacked the suffrage.

The principal debate among those who controlled the political machinery whenever such a widening of the suffrage was discussed was always one between the fearful (who paraded as the tough-minded) and the sophisticated. The fearful were those who argued that allowing wider access to the suffrage would result in significantly negative changes in the control of the state machinery, putting political power in the hands of persons who would undo the existing social system. This was the theme of the "unwashed masses" threatening to displace persons of social substance. The sophisticated were those who argued that, on the contrary, once they were accorded the suffrage, the "dangerous classes" would become, by the very fact of their nominal inclusion in the political process, less dangerous, and the dreaded political changes would not occur or would turn out to be minor.

The incremental concessions advocated by the sophisticated were eventually widely adopted, and the sophisticates turned out to be correct indeed in their anticipations that a widened suffrage would not lead to overturning the system. On the contrary, the concessions did precisely seem to undo the revolutionary inclinations of the unwashed masses. But of course, this is in part because the concessions went beyond those of the suffrage alone. The second set of concessions are those we call generically the "welfare state." If we define this loosely as all state action that supported and made possible increases in wage levels plus the use of the state for a certain amount of redistribution of the global surplus, then we have had the welfare state to some degree for over a century and virtually across the world (though to very different degrees).

Actually, we can divide the welfare state redistributive benefits into three principal categories, the response to three kinds of fundamental demands that average persons have put upon the states. The categories are health, education, and lifetime income. Virtually all people wish to prolong life and good health to the extent possible, for themselves and their families. Virtually all people wish to arrange education for themselves and their children, primarily in order to improve their life chances. And almost all people worry about the irregularities of real income over their lifetime and wish not merely to increase their current income but to minimize sharp fluctuations. These are all perfectly reasonable aspirations. And they have been regularly reflected in ongoing political programs.

Actually, quite a bit has been done along these lines over the past 200 years. In the field of health, we have had governments active in improving sanitation, in providing preventive medicine (such as, for example, mass vaccinations), subsidizing hospitals and clinics, expanding medical education, providing various kinds of health insurance (as well as certain kinds of free services). In the field of education, whereas 200 years ago virtually no one received a formal education, today primary education

is available almost everywhere, secondary education is widespread (albeit unevenly), and even tertiary education is available for a significant number of people (at least in the wealthier states). As for guaranteed lifetime income, we have programs of unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, and various other methods of evening out fluctuations over the life span. To be sure, compared to health and education, programs to guarantee lifetime income are far more unevenly distributed across the world-system.

We should be careful how we evaluate these welfare state benefits. On the one hand, they constitute a remarkable structural difference with the situation of 200 years ago, where almost all such programs and mechanisms were unknown and politically inconceivable. On the other hand, these programs have benefited primarily that part of the world's population we might call the cadres of the system, or the middle strata. Such middle strata are not, it is important to note, evenly distributed across the world-system. In a Third World country, at most 5 percent of the population might fall within such a category, whereas in the wealthiest states, perhaps 40-60 percent would.

Thus, looked at through the lens of national statistics, it is the case that in a minority of states the majority of the population is better off today than their putative ancestors were 200 years ago. At the same time, the polarization of the world-system has continued apace, not only between countries but within countries. Furthermore, this polarization is not merely relative, but for some portion of the world's population (difficult to measure but not too difficult to observe) the polarization is absolute.

And yet, while the redistributive effects of the welfare state have been far less good than we are wont to believe, or that the propagandists of the world-system constantly tell us, it is simultaneously true that the cost of such redistribution as there has been is considerable and is reflected in the relatively high tax rates of the wealthier countries. Those who are taxed perpetually complain that it is too much. But it is true that the tax bill is far higher today than 50, 100, 200 years ago — both for the upper and middle strata of the world's population and for capitalist enterprises.

To be sure, there are advantages to capitalists in this redistribution, since it increases effective demand. But it is not at all certain that the increased effective demand is greater than the tax bite, as measured over the long run. And this is true for one simple reason. Politically, the popular demand for democratization has translated into an unceasingly upward curve in the level of demand for redistribution, spreading not only upward within countries, but also outward to more and more countries and therefore upward within the world-system as a whole.

Now this kind of democratization is less popular with capitalists in general than are civil liberties, and the struggle to limit redistribution, to reverse the pattern and reduce the rate to the degree possible, is the bread and butter of conservative political programs. I have no doubt that, repeatedly, conservative forces win victories that enable them to stem the increase in or even reduce the levels of redistribution. But if one regards the picture over some 200 years, it seems clear to me that taxation has followed an upward ratchet. Each reversal has been small compared to the next advance. The neoliberal offensive of the 1980s (Thatcherism-Reaganism) and the globalization rhetoric of the 1990s have been just such an effort to stem the increase. This effort has achieved something, but far less than its proponents had hoped, and the political reaction has already set in across the globe.

Let me now introduce the third set of complaints, that about the inadequate inclusiveness of citizenship. The term citizen we know is one thrust upon the world's political vocabulary by the French Revolution. The concept was intended to symbolize the refusal of a system of orders, in which no-

bility and commoners had different social rank and different political rights. The intent was one of inclusion. Commoners as well as nobility were to be included in the political process. All persons, that is, all citizens, were to be equal. All citizens had rights.

The problem is posed immediately in what is to be included in the "rights" of citizens. Various attempts to have these rights defined very extensively at one fell swoop were beaten back by "counter-revolutions." But there has been a slow extension over the past 200 years, which has accelerated particularly in the last 50 years. One element was the extension of the suffrage, expanding from the propertied to the nonpropertied, from older to younger persons, from men to women, from the core ethnic group to so-called minorities. A second front was the struggle against slavery and then against other forms of servitude. A third front has been the effort to end formal discriminations, by eliminating them from state practices and forbidding them in private practices. Today, we have a long list of sources of discrimination which have become socially illegitimate: class, race, ethnicity, "indigenicity," gender, age, sexuality, disability. And this list is constantly being augmented.

One should point to one last level of complaint about democracy. It is the complaint that we are theoretically limited to complaining about, and doing something about, the amount of democracy in the countries of which we are citizens. There have always been persons who have been solidary with movements in other countries for social justice or for citizenship rights or for national liberation. There have been cosmopolitan individuals who have gone off to other countries to be active in their struggles, including their revolutions. But states have been constrained and have constrained themselves on the principle of reciprocal recognition of sovereignty.

In the 19th century, the reciprocal recognition of sovereignty was accorded only to states considered part of the interstate system, which were defined as "civilized" states. Other zones of the globe that were not considered "civilized" were subject to the self-proclaimed right of the "civilized" states to engage in a "civilizing mission," which involved conquest, administration, and forcible transformation of certain customs. In the heyday of imperialism, in the late 19th century, the term imperialism was a word of honor, at least in the countries in which it formed the basis of their policies.

The attitude toward the legitimacy of imperialism changed after World War II. Suddenly, it became a negative word. And we entered the era of the national liberation movements which proceeded to achieve success more or less everywhere in the post-1945 period in their primary aim — local sovereignty for their states. As soon as this occurred, however, a new movement arose, largely in the Western world, in favor of "human rights," which were defined as the various kinds of democratic rights of which we have been speaking, from civil liberties to citizenship rights.

Organizations outside the accused countries were founded, which tried to create political pressure, directly upon the governments of the states defined as having inadequate human rights and indirectly via the governments of the states in which these human rights organizations were located. Pressure could take many forms — publicity, boycotts, and ultimately "the right to intervene." The recent activities of the NATO states in the Balkans have all been conducted under the rubric of "human rights" and the "right to intervene."

So where are we in this discourse about democracy? Is it a reality, a mirage, something in-between? Is it realizable, but not yet realized, as the organizers of this forum seem to suggest in the way they have formulated the question? The apologists of incremental advance assert that much has been accomplished. The spokespersons for the multiple groups that have come into existence to struggle for greater democracy argue, for the most part, that the goal of equal rights is nowhere near to being realized. I think that, if we are to speak to these dissonant evaluations, and in the light of the histo-

rical realities I have summarized, we must go over the ground a second time, a bit more analytically, dividing our assessment into three categories: democracy as rhetoric; democracy as practice; democracy as possibility.

## II. Democracy as Rhetoric

Why did the term democracy evolve from being the expression of revolutionary aspiration to a universal platitude? Originally, in Western political philosophy, from the Greeks through the 18th century, democracy had always been taken to mean what its Greek roots indicate, the rule of the people — that is, the rule of the people as opposed not only to the rule of one person but even more to the rule of the best people, aristocracy. So democracy was first of all a quantitative concept. It implied the call for equality in a basically inegalitarian situation, since if there were "best" people, then there must have been "less good" people — ignorant, unwashed, crude, poor.

Who the best people are does not really matter. They have been defined in terms of blood/descent/formal attributions. They have been defined in terms of wealth/property/economic managerial role. They have been defined in terms of education/intelligence/complex skills. And all of these modes of classifying the best have always been accompanied by assumptions that manners/style of life/being "civilized" is a characteristic of the best people. The crucial element has always been to distinguish between two groups, those defined as having the capacity to participate in the process of collective decisions and those said to be without this capacity. Democracy as an idea, as a movement, was originally intended to refuse such a distinction as the basis of organizing political life.

There was never really any important debate on this issue. Indeed, there could not have been one, until the time that the concept of "citizenship" became current in ordinary political discourse. And this cultural shift is the great rhetorical legacy of the French Revolution. We are all citizens now.

Or are we? The basic discussion about the implications of the concept of citizenship took place at two successive moments in time. In the beginning of the 19th century, it took the form of an internal national debate in Great Britain, France, the United States, and a few other countries, centering on the issue of the suffrage.[6] The basic choice was between propertied suffrage, what the French called suffrage censitaire, and universal suffrage. We know that eventually, in these countries and then elsewhere, universal suffrage won out; furthermore, what was included in the term universal was steadily expanded.

But once the principle of universal suffrage became accepted (even if not fully implemented), the debate shifted location. As suffrage became wider in Western countries (and other elements of civil liberties became more widespread as well in these same countries), the term citizen became more legitimate in these countries and was utilized to fulfill its inclusive intention. However, the concept of citizen always excludes every bit as much as it includes. For citizen necessarily implies noncitizen. If the dangerous classes are no longer dangerous, if the uncivilized working classes are now accepted as citizens, then the rhetorical line between civilized and uncivilized shifts to being one between civilized countries and uncivilized countries. This would then become the chief rhetorical justification of imperial rule, and the rhetorical basis of demanding and obtaining working-class participation in the glories of the civilizing mission.

At this point, "democracy" was no longer being used as a term to express the demands of the understrata in a national class struggle but rather as a term that was justifying the policies of the dominant forces in a world struggle between the so-called civilized and the noncivilized, between the

West and the rest. Thus, because the resonance of the concept of democracy had changed, the very groups which dreaded the word in the first half of the 19th century came to adopt it by the end of the century and were using it as their theme song by the second half of the 20th century. At this point, the concept of democracy became primarily a symbol of, a consequence of, a proof of civilization. The West is democratic; the rest are not. The hegemonic forces in the world-economy proclaim themselves thereby the moral leaders. Their hegemony is the basis of progress throughout the world. They offer democracy as a Holy Grail. They therefore incarnate virtue.

## III. Democracy as Realization

The new rhetoric would not have worked if there were not some empirical bases to these claims. What were they? To appreciate this, we have to reflect on the fundamental difference between a capitalist and a precapitalist system in terms of social stratification. In a precapitalist structure, the upper stratum holds power because it controls the means of violence. It thereby lays claim to a disproportionate share of the wealth. Those who acquire wealth otherwise than by military appropriation, say via the market, are not defined as part of the upper stratum and therefore live in the eternal fear of confiscation. They seek to avoid this fate by buying their way into the aristocracy, which took time — sometimes as much as four generations — to complete.

The capitalist world-economy is just as deeply stratified as the precapitalist systems, but the relations of the strata are different. The upper stratum holds its rank not because of its past military prowess but because of its past economic prowess. Those who are not at the top but have skills, those we are calling the cadres or middle strata of the system, are not living in fear of confiscation. On the contrary, they are in effect being constantly solicited and appeased by the upper strata, who need their assistance to maintain the political equilibrium of the overall world-system, that is, to hold in check the dangerous classes.

The extension of the suffrage, the benefits of the welfare state, the recognition of particularist identities, are all part of the program of appeasing these cadres, securing their loyalty to the overall system, and most of all obtaining their assistance in maintaining in their place the majority of the world's population. Let us think of the capitalist world-system as socially a tripartite system divided (symbolically) into 1 percent at the top, 19 percent who are cadres, and 80 percent at the bottom. Then let us add the spatial element to which we have already referred. Within the bounds of the singular system that is the capitalist world-economy, the 19 percent are not spread out evenly among all the political units, but rather concentrated in a few of them.

If we make these two assumptions — a tripartite stratification system, with geographical lumpiness — then it seems obvious that the slogan of "democracy" has had enormous meaning for the 19 percent, since it implies a real improvement in their political, economic, and social situation. But we can also see that it has had very little meaning for the 80 percent, since they have received very little of the presumed benefits, whether political, economic, or social. And the fact that a small group of countries has more wealth, and a more liberal state, and multiparty systems that function more or less — in short, the fact that a few countries are civilized — is not the cause but precisely the consequence of the deep inequalities in the world-system as a whole. And this is why the rhetoric rings true in some parts of the world-system and seems so hollow in other parts, the larger parts.

So, democracy unrealized? Of course. One doesn't even need to demonstrate, which can be done, that democracy, however defined, is constrained and limping even in the so-called liberal states. It is enough to note that it is not functioning to any significant degree at all in most of the world. When

a Western leader preaches the virtues of democracy to a Third World state, and they do this quite regularly, he is being either willfully blind to the realities of the worldsystem or cynical in asserting his country's moral superiority. I am in no way defending or justifying the dictatorships of the world. Repression is not a virtue anywhere, not to speak of mass slaughters. It is simply to note that these phenomena are neither accidental, nor the result of the fact that certain countries have uncivilized cultures, nor certainly the result of the insufficient openness of such countries to the flows of capital. Two-thirds of the world do not have liberal states because of the structure of the capitalist world-economy which makes it impossible for them to have such political regimes.

## IV. Democracy as Possibility

If democracy is thus quite unrealized in our contemporary world, is it realizable? There are two possible answers: "yes, by further increments"; and "no." There are no small number of people who say "yes, by further increments." The idea is that the benefits accorded to 19 percent could next be accorded to 21 percent and then to 25 percent and then and then. What is needed, say these people, is further organized pressure — by social movements, by NG0s, by enlightened intellectuals, or by the cultural reformation of the uncivilized peoples.

The major argument that such prognosticators have on their side is that this is how it has worked in the last 200 years, where the concessions we may call democratization have indeed been won by struggle, have indeed been won in increments. What this prognosis leaves out of account is the cumulative impact of the incremental change on the functioning of the system. The basic reason for concessions by persons of privilege to demands for democratization is to defuse the anger, to incorporate the rebellious, but always in order to save the basic framework of the system. This strategy incarnates the di Lampedusa principle that "everything must change in order that nothing change."

The di Lampedusa principle is a very efficacious one, up to a tipping point. Demands for further democratization, for further redistribution of the political, economic, and social pie, far from having exhausted themselves, are endless, even if only in increments. And the democratization of the past 200 years, even if it has benefited only my hypothetical 19 percent of the world population, has been costly to the 1 percent, and has consumed a noticeable portion of the pie. If the 19 percent were to become 29 percent, not to speak of their becoming 89 percent, there would be nothing left for the privileged. To be quite concrete, one could no longer have the ceaseless accumulation of capital, which is after all the raison d'être of the capitalist world-economy. So either a halt must be called to the democratization process, and this is politically difficult, or one has to move to some other kind of system in order to maintain the hierarchical, inegalitarian realities.

It is toward this kind of transformation that I believe we are heading today. I shall not repeat here my detailed analysis of all the factors that have led to what I think of as the structural crisis of the capitalist world-system. Democratization as a process is only one of the factors that have brought the system to its current chaotic state, and immanent bifurcation.[7] What I see, as a result, is an intense political struggle over the next 25 to 50 years about the successor structure to a capitalist world-economy. In my view, this is a struggle between those who want it to be a basically democratic system and those who do not want that. I am therefore somewhat unhappy about the suggestion of the organizers that democracy may be "an essentially unfinishable project." Such a formulation evokes the image of the tragic condition of humanity, its imperfections, its eternal improvability. And, of course, who can argue with such an imagery? But the formulation leaves out of account the possibility that there are moments of historic choice that can make an enormous difference. Eras of transition from one historical social system to another are just such moments of historic choice.[8]

If we can never have a perfectly democratic system, I do believe it is possible to have a largely democratic system. I do not believe we now have it. But we could have it. So, it then becomes important to go back to the drawing board and say what the struggle is about. It is not about civil liberties, although of course a democratic society would have civil liberties to warm the cockles of John Stuart Mill's heart. And it should have them. It is not about multiparty systems, a technique of democratic large-scale choice that is only one of many possible ones, and one not widely used in any arena today other than in national and subnational periodic votings.

Democracy, it must be said, is about equality, which is the opposite of racism, the pervasive sentiment of political life in the capitalist world-economy. Without equality in all arenas of social life, there is no possible equality in any arena of social life, only the mirage of it. Liberty does not exist where equality is absent, since the powerful will always tend to prevail in an inegalitarian system. This is why there are complaints about corruption, endemic to our system. This is why there are complaints about the uneven realization of citizenship. This is why there is cynicism. An egalitarian system might be relatively depoliticized but it would not be cynical. Cynicism is the psychological defense of weakness in the face of power.

Of course, the call for a system that combines relative equality with a relatively democratic politics raises the question, is it possible? The main argument against the possibility is that it is historically unknown. This seems to me a very weak argument. Human societies have existed for a very brief time when all is said and done. We cannot begin to rule out the future on the basis of our short historic past. In any case, the only conclusion one can draw from pessimism is to give up the ghost. The second major argument against equality is the sorry showing of the Leninist regimes. But, of course, these regimes were never egalitarian, at any point, although at early stages they pursued an egalitarian rhetoric and may to some extent have believed in it. But their practice was deeply inegalitarian, a mere variant on other regimes in peripheral and semiperipheral zones of the capitalist world-economy. Their experience tells us absolutely nothing about the possibilities of an egalitarian social system.

The fundamental issue is that today, at this point in the evolving history of the capitalist world-economy, further incrementalism is not a real choice. We have, it seems to me, reached its limits within the framework of our present historical social system. The system is in crisis and will inevitably change. But it will not necessarily change for the better. This is the political and moral choice of this era of transition. I do not believe there is any reason to assume the inevitability of progress, of political or moral progress. I believe, however, in the theory of possible progress.

What do we then need to do? First of all, we need to be clear about where we are and about the fact that we have choices, because the system is bifurcating and therefore ending. Secondly, we need debate among ourselves (the "us" being those who wish the successor system to be egalitarian) about what political tactics might offer us the possibility of creating such a system, and how one might construct the alliances that are necessary to achieve this. And thirdly, we need to avoid the siren songs of those who would create a new but still hierarchical and inegalitarian system under the aegis of something progressive. None of this is easy. And there is no assurance we can succeed. What we can be sure of is that those with privilege intend to retain it in one form or another, and will fight both fiercely and intelligently to do so.
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So, democracy? I feel about it like Mahatma Gandhi, when asked what he thought of Western civilization. He replied, "I think it would be a good idea."

*Immanuel Wallerstein. Democracy, Capitalism, and Transformation. In: Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya (ed.): Democracy Unrealized. Documenta11_Platform1. Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit. 2002, pp. 97-110.*

## References

**1** See the discussion of "democracy" as a talismanic word to rally the revolutionary Left in James H. Billington, Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith (New York: Basic Books, 1980), pp. 244-246, which describes the evolution of such revolutionary language from "democracy" to "communism" in the period 1789-1848.

**2** Most of these groups were ephemeral and small, but see the names they chose: Democratic Friends of All Nations, Fraternal Democrats, Association Démocratique, Comité Central Démocratique Européen. See also the names of journals: Demokratisches Taschenbuch für das Deutsche Volk; Le Débat social, organe de la démocratie. When, in England, a group seceded from the Working Men's Association in 1837 because it was too peaceable, they called themselves the Democratic Association. See Arthur Lehning, The International Association, 1855-1859: A Contribution to the Preliminary History of the First International (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938), pp. 4, 11-18. As late as 1872, Fustel de Coulanges, whose politics were conservative but republican, was accounting for the origins of the Second Empire in this way: "If the republicans who had just chased Louis-Philippe [from his throne] hadn't naively also been democrats and not instituted universal suffrage, it is extremely likely that the Republic would have continued to exist in France these past 24 years." "Considérations sur la France," in François Hartog, Le XIXe siècle et l'histoire: Le cas Fustel de Coulanges (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), p. 238.

**3** See Lehning, The International Association, pp. 24-25 and Appendix X, pp. 90-96.

**4** This is of course only part of the story concerning Jörg Haider. See my lecture from March 9, 2000, delivered in Vienna, on "The Racist Albatross: Social Science, Jörg Haider, and Widerstand." A slightly abbreviated version of the talk appeared in the London Review of Books 22, no. 10 (May 2000), pp. 11-14. The complete version is forthcoming.

**5** See, for example, the work of Stein Rokkan, including the article on suffrage extension, "Electoral Systems," in Citizens, Elections, Parties: Approaches to the Comparative Study of the Processes of Development (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1970), pp. 147-168; also published in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed. David L. Sills (New York: Macmillan, 1968), vol. 5, pp. 6-21.

**6** See Stuart Woolf on the distinction between nation and people in Enlightenment thought as it informed the thinking of the Napoleonic era: "The ‚nation' was understood in a restrictive manner, as the ‚educated' or, slightly more broadly, the ruling elites. ... Enlightenment writers always made a sharp distinction between the educated, to whom their message was directed, and ‚the most numerous and useful part of the nation.' The ‚people,' by definition not depraved but easily influenced, required a moral, technical (and physical) education appropriate for their status, that best equipped them for the life of a laborer." "French Civilization and Ethnicity in the Napoleonic Empire," Past and Present, no. 124 (August 1989), p. 106.

**7** I have argued this in detail in various places in recent years. See Utopistics, or Historical Choices for the Twenty-first Century (New York: New Press, 1998).

**8** The argument is spelled out in Terence K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, coords., The Age of Transition: Trajectory of the World-System, 1945-2025 (London: Zed Books, 1996).