

LIBERAL VALUES AND SOCIALIST VALUES

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THE question of the relation of socialism to liberalism can hardly be regarded as a matter of purely academic, or even of purely theoretical, interest. It crops up in the daily experience of socialists in many parts of the world. At the verbal level we find that the word "liberal" is used by many people on the Left as a term of dismissal, abuse or criticism, as it is also by demagogues of the Right, such as America's Vice-President Agnew. Liberal attitudes, liberal causes and policies are implicitly contrasted with their radical or socialist opposites. "Liberalism" has become a dirty word on the Left, and it is not hard to see the reasons why. Most Western liberals, for example, were happy to accept the identification of liberalism with anti-Communism, and this sleight-of-hand led not only to such miserable episodes as the failure of so many of them to resist the McCarthyite attacks on intellectual and political freedom, but also to the major tragedy of the extended American war on Vietnam. Vietnam has been the liberals' war, planned and mounted by liberal administrations, and supported by liberal intellectuals inside and outside the government—at least until the war began to look like an American defeat. In other respects, such as the West's policies towards the racist regimes operated by South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia, or its distribution of aid to the poor countries, liberalism can be charitably interpreted as a synonym for hypocrisy and ineffectuality. But though the outward form of liberalism may vary from the more or less aggressive to the more or less benevolent, its function remains essentially the same. It serves as the ideological cloak for the fundamentally exploitative character of Western imperialism. However crude this may seem to Western sophisticates, this is the profile which liberalism presents to the radicals of the Third World, and to much of the Left in the West itself as well, as Conor Cruise O'Brien realized when challenged on the subject by Kwame Nkrumah :

"Are you a socialist?" asked the African leader.

I said; yes.

He looked me in the eye. "People have been telling me," he said lightly, "that you are a liberal . . ."

The statement in its context invited a denial. I said nothing.

I knew what the leader meant when he used the word "liberal", and I understood why a charge of "liberalism" was felt to be damaging. In relation to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the European and American liberal has too often been—and is perhaps increasingly—a false friend . . . To those, outside the rich countries, who are sickened by the word "liberalism", the liberal voice *par excellence* is that of Mr. Adlai Stevenson—the voice that explained to the world that the United States had had nothing to do with the Bay of Pigs invasion; the voice that justified the exclusion of China from the United Nations on moral grounds; the voice that expounded the humanitarian reasons for supporting Belgian policy in the Congo. From this viewpoint Mr. Stevenson's face, with its shiftily earnest advocate's expression, is the ingratiating moral mask which a toughly acquisitive society wears before the world it robs: "liberalism" is the ideology of the rich, the elevation into universal values of the codes which favoured the emergence, and favour the continuance, of capitalist society.¹¹

There are good reasons, as Conor Cruise O'Brien makes clear in the essay from which these quotations are taken, why liberalism should have fallen into such low repute, particularly outside the West. Yet there is the paradoxical fact that in many societies the Left must not only depend on and appeal to such liberal wrrnnonplaces as freedom of speech, and the right to demonstrate and organize politically, for its very survival; it is frequently also the Left which undertakes the work of upholding and defending those and other liberal rights, often as a direct consequence of the default of the self-proclaimed liberals themselves. The denunciations of Spiro Agnew, originally derided by liberals as the ravings of a semi-literate political eccentric, have come to appear much more sinister in so far as they have faithfully reflected the deepening climate of repression and intolerance within Western capitalism. And as the scene darkens, so it has fallen increasingly to the Left to defend the threatened achievements of liberalism. It is symptomatic that such conscientiously non-political bodies as Britain's National Council for Civil Liberties, and the associated Council for Academic Freedom and Democracy, should be widely regarded as "Leftist" if not as actual agencies of subversion.

One might have thought, for example, that the introduction of internment in a part of the United Kingdom in August 1971, provided liberals with an almost classical case for protest and opposition. Internment without either charge or trial for an unlimited period is, after all, the very negation of the rule of law, in the name of which liberals have loudly proclaimed their hostility to tyrannies of both Left and Right, to the Soviet Union as well as to the Colonels' Greece and Vorster's South Africa—and even South Africa sets a time limit—in theory—to the period during which a person can be imprisoned without trial or charge. Furthermore, it was introduced

under the aegis of the notorious Special Powers Act, a piece of legislation which is little more than a licence for total arbitrariness, was originally introduced as a supposedly temporary emergency measure, yet was from the beginning used by the permanent ruling party in Northern Ireland as a weapon against any political action or group which threatened its hegemony.³ It was introduced at the insistent request of the leaders of that same party, and it was very soon apparent that Mr. Brian Faulkner's claim that it was directed essentially against "terrorists" and not "against any responsible and law-abiding section of the community"⁴ was a lie, since those initially detained or interned included leaders of People's Democracy, organizers of the Civil Rights Association, veteran Republicans in their sixties and seventies, and a pacifist anarchist? For the most part the facts of the situation were not in dispute, nor were they difficult to ascertain. Yet the explosion of liberal outrage which might have been expected did not take place. The British press, including *The Guardian*, which regards itself and is regarded by many of its readers, as the quintessence of liberalism, offered virtually unanimous approval, and Her Majesty's official Opposition offered, as usual, no opposition beyond some marginal doubts and demurs. It was the Left which had to uphold the liberal position, and it is probably fair to say that, with the significant exception of the Reverend Ian Paisley, to have opposed internment at its introduction was to define yourself as a member of the Left. Subsequently, of course, as with Vietnam, when the policy had clearly failed in its purpose of "getting the gunmen behind bars" and had produced exactly the appalling consequences predicted by the Left, moderates and liberals climbed belatedly on to the bandwagon of critical opposition. But opposition on grounds of principle, as opposed to opposition on the pragmatic criterion of success or failure, was confined to the Left.

Such situations have become increasingly common. But they occur within the same overall political context as other situations, also not infrequent, in which it is the Left which is accused of violating such liberal principles as freedom of speech by, for example, shouting down Enoch Powell and other Right-wing Conservative MPs at their political meetings. Such events have generated a good deal of agonized debate in the institutions in which they have occurred about the proper policy of the Left in respect of such liberal principles, while in wider discussion a single essay of Marcuse, that on "Repressive Tolerance",⁵ has been taken to exemplify the supposedly widespread illiberalism of the New Left.

It would be easy to multiply examples, but it is hardly necessary. For it is quite clear that the relationship of the Left to liberation is

an extremely confused one, full of paradoxes if not of plain contradictions. On the one hand the Left is likely to be suspicious of, or actively hostile to, liberalism, and, partly as a consequence of this, it is often charged with illiberalism—a charge viewed with apparent indifference by some sections but rejected with anxious indignation by others. Yet on the other hand the Left both appeals to, and defends, liberal principles in situations where no one else is willing to do so. Nor does this dichotomy do justice to the complexity of the situation. The contradictions, the tensions and ambiguities which I have been discussing run deeply through the attitudes and personalities of most Western and Western-influenced socialists. Even socialists who spend much of their time and energy attacking liberalism find it hard to discard liberal assumptions and the liberal world-view. O'Brien discovered this :

“. . . as I drove home from my interview with the leader, I had to realize that a liberal, incurably, was what I was. . . . The revolutionary idea had impressed me and struck me as more immediately relevant for most of humanity than were the liberal concepts. But it was the liberal concepts and their long-term importance—though not the name of liberal—that held my allegiance. . . . Liberal values, tarnished by the spurious tributes of the rich world's media, today make the rich world yawn and the poor world sick. For my own part I had had so little enthusiasm for them in theory that I was surprised and disconcerted at the depth of commitment to them experienced when, in practice, I met challenges to them.”⁶

Two decades earlier a different kind of writer (Cyril Connolly) had recorded a similar reaction during the war against Nazi Germany:

“While we re-live the horrors of the Dark Ages, of absolute States and ideological wars, the old platitudes of liberalism loom up in all their glory, familiar streets as we reel home furious in the dawn.”⁷

Liberalism is not just one creed among many in a supposedly pluralist society; it is the ideology of pluralism itself. It is all-pervading, the ideological air we breathe, not a doctrine or a set of ideas only but “a whole climate of opinion”. Liberal responses, a liberal view of the world, are absorbed largely without our realizing it, so that even its critics are liable to discover, as O'Brien did, that they have been endowed with what amount to instinctively liberal reactions.

But the triumph of liberalism is that it commands the most widespread conscious and voluntary acceptance. It is not simply a prison of ideological assumptions from which socialists would escape if only they could. On the contrary, very few people on the Left would be happy to repudiate liberalism in its totality: very few people are content to be thought illiberal even when they are anti-

liberal, and this partly accounts for the quite common use of the term "libertarian socialist" on which I have commented elsewhere.⁸ Respect for the individual human person, freedom and democracy—these are some of the major principles of liberalism, and they are not ones which most socialists wish to abandon or deny, whatever differences there may be in the interpretations put upon these notoriously open concepts. To say this, however, is not to resolve our problem; it is merely to state one aspect of it.



There is one would-be Marxist way of approaching this problem which is really only a way of evading it, and must be rejected for that reason. That is to deny altogether the possibility of reaching any general conclusions about it on the grounds that this is to treat the issue in a wholly ahistorical and un-concrete way. These questions, it is suggested, can only be resolved concretely according to the specific concrete situation in which they occur. This is, ironically, nothing more than traditional liberal-conservative empiricism coated with a veneer of Marxist phraseology:

“. . . there is the view that abstract arguments and general ideas must mislead in politics: better to **look** for practical solutions of concrete problems, one by one, as they arise, and to forget programmes and ideals. This has, on the whole, been the conservative attitude; . . .”⁹

So wrote Stuart Hampshire in the mid-fifties, and one notable conservative writer, T. E. Utey, agreed with him. Detecting a "move towards the Right" in British politics, he described it as:

"a move towards empiricism, towards scepticism of generalities in politics, and towards the belief that sound political thinking must begin from concrete situations understood in the light of the history **which** created them. It is a repudiation of the tradition of the Encyclopaedists and of the French Revolution, the tradition to which doctrinal Socialism is the heir."¹⁰

But the most significant development has been the espousal of this classically Right-wing approach by the liberals of the West, most of whom have welcomed the supposed "end of ideology" with quite as much enthusiasm as their conservative friends:

“. . . in our decade (i.e. the fifties again) the nations which have most successfully managed their internal affairs—Great Britain, the United States, Western Germany, and the Scandinavian countries—have increasingly considered their major domestic policies without regard for the standard distinctions of "left" and "right", of socialism and laissez-faire,

but in a matter-of-fact way which recognizes no general principles and treated each emerging situation on its own merits . . ."¹¹

The objections to political pragmatism, or empiricism, whether its form be conservative, liberal, or "Marxist", are basically the same. Pragmatism is largely an illusion. It boasts of its independence of general principles, which it prefers to call "dogma" or "ideology", but in dispensing with conscious and explicit general principles it does not, in fact, free itself from such principles altogether. On the contrary, in relying on "common sense" or "realism", it surrenders to other general principles which are inexplicit and appear as "common sense" only because they are expressions of society's dominant and largely unquestioned ideology. Political empiricism, as that perceptive conservative thinker, Michael Oakeshott, has pointed out, is strictly speaking an impossibility :

"empiricism by itself is not a concrete manner of activity at all, and can become a partner in a concrete manner of activity only when it is joined with something else—in science, for example, when it is joined with hypothesis."¹²

It is only fair to point out, however, that Oakeshott argues, not for the unavoidability of ideology, but for the unavoidability of tradition, of which ideology is for him only a reflection and an offshoot.

Pragmatists make much of such phrases as dealing with a situation "on its merits" and in "a matter-of-fact way", but it is far from clear what these familiar phrases really imply. What are the "merits" of a situation? How can "the facts" point us in one direction rather than another, except in so far as they are grasped in the only way that they *can* be grasped—within an interpretative and value-laden framework?¹³ The pragmatist, refusing to specify in advance how he would react in any particular hypothetical situation, refusing to formulate guidelines for such situations, ends up by reacting in a quasi-instinctive, unthinking manner, relying on suppositions that he has not bothered to clarify or justify. Hence the spectacle of some sections of the Left producing instant-liberal reactions to issues which must demand a more complex reaction from socialists. For example, when printworkers have objected to the publication of viciously anti-working class material in certain newspapers this has been presented by the editors of those papers in terms of a threat to the freedom of the press, and some socialists have accepted that interpretation, without seeing that the situation also raised the questions of ownership, control and general bias of the press, and of the possibilities of control of newspapers by those who work on them rather than by private proprietors and their chosen

editors. Such traps as these can only be avoided if we are prepared to think about the general principles involved, and that is why attempts to evade the issue with talk of "concreteness" must be rejected.



The problems of the relationship of socialism to liberalism focus on four aspects of liberalism: its world-view or metaphysic, its definitions of freedom, and of democracy, and its historical and class character. These elements can be separated out for the convenience of discussion, but it will be seen that they inevitably belong together in what is a remarkably coherent as well as comprehensive ideology.

One consequence of that liberal espousal of empiricism to which I have already referred is that liberalism is generally regarded by its defenders as an anti-ideological, and anti-metaphysical approach, which, unlike its doctrinal rivals, eschews a comprehensive world-view in favour of the principle of attempting always to see and to grasp the facts as they are, free from the distortions imposed on them by mediating ideologies. But that is not how liberalism appears to those who stand outside it. Empiricism is itself a theory about the world and about our knowledge of it, and, as E. H. Carr once remarked, "to denounce ideologies in general is to set up an ideology of one's own."¹⁴

At the centre of the liberal world-view is a particular picture of the individual human person and of his relations to the world in which he lives. The individual is seen as separate from that world in two crucial ways. First, what distinguishes him from the essentially mechanical, law-governed world of fact which surrounds him is that he is a being who has to make judgments, decisions and choices in order to act at all. That world of brute fact can give him no guidance in making his decisions and evolving his values. Fact is one thing, values are another. The two are not to be confused. The world is there to be observed and understood, and as a result of this process to be controlled. But, contrary to more ancient philosophies, "nature" is not a source of moral guidance, and an understanding of the world is only made more difficult by the interpolation of ideological or evaluative elements into what ought to be a factual, neutral and scientific kind of understanding. What this amounts to is, in Iris Murdoch's words, "the picture of man as a brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical world."¹⁵ Existentialism carries this conception of man in his relation to the world

to its furthest conclusion, and can therefore be regarded in this respect as an extreme form of liberalism :

"What it pictures is indeed the fearful solitude of the individual marooned upon a tiny island in the middle of a sea of scientific facts, and morality escaping from science only by a wild leap of the will."¹⁶

Secondly, the individual is seen as essentially separate from all other individuals, not merely in the banal physical sense, but in the sense that he is self-directing, self-propelling and in some sense complete in himself. His desires, impulses, animating aims and passions are "his own", and society is no (or very little) more than a collection of such discrete individuals. In its baldest form this merges as the unqualified psychological egoism which Hobbes and Bentham (and perhaps Locke) see as the essence of human nature:

"Bentham's idea of the world is that of a collection of persons pursuing each his separate interest or pleasure, and the prevention of whom from jostling one another more than is unavoidable, may be attempted by hopes and fears derived from three sources—the law, religion, and public opinion."¹⁷

J. M. Young quotes a marvellously revealing non-meeting of minds between Coleridge and that very orthodox Utilitarian, Harriet Martineau :

"Coleridge once said to Harriet Martineau: 'You seem to regard society as an aggregate of individuals.' 'Of course I do,' she replied. There is much history implicit in that encounter . . ."¹⁸

I have quoted from Mill's critical essay on his mentor, and this in itself implies that there are important divergences and historical changes within liberalism that have affected its view of the relation between "the individual" and society or his fellow human beings. Yet the remarkable fact is that this picture of society as a collection of individuals has never been effectively discarded, and appears in its traditional simplistic form in some of the writings of Hayek, and Karl Popper and his disciples. For almost all liberals retain a belief in the ontological primacy of "the individual", together with a concomitant tendency to regard society and its institutions and all collectives as abstractions, less "real" than the individuals of which they are either in whole or in large part composed.

As Robert Paul Wolff has pointed out, this means that from the point of view of any single individual of the egoistic type envisaged by Hobbes and Bentham, other persons appear as objects: either as means to my own purposes (or pleasure, or happiness), or as obstacle:

to them. Even when this egoism is diluted or qualified, the essential picture is not much changed :

“. . . society continues to be viewed as a system of independent centers of consciousness, each pursuing its own gratification and confronting the others as beings standing-over-against the self, which is to say, as *objects*. The condition of the individual in such a state of affairs is what a different tradition of social philosophy would call 'alienation'.”¹⁹

From this conception of "the individual" and of his relations to the world and to other individuals flows much of the liberal system of political values. If man is in this way self-propelling, self-contained, and responsible for his own values, then it is clear that what he needs is space and opportunities to realize his aims and gratify his wishes. He needs, in other words, freedom and privacy—that "area of non-interference" which for classical liberals from Constant, de Tocqueville and Mill to Sir Isaiah Berlin, is the essence of liberty. Although freedom is a word which evokes a sympathetic response almost universally, it is often hard to discover precisely why so much value should be, and is, attached to it. What is it about freedom that makes it *so* important that human beings should have it? Liberal thinkers do not always provide an explicit answer. But what Iris Murdoch calls "Mill's equation: happiness equals freedom equals personality"²⁰ is usually there, even if not always on the surface. The important assumptions are that the individual requires freedom for self-fulfilment, and that self-fulfilment is not problematical so long as the individual has the opportunity and the scope for it. Within liberalism the autonomy of the individual is both an existential fact about him, and an ideal, and the "fact" of his autonomy provides a metaphysical-empirical foundation for the principle of the freedom of the individual.

It is the freedom the individual above all with which liberals are concerned. Freedom of the press, political freedom—these matter too, but the stress is on the individual and on his *private* life as opposed to the public life of society which he may or may not engage in. Privacy is, for the liberal, an aspect of freedom, and it is important because it is in private and not public life that the individual is likely to realize himself. Politics is a specialized activity, a profession like any other, and the participation of the individual citizen in politics is a matter of obligation rather than an experience from which he is likely to derive any genuine personal satisfaction. It is the area of non-interference, the area free from social and political pressure, which really matters. And this makes it clear that the original picture of a man as an isolated, non-social (if not actually anti-social) being still retains its force. It is not through society, but

by carving out independent enclaves within the overall context of society, that man fulfils himself.

Freedom, understood in this sense, can be identified as the paramount liberal value because of this intimate connection it has with the liberal version of human nature. The fact of its paramountcy is important, because what distinguishes one political creed from another is often not so much the values to which they officially subscribe, which may very well be substantially the same, but the hierarchy of those values. It is the priority that is given to freedom by liberals that distinguishes them from conservatives or socialists or others who may also value this kind of freedom, but not to the point where it takes unquestioned precedence over other values or principles. Thus the typical liberal-judgment on post-revolutionary Cuba, or on Nkrumah's Ghana, as made in the pages of *Encounter*, was one which condemned these regimes for their disregard of civil liberties, and this weighed far more heavily in the scales than any amount of progress in terms of living standards, equality, or literacy. (The sincerity of these judgments was another matter, for *Encounter* was conspicuously silent about the non-existence of civil liberties, let alone material progress, in Batista's Cuba and in many other pro-Western dictatorship~.~?)

Towards democracy, a word which also figures largely in the official litanies of liberalism, the liberal attitude has in fact always been extremely ambiguous. To a ruthlessly logical thinker like Bentham the choice lay between democracy and one of the various forms of oligarchy or one-man rule, and it became clear to him that the greatest happiness of the greatest number stood a better chance of being achieved if the greatest number exercised a decisive say in government, not directly—that was not practicable—but through their chosen representatives. Bentham had no time for the idea of natural rights, which he described as "nonsense on stilts", but other liberal thinkers did, and from that starting point they too came to democratic conclusions. But almost from the moment when the French and industrial revolutions inaugurate the modern era in politics and social life, and "the people" make their decisive entry on to the political stage, aristocratic and middle-class liberals begin to express their doubts about the likely effects of democratic government. Phrases such as "democratic despotism" and "the tyranny of the majority" become increasingly familiar. The point is made that there is no logical connection between the type of government, democratic or otherwise, and its respect for the freedom of the individual. There are liberal monarchs, and there are illiberal democracies.

John Stuart Mill and De Tocqueville carry the argument a good deal further than this. They see in certain "erroneous ideas" of

democracy a threat to good government, which is necessarily "the government of the wisest" who "must always be a few".²³ What is more, democracy may very well prove to be an even worse form of tyranny than its predecessors, for two reasons. First, its basis in popular or majority support will give it both a strength and a legitimacy which previous despotisms never had in the eyes of the majority of the people. Second, democracy is not merely a political system, but a whole new social order in which the dominance of a monolithic public opinion is likely to prove a much more formidable enemy of individual freedom than any state apparatus, however powerful and intolerant. This second misgiving forms, of course, the central theme of Mill's essay *On Liberty*. Mill was concerned to sustain "the existence of a leisured class"²⁴ and to contain what he saw as the threat posed by the possible dominance of that part of society he on occasion referred to as "the common herd". At the time of the French Revolution Burke referred to the people as "the swinish multitude", a phrase which the popular radicals seized on and made notorious.²⁵ Liberals prefer to gloss over it, but Mill's attitude was, at times, not very different, and this same mixture of fear and contempt of "the mob" can be found in another mid-Victorian liberal classic, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*.

Such frank expressions of class prejudice are now much rarer, and in the twentieth century the liberal suspicion of democracy has been given a different and much more sophisticated form. In effect, this has amounted to the device of redefining democracy in such a way that it no longer poses a threat to the established social order and its values. The element of threat in the original or classical conception of democracy is worth stressing. C. B. Macpherson has reminded us that democracy was originally a class term,²⁶ and it retained that kind of connotation even in the nineteenth century. Its critics at that time at least took it seriously. They assumed that democracy wasn't simply a matter of quinquennial visits to a polling station, but would actually involve the dominance of the people (in effect, the working class) over both political and social life, and the prospect filled them with misgivings and distaste. The achievement of twentieth century liberal political scientists has been to empty the term of all these large and ominous implications, and to establish as the new orthodoxy that it no longer poses a threat to the established social order and its the habit of thinking of democracy simply as one system among competing elites shall govern it. Nor has the process of dilution stopped there. One professor of politics tells us that :

"Government alone can establish priorities of real social effort, and actual policies. Democracy can only advise and consent, and then only in an indirect and spasmodic manner."²⁷

While another reaches a nadir of vagueness when he defines "what we call democracy", as

"a system of decision-making in which the leaders are more or less responsive to the preferences of **non-leaders**"²⁷

—a definition which clearly allows us to define all but the most inflexible tyrannies as democratic.

A second aspect of this de-radicalization of the concept of democracy has been in terms of pluralism, which has attempted to compensate for the embarrassingly obvious impotence of the individual in so-called democracies by laying stress on the participation of groups and organized interests in the processes of political decision-making. This revision has the further advantage, from the point of view of the liberal strain which we are considering, of denying in effect, or sometimes quite **explicitly**,²⁸ the **existence** of any social group which could meaningfully be called "the people", or even of anything coherent enough to be describable as "the will of the majority". For if it is true, as pluralist social theory asserts, that "all known advanced societies are inherently pluralistic and **diverse**"²⁹ then it is clear that there cannot be any such thing **as** a general will or a general interest, but only a plurality of sectional and specific interests. Any claim, therefore, to represent the general interest or the will of the people, is fraudulent, and can be legitimately resisted in the name of democracy itself. And the politics of democracy must necessarily consist not in the assertion of the will or wishes of the majority, **but** in the ceaseless adjustment to each other of the competing interests and groups within society. The politics of democracy are inevitably the politics of balance and compromise. We are a long way from "government by the people" and *vox populi vox Dei*. But the process of redefining democracy has enabled contemporary liberals, unlike their nineteenth-century forebears, to pose as the champions of democracy while holding on to all the objections to democracy which they share with de Tocqueville, Mill and Arnold.



I have attempted, in this highly condensed summary to present liberalism in a way which, while not being (I hope) excessively inaccurate, highlights some of the points of difficulty for socialists **as** well as some of the features which socialists are bound to object to. For example, the class character of liberalism, its character **as** a bourgeois ideology, stands out most clearly in the ambiguity of its approach to democracy. The liberals' mistrust of the people, expressed

most recently in their hostility to renewed demands for popular participation in government at many levels, and their determination to see government retained in the hands of the minority of the "wise" and "competent", are attitudes diametrically opposed to those of socialists. It is not simply that socialism can only be achieved when the most exploited class in capitalist society, the working class, becomes the dominant class instead of the subordinate one. Socialists are also bound to point out that the liberal thesis is in fact self-confirming. For the majority of the people remain "incompetent" to govern for just so long as they are excluded from governing for that very reason. In just the same way the findings of sociologists who "discover" or "prove" that people do not want to participate are worthless, since the principal reason that no desire to participate is expressed is because no opportunity for effective participation actually exists. When a crisis occurs, and a situation is created, usually for only for a brief period, in which popular participation is seen to be meaningful and effective, as in France in May 1968, or on a smaller scale in the sit-ins and occupations which have now spread from educational institutions to factories and dockyards, then people turn out in their hundreds and thousands to participate in the processes of popular decision-making. And through this participation they acquire an understanding of politics and a seriousness about politics which they could never gain from a decade of conventional elections and their accompanying rituals.

It is not a matter, therefore, of setting up a tendentious contrast between, on the one hand, the empirical findings of "objective" sociologists, and on the other the socialists' almost mystical and quite groundless faith in the goodness of the masses. Socialists will question the validity of these "empirical" findings and the framework of assumptions within which they are set, and will point instead to the evidence which suggests that when meaningful participation becomes possible, people discover within themselves capacities and aspirations which hitherto they had not suspected they possessed.¹⁰

But socialists ought to reject the liberal approach to democracy, not only on account of its inherent elitism, but also because of its ahistorical and uncritical character. To construct a definition of democracy according to which it is possible to say that some political systems are democracies while others are not, is a mistaken enterprise for two reasons. First, this means that democracy then ceases to be what Marcuse calls a "critical" concept; that is, for those systems labelled democratic, it no longer acts as a yardstick, or an ideal by which the shortcomings and failures of reality can be assessed. This might be less objectionable if it were the case that it was the original high ideal which had been attained. But, as we have seen, so far

from this being the case, the concept of democracy has been revised in *order to* bring it more into conformity with what are seen as unalterable political realities. In other words, its normative content has been quite deliberately reduced. This is the exact opposite of what ought to occur with such concepts. It is of the *essence* of such concepts that they are normative and critical, and ought always to remain so. It is extremely unlikely that even a socialist society will ever reach a stage when men can sit back and congratulate themselves that their society is now fully democratic. It is much more likely that, given that society remains dynamic, there will always be ways in which it can become more democratic, and there will always be new dangers to such democracy as has already been achieved. For besides being uncritical, the liberal treatment of the concept of democracy is also unhistorical. That is, it shows no recognition of the complex, dialectical character of historical change, as a result of which institutions and arrangements which may well represent the summit of democratic achievement in one epoch are equally likely to prove to be major obstacles to further democratization in the next. Contemporary bourgeois parliaments, the members of which so jealously seek to hold on to their waning monopoly of recognized political authority, might serve as examples of this dialectic. There is no better illustration of this unhistorical approach than the fact that the slogan of "democratic socialism" is invariably interpreted by those who adhere to it as implying a more or less unqualified and often exclusive commitment to "the parliamentary road", as the means by which socialism is to be brought into being. Democracy is simply identified with bourgeois parliaments, and for the most part this assumption is left unchallenged by other socialists.

Socialists, then, cannot share the elitist liberal attitude towards democracy; nor can they accept current liberal conceptions of democracy, which are static, self-congratulatory, and arbitrarily narrow. But none of this criticism implies any hostility towards democracy as such, and nor should it. It is the ambiguity of the liberal attitude towards democracy, and the inadequacy of its conception of democracy when it is measured by the standards of democracy itself, that I have criticized. Socialists criticize liberal democracy in the name of a conception of democracy which is both more thorough-going and radical and also closer to the original, classical ideal. Liberals, on the other hand, have never shown much sympathy for direct democracy, and it is indicative that in recent decades they have made Rousseau, who is probably the most formidable and certainly the most subversive advocate of direct democracy, a particular target for academic attack.

It would be wrong, however, to imply that either direct democracy

or Jean-Jacques Rousseau have normally commanded the allegiance or enthusiasm of the Left. Rousseau is often categorized as a "petty-bourgeois radical",⁴¹ and demands for direct democracy are apt to be dismissed in the same terms. Those revolutionaries who claim to follow the Bolshevik formula of "democratic centralism" often appear to be more concerned with centralism than democracy—at least to outsiders like myself. While those who agree with Engels that "a revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is", and that "wanting to abolish authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself",⁴² are unlikely to have much patience with demands for democracy in the context of either revolutionary organizations or industry. Democracy, however radical in conception, is likely to be stigmatized as utopian, or liberal, or both.

Both charges are misdirected. The charge of utopianism rests on that separation between present and future, means and ends, which has done so much irreparable damage to the socialist movements of this century. Not only has that separation served as a theoretical justification for predictably unsuccessful attempts to attain libertarian ends by authoritarian means; it has also deprived socialism of essential vision and inspiration by ruling out the possibility of anticipating in the present the better society of the future, on however small a scale. Yet it is precisely through such anticipations, through transient episodes of participation and community, in which the barriers of class and competitiveness are temporarily pushed aside, that we glimpse how we might live and what an unalienated society might be like.

The charge of liberalism illustrates a crude and undialectical reaction which is, unfortunately, all too common on the Left. The fact that a word, or concept, is traditionally associated with liberalism, and became current as part of the ideology of liberalism, does not, in itself, provide any reason for socialists to reject it. The assumption seems to be that there ought to be, or will be, a clean break between the epoch of bourgeois society and that of socialist society. There is nothing in history, or in the Marxist approach to history which can support such a view. On the contrary, Marx's conception of historical progress quite rightly implies that the achievements of one epoch of man's social development will be both subsumed and transcended in the next. Thus socialist society will bring to an end the exploitation of capitalism, but it will use the technological advances made under capitalism, and it will not abolish, but add to, the liberties and other political gains which the bourgeoisie made in its struggle against the feudal order of the *anciens régimes*. So bourgeois democracy is to be supplanted by a more wholehearted system of popular rule, and not, as some people seem to imagine, by the dominance

of a revolutionary elite, or a party or a central committee. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" is the name that was given to the transitional political arrangements which were to supercede bourgeois democracy and pave the way for socialism, but the phrase is, I would suggest, in some respects an unfortunate and misleading one.³³ By dictatorship Marx means essentially dominance, and this transitional phase he envisaged as being in fact a great deal more free and democratic than bourgeois society had been. There is thus no grounds in Marxism, and no socialist argument, to support the notion that socialism involves, now if not in the utopian future, rejection of the very concept of democracy. On the contrary, it ought to be the distinguishing mark of socialists that they take democracy more seriously and constantly seek to carry it further than any liberal would dare to contemplate. Democracy, they might say, is too important a thing to be left to the liberals, who are at best half-hearted about it in any case.

Much the same can be said of freedom, in respect of which a similar, but rather more complicated case can be made out. Again it is the placing of the concept within an historical and dialectical perspective that must be stressed :

"Freedom is not something which at any given moment men either do or do not possess; it is always an achievement and always a task. The concrete content of freedom changes and enlarges from age to age; in the dialectical growth of human nature what was the freedom of the past may be the slavery of the present."³⁴

For more than a century, at least since the date of Mill's classic essay (1859), liberals have clung to the definition of liberty in terms of an area of non-interference and have strenuously resisted all attempts to re-define freedom in wider terms, which take account, not only of law and the state, but also of the forms of economic and social oppression. This static approach has trivialized the idea of freedom and brought it into contempt. For, from being the battle-cry of a progressive and aggressive liberalism it was converted into the slogan which every employer, landlord, profiteer and speculator used in his struggle against any attempt by the state to restrict or control his freedom to pursue the unlimited exploitation of the poor and needy. The combination of freedom, meaning freedom from state interference, with a high degree of inequality in terms of wealth and power has made freedom not an advantage but a burden to the vast mass of the exploited and oppressed in both the developed and the undeveloped worlds. Yet liberals have persisted in thinking of freedom in highly abstract and essentially legalistic terms. They have thought of freedom in terms of what the state and the laws allow, or disallow,

and in so doing they have laid themselves open to Anatole France's celebrated mockery, that "the law permits the rich as well as the poor to sleep under the bridges of Paris". They have not asked the essential question, freedom for whom? And they wholly failed to see the point made by T. H. Green and his followers, when they pointed out that it was of no advantage to a poor man that he was "free" to travel first class by train from London to the French Riviera if he had not even the money to afford the third class ticket to Southend. Of what value was a freedom defined in legal terms which he was quite unable to make use of?

As it was with democracy, so it was with liberty. A critical concept was divested of its critical content, and became a watchword of the established order. In the period of the cold war in particular it became common to talk about the "defence" of freedom, the assumption being that freedom was, indeed, something which the fortunate countries of the West already possessed. But this complacent and conservative interpretation did not go entirely unchallenged, even in those barren years :

"A radical will tend always to distrust those who speak of safeguarding our liberties. He will see in this phrase the conservative assumption that the degree of distribution of liberty already existing in a society is to be taken as the permanent standard. . . . (but) freedom is not something which has to be safeguarded, but rather something which has to be extended. If one tries to stand still, only defending the freedom already established, one unavoidably finds oneself slipping backwards into repression."¹⁰

Once again I am suggesting that the appropriate response by socialists to the liberal version of freedom ought not to be the totally negative one of abandoning the concept altogether. Once again it is from the standpoint of a more comprehensive conception of freedom that the narrowness, and the static and uncritical character of the liberal definition are to be indicted. But important problems remain to be confronted.

Liberals place freedom at the top of their hierarchy of values. Where should it appear in the socialist scale? First it must be clear that freedom conceived in the traditional liberal terms cannot claim paramount importance for socialists. The conception of an area of non-interference, and the distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding actions on which Mill based it, have both rightly been subjected to much criticism. Non-interference, whether by the state or society, is not inherently desirable; on the contrary, interference which restricts a particular freedom available in practice only to a particular group or class may be absolutely necessary if some wider and more important freedom is to be established or extended.

The point has already been made that legal freedom is negated by social and economic inequality. There can be no doubt that the establishment of equality must involve very large-scale interference and quite drastic restrictions on the freedom of "the individual" to accumulate property, wealth or power. Not all freedoms are equally valuable or important either. Restrictions on car parking, and countless other rules and regulations of a trivial nature undoubtedly constitute denials of freedom in those areas, and no doubt many of them could be abolished without much trouble. It would be preferable to rely on, and so to encourage, habits of co-operation. But it would hardly be worthwhile to launch major campaigns against such restrictions in the name of freedom, since the freedom which would be gained is of no great importance in terms of what really matters—the free flowering of the individual human personality. Liberal theory, by focusing on the state and law as the chief enemies of freedom, has grossly under-estimated the importance of economic freedom (by which I do not, of course, mean the freedom of the market economy) and exaggerated the dangers posed by the often quite trivial encroachments of state bureaucracy.

Liberals have also tended to overestimate, comparatively speaking, the importance of the other classical freedoms, such as freedom of speech and the freedom of the press. This is difficult to say, since I do not at all want to imply that such freedoms are unimportant, or should not be defended against attack; and while it is true to say that such freedoms are naturally a matter of particular concern to those sections of the middle class whose life is bound up with the written and spoken word, it would be quite wrong to imply that they are of no importance or value to the mass of the people. In a country where there is a measure of these freedoms it is easy to underestimate their value. But such a mistake is not likely to be made in Greece or Czechoslovakia. Socialists ought always to be deeply suspicious of any attempt by any government, whatever its colour, to restrict these freedoms. Nevertheless, there are occasions where restrictions may be justified for the sake of some still more important social principle. There can be no doubt, for example, that Britain's Race Relations Act, ineffective as it is, does involve restriction on freedom of expression in respect of blatantly racist views, and some logical liberals have criticized the Act on this account. But socialists would support this restriction as a necessary, though certainly not sufficient, condition of establishing both security and equality of status for the black man in a predominantly white society. And, as was suggested earlier, socialists ought to be careful not to allow themselves to be swept along on a tide of liberalism when those who actually produce newspapers are accused of interfering with the freedom of the press.

Once again, the crucial question, freedom for whom? has to be asked, and it then becomes clear that "freedom of the press" is in effect a synonym for the freedom of editors and proprietors. In many cases even the journalists who do the writing have little or no control over the opinions they are required to express. Similarly, the shouting down of Enoch Powell or Patrick Wall cannot be considered solely in terms of freedom of speech. Certainly it is important to be aware of the importance of setting a precedent, so that one incident lends a sanction to the next and a general pattern of intolerance of unpopular views is established. But against such considerations must be set others, such as the importance of making clear to the victims of racialism the opposition to it of at least a section of the privileged racial group. It is also the case that audiences as well as speakers have their rights, among them, perhaps, the right to express their intolerance of intolerance.

When we turn from liberal freedom to the wider conception with which it had been contrasted, the situation is more complex. For now the question to be asked is whether freedom, **however** comprehensively defined—and re-defined, constantly, in the unending dialectic of historical development—ought to be for socialists the supreme or ultimate political principle. We here come to the heart of the relationship between liberalism and socialism. The case for giving an affirmative answer is very strong, for we are thinking now of freedom in its completest sense, the scope and opportunity available to each person equally to make his own choices, follow his own chosen pattern of life, rather than have this imposed upon him by some outside force, whether it be convention, habit or society, church, party or state. What else, it may be asked, can be the objective of any humane politics, any politics based on respect for the individual human person? What right, indeed, have we to think in any other terms except those of maximum freedom? For must not any other conception involve elements of dominance and compulsion quite at variance with the idea of a **society** in which "the free development of each will lead to the free development of all"?

It is at this point that we must return to the connection which we noticed earlier between the ideal of freedom and the liberal picture of the relation between "the individual" and society. What I want to suggest is that a socialist will not reject the ideal of maximum freedom, but he will not regard it either as adequate in itself and without supplementation. For if we assume that it is freedom and freedom alone which a man requires as the product of his social arrangements, we implicitly accept the liberal metaphysic of "the individual" as an ultimately autonomous, self-contained and self-sustaining being, who needs only freedom as the condition of his

self-fulfilment. Both socialism and conservatism, in their different ways, diverge from liberalism at this fundamental level; for both of them hold to the Aristotelian-Greek assertion that man is by nature a social and not an anti-social or non-social being. Both would assert, and would contend that psychology and sociology support the assertion, that human beings are dependent upon each other, not merely for temporary and eliminable economic reasons, but as a fact of their basic nature, and that the man who lives alone and feels no loss in it is, to revert to Aristotle again, either a beast or a god, but not a normal human being. Conservatives believe that men need a hierarchical social structure in order to feel at home in the world. Socialists have developed the ideal of fraternity as a concept which recognises men's need for each other, and suggests that a good society will be one in which there are no longer any barriers to prevent men and women from living harmoniously and co-operatively with each other. Fraternity, the most neglected and the most utopian of the French Revolution's triumvirate of virtues, is the principle which in a single word distinguishes the socialist utopia from the purely liberal vision of complete freedom equally available to all. But it is important to stress that this is not simply an arbitrary difference in ideals, but a divergence which is rooted in a different understanding of man and of society.

This difference is bound to affect socialist attitudes at many different levels. A socialist will observe, for instance, that the gains in terms of greater personal freedom which many young people experience when they move from a small community into the more anonymous environment of a large city, may very well be offset by the losses which older people suffer in terms of loneliness and the absence of neighbourly kindness and support. The dichotomy of the "open" and the "closed" society which is such a feature of liberal thought is not the black and white distinction it is supposed to be. Nevertheless, it would be a most serious misinterpretation of what has been said if it were supposed that socialists are likely to appear as the opponents of greater freedom or the champions of censorship and repression. As has been suggested, there may be occasions when a socialist may have to choose between freedom and some other good, and when it may be right not to choose freedom. Nevertheless a belief in fraternity cannot without perversion be used as the grounds for upholding legal or other measures which are essentially repressive, and involve compelling people to live other than as they would wish to live. What it does imply is that social arrangements which hold people together should not be wantonly destroyed and replaced by others which divide them, when it is the desire of people to stay together. (Many re-housing schemes would fail by this criterion.) In practice,

a socialist will support the continuing liberalization of society, and will not be deceived by the essentially reactionary terminology of "permissiveness", which is the bigot's name for tolerance. But it is not only for freedom that he fights. And it is not simply in terms of separate and autonomous individuals that he constructs his conception of the ideal society.

NOTES

1. Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Writers and Politics* (London 1965), Introduction, pp. xiii-xiv.
2. These points were made abundantly clear as long ago as 1936 in The National Council for Civil Liberties' *Report* on the working of the Special Powers Acts, republished earlier this year.
3. Full text in *The Times* and *The Guardian*, 10 August 1971.
4. See the *Sunday Times*, 19 September 1971, and Bernadette Devlin's speech in the House of Commons on 23 September 1971, *Hansard*, Volume 823, No. 197.
5. Published in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston, 1965).
6. O'Brien, *op. cit.* p. xv.
7. "Palinurus", *The Unquiet Grave* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 58.
8. In *The Socialist Register 1971*.
9. Stuart Hampshire, "Human Nature in Politics", *The Listener*, 3 December 1953.
10. T. E. Utey, "Thinking and the Right", *The Spectator*, 19 October 1956.
11. Edward Shils, "The End of Ideology?", *Encounter*, November 1955, pp. 53-4.
12. Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics* (London, 1962), p. 114.
13. See H. D. Aiken, "The Revolt Against Ideology", *Commentary*, April 1964, p. 39.
14. E. H. Carr, *The New Society*, (London, 1951), p. 16.
15. Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness", *Encounter*, January 1961, p. 18.
16. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London, 1970), p. 27.
17. F. R. Leavis, ed. *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge* (London, 1950), p. 70.
18. G. M. Young, *Victorian England, Portrait of an Age* (London, 1953), footnote p. 68.
19. Robert Paul Wolff, *The Poverty of Liberalism* (Boston, 1969), p. 142.
20. "Against Dryness", *op. cit.*, p. 17.
21. See O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
22. Quoted by J. H. Burns in "J. S. Mill and Democracy, 1829-61", printed in *Mill, A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by J. B. Scheewind, (London, 1969), p. 294.
23. *Ibid*, p. 295.
24. See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 98.
25. In *The Real World of Democracy* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 5-6.
26. Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics* (London, 1962), p. 65.
27. Robert Dahl, quoted in "The New Democracy" by Graeme Duncan and Steven Lukes, *Political Studies*, Vol. XI, No. 2. (1963), p. 163.
28. Crick, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
29. *Ibid*, p. 58.

30. See *The Hornsey Affair* (Harmondsworth, 1969), and my contribution to *Participation in Politics* (Manchester, 1972), edited by Geraint Parry.
31. For example, by E. J. Hobsbawm in his *Age of Revolution* (London, 1963), p. 247.
32. Frederick Engels, "On Authority", in *Marx and Engels, Selected Works Vol. I* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 639 and 637.
33. See the discussion by Eugene Schulkind in his introduction to *The Paris Commune of 1871* (London, 1972), pp. 53-4.
34. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Breaking the Chains of Reason" in *Out of Apathy* (London, 1960), p. 202.
35. See David Nicholls, "Positive Liberty, 1880-1900", *American Political Science Review*, 1962, and Noel Annan, "Misconceptions of Freedom", *The Listener*, 19 February 1959.
36. Stuart Hampshire, "In Defence of Radicalism", *Encounter*, August, 1955, p. 36.