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Chapter Seven

Decentralisation and the State

I have discussed at some length, in chapter five, different forms of democratic and social organisation, expressing a preference for pluralist and social, or associational, arrangements. I have discussed, in chapter six, some of the mechanisms of ownership and capital formation that could be used to support associational democracy in the economy. But what are the implications of the concept of association for different levels of political democracy.

In this chapter and the next I wish to discuss the different political levels at which the associational form of democracy might be most appropriately sited. In this chapter I will look at intra-national and national levels of democracy. In the next I will look at supra-national and international levels. But first I need to make some observations laying out the background to the issues to be discussed in the next two chapters.

The Changing Levels of Democracy

The revolutionary changes that marked the end of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s involved transformations in both existing forms of democracy and the levels at which they have been situated. Perhaps the most notable revolution in forms of democratic organisation has been the replacement of state collectivism with new competitive pluralist regimes in both the economies and polities of the Central and East European countries. But it is also in the levels of democracy that a revolution has been going on, the most notable development having been the gradual displacement of the centrality of the national economy and polity by forces from both above and below.

In this section I will look at two areas of change - 1) economic change which has involved a) a shift from the state owned and planned sectors to private and marketised sectors and b) shifts of power from the national level down to more intra- nationally decentralised levels and up to more transnational levels; and 2) political shifts of power from the nation-state to a) more transnational levels and b) more intra-national levels.

On the economic side developments in political ideology, left and right, and in the economies of East and West Europe have resulted in changing roles for ownership, planning and markets and in an increasing decentralisation of economic power away from the national level downwards to autonomous enterprises and upwards to supranational institutions, multinational companies and international trade. Changes have involved shifts both from the state and planned sector to the market and private sector and from the national level to intranational and supra-national levels.

Central and national planning, East and West, has found itself increasingly displaced by markets, decentralised enterprise autonomy and the increasingly transnational organisation of capital and economic decision-making in multi-national corporations and the European Community. There have been new developments in the changing balance of public and private ownership including increasing roles for private enterprise and for new forms of social ownership such as workers' co-operatives. Enterprises have found themselves enjoying greater autonomy with the decline of central state ownership and direction, and with the expansion of various forms of privatisation, self-financing, co-operative ownership and self-management, and with an increasing emphasis on 'post-fordist' developments such as flexibility and innovation.

In the West Mrs Thatcher and former US President Reagan were the most prominent practitioners of privatisation and deregulation. Such techniques were not the simple ideological commitments both leaders liked to claim. Mrs Thatcher was as much eager to sell off the state silver in order to fill the coffers for tax

cuts and pre-election reflations of the economy than in order to meet prior ideological commitments. However she found that such an approach blended in nicely with neo-liberal *laissez-faire* ideology and accordingly packaged her economic strategies in the language of Smith, Hayek and Friedman. Mrs Thatcher turned necessity into virtue, opportunism into resolution. But nevertheless she, along with Ronald Reagan, made privatisation an article of faith, gave it a high public profile in the West and put it on the agenda in the post-communist East as a panacea for all economic ills. In the East private initiative and the market will be an important part of the economic rescue package but they are bound to produce nasty side-effects and disappointments which are concealed by the hallowed and sacred status that such institutions are being given on the contemporary scene.

Increasing freedom for enterprises has been a growing feature in the reforming communist economies. In Yugoslavia the shift from the state to the self-management of enterprises has put into practice an ambition long dreamt of by the left. Even in the USSR, where political reform has outpaced the relative economic conservatism of President Gorbachev, self-financing and autonomy for enterprises and cooperatives, rather than state-ownership, have been encouraged.

Increasing roles for privatisation and markets, and the downwards decentralisation of economic power which has also displaced the role of central state ownership and planning, have been accompanied by a re-ordering of the world economy in a complex series of supra-national and international developments. The nation-state has been displaced by the upwards as well as the downwards decentralisation of its powers. The economic role of the nation-state in Europe has gone into decline, undermined by the rise of the EC as a commercial superpower bloc built up to allow European nations to compete on the world economy with Japan and the US. The increasing significance of multinational corporations and the loosening up of international trade has meant that production and trade take place less and less within clear national boundaries.

The day of the autarkic siege economy, which was perceived to be a viable proposition in the early 1980s, is now acknowledged to be long gone. The British Labour left promised then a strategy that assumed the possibility of a siege economy, Luckily for them they were never given the chance to put it to the test. Marginalised by the political skills and opportunism of Mrs Thatcher and disabled by a catalogue of own goals and a generally anachronistic approach to politics, the British Labour Party consigned itself to years of opposition. Perhaps thankfully because the French left were less lucky. They had the misfortune to be the ones to discover that autarkic economic transformation driven by the nation-state was no more. They came to power in the early 1980s boldly committed to a variant of the socialist autarkic siege economy, yet pulling back rapidly from the tatters of their economic strategy as it became increasingly apparent that it was unworkable in the modern international economy.

On the political side there have also been increasing pressures for shifts of power away from the nation-state - 1) up to more transnational levels and 2) down to more intra-national levels. There has been, with the accumulating influence of the EC, an increasing role for supra-national politics. Governments are increasingly coming to realise that problems such as the economy, environment, arms control, international poverty and drug abuse are global in character and require internationally negotiated and agreed solutions. These problems transcend national boundaries and can only be tinkered with from within the confines of the nation-state. Furthermore national governments are only willing to put in the sacrifices needed to deal with these problems if they can be sure that other governments are going to do the same, It is rare to find politicians willing to take unilateral steps on issues such as these. The British Labour Party's unilateral disarmament policy, now expediently ditched, was the exception that proved the rule.

The easing of international tensions as a result of President Gorbachev's reforms in Soviet foreign policy has facilitated international negotiations on such problems, particularly on arms control. President Gorbachev has become increasingly unpopular inside his own country, if he ever was particularly popular, as his political reforms have failed to keep up with the expectations they have generated. They have been outpaced by political developments in Eastern Europe which Gorbachev played a part in provoking but which made his own reforms look out of season. Meanwhile economic revival has failed to follow from political reform and Gorbachev is failing to deliver the only ever reliable guarantee of political support the world over - money in

the pocket and affordable goods and choice in the shops. But long after he is gone Gorbachev will be remembered for the international developments that he stimulated. And it is because of the change in the international climate, which no amount of blustering from Presidents Reagan or Bush could give them the credit for, that he gained a popularity on the international scene that clashed unhappily with his domestic reputation. The changing international mood facilitated by the Soviet reforms contributed to the increasing recognition by states of the global nature of the world's key problems.

Nation-states have also experienced increasing destabilization from below, under pressure - 1) from regional and nationalist movements seeking greater autonomy, and 2) from movements in civil society, including the so-called 'new social movements', trade unions and civil and democratic forums, concerned to check the power of the central state both East and West and to install new standards of self-determination and democratic rights. In this sense the nation-state is under threat from both territorial movements and political movements, the former which wish to reclaim national sovereignty at new levels, the latter which wish to deconstruct the very nature of such sovereignty.

Nationalism carried the banner in many of the 1980s Eastern European popular protests. Anti-communism became equated with national liberation because communist governments in the East were, Yugoslavia aside, imposed from outside, and, in the cases of Hungary and Czechoslovakia re-imposed in the legendary years of 1956 and 1968. In Germany nationalism was a force invoked East and West to support the drive for re-unification. Helmut Kohl, the West German Chancellor, and his party, the right wing Christian Democrats, used nationalism cynically to influence the results of the post-communist East German elections. In the West nationalism was a force for re-unification yet also a basis for the West Germans' resentment of the opportunities offered East Germans in the West. Either way it stoked up nationalist fervour and aided the growing popularity-of racist and neo-fascist movements in Europe.

Internal regionalist nationalisms have also been a potent force for change in Europe. Throughout Central and Eastern Europe many persecuted minorities are staking their claims for self-determination and autonomy not just from externally imposed communist governments but from existing national boundaries. Nationalism, in Europe as in Africa and elsewhere, has been a progressive force for change anticommunist change in the former, anti-imperialist in the latter but also casts a frightening shadow over the future as its irrational and prejudiced spectre shows signs of snowballing into an escalating role in the restructuring of Europe in the years to come, Nevertheless, while nationalist sentiments appear to be on the rise, nationalism is no longer a full-scale driving force in historical and political development because of the decline of its political concomitant, the nation-state.

As I have mentioned it has not only been territorial and cultural movements that have called into question the role of the nation-state. For the most part such movements have not attempted to subvert the legitimacy of nation-state sovereignty per-se, but only the status of existing boundaries and territorialities within which it is exercised. These movements do not wish to undermine national sovereignty but to re-establish it in new sites. This has been the case except where such nationalist movements have also been political movements for democratic change in the form and substance, rather than just the location, of nation-state power.

Political and democratic movements for increasing political pluralism and liberal human rights, for checks and balances on the power of the state and for a reconstitution of the state so as to restrict its powers have been another important force undermining the role of the nation-state in the world. These movements attempted to challenge the nature of the state, not just the locations in which it can be found. Democratic and civil movements were at the centre of the East European revolutions, concerned not just with ridding their nations of externally-imposed powers but with deconstructing the authoritarian state which had imposed putatively communist norms and values on the population. They were based on ideas of popular power and protest, on new but vaguely defined ideas of a pluralist and democratic politics, and on a commitment to the clearing out from the state bureaucracy of the nomenklatura and of special privilege and power.

They promised a reversion to conventional western-style pluralist polities but also a translation of their informal, spontaneous and novel styles of political action into future post-communist political structures. What this promise meant concretely was vague and necessarily poorly defined. It was more an implicit implication of their oppositional political styles than any explicit programme, and was compromised by the electoral disappointments that the 'forum' movements faced or marginalised by the pressing problems of office of those who were more successful. And, as I have argued, the democratic superiority of 'pure', spontaneous and populist type democratic politics is often more complicated and many-sided than it at first appears.

One of the most negative developments on the post-communist political scene has been the way in which the powerful political forces of the West have acted as models and actors in the political process to sideline the exciting democratic and civic forums which played such a central part in the revolutions and which promised fresh and new approaches to democratic politics in the post-revolutionary period. In East Germany the alliance to which New Forum belonged scored less than 3% in the elections for the new transitional government although in Czechslovakia Civic Forum formed the first post-communist government.

Political and democratic movements which challenge the existing structures of the nation-state have not only been evident in the East. In the West such movements have also been notable. Over the last two decades or so the student movement, then the women's movement, then the peace movement, and most recently the green movement have attempted to challenge existing conceptions of political rule and organisation in various ways. Most prominent in their political styles and advocacy has been an emphasis on informal political organisation, participatory politics and non-hierarchical forms of organisation. Many of these movements have had their day and then withdrawn from prominence. The student political movement all but disappeared after the late '60s actions. The women's movement has changed from being a united political movement into more of an intellectual movement fragmented by internal ideological differences. The peace movement has become a much quieter presence on the political scene after a swelling of support in the early 1980s. What will happen to the Greens remains to be seen. Perhaps the biggest danger here is not that they will disappear or retire gracefully from the scene. More likely is that their thunder will be stolen by the traditional parties or that they will be seduced into traditional political styles and modes of thought.

Last but not least there have been some explicitly and specifically political and democratic movements in the West geared solely towards the reform of the constitution and the state. In Britain, where the political system is more undemocratic and archaic than in other Western European nations, the Charter 88 campaign has gained in intellectual presence, calling for a Bill of Rights, a written constitution, proportional representation, devolution and such like, all in the aid of reforming, limiting and disaggregating nation-state power.

In short the levels at which democratic power has traditionally been held and even monopolised in Europe and the western liberal democracies are being called into question. Private initiatives and markets are increasingly depriving the state sector of a role it has more often than not exercised at a national level. The traditional source of sovereign power, the nation-state, is losing many of its powers as a result of such developments and under challenge from intra-national territorial and political movements concerned with the re-establishment of power at more devolved levels. And the nation-state is also being displaced by the increasing transnationalisation of decision-making.

Against this background it is necessary to make some comments about the appropriate levels of organisation of associational forms of democracy. In doing so it will be necessary to investigate what the concept of association itself implies for the re-siting of democracy at new levels and for its reform per se. There are four main levels to be discussed, the first and second in this chapter and the third and fourth in the next:

1. The Decentralised Autonomous Community – the territorially or functionally intra-national local community or association.

2. The Nation-State - as the site of social negotiations, co-operation, and co-ordination between decentralised autonomous communities at a national level.

3. The Supra-National System - where regional blocs of nations are represented.

4. The International Order - the role of the nation-state and supra-national organisations of states, such as the European Community, in the international system, including the role of international agencies.

Decentralised Autonomous Communities

The idea of associationalism refers to loosely communitarian relations of pluralist co-operation which come somewhere between competitive pluralism and monist communitarianism. It allows us to conceptualise the way in which plural interests can retain their independence and difference - as decentralised communities, regions and nationalities - yet also come together to co-operate - at national, supra-national and international levels - in order to overcome conflict and the rule of unbridled self-interest.

There are four main reasons for holding to a principle of subsidiarity, which stipulates the maximum possible decentralisation of power to the lowest, most local and small-scale level: 1) because decentralisation facilitates the expression of social diversity and difference; 2) because it allows for the maximum possible participation of people in decision-making; 3) because it provides for a range of countervailing centres of power, restricting the possibility of tyranny or of the monopolisation of power by a single body; and 4) because it provides a basis, but only a basis, for the cultural generation of solidaristic values and relations in the decentralised community. I will take these four points in turn.

Pluralism and Autonomy

The concept of association at the centre of this thesis is intended to provide a way of dealing with the dilemma between liberalism and pluralism on one hand and democratic power and socialism on the other.

In line with the objectives of the latter I have tried to outline a solidaristic form of pluralist democracy in my proposals for the social concertation of plural interests in democratic structures. But a social form of pluralism provides not only a structure which can facilitate a greater mutuality amongst diverse independent interests, it can also protect and cultivate difference and autonomy, principles valued by liberals and pluralists. It can do this in two ways - firstly, by empowering plural and autonomous interests in the social negotiating structures of associational democracy; and secondly, by providing the reciprocity and mutualism necessary for the survival of pluralism and freedom. The first of these, the plurally inclusive empowerment of interests in government, provides an alternative to the imposition of social priorities from above by external representatives, be this justified by the Leninist doctrine of the party expression of the popular will or by the liberal ideology of representative democracy. These doctrines lead to centralised and standardised definitions of the social good and are based on undemocratic ideologies of the external rather than the self-definition of social interests and on spurious notions of representation. Collective priorities and needs can be better defined through negotiations between interests themselves in which they participate and can represent their own plural interests. Associational government gives interests the political clout to decide themselves on their identities and needs. This is a more democratic way of doing things. And through the empowerment of plural interests in democratic structures is provided a means for their independent and particular interests to be represented, in short a means for the protection of pluralism and diversity.

There is, as I have said, a second characteristic of associational democracy which provides a haven for pluralism. Pluralism is protected not only by the empowerment of plural interests in democratic structures, but also by the mutualist relations that they are integrated into there. The solidarism as well as the democracy of pluralist social negotiation can protect pluralism and autonomy. It would be all to easy to reduce my concept of association to yet another attempt to give collectivism a new coat, to smuggle

socialism in through the back door. It is not this simple. Collectivist relations are not only advocated here for their own sake but also because they provide essential conditions for the survival of pluralism and autonomy, principles which are usually seen as opposed to collectivism. This is what competitive and contractual pluralists, who shun collectivism as antipathetic to pluralism, overlook. In order to protect diversity and freedom, interests, in expressing their freedoms, must show a due regard for the needs of others and for their rights to do the same. John Stuart Mill, the classic liberal theorist of liberty argued that the 'only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it'. The structures of associationalism provide the forums where such a mutual regard can be institutionalised. The weak and class-blind minimal regulation envisaged by neo-liberals and some social democrats cannot do this. Association, on the other hand, institutionalises a political structure which can. Its social structures of negotiation are not aimed simply at collectivist ends. The corporatism of an associational democracy provides the social structures within which interests can be integrated into relations of social regard and a mutualist sensitivity towards the needs and identities of each other in a way which safeguards the liberal and pluralist objectives of diversity and freedom.

These are two ways in which associationalism can provide the conditions for protecting pluralism and autonomy - firstly, through the empowerment of plural and independent interests in associational government and secondly, through the safeguarding, in a mutualist corporatism, of difference and autonomy.

A third safeguard for pluralism and autonomy can be through the proliferation of independent decentralised sites of decision-making. Diversity and freedom can be protected not only through the inclusion of the diverse and free in government, but also by the diffusion of governmental powers to them. This can give actors the power and independence to pursue their own interests and can free them from top-down imposed uniform standards which suffocate freedom and are insensitive to diversity.

Decentralisation may take place vertically or territorially, horizontally or functionally. That is, it may decentralise to geographically local areas or it may decentralise power to groups engaged in particular, sorts of activities. Decentralisation can be about the territorial localisation of decision-making but this is not, as is often assumed to be the case, the only form of downwards decentralisation. Decentralisation according to function as well as according to geography is an option.

Participatory Democracy, Representation and Decentralisation

Giving the diverse and different their independence and powers of self-determination helps to safeguard diversity and difference. It also provides the forums for greater individual participation in decision-making.

I wish to discuss three main points in this section concerning the relationship between decentralisation and participation - 1) What the merits and dangers of participatory democracy are; 2) how, in a complex mass society, participation can be facilitated through inclusive corporatist forms of representation; and 3) how it can be facilitated through decentralisation.

1) *Participatory Democracy*. Firstly, then, what are the merits and dangers of participation? What is there about participation that we should try to preserve and what nasty side-effects does it have for which we need to find remedies? I would argue that if democracy involves the control of people over matters that affect their lives then the ultimate form of democracy must be the direct participation of people themselves in making the decisions on such matters. There can in principle be no more democratic form of expression than self expression unmediated by any intermediary or representative agency. If democracy is about control then direct control by the *populus* cannot possibly be superceded. People have more control over matters that affect them if they themselves exercise choice over those matters than if that choice is exercised by someone else on their behalf.

But, as critics of participatory democracy from Plato (1974) to Max Weber (1978) have, in their different ways, pointed out, the situation is not as simple as this. In large complex societies direct participation is

limited as a way of making decisions and in even moderately large units a participatory democratic process can be intimidating and monopolised by certain groups. In mass societies characterised by complexity and differentiation it is impossible for people to make informed decisions about the wide range of specialised matters on which they have to be taken. It is also impractical to hold participatory democratic meetings where large numbers of people are involved, It is impossible for individuals or even groups to wield any significant influence or make a significant input into democratic decision-making in mass participatory forums however much they may wish to do so. Furthermore in participatory democracy a frequent problem is that leaders and small groups can still wield a disproportionate influence. Rhetoric, passion and intimidation are often more significant forces in decision-making than reason, frequently with authoritarian and intolerant consequences. No-one who has been to, for example, a union mass meeting could honestly deny that this is an occupational hazard of participatory forms of democracy. Given these democratic advantages and dangers of participation the task must be to find ways in which participation can take place with the maximum beneficial effect but without exhibiting its darker side.

One way might be through the small-scale local community to which powers have been decentralised. If this is really very small scale it can provide a context in which participation is feasible and in which opportunities for intimidation and the marginalisation of dissent are restricted. Fully participatory democracy can work but only when certain quite strict conditions are met - that a very small number of people are involved and that the decisions they have to make are about matters that are fairly straightforward or about which they are well-informed. Only in situations like this can people make decisions on matters on which they have, or can develop, the necessary know-how, over which they can be sure of adequate rights of discussion and participation and in which they are a significant enough presence not to easily be treated in an intolerant manner.

But this really does mean very small scale contexts involving handfuls of people. In even moderately large units (in my opinion, well before you get even into triple figures) all the problems of practicality, intimidation and marginalisation occur. However in larger units indirect or representative participation is still a possibility.

2) *Corporatist Democracy*. This brings me to my second concern in this section - how participation might be facilitated through inclusive and corporatist forms of representation. These involve the representation of people in government through the participation of their interest groups. They imply representation but not of the sort associated with conventional representative democracy. Conventional representative democracy involves the representation of social interests by an exclusive body external to them. A more inclusive and participatory form of representation, however, would involve the representation of interests by their own participation through their collective associations, integrated into corporatist structures of social negotiation in government. A participatory and inclusive corporatist democracy would be a far cry from the exclusive club government of parliamentary representation.

Here participation and representation are intermingled. Interest groups participate through the inclusion of group representatives in government. As such the form of participation involved comprises some elements of representation. Furthermore this form of participation can co-exist alongside and within conventional representative bodies. Participation and representation as such are not mutually exclusive and the counterposed dichotomy that is often made between the two in conventional wisdom is redundant.

In conventional representative democracy representatives are rarely in any genuine sense a member of the constituency they represent - not even in the typical case of territorial representation - and as such constituencies themselves can hardly be said to have a participatory role in government, however indirect, Furthermore representative democracy is barely representative, there being many determinants of representatives' decisions other than the wishes or interests of their constituents. When MPs stand up in parliament they rarely speak for their constituents. There are some good constituency MPs but many have only the most tenuous links with their constituencies and a democracy can hardly call itself representative when the vast majority of interests in society, because they do not translate into territorial constituencies, are unrepresented and excluded from its structures.

Representative democracy as we know it is really, as competitive elitists like Max Weber (1978) and Joseph Schumpeter (1942) have argued, a mechanism for revolving governing elites and ensuring their accountability. What it involves is the external and exclusive representation of social interests rather than their participation in government while what I propose is the participation of interests in government via their own representatives. The conventional idea of participatory democracy is of mass direct participation. But the indirect participation of interests in decision-making, via representatives from their interest groups, - functional representation - is still a participatory scheme distinct from the external representation of interests that we are used to. It preserves the principle of participatory as against purely representative democracy.

In short the concept of association implies government by the concertation of affected interests themselves determining, through negotiation and compromise, social priorities and needs. This is distinct from the external statist determination and execution of the social good characteristic of conventional representative democracy. In associationalism government is corporate and inclusive of the variety of interests in society rather than external and, ultimately, exclusive.

3) *Decentralisation*. Although indirect or representative participation is compatible with centralised decision-making in larger units this does not justify siting democracy at higher levels where it can be decentralised, Indirect participation is useful only where it provides a way of facilitating participation at higher levels on matters which can only be resolved there and not lower down. This brings me to my third concern in this section - how participation can be enabled not only through corporatist representation but also through the decentralisation of powers to more devolved levels, Government can be democratised not only through the opening up of democratic forums to consultation and inclusive participation but also through the decentralisation of its powers to more devolved levels. Both measures involve empowering the previously powerless, whether by their upwards incorporation into government or the downwards devolution of powers to them.

Using the principle of subsidiarity it is possible to site decisions at the most appropriate and relevant local levels, to maintain the proximity and responsiveness of participatory representatives to their constituent interest groups, and to allow for the proliferation of countervailing centres of power. Decentralisation can give free expression to the diversity and autonomy of interests in society and provide devolved forums accessible to individual participation and facilitative of the development of co-operative and solidaristic relations. As such it should be preferred over centralisation wherever possible.

Decentralisation and participation go together in two ways. First, corporatist structures provide a role for the participation of plural decentralised units in government at higher more centralised levels. Second, the maximum possible participation of people in decision-making can be fostered by the decentralisation of decision-making to the most local accessible possible levels, territorial or functional, where opportunities for participation are most feasible. A commitment to participation invites the inclusion of decentralised units in government; decentralisation facilitates the expansion of participation in lower-level decision-making.

There is a contradiction in my model between an inclusive commitment to the participation of all affected interests in government on one hand and a more exclusive priority decentralisation on the other. The opening up of government to wider and wider fields of interests increases the number of interests to be incorporated and the degree of centralisation at which decisions have to be taken. Yet the idea of decentralisation implies that communities should be self-governing and freed from the dictates of the wider community or from central directives.

I would argue that the social principle of all affected interests should take priority over decentralisation because a decentralisation which localises decisions to the extent of excluding external but affected interests is likely to foster private and sectionally interested decision-making insensitive to wider social considerations and consequences. It disenfranchises interests from having a say in matters which affect them. In other words unqualified decentralization is liable to fall into all the problems of a competitive pluralism which does not situate pluralism within a collectivist context.

Other than this, though, subject to the inclusion of all affected interests in decision-making, decentralisation can be a priority. Decisions can be made at the most local level consistent with the participation of all affected interests. If there is no other criteria according to which decisions should be made at higher levels then there is no sound reason - tradition, habit and prejudice being the normal guides in such situations - for decisions not to be made at lower levels. Decisions need not be made at a centralised level if they can be made at a more decentralised level local to the matters concerned while still involving all affected interests. Furthermore, paradoxical as it may sound, centralised decision-making can be compatible with decentralisation where inclusive corporatist institutions in which decentralised units can be empowered are built at the centre. While in a strictly descriptive sense corporatism may involve decision-making at the centre through its inclusive structures, it effectively shares and diffuses power to previously disenfranchised interests co-opted from functionally or territorially decentralized levels, so lending power to such levels.

It is significant to make decentralisation a principle for determining the most appropriate level of decision-making because at present there is often no guide to the siting of decision-making other than tradition which, when combined with nationalist prejudices, usually dictates that powers should be centralised in the nation-state. It is tradition rather than reason that is often invoked by the supporters of exclusive national sovereignty - I mention yet again the example of Mrs Thatcher - whether they are arguing against the supra- nationalism of the EC, or the power of interest groups like the unions or against regional devolution.

The small-scale locality is the most appropriate unit for many decisions that do not require external consultations or upwards centralisation but are exclusively specific to the locality. Where decisions concerning local communities affect outside interests those interests should be involved. But many matters will affect only the community itself and need not concern outside parties who cannot claim a legitimate interest in locally specific matters if they do not affect them.

Decisions on matters of exclusive concern are most appropriately made at the level of the decentralised autonomous community. To subject such communities to the rule of a higher external authority, such as the nation-state, on decisions that are exclusively relevant and specific to the community, suppresses the diversity and autonomy of communities and their opportunities for self-government. Centralised authorities tend to impose uniform standards of behaviour according to national priorities, often insensitive to local wishes or circumstances, and they deprive local communities of democratic rights of self-determination which are legitimately solely theirs where they concern matters which affect only them and no-one else.

Countervailing Centres of Power

So decentralisation allows social diversity and freedom to flower and it provides forums for the development of active participation in the political process. Another reason for prioritising the decentralisation of decision-making is in order to distribute power in accordance with classic pluralist tenets, stipulated by pluralists from de Tocqueville (1835 and 1840) to Dahl (1956). Politically such tenets call for the pluralist reconstruction of the state by the participation of a variety of parties in politics representing the plurality of interests in society and by the division of the state into many agencies and branches. They also put the case for a pluralism against the state facilitated through the distribution of power to agencies in civil society aimed at preventing the monopolisation or abuse of power in the hands of any one single body, the state in particular.

In Britain Mrs Thatcher made explicit what had long been the case - that the UK parliament is one of the most potentially autocratic in the West. It has the potential to become, as Lord Hailsham (1978) put it, an elective dictatorship. Mrs Thatcher built up this already frightening power by attacking independent bases of power in society in the trade unions, local government and the media.

She did so in the name of parliamentary sovereignty. The truth is that parliament has no greater natural right to sovereignty than any other institution in society. Tradition, habit and routine are not

good reasons for attempting to retain for the nation-state sovereign power. Neither is an irrational nationalism. Power has to be distributed according to assessments of what are the most appropriate sites for decision-making on particular matters and according to democratic considerations. There is no prior or fixed primacy for the nation-state. It must fight its corner like any other centre of power. At the moment its corner looks less and less convincing as the most appropriate sites of decision-making are, for economic, political and cultural reasons, becoming more local or supra-national and as the need for democratic safeguards requires the surrendering up by parliament of many of its prerogatives and arbitrary powers. Mrs Thatcher refused to accept this. Only towards the end of her tenure did she begin to resign herself to the inevitability of the loss of national powers to Europe. Meanwhile she, along with many leading Labour politicians, Roy Hattersley for instance, continues to defy calls for the democratisation of the state through constitutional safeguards and political reform.

There are many matters in society which could be made by horizontally or vertically local units and which are at present made from the centre. Centralised democracy is often inappropriately sited and insensitive. It stifles pluralism, transgresses rights of independence and self-determination and concentrates power dangerously. All of these are indictments which provide a strong case for the decentralisation of decision-making to local autonomous communities.

There are many ways of checking and balancing the power of the state. One of the most talked-about methods at the moment is constitutional reform. Britain does not have a written constitution and the introduction of one would be a timely step. But a much better way of checking the power of the state is by dividing it and providing balancing centres of power. What is written on a piece of paper can be ignored. The rule of law can be interpreted flexibly, especially by a biased Judiciary, or it can even be overriden. But what you cannot argue with so easily is power distributed and embedded throughout the fabric of society. It is more difficult for the state to impose decisions in an area where it has no power of jurisdiction than in one where it has jurisdiction restrained by written laws. It is very difficult for the state to monopolise power and administer it in an authoritarian or oppressive way if there are multiple centres of power with the teeth to provide alternatives and opposition to the state.

Obviously governments can simply reclaim powers held in alternative centres and this is precisely what the Thatcher government in Britain did. They tried to override pluralism in the state and build up centralism through attacks on local government, and they tried to do the same in civil society by imposing restrictions on the unions. When the going got too tough they even, at GCHQ, abolished union membership and, at the GLC and in the metropolitan authorities, wiped out an entire tier of local government. But this was made easy for Mrs Thatcher by the already centralised bias of the British system. It would not be such a simple task for a government faced with a deep and extensive pluralism of the state and civil society, much greater than we are used to at present in Britain. To dismantle such a pluralism would prove very arduous, complicated and potentially unpopular.

The decentralisation of power must be a democratic priority. This can be achieved through a number of concrete steps - through the establishment of two chamber systems of government at national, regional and local levels, in which the second chambers have real teeth and are elected; by state funded political parties and proportional representation to ensure strong and fair multi-party opposition; through the devolution of power to assemblies at regional and local levels; by a strong culture of independent associational activity in civil society; by the incorporation of interests into government; and by an independent and pluralist media, to mention just some examples. The single sovereign state with a monopoly on power in society has to go. The society in which power is widely distributed to communities and associations beyond the state in civil society and whose state is itself divided and pluralist has to be established in its place.

Pluralism between elections can be as important to a democratic society as the elections themselves. This is a point that went over the heads of the post-communist Romanian government when they sent in vigilantes armed with sticks and clubs to break up opposition demonstrations. And it is a truth against which Mrs Thatcher, who was staunchly committed to the trump of the electoral mandate, struggled. While

East Europeans were busy dismantling the apparatus of state power Mrs Thatcher was building it up. Just as they were attempting to foster an active associational life in civil society Mrs Thatcher was attempting to kill it off. This leaves Britain with an honourable record on multi-party parliamentary democracy but way behind Eastern Europe in having little else in the way of democratic institutions or processes between elections or outside parliament.

Solidarism

A central concern of the concept of associational democracy is that plural interests should retain their diversity and independence within a context of co-operation and co-ordination rather than within relations of atomised competition, of the sort typical of competitive pluralist or market models. Co-operation, co-ordination, compromise and mutual understanding are necessary if not sufficient bases for democracy because without them pluralism can slide into competitive self-interest, atomised decision-making, inequality and exploitation all of which undermine democratic control, pluralism and liberty. It is necessary, therefore, to find the political structures appropriate to a social pluralism and to promote a supportive solidaristic value consensus which can underpin it and give it force.

Decentralised autonomous communities can provide a focus for the identification of citizens with the collectivity. The decentralized local community - territorial or functional - provides a site between the individual and the state where it is feasible for individuals to develop collective identifications and feelings of belonging with other individuals who share common territorial or functional identities or interests. Solidarism at this level can provide a basis for the generalisation of solidaristic attitudes and practices in wider democratic spheres,

The problem, though, is how to develop the solidaristic relations that exist amongst collective group members further into solidaristic rather than antagonistic relations between collective groups? How do you make group solidarism into universal solidarism rather than merely local parochialism or sectionalism? This is a problem for competitive pluralist and associationalist theories which can only be resolved by recourse to ideas of mutualism, co-operation and universalism offered in socialist political thinking. Associationalists have been deeply concerned with the development of more mutual and communal forms. But they have tended to settle for the intermediary association - often the professional association - at the expense of a concern for the relations between associations. They have tended to settle for particularistic rather than universal solidarism, for meso- rather than macro-associationalism.

The main sites of collective identity which liberals and pluralists have focused on have tended to be the family, the association or interest group and the state, liberals emphasising the first and third institutions and pluralists the second intermediary agency. The problem with liberalism and pluralism is that they offer no glue to bind these social units in society together in a solidaristic or socially conscientious manner. Their theory of societal reproduction is of the co-existence of social diversity in a competitive equilibrium. But the atomistic and competitive relations of such an equilibrium are a breeding ground for asocial parochialism. It is the location of sociality within small-scale local institutions without an overarching context of social co-operation and coordination that has fostered familial self-interest and privatism, functional sectionalism, nationalism and provincialism as such key features of modern social and political life. The restriction of the cultural production of solidarism to such spheres fosters a particularistic rather than a universal or generalised solidarism. This is why the idea of 'association' for me refers not only to associations but also to the solidaristic social relations that bind them together.

The problem is how to preserve pluralism and autonomy within a framework of collective solidarism and co-ordination. I agree with the argument put forward by Charles Taylor in his book on Hegel:

> ‘what modern society needs ... is a ground for differentiation, meaningful to the people concerned, but which at the same time does not set the partial communities against each other, but rather knits them together in a larger whole’.

The solidarism cultivated in small-scale decentralised communities needs to be generalised by their integration into wider associations and corporate relations with other communities. Associationalism should not stop with the association. Corporations should themselves join corporations. Local communities must be able to preserve their distinct identities and freedom but they must do so within a framework which leads them into relations of mutuality and social sensitivity.

The Associational State

This leads on to my next concern. Given that associations can only provide a basis for particularistic solidarity but not for its generalisation how can social conscientiousness be ensured on a wider scale? How can the internal solidarity of associations be prevented from turning into parochial instrumentalism and conflict?

This raises the question of the context and institutions appropriate for the association of associations, and here is where the state comes in. The site where associations gather together in order to negotiate socially agreed needs and priorities is effectively some kind of a state, whether local, national, supra-national or international. This state, I will argue, needs to be strong but democratic.

The Associational State and Why it is Necessary

Two questions need to be answered. Why is it necessary for the state to be associational? And what is the necessity for the state in the first place?

The associational state is a corporate and inclusive, rather than an external and exclusive, state. In my view the state should not be an external power ruling in society, defining, representing and executing social, interests and priorities. These should be agreed upon by interests themselves in negotiation rather than imposed from above. What is needed is a mechanism for establishing collective and solidaristic relations amongst plural interest groups in society that does not impose these from above. An external and exclusive state collectivism is insensitive to pluralism and autonomy. It formulates standardised social priorities without any real knowledge of the diverse range of demands in society and it is paternalistic and potentially authoritarian. This is the case for both the centrally planned command economy and the social democratic welfare state. Bread queues and dole queues are equally ill-served by an exclusive state collectivism.

Social needs and priorities should be negotiated and agreed through the participation of plural interests themselves rather than by a sovereign external body. This means that the state in an associational democracy should be constituted by the corporate participation of plural interests. It should no longer be an external body, over and above the constellation of interests in society, able to impose an externally defined set of needs and interests upon them.

The basis for the generalisation of social conscientiousness beyond the internal particularistic and sectionalist solidarism of the association is in the association of associations. This cumbersome phrase ultimately means a state, but a corporate, associational and inclusive state rather than an external and exclusive one.

The associational state is necessary, in short, for pluralist, solidarist and democratic reasons. It is also necessary because, paradoxical as it may sound, such a state can be strong enough to deal with the problems of modern society. The complex, deep-seated problems of modern societies require radical and sustained programmes of action. A strong state is needed in order to carry through such programmes. But if the powers of the state have been divided and dispersed throughout society where can the strength and leadership needed to tackle seemingly intractable problems come from? It is my argument that the inclusive corporate state can be stronger and more radical yet also more democratically accountable than the strong state of hegemonic adversary party politics.

The liberal answer to state authoritarianism is the minimal state. Yet throughout all modern, complex, large, advanced industrial societies correspondingly large and complex state bureaucracies have grown up, Max Weber (1978) being perhaps the most noted analyst of this phenomenon. Bureaucratisation is not a coincidence, nor just the product of the scheming minds of fiendish power-hungry politicians. Furthermore socialism does not have a monopoly on this sort of thing. Capitalism has been Just as good at it. The state has taken on a huge wealth of responsibilities for macro-economic management and has built the massive apparatus of the modern welfare state, providing public services including social welfare, education, health and so on, as well as assuming responsibility for military and policing matters and such like. These are reactions to the growing scale and complexity of modern economic and social needs. Weber himself expressed a pessimistic resignation to the necessary fact of bureaucratisation. Even in these neo-liberal times this is the way of things and the neo-liberals are finding that they can only dismantle this apparatus so far and that, in order to do so, they have to build it up elsewhere. The freeing up of the economy and the selling off of the public monopolies has required an indefensible centralisation of the state's powers and the amassing of new regulatory apparatuses. Neo-liberals who want to be able to express approval for Mrs Thatcher's economic liberalism yet also scold her for her political authoritarianism do not account for the fact that the first has required the latter.

The idea of the minimal state just does not face up to the realities of the society we live in and the fact that Mrs Thatcher ended up accumulating central state powers as much as she rolled them back testifies to this. Big business and markets will not regulate themselves and are too powerful to be left to their own self interested devices. The Thatcher government found that with every privatisation new regulatory bodies had to be set up. The economy's many complex parts are heavily interdependent and need to be co-ordinated and underpinned. Training, research and macro-economic policy and investment, for instance, are vital elements in a successful economy and it is only through state intervention that such infrastructure will be provided. The neo-liberal idea of a free market economy is a myth. Markets and private production cannot sustain themselves without regulation and the provision of public services. They are necessarily embedded in the social and political institutions of public life. We do not have the luxury of choosing the mixed economy out of some ideological preference. It has become a necessary and inevitable part of modern industrial society and like it or not it is here to stay. The burden placed on the state by public need is great and has grown massively in recent times. The infrastructure needed to hold up the economic and social fabric of society would simply not exist without a state to manage the massive task of its development and constant modernisation. It is only just becoming recognised by governments that environmental protection is a matter which cannot be resolved by the local government environmental health officer or by a reliance on the benevolent public-mindedness of the multi-national corporation, but requires massive state intervention on an international scale. In fact many of our environmental problems are a direct result of the unregulated behaviour of private business.

The danger is that we could over-react to the unhappy experience of statism. Many socialists have been too infected by neo-liberal doctrine. Their idea of a non-statist socialism is one that abandons the sphere of the public or social good and the state to retreat into the world of individual self-interest and market forces. In this respect the response of the democratic socialists is one up on that of the market and individualist socialists. The way out of statism should not be through rolling back the state to the status of a minimal feeble agency in society. A centralised agency is needed, for good or ill, to co-ordinate and regulate and to provide for complex and large scale economic and social needs. Our response to statism should not be to throw out the baby with the bathwater but to democratise the state within a collectivist context. In complex mass societies the large strong state is a necessity. The question is how to give it the strength to do what it has to do whilst simultaneously tightening up on its democratic accountability and safeguarding against the abuse of power. The beauty of the associational state is that it provides a system which can meet such apparently contradictory requirements for a strong yet also a democratic state.

A Democratic State?

But the British state in particular, as it is, is hopelessly inappropriate for the tasks which face it. It is an elitist and exclusive state rather than corporate and inclusive. Mrs Thatcher demonstrated as much by her authoritarian use of a minority vote to accumulate powers at the centre and stamp out opposition and

dissent. But what she did only exploited the worst potential of what was already a hopelessly archaic and undemocratic political system.

There are a number of particularly worrying features about Britain's undemocratic state which I will discuss in turn - its centralism and lack of regional pluralism; the lack of a strong countervailing pluralist civil society; its inappropriateness to the new European supra-nationalism; the inadequacy of the electoral and party system for checking the abuse of power; and the absence of constitutional checks on government. All of these factors make for a political system which has long allowed for the possibility of authoritarian rule, concealed behind the facade of parliamentary democratic institutions and of a sort which Mrs Thatcher only began to exploit.

The British state has failed to come to terms with internal nationalist demands in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, or with its position within the new European supra-nationalism. Mrs Thatcher tried to wipe out political pluralism, vowing to eliminate socialism as a political alternative in Britain and attacking the power and autonomy of the unions and local government. The representative party system of adversarial politics and single party rule as it operates in Britain does not make for democratic, accountable or restrained government and there are no significant constitutional checks on the power of the state. Mrs Thatcher worked to exclude the last vestiges of the two main concerns of this thesis - pluralism and co-operation - insofar as they did anyway play a part in the British system. A radical rethink of the nature of the state is needed if more pluralist and inclusive, strong yet democratic, political system is to be built in Britain. Let me expand briefly on the problems I have mentioned.

Ulster is stricken by unemployment, economic decline and terrorism. The conflict there results in death and bereavement in and beyond the province, a culture of violence and antagonism on the streets and the imposition of unprecedented legal and policing powers and restrictions on civil liberties by the state. Politicians seem incapable of making more than the most fleeting steps forward. In Wales and Scotland distinctive historical and cultural identities are felt strongly but not recognised in corresponding political structures geared towards more federalist or devolved forms of government. Under Mrs Thatcher the inappropriateness of the British state's structures to regional differences actually became more acute because of the demise of the Conservative Party in Scotland and the subsequent declining legitimacy of centralised Tory rule there. As if this was not enough Mrs Thatcher tried to use Scotland as a guinea pig to test out the unjust and unpopular poll tax, imposed on the Scottish by a predominantly English government whom they did not support. This sort of behaviour only served to demonstrate the inappropriateness of a centralised British state unresponsive in its political structures to regionalism. There is nothing democratic about a state in which it is possible for a Westminster government unsupported in the regions to impose policies there unaccountable to and unrestrained by their popular demands and dissatisfactions. The only way this situation can be remedied and repeats of the same sort of insensitive centralism in the future prevented is through devolved government and greater powers for the regions.

The over-centralisation of the British state has always been a problem but became blatantly obvious under Mrs Thatcher as she attempted to exploit and build on it. She not only showed little interest in regional government for the other countries in the United Kingdom but deliberately tried to tie down the powers of local government and transfer many of them to the central state. Her attack was two pronged - both on local democracy in the name of parliamentary sovereignty and on socialism whose main basis in power and as a source of opposition to Thatcherism was, for much of the 1980s, local. The financial powers of local government were repeatedly attacked by the Conservatives. Where one measure was sidestepped another was put in its place until some - ratecapping and chargecapping - were found which could finally put the lid on local financial powers.

There are no legal safeguards protecting local democracy against this sort of central interference. In fact when the going got too tough Mrs Thatcher did what would have seemed inconceivable in the 1970s - she abolished the GLC and an entire tier of metropolitan Labour local government. This was a blatantly political move intended to undermine radical strategies being pushed through which went against government policies. What was shocking about abolition was not just Mrs Thatcher's brazenness in pursuing it, but that there were no constitutional, legal or political safeguards to stop her. The immediate reaction of many to

hearing about the abolition proposals was, as it was for many of the governments policies, 'she can't do that!'. In complex societies what is required more than almost any other democratic mechanism is pluralism in the devolution of power and safeguards to protect local and devolved distributions of power as balances against the necessary and inevitable powers of the state. But rather than showing some consistency in her liberalism Mrs Thatcher proceeded to accumulate ever greater powers for the central state where everywhere else in Europe the emphasis has been, if anything, on the dismantling of central state powers in favour of more liberal and pluralist forms. Again, in the era of liberal and pluralist politics the British state seems undemocratic and out of step with prevailing trends and Mrs Thatcher has only succeeded in making it more so.

In addition to regional and local diffusions of power another pluralist protection against the monopolisation or abuse of power at the centre is in a healthy associational life in civil society. The main associational agencies in British society have for a long time been, of course, the unions. However the unions are now so shackled and impotent that they pose little check or balance to central state power. The power of the unions under Edward Heath and James Callaghan in the 1970s provided an excuse for a backlash expressed in a catalogue of anti-union legislation. Some of the legislation was justified and the unions and the Labour Party now acknowledge this. But much of it was not. Right down to details the government can now prescribe how unions should conduct their affairs through the use of legislation and the courts. Even the right to belong to a union was challenged in the case of GCHQ. The hypocritical and politically partisan intentions behind the union legislation has been demonstrated by the fact that the unaccountable and undemocratic power of private business has been left untouched. Some independent associational activity has been subjected to greater central state control and some hasn't. And, again, there have been no protections for free association against central state interference. The recent restrictions take away any power the unions had to provide a countervailing balance which could check abuses of power by central government. Neither unions free from legal restraint holding the government to ransom, nor unions made impotent by centrally imposed controls are appropriate in a pluralist and democratic society. The lack of an even balance has been something the British state has been unable and unwilling to provide.

The British state has not only been unable to cope with pluralism within the confines of its own borders but it has also been thrown off balance by threats to its sovereignty from supra-nationalism. The British have been unsettled on the question of EC membership right from the start, going so far as to put it to a referendum, and they have continued since to be reluctant Europeans. Mrs Thatcher stressed her principled support for the idea of a European market but tried to put a damper on economic union, played down the political and social aspects of Europeanisation and in general was an obstructive presence in its development. Her stand throughout the whole process of Europeanisation was on the issues of the national interest and national sovereignty.

There is no rational democratic reason for accumulating all power at the level of the nation-state, only irrational, traditional and nationalistic reasons. In fact there is a lot to be said against exclusive national sovereignty, both on democratic grounds and because it is so inappropriate in the contemporary climate of transnationalism. The reason Mrs Thatcher and many on the left fear supra-nationalism, aside from their traditionalism and nationalism, is because it will inhibit their ability to push through policies to their personal taste unhindered by the need to consult with other affected interests about their needs and feelings. Politicians are hostile to supra-nationalism precisely because of their well-founded fears that it will break down the accumulation of powers in one single centre and diffuse them in a way which will restrain them in their ability to rule without inhibition. The fact is that it is academic anyway. All Mrs Thatcher has been able to do is slow down the process of Europeanisation because the forces acting in its favour are stacked against her. She uncharacteristically resigned herself to this reality. But the posture and inclinations of the British state are still inappropriate to the times. For the British state to have any democratic credibility it will have to accustom itself not only to a greater pluralism within its own bounds but also to a more co-operative attitude towards its neighbours and, ultimately, a more positive orientation to the needs of global humanity rather than to just its own parochial national interests, whether as they exist in isolation or as part of a provincialist regional bloc of European nations. (That Europe as well as nations is provincialist is one of its limitations, as we will see in the next chapter).

The electoral and party system in Britain is also limited in a way which does little to bolster the democratic credibility of the British state. It is geared around single party rule in which the ruling party is not expected to co-operate or consult with other parties or wider interests in society. It gets all its democratic legitimacy from the electoral mandate and needs to go nowhere else for authority for its actions. This concentrates power centrally and exclusively and the style it fosters is hegemonic rather than cooperative. Parties are encouraged to go it alone rather than to share power or consult.

The first-past-the-post electoral system allows a party to rule alone with a majority of seats in the Commons disproportionate to the amount of support it has received in votes. The Conservatives ruled through the 1980s alone with a majority of seats in the Commons and a monopoly of power yet with a minority vote of only around 40%. Uninhibited rule by a party not supported by a popular majority does not constitute the paragon of democracy and it is something that would be impossible in most liberal democratic systems. Not surprisingly East Europeans coming from the new emergent democracies there have not been impressed by this scenario and have gone home convinced of the need for more proportionately representative systems.

Furthermore the main sources of checks and balances on the power of government typical in other countries are weak or nonexistent in Britain. Britain, unlike other liberal democracies, imposes virtually no constitutional checks on the power of the state. Associational life in civil society which should provide countervailing centres of power is weak and, as I have argued, was deliberately further weakened by Mrs Thatcher. Party opposition in the Commons has subsequently had to carry the burden of the task of keeping a check on the government. The precariousness of this arrangement was demonstrated in the 1980s by the lack of aptitude, declining electoral credibility and disunity of the opposition. The two party system, in which much responsibility for restraining the actions of the government has been put in the hands of the parliamentary opposition, did not under Thatcherism prove up to such a task.

The potential inherent in the system for unchecked minority rule is not new. It has long existed, concealed by the relatively successful operation of the two party system in which opposition parties have provided a check on the government sufficiently capable and united to restrain them from their worst excesses. But now, although Labour is regaining its electoral strength, the two party system is still unstable and the opposition is still weak and divided. This makes for poor democracy. British governments have always been kept in check by the spectre of an alternative government in waiting who could easily be swept into power on a small switch of the vote as a result of unpopular government policies. The weakness of this system was realised when there arrived in office a zealous and doctrinaire government driven by conviction rather than consensus and when this development coincided, fortuitously for the Conservatives, with a collapse in the electoral credibility of the main opposition party and the growth of a third political force. The poor existing checks on uninhibited single-party rule collapsed.

This situation allowed Mrs Thatcher to exploit the bias of the system towards the authoritarian monopolisation of unchecked power by a 'majority' government. She was technically answerable to the electorate, but this was an inadequate form of accountability when she could be returned with minority support on the backs of a divided opposition and despite an anti-Thatcher majority of votes, and when she could override any appeals for her to be responsive to checks in between elections, claiming a spurious electoral mandate for her policies.

What is needed to resolve this situation in the peculiar case of Britain is a more proportionately representative system, greater checks and balances on the power of government and political institutions which favour a more widely and plurally responsive style of consensus government. Measures along these lines could prevent a party with minority support - be it of the right, left or centre - governing alone like a majority party insensitive to popular feelings, on the poll tax or the NHS for instance, and unrestrained by checks on the authoritarian abuse of power. The political system should be sufficiently representative, pluralist, inclusive and subject to restraints to make governments accountable to popular wishes. Such basic democratic standards are absent from the British system.

The British state is not only lacking pluralism in its own structures, and missing a strong pluralist countervailing civil society and an electoral and party system geared to inhibiting the abuse of power. It is also devoid of the sort of constitutional checks on the power of state assumed as the necessary and indispensable cornerstone of democracy in other liberal polities.

In Britain government legislation cannot be challenged through the courts or overturned in the Lords. This means that the rule of law is effectively what the government passes in the Commons, rather than what restrains their actions. There are not predetermined constitutional rights or standards, as there are in other liberal democracies, according to which government legislation can be judged and legally challenged. The second chamber is not strong enough to throw out legislation, only to delay it. The theoretical possibilities inherent in such a system are frightening. Any piece of legislation can be passed through parliament without external restraint and, with our first-past-the-post electoral system of single party rule, could be engineered by a small faction within a minority party in government. To some extent this is what does appear happened in the Conservative governments of the '80s as Mrs Thatcher commanded loyalty behind her personal leadership, sometimes on issues where there was stifled unease within the party and the government about her stance.

Labour and Tory politicians are mostly either silent or positively hostile on the issue of restraints on power, because they want to use the opportunities for unchecked radical reformism that the present system permits. They reduce democracy mostly to the electoral mandate which is seen to legitimate more or less anything and override need for further consultation or accountability. Consultation is seen as weakening democracy because it undermines the sovereignty of parliament. Politicians are willfully blind to the flaws in the electoral system and relatively silent on the need to retain democratic standards in between elections. But Mrs Thatcher has now shown that what has long been possible but never seriously countenanced, minority rule in spite of and unhindered by opposition, can be a reality. Previously it was assumed that genuine majority government and the strong opposition supplied by two party politics would prevent this scenario. But under her the need has been demonstrated for pluralist and constitutional reforms to limit the powers of government, not because of the policies she has pushed through, although these have been bad enough, but because of the undemocratic way in which she has been able to do so, only partially restrained and accountable and despite an absence of popular support.

Citizenship Democracy: Two Types, Their Merits and Limitations

What measures can be taken to overcome the peculiar undemocratic structures of the British state and how can the concept of associational democracy help us in this project? Citizenship devotees, such as those discussed in chapter four, socialist and non-socialist alike, have argued for new strategies of democratisation. The citizenship democrats can be grouped into two main camps. One argues for constitutional and political reforms of the existing British political system. The other, more abstractly and vaguely, but no less convincingly, argues for more fundamental changes in political structures and the political culture, favouring more participatory forms of democracy. I wish to draw on both of these paths out of the democratic crisis to argue that what is needed is a more associational style of democratic government, one which both lends a greater role to associational activity in civil society and puts a premium on associational relations between interests in the polity through which they can co-operate and negotiate commonly agreed and broadly supported policies in a way that is democratically inclusive and responsive. In this section I will discuss the proposals of the two camps of citizenship democrats before going on in the next to discuss associational ideas of democratic reform.

1) *The Constitutional Reformers*. The constitutional citizenship advocates are concentrated around the Charter 88 campaign initiated in 1988 by the magazine New Statesman. Charter 88 is not a specifically socialist document and has broad cross-party support from socialists and non-socialists. Its signatories call for a Bill of Rights enshrining rights of free assembly, association and expression, rights of privacy and trial by Jury, for freedom from discrimination and for the scrapping of detention without trial. They call for the executive to be made subject to the rule of law, for freedom of information, open government, proportional representation, an elected second chamber, an independent judiciary, legal channels of appeal for victims of

abuses of state power, for greater devolutions of power to the regions and local government and for a written constitution.

These proposals are tame and unoriginal in the sense that many of them are standard practice in other countries, the 18th century United States constitution being perhaps the most notable example of the sort of thing the constitutional citizenship democrats are after. But within the British context they are constitutionally revolutionary. The constitutional reformers are questioning an idea of unlimited and undivided parliamentary sovereignty which is central to British political culture, regarded as the epitome of democracy and worshipped by conservative parliamentarians from Margaret Thatcher to Michael Foot. They want power to be divided and devolved, subjected to limits and checks and made answerable to the law.

Everything I have said about the undemocratic nature of the British state shows the need for such measures. Nevertheless Charter 88 has attracted just as broad a range of critics as supporters. The people who matter most in the Labour and Conservative Parties do not support its proposals and this puts a block on the immediate possibilities for progress on constitutional reform. But the critics' arguments against the sort of proposals made by Charter 88 are weak and unsustainable.

Opposition to political reform is based on the wrong reasons, The most conservative opponents, left and right, shun it because they have a traditional, sentimental attachment to parliamentary sovereignty. They can give no arguments for this other than that this is the way it has always been and the way it should be. It is the natural way of things. Acknowledging the case against unlimited and undivided parliamentary sovereignty would for them involve breaking with the habits of a political lifetime. Others base their opposition to political reform on an irrational nationalism which justifies the concentration of powers at the level of the nation-state, rather than on any sound democratic reasons.

Another source of opposition to political reform comes from self-styled radical reformers of very different pedigrees, from Roy Hattersley to Tony Benn. Hattersley and others like him on the left and right of the Labour Party argue that the reforms advocated by Charter 88, by dividing and limiting parliamentary sovereignty, would undermine the power of a Labour government to push through radical reforms. Mrs Thatcher was not interested in political reform not just because of her attachment to national parliamentary sovereignty, but also because it would leave less space for her brand of conviction politics and more for the politics of consensus and compromise.

It is also argued by some that many of the reforms would put too much power in the hands of a judiciary who, coming from a selective upper class background, would be class, gender and racially biased and would favour the interests of the conservative establishment. PR meanwhile, would lessen Labour's chances of governing alone and would lead to coalitional governments in which Labour would have to water down its programme. Another argument is that PR would weaken MPs links with their constituencies because they would be elected according to the national distribution of the vote between the parties rather than by constituencies. And another criticism of PR is that, because it leads to less single party rule and more coalitionism, policy will result from deals hammered out in smoke filled rooms by prospective coalition partners rather than from manifestos which are open to full public view and can be voted on by the electorate.

Some of these criticisms are weak because they put partisan political priorities before the need for a better democracy. They stay within the camp of paternalistic, party-centered and statist politics. Total pragmatic accomodation to the lowest common denominator is no way to govern. But radical reformism and political leadership must take place within a democratically accountable, inclusive and plurally sensitive framework rather than through the exploitation of a deficit in democratic procedures. This is a more democratically adequate perspective. The self-styled radical reformers are effectively saying that when it comes to the success of their own politics on one hand or the safeguarding of basic rights or fair electoral representation or the diffusion of power on the other they would rather see their own politics succeed.

But even if radical reformers decide that this is a justifiable order of priorities their argument is still flawed in its own terms. Contrary to their stipulations a reformed polity could be conducive to a more rather than

a less radical reformism. A democratically reformed system would in fact provide a better rather than a poorer basis for the success of a radical politics. Single party rule rests on a narrower base of support than coalitionism, especially so if the ruling party governs on a minority vote. Furthermore by exploiting a deficit in democracy single-party governments under the present system cannot command the same democratic legitimacy needed to sustain a radical programme as a government in a more democratic reformed polity could. In addition, in a reformed polity the diffusion of powers and proportional representation would force the government to co-operate widely with other parties and agencies in society in order to win the collaboration and support it would need to form a government and push through its programme, making it more socially sensitive and mobilising a broader basis of support behind agreed programmes. This would give the government a greater democratic credibility and breadth of support, guaranteeing more surely its success. Such an approach could actually build the sort of broad legitimacy and support for a radical politics which single party parliamentary rule is unable to.

As for the question of giving too much power to a class-biased judiciary this is a real problem, but it should be a basis for reforming the judiciary rather than abandoning something like a Bill of Rights. As far as the demise of the constituency MP is concerned this could be replaced by new forms of local representation - local ombudsmen, constituency representatives making up part of the membership of a second elected chamber or the devolution of parliamentary powers to local and regional authorities, to give just three possibilities. Finally the idea that policy will result more from inter-party negotiation in the coalitional politics of a PR system and less from manifestos voted upon by the public is flawed. For one thing people vote very often - like it or not - for a general political image rather than on policy detail and this would not be lost under PR. While parties would be prevented from making detailed policy promises because of concessions and compromises that they might have to make in negotiations, they would still be able to maintain a clear image based on the usual things – their philosophy, their social base, the personalities of their leaders, their credibility as a party of government and so on. Furthermore prospective negotiating stances could be presented in manifestos and incorporated into the political image of a party for the electorate to vote on. And politicians have to be given some leeway to negotiate. Otherwise they will be unable to react pragmatically to changing circumstances and new opportunities. It is simply not practical for people to vote on policy detail all the time. What should be voted on is the general stance and main policies of a party within the framework of which it will enter into coalitional negotiations.

2) *Problems with the Citizenship Reformers*. Nevertheless there are problems with Charter 88 although these are more to do with what it does not say than what it does. There are four problems - 1) the Charter omits to mention a number of areas of political reform which are vital; 2) it is biased towards political and individualist concerns to the exclusion of considering communitarian, economic and social aspects of citizenship; 3) it is blind to the economic bases of the democratic deficit; and 4) it fails to deal with the democratisation of civil society. I will look at these in turn.

The Charter evades the important issues of the position of the monarchy and of to whom and how ministers and civil servants are to be made accountable, all questions raised by Tony Benn after his experiences of ministerial office, yet marginalised by Charter 88. It says nothing about what role a democratic nation-state should play within the new European supra- nationalism and makes no specific statements on the devolved power structures appropriate to greater independence for Ulster, Scotland and Wales.

The British Liberal Democratic Party have produced a more detailed written constitution but this also suffers from errors of omission. It proposes a reduction of the size of the Commons from 650 to 450 members, with a fixed four year term. It advocates a second house with members elected through the Single Transferable Vote PR system from the constituencies of Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the English regions. It advocates a reduction of the voting age to 15 and a supreme court whose members would be nominated by a parliamentary commission and confirmed by parliament. The constitution, it proposes, could be amended by two-thirds majorities in both houses.

The Liberal Democrats are to be credited for making the bold move of laying out a draft constitution for the U.K. But it is document that leaves too much untouched. The rights it codifies are too heavily qualified

by riders on national security, economic well being, public order, and 'morals', and by powers given to the whim of the court. The second house is given only feeble two year delaying powers and the constitution fails, like the Charter, to tackle the power of the monarchy, even giving the head of state the fantastic power to dismiss the Prime Minister, something that the crown cannot do even now.

So both Charter 88 and the Liberal Democratic constitution, while steps in the right direction, are partial and timid. Another problem is that the new constitutional citizenship democrats focus on the rights aspect of citizenship to the exclusion of duty. The idea of citizenship in political thought has traditionally had two sides - on one hand a commitment to the individual rights of citizens and on the other to civic duty, the public good and the larger community. The first is primarily an individualistic and passive idea, the latter more communitarian and positive. At a time of fundamentalist intolerance, nationalist and ethnic conflict and the fetishisation of individualism and market competition such an ethic of solidarity is needed more than ever. A more publicly-minded perspective has to accompany the idea of the rights of citizens to be free to pursue their own interests. The irony is that it has been an idea of 'active citizenship' pioneered by a Tory Minister, Douglas Hurd, which has championed the duties element of citizenship. Charter 88 has actually opposed Hurd's idea mostly because Charterists like Anthony Barnett (1988) see Hurd as trying to steal their thunder. Hurd's idea of active citizenship was an attempt to counter the Tories' identification with unbridled individualism by popularising a concept couched in one-nation conservative rhetoric and stressing civic duty and the role of individuals as part of a larger community. It drew on the old conservative idea of the publicly-minded benevolent philanthropist, in which it is stipulated that people should be allowed to make money but should show some charity in donating part of it to public purposes.

Certainly Hurd's idea is backed up by a hopeful appeal to cut-throat business entrepeneurs to show more charity and by feeble ideas of educational courses in citizenship. But Charter 88 has failed to provide an alternative and has restricted its attention to individual rights, remaining disparaging about attempts to emphasise also the community duty aspect of citizenship. Yet individual citizenship will mean little to most citizens unless accompanied by a more communitarian attempt to supplement universal political rights with universal and equal social and economic rights which many outside the middle class intellectual club of Charter 88 more sorely feel the need for. The good society which has often accompanied the idea of citizenship depends just as much on public-mindedness, economic and social rights and the economic transformations needed to achieve them as on a revolution in the political system. This does not imply a totalitarianism in which people are coercively mobilized into performing publicly-spirited acts, but an economic system in which citizenship rights are not unequally distributed and structures of political decision-making in which relations of mutual regard and sociability are institutionalised.

Socialists and the participatory citizenship democrats have shown such a concern for the common good as well as for individual rights and this brings me to another problem with Charter 88 and constitutionalists in the Liberal Democratic Party and elsewhere. This is that they evade the classic problem raised by socialist democratic theory which is that political democracy, however perfectly reformed, is always compromised by unequal structures of economic power in society which allow for some individuals and corporations to wield vastly disproportionate influence over the actions of the government and over economic circumstances of their own making. While socialist democratic theory may be lacking in its uncomplicated approach to 'bourgeois' democracy it does make links between political democracy and the existing structure of society in a way that other democratic theories, which tend to focus their analysis of democracy fairly exclusively on the polity, fail to, showing how there need to be fundamental changes in economic relations if the conditions for a genuine democracy are to be fulfilled. Democracy cannot be secured by political reform alone but needs to be pursued through thoroughgoing programmes of economic democratisation and redistribution. Even conventional pluralists like Dahl (1985) and Lindblom (1977) have come around to this basic insight of socialist democratic theory.

Charter 88 and the Liberal Democrats also fail to deal with the need to extend democracy beyond the polity into civil society, embedding it in the fabric of an active pluralist associational life that any state in an electoral democracy, even unburdened by legal and political restrictions on its powers, would have difficulty in suppressing. In other words what needs to be re-established is a culture of political participation and

pluralism beyond the state which will provide countervailing centres of power holding the state accountable and will firmly entrench pluralism and democracy in society.

An attempt to overcome the undemocratic flaws in the British state needs to take on board the sort of political and constitutional conditions for a more democratic state proposed by Charter 88 and the Liberal Democrats. But it has to be remembered that the reforms the liberal constitutionalists propose provide only the bare minimal standards for a good democracy. Many of them have been in place in other countries, whose democracies are still short on credibility, for hundreds of years. An approach to the problems of the undemocratic state needs to turn its attention to different political structures, rather than to merely reforms to the existing system, and to the economic and social conditions for such a state. Politics needs to be characterised by more collaboration and power-sharing within the polity and by the diffusion of political powers into a pluralist and participatory civil society. Political democratisation, meanwhile, needs to be extended into a thoroughgoing programme of economic democratisation and redistribution, into more co-operative, communitarian and egalitarian ideas of the common good as well as of individual rights and into a new decentralist and participatory approach, devolving power to the third voluntary sector, neither statist nor private, and empowering associations from civil society in government. Such steps would provide the broad and extensive changes needed to ensure a more democratic state.

3) *The Participatory Citizenship Democrats*. This brings me to the second camp of citizenship democrats who provide such a set of proposals in their vision - the participatory democrats. As I argued in chapter four, the problem with the arguments coming out of this camp is not that they are flawed in themselves, but that they need to be taken further and developed. What the participatory democrats fail to do in the main is to develop ideas about the institutional and political conditions for the values they propose in the abstract - participation, pluralism and communitarianism. What are needed are institutions that can turn the idea of participation into a reality and give force to its strengths whilst ridding it of its weaknesses. The abstract ideas of the participatory democrats need to be turned into institutional prescriptions.

The great virtue of the new participatory democracy is that it tries to tackle the problem of statism but in a way that contrasts with the neo-liberal approach. It draws on a long history of political thought stretching back to the popular democracy of the Athenian city-state, through Rousseau (1762), with his ideas of popular democracy and the general will, to Marxism and socialism with their commitments to egalitarianism and direct democracy. It retains rather than rejects ideas of the public good and collectivism, attempting to rethink them democratically rather than replacing them with private self-interest and an asocial individualism.

It has a particular idea of the shape such democratisation should take. The new participatory democracy proposes a culture of active citizenship in which citizens feel a duty to participate and a commitment to the public good. It emphasises, in other words, the second aspect of citizenship mentioned above. Political culture is characterised by public spaces for democratic participation and by a civic virtue, an ideology in which participation and a public conscientiousness are highly valued, The idea of the public good is retained rather than rejected but is seen as being constituted not by the state but through the active political participation of citizens themselves. For citizens to properly play a role in a society of active citizenship they have to have the equal capacities to do so and this is where the participatory democrats, who draw on the longstanding socialist desire for popular democracy, are further bolstered up in their socialist credentials by commitments to equality and positive freedom. Economic and political resources have to be equally distributed in a citizenship democracy in order to turn participation into a reality and so that citizens have equal abilities to be active in the political process and can themselves decide on the common good.

The problem with this approach is that it needs to be developed further before it can look really convincing. In societies with large populations and complex and specialised structures, it is difficult to see how mass participatory democracy is possible. Not everyone can be sufficiently knowledgeable about everything to be able to make decisions on all matters. And in mass forums not everyone can have an equal say or influence. In fact decision-making in mass participatory forums is susceptible to the rule of passion over reason, to intimidation and to dominance by small groups or individuals. In order to deal with such problems advanced

industrial societies have used representative democracy, whereby we elect a small group of representatives to manage our affairs who are accountable to us through regular elections.

Representative democracy is indispensable. While it does alone not make a democracy it does inhibit tyranny because it makes governments accountable to the electorate and unlikely to carry out enormously unpopular policies which may result in electoral defeat. This aspect is compromised in the British system because a government can still stay in majority power alone on a minority vote and so can risk, as we have seen, unpopular policies as long as they can retain a strong minority core of support through difficult times. But, this serious yet remediable technicality aside, representative democracy does provide a form of government which, while democratic, is still practical in a large complex society.

The question has to be, then, how far is it practical and democratic to increase participation within the confines of a representative democracy? Contrary to conventional assumptions these two forms - participation and representation - are not incompatible or mutually exclusive. Participatory democracy may have traditionally been set up in counterposition to representation but this involves a false dichotomy between the two.

Associational Democracy

The key to, firstly, expanding the role of participation in a representative democracy and, secondly, to entrenching checks on the power of the state and ensuring its democratic accountability, the demands of the two citizenship camps, is a strengthening of the role of interest groups in civil society and the state. A greater role for associationalism in social and political life can also meet a third requirement in modern politics, for stronger and more stable government, and a fourth, for a more co-operative orientation towards achieving a shared common good.

1) *Participation*. Participation is more feasible through decentralised collective organisations than on a mass individualistic basis. Individuals alone are fairly powerless as political participants. But acting collectively they can have some influence. This is why people still vote even though their one vote alone cannot make any difference. They know that in a collective context it makes sense to vote. Sociological explanations make the political participation of individuals intelligible where rational choice theorists find the whole thing baffling.

But people cannot participate on a mass individualistic basis so easily beyond the ballot box. The meeting places that could accommodate mass democratic participation do not exist. People cannot genuinely participate in mass democracy and many matters are of too specialised a nature for everyone to be able to make judgments on them in an informed way. But where people cannot actively participate as individuals in mass contexts they can do so as individuals in smaller shared interest groups or in territorially or functionally decentralised units. Associations provide decentralised forums within which it is practical for people to actively participate and to do so on matters on which they have some expertise. And where, as individuals, they can exert no real influence in a complex mass society they can do so through decentralised collective forums. People can participate as individuals in small units and can pursue their interests in a mass society collectively with others through the participation of their shared interest groups in a corporatist political process.

2) *The Common Good*. Associations can be given a more major role in two main ways. One way is through the decentralisation of powers down to associations or local communities, functional or territorial, for self-government where, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, there is no reason for those powers to be exercised centrally. And, secondly, where central co-ordination is needed, associations can be integrated into corporatist structures in which government and interests can co-operate in the pursuit of agreed shared objectives.

Associations integrated into pluralist co-operation can negotiate a common good, central to the participatory vision, for themselves rather than having it imposed upon them by an external and exclusive state. It is essential that associations are integrated into common structures because otherwise they will

become nothing more than particularistic sectional interest groups and this would go against all the mutualist and collectivist aspirations of the participatory citizenship socialists.

3) *Liberal Constitutionalism*. In relation to participatory citizenship democracy, pluralism and corporatism provide the institutional conditions for a greater and more inclusive participation and for the democratic negotiation of the common good. In relation to the constitutional strand of citizenship democracy they provide checks on the power of the state and a greater democratic accountability embedded in the pluralist and participatory structure of society and politics, well beyond what mere constitutional and political reforms can guarantee,

Such an associational system can cope with the problems that constitutional and political reform can only go so far along the way to dealing with. It can make governments more democratically inclusive and accountable and more subject to checks and balances through the role of plural interests in democracy. An active pluralist civil society composed of strong associations, internally democratic and laying on channels for political participation, provides a society in which democracy is inclusive and power diffused so as to prevent its monopolisation or abuse by government. This is the case whether associations act as independent interest groups, as governmental regulatory bodies in their own right, given powers according to the principle of subsidiarity, or whether they become integrated into the structures of corporatist government and wield power there.

3) *Strong Government*. But as well as making government more democratic and accountable, associationalism can achieve what might seem to be the contrary objective of making government stronger. In a corporatist state a common programme can be built by a governing coalition behind which, by virtue of its inclusiveness, a broad consensus for change is gathered. Inclusive and consultative structures of government ensure a greater democratic accountability. But they also build the broad support, strength and stability needed by a government to carry through the sort of radical reforms necessary to deal with the complex and deep-seated problems of modern industrial society. Exclusive party-centered rule is much less able to do this because it typically has a much narrower basis of support. Coalitionism combines the need for strong and stable government with the need for greater accountability and balances and checks on the power of the state. Because government is more accountable, responsive and inclusive, in other words more democratic, it can talk with a voice which carries that much more legitimacy and authority and can govern more assuredly, with a broader and more committed basis of support and with greater confidence in its long term stability and strength. Associationalism, in short, provides for a more democratic yet also a strong state, both of which are necessary in modern complex societies in which the state necessarily has to have a big role but must be restrained and made accountable precisely because of this.

4) *Representative Democracy*. This does not provide an alternative to representative democracy. Representative democracy can survive healthily alongside the participatory structures of the pluralist society and the corporatist polity. There is no obvious reason why the advocacy of greater participation should imply an exclusive monopoly for participatory forms of democracy. Nothing in the participatory vision necessarily implies that there cannot and should not also be a role for representation. Certainly representative parliamentary governments should surrender some of their powers through corporatist power-sharing and through the devolution of powers to the regions and other agencies in civil society. This is what the critique of statism demands. But this does not mean the end of representation.

Only at the most small-scale decentralised levels will individuals be able to participate directly. Above this they will have to participate indirectly through the participation of representatives from their interest groups or functional or territorial units in government. And representative democracy must exist alongside, in a leading role and intertwined with corporatist government. Representative democracy provides for objective governments capable of making independent judgments in a way that corporatism, constituted by the concertation of interested parties, cannot. It is subject to regular election by society as a whole. And it provides a leading agency needed to initiate negotiations, form power-sharing governments and provide leadership and direction within the context of corporatist negotiation. It is representative governments that can reach out and form coalitions with interest groups to negotiate policies more democratically inclusive of

the broad range of needs and demands in society and more able to command broad support and win success.

In a corporatist state and a pluralist civil society there is room for both representation and participation. Interest groups participate in government through their representatives. Representative party governments provide the leading agency which can initiate coalitions and is subject to regular election on its record in doing so. The representative-participatory democracy opposition is another false dichotomy that has been built up by both sides to create unnecessary false ideological differences and it is another old dichotomy that has to go.

5) *Rethinking Corporatism*. Representative democracy supplies the leading actor in coalitional government and through being subject to regular election can ensure the accountability of a corporatist or coalitional government. But this still leaves a potential problem of accountability in that associations may not be representative of interests in society. Three conditions are needed to prevent such a problem arising. First, corporatism needs to be inclusive; secondly, associations need to be inclusive; and, thirdly, they must be internally democratic.

The first point is that corporatism must be genuinely inclusive. It needs to go beyond empowering only already powerful organised interests, such as the unions and big business. It has to incorporate the broadest range of interests possible in government. Otherwise it will become biased towards the needs of employers or workers to the exclusion of, say, the needs of consumers, the unemployed, pensioners or employees in poorly unionised sections of the economy and blind to environmental considerations, to give just some examples. Amongst marginalised groups narrowly corporatist governments will lose credibility and such groups will make the representatively elected leading actors in corporatist governments pay for their exclusivity in the polling booths. Governments that pander to special or already powerful interests can win little democratic legitimacy. Where they are more inclusive in their concerns, and where they do not just minister to special interests but try to achieve co-operation in pursuit of common goals, then they can command greater authority, Governments have to negotiate with the many rather than the few. The best way to ensure this is through the formalisation and institutionalisation of a widely inclusive corporatism. Corporatism has too often been informal, *ad-hoc*, and opportunistic and has remained too partial and exclusive. Governments have tended to negotiate contracts with selected major organised interests only when and where they need to, and this has given corporatism a bad name. The solution is to build corporatism into the system in the form of the installation of formal permanent inclusive corporatist forums as a principle of government.

The second condition for a successful corporatism lies in associations being genuinely inclusive of their constituency and universal rather than particularistic in their approach. The third lies in them being internally democratic. If associations are not inclusive and internally democratic then they may no longer remain representative of or accountable to the diverse social needs they are supposed to represent and corporatism can turn into just another version of exclusive and elitist government, with all its dangerous authoritarian consequences. Associations which lobby selfishly for their special interests command little respect outside their own ranks and give little legitimacy to corporatist government. However if associations are seen as co-operating in the pursuit of common purposes, sensitive in constructive dialogue to the needs of others, then they can gain greater authority.

On the question of how to achieve these second and third conditions things get delicate. The dilemma is how to oblige associations to be inclusive and internally democratic without compromising their independence from the state. Basic minimal standards have to be set in legislation for the internal governance of associations and local democratic units. The problem with Tory legislation in these areas is not that legislation on associational democratic standards is unjustifiable. In fact some of the legislation is justified and the Labour Party and the unions do not want all of it repealed despite their early opposition. The problem is that the legislation has been used for political purposes, in order to immobilise the unions, rather than out of a genuine democratic impulse and has been selective, imposed on the unions but exempting big business. Governments should not interfere too far. Associations have to remain

independent and intervention restricted or a culture may be fostered in which the state suppression of associational life and the promotion of state-sponsored corporatism become the norms. But basic standards have to be set which associations have to meet before they can be legitimate participants in democratic corporatist government.

It is the failure to meet these inclusive and democratic conditions that has given corporatism in its fascist and social democratic forms such a bad name. Undemocratic and partial corporatism is worse than the exclusive state that we have now in Britain because it is not even subject to proper election. It gives preference to special interests and is used opportunistically by governments to discipline interests in society and increase rather than diffuse the government's powers.

Bases For An Associational Politics

What bases are there for the development of a more corporatist, coalitional or consensual approach to politics, particularly in Britain where the need for such an approach is especially pressing. First, what political forces and, second, what political circumstances exist which might be conducive to the development of such an approach? I will discuss this question further in chapter nine but let me make some points here. There are, for a start, progressive groups such as Common Voice and Charter 88 who either advocate or practise a coalitional approach to politics. The journal *Samizdat* is based on the idea of a popular cross-party intellectual alliance. Many academics and commentators on the centre-left are involved with these organisations or advocate coalitional politics - see the recent writings of left thinkers in Alcock et al's (eds. 1989) *The Social Economy and the Democratic State* and Pimlott et al's (eds. 1990) *The Alternative*, for example.

Beyond the intellectual left, in the more hectic circles of radical left politics, the new left both inside constituency Labour Parties and amongst independent non-aligned socialists is keen on a more coalitional approach to left-wing politics, bringing the traditional working class constituency of the labour movement into alliances with a rainbow coalition of groups represented by the new social movements - women, ethnic minorities and gays and lesbians, for instance. It is also the new left in local government that has pioneered experiments in new decentralised, consultative and participatory forms of democracy.

The left is not very susceptible to party coalitions, at least not to those between left parties and the centre (they have more time for red-green party coalitionism), and their coalitionism tends to extend only to groups defined as being already potentially sympathetic to labour movement objectives. I have some sympathy with this suspicion of party coalitionism. While party coalitionism should not be opposed in principle and while a strong case can be made for it under present circumstances, there are many possible scenarios in which its cons would outweigh its pros. But the limited nature of the left's commitment to coalitionism is partly due to the fact that they are concerned more with the politics of agency and transition than with the politics of democratic government. The left is more concerned to seek alliances with groups who will support left programmes than with impartially diffusing power. The left's commitment to pluralism is half-hearted and compromised by political considerations. However more pluralist sections of the left, those more positively inclined towards political reform and more impressed by the idea of a broad and pluralist form of politics than by Trotskyism or Leninism, are susceptible to being persuaded of the utility of broader coalitions with wider interests and, perhaps also, at least on a temporary basis and given a reasonable deal for the left, might be able to contemplate coalitions with the Liberal Democrats.

As well as there being political forces sympathetic to a more coalitional or corporatist approach to politics, there are political circumstances in Britain in recent years which have favoured such an approach, the main factor being Mrs Thatcher's large majority in the Commons throughout the 1980s. There has been a large anti-Thatcher majority amongst the electorate in Britain. The opinion polls and the opposition vote at the last two elections show this. The opposition parties have been desperate to get into power and the Labour frontbench, whether you like the new slick model or not, looks like a possible government-in-waiting. Labour knows this and must fear that its time could pass. Yet some on the left increasingly came to contemplate during the 1980s the possibility that its most optimistic hope might be to expect a hung parliament in which it would need to form a coalition with the Democrats to make a government.

With coalitionism on their mind Labour was increasingly encouraged to consider the advantages that could be gained from standing at the next election committed to an anti-Thatcher coalition with the Democrats on a previously agreed programme in which Labour would concede on political reform in return for the Democrats conceding on Labour's economic programme. Such a coalition, albeit in changing circumstances facing up to a different Prime Minister, would not be all that shattering in itself compared to the long-term effect it could have in shaping a more coalitional political culture and institutions in Britain. It might foster a new coalitional culture which could be exploited in order to encourage a more corporatist style of government incorporating the participation of wider social interests from beyond the party system. Plus it could very possibly lead to the introduction of PR which is a system that favours coalitional politics and would institutionalise it on the British scene.

Party coalitions will probably often be far from desirable in practice for Labour. More often than not they may not be a good path to go along. The compromises demanded by political partners in return for their collaboration in government may undermine rather than further radical reforms. But party coalitionism should not be rejected out of hand in advance. Parties should always be looking for a co-operative approach to dealing with problems rather than sticking mindlessly to the destructive adversary politics of the British system. If co-operation is accepted as a philosophically desirable principle then it should be pursued in politics as elsewhere, if not at any cost.

Under present circumstances, where Labour have in political reform and PR probably the best bargaining counters they will ever have for negotiations with the Democrats, the possibilities that party coalitionism could yield are probably greater than they will ever be. Furthermore, like it or not, politicians will have to get used to the idea of coalitionism now because the pressure is growing for PR in Britain. The greater integration of Britain into Europe, where PR is everywhere else favoured, will put Britain under pressure to adopt it. Leading Labour politicians are coming over to PR in numbers. And, most of all, the poverty of the first-past-the-post system means that Labour cannot resist its abolition forever. It would be silly, in this context, for Labour to make the inevitable concession to PR unilaterally when they could get Liberal Democrat support for their own policies if they treated PR as a bargaining counter to be traded with.

Finally the sheer scale of the economic, social and political a problems that are building up in Britain may force the parties to a more co-operative approach. The problems that complex industrial societies face, exacerbated in the British case by a decade of deliberate neglect justified in the name of *laissez-faire*, require long-term solutions of the sort that can only be carried out by a strong and stable government. Such a government cannot be supplied by single party rule on the basis of a thin majority or a minority of votes. Governments elected on this basis are susceptible to electoral defeat in the event of fluctuations in their fortunes. Mrs Thatcher only avoided this because of the weak and divided opposition. But governments who have consulted widely and drawn in a broad basis of support for their programmes from a range of interest groups and perhaps also from other political parties can command greater legitimacy and authority and can pull the electorate and important interest groups in society along behind them even when the going gets tough.

Democracy may help with economic reform. This is what Mikhail Gorbachev argues but Deng Xiaoping does not. China may grow fast under a capitalist-minded single party and economic success does not necessarily follow from political reform, as Gorbachev has discovered. But people have to know that they are really involved in government and that governments are including their needs and are responsive and accountable to them before they can gain any legitimacy for their economic and social programmes. Thus the necessity for economic and social reform invites corporatist democratic change and constitutes another potential basis for change towards a more democratised, co-operative and inclusive political system and culture in Britain and away from the narrow party-centered approach. In fact the economic and social conditions for democratic change are more important than the political conditions because it is in economic and social conditions, much more than in the nitty-gritty of political democracy, that most people are interested. It could, therefore, be as part of an economic strategy rather than as a programme of political reform that a collaborative political approach and more associationalist political institutions could be sold to the electorate in Britain.