Chapter Five

Associational Democracy

Socialists have traditionally had two major objectives. Firstly, for the economy and industry to be responsive to public or social needs rather than private self-interests. Secondly, for them to be under the democratic control of the public or society rather than in the hands of private owners. These objectives – one social, one democratic, go together. They are both concerned with the running of the economy socially rather than by and for private interests. And the goal of democratic social *control* is a precondition for the primacy of social *objectives* in decision-making.

I concur with the sentiments of these two principles. The whole tenor of this thesis is critical of private control in the economy and of the pursuit of private ends without regard for wider needs or the social consequences. Economic and industrial units should be under the control of all those affected by their actions and not just controlled by those who own them. And they should be responsive to the wider social needs of all affected interests and not simply to the particular self-interests of private groups with little or no regard on their part for the well-being of other parties or for the public good.

But while I concur with the social principles of socialism my aim is to reconstruct the way in which they have traditionally been conceived. Socialists have clung to collectivist and statist conceptions of the common good and public control. They have been slow to look undogmatically at institutions such as private ownership and markets and to look critically at state collectivism itself. Political principles such as pluralism and liberty and the role of representative democracy and civil liberties in the West have been dumped by many Marxists as bourgeois apologism.

Marxism and socialism have had a huge practical and political influence in the world. Until recently a third of he world's population lived under nominally Marxist regimes, let alone socialist or social democratic governments. Most of these Marxist regimes have shown little regard for liberal or pluralist principles. At the most extreme, two of the three most murderous tyrannies of modern history, Stalin's and Pol Pot's, carried out their crimes in the name of socialism.

Furthermore, Marxism and socialism have had a strong influence in social science and right-wing critics like David Marsland (1988) and Peter Saunders (1989) have argued that their statist, collectivist, anti-liberal and anti-pluralist prejudices have been reproduced there.

The confines of state collectivism have to be, and are being, lifted. Socialists have to look with genuine openness at pluralist and liberal ideas, explanatory and normative, of economic, social and political organisation. Pluralism and liberalism should not be dismissed just because they have traditionally come from the right or because they have so long served – as they have – as apologies for exploitation, inequality and cold war confrontation.

However it is also my argument that competitive pluralist and liberal individualist models are themselves unable to conceptualise important principles for the organisation of human life – economic egalitarianism and social conscientiousness, for example – and that without some commitment to equality and sociality they cannot fulfill their own promises of libertarian and pluralist democratic rights, let alone recognize the intrinsic desirability of those principles themselves.

There is nothing new in the liberal critique of socialism. Conservatives, liberals and pluralists have been making the now familiar points about statism and collectivism for years, long before contemporary post-Marxists and revisionist socialists came around to them. The words of today's revisionist socialists sound uncannily like those put to paper by critics like Hayek (1944) and Popper (1962) decades ago. But what would be new would be a perspective that was able to escape the grip of state communitarian socialism without fleeing into unmodified liberal or pluralist models, an alternative path, not one that presumes to *resolve* the essential tension between socialist and liberal/pluralist models or go *beyond* them but one that can manage a *compromise*.

Such an alternative is the concern of this thesis. I aim to move on from the critical observations of the last few chapters on recent pluralist economic, social and political trends and the socialist responses to them, to more normative discussions in this chapter and those that follow. There are a number of important issues to be discussed:

- *Associational Democracy.* I aim to move away from a statist and oppressive socialism to one that is sensitive to the principles of liberalism and pluralism. But I do not want to slide into the easy alternatives of liberal individualism or competitive pluralism. I want to instill pluralist and liberal commitments alongside an enduring commitment to collectivism and co-operation. The alternative proposed, which combines pluralism and co-operation, I call 'associational democracy'.

- *Economic Democracy.* I will move onto look at the implications of associationalism for economic and industrial democracy. What would be the appropriate forms of democratic ownership and social control in the economy according to the idea of associationalism?

- *Levels of Democracy.* I will look also at the appropriate levels for decision-making in an associational democracy. What roles are implied for decentralised autonomous communities, the nation-state, supra-national configurations and the international system by the concept of associational democracy?

- *Politics.* What are the types of transitional politics appropriate to the idea of associational democracy? What transitional means might be used for moving towards more associational arrangements and what are the implications of the idea of associationalism for the politics of agency and transition?

Community and Pluralism

A major concern of this thesis is with three different types of democratic and social organisation – community, pluralism and association. There are three main aspects to the idea of social organisation. First there is the *social* aspect. Talking of types of social organisation involves referring to the social dimension of human life. Human existence consists of more than just the lives of individuals. It consists also of the social relations that are both constituted by and constitutive of them. Second, there is a *relativistic* aspect. This refers to the fact that there are different types of social organisation in different temporal or spatial locations. Types of social organisation vary. Thirdly there is the *micro* aspect. In many ways the purpose of looking at types of social organisation is to deduce from them the sort of implications different types have for the relationships between individuals in society.

There is also a democratic dimension to this whole question. My project is not just a sociological one. This thesis is concerned with *political* sociology. Politics is about the distribution and use of *power*. Democracy involves the extent to which populations have possession or control over power in their societies. This implies a wider and more sociological definition of politics, power and democracy than used in traditional political science, looking at these phenomena as they exist well beyond the formal policy and institutions of government. This is political *sociology* because it looks at power in its social context. It is *political* sociology because it looks at the democratic and political dimensions of different types of social organization. Thus I am not just concerned with different forms of social organization but also with the way in which power in those forms is distributed and held and the extent to which it is held democratically. Hence the concern of the 'applied' parts of this thesis, chapters six to nine, with the democratic organization of the economy, polity and the question of democratic political action.

In this chapter I will discuss several different models of democratic and social organization in order to try to deal with the tension between pluralist and liberal values on one hand and socialist and collectivist concerns on the other. Each of the models I will discuss emphasises one or the other of these two inclinations in social

and political thought. And the models I am most interested in – the associational ones – attempt to combine these different traditionally counterposed doctrines, although even these are biased one way or the other.

There are six different models of democratic and social organization that I will be dealing with – spontaneous community, state communitarianism, macro-associationalism, meso-associationalism, competitive pluralism and liberal individualism. The first two are predominantly community models, the last two are mainly pluralist models, the middle two are corporatist or associationalist models which attempt to combine community and pluralism. Of the middle two, the first – macro-associationalism – has a stronger community-inclined edge over the second meso-associationalism – which is more pluralist-inclined.

They can be set out as follows:

Table 1 Models of Democratic and Social Organisation

	Vertical control	Horizontal control
Community Models		
a) Spontaneous community	-	+
b) State communitarianism	+	+
Associational Models		
a) Macro-associationalism	-/+	-/+
b) Meso-associationalism	-/+	-/+
Pluralist Models		
a) Competitive Pluralism	-	-
b) Liberal Individualism	-	-

These models can be judged along two main dimensions, one vertical, one horizontal. The *vertical* dimension is a political one involving the hierarchy of power and authority, the power of those higher up the scale to control and direct those lower down and to ensure their conformity to top-down defined norms. State communitarianism involves an extreme statist version of hierarchical domination along vertical lines. All the other models involve varying and decreasing amounts of vertical hierarchical control.

The *horizontal* dimension is a social one and involves the degree of conformity to community or group norms secured either by the consent of individuals or by the control and coercion of the group or the state. Both the community models involve variants of this. State communitarianism imposes horizontal control from above and is interesting because it involves conformity defined and imposed vertically but to horizontal norms. It involves strong control and conformity along both dimensions. In the spontaneous community model horizontal conformity is natural or voluntary. The pluralist models involve much decreased levels of horizontal control and conformity. This is especially the case for the liberal individualist who does not even

recognize small group or interest group collectivism, of the type advocated by competitive pluralism.

Vertical control has been very much the concern of *political* analysis, in particular of the liberal and pluralist critiques of the state, traditions which run from Mill (1859) and before to Hayek (1960) in the liberal case and all he way from the classic pluralism of de Tocquville (1835 and 1840) through the English pluralism of writers like G.D.H. Cole (1920) to the more recent American pluralism of writers like Robert Dahl (1956). Horizontal control has been very much the concern of *sociological* analyses made by people like Ferdinand Tonnies (1887) and Emile Durkheim (1893) of order and solidarity and of the tightness or looseness of social relations in modern industrial society.

Association offers a means of balancing the contradictory pulls towards freedom and conformity made by pluralism and socialism respectively along both of these dimensions - vertical and horizontal. It can offer a non-statist alternative yet one which tempers *laissez-faire* with co-operatively agreed regulation and co-ordination, and it can offer a non-monist alternative, yet one which modifies pluralism with a heavy dose of social responsibility. Meso-association pulls hard towards competitive pluralist models mitigated by internal interest group solidarism. Macro-association emphasises more the solidaristic relations between associations. This is important for both communitarian and pluralist reasons. Macro-associationalism is needed not just to build socially caring relations in society, but also to build the sort of socially sensitive relations that can sustain pluralism and freedom. Without sociability the diversity and autonomy characteristic of pluralist, liberal and meso-associational models will be swept away by instrumental utilitarianism and particularistic competition and conflict.

One final point needs to be made about the concepts of community, pluralism and association before I look at them in more detail individually. This is that these are *models*. They do not and could not exist anywhere in the world or history in their pure form alone. They are intended as ideal-types of particular forms of social organization. They are useful analytical tools with which it is possible to approach the problems of societies, or ideas of societies, which are inclined towards certain forms of organization or have knowingly modeled their development on such hypothetical types.

I am aware of the dangers of using models like this - they too often grow into literal claims about empirical reality, or they miss the complexity and reality of the way things really are. In fact some of the central criticisms of this thesis are of the false closed coherences and polarisations caused by the model building of some commentators. Thatcherism, post-fordism, liberalism versus socialism, plan versus market, representative versus participatory democracy, reformist versus revolutionary politics - none of these categories and dichotomies are as coherent and exclusive as we have been led to believe. The most I claim for the models I will

discuss is that they give a guide to *orientations* or *inclinations* that have been present in different traditions of social and political thought and in different societies. All I can say is that I think the models shed some light on actual forms of social organization and that the complexity and multi-faceted nature I ascribe to the model of association goes some way towards acknowledging the actually and necessarily mixed nature of economic, social and political organization in really existing societies.

Community and the State

Community has been a well used concept in the social sciences, particularly in sociology. Many of the classic and most influential theories in sociology - Ferdinand Tonnies' (1887) work on gemeinschaft and Emile Durkehim's (1893) on organic solidarity, for instance – have been directly or indirectly about the place, or lack of it, of community and social order in modern industrial societies. As a consequence it is perhaps one of the most unclear terms in the social sciences. Hillery (1955), for instance, found little else but areas of disagreement in his paper on 'Definitions of Community: areas of agreement'. In fact he found ninety-four definitions of the term.

To make matters worse community has been a concept which has been thrown around with much passion. It has tended to carry a very positive emotional appeal for sociologists. The classic sociological theorists of industrial society set the tone with their sorrowful statements on the loss of community. In some cases these theorists made thinly disguised normative appeals for its revival or sadly mourned its inevitable decline. Community has either been peddled as an explicitly normative concept or, as in the case of some of the founders of sociology, it has been dealt with in a nominally descriptive-explanatory fashion but barely concealing the personal preferences of the authors. The lofty writings of the classic sociological theorists, self-styled masters of discretion as far as objectivity and value-freedom are concerned, have been no exception. The situation has not been dissimilar in political thinking. For socialists from Robert Owen to Karl Marx, and even for many libertarians and anarchists, community has been a utopian haven for the good life. For liberals and some conservatives, on the other hand, community is often just a codeword for a much more evil manifestation – communism. Community, in short, has not only been a well used concept but one loaded with emotion.

I am not going to try to relieve community of the emotion and passion that it carries with it everywhere it is discussed. A reduction of community to its purely rational aspects would denude it of much of its meaning. However I do intend to approach the emotive or normative aspects of community without dogma and in an open-minded, balanced, eclectic and pragmatic way. I intend to bring out what seem to me to be both the positive and negative features of community.

Definitions of community can be collapsed into three main types. Firstly, there is community in its strictly geographical sense. Community is used here to refer to the territorial location and boundaries of a particular human settlement. Second, there is, a strictly sociological concept of community. In this use it refers to the shared social and communal identity of a group of individuals, irrespective of their geographical location or spread. Thirdly, there is a combined sociological and geographical concept of community which refers to a type of social- system within a given territorial locality.

I am concerned with the second usage, with the exclusively sociological meaning of community. My concern is with community as a type of social organisation irrespective of whether or not it has any geographical correlates. However to restrict the meaning of community to its sociological usage is not enough. It is also necessary to fill out what is *meant* by sociological concept of community.

Community, pluralism and association are all models of social organisation and social relations. Community is a model in which the social group is the focal institution in soceity. Individuals are subordinate to the community rather than *vice-versa* and their primary obligation is not to themselves to but to the norms, needs and values of the community as a whole. Community-inclined societies are relatively homogeneous and in them individuals and groups are less inclined to pursue their own ends and more bound to bow to the demands and norms of the larger community. Diversity in other words defers to conformity.

My concept of community is not especially intended to bear any relation to other existing concepts of the same thing. Tönnies' (1887) concept of 'gemeinschaft', usually translated into English as 'community', refers to the social relations putatively characteristic of a particular sort of pre-modern pre-industrial society. Tönnies stresses the importance of personal rather than impersonal qualities and relations in community-type relations; the geographical and social immobility associated with community-type systems; the naturalization of community norms in the taken-for-granted unconscious; kinship and territorial relations as key sites of community; the sentiment and emotion of community - and so on. In these notions he prefigures and influenced many of the ways in which community is commonly understood now. My emphasis is strictly on the subordination of individual or small group identities and desires to those of the larger community. Many of the aspects of community specified by people like Tönnies may or may not be associated with situations in which such an arrangement prevails. My model, in short is a basic one, referring to the predominance of community norms over particularistic individual or lesser-group interests.

I distinguish two sub-types of community – *spontaneous* community and *state* communitarianism. Spontaneous community refers to the holding together of community norms by the natural community inclinations of the community's membership. It assumes an innate community-oriented human nature. Where this is

not manifested, in competitive utilitarian market societies for instance, it is because such an instinct has been suppressed or distorted by the prevailing mode of social organisation. Humans are not just social beings, subject to the constitutive influence of their social environment, but they are actually socially-*oriented* and inclined to social considerations before individual self-interests in their decision-making and actions.

However, more commonly, many people perceive that community is not an innate naturally or voluntarily forthcoming attitude basic to human nature. It is something that has to be built. This need not necessarily involve adopting an alternative Hobbesian 'selfish' concept of human nature. It could involve a '*tabula rasa*' or some other idea of human nature. The point is that community is *made.* This requires a string moral authority in society charged, or charging itself, with the task of creating and enforcing community norms. Throughout history this has often been the church. In modern societies the appointed representative and executor of the community interest has been the state. This gives is state communitarianism – the specific sub-type of community in which conformity is not spontaneously forthcoming but is engineered and enforced by the state.

In both spontaneous and state communitarianism, horizontal constraints – requiring conformity to social norms – are tight. However vertical or hierarchical constraints – conformity dictated by command from above – are imposed only in the statist version. The very rationale of spontaneous community, popular with communitarian anarchists and libertarian socialists, is that such statist constraints are absent. Community control is exerted by the community itself or, rather, it comes naturally. Statist communitarianism lends heavy weight to state authority, although there is considerable leeway as to how far the state is made democratically accountable or not. In social democratic forms of state collectivism, for instance, there has been a much greater emphasis in practice on democracy than in Marxist-Leninist variants. But in both the state is the representor and executor of the public interest.

State Communitarianism

State communitarianism involves the use of hierarchical control to achieve state-established collective priorities and community conformity to them. Statism and communitarianism go together, involving both vertical (statist) and horizontal (communitarian) dimensions of control and conformity, the latter being secured by the former. This is typical in varying degrees of many, although by no means all, forms of socialism. State communitarianism has been most notable under Marxist-Leninist regimes, although there have been influential if weaker social democratic types of state collectivism and many socialists have been concerned with the use of a strong state to pursue communitarian ends.

Although statism is often fetishised into an end it is really a means for pursuing communitarian objectives. Communitarianism itself is not such a bad thing. My

proposed model of associational democracy draws heavily on communitarian or social aspirations. Communitarianism is about the commitment of individuals and social groups to shared social or collective values and priorities rather than merely to private self-interests. Interpreted not too vigorously such a commitment makes for a humane and peaceful form of social organisation. For anarchists communitarianism is a spontaneous thing given liberation from constraints on human freedom and spontaneity. For state communitarians it is the role of the state to represent and pursue social values ad priorities. The state is the expression and executor of the public interest.

Traditional social democrats envisage a knowing and beneficent state. In the economic sphere they are committed to the regulation and planning of the economy by various manipulative mechanisms implemented from above, and in the social sphere to paternalistic state provision. In the political sphere they are committed to the parliamentary monopoly of political power and party rule from above.

What goes wrong with communitarianism in its most statist form is that it becomes socially authoritarian. On the vertical dimension communitarian values and structures are imposed from above by state directive. On the horizontal axis diversity, autonomy and deviation from the social norm is suppressed. Both vertically and horizontally, liberal toleration and pluralist diversity are sorely lacking. In social democratic doctrines the state is the guardian of the people that defines and delivers from above the things that it assumes to be socially required. As a centralised hierarchical system it is not suited to a responsiveness or sensitivity to diverse needs and demands but can only provide for broad brush standardised social priorities.

The more extreme version of state collectivism practiced by Marxist states worldwide has been based on the definition of a general will from above by the party and on the hierarchical control of the population by the state through coercion and fear. In the economic sphere this involves the direction of production from the centre by the state. Diversity and responsiveness in production are not possible in such a system. Public priorities are decided at the centre and adherence to central state plans is ensured by hierarchical control and coercive sanctions. In decentralised market systems on the other hand diversity and responsiveness are possible through the profit-seeking mechanism of adaptation to consumer demands on the market.

In the political sphere the priority is on conformity to the leading role ad priorities of the vanguard party. The party has a monopoly on power. This pre-empts the possibility of political pluralism or deviance. These are inhibited by party discipline and the suppression of dissent in the name of the primary interests of the people or socialism. In short state communitarianism in the Stalinist version involves a

monopoly of the party over the definition of the public interest and the hierarchical power of the bureaucratic state to enforce it.

It is a dangerous delusion to think that statist collectivism has nothing to do with socialism. It is dangerous because it implies that if we continue to pursue an unreconstructed socialism we can achieve something egalitarian and democratic, unlike state collectivism so often associated with socialism. State collectivism may have developed in its extreme forms under harsh and historically specific circumstances and the way 'actually existing socialism' has worked out may have run directly counter to the egalitarian and democratic goals of socialists and communism. It is fair, as such, to say that socialism and communism have never been achieved. But this is only half the story. The Marxist regimes of recent history may not have been socialist but socialism is not blameless when it comes to the systems that have been established in its name. The tyrannical experiences of the Stalinist regimes cannot be divorced from socialism or dismissed as 'deviations' or 'distortions'. Socialist thought has, in all of its most influential forms, put a heavy emphasis on collectivism, party-centred politics and on the role of the state as the representative of the public interest and the means through which it can be achieved. It is not surprising that systems evolved which imposed these features right down to the finest detail at the expense of all else.

Pluralist and liberal antidotes to collectivism and state power have got short shrift from socialists relative to such priorities. More often than not they have simply been dismissed as 'bourgeois' deviations. This attitude hangs on now even amongst self-styled pluralist and liberal socialists who pay lip-service to the values of these doctrines but do little to incorporate them into the reconstruction of socialist thinking except where they want to soften up new social movements into forming alliances with the left. Even the libertarian 'new left', for all its good intentions and courage in breaking old dogmas, has been compromised by an inability to let go of effectively Leninist-influenced commitments to the party and state power. Socialists need to face up to the role that the traditional collectivist and statist preoccupations of socialist thinking have played in providing the ideological bases for the excesses of 'actually existing socialism'. They should not throw out the socialist baby with the statist bathwater. But equally they should not pretend that the baby did not muddy the bathwater.

Many socialists were critical of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in their heyday. But Eastern bloc state collectivism really began to lose credibility amongst its devotees under Stalin. The Soviet interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1956 and 1968 were key turning points in the loss of faith in Soviet-style socialism amongst socialists and in the rise of the more democratic and pluralist 'new left'. The Soviet and east European economies and political systems have been in trouble for some time, unable to meet the rising expectations of citizens stimulated by knowledge of the relative situation in the West. In the 1980s the Soviet economy hit rock bottom and Gorbachev's rise to power and the reforms he forced in Soviet politics and

foreign policy were the catalysts which broke a bottleneck of popular and political pressure which had been building up for some time in the Eastern bloc. Ultimately, in post-communist Eastern Europe the command economy and the party line have been rejected in favour of market and pluralist models of the economy, politics and civil society.

In the West collectivism and statism have been collapsing on the left as credible ideas under pressure from the pluralist new social movements, neo-liberal ideology, globalisation and 'post-modern' changes in the economy, society and politics and as a result of the declining credibility of socialist regimes abroad. But neo-liberal models, stressing individualism and economic *laissez-faire* and adopted on the right and left in many countries, have not had a monopoly on alternatives to state communitarianism even if they have for a while outflanked socialist and social democratic thinking. Recently on the left a revitalised revisionist form of social democracy has emerged out of the crisis of the older statist, Keynesian, class-oriented and nationally autarkic model. This new version is characterized by an emphasis on markets, European integration, democratic rights, environmental concerns and social citizenship and is symbolized by people like the socialist EC president Jacques Delors and by the politics of the French and Italian socialist parties. In Britain it has been slow and reluctant in coming but has made its mark on the new model Labour Party that has emerged under Neil Kinnock.

It is now widely accepted that exclusively statist and collectivist idea of the organisation of human life – social democratic or Stalinist – are redundant. Competitive pluralism is making all the running as far as the organisation of economic and political life is concerned. Despite hopes on the left for a 'third way' between competitive pluralism and communism it is the former which looks likely to establish itself as the dominant regime, West and East. If social democracy as a set of ideas is still a force to be reckoned with – and it has to be said that in the immediate term at least it is questionable as to whether this is the case – it must be at least in part because it has accommodated itself to this reality.

Pluralism and Liberalism

Pluralism has less of a heritage than community in sociological thought. It is a concept that has figured more strongly in political thinking, from de Tocqueville (1835 and 1840) to the American pluralists, most notably Dahl (1956), and in the English pluralism of writers like G.D.H. Cole (1920). Liberalism has similarly been primarily the pre-occupation of political rather than social theorists, from the classic liberalism of John Stuart Mill (1859) and his predecessors through to the neo-liberalism of Friedrich von Hayek (1960).

As with community, the definition of pluralism is not an area devoid of contradiction and ambiguity, as is clear in recent discussions of the multi-faceted phenomenon of pluralist theory by commentators like Held (1987) and McLennan (1989). The

separate traditions of pluralist thought, for example, differ on the definition of pluralism. The English pluralists have a more institutional and socialist idea of pluralism than the Americans whose emphasis is more cultural and liberal. Furthermore, pluralists have sometimes seemed to change their ideas of pluralism over time. Dahl (1985) and Lindblom (1977), for instance, have developed much more socialist-inclined versions of pluralism in more recent works. And the ideas of the pluralists about about what pluralism is have not always been crystal clear. The antagonistic wranglings of Marxists and pluralists, for instance have been marked by a confusion over whether the pluralists' contentions are intended normatively or in a descriptive-explanatory sense.

The Marxism-pluralism debate has been the site of some of the most emotive and passionate defences of, and attacks on, pluralism. Pluralism has often been seen as the model of liberty and the good in contrast to the tyrannous evil of the ultimate form of communitarianism – communism. On the other hand pluralism has been seen by its critics as nothing more than bourgeois apologism for capitalist exploitation and inequality. There is probably some truth in both interpretations. Either way the emotive and normative loadedness of pluralism has only further clouded its definition. Again my intention is not to rid pluralism of its inevitable and justifiable emotive aura. It is rather to try to more coolly evaluate both its strengths and weaknesses in an open-minded and methodologically pluralist way.

Pluralism in many ways is the direct opposite of community. It is a model in which plural groups or individuals, rather than the community, are the foci and homogeneous actors. In society as a whole the order of the day is heterogeneity rather than homogeneity. Pluralism stresses the diversity and freedom of individuals and groups on society. The community serves its diverse constituent members rather than vice-versa. This idea of community norms which infringe on the liberty and identities of plural units in society is anathema to pluralism. Individuals and groups are charged with pursuing their own interest and identities free from constraints imposed by wider social norms or demands. Their obligations are to themselves not to the community as such. Conformity is subordinated to diversity and individual and groups are less inclined to be restricted by community norms of priorities and more inclined to pursue their own diverse particular interests.

Pluralism is anathema to statism as well as to community. It is about the diffusion of power rather than its accumulation and monopolisation in the hands of the party or the state. Liberalism, meanwhile, is all about the liberalisation of the economy and its disengagement from state intervention, while politically it is about the protection of the individual from the state through measures involving the restraint and division of state power and the reduction of the state to the most minimal forms necessary. In Britain, after the politically authoritarian experience of Thatcherite neo-liberalism, this may seem an odd idea of liberalism. But this is because Mrs Thatcher has been inconsistent in her liberalism, failing to follow through the logic of her economic liberalism to its political conclusions.

There are two sub-types of pluralism in my model - competitive pluralism and liberal individualism. The former is that associated mostly with the American school of pluralist thought mentioned above, the main representative of which has been Robert Dahl (1956). Liberal individualism draws on a long tradition of political thought going back to people like Jeremy Bentham (1838-43) and Mill (1859) and further. More recently it has been evident in the individualism of writers such as Hayek (1960) and Nozick (1974) and has become a doctrine that, in its neo-liberal forms, has been politically influential on the right in Britain and the USA and, indeed, on the left under governments like the Hawke and Lange administrations in Australia and New Zealand. Recent forms of revisionist socialism namely individualist socialism and market socialism have been heavily influenced by neo-liberal ideas while the new citizenship socialists have been motivated by the need to establish a new non-statist socialism which can provide some kind of credible alternative to the neo-liberal challenge.

The main difference between competitive pluralism and liberal individualism is that the focus of the former is on social groups whereas the latter concentrates on the individual. These different foci are based partly on different ontologies of human nature. Liberal individualists tend to view the basic unit of human existence as being at the level of the individual. All people *are* islands. Hence Mrs Thatcher's notorious statement that 'there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families'. Any other forms of organisation of human life - the state or society - while they may sometimes be necessary and justifiable in order to protect individuals, are essentially impositions on individual freedom. Any impositions other than the most basic laws and regulations designed mostly to protect individuals are illegitimate. This involves a negative concept of democracy involving freedom from constraint. A positive concept of empowerment and a role for the beneficent state intervening to promote the good life for citizens is ruled out. As the central figure of classic liberal theory, John Stuart Mill, puts it:

> 'The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community against his will is to prevent harm to others. His own good ... is not sufficient a warrant'.

The individual is sovereign and liberals are concerned with the protection of the individual from the state. As such liberal individualism is a reaction to both the vertical dictates of state power and the horizontal norms of communitarianism.

Competitive pluralists however see the natural and most comfortable site of human life in the social group or association, at a level in between the individual and the state. Hence competitive pluralism can be something quite different to liberal individualism. Yet its consequences can be similar and in an impure political world many liberal individualists are also adherents to the doctrine of competitive pluralism. Only the most extreme zealots on the neo-liberal right harbour doubts

about competitive pluralism on a social group level. Pluralism makes an ontological assumption about the locus of human nature as lying at the level of the social group. But it shares with liberalism a conviction in the natural and desirable order of things as being encapsulated in the free development and competition of plural interests in society. This is how both the economic and political orders are constituted.

For either variant the key point is that humans should be able to develop and express themselves free from the restrictions imposed by wider community norms or demands, other than those strictly necessary to protect them in their abilities to do so. In both forms vertical-hierarchical and horizontal-community norms and control are very relaxed. The key to democracy is either its pluralistic distribution to individuals or social interest groups in society or its minimisation.

I intend to incorporate both competitive pluralism and liberal individualism under the rubric of 'pluralism'. I do this mainly for the sake of analytical and explanatory simplicity. I wish to draw attention to the shared relation that both doctrines have to socialist thought. The two doctrines locate the primary locus of human ontology differently - at the level of the social group or individual respectively - and some liberal individualists would have nothing to do with the communitarianism implied by group associationalism. But both the individualists and the social group pluralists share a basic commitment to two fundamental principles of pluralism - first, social difference and diversity and second, political freedom and independence.

Another point worth mentioning here is that throughout this thesis I will favour a methodologically pluralist or eclectic approach. Methodological pluralism is what underlies my rejection in the pages that follow of dichotomous tendencies in social thought in favour of a more mixed approach. This philosophical or methodological pluralism is not strictly related to my interest in social and political pluralism except insofar as the former does aid a more rounded understanding of the latter, and insofar as a commitment to pluralism in all these spheres may be part of a general pluralist temperament.

Just to confuse matters further a number of the characteristics of what I would call competitive pluralist regimes have been grouped under Tönnies' (1887) 'gesselschaft', which has been translated as 'association' (or sometimes 'society' or 'organisation'), a term I unfortunately intend to use to refer to a different third model of social organisation which combines both communitarianism and pluralism. Tönnies contrasts association to community, as characterised by contractual relationships between instrumental, rational, calculative individuals rather than by communal sentiment. By calculative and rational he meant that thought and action are governed much more by the definition of precise ends and the specific means of achieving them than by tradition or metaphysical considerations. Community is lost in this scenario partly because rational modes of thought replace affective and sentimental ones, but also because individualism replaces sociality. People are more

interested in pursuing their own interests and development than in subordinating such priorities to community norms and priorities. The typical site in which people meet socially is the market - and no better example of contractual, calculative and utilitarian behaviour is there than that exhibited in markets.

I emphasise here that what Tönnies describes as association is comparable with my competitive pluralist model rather than my associative one. Nevertheless there are some ways in which Tönnies' 'association' does cast light on my concept of association. For one thing, I propose two sub-types of association one of which – meso-associationalism - is much closer to competitive pluralism than the other and thus does bear some comparison with 'gesselschaft'. In fact it is a sort of formal corporatist version of competitive pluralism. For another, Tönnies' emphasis on association as a type of social relation rather than on associations as such jells with the emphasis in my second more community-oriented sub-type of association – macro-association - on associational relations rather than on associations as organisations.

The problem with these two competitive pluralist and liberal models is that they imply a society marked by instrumental rationality, sectionalism and a lack of regard on the part of particular actors for co-operation or for the needs of wider social interests. The competitive pluralist idea is that society will be formed as an equilibrium constituted by the sum total of competitive interactions in society and the aggregated trade-offs made by plural interests. This free market idea of the constitution of society is applied to both the economy and polity in various competitive models and is proposed by free marketeers from the liberal individualist tradition as well as by American empirical democratic theorists from the competitive pluralist school.

The reality behind such a vision is that plural interests pursue their own preferences with little regard for the social consequences. The competitive vision is not only anti-social. It is also anti-pluralist because it leads in practice to the accumulation of powers and resources by some at the expense of others who correspondingly find themselves with less autonomy and fewer opportunities for free self-development. Furthermore it is an undemocratic doctrine because it posits society as the result of a myriad of atomised decisions beyond the overall democratic control of its collective membership and leads to unequal distributions of wealth and, subsequently, of power. In addition, the competitive pluralist and individualist models not only subvert sociality, pluralism and democracy but they also undermine economic efficiency because they replace co-operation, co-ordination and intervention with the ideologically legitimated neglect proposed by laissez-faire economic liberals.

Dilemmas of Democracy

What is needed to ensure a more social, democratic and economically viable pluralism is its reconceptualisation within a co-operative framework. The task must be to construct a co-operative model of social organisation which offers a pluralistic and democratic alternative to state communitarianism without sliding into the unfettered selfish rationality and inegalitarian exploitation of liberal individualism and competitive pluralism, a model which can combine pluralism and socialism.

Social and political thinkers, not least those on the left, are obsessed with new models and approaches. But, in the face of the uncritical celebration of an unbridled individualism and competitive pluralism in the West and the sweeping adoption of such an orientation across the post-communist East, the need for new models which provide balancing co-operative structures really is vitally important. More co-operatively pluralist ideas of how the political system, economy, civil society and political action can be organised are needed.

The task of a new concept of social and political organisation must be to deal with the dilemmas thrown up throughout history by the great competing ideological giants of liberalism and socialism. These can be collapsed into two principle problems - one social, concerning the balance between collective and pluralist priorities in the horizontal constitution of social relationships and the second political, and concerning the balance of power and liberty in vertical relations of hierarchy, power and domination.

On the question of *social* relations there is a tension between a commitment to collective or public interests on one hand or to the autonomy and freedom of plural interests on the other. How far should society be approached as a collective unit with collective needs and priorities or as an aggregation of plural interests all with diverse and varying needs? How should the balance between collectivism and pluralism be weighted? This is a classic historical tension in social and political thought that has been fought out over the ages by socialist- inclined and liberal-- inclined philosophies which have put the emphasis on either the former or the latter respectively.

On the question of *political* relations there has been a longstanding stand-off between the values of democratic power on one hand and those of liberty and autonomy on the other. This also is a classic dilemma stretching way back and pervading the history of social and political thought. The two poles of this dichotomy reflect two different concepts of politics - one to do with the exercise of power and the other to do with its restraint. The history of political thought and of practical politics has been littered with attempts to resolve this dilemma, usually by opposed parties preferring one pole over the other. There has been a long historical tradition of democrats who see democracy as the method by which power and control is exercised over society - popular and participatory democrats, representative democrats and competitive elitists. There has been another tradition

for whom the essence of democracy is the freedom of citizens from, and restriction of, power - pluralists, liberals, individualists and anarchists.

The two dilemmas concerning social and political relations respectively have been inextricably interlinked throughout the history of social and political thought. Collectivists have inclined towards emphasising the value of democratic power while pluralists have tended to line up behind freedom from democracy. The socialist has traditionally viewed agency positively and socially as collective empowerment. The liberal has seen it negatively and in individualistic terms as individual freedom from the constraints imposed by hierarchical and social norms. The political dichotomy between power and liberty insistently intrudes into and is constitutive of the tension between collective and plural models of social organisation and vice-versa.

A particular concern of this thesis is with such traditional dilemmas and dichotomies of economic, social and political thought. The typical radical approaches to these dilemmas have, as Gregor McLennan (1989) has shown, been problematic. These approaches have been: 1. Polarisation; 2. Synthesis; and 3. Transcendence.

Polarisation. It is not satisfactory to opt for one polar opposite or the other in any of these dichotomies. Typical solutions have been to opt for a model of democracy based on either empowerment and public interests or liberty and pluralism, to attempt to increase the scope of democracy and social power or to limit it. But neither of these opposed paradigms should be allowed to triumph over the other. We have seen the consequences of both. In the first case tyranny and the suppression of diversity and freedom. In the second self-interest, inequality, exploitation and ultimately the undermining of liberty itself. Dogma and antagonism should be left behind. The dogmas of statist collectivism should not simply be exchanged for those of competitive pluralism or liberal individualism. What is needed is a more pragmatic eclectic approach which attends to contemporary problems rather than trying to live out ideological predispositions and which draws on all the theoretical sources available rather than attempting to stick faithfully to only one.

Synthesis. I do not think either that it is possible to synthesise the counterposed options of pluralist liberty and autonomy on one hand and social responsibility and other-regard on the other. There are essential and irresolvable tensions between the doctrines of pluralism and socialism. These doctrines may be brought closer together or further away from each other. Their incarnations as competitive pluralism and state communitarianism see them at their most polarised. Associationalism sees them integrated as closely as they can be. But they cannot be synthesised or completely converged because all moves towards collectivism inevitably involve some restrictions being imposed on plurality and liberty. All moves towards plurality and liberty inevitably involve some loss of collectivism. Synthesis aspires to the reconciliation of the irreconcilable. The task instead must

be to manage the relationship between social power and plural autonomy, to find not a resolution but a compromise between the two.

Transcendence. Neither is it possible to transcend or 'go beyond' the pluralism-socialism dichotomies by invoking an entirely new paradigm or 'third way' because the old dichotomies are between essential and enduring principles of social and political organisation which cannot be overcome. Ecology, for instance, offers a distinctive and vital perspective on economic, social and political life but, not one that, as many of its advocates like to pretend, can break with all the old doctrines and live independently of their preoccupations or traditional interpretations of them. Like McLennan (1989), I cannot envisage any idea of economic, social or political organisation that can avoid tackling the problems of social responsibility and co-ordination or of pluralism and autonomy. As Bowles and Gintis put it:

> "[the] plague on both your houses stance towards liberal and Marxian social theory is misplaced. Only at its peril can a democratic politics ignore the classical philosophical debates concerning representation, accountability, privacy, property exploitation and scarcity. It may be true that the two great classical political and economic traditions are part of the problem; but they are surely part of the solution as well ...
> ... Our commitment to the development of political theory within the common enlightenment framework of liberalism and Marxism stems from our appreciation of the enormity of the forms of social oppression to which they are addressed, and from our conviction that a good society in a peaceful world is inconceivable in the absence of solutions to the problems to which liberalism and Marxism have been the historical responses'.

Associational Democracy

However I am not against third ways, only sceptical about those that attempt to conflate or break with all the old dilemmas. This brings me to associational democracy. This is a possible alternative third way of attempting to come to terms with the democratic dilemma between pluralism and liberty on one hand and collectivism and democratic power on the other.

I agree with Bowles and Gintis (1986) and McLennan (1989) that the only viable 'third way' is one that learns to live within the tension of the existing democratic dilemmas between socialism and pluralism, finding methods of achieving an ongoing balance between the genuinely contradictory principles of different traditions of democratic thought. In practice this is what the synthesis and transcendence alternatives end up doing. Most people who want to go 'beyond' market and state

actually end up trying to combine the two. They cannot make the entirely novel break that they claim.

What is needed is an approach that can preserve mutualism without monism, and pluralism without particularism. But how do you preserve liberty and pluralism without their escalation into parochial self-interest, antagonism and the infringement of the liberty of others? How do you enforce social responsibility and create democratic power without resort to a superior authority or without transgressing the individuality and autonomy of independent individuals and social groups? I think the answer lies in a third sector, neither statist nor *laissez-faire*, but co-operative and pluralist and combining some aspects of both the state and *laissez-faire* models.

Associational Democracy and Pluralist Social Negotiation

The concepts of 'pluralist social negotiation' and 'associational democracy' offer the tools for thinking through the third co-operative sector. There should be a pluralist society with the maximum degree of decentralised freedom and without restrictions on the development of a diversity of identities for independent individuals and social units. But this should not be allowed to collapse into an atomistic and uncoordinated competitive sectionalism, particularism and self-interest. Plural and free individuals and social groups should pursue their own independent identities and interests in a spirit of social responsibility and other-regard. While I want to preserve pluralism I also want to preserve it within a social context.

The way to do this is to stand by the idea of independent, autonomous and diverse individuals and interests in society but to integrate these into systems of association and pluralist social negotiation within which they must pursue their own identities and interests in negotiation with others and with a regard for others' priorities and interests.

'Associational democracy' describes a political structure and system of relations intended to allow for and institutionalise the pluralist social negotiation of social priorities. 'Pluralist social negotiation' describes the process appropriate to that structure and set of relations. The process is one in which social interests and priorities are negotiated by independent interests interacting socially in inclusive and associational negotiative political structures.

Just as associationalism can combine both pluralism and mutualism in social relationships so it can combine, in political relations, democratic power with its accountability and restraint. Democratic power can be constituted by the participatory association of interests themselves, rather than being reduced to a feeble minimum or monopolised by an external and exclusive body. A co-operative political system can replace both statism and the market. Constituted by the

participation of plural interests associational democracy can from its inclusiveness gain the strength and legitimacy that it needs to tackle complex problems, yet in this same feature power can also be diffused and made broadly accountable to diverse interests in a way that puts restraints on its monopolisation or abuse in any single set of hands. Further restraints can be added constitutionally and by an active associational life outside the polity in a pluralist civil society.

Association is quite different from the alternatives. Association means the collection of the diverse. It is the organisation, companionship and connection of the many, the loose aggregation of the several. It is both pluralist and collectivist.

There is no several in the state communitarian model. Here the community is the collective without the plural. It is singular and involves the top-down imposition of a false unitary will, the oneness of the many. Strong community is not diversity and commonality, but the conflation of the diverse into the common.

The statist dimension of this strong communitarian model goes further. It delivers the common will from above. It disenfranchises interests from deciding together what their interests could be and how a settlement could be reached amongst them all. The state can somehow express, represent and execute externally and from above plural needs as one unified will. Statism adds the vertical coercion of hierarchy to the horizontal coercion of monist communality.

Yet there is no commonality at all in competition. The market involves the striving of the many and diverse for advantage over one another. It gives people their individuality but at the expense of their sociality and solidarism. The competitive market model is pluralism without social responsibility, individualism without society.

Against strong communitarianism, association permits pluralism; against statism it is for democracy through the association of interests themselves; against the market it is for diversity in a cooperative context.

Associationalism and Corporatism

The model of association is more difficult to deal with than community and pluralism because its whole character and rationale is that it is neither one thing nor the other. It combines both pluralism and community and is torn between the two of them. The two sub-types of association have in turn as much to do with pluralism and community as they do with each other. What unites them is the fact that they both attempt to temper either pluralism or community with some elements of the other. The other point they have in common is that they both reject the extreme forms of community and pluralism - state communitarianism and liberal individualism. While to differing extents they share weak communitarian commitments they are both non-statist, preferring participatory pluralist

co-operation over statism and the market. Where they see a role for the state they see it as an associational and inclusive state, not an exclusive and external one. And they are both firmly social doctrines, taking the social group as the central agent in social and democratic life. They are non-individualistic models although they do not lack a respect for individual liberty and rights.

You could call this model either 'associationalism' or 'corporatism'. Corporatism involves the forming of one body out of many individual units. In corporatism the resulting body - a corporation - is usually authorised by law or by charter to act as an individual itself. Typical examples include business or municipal corporations. Corporatism is often used to refer to the political institutionalisation of concertation between organised interests and government. It is used to denote formally recognised or informal associational co-determination, in for example the tripartite corporatism of employers, unions and government.

Association involves an act of associating into an organised body of persons with a joint purpose. Association is usually used to refer to relations of fellowship and agreement, associates being companions, colleagues or partners in a shared venture. To associate is for those members to join or combine in common partnership, purpose or agreement. A key point is that, while this involves common purpose and collective organisation, association is also frequently invoked to capture the looseness of such aggregation and the plural nature of its constituent membership. It is this evocation of communitarian and pluralist sentiments in one system that makes the idea of association attractive.

I will tend towards the use of the term 'associationalism' to refer to the model I propose, while confining the use of 'corporatism' to the particular role in the associational model reserved for associational relations in an inclusive state. It would have been tempting to use the term 'corporatism' rather than 'associationalism' as the general term in this thesis because associational thought can often be read as inferring a role for associations at the expense of considering processes of concertation between them, the latter being seen as falling within the rubric of corporatist theory yet being something which is important to me. Associationalism is sometimes taken to be concerned with the institution, the association, rather than with the associational relations between associations.

However I have opted for association over corporatism for three main reasons. The first is that in sociological theory 'association' does carry a relational rather than an institutional emphasis. It is used, following Tönnies (1887), to refer to looser knit social relations as opposed to the tightly knit relations of community. Whereas in political thought 'association' often means the organised interest group, most notably the professional association, and corporatism is the term used to refer to the relations between such groups, in social theory association tends to be used in the relational sense. So while in political theory the use of 'association' to refer to relational concertation and co-operation may possibly seem rather strange, in social

thought it makes perfect sense. Association is just as good a concept for this phenomenon as corporatism.

My concern is to find a term capable of evoking the idea of a system in which community and pluralism can be combined. The useful thing about association is that it refers to relations of common purpose and partnership and so implies some degree of collectivism but without professing a strongly monist communitarianism. Association presupposes a loose and pluralist aggregation of associates. It does not reduce actors to a common identity but stresses their common purpose and their diversity. Interests are associated with one another, but they are not one, there is difference in unity. This is a firmly pluralist model committed to the irreducible diversity and independence of groups and opposed to their reduction into singular communal identities yet it implies some degree of sociality in their relationships with one another.

In my associationalism vertical and horizontal constraints, coming from the state and social norms, on the decisions and actions of diverse actors do exist. However such constraints are constituted through the association of interests themselves. Association combines community with pluralism, common purpose with its subjection to pluralist democracy. It is such a combination of community and pluralism which I aim to pursue in this thesis and a term 'association' - which can suggest such a complex set of relations collective yet plural - is well suited to such a purpose. 'Corporatism' cannot describe the delicate and subtle relational balance described here.

One reason for this, and my second reason for preferring 'association', is that corporatism already has certain other connotations deriving from its previous usage. It has been a much more widely used word in politics than 'association' and has had a pretty checkered career in practice, whether you look at the state sponsored corporatism of Mussolini or Hitler, or the beer and sandwiches corporatism of western social democratic governments. Corporatism is prone to misunderstandings and preconceived prejudices and it is too tightly linked with a particular sort of social democratic tripartism. These historical examples should not be allowed to cast a shadow over the general principle of corporatism which is a good one and should not be reduced to the unhappy forms it has often taken. Nevertheless, as a choice of terms exists, corporatism may be best avoided on account of the connotations it has from its dubious historical record and because these examples have, like it or not, given corporatism a bad name.

A third advantage of using association as the general term in my model is that it brings in the role of independent associational activity in civil society unlike corporatism which tends to imply less the role of associations as autonomous democratic agencies and more their integration into structures of concertation in and with the state. The importance of concertation should not be allowed to override the importance of a free pluralist associational life in civil society. It is

partly in recognition of the importance of this aspect that I have chosen to talk of 'associationalism', a word which can be used to refer to associational relations but also to the independent activity of associations. Corporatism, on the other hand, is very much oriented towards concertation and the state and lays less stress on associational life itself and on the role of a pluralist civil society. I have, then, opted for associationalism rather than corporatism. Nevertheless it should be recognised that my model is a corporatist one although not to be confused with the dubious forms such as those mentioned above. I will use corporatism to refer to associational relations in the state, one half of an associational democracy (the other being a pluralist associational civil society), but associationalism will be the general term for the model I wish to propose.

Two Types of Association

This leads me on to the distinction between the two sub-types of association - macro- and meso- associationalism - referred to in Table 1above. Three potential levels of association could be identified. *Micro-association* could refer to association at the smallest level, most conceivably at the level of the individual. It could refer to the association of characteristics which make up a subject yet define her or his diverse and contradictory subjectivities. Taken alone this is an exclusively individualistic and psychological notion and it is not my concern here, although it would be correct to say that individual subjectivity is inevitably bound up in the sort of meso- and macro- social relations in which the person finds her or himself.

Meso-association refers to association at the intermediate level of the organisation of individuals into shared interest groups. It is at this level that many associationalist theories concentrate, focusing on the primacy of the association as a democratic agency in society. In addition there is *macro- association*, association at the large scale level of the concertational association of associations which is the area of prime concern for corporatist theorists.

It is tempting to use the labels 'group association' to define meso-association and 'relational association' to define macro-association on the grounds that meso-associationalism tends to focus on the agency or institution, the association, whereas macro-associationalism tends to concentrate on the relations between associations. In other words it is tempting to use terms that bring out the institutional focus of meso-association as compared to the relational focus of macro-association. However this would not be justifiable. Meso-association is a relational concept because it stresses the relations of individuals in shared interest groups. This is no less relational than the idea of the macro-association of associations.

Having said this, though, while there is in principle no greater relational emphasis in macro- than in meso-association, there can be in practice a difference. In practice meso-associationalism often tends to focus on the institution and agent - the

association. The problem with this is that corporate groups in isolation from relations with other such groups are not likely to provide any guarantee of generalised solidarism. They are more likely to be a source of parochial instrumentalism and conflict unless they themselves are integrated into corporate association. Macro-associationalism theories tend to focus on the associational relations between associations and interest groups rather than on the associations themselves. They may often assume the nation-state to be the relevant level of analysis without much reference to higher and more transnational relations, which is a bias I wish to correct. But on the whole macro-associationalism or corporatism is important because it focuses on the relational collaboration between associations and not merely on the associations as institutions themselves, As a more broadly relational perspective it is better suited to helping us to understand how more generalised forms of co-operation and solidarism could be promoted, over and above the internal sectionalist solidarism of the association.

There are three models of democratic and social organisation here. *Community* stresses the primacy of collectivism over diversity and particularism. *Pluralism* gives primacy to the free development and expression of individuals and groups over community or co-operative values. *Association* attempts to combine the two, emphasising diversity and difference within a framework of mutuality. The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that there is a road which can combine the best of communitarianism and pluralism while relieving each of their worst features. This road, I will argue, is that of associational democracy.

Let me turn now to some questions concerning the balance between associations and associational relations in associational thinking. First, what do associational thinkers have to say on the question? Second, what is the role of the association? Third, given that many interest groups are not organised associationally how can this be encouraged? And fourth, what is the role for associational relations? In the following sections I will look further at the pluralist, social and solidaristic dimensions of associational democracy before turning in the chapters that follow to ways in which associational democracy may be relevant in the economy, civil society, polity and political action,

Association and Associations

There have been many recent budding theories of association. Wolfgang Streeck and Philippe Schmitter (1985) have tried to theorise a new model of social organisation - association - arising out of the history of some older ones - community, statism and the market. They carve out new ground for the components of associationism - 'its guiding principle... "organisational concertation"' and 'its embodying institution..."the association". John Mathews (1989) has tried to demarcate the role of associationism in a new post-fordist politics suitable to the emerging 'age of democracy'. Paul Hirst (1988) has tried to

think through an associational socialism appropriate to a more pluralist state. Stephen Yeo (1987) has distinguished between the old ugly forms of socialism he calls collectivism and statism, and the brighter more promising version he calls associationism. Most recently Michael Walzer (1989), in an exciting, succinct and accessible introduction to the associationalist perspective, has advocated a 'critical associationalism' in which the focus is on a civil society characterised by the co-existence of fragmentation and sociability. And associational theory goes back a long way prior to this, back to the days of G.D.H. Cole (1920a), Harold Laski (1921), Emile Durkheim (1893) and before him to Hegel (1821) and beyond. In addition there have been many theoretical and empirical studies of the activity of associations and the practice of associational concertation. It is not my intention to lay out the history of associational thinking. A project along these lines has already been presented by Antony Black (1984). But it is important to pick out some relevant themes from older and more recent strands of associational thought.

Two main themes run through the associationalist literature – the pluralist civil society and the corporatist state. The first infers a strong role for associations in a *pluralist civil society*. The idea is that statism and bureaucratic collectivism can be overcome by the decentralisation of powers down to self-governing voluntary associations in civil society. This direction of thinking attempts to come to terms with normative pluralist democratic principles and with the simple facts of life in increasingly pluralist modern societies. The second characteristic of associationalism is the *corporatist state*, opening government up to the widest and most inclusive possible range of power-sharing, partnership and consultative arrangements with associations and interests in society. This aspect emphasises not only self-governing associations but their integration into collaborative democratic forums. This is intended to achieve the co-ordination and co-operation so absent from *laissez-faire* approaches, yet without resorting to the paternalism and authoritarianism of central state planning. These theories base their normative associationalism on a descriptive-explanatory account. That is, they argue, the work of Streeck and Schmitter (1985) being a good example, that loose and informal pluralist, co-operative and associational arrangements already exist and are growing in modern economies, societies and polities. The task is to build on these existing bases and formalise and institutionalise associationalism within a democratic framework.

Many associational proposals rest their case on the institution, the association. The association has a role, but it is important to look at association as well as at associations, not just at the organisation of individuals into associations but also at the associative relations into which associations themselves are inscribed. I emphasise Streeck and Schmitter's 'guiding principle of interaction and allocation..."organisational concertation"' as well as their 'embodying institution..."the association"'. A focus on associations alone leads to all the problems of competitive pluralism - diverse and free interests in society but

atomised and without any overarching system for social responsibility and co-operation.

There is an important role for interest groups. Any polity, economy or society, however pluralist its institutions of government, must have bodies independent from and countervailing to governmental power. These can scrutinise government behaviour, form an intermediary body between individuals and social interests on one hand and government on the other and pressurise the latter on behalf of the former. They entrench the ethos of a plurality of ideas and interests and of the constant availability of political alternatives and they provide a constant source of opposition, criticism, innovation and experimentation. They provide alternative political centres of power which safeguard against the monopolisation or abuse of power by any one single agency, notably the central state. They provide the forums through which collective identifications and the political participation of individuals can be fostered and, through a pluralist associational life, a society has a means of giving expression to its constituent diversity and difference.

In Britain under Mrs Thatcher we saw the erosion of such a pluralistic role for independent agencies in society which suffered from government interference, legal restrictions and even abolition. Think, for instance, of the media, trade unions, and local government. Mrs Thatcher went so far as to abolish trade unionism at GCHQ and local government at the Greater London Council (GLC) and in the metropolitan authorities. As Andrew Gamble (1988) observed, the withdrawal of the state from the economy was accompanied by and, in fact, necessitated its strengthening in the political sphere. In this respect Mrs Thatcher failed to follow through the logic of her liberalism to its political conclusions. In spite of her avowed intentions to roll back the state she did so only partially in the economic sphere, often creating just as thick a morass of regulatory agencies to monitor the newly privatised industries as she disposed of, and she failed to carry through her liberalism to the political sphere where the powers of the central state were greatly expanded, rather than reduced, restrained or divided. Mrs Thatcher's version of liberalism may have pleased the Hayekian neo-liberals of this world but it would have had John Stuart Mill turning in his grave.

Associations are not the only form that interests take in social life. Putting the association at the centre of the political stage runs the risk of marginalising identities and interests in civil society that are not expressed in an associational form, say where a clearly definable interest group exists but is not organised associationally. There are a huge range of interests in society not all of whom are formed into organised social interest groups and some of whom who are organised who are more powerful and effective than others. However all interests are entitled to an equal role in democratic politics and non-organised and poorly organised interests as well as organised interest groups are entitled to a social and political status, A focus on organised interests as the basic unit of political activity serves to disenfranchise non-organised or poorly organised interests.

But how are interests who are not formally organised to participate in government if not through interest groups? What other way is there of defining interest categories other than through their self -organisation? Through what sort of forum can interests determine their representation in government if not through their own organisations? The answer is, I think, that there is no other way. Solutions involving direct elections or rota representation from nonorganised interest groups raise the questions of who is to define the interest group and how its representation is to be secured. There is no alternative but for government itself to provide the political infrastructure for associational organisation amongst non-organised groups.

Concrete encouragements can be provided - the state funding of associational activity in non-organised sectors, financial incentives and licensing relaxations, for example. In addition the consultative and corporatist political institutions and the culture needed to encourage and support associational activity in civil society can be built up by the state. The GLC in London prior to its abolition in 1986 did a lot to promote associational activity in the local community through the decentralisation of resources to associations, by promoting a consultative institutional set-up whereby associations had access to the local state and by generally fostering a culture in which associations felt they had a political status and clout. Existing associations gained in confidence and strength and the conditions were laid whereby new groups sprung up motivated by the belief that they could obtain the resources and influence to make their existence worthwhile. The key point is that the state should not create an associational life in civil society. This would compromise the independence of associations from the state. But it can provide the political conditions whereby interest groups can do this themselves and be persuaded to believe that it is worthwhile.

However while interest groups have a vital role in an associational democracy they should not alone be its governing principle because the associational concertation between associations is as important as the associations themselves. My concept of 'association' refers to associational relations between interests, which institutionalise their combined independence and social integration, as well as to associations themselves. On this point it aims to avoid the slide into competitive pluralism that results from an exclusive focus on interest groups rather than associative relations, or from the ascription of a particularistic instrumental rationality to groups rather than their integration into a framework of social co-operation. My concern with the peaceful coexistence of pluralism and socialism leads me to emphasise organisational concertation as well as the association.

A democracy based on the competition of independent atomized interest groups is a recipe for antagonism, conflict and instrumental self-interest - dog-eat-dog or the war- of -all-against-all. There must be independent interests and identities but they must associate. Association provides a political structure which allows for the

preservation of the autonomy and diversity of plural interests within a framework of social negotiation and co-operation.

Furthermore it is no good if such associative relations are entered into in a spirit of competitive bargaining based on an instrumental rationality and the striking of self-interested trade-offs. Association has to be practised in a spirit of genuine solidarism or social-mindedness. It is important, therefore, to develop in associative relations a solidaristic value consensus.

The key to pluralism is that it must be organised co-operatively rather than antagonistically or competitively. State or communitarian modes of organisation cannot do this. They deprive associations and interests of their autonomy and diversity. *Laissez-faire*, on the other hand, worships pluralism to the extent of being blind to the need for co-operation and co-ordination. Co-operative association, the integration of autonomous plural interests into social negotiation, is the key to the preservation of co-operation and solidarism alongside autonomy and diversity. 'Association' should be taken to mean not just interest groups but also the political relations through which they can retain their independence yet be obliged to respect the interests and needs of others. The role of associations is important but it should not be overstated next to the importance of association.

All Affected Interests

What interests should be included in associational democratic forums? I would argue that any centre of decision making should incorporate into its democratic structures all interests affected by the decision-making done at that level. Pluralist social negotiation should be inclusive according to the principle of 'all affected interests'. This principle both extends and limits the scope of interests permitted to participate in decision-making in a way that meets both the social and libertarian requirements of democracy.

In what way, according to the first of these requirements, does the principle of all affected interests extend democracy more inclusively? The traditional form of control in capitalist economies is by owners or shareholders through managers accountable to them. The traditional socialist alternatives are state or workers' control. None of these will do because they are all essentially private forms of control and exclude from democratic decision-making a wide range of affected interests.

The behaviour of a company is not only of interest to its owners or management. It affects workers who are directly involved in production and who put in most of the elbow-grease involved in the creation of a company's wealth out of which the owners reap most of the benefits. It also affects consumers who are the group that production is, after all, supposed to satisfy. It also affects local host communities and has consequences for society as a whole. Apart from this there are a range of

interest groups who represent causes and communities specifically affected by the actions of companies. Women, for instance, can make a strong case for having a big say in production decisions when, for good or ill, they do most of the consumption work in modern societies. Environmental pressure groups, to take another example, have a lot to say about the ecological consequences of industrial decision-making and they ought to be able to say it through voting power on company boards. Thus there is a wide range of groups who can legitimately claim to be affected by the operations of companies, or to be representative of those who are, but who have no say in their running. Their democratic control over their own lives is diminished by their exclusion from legitimate influence in activities that affect them.

State or workers control are no alternatives to capitalist ownership and management control. They both essentially preserve as privately governed activities which have a wide social effect. Nationalisation or workers control do not socialise economic democracy, they merely shift it from one set of private hands to another.

The idea of state ownership as democratic, public or social ownership or control is, as writers like Wlodzimierz Brus (1972, 1973 and 1975) have pointed out, inaccurate because it does not involve the democratic control by social or public interests of production. The idea of the state expression or representation of social interests is a thin disguise for what is basically their external paternalistic or authoritarian definition. What is needed for genuine socialisation is the social construction of social needs by interests themselves.

The case for workers involvement in economic democracy is popularly supported well beyond the left and labour movement. Within the left it has traditionally been supported by all sections from revolutionary to reformist wings. Workers' control, workers' participation, worker co-operatives and self-management are popular amongst market socialists and advocates of new forms of social ownership. In a revitalisation of the left in Europe around social democratic ideas and a turn to co-operative and private initiatives, worker participation is enjoying a renaissance in the chambers of some of the most important forces of change, so much so that Mrs Thatcher was driven to deriding very mild proposals on worker participation proposed in the EC social charter as 'a return to the ideas of Karl Marx and the class struggle'.

The inclusion of workers in government can enfranchise a group much affected by company-level decision-making and directly involved in the work on which decisions are made. Workers control can give workers a greater say over their conditions and structures of work and over the distribution of the surplus which they produce. These are matters over which at the moment they have little control and suffer exploitative and unequal treatment. There is also a lot of evidence to suggest that worker participation in decision-making enriches peoples' work and enhances productivity.

But workers' control continues private rather than social control because it involves only the interests directly involved in production in democratic control to the exclusion of other interests who are left with no say over activities which affect then. Workers control is vastly preferable to capitalist ownership as one form of sectional control over another. In the present context it is a desirable first step towards genuine all-round social ownership alongside other first step mechanisms such as state ownership and community and consumer partnership and consultation. But ultimately the objective should be the full inclusive socialisation of economic democracy and not the passing around of private ownership from one sectional interest to another. In a situation of genuine all-round social control, workers' control would be a regressive step to be resisted.

Economic democracy, then, should be social in the sense of incorporating a plurally inclusive range of all affected interests in government rather than just certain private sectional interests, be they capital or workers. Government by all affected interests is necessary to safeguard against the distortion of information by sectional interests for private gain and against the sway of sectional over social interests in production decisions. All-round democratic and social participation in economic government is the basis for a greater social responsiveness in economic decision-making. What is needed is democratic popular planning, accountable to and inclusive of the full range of affected community interests, an objective that can be realised through consultative and corporatist structures of decision-making in the economy.

So the concept of 'all affected interests' extends the range of those who can legitimately claim a role in economic government to an all-round plural inclusiveness in accordance with the social objectives of associational democracy. But it also limits the field of interests who can hope for inclusion in economic government in accordance with the converse libertarian tenet of liberal and pluralist thought - in favour of the autonomy and freedom of units from illegitimate external interference. While people should be able to have a democratic say in decisions that affect them, they should not be able to bear influence in matters which do not. This too is covered by the concept of 'all affected interests' because such a concept excludes non-affected interests from a role in production decisions. This side of the principle safeguards decentralised self-government against illegitimate interference and protects the autonomy and independence of plural interests in society.

Making Association Social

New right liberal individualism rode to power to dominate the 1980s in Britain on the back of the social contracts and corporatism of the 1970s Labour governments. Mrs Thatcher expressed the depth of her individualist convictions with the assertion that 'there is no such thing as society'. And, at the end of the

1980s, competitive pluralism of both the political and economic kinds became fetishised as the successor to state socialism in Eastern Europe.

Against this background there have been some recent attempts - by Brian Barry (1989) and Michael Luntley (1989) for instance - to reassert the importance of the social or solidaristic objectives of socialism. A central aim of this thesis is to develop a collectivist concept of democracy. But a distinction needs to be made, as Barry (1989) notes, between collectivist structures and collectivist behaviour. How can collectivism be translated from structure into action? Three theories can be noted here - 1. a natural or spontaneous theory; 2. a contractual theory; and 3. a cultural theory.

The concept of natural or, spontaneous solidarism is characteristic of much anarchist and socialist theory. It supposes that all humans are naturally solidaristic. Given the chance to do so we will all automatically act in a socially-minded way, pursuing our individual preferences in the light of social considerations and spontaneously acting with great social responsibility.

This implies that associational political structures alone can provide a sufficient basis for the development of solidarism and that given appropriate structures we will develop our natural sociality. But this assumes not just that humans are social beings but that we are naturally socially- minded. A socially-minded form of pluralism certainly beats the statist, competitive or individualist alternatives any day because it allows for the free pursuit of particular identities and interests modified by a regard for others doing the same, a combination which none of the alternatives can deliver. But if we are to hope for a social form of pluralism we cannot expect it to arise spontaneously from associative democratic structures as if it were the natural state of things so far entrapped by an individualistic culture. Once we have social structures of democracy we will have to work to translate then into social behaviour. I would like to think that humans were inherently socially altruistic but I doubt that there is a suppressed natural core of solidarism in modern societies because where associative structures do come about they simply do not easily or automatically generate solidarism. Just think about industrial and international relations for example.

In contrast to natural solidarism, contractual solidarism is based on an individualist or competitive theory of human nature. For contractualists reciprocity is not natural but can be won through voluntary social contracts between parties based on instrumental rationality and the pursuit of mutually beneficial agreements. Contractual solidarism is characteristic of many competitive pluralist and social democratic ideas and is common in much associationalist and corporatist thought. It would be likely to form part of my model of association in practice because pluralist social negotiation would inevitably sometimes involve the striking of mutually beneficial trade-offs.

But contractualism cannot serve as a basis for a universal solidarism because it lives off the fulfillment of sectional and instrumental rather than solidaristic needs. Socially beneficial outcomes are reached only where parties think they can gain individually. Quite apart from the intrinsically undesirable motivations this encourages, of selfish instrumental rationality, it could never be the basis for a generalised social or solidaristic form of democracy, only for the piecemeal and occasional negotiation of mutually advantageous trade-offs based on individual self-interests. It is important to make this point because so many contemporary associationalist ideas, infected by a traditional social democratic contractualism and a totally pragmatic attitude to existing forms of human consciousness, call for a revival of social contractualism as a basis for greater solidarism.

This brings us to the cultural theory of the development of solidarism. My concept of associational democracy is motivated by a commitment to solidarism. Its aim is to rethink pluralism in a way that will enable us to integrate plural interests in society into structures of social co-operation instead of allowing them to degenerate into the competitive pursuit of self-interests. The idea of associational democracy implies a relational structure which maintains the autonomy of plural interests but within a mutualist framework.

But a limitation of this concept, as it has so far been outlined, is that it reduces the exercise of social-mindedness to the social integration of different parties in decision-making. It replicates the attribution, made by the natural and contractual theories, of solidaristic consequences to social relations. However the leap from social structures to solidarism is a big one. As I have suggested, you need only look at the experience of industrial and international relations to see that putting diverse parties around a table does not automatically propel them into reciprocity and harmonious agreement. There is a danger in assuming, in normative associationalist thinking, that somehow social forums of decision-making will themselves do the job, that co-operation and consensus will simply follow in time given a corporatist democracy.

The problem with natural and contractual theories of the social is that neither can provide a good theory for the development of solidarism. They both posit social structures of democracy without explaining the jump from there to solidaristic behaviour. But if solidarism will not arise naturally from social structures, and if contractualism cannot be a basis for a generalised solidarism, then how do you move from the social structures of associationalism to social behaviour?

If solidarism will not arise spontaneously or out of social contracts then it will have to depend on the construction of a value commitment to social welfare which can give force to the underlying potential present in associationalist institutions. An ideology or ethos of solidarism, a convention, principle or norm of behaviour will not arise naturally or from social contracts but has to be constructed. This implies a need for both the institutions and a culture of solidarism. How can such a culture be

fostered? I would argue that there are two steps needed - one structural and one political.

The first step involves the formal institutional framework of democracy. While you cannot leap from social structures to solidarism the former provide necessary, if not sufficient, conditions for the latter and their importance should not be underestimated. The more that diverse autonomous interests are associated in common institutions of decision-making the more likely they are to seek social agreements, compromises and trade-offs and to see the links and shared interests between their different concerns. The more likely they are to understand and consider the needs of other parties with whom they interact and to adopt an egalitarian, reciprocal and other-regarding style of decision-making.

A second step in making associational relations solidaristic can be fostering the social potential of collaborative democratic institutions through politically campaigning for a social morality and ethos. The institutions of a collectivist democracy combined with the political development of a solidaristic ethos can foster a social orientation in associational democratic structures. Legally inscribed social structures of democracy can provide the framework for socially-minded decision-making and this can be further developed and given force by a corresponding politically articulated normative social morality or cultural consensus. As such there is a role for hegemonic ideological politics within a non-hegemonic pluralist polity running with the grain of, and attempting to imbue a social ideology into, pluralist associative political structures.

This solution is far from satisfactory because it leaves a lot to subjective political will and does not objectively establish cooperation in political institutions. It leaves the development of a solidaristic political culture from social structures too much to the efforts and skill of political work and makes the entrenchment of social obligations contingent and reversible.

But that it is a charter for activists should not make it more or less attractive. There is no other humane solution. There is no objective fundamental structural way of embedding solidarism in democratic institutions. Humans are not spontaneously solidaristic given half a chance. The only other alternatives are the statist imposition of solidarism or the instrumental rationality of competitive pluralism.