For Ethical Politics

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Introduction

All over the world, the Left is facing an impasse, and not a conjunctural or passing crisis, but an historic crisis, while, in the context of economic globalisation, the far Right has enjoyed a resurgence. Driven by racist ideologies, the populism of the Right has enabled the politicians of neo-liberalism to maintain their dominance of the political field, despite the increasing unpopularity of economic rationalism. Blaming the massive shift in wealth and the containment of democratic controls on the state on "cultural elites" and "illegal immigrants," the populist Right - from neo-fascists to mainstream conservatives - have effectively controlled the political agenda in the industrialised democracies.

The movements for economic justice and equality which defined progressive politics at the beginning of the modern era have gradually had to accommodate progressive movements centred on the struggle for recognition, notably national and ethnic liberation, civil rights and gender politics.

The contention of this article is that the political field now opening up poses a completely new way of doing progressive politics, *ethical politics.*

Ethical politics is the field constituted by the tension between redistributive justice and the struggle for recognition. Questions of redistributive justice spring from the socialist tradition, aiming to redress economic inequalities and are located under the signs of equality and liberty. Questions of cultural recognition spring especially from the new social movements of the post-1960s era, aiming to redress the misrecognition of cultural specificity and the devaluation of difference, and are located under the signs of recognition and difference.

Thus ethical politics is the form that the problem of the different oppressions suffered by the "holy trinity" of class, race and gender takes in the current period, after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Left *must* aim to construct a discourse capable of dividing society between "the people" and "the power bloc," between "us" and "them,"

but *populism* cannot be the form of this discourse.

Bluntly, "ethical politics" must seek to "ride the tiger" of popular moralism in exactly the same way that the mainstream Right has been able to ride the tiger of populist racism. At the same time, ethical politics links up with the forefront of intellectual debate on the theoretical options confronting the Left today. This discussion, rather than being a theoretical ghetto, is capable of challenging mainstream political philosophy, sociology and ethical theory on its own terrain and shifting the debate to the left. Ethical politics therefore addresses the key dimensions of "moral and intellectual leadership" that are central to the ideological struggle for hegemony.

Ethical politics needs to mobilise the immense potential constituency of the *moral common sense* of the Western societies. This moral common sense is defined by the notion of respect for the moral worth of all persons and underwrites many of the claims for cultural recognition that have been successfully institutionalised in multiculturalism and equal opportunity legislation.

The task of framing the terms of ethical political practice lies ahead of us, and this article is intended to contribute to posing the questions whose answers can shed light on this task.

Political discourse is currently structured in such a way as to exclude the formation of a broad, popular emancipatory movement challenging the neo-liberal hegemony over public discourse. The point is to *change* that landscape. At the level of *ethical* discourse, the divergent signs of redistributive justice and the recognition of difference can be correlated. Contemporary globalised, multicultural life, is the ground on which an embryonic, universal 'moral common sense' is growing, and provides the opening for such a correlation.

This is as far as we can go at the moment by way of a preliminary definition of "ethical politics".

Part One: The social and political landscape of the Twenty-first Century

The political landscape of the twenty-first century is completely different from the terrain of the 19th and 20th centuries upon which the socialist and other progressive social movements worked out their political strategies. The spaces through which to build governments-in-waiting to conquer public political power and lead a social transformation, or for pressure groups and social movements to eradicate racism, sexism, poverty and injustice incrementally, or for social and political alliances to be built to achieve common objectives by protest and propaganda are becoming increasingly restricted. Few any longer believe that the most compelling injustices and forms of suffering of the modern world can be resolved by these means alone. Nevertheless, despite everything, the world clearly stands at a higher cultural level than ever before, suffering and injustice that has existed in the past is no longer *necessary*, and their continued existence is intolerable, - the opportunity *must exist* to address the manifold outrages that affront and alarm popular consciousness.

The division of the world into haves and have-nots is hardly new. Poverty (or wealth) continues to be located in far away lands or on the other side of the tracks - in ghettoes (or gated villages) that people do not visit. But what is new is the *interconnectedness* of our lives: the poor work for the same employer, watch the same TV news and buy the same hamburgers as the average, professional or middle-class citizen of Europe or North America. This poverty (and wealth) now constitutes an outrage to popular consciousness in a way that it has never before.

The reverse is true also. The poor no longer, if they ever did, accept their lot, but labouring long hours in sweatshops producing stuff they desire but cannot afford, watching days of the lives of the better-off on TV, and their exclusion from the fruits of modernity is a constant outrage. Any wonder then, that the well-meaning better-off citizens of the "global village" live in gated villages, in a world which resembles not a sharing community, but rather a "global walled village".

Whereas in the past class divisions could draw a degree of legitimacy from traditional conceptions of their inevitability, perceived bonds of mutual benefit, "respect for one's betters", and religious and moral homogeneity, people no longer accept the necessity of having a different station in life, just as people are more conscious than ever of how different is the lot of others and how fragile is their own.

The world market has drawn everyone into a single, universal life, but at the very same time has destroyed almost every ideal through which a shared life could be given meaning and stability.

Foremost among those ideal elements which bind society and mediate its conflicts are the states and their national governments. Few heads of state are today held in any degree of respect, let alone awe, and no-one sees their head of state as representing themselves. Most bureaucracies and police-military machines are in actuality or at least in public perception corrupt and illegitimate, despite the fact that their ability to

police and terrorise their citizens is greater than ever. This situation is accentuated by the fact that there is only one state, that of the U.S., which truly rules. Anti-monopoly laws evidently don't apply to states. If the state is the "march of God in the world" (as Hegel says in the *Philosophy of Right*), then this is a very lonely God, because it represents no-one.

National governments on the other hand are close to losing any capacity to productively regulate and intervene in the lives of their citizens other than by steering a course on the tides and currents of the world market. The welfare state can redistribute consumer goods, but it cannot cure alienation.

These processes have been under way for more than a century, but the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, the ubiquity of media and computer and information technology, the successive waves of export of productive capacity - from Britain and the U.S. to Japan to Korea to China ... and the movement of whole peoples into the cities and into the industrialised countries, all these factors combine to bring a new quality to the domination of the world market.

Negri and Hardt go so far as to talk of this mass movement of peoples around the world eroding the concept of "the people" of nation-states, and bringing into being a global "multitude":

> "Is it possible to imagine U.S. agriculture and service industries without Mexican migrant labour, or Arab oil without Palestinians and Pakistanis? Moreover, where would the great innovative sectors of immaterial production, from design to fashion, and from electronics to science in Europe, the United States, and Asia, be without the "illegal labour" of the great masses, mobilized toward the radiant horizons of capitalist wealth and freedom?" [*Empire*, p. 398]

These economic and social conditions have led to a political impasse for the left. The social crisis (poverty and inequality, war, refugees, fragmentation, ...), and an ethical crisis (multiculturalism, new technology, corporate fraud, ...) which must be recognised by *everyone*, have *merged*, making instrumental politics of the old kind increasingly ineffective. Appeals to values and ideals previously associated with progressive politics seem bound to fail; no social agent capable of offering political and moral leadership for radical social change is visible even on the horizon; consensus on any progressive political program of action seems to be hopelessly out of reach. Political and ethical progress can only be made through *ethical politics*, that is, through political practice which aims to bring about political change by challenging ethical and moral precepts underlying public life, rather than taking this ethical and moral substratum as a *given*, to which political activity can only adapt or respond.

The entire world has been unified under capital, but this very unification takes the form of infinite fragmentation, both cultural and functional. This is the "geology" underlying the political landscape. A number of features of this underlying "geology" are worth mentioning.

Commodification

Commodification has invaded working relationships, family relationships and even relationships of governance. This has led to the destruction of traditional roles and values, the weakening of conceptions of duty and ethical bearing. Commodification, which is the *cause* of the impoverishment of the majority of the world, still remains the main feature of most liberal *solutions* to the world crisis - from privatising employment services through to greenhouse gas coupons and the WTO programs. It is also the source of the crisis for communitarianism of all kinds, the dominance of "material" values in a world where "non-material" values are what people are looking for.

The most significant cultural gains of the bourgeois epoch - from national liberation to women's emancipation, social welfare and mobility, universal public education, the overcoming of religious and racial prejudice - originate from the combination of this process of *commodification* with the *resistance* offered to forms of exploitation, made obsolete by the progress of commodification. That is, by people asserting their *equal value* as human beings. No-one proposes a return to pre-bourgeois traditional modes of trade or to the bureaucratic state-regulated modes of the twentieth century.

However, the commodity relation, that of customer to service-provider, which is everywhere supplanting the array of former traditional-hierarchical, master-servant and bureaucratic relationships, is ultimately restricted and mutually alienating.

Kant tells us that we must always treat another person as an *end* and never as mere means [*Metaphysical Elements of Ethics,* Kant 1780]. The relation of exchange of commodities at their value, is one in which *each* uses the *other* as a means to their own end. This relation is by definition *mutual* (*symmetrical*), but it is a relationship of mutual instrumentalism, of mutual *manipulation*, and so must still fall short of a genuinely human relationship. What I mean by a "genuinely human relationship", is expressed in Agnes Heller's formulation of the "golden rule": "I do unto you what I expect you to do unto me. [Luke 6:31] *What* I do unto you and *what* you do unto me should be decided by you and me". [*Beyond Justice*, p. 253] but with the *additional* determination that "*what we do*", is "decided by you and me".

An example of this process can be seen in the higher education "industry". Corporatism, by casting the student as a "customer" purchasing knowledge from the academy, has broken down the hierarchical and bureaucratic teacher-centred and elitist notions of learning. But the "customer focus" notions which have replaced them is a nonsense hardly worthy of critique. However, the best academics respond not with a call for a return to the former hierarchical teacher-centred relationship, but rather with a move forward to *collaborative learning*. It is on this notion of **collaboration** which I rely in critique of the commodity relationship.

As Alasdair MacIntyre points out, the manager and the therapist are characters of modern society, whose very essence is to "treat people as a means":

> "The manager represents in his character the obliteration of

the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations: the therapist represents the same obliteration in the sphere of personal life. The manager treats ends as given, as outside his scope; his concern is with technique, with effectiveness ... Neither manager nor therapist, in their roles as manager and therapist, do or are able to engage in moral debate. They are seen by themselves and by those who see them with the same eyes as their own, as uncontested figures, who purport to restrict themselves to the realms in which rational agreement is possible - that is, of course from their point of view to the realm of fact, the realm of means, the realm of measurable effectiveness." [MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 30]

Commodification has undermined these character-types. Primarily through the spread of commodification and people's assertion of their equal value as human beings, modernity has attained a high cultural level (people have more choice), but it has also created a situation which cries out for genuine human collaboration to supplant the relationship of buying and selling, of "mutual use".

For centuries since a civil society first inserted itself between the family on the one hand and political life and statecraft on the other, these two traditional domains remained important sites for the production and defence of human values and the satisfaction of human needs, needs which could not be sustained by the economy. The destruction of the family and the attenuation of the role played by the state can be welcomed insofar as these have always been the sites of oppression, exploitation and reaction. But even though the displacement of values from the domestic and political sphere into economics has been effective in promoting and meeting individual human needs, this has proven to be largely illusory because the cost in community and ethical life undermines what has been achieved. There is no escape from or point of support against those forces which dominate the world economy.

Intellectual property in science, loss of public space, fast food which causes obesity, cheque-book journalism are among the growing array of affronts to popular moral consciousness to which commodification has given rise.

Commodification drives the endless elaboration of the division of labour. The resulting destruction of the integrity and coherence of humanity at the individual level, displacing its integration to the level of the world market, is not matched by cultural and political norms and universally recognised icons to match the ever-growing power of the market. In itself, division of labour is hardly a social ill. On the contrary. It is simply that the loss of coherence, immediacy and self-sufficiency which results from the division of labour has to be compensated by engagement at a higher social level if it is not simply to lead to loss of community and ultimately of self-determination.

There is no joy in realising oneself as part of a larger whole, if that larger whole (the world market) has no recognisable human identity nor (for many) gives any recognition in return.

Fear and uncertainty

The terrorism currently the subject of public hysteria is but the latest demon to occupy the public space of post-modernity, alongside y2k, "muggers", serial rapists, paedophiles, carbon monoxide and AIDS. Fear and uncertainty also characterises economic fortunes which are computed three months in arrears with the only consensus about what may happen next being that we don't know; new viruses, food allergies, forms of pollution and environmental catastrophes join the prospect of intercontinental nuclear war as images of Armageddon. Life was surely more unpredictable and prone to catastrophe in earlier days, but the "reflexive citizens of modernity" are all too able to imagine the disasters which threaten their tranquillity and their reflexive social action generates the complexity which ensures that economic and social processes are formally unpredictable.

This uncertainty is one of the main drivers for ethical politics. Instrumental politics is impossible when you don't know where the world is going; no-one today believes the politician who claims to have the "sure solution", but it is still possible to "do the right thing".

The ease with which scapegoating and scaremongering can muddy the political waters poses one of the most difficult challenges to progressive politics. People prefer the fear of a named enemy to relieve the anxiety of maladies whose cause is indeterminate. It is far easier to imagine a global catastrophe than a satisfactory solution to the world's problems.

Ethical politics addresses these problems because it addresses itself to the values of security and equity rather than being driven by the politics of fear and insecurity.

Duty and Virtue

Terms like "duty", "virtue", "good", "ethics", "morals" are foreign to the discourse in many parts of the Left, especially the Marxist left, at least until recent times. This is a deplorable situation. And the use and misuse of the terminology of ethical discourse is hardly better in the mainstream.

The idea of *virtue* has been largely narrowed to that of *excellence*, which is of course handsomely rewarded. The dominance of liberal over communitarian social values, multiculturalism, commodification and the destruction of tradition and the relativism left in the wake of identity politics, have created a situation where it is "politically incorrect" to suggest that there could exist an objective or socially meaningful definition of virtue beyond the recognition of excellence. Every desire is valued solely according to the cost of gratifying it.

The culture of libertarian autonomy allows that the community may place bounds on what you may *do* - indeed laws regulating behaviour continue to *proliferate* - but to enquire into what you should *be*, into what you should *desire to do*, is an unwarranted intrusion into personal space tantamount to "thought police". And yet, the translation of values into the form of money means that values are *depersonalised*. By means of payment, the community bestows value on anything which is sufficiently desired. The tabloid papers, with journalists like Andrew Bolt, who whip up hatred and spread lies for no better reason than to sell

a couple of hundred more copies of their paper, are exemplars of the negative effects of this tendency. Fine journalists still exist in abundance but it is rare that they enjoy pride of place in the mass circulation media.

Despite the proliferation of laws and regulations, an ethics of *duty* cannot ultimately provide the basis for society-wide integration. By "ethics of duty" is meant an ethical theory or policy centred on the prescription of what one should and shouldn't *do*, while an "ethics of virtue" is an ethical theory or program which focuses on what it means to *be* a "good person", of *fostering* the good person. An ethics of virtue looks at the conditions which lead people *desire* to do this or that in the first place, rather than simply prescribing what desires may or may not be *acted upon*. In modern times, especially under the influence of utilitarianism, ethics has been predominantly one of duty. Concepts of virtue continue, but are largely marginalised.

Over and above this, neo-liberalism now marginalises even an ethics of duty in favour of an exclusive focus on the ethics of *right*. As a result, negative is prioritised over positive freedom, what you are *allowed* to do, over what you are *able* to do.

It is rightly said that good intentions pave the way to hell, and a fundamentalist hell at that. An ethical policy based exclusively upon an ethics of virtue as opposed to an ethics of duty is just as unviable as an ethics of duty alone. But nowadays, any kind of ethics of *virtue* seems to be excluded, because of the fact that the doctrine of individual autonomy makes such a suggestion "politically incorrect". [I use this term "politically incorrect" to indicate that in a given political environment certain actions or speech acts are excluded. The term, originally coined by the left by way of self-mockery, has been largely co-opted by the right to contest the derogation of the expression of certain of their own views, but I continue to use it because it aptly points to the problematic character of the exclusion of certain speech acts in the current environment.]

The complexity of postmodern society is such that it is inconceivable that a better world can be approached by the further elaboration of duty, of laws and regulations, outside the fostering of social values which ensure that what people *desire* to do is socially beneficial, or at least not harmful. It is undeniable that the elaboration of *rights*, as opposed to duties *or* virtues, is the fundamental level of ethical life, but it is equally inconceivable that a good life can be reached by *rights* alone. But these questions cannot be answered as isolated theoretical exercises: how can people live a good life? That is the question.

"Education not regulation" is the well-known aphorism which expresses the same basic thought on this matter, except that it is not just a question of people learning about what may be the consequences of their actions, but of creating conditions where their desires orient others as well as themselves to socially productive, or at least *not harmful*, activity. The same idea is expressed in the thesis that rhinoceros poaching cannot be eradicated by park rangers so long as some people are willing to pay high prices for rhino-horn while others are too poor to worry about the consequences. Or that bullying in schools and workplaces cannot be eradicated by penalties rather than by "changing the culture".

Ethical politics seeks to go to the underlying causes of political problems, rather than playing a game in which the cards are stacked against us.

Tweedle-Dum & Tweedle-Dee

With politics conducted with 24-hour media coverage and scientific opinion measurement by professional spin-doctors, voters are presented with tweedle-dum tweedle-dee choices, both of which lack any vision more profound than that of a bean counter. Only minor parties which are neither in-between or extremes, but offer an *ethical* alternative, can make any impact on the media-massaged electoral swell.

The success of the Victorian Greens in the November 30th election exemplified this trend; their policy platform was limited and gave minimal prominence to environmental issues; they attracted support almost exclusively on the basis of a clear stand for social justice.

All the mainstream political parties, but the social-democratic parties above all, are inextricably bound up and even merge with the state and its bureaucracy. They no longer represent social bases outside the state, but are rightly perceived as being simply wings of the "political class". (Most Labor MPs today have never earned a living outside of the electoral party industry.)

In countries where there are a large number of parties in the parliamentary arena, rather than the two-party system, the situation is of course different, but the dynamic is essentially the same: mainstream vote-chasing is dominated by populism, deceit and the logic of mass-media communication which leaves little real choice in the party of government.

Cultural politics

Cultural politics therefore becomes increasingly a more significant avenue for political activity.

In the absence of a credible icon of national and social cohesion, pop-culture is the foremost vehicle for universality, but pop-culture is a *corporate product*, magnifying and reflecting itself in a profitable spiral. Ever since youth cultures began to see themselves as a vehicle for social change in the 1950s, every new fad has made the passage from nihilism to commodity in rapid progression, despite every effort by the artists involved to resist this passage. *Style* can never be genuinely subversive. Life-style criticism which resists commodification is marginalised. Cultural politics has to orient itself towards daily, mainstream life.

Aspirational politics has been the subject of much attention. A recent US survey found that 39% of American voters believed either that they were in the top 1% of income earners, or that they would be eventually. This observation serves to emphasise some of the difficulties facing the politics of redistribution. Ethical politics addresses itself directly to aspirations, rather than choosing between manipulating aspirations or crushing them.

Public and Private Space

Public (communal) space is either degraded or privatised, while private (domestic) space is saturated by public (corporate) content.

The private space of immediate human relationship in the family home, may be reviled as the historic site of the oppression of women, abuse of children and so on, but it is only within such spaces that the cultured, critical human being, able to stand against the stream of public life, can be raised. This space is now saturated by television, advertising, marketing and bureaucratic intrusion. The TV set may take more of a role in raising the kids than their working parents.

On the other hand, the public spaces provided by the streets, market places, public schools, universities and meeting halls, in which the independent-minded individual has a forum in which to give voice to dissenting views and find a hearing, are also disappearing as they become private property or eroded by the intrusion of the market, crime or simple decay.

This reciprocal invasion of public and private space amplifies the feeling of powerlessness which grips everyone.

In a world where anything is possible nothing can ever be achieved.

The New World Order

The advent of the New World Order with the collapse of the USSR has *accelerated* all the processes of modernity, terminating the compromises of the post World War Two period, which had retarded them. This has led immediately to the perceived impossibility and undesirability of the social-democratic project, the welfare-public enterprise state, etc. Conditions still vary widely from country to country. However, the widespread bankruptcy of social-democracy and the welfare state is not just an ideological construct, it is *real*. The Blair-Giddens critique of welfare is as valid as it is reactionary; *welfare is dependency*.

The shopping mall which is owned by a retail giant is no more alien to the community than the dilapidated local council-run high street, the government unemployment department no more helpful or sympathetic to its unemployed clients than the staff at a private placement agency. Islands of public enterprise such as the *ABC* exist, staunchly defended in "holding operations", protected from the diktat of the market by public ownership, but nationalisation cannot inspire us with the prospect of returning entities to "public" control when government itself is alien.

The social democratic project depends on the thesis that state-owned public property is a viable transitional form towards the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, of capitalism, or at least a viable moderation of its defects. This conception depends on two theses: (i) that the state can be an effective means for the community to control the conditions of their own lives, and (ii) that individuals recognise themselves as members of the community and see the state as an extension and representative of them as members of the community. Neither thesis applies.

As a practical project for addressing economic crisis and inequality, workers' control, employee participation and its variants are a dead end, but nevertheless, despite everything, an employee is far more likely and able to identify with their own firm, even though it be the private property of someone else, in which they have negligible say in running, than to identify with a government for which they have one vote every 3

or 4 years.

On reflection, it is hardly surprising that an implementation of "democracy" which was designed for property-owners and after the emergence of the organised working class on to the political arena, adapted as a *façade*, does not make for a viable instrument of proletarian participatory democracy.

In any case, a century of social democracy has left people more alienated and disempowered and the gap between rich and poor wider than ever, despite the significant social reforms that have been achieved.

Nevertheless, even in countries most under the heel of neo-liberal economic policy, there exist public (i.e., government or municipal) organisations - schools, radio stations, hospitals, etc. - which despite everything are still non-market and nominally community property, and which are sustained by the communitarian or critical ethos of their employees, and which continue to provide latitude for resisting neo-liberalism in a hundred ways. Defence of these oases is of course vital. But there cannot be an illusion that such public spaces can be strategically expanded to revitalise social democracy.

It is not really a question of whether workers' control is possible but that the right of capital to dictate ought to be *contested*. The young activists of the anti-corporate movement *are* contesting the right of capital to subsume the world in its net, but rarely does *workers'* control figure in their programs for large corporations.

The move by the anti-WTO protests to take the state out of centre-stage and turn their fire upon the corporations makes a great deal of sense, but it still suffers largely from the defect that it approaches the corporations in the capacity of *consumers* and as *objects* of corporate productive activity, that is, from the outside. There are significant exceptions from this tendency, such as the organising drive supported by youthful employees of MacDonalds and the labour activists who have piggy-backed on to the anti-corporate protests to organise sweatshop workers exploited by high profile "brands". But it is the exception rather than the rule, that the anti-corporate actions originate among *producers* rather than *consumers*. By and large, the anti-corporate movement throws bricks, from the outside, at the some of the greatest achievements of modernity, which is after all what these giant corporations are.

Looking for a way forward here, a way forward which seeks to *reconquer* control of productive life rather than alienate it, leads to other aspects of the current crisis.

The disaggregation of the labour force

In the developed capitalist countries the labour force is fragmented into multitudinous layers of supervisors, technical workers, specialists, contract workers, part-timers, sub-contractors and "wired workers" who increasingly organise their own work or that of others. Gone are the serried ranks of organised workers who formed a coherent and concentrated force for progressive politics a century ago. The bottom ranks of the proletariat which once occupied the inner suburbs of the metropolitan cities, are now mostly to be found thousands of miles away in the enterprise zones of Asia and Latin America, while that section of

the most exploited which lives in the metropolis is generally *marginalised*.

This long-drawn out transformation of working relations is in fact the process which is lies at the root of the whole change which has taken place in the political and social terrain. The factory system began with a radical rupture between head and hand, between theoretical and practical reason, but it has continued over the 125 years since the arrival of Taylorism to shatter the human form into a million tiny bits, each human function becoming first an instrument, then a profession and finally an independent industry, which relates to other human functions not by collaboration or cooperation, but by exchange of values. Without a unifying ideal, division of labour is dehumanising; the only unifying ideal cementing the world division of labour is *money*.

The root of the alienation which affects all of social life lies here in work relationships and a way forward must include a strategy for employees. The trade unions remain the only voice of the working class, but not only is their membership declining but the unions are finding it increasingly difficult to organise the expanding new industries. The unions have successfully organised the great public sector industries such as health and education, which are now their core territory in fact, but the new technology areas, franchises, call centres and so on are still largely unorganised. If the unions are to be part of the solution, so to speak, then these new industries have to be unionised. As a concomitant of the challenges facing union organisation, the unions have been reduced to consolidating the position of their members as wage-slaves, endeavouring, usually unsuccessfully, to *sharpen* the divide between work and leisure, and relying more and more on a declining state and its relationship with the bureaucratic caste to defend the economic interests of members.

Ethical bankruptcy

"Ethics" has been reduced to consideration of arcane problems of reproductive technology or the niceties of corporate behaviour. Members of Parliament get a "conscience vote" over stem-cell research, but not about state support for gambling, launching a war or deciding the level of foreign aid. No-one believes the "values" inscribed in the corporate mission statement because everyone knows that the profit motive is the only real ethic known to corporate capitalism. Who is responsible for corporate behaviour? Not the base employees, who must do as they are told or be sacked, nor the managers whose obligation is to shareholders who in turn, if they have any say at all, are governed by "economic forces".

All the professions - journalists, politicians, the clergy, entrepreneurs - are increasingly perceived as untrustworthy; there is no trust in authority and disbelief in public information is widespread.

Only hard cash commands trust.

Accountability, one of the watchwords of "really existing democracy", only serves to emphasise the deception endemic in postmodern society. Politicians *must* lie when almost every word they utter is recorded and broadcast to millions. How *can* the political and social elite behave

ethically? Only by stepping totally outside their assigned roles, that is to say, outside the ethos of their chosen profession. It is hardly tenable that politicians were more honest in the times when "snake oil salesman" was a real occupation rather than a metaphor. Modern society has set standards but is unable to fulfil them.

The replacement of locality and kin by the virtual community of broadcast humbug and internet noise opens possibilities which cannot be fulfilled while destroying what can no longer be maintained. Postmodern society, which has developed the world division of labour to undreamt of degrees, lacks any spiritual cement. People cry out for an ethical life but modern commercial, multicultural life can offer no standard for an ethical life - it must be constructed anew. Or pulled from the Pandora's box of ancient history.

Fundamentalism and Right-wing Populism

The above conditions pertain in the metropolis and among the more privileged. In those quarters which have not yet attained the postmodern condition, or rather who suffer *its inverse*, the underbelly of postmodern development, most reject modernism not so much for its economic exploitation and its inequality, as for its immorality. We recoil at Islamic law, terrorism, suicide bombing, child-soldiery, sectarian and internecine warfare, but these were not the first choice of the people fighting to liberate themselves from the domination of Euro-American capital. Their first choice was Pan-Arabism and various forms of state-led development to make their own way to modernism. But imperialism could not tolerate this choice and forced them to either find a place within the imperialist system as sources of cheap labour and raw materials or reject modernism entirely.

The fundamentalist Christians in the U.S. (where the word "fundamentalism" originated) and the conservative/communitarian and right-wing populist movements in rural areas of Australia, basically express the same *reaction* to modernism.

No progress is possible in the "West" without a reconciliation with the "East", between "North" and "South", city and countryside.

The left

On the other hand, the left-wing socialist parties have lost all ideals, and assemble their members to protest at staged media moments on the plane of alliance politics, offering no noticeable resistance and absolutely no alternative in the face of too many atrocities to even list, far less defeat, and has, to a large extent, been reduced to a band of professional protesters engaged in specialised activity unrelated to daily life. This public activity is however only a means of sustaining sects which only fail to emulate the horrors of Pol Pot, Stalin and Mao by virtue of being small and lacking in prestige.

The Left must face the fact that a completely new way of doing progressive politics, is not only necessary - it is emerging.

There is good reason to believe that if progressive people can orient themselves in this new terrain, then the radical social transformation to which so many aspire can be achieved. Despite the cultural and political

fragmentation, the widespread prejudice as to the equal moral worth of all human beings, resulting from the worldwide division of labour, constitutes the embryo of a new universal consciousness.

Part Two: From Political Party to Cultural Politics

"Collectivity" has had a succession of different names over the past 200 years. These are the "flora and fauna" which inhabit the political terrain, the social agencies, or forms of political subjectivity which populate the changing political field. The first of these definitions of "us" was the "brotherhood" or "league" - the small band of "brethren" who swore to die for one another in pursuit of a quasi-religious millennial doctrine.

When a few English trade unionists got together in 1864 and declared the founding of the International Workingmen's Association and invited the émigré German revolutionist *Karl Marx* to join its General Council, a completely new political force showed itself. The organised working class which had first reared its head in the Chartist movement, and whose leaders made up the leagues and brotherhoods of the early communist movement now found a dramatic new form, with international reach, an historical vision, a program and a socialist doctrine. This was the period when the words *solidarity* (1840s), *internationalism* (1850s) and *collectivism* (1880s) entered the English language. It was the era of "class against class". The liberal and conservative, protectionist and free-trade parties of the bourgeoisie gave way to political parties resting directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, on proletariat or bourgeoisie.

This sharp class division, which is implicit in the structure of Marx's *Capital*, only reflected how things were done in the manufacturing industries of the Britain when it was the "workshop of the world". This was much the same as what we would today associate with the sweatshops of Thailand, the Philippines or enterprise zones anywhere in the world - workers are literally locked inside the factory for long hours, paid barely enough to live, and fined for underproduction or minor infractions. The definition of productivity under these conditions was to have as few "unproductive" supervisors and overseers as possible and make the workers work as long and as hard as possible.

Naturally, under such conditions, leaders of the workers' movement, such as *Karl Kautsky*, anticipated the ever-increasing size of the proletariat, its ever-growing militancy and organisation, alongside the continued concentration of capital in the hands of great trusts and corporations, the eradication of petty-capital, inevitably leading to a polarisation which would place the social democrats in a position to form a government and implement the socialist program with overwhelming numbers on their side.

> "We consider the breakdown of the present social system to be unavoidable, because we know that the economic evolution inevitably brings on conditions that will *compel* the exploited classes to rise against this system of private ownership. We know that this system multiplies the number and the strength of the exploited, and diminishes the number and strength of the exploiting, classes, and that it will finally lead to such unbearable conditions for the mass of the population that they will have no choice but to go down into degradation or to overthrow the system of private property. ..." [Kautsky, *The Class Struggle*, 1892, Chapter IV. §1. Social Reform and Social Revolution]

> "Ever larger and more powerful grows today the mass of the propertyless workers for whom the existing system is unbearable; who have nothing to lose by its downfall, but everything to gain; who are bound - unless they are willing to go down with the society of which they have become the most important part - to call into being a social order that shall correspond to their interests. ...

> "As things stand today capitalist civilisation cannot continue; we must either move forward into socialism or fall back into barbarism." [*The Class Struggle*, Chapter IV. §6]

Not only would economic forces fashion the modern working class and *compel* it to make revolution, there was no need for the working class to seek alliances with other parties or classes:

> "The last decade has certainly nurtured a growing hatred for the proletariat amongst the petty bourgeoisie. The proletariat must base its policy on the expectation that it will fight the coming battles alone.... because of his intermediate situation between the capitalist and the proletarian, the petit bourgeois wavers back and forth between the two, now on one side, now on the other. We cannot count on him, he will always be an unreliable ally ... But that does not exclude the possibility that, some day, under the impact of an intolerable burden of taxation and of a sudden moral collapse of the ruling class, the petit bourgeoisie will come over to us *en masse,* and will perhaps sweep away our opponents, and decide our victory." [*Road to Power*, 1909, Chapter 9]

and consequently:

> "If there is one thing that will rob us of the confidence of all the honest elements among the masses and that will gain us the contempt of all strata of the proletariat ready and willing to fight, that will bar the road to our progress, then it is participation by Social Democracy in any bloc policy." [*ibid.*]

While "scientific consciousness" presupposes assimilation of the whole body of the culture of society, and Kautsky no more than anyone else denied this, Kautsky relied upon the emergence of a "general crisis" to awaken political or "class consciousness" in the working class, and underestimated the relative independence of the political and economic class struggle. Better to allow this crisis to mature than to either short-circuit history by pre-emptive action or parliamentary compromises:

> "Anxious friends fear that the Social Democracy may gain state power prematurely *by means of* a revolution. But if for us there is a premature attainment of state power, it will come from gaining the appearance of state power *before* the revolution; that is, before the proletariat has gained real political power. As long as it has not gained this, the Social Democracy can only obtain a share in state power by *selling* its political strength to a bourgeois government." [*ibid.*]

The above words of Kautsky are chosen from the period when he was the foremost advocate of social revolution, before the break with Lenin or Luxemburg.

Rosa Luxemburg was distinguished by first coming out clearly and

strongly against the implications of the reformist social-democratic perspective which relied on the inevitability of such a polarisation as an alternative to self-emancipation. Luxemburg realised that proletarian subjectivity was not fully formed in the economic or sectoral struggle, but required political-ideological *formation* and that this had to be a specific element of the socialist programme. Luxemburg shared Kautsky's conviction that the working class would make the revolution alone, but challenged the conception of a party able to represent and direct the class struggle on its behalf, constantly emphasising the interpenetration of the self-organising capacity of the working class on the one hand and political and ideological direction of the social democratic party on the other.

> "... the task of social democracy does not consist in the technical preparation and direction of mass strikes, but, first and foremost, in the *political leadership* of the whole movement.

> "The social democrats are the most enlightened, most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat. They cannot and dare not wait, in a fatalist fashion, with folded arms for the advent of the "revolutionary situation," to wait for that which in every spontaneous peoples' movement, falls from the clouds. On the contrary, they must now, as always, hasten the development of things and endeavour to accelerate events." [*The Mass Strike*, Ch 6, 1906]

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Two lines of development sprung from this conjuncture however, which transformed the political landscape and led to new varieties of political flora and fauna: **(i)** the effect of "combined and uneven development" as the methods and organisation of large-scale European and America industry penetrated into regions where neither an indigenous bourgeoisie or proletariat had developed, and **(ii)** the introduction of *Frederick Taylor's* methods of production, initially in America in the 1880s and later in Europe and elsewhere.

Taylor redefined what could be meant by "productive labour", holding that about 25% of employees in large-scale industry ought to be engaged in the "science" of work, observing, measuring, supervising and directing the work of others.

> "The belief is almost universal among manufacturers that for economy the number of brain workers, or non-producers, as they are called, should be as small as possible in proportion to the number of producers, i.e., those who actually work with their hands. An examination of the most successful establishments will, however, show that the reverse is true."

Taylor enumerated seventeen different roles in a manufacturing workshop that were formerly performed by a single "gang-boss" or the "productive" workers themselves. He proposed that a specific department be established for each of these functions, employing one or a number of functional bosses. Most of these new positions were filled by promotion from the shop-floor, and participation in the new form of management entailed wage increases of at least 30% to gain acceptance

by the workers, and financed by productivity levels that were up to ten times what they had been previously. Every single worker would be in receipt of pay set individually according to their level of productivity and responsibility. Active efforts were made to gain the consent of the workers, one at a time, to increasing productivity, while time-and-motion measurements were used to make it also impossible for workers to "go slow" without being detected. Collective bargaining practices were not to be banned by the management but simply undermined by the offering superior wages on an individual basis to what was negotiated on a collective basis. Increasingly workers who took a "class-stand" would be marginalised and ghettoed into low paid jobs, while others moved into technical and supervisory positions or enjoyed high rates of pay working under the new "scientific management".

This led to an ever-evolving stratification of the proletariat, including *theoretical* and *supervisory* work as component parts of productive labour. The profundity of this change cannot be overestimated: the orthodox social democratic perspective of increasing polarisation would become unviable.

"Taylorism" is usually, and not without a real basis, associated with ultra-discipline and control of labour and the fragmentation of the labour process into mindless and repetitive tasks measured and rewarded by the stop-watch. [The symbol of the giant decimal clock in Fritz Lang's movie *Metropolis* was pointedly based on Taylor's decimal stopwatch.] But this misses the main point, as in this respect it was only the replacement of brute force and terror by science so far as the mass of manual workers was concerned. The dramatic *blurring of class lines*, associated with very significant increases in productivity and, for many workers, increases in living standards, which was the real social impact of Taylorism. Life inside the factory itself no longer resembled the picture of *class polarisation* which lay at the foundation of socialist and trade union strategy. Whole new social strata of productive wage workers grew up whose relations to the employers and the other employees was entirely problematic. And it was exactly this outcome that Taylor was aiming at.

> "One of the marked advantages of scientific management lies in its freedom from strikes. The writer has never been opposed by a strike, although he has been engaged for a great part of his time since 1883 in introducing this type of management in different parts of the country and in a great variety of industries. ... The writer has seen, however, several times after the introduction of this system, the members of labour unions who were working under it leave the union in large numbers because they found that they could do better under the operation of the system than under the laws of the union." [Frederick Taylor, *Shop Management*, 1903]

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The other element which contributed to the change of political terrain, but this time specifically on the international plane, was the introduction of modern manufacturing plant into countries where there had not already grown up an indigenous bourgeoisie and proletariat.

The effect of the penetration of imperialist production into Russia (for example) meant that the proletariat growing up in its cities, attracted by the employment opportunities offered by the giant new manufacturing plants, had to lead a mass of dispersed, semi-literate peasants, aspiring not to socialism, but to land-ownership, in a "proletarian-democratic" revolution, catching up and telescoping the protracted development which had taken place in the "West".

Since the 1870s social-democrats had looked forward to a revolution in Russia which would be led by social-democracy, based in the militant Russian working class, but which would introduce, not socialism, but capitalism and bourgeois democracy in Russia. This is implicit when Rosa Luxemburg remarks:

> "In the case of the enlightened German worker the class consciousness implanted by the social democrats is *theoretical and latent:* in the period ruled by bourgeois parliamentarism it cannot, as a rule, actively participate in a direct mass action; it is the ideal sum of the four hundred parallel actions of the electoral sphere during the election struggle, of the many partial economic strikes and the like. In the revolution when the masses themselves appear upon the political battlefield this class-consciousness becomes *practical and active.* A year of revolution has therefore given the Russian proletariat that "training" which thirty years of parliamentary and trade-union struggle cannot artificially give to the German proletariat. Of course, this living, active class feeling of the proletariat will considerably diminish in intensity, or rather change into a concealed and latent condition, after the close of the period of revolution and the erection of a bourgeois-parliamentary constitutional state."
> [*The Mass Strike*, 1906]

Lenin solved this conundrum by means of a *class alliance* in which the organised working class, amounting to no more than a few percent of the population, led the peasant masses, and created the most progressive revolution in history. The Russian Revolution of 1917 was executed along the classic lines anticipated by social democrats, by the urban proletariat led by the Communist Party; but the Soviet state thus created could only be defended by winning over the peasantry who would make up the ranks of the Red Army which defended the Revolution against the invading armies of imperialism. However, the dynamic set up by the Russian revolution, which conditioned progressive struggles throughout the 20th century, was contradictory in its impact. This will be considered presently.

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Already, early on in the 20th century a new process of restructuring of capitalist production had begun, which was to have profound effects on the political landscape and the flora and fauna in habiting it: Fordism. *Henry Ford* redefined profit and market-share. The truism that the lower the wages you paid your employees and the higher the price you charged for your product, the higher would be your profits, was turned inside out by Ford who deliberately paid his workers more, reduced hours of work and sold his cars for less. His highly profitable revolution

transformed America and the entire world.

The kind of political problems which would arise from this kind of industry were probably first glimpsed by the communist-sociologists of the Institute for Social Research (the Frankfurt School), who first applied the opinion poll to political science and delved into the mass consciousness of the working class.

Antonio Gramsci was the first to theorise the new political landscape, adapting the concept of *hegemony* to grasp the way in which politics was structured in this epoch. Gramsci rejected the Kautskyian model of class *representation* for a politics of *class formation*.

> "if it is true that parties are only the nomenclature for classes, it is also true that parties are not simple a mechanical and passive expression of those classes, but react energetically upon them in order to develop, solidify and universalize them." [*Prison Notebooks*, Q3§119, 1930]

Gramsci welcomed the Russian Revolution in 1917 as a break from the determinist conception of history which meant waiting for the pre-conditions for socialism to mature within the framework of capitalism, initially calling it a "revolution against [Marx's] *Capital*". At the same time Gramsci criticised Luxemburg for underestimating the depth of the defences of bourgeois society, likening it to the trenches of contemporary warfare, against which a "war of movement" and frontal assault was foolhardy.

In his understanding of the concept of *hegemony*, he recognised that the advent of the national state and the entry of the broad masses into political life required specifically political and ideological struggle to win them over and integrate them. Specific mechanisms were required to extend and concretise the class alliances first elaborated in Lenin's policy of a class alliance between the working class and the peasantry.

> "The proletariat can become the leading and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois state. ... In Italy, the peasant question, ... has taken two typical and particular forms - the Southern question and that of the Vatican. Winning the majority of the peasant masses thus means, for the Italian proletariat, making these two questions its own from the social point of view; understanding the class demands which they represent; incorporating these demands into its revolutionary transitional programme; placing these demands among the objectives for which it struggles. ...

> "The proletariat, in order to become capable as a class of governing, must strip itself of every residue of corporatism, every syndicalist prejudice and incrustation. What does this mean? That, in addition to the need to overcome the distinctions which exist between one trade and another, it is necessary - in order to win the trust and consent of the peasants and of some semi-proletarian urban categories - to overcome certain prejudices and conquer certain forms of egoism which can and do subsist within the working class as such, even when craft particularism has disappeared. The metalworker, the joiner, the building-worker, etc., must not

only think as proletarians, and no longer as metal-worker, joiner, building-worker, etc.; they must also take a further step. They must think as workers who are members of a class which aims to lead the peasants and intellectuals. Of a class which can win and build socialism only if it is aided and followed by the great majority of these social strata. If this is not achieved, the proletariat does not become the leading class; and these strata (which in Italy represent the majority of the population), remaining under bourgeois leadership, enable the State to resist the proletarian assault and wear it down." [*L'Ordine Nuovo*, January 1920]

The Russian Revolution, and the formation of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1919, unified the working class across the world, drawing into its ranks millions inspired by the Revolution and in the wake of the Wall Street Crash which threw millions into employment and penury, opened up new opportunities for the workers' movement to place itself at the head of mass movements across the world.

Gramsci later described the task before the Comintern as follows:

"Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed — in other words, that the leading group [*i.e.*, class] should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group [*i.e.*, class] in the decisive nucleus of economic activity." [Q13§18, 1932]

However, the Socialist International did not disappear, but restabilised itself, retaining an organisation in most countries, and generally speaking, with a base amongst the unionised and better-off workers, while the Comintern insisted on its *exclusive* right to lead and characterised its opponents in the workers' movement as "social fascists". The problem of class unity now took on an additional dimension.

In the 1930s, as this split proved an increasing obstacle social progress and amidst unprecedented social crisis, and Hitler threatened to seize power in Germany, *Trotsky* developed the policy of class alliance in the form of United Front, principally with the aim of unifying the working-class, now divided between mass Social Democratic and Communist Parties, so as to be capable of drawing behind it the broader masses.

Trotsky's formula for United Front:

"No common platform with the Social Democracy, or with the leaders of the German trade unions, no common publications, banners, placards! *March separately, but strike together!* Agree only how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded even with the devil himself, with his grandmother, and even with Noske and Grezesinsky. On one condition, not to bind one's hands. " [*Trotsky*, For a Workers' United Front Against Fascism, December 1931]

emphasised the *unity of the working class* despite its being *split* between two mutually hostile political parties. The United Front policy was intended to allow the continued struggle for leadership between the contending working class parties, while maintaining the unity of working class ranks. This unity would not be achieved before Hitler had triumphed and it was too late. The Comintern did then abandon its go-it-alone policy, but developed the *Popular Front* policy, which aimed to unite "all progressive forces", *irrespective of class.*

In Australia, in September 1938 the CPA explained the policy in this way:

> 'The general form of the People's Front in this country might be described as follows: It will consist of the Labor Party, which is the mass political organisation of the working class embracing the trade union movement. It must cover organisations of farmers including groups in the Country Party which are in opposition to the reactionary groups who betray the farmers. It will need to embrace the middle class in the cities and the towns and their organisations and also groups in the United Australia Party [of Robert Menzies] who are discontented with their leadership. The People's Front implies the participation of the Communist Party and the Labor Party. ...

> 'Unfortunately the Labor Party, instead of taking the course of working to achieve agreement with the malcontents of the UAP and the Country Party, set out to abuse them. ... agreement should be extended to the elections and provide that the Labor Party will not run candidates in electorates contested by UAP and Country Party members who have lined up against Lyons.'

Although for very brief moments in separate countries instances of the unity of the Communist Party and the Social-Democratic Party occurred, these were never more than episodic and partial, and in the main it can be said that the policy of a United Front of all working class parties never eventuated. The nearest thing to the United Front (or "Proletarian Front" in Comintern language) of multiple working class parties, coming to fruition was the United Proletarian Brotherhood set up by the Asturian miners in 1934, which launched an insurrection, but was brutally crushed by Franco's Moroccan troops.

Trotsky argued against the "popular front" and "union of progressive forces" as follows:

> "A bloc of divergent political groups of the working class is sometimes completely indispensable for the solution of common practical problems. In certain historical circumstances, such a bloc is capable of attracting the oppressed petty-bourgeois masses whose interests are close to the interests of the proletariat. The joint force of such a bloc can prove far stronger than the sum of the forces of each of its component parts. On the contrary, the political alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, whose interests on basic questions in the present epoch diverge at an angle of 180 degrees, as a general rule is capable only of paralysing the revolutionary force of the proletariat." [*Trotsky*, The Lessons of Spain, January 1938]

The Comintern policy of Popular Front aimed at solidarising the workers with "progressive sections of the bourgeoisie" and the peasant masses. Although the proletariat was to be the "leading force" in the Popular Front, in relation to other working class parties, calls for "proletarian unity" only signalled the intention of the Comintern to silence its dissenting rivals.

Where they did form, the Popular Fronts were *class alliances*, negotiated between the leaders of parties, representing distinct social strata and classes, but did *not* create an arena for the struggle for influence and leadership of the mass movement in the way envisaged by Trotsky, since the pacts were invariably predicated on mutual "non-aggression" pacts between the respective party leaders.

It was these political formations, the definitions of "collectivity", which dominated the 1930s and 40s - the great United, Popular and Democratic Fronts, first in Germany, and which were subsequently to define the political geography of the whole globe.

Through these formations, parties representing definite social bases, sought to construct counter-hegemonies, and distribute benefits and capture the intellectual and moral leadership of society. They were not coalitions or alliances of any kind though; one party constituted the "leading force", but the social composition of the Front was deliberately and genuinely diverse.

The consolidation of the Stalinised USSR, the Great Depression and the triumph of Fascism in Europe left little room for emancipatory politics. Nevertheless, it was in this period that the conception of the ***Front*** - be it "Democratic", "Popular" or "United" or whatever - took hold.

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The Second World War and its aftermath, however, led to a gigantic *historic compromise* which gave new life to the social-democratic project. It also meant a degree of prosperity and stability for the working class of the US and Europe. Welfare-state policies, post-war reconstruction and infrastructure-building projects, controlled inflation based on the US dollar, the political application of Marshall Aid funds - a whole series of political and economic measures - were deliberatively applied to prevent a return to the civil conflict of the inter-war years.

In Red Army-occupied Europe, the Popular Front policy took the form of governments in which the role of the non-proletarian parties was played by *phantom* entities created for the purpose by the occupying forces, who in reality constituted the state. But outside of the areas assigned under the Yalta Agreement to the Soviet Union, especially in the former colonies, the Popular Front conception took on real meaning.

Excluded from the post-war historic compromise however, was *firstly,* the mass of the former colonies, now rising in rebellion against a weakened imperialism. The *second* group which had been excluded from the benefits of the post-war compromise, who were directly inspired by the national liberation movements, were the US Blacks. The *third* group to be mentioned is *women.* It was these groups excluded from the post-war compromise which now led rebellion.

The post-war conjunction led to the USSR placing itself in the leadership of many national liberation movements striving for modernisation and national self-determination. National, popular fronts embracing all those who were being excluded from the spoils of empire, whole peoples, *all the classes* of a given nation, together, albeit led by the international party of the proletariat. These national liberation movements were the beginning of the "new" social movements - cross-class, popular movements in pursuit of an *idea*, an idea of self-determination and enjoyment, of *recognition*.

In China, efforts had been made towards a National Front to fight the Japanese, but after the war, national liberation took the form of a civil war against the Kuo Min Tang in which the Chinese Communist Party, whose cadre were drawn from the urban intelligentsia and working class, led a peasant army. Elsewhere the Communist Party played the "leading role" in National Liberation Fronts, with much the same composition. In some countries however, such as Indonesia, the Communist Party did *not initially* play this role, but the basic social formation was the same, that of a "Front" uniting all social classes in pursuit of national liberation. India was also another story. The National People's Front which operated in the Philippines up until the early 1990s was typical of the Front formation. Despite the fact that the Front brought together a diversity of broad organisations operating in distinct social strata, the Philippines Communist Party controlled the Front with an iron fist.

Whether under the whip of MacCarthyite and Cold War terror or under the discipline of Stalinist and social-democratic parties, class compromise eventually prevailed in Europe and North America. The national liberation struggle was the main game so far as struggles for emancipation were concerned. Even where the Communist Parties were not the "leading force" in these struggles, often, such as in Cuba, the newly independent nations had to find refuge within the orbit of the Soviet Union or China. Consequently, the language of class struggle often blurred the *cross-class* character of the movements. Nevertheless, what was fighting imperialism was not a *class*, but whole *peoples* united arms-in-hand under the banner of recognition of their own national independence. This had a transforming effect everywhere.

Frantz Fanon expressed it this way:

> "We believe that the conscious and organised undertaking by a colonised people to re-establish the sovereignty of that nation constitutes the most complete and obvious cultural manifestation that exists. .... The struggle for freedom does not give back to the national culture its former value and shapes; this struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men cannot leave intact either the form or the content of the people's culture. After the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonised man.

> "This new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and for others." [Speech by Frantz Fanon at the Congress of Black African Writers, 1959]

The fate of the different national liberation struggles was as diverse as the countries themselves, but that does not concern us here. The point is

that, as Fanon predicted, these struggles functioned directly as an inspiration to Black and indigenous people oppressed within the imperialist countries, but first of all the American Blacks.

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The complexity of this conjuncture defies narration. Hopefully, the reader will forgive me the schematism of the exposition, in which the objective is solely to bring out the transitions taking place in the form of emancipatory subjectivity.

In the U.S., the centuries-old struggle of Afro-Americans against slavery, "Jim Crow" laws and other forms of racial oppression had already begun to gain momentum as a result of war-time experiences.

When Rosa Parks was arrested in December 1955, for refusing to move to the black section of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, Martin Luther King rose to prominence as leader of a rapidly growing mass social movement. King described himself as a "socialised democrat", and most of his closest advisers were current or former members of the Communist Party until it was banned by the MacCarthyite laws. Mahatma Gandhi was however far more obvious as an inspiration than Mao or Ho Chi Minh in those days. It was a genuine *social movement*. At its base were Church groups, neighbourhood associations, families, union locals, political party branches, sharing nothing in common but the *ideal* of racial tolerance.

The character of the movement is captured in King's "I have a dream ..." speech. Like the Peace Movement, the Civil Rights Movement was organised around an ideal, an ideal purified of even national content, but an ideal capable of mobilising millions and engendering self-sacrifice and life-long struggle and dedication. And many of its leaders indeed died for the cause.

> "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed ... We have waited for more than 300 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace towards gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait". But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park ... There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair ...
>
> "Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The

yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright and freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the *Zeitgeist*, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of the Asia, South America and Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice."
[*Letter from Birmingham Jail*, May 1963]

The Civil Rights Movement drew strength, confidence and inspiration directly from the national liberation struggles. Soon it began also to draw tactical and strategic lessons as well. Malcolm X observed: "While King is having a dream, the rest of us Negroes are having a nightmare." By the time of King's assassination in April 1968, the Black Panther Black Liberation Movement, founded in October 1966, had already become the most dynamic and challenging faction within the Civil Rights Movement, demanding not just equality, but *self-determination* for the Black community and determined to pursue their objective arms in hand. The Black Panthers were subsequently repressed with murderous force beginning in December 1969.

Like any social movement, once its abstract notion (its ideal) was formed, it developed from abstract to concrete. That is to say, although organised around an *ideal*, as this ideal was pursued in the various aspects of social life, the movement went through a process of differentiation and crystallisation of its myriad of local groups into a new configuration along social and ideological lines. The struggle of tendencies which was lacking in the Fronts of the 1930s and '40s flourished within this social movement. This process led eventually to its *institutionalisation* and the incorporation in laws and norms of social life, to its *objectification*. Although there may appear to be a superficial similarity between the organising bodies of the Civil Rights Movement and the National Liberation Fronts, both being organised around an ideal, in essence and in actuality they were quite different.

Even the Black Panthers, who certainly sought a change of government, only demanded the just implementation of the U.S. Constitution, not its overthrow, quoting it in its entirety in their founding 10 Point Plan. The Civil Rights Movement did not and could not seek state power or its overthrow (The Nation of Islam notwithstanding), but rather *recognition and* social *equality within* American society. All successful national liberation movements, on the other hand, transformed themselves into states and their governments.

It is necessary to mention here the Peace Movement. Peace Movements, of a largely pacifist character have existed in the wake of wars in the past. The world-wide character of the World War Two, and the Cold War threat of nuclear annihilation which followed, stamped its character on the Peace Movement of this time. The Movement was initiated by Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell and Linus Pauling and other Nobel Prize winners in 1955, in the wake of Atom Bomb tests by Britain and the Soviet Union and it mobilised large numbers of young middle-class people in Europe and America. The Peace Movement in the US

intersected with the Black Civil Rights Movement.

Emulating Gandhi's tactics in the U.S., the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) launched the sit-in movement, at the segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960. Supermarkets, libraries, and movie theatres were targeted as the movement swept across the country. In May 1961, the Freedom Rides began. Tens of thousands of students participated, many thousands of whom were arrested and beaten. These experiences alongside African-Americans transformed the student movement, who then turned to applying the same kind of militancy to issues of principle affecting them as students.

Another factor which needs to be mentioned here is the rift which opened up between the progressive intelligentsia and the working class somewhere around the mid-1950s, possibly related to the suppression of the Hungarian Uprising. This was illustrated in 1968 by the bashing of students by Communists in Warsaw and the betrayal of the Paris students by the CGT. In actuality it was a split between the Stalinist movement and the young intelligentsia, who had played such an important part in the Communist Parties and Popular Fronts of the inter-war years.

The intervention of the National Liberation and Civil Rights Movements in the Peace Movement and the Student Protest Movement, ignited new alignments under conditions where the working class was already facing its prospect of losing its hegemonic position on the Left.

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The post-war historic *compromise*, the resistance of the organised working class, and the integration of the world economy under the US dollar contributed to the emergence of the social movements which by-passed the former "leading role" of the working class. The acceleration of the social division of labour, and most notably the *socialisation of women's labour* constituted a dramatically new conjuncture as the post-war boom began to exhaust itself. The chain of reaction which ran from the *national* liberation movements to *Black* Liberation flowed on to *Women's Liberation*. The third wave of the women's movement was of a quite different character from the earlier waves. The word "sexism" entered the English language in 1968 by analogy with "racism" marking one of the sharpest discontinuities in social landscape the world has experienced.

Kate Millett expressed it this way:

> "The study of racism has convinced us that a truly political state of affairs operates between the races to perpetuate a series of oppressive circumstances. The subordinated group has inadequate redress through existing political institutions, and is deterred thereby from organising into conventional political struggle and opposition.
>
> "Quite in the same manner, a disinterested examination of our system of sexual relationship must point out that the situation between the sexes now, and throughout history, is a case of that phenomenon .... Through this system a most

ingenious form of "interior colonisation" has been achieved. It is one which tends moreover to be sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring. However muted its present appearance may be, sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power. [*Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett 1969]

While the women's liberation movement introduced a critique of modern society which continues to this day to transform ideas, institutions and relationships and went to the heart of the human condition, it differed from the claim of the civil rights movement in that it introduced a "*competitive*" claim for recognition. Like the woman suffrage movement of the 1870s, women suspected that Blacks would get equality before women. Continuing in Kate Millett's words:

"... our society, like all other historical civilisations, is a patriarchy. ... the priorities of maintaining male supremacy might outweigh even those of white supremacy; sexism may be more endemic in our own society than racism." [*Sexual Politics*]

or in the words of an *anonymous* black woman quoted by Raya Dunayevskaya:

"I'm not thoroughly convinced that Black Liberation, the way it's being spelled out, will really and truly mean my liberation. I'm not so sure that when it comes time 'to put down my gun,' that I won't have a broom shoved in my hands, as so many of my Cuban sisters have." [Dunayevskaya, *New Forces &New Passions*, 1973]

Exactly like the Civil Rights Movement though, the women's movement was a genuine *social movement*, organised around an *emancipatory idea* with a social base which defied any notion of organisation, but all the more effectively penetrated and transformed every branch and avenue of human life. It inspired bravery and self-sacrifice not so much in confronting authority on the streets (though that too!) but in a billion workplaces, kitchens and halls across the world. The invention of the aphorism "The personal is political", added a quality which no social movement before it had had. In this process of institutionalisation and *objectification*, the women's movement also developed radical, socialist, liberal and ... ultimately as many strands of feminism as there are women.

When I say that women raised a "competitive" claim for recognition, this is not to say that there was any essential conflict between each claim for recognition. On the contrary! But their consonance could only be *anticipated*. Both claims had to be established independently, but the articulation of these claims had a logic which was quite different from, for example, the claims of the different nations claiming recognition of their independence. Rather than being the *generalisation* of the claim for liberty, as it had begun, it was a process of *particularisation*, of a notion of emancipation still *in gestation*.

"Us" was the *whole nation* for the national liberation movements, rather than "the working class" as it had been at the turn of the 20th century.

This "us" was thus far broader and more inclusive, but it was really an *abstract general*, *masking* the relationships of exploitation and repression which made up the nation. What flowed from here was the process of *particularisation*. Blacks and Women formed different strata both excluded and oppressed *within* the relations of bourgeois society, but in ways which are *inessential* to the capitalist mode of production itself.

This process of particularisation gathered a momentum of its own. Beginning by uniting *whole nations*, it moved to increasingly particular definitions of "we"; vast national movements ignited massive social movements but it moved inexorably towards identity politics, towards a critical notion of power and domination articulated through intricate relations of stigmatisation lacking any centre.

Perhaps Michel Foucault best expressed the logic of this move:

> "A task that consists of not - of no longer - treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically *form* the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language and to speech. it is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe." [*Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault 1971]

So, there was no *agency* which could in advance validate *all* legitimate claims to recognition. Just because there were women, or there *were* disabled people, or whatever, did no *ipso facto* mean that there existed a legitimate claim to recognition. Each such agency had to form itself and stake its claim to recognition and objectification of that recognition.

Underlying this process of particularisation were new changes in production relations. Macro-economic strategies were being abandoned in favour of micro-economic "reform".

The elaboration of the division of labour, the increasing commodification of social relations, and in particular the growth of "service sector" forms of production and distribution fuelled the spread of "*Toyotist*" industrial methods (like the system of W. Edward Deming, and the *Kaizen* or "continuous improvement" methodology of Masaaki Imai), devolving intellectual labour, including product and process design, quality control and supervision right down to the shop floor.

Although these methods were adopted in Japan in the 1960s, it was not until the early 1980s, when U.S. businesses began to believe they were being eclipsed by the Japanese in both domestic and world markets, that they were embraced by the U.S. Having its immediate impact in the large, generally unionised, enterprises, these methods raised the stratification of the working class to new levels, while reinforcing the marginalisation of the lowest ranks of the proletariat.

In a sense, the Japanese industrialists 'negated' Taylorism by placing responsibility for the engineering of processes back on to the shoulders of the operatives, who had to form "quality circles", enforce their own discipline and take responsibility for perfecting the production process. Meanwhile, servicing and supplying the core of full-time, permanent

employees who formed these "self-managing" workgroups, was a mass of contractors, casual employees and outworkers. This mass was disciplined by insecurity, and it made little difference whether you were formally an employer or an employee.

Subsequently, the growth of franchises (transforming the former branch manager into an independent proprietor who could be screwed to the wall for the benefit of corporate profit) and the use of quasi-commercial relationships in lieu of direction in the *internal* structure of the large corporations (one-line budgets, internal competitive tendering, and so on), the widespread turn to out-sourcing and subcontracting (sometimes transforming the very same employees into contractors or consultants) was fashioning a new terrain in which the very contrast between production and exchange was obscured. Workers at the operative level were working in problems-solving teams and supervising each other, whilst line managers were cast as service-providers in relation to other parts of the same firm. Despite its invisibility, the rule of capital had been made all the more secure by its exclusive reliance on the commodity relation, and the diminution of antiquated forms of domination and discrimination.

Capital had become so ubiquitous, the polarisation of the 19th century so dispersed, that the politics of representation and recognition all but obliterated the politics of class. This brings us to the period of dominance of Identity Politics.

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When a social movement assembles into its ranks such a degree of particularity that it has become *identity*, then we have arrived at a definition of "we" which barely merits the plural at all. Identity politics marked the end of the road for the social movements of the post-world war two period.

Naomi Klein, herself a self-confessed "ID warrior" of the 1990s, expressed the situation perfectly:

> "We knew the fast food chains were setting up their stalls in the library and that profs in the applied sciences were getting awfully cosy with pharmaceutical companies, but finding out exactly what was going on in the boardrooms and labs would have required a lot of legwork, and, frankly, we were busy. We were fighting about whether Jews would be allowed in the racial equality caucus at the campus women's centre, and why the meeting to discuss it was scheduled at the same time as the lesbian and gay caucus - were the organizers implying that there were no Jewish lesbians? No black bisexuals?

> "In the outside world. the politics of race, gender and sexuality remained tied to more concrete, pressing issues, like pay equity, same-sex spousal rights and police violence, and these serious movements were - and continue to be - a genuine threat to the economic and social order. But somehow, they didn't seem terribly glamorous to students on many university campuses, for whom identity politics had evolved by the late eighties into something quite different. Many of the battles we fought were over issues of

"representation" - a loosely defined set of grievances mostly lodged against the media, the curriculum and the English language. ...

"These issues have always been on the political agendas of both the civil-rights and the women's movements and later, of the fight against AIDS. It was accepted from the start that part of what held back women and ethnic minorities was the absence of visible role models occupying powerful social positions, and that media-perpetuated stereotypes - embedded in the very fabric of the language - served to not so subtly reinforce the supremacy of white men. For real progress to take place, imaginations on both sides had to be decolonized. ...

"The backlash that identity politics inspired did a pretty good job of masking for us the fact that many of our demands for better representation were quickly accommodated by marketers, media makers and pop-culture producers alike - though perhaps not for the reasons we had hoped.

"... for many of the activists who had, at one point not so long ago, believed that better media representation would make for a more just world, one thing had become abundantly clear: identity politics weren't fighting the system, or even subverting it. When it came to the vast new industry of corporate branding, they were feeding it. ...

"The need for greater diversity - the rallying cry of my university years - is now not only accepted by the culture industries, it is the mantra of global capital. And identity politics, as they were practiced in the nineties, weren't a threat, they were a gold mine. "This revolution," writes cultural critic Richard Goldstein in *The Village Voice,* "turned out to be the savoir of late capitalism." And just in time, too." [*Patriarchy gets Funky*, Naomi Klein, 2001]

It was from this ground that a new political animal began to evolve - **the alliance**, the absolute abstract general collective.

The Greens

Before completing this historical section, consideration is due to the social movement which has proved most tenacious *in continuing to exist as a social movement,* and that is the Environmental Movement. Like the Peace Movement, the Green Movement was actually initiated "from above", by the Club of Rome, an elite group of national and business leaders which met in Rome in 1968 focussing on the "North-South divide", and in 1972 published the epochal document *Limits to Growth.* The environmental movement became of course a world-wide popular, grass-roots movement which unrelentingly challenges the kind of people who met in Rome in 1968. It's trajectory varies greatly from country to country, and there is no need to follow its complex history here. In many respects its development has meant, just like other successful social movements, the *objectification* of its ideal by way of laws, institutions and social norms thoroughly incorporated into modern life.

Nevertheless, *despite* this objectification, the Green Movement continues to exist in many countries as an extremely broad and vibrant social

movement as such, including those who function squarely as part of the objectification or institutionalisation of the movement, those who operate within the political sphere within both industrialised countries and in developing countries, and those who live in intentional communities "opting out" of mainstream political life. This is possible, perhaps, because over and above its specific demands in relation to care of the Earth, the Green movement has always incorporated *ethical* principles which so far defy such institutionalisation.

Perhaps this fact could be understood on the basis that there are, fundamentally, *two* universals binding humanity into a whole: on the one hand, universal social and political life, founded on the growth of the *world market*, i.e., the exchange of human labour and material products, and consequently the actualisation of "world history", and on the other hand, the finite and interconnected *bio-sphere* we share whether consciously or not, i.e., the fact that we breath the same pollutable air, are flooded by and drink from the same water-systems and so on. There is thus an element of intersubjectivity which transcends the moral common sense which may arise on the basis of relationships mediated by labour or the products of labour. Such a sense can only arise through a shared sense of Nature.

Consequently, the Environmental Movement has a quite special place in the period now to be considered.

"The Multitude"

In their much-acclaimed *Empire*, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt also sketched an outline of the development of emancipatory collective subjectivity over the same period. Their outline is as follows:

> "Between the communist revolutions of 1917 and 1949, the great anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s and 1940s, and the numerous liberation struggles of the 1960s up to those of 1989, the conditions of the citizenship of the multitude were born, spread, and consolidated. Far from being defeated, the revolutions of the twentieth century have each pushed forward and transformed the terms of class conflict, posing the conditions of a new political subjectivity, an insurgent multitude against imperial power. [*Empire,* p. 394]

> "The **first phase** of properly capitalist worker militancy, that is, the phase of industrial production that preceded the full deployment of Fordist and Taylorist regimes, was defined by the figure of the *professional worker*, the highly skilled worker organised hierarchically in industrial production. This militancy primarily transforming the specific power of the valorisation of the worker's own labour and productive cooperation into a weapon to be used in a project of *reappropriation*, a project in which the singular figure of the worker's own productive power would be exalted. A republic of worker councils was its slogan; a soviet of producers was its telos; and autonomy in the articulation of modernization was its program. The birth of the modern trade union and the construction of the party as vanguard both date from this period of worker struggles and effectively overdetermine it.

"The **second phase** of capitalist worker militancy, which corresponded to the deployment of Fordist and Taylorist regimes, was defined by the figure of the *mass worker*. The militancy of the mass worker combined its own self-valorisation as a refusal of factory work and the extension of its power over all mechanisms of social reproduction. Its program was to create a real *alternative* to the system of capitalist power. The organization of mass trade unions, the construction of the welfare state, and social-democratic reformism were all results of the relations of force that the mass worker defined and the overdetermination it imposed on capitalist development. The communist alternative acted in this phase as a counter-power within the processes of capitalist development.

"Today, in the [**third**] phase of worker militancy that corresponds to the post-Fordist, informational regimes of production, there arises the figure of the *social worker*. In the figure of the social worker the various threads of immaterial labour-power are being woven together. A constituent power that connects mass intellectuality and self-valorisation in all the arenas of the flexible and nomadic productive social cooperation is the order of the day. In other words, the program of the social worker is a project of *constitution*. ... a biopolitical unity managed by the multitude, organized by the multitude, directed by the multitude - absolute democracy in action." [*Empire,* pp 409-10]

The comparison and contrast of this scheme with the one presented above can be left to the reader. The principal difference this author has is with Hardt/Negri's assertion that the current conjuncture constitutes the phase of complete formation of the self-conscious "multitude", while:

"The only event we are still awaiting is the construction, or rather insurgence, of a powerful organization. The genetic chain is formed and established and renewed by the new cooperative productivity, and this we await only the maturation of the political development of the *posse*. We do not have any models to offer for this event. Only the multitude through its practical experimentation will offer the models and determine when and how the possible becomes real." [*Empire,* p. 411]

To begin with acclaiming the constitution of a self-conscious world-wide proletariat, and then go on to "await" the "insurgence" of its world-party, is to gloss over just where the movement is at at the moment, and what ways forward may be open to it.

Note: Essential Development

In sketching this development of collective subjectivity over the past 150 years, I do not suggest that, when one form of subjectivity and its opposite is overtaken by a new form of subjectivity and struggle, that the old form disappears. On the contrary, as Hegel puts it:

"In the sphere of Essence one category does not pass into another, but refers to another merely. ... In the sphere of Being, when somewhat becomes another, the somewhat has vanished. Not so in Essence: here there is no real other, but

only diversity, reference of the one to *its* other. The transition of Essence is therefore at the same time no transition: for in the passage of different into different, the different does not vanish: the different terms remain in their relation." [*The Shorter Logic*, §111n]

Part Three: Alliance Politics

The radical politics of today operates on the terrain of *alliance politics*; this is the terrain which determines what actions are possible and what are not.

The anti-WTO protests are archetypical examples of alliance politics: a number of diverse organisations and individuals on their peripheries cooperate for several months to come together for a day or two to protest against a symbol of global capitalism, and then afterwards go their own way.

The participants do not call upon the WTO to do this or that (other than perhaps to disband), since the alliance does not have any consensus as to what the WTO ought to do. And in any case the alliance does not aspire to supplant the WTO or to engage with it. The symbolic target simply functions to represent what everyone is *against*, but by no means establishes anything that everyone is *for*.

Where different participating groups collaborate in organising the event, very strict protocols apply regulating the collaboration. Discussions are for the purpose of achieving the basic practical goals of the protest, who will be where when, or for providing relevant information. Selection of demands and slogans is carried out collectively where possible, though this is often not possible. On the radical wing of the alliance logic pushes demands to the left to such an extent that mutually irreconcilable demands are put, functioning more as an expression of ethical principles than elements of an agreed program.

The events are generally triumphs of organisation (at least until a change of plan is required). The whole is so much greater than the sum of the parts, let alone any of the parts taken separately, that any idea of it being a front for one or another of the participating currents is nonsense and anyone silly enough to pose as leader is bound to make an idiot of themselves. Consensus decision-making prevails throughout and all forms of hidden agenda, egotism or manipulation are *verboten*.

The more typical manifestation of alliance politics though is where a campaign is initiated to effect some change in the law or stop some local government initiative or whatever. The range of possibilities offered by the terrain of alliance politics is vast and far from exhausted. If the "gatekeepers" of local communities, for example, organisers of voluntary organisations and so on, were to devote only a small proportion of their energies to maintaining their network, then the potential to draw on the network for the purpose of alliance politics when needed would be enormous.

The only mistake, however, would be to cast such alliances as "movements" or worse still to try to organise them into a "front" or a "party". People are busy enough defending the local nature reserve or eradicating some disability or whatever, without dealing with someone trying to convert them to the new religion.

But of course people will try. All the participants in an alliance have their political beliefs and their own critique of contemporary society, whether or not they belong to a party or some social movement, so to exclude

people from an alliance on the basis of their political affiliation undermines the whole basis for alliance politics. Unfortunately, the left-wing socialist parties more often than not so misunderstand the terrain of alliance politics and their participation can be so destructive that they are increasingly likely to be excluded from alliances.

The mechanics of bringing autonomist "caravans" together with membership parties poses real challenges. Since autonomists do not generally recognise relations of delegation or representation, their organising meetings are always open, and naturally form the common organising forums with others, who belonging to parties or movements, are able to caucus outside of open meetings. The autonomists can react by defending themselves by setting rules of debate before anyone else join in and thereafter ruling out of order all attempts to discuss the decision-making rules.

On the other hand, it is hard for some to accept that it does not follow that just because you are all discussing in the same room together and in the same project, it is necessary that what is under discussion is a *collective action*. Within a given action, participants in an alliance will independently do different things. What *is* done together, must be decided together, but not everything is done together. If everything was to be done together, then there would be no alliance politics.

The socialists have largely misrecognised the rise of alliance politics as a resurrection of social movements after a few decades of quiet or "retreat"; that is, they see the period of identity politics which came out of the social movements as a "down-turn", and the negation of identity politics into alliance politics as an "up-turn". Since the social movements of the 1960s were largely misrecognised as fronts which parties had to subvert or lead, their apparent reappearance in the 1990s and 2000s means that many left socialist parties see the succession of alliances as movements that they have a duty to split and co-opt.

Alex Callinicos exemplifies this view:

> "This is, as they said in 1968, only a beginning. Anti-capitalism is most widely diffused internationally as a mood. Its development into a movement is quite variable – most advanced in the US and France, much more patchy elsewhere. Ultimate success will depend upon what happened briefly in Seattle – the coming together of organized workers and anti-globalization activists – becoming a sustained movement. And that in turn will require anti-capitalism, still as a diffuse ideology defined primarily by what it is against – neo-liberal policies and multinational corporations, developing into a much more coherent socialist consciousness. All this is ABC for revolutionary Marxists. The fact remains that this is the greatest opening for the left since the 1960s." [Alex Callinicos, *The Anti-Capitalist Movement and the Revolutionary Left*, 2001]

and Ahmed Shawki:

> "The new radicalization may be in the early stages of its development, but it represents a growing rejection of what capital has done in the last period. It is emerging, however, against an international background of retreat and decline by

organized labour and the left, reformist and revolutionary. The balance of class forces shifted decisively in favour of the employers from the 1970s through the 1990s. Rebuilding the forces of organized labour, the left, and, in particular, the revolutionary left, is key to generalizing and building today's radicalization. But an understanding of the period of downturn, or retreat, allows us to understand better what we need to overcome and helps to explain some of the dynamics of today's movement." [*Perspectives for Socialists. Between Things Ended and Things Begun*, Ahmed Shawki, June/July 2001]

The way these alliance campaigns happen today differs from the "fronts" of some decades or more ago. Those fronts would usually be initiated by a political party which sought both to further its own objectives and to extend its influence, setting up relationships with those joining the front, hopefully recruiting them. Work in the Front was party work, and while internal party work still had a distinct existence aside from work in the fronts, the two domains of activity were closely interconnected and mutually supporting.

The relationship also differs from that of the political parties and the social movements of the 1960s, where the participants were united by a very specific ideal. Big campaigns like the opposition to the Springbok tour in New Zealand, for example, manifested the kind of diversity of today's alliances, but whatever the diversity of the participants, all could formulate the rationale for their participation on much the same basis, in support of the unifying ideal, the objectification of which was sought.

The relationship between left political parties and the social movements was always complex of course. The social movements provided a genuine and essential opportunity for political currents to contribute to the debate over tactics and strategy and compete for leadership while their members collaborated in pursuit of the ideal. The left parties also faced the problem of social movements competing for the loyalty and energies of their members, which would otherwise be engaged in "party work". Alliance politics poses similar but different challenges. Insofar as it is distinct from participating in alliances at all, "party work" has become quite separate, even antagonistic and irrelevant to any form of politics.

The point is: the '80s and '90s were not a "*downturn*" but a *change* in the terrain, albeit terrain in which the gulf between the politics of equality and redistributive justice and the politics of recognition and representation opened to its widest.

Political organisations participating in an alliance ought to know that attempts to "take over" alliances or manipulate them cannot succeed, and they shouldn't try. This does not prevent alliance campaigns from functioning as a recruiting ground. Indeed, they are near to being the only recruiting ground available for political parties.

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Every member of an alliance is motivated by some universal principle; the point about an alliance is that the participants are not motivated by the *same*, *shared* ideal, and any attempt to *impose* some shared ideal has

the danger of destroying the alliance.

So even though the collective activity is *intentional* (i.e., is not based on what or where you *are*, but is *voluntary*, for a given shared *purpose*), the object of the intention is rarely universal (as in "Network for Peace"), usually particular ("Anti-X-freeway Campaign") and typically *individual* (S11). In the absence of universal principles flowing from the intention of the alliance, ethical principles governing activity, and relations between participants have to be negotiated on the basis of *no* universal agreement. This situation is similar to the position of the citizens of a multicultural society, where there exists no universally accepted moral code from which appropriate behaviour can be deduced.

In fact, the principles governing relations within an alliance constitute an ethical precept which is able to be generalised, since they do not draw on any external principle other than the need to *collaborate*. It is not possible for the rules and regulations of a political party, social movement or front to be generalised to everyone because not everyone accepts the objectives and principles expressed by the party or social movement. But it *is* possible to generalise the organising principles of an alliance.

Thus alliance politics performs an historic function within modernity, that of giving real social form to ethical principles which pass the Kantian test of being *universalisable* [“Act according to a maxim which can be adopted at the same time as a universal law.” - *Introduction to the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant 1785]. This is despite the extremely serious defect that no alliance has any agreement whatsoever about the kind of society which ought to be.

The social movements which transformed the modern world in the 1960s and '70s were formed around universal principles and were therefore *social movements* properly so called, the particular expressions of universal principles. The social movements were for *transformation* of society rather than its *overthrow*. In Hegelian terms, once having achieved existence as a thing-for-itself, their concept was *subsumed* within the dominant concept of society by effecting the *objective development* of that dominant concept. They changed the world by winning support for the principle they advocated and concretising it by pursuing the implications of the principle within each and every aspect of social life until they ceased to exist as movements, becoming instead simply aspects of universal social life itself, institutionalised in the form of a myriad of laws, institutions and moral norms. But they achieved this objectification by *modifying* the dominant culture, not *overthrowing* it.

But this is not the *only* way in which a notion (social movement) becomes objectified; a notion which confronts the dominant notion of society as its *opposite*, which aims at the destruction of the very essence and foundations of the dominant ideal of modernity (I have in mind here the overthrow of capital), must itself become the *universal subject* before it can embark on the process of objectification by concretising itself, "absorbing" other notions.

Hegel described the process of objectification this way:

> "The onward movement of the notion is no longer either a

> transition into, or a reflection on something else, but
> Development. For in the notion, the elements distinguished
> are without more ado at the same time declared to be
> identical with one another and with the whole, and the
> specific character of each is a free being of the whole notion."
> [*The Shorter Logic*, §161]

A social movement, therefore, which aims to *really* change the modern world, to really go to the *heart* of the problem, must be able to merge with an ethic capable of *universalisation*, to be able to *redefine* the global field.

> "The Notion is the principle of freedom, the power of
> substance self-realised. It is a systematic whole, in which each
> of its constituent functions is the very total which the notion
> is, and is put as indissolubly one with it. Thus in its self-
> identity it has original and complete determinateness. [*The
> Shorter Logic*, §160]

At the same time, the diversity of cultures and spheres of activity which characterises modernity emphatically needs to be retained and developed, rather than brought under the domination of any new, overarching ethos. The only rival to economics as a means of integrating and regulating a world in which this diversity can genuinely flourish, is the ethos being worked out in the minutiae of alliance politics, that kind of *moral common sense* which develops out of collaborating with strangers and with people whose beliefs are different from one's own. So when we talk about "universalisation" here, we do not mean it in the sense of "*totalisation*", but exactly in the sense in which it develops in alliance politics, articulating between divers ideological, functional and cultural domains of activity.

The point with alliance politics is that its "ideal", or rather its *objective*, since it has no "ideal" at all, is wholly external to the ethic governing the collaborative activity. In its purest form, alliance politics may equally be engaged in stopping a WTO meeting, producing a pamphlet against the War on Iraq, launching a terrorist raid, publishing an advertising brochure or selling Kentucky fried chicken. The farmer who joins a protest against the WTO aspires to quite a different vision than the young anarchist who is *in favour of* globalisation, albeit from below. The *only* thing which needs to be agreed is the practical action to be executed.

And that is its *great strength*.

For alliance politics to reach its full potential, all the participants have to *keep to themselves* the ideals which separate them from the others, to be open to the idea that the ideal which they hold dear to themselves may not offer a solution to *every* problem nor answer to *everyone's* prayers.

If it weren't for those ideals, *why would anyone do anything at all?* So it is generally only that aspect of an ideal which interferes with collaboration with others sharing the same objective, which "offends" other people, which people should be asked to keep out of alliance politics, and it is particularly the claim of any idea to universalisation which must be handled with care. Of course, the activity people engage in will mobilise their *entire* personality, political ideals included, but

alliance work does not require theoretical agreement, only practical agreement. If you need to convince someone of the merits of some practical proposal rather than another, it is no good mobilising theoretical arguments which rest on concepts which are not shared. You have to appeal to "common sense" so to speak.

Even though the organisations entering into an alliance, formally do so on the basis that they remain *external* to the alliance, that they make no commitment to modify themselves by entering into a relationship with the other participants, it is inevitable that in such a situation, the participants *cannot* remain unchanged by alliance politics. In particular, as remarked above, the tendency for "party work" to become more and more remote from politics, must take a toll on the parties. It is inconceivable that there will be a significant *dying out* among the participating parties, but there most certainly will be both decomposition and recomposition. Thus inevitably, the number of independent bodies participating in alliances will *grow*, and the polarisation will be manifested on more and more poles, but as a result, may lessen, and the *form* of alliance politics will change.

And it *has to* change. Political activity cannot be sustained on the basis of serial protest. The more abstract the goal, the broader the alliance and the easier the consensus - but the *less* the commitment. One cannot help but make the comparison with how bourgeois society organises itself, on the basis of money, the *abstract* of all social value. But money is not a nothing, it represents the ideal value of society, albeit the *unintentional* ideal value. What alliance politics promises is an *intentional* ideal, but one which it is unable to formulate.

But such a development presupposes the *negation* of alliance politics. A 'movement' which is united only by what it shares in common is *no movement at all.* In Hegel's words:

> "For the sake both of cognition and of our practical conduct, it is of the utmost importance that the real universal should not be confused with what is merely held in common. ...

> "The distinction referred to above between what is merely in common, and what is truly universal, is strikingly expressed by Rousseau in his famous *Contrat social*, when he says that the laws of a state must spring from the universal will, but need not on that account be the will of all. ... The general will is the notion of the will: and the laws are the special clauses of this will and based upon the notion of it." [*Shorter Logic* §163]

The socialists of the workers' movement of the late 19th/early 20th century *had* a notion and were able to deduce from that notion the laws of a socialist state, but apart from brief episodes, they were not able to conquer power, they were not able to overcome and transcend bourgeois society, or where they did, they *missed* the notion of their own movement.

If alliance politics is to become a genuine movement, a genuine universal, which is to embrace the whole of society, *how is this to happen*? To propose that alliance politics should first negate itself, and make itself into a Front, or a social movement or a party, is an absurdity.

Doubtless, alliance politics is the terrain upon which new movements, new ideals, new parties, may arise, but alliances cannot be transformed today into parties, without turning back the clock of history, without regressing.

That the way these alliances work is an innovation, and defines the character of the current political terrain, does not take away from the fact that there are *real problems* in the methods of decision-making and organisation at the moment. The large assemblies of the anti-WTO and anti-detention centre campaigns are sometimes totally incapable of making a decision when posed with a dilemma, and the result is invariably that decisions are made "informally"; that is, in a way which contradicts the decision-making procedures which are formally agreed, usually by a small sub-group of experienced activists. To claim that the negotiation of ethical norms in the collaboration taking place in alliances is the likely birthplace of a new political creature, essentially recognises that these norms are problematic and even dysfunctional as things stand at the moment. At the moment, the dominant organisational principles are *not* the creation of current or recent campaigns, but are generally the received wisdom from earlier periods of activism.

As Naomi Klein observed in her recent collection of essays [*Fences and Windows*], while alliances regularly manage the perfect coordination of the *beginning* of a protest, just getting a consensus on when a protest is to *end* is often simply impossible, far less how to react to unexpected turns of events, or what is to happen next.

In the chapter called *What's Next?*, Klein gives an accurate exposition of the error of trying to transform the anti-WTO alliances into a party or movement:

> "So how do you extract coherence from a movement filled with anarchists, ...? Maybe, as with the internet, the best approach is to learn to surf the structures that are emerging organically. Perhaps what is needed is not a single political party but better links among the affinity groups; perhaps rather than moving towards more centralisation, what is needed is further radical decentralisation.

> "When critics say that the protesters lack vision, they are really objecting to a lack of an overarching revolutionary philosophy ... that they all agree on. That is absolutely true, and for this we should be extraordinarily thankful. At the moment, the anti-corporate movement, the anti-corporate street activists are ringed by would-be leaders, eager for the opportunity to enlist activists as foot soldiers for their particular vision. ...

> "It is to this young movement's credit that it has as yet fended off all these agendas and has rejected everyone's generously donated manifesto, holding out for an acceptably democratic, representative process to take its resistance to the next stage. Perhaps it's true challenge is not finding a vision but rather resisting the urge to settle on one too quickly. If it succeeds in warding off the teams of visionaries-in-waiting, there will be some short-term public relations problems. Serial protesting will turn some people off ... before it signs on to anyone's ten-point plan, it deserves the chance to see if, out of its chaotic

> network of hubs and spokes, something new, something entirely its own, can emerge." [*Fences and Windows*]

Later Klein suggests that "democracy" may constitute the one unifying value shared by all components of the "movement of movements", despite the observation that they manifest a chronic inability to evolve any practicable form of democracy for themselves. This is an important observation, but it needs further thought, because the suggestion is still pointing towards a shared *political ideal* while the evidence is that the basis for this does not exist.

Democracy *is* a problematic ideal: it means *recognition*, for everyone is to be consulted and given due recognition in decisions; *autonomy*, whether in the form of individual autonomy or of the self-determination of communities and peoples; *community* since democracy is the form of political subjectivity which constitutes the community; *equality* because everyone has an equal say and their interests are spoken for.

Freedom, the other grand unifying ideal, is also problematic: it means both the negative freedom of *autonomy* including the self-determination of communities, and the positive freedom which underwrites *equality*; the freedom to *be* which constitutes *recognition*, and the freedom to *do* which constitutes *autonomy*.

While it is "politically incorrect" to introduce into the business of alliance politics a dispute over ideals, since such discussion always bring about *dis*unity and *dis*organisation, there *is* room for discussion and disputation about ethics, about ethical rules and norms, and to some extent even values, since these are the legitimate ground upon which collaboration is based. This legitimacy extends beyond the domain of alliance politics as such.

And in fact, the real target of the mass alliance political protests is not the giant capitalist corporations - which in fact alliances are powerless to stop - but rather the ethical foundations upon which these corporations rest, and the struggles of resistance against these corporations may be the site from which a new ethic may emerge.

Social stratification and the 'Loose ethos'

In her *General Ethics*, *Agnes Heller* holds that the formation of independent functional "spheres" in modern society, replacing the traditional division of labour, is a healthy process in itself provided that "practical reason" can form the basis of a "loose ethic" binding civil society:

> "... I have stressed the desirability of both the moral division of *Sittlichkeit* among the spheres (with the primacy of practical reason as a 'loose ethos') and the plurality of the moral norms of life." [p. 158, *General Ethics*]

By "practical reason", or "conscience", Heller means the capacity of individuals to distinguish between good and bad and choose good before bad. Heller distinguishes between the "totalitarianism of a dominant morality or ideal, such as in traditional society, Stalinism or fundamentalism, and the healthy effect of the kind of "loose ethos" which may develop:

> "... the modern imperatives of practical reason must be universal enough and general enough *not to interfere* with the relative independence of inner-spheric norms and rules. If they interfere with this independence, fundamentalism will be the result, and this in turn will represent a violation of the value of freedom, the value which, in the end, modern practical reason finally stands for. ..." [*General Ethics*, p 163]

The kind of 'loose ethos' that Heller talks of, which emerges through the testing and challenging of the norms prevailing within the different "spheres", is close to what is proposed here as emerging through the *collaboration* of people pursuing different ideals or vocations, who continue to challenge the norms of their own sphere of activity from the standpoint of a general or universal ethos.

> "Let me emphasise once again that it is not a regressive development that the all-encompassing 'dense' ethos of society has disappeared. But an all-encompassing *loose* ethos rooted in the universal values of freedom and life must still develop and grow beyond its present emaciated form. A loose ethos such as this would not revoke the division of *Sittlichkeit* ["ethical life"] among the spheres, and it would not hamper the coexistence and mutual recognition of diverse forms of life with their unique concrete systems of *Sittlichkeit*. A loose ethos such as this could be supported, reinforced and kept alive by the attitude of morality, by the individual's practical relationship to the fundamental norms. The term 'individual' stands here for both for the 'individual person' and the 'individual form of life' of the community. If this were the situation, then the process of the division of *Sittlichkeit* along the lines of spheric differentiation could unqualifiedly be called a process of emancipation and progression. [*General Ethics*, p. 165]

The position supported in this article is that such a 'loose ethos' can be constructed by pursuing the diversity of progressive and emancipatory struggles in all the various spheres of social practice, by means of *ethical politics*. It is my contention that it is the *commodification* of all aspects of life, characteristic of modernity, which both generates the independent "spheres", and the basis for this shared "loose ethos"; what Heller refers to as its "emaciated form" reflects the fact that the relation of *commodity exchange* has yet created only the potentiality but not yet the actuality of genuinely human *collaboration*.

Agency

This succession in the form of collectivity down the decades raises the question of *agency*. If one can imagine a mythical moment in the past when production was carried out in the manner described by Adam Smith while all the remnants of aristocratic privilege had already been eliminated, then we would have had a situation where the practical reproduction of material life lay with the exploited and the theoretical, political, social and moral leadership lay in the hands of the exploiters - an absolute polarity of subject and object. Here the contradiction of agency would have been posed as sharply as possible, and this contradiction made the class struggle the central axis of progressive politics. One has only to look at how the productive process itself has

changed, to see how the struggle for an agency of radical political change has developed, and become ever more complex.

It is no longer possible to propose that any limited social strata can capture the intellectual and moral leadership of society, if one leaves aside the category of "not-capital", which embraces the overwhelming majority of the population, notwithstanding pension schemes, share ownership and whatever.

There is no compelling reason to insist that social transformation and a reconstruction of society must be carried out on any narrower basis than that upon which the relations of production are themselves reproduced in modern bourgeois society, excluding capital itself.

Ethical politics posits the unity of political struggle and social life.

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We briefly discussed above the internal dynamics of alliance politics, the inevitability of the modification and proliferation of subjects participating in alliances, and the necessary transformation of its forms in connection with its changing content. No new ideal can enter the world and become a genuine subject with its *actualisation*. This means it becoming a *cause* on the political or social field and finding its own reflection in each and every branch of social life, and entering that stage of its development called *reciprocity*, wherein it is, as they say, a *cause of itself*.

As things stand at the moment, even the broadest arena of action of alliance politics tends to be the territory of *professional activists*, more or less isolated from the mass, from the "multitude" in fact.

Ethical politics offers a way out of this ghetto.

Consensus Decision Making and Formal Meeting Procedure

Before moving to an outline of ethical politics as I see it unfolding in the period ahead, it is worthwhile reflecting on one of the ways in which the two antagonistic signs of political radicalism meet on the terrain of alliance politics, the two antagonistic conceptions of decision-making.

Formal meeting procedure (FMP), or "Standing Orders," dates back to the dawn of the bourgeois epoch, from the early companies and guilds, and have been practiced by trade unions and working class political organisations for centuries. The underlying assumption is: **(1)** that the participants in a decision process may potentially have irreconcilable ideological differences or conflicts of economic interest, and **(2)** that the organisation has assets, whether of a material or human kind, over and above the delegates present in the meeting. Consequently, FMP does not really attempt to resolve differences, but rather makes decisions by majority and is designed to ensure, on one hand, that a minority is not able to disrupt or obstruct the majority and conduct of meetings is always in the hands of the majority, and on the other hand, that the meeting is always able to hear dissenting views and receive relevant information, so that a well-informed proposal may be formulated and receive majority support. The fact that the organisation has assets (for example it may be the peak body of a large organisation), ensures that

the minority will continue to participate even though it is out-voted. The shared assets constitute an objectification of the "*we*" which *mediate* the conflict and hold the organisation together.

Consensus Decision Making (CDM), on the other hand, has its origins, I believe, in the Civil Rights Movement and the Peace Movement after the Second World War and became the normal means of decision-making throughout all the social movements of the subsequent decades. CDM takes as its starting point **(1)** that "everyone is on the same side," and **(2)** that the only assets the meeting has is the active commitment of those present. Consequently, rather than trying to enforce the will of the majority, emphasis is on patiently achieving a consensus. Once consensus has been achieved by patient discussion, and every point have view has been given *recognition*, the organisation can count on the commitment of everyone present.

For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that the various procedures of decision-making actually number four, for there is also the *informal* decision-making process normal among a group of friends or people who are thoroughly bonded to one another and act as one without the assistance of any procedure whatsoever, and on the other hand, the *military* and other *traditional* forms of decision-making in which the superior officer simply issues commands and the subordinates obey. There is, of course a time and a place for *all* these different decision-making processes. But what concerns us most of all here is the two great traditions of radical democratic politics: Formal (majority voting) decision-making and Consensus Decision Making.

It is the Consensus Decision Making process which predominates in alliance politics. Of course, *within* an alliance *all sorts* of decision-making processes are operative, but it is CDM which is generally articulating between the component parts of an alliance. This practice has been learnt and inherited from the past. While the shortcoming of FMP is obvious, the shortcoming of CDM on the terrain of alliance politics is less obvious, at least until it is witnessed.

At a recent blockade of a refugee detention centre, much to the surprise of the demonstrators, a number of detainees took the opportunity to make their escape and took cover amongst the ranks of the startled protestors. This generated a huge crisis for the protest, since no-one had anticipated this eventuality, far less had the alliance made a decision about how to respond. The protestors met right through the night and when dawn came they were no closer to arriving at a consensus about whether to encourage the detainees to return to the authorities or to facilitate their escape. Fortunately, in the meantime a small group of experienced activists resolved the problem and facilitating the escapees to slip out and lose themselves in a nearby metropolis.

Another anecdote. The protest took place in the desert, where there was no water to be had for miles. The working group responsible for logistics had identified this as a problem; one view was that for a few hundred dollars a water tanker could be hired and everyone would have as much water as they wanted very cheaply; on the other hand, others thought that by supplying drinking water from a tanker implied that there was *a* protest, as opposed to a *convergence* of about 20 different protests, and

that individuals and groups should supply their own bottles of drinking water. In the end, one of the supporters of the tanker idea simply announced that, it being impossible to get consensus on the question, they were going to fork out for the tanker from their own pocket. This proposal was acceded to and the person *did* hire a tanker and were indeed fully reimbursed for the cost after the protest was over.

Stories like these, and the incidents cited by Naomi Klein in *Fences and Windows*, are normal. CDM actually does not work in alliances. And nor does FMP. The reasons that FMP does not work are obvious enough: there is no ideological agreement and people absolutely refuse the imposition of a majority decision. People who have been "brought up" on majority-decision making usually don't need to be given reasons why CDM doesn't work, since they have always believed that CDM was dysfunctional, at least when it comes to action. However, if one accepts that CDM served the social movements very well, it is really not at all obvious why it is becoming dysfunctional in the environment of alliance politics.

I believe that the underlying conditions, the presumptions upon which CDM is based, are not actually fulfilled in alliances.

Firstly, it is not possible now simply to assume that "everyone is on the same side." There may be huge ideological gaps and conflicts of interest within alliances. The unifying objective for any given action is *not strong enough* to bind conflicting allies. As is frequently observed, discussions may be literally interminable, especially in the event of an unexpected turn of events needing to be responded to.

Secondly, the only "asset" an alliance has is the rich and creative environment it provides for political activity. Political parties attracted to an alliance for its potential for recruiting are happy to consent to a majority view while still harbouring disagreements, but they will never accept any constraint on what they do outside the alliance.

Binding majority voting remains untenable except in the situation just mentioned. In general the only alternative to consensus is a split.

Shortly after the successful S11 campaign in Melbourne in 2000, which succeeded in uniting Trades Hall with the social movements and radical political groups, the same participants entered a process for M1 (i.e., May Day 2001). This process was less successful, and the splitting of the campaign manifested itself in the resort to majority voting. As soon as they were out-voted, the libertarian wing stopped meeting at Trades Hall and organised separately.

Thus we have in alliance politics a tension between the two phases of development of organisational thinking: FMP and CDM. This tension corresponds to the tension between the struggle for liberty and equality originating in the socialist movement, and the struggle for recognition and difference originating in the social movements. The tension is manifested in dysfunctional thinking. People have to be prepared to let go of the organisational procedures they know and love and work out new principles of decision-making.

Splitting when consensus cannot be reached is not, in fact, the unmitigated disaster it is taken to be by those who are accustomed to

building parties and fronts. "What *we* do shall be decided by you and me" is, I maintain, the maxim of the current period. The converse of this is that "What we do *separately* is decided *separately*."

Naomi Klein cited the example of a failure to agree on whether to wind up a blockade at a certain time [*Fences and Windows*, p. 22-23]. The decision was for the two sides of the debate to do as they wished, and this of course had the effect of ending the blockade. The same issue arose in the S11 process in Melbourne, and the same decision was made, but with the *proviso* that the group which wanted to leave would delegate a group of stewards (older construction workers) to watch over the youngsters who were going to stay, to make sure that they didn't get bashed by the police.

I think that this indicates how alliance decision-making is developing. There has to be an "ease" about *dividing* an alliance when a consensus is not reached, which respects people's right of self-determination and recognises the relative validity of anyone's point of view until the question is finally resolved by history.

So, in the detention centre example, perhaps what should have happened is that once it was obvious that the alliance could not agree on whether to aid the escapees or advise them to return, the meeting should have been split in two, and the two different groups decide on how to deal both with the escapees and the other half of the alliance, and do so in a comradely manner. In any case, the escapees themselves had determined their own action without asking for the opinion of the protesters. Whether such a split would become a permanent parting of the ways, or perhaps very soon reconcile itself with the benefit of hindsight, experience and mutual respect, could not be predicted.

Part Four: The Fight for Justice in the 21st Century

If it be accepted that alliance politics is capable of carrying out agreed common actions, but incapable of formulating or implementing a new social principle, then the question is: how can progressive political struggle take place on the terrain of alliance politics?

The answer proposed here is: *ethical politics.* Ethical politics confronts the need to actively *form* a *new* political subjectivity and shape the cultural norms required to undermine and supplant the domination of right-wing populism and the anxiety of post-modern life.

Ordinarily, public political debate is conducted on the basis of arguing over which policy or which party is best able to further a given social good which is itself not the subject of public dispute. Values of course motivate political action and voters may prefer one party to another on the basis of placing one value above another. But values are not easily changed, and successful politics generally lies in perceiving the values underlying politics, and in being able to present oneself as effectively defending those values, rather than in attempting to change the values held by voters or other political actors.

In fact, changing voting patterns and the rise and fall of different political forces do result from shifts in social values, whose roots lie deep in social practice, but the political actors generally *react* to these shifts,

rather than participating in changing them.

Alliance politics is no different in this respect.

Although each of the component parts of an alliance have their own ideal, when they participate in alliance-making, these ideals have to be left at the door step, so to speak. Consequently, alliance politics forbids any attempt to organise broadly around a whole shared program or historical *ideal*. However, the claim is that it is more than ordinarily amenable to the promotion of *ethical* politics. The relation between *ideals* and *ethics* is this: ordinarily, what is ethical is expressed by means of an ideal, a *regulative* ideal; the ideal expresses the way the world would be if *everyone* adhered to the given ethic or moral precept, i.e., if the ethical principle were to be *universalised*. On the basis of an agreed ideal, it is then possible to determine what is ethical: what are your rights, what is your duty and what is virtuous. In the broader terrain of postmodern multicultural society, and in the domain of ethical politics, no such agreement is possible. But what is relied upon are the ethical principles governing collaboration - these *must* be agreed. Collaboration aims at *practical agreement*; theoretical agreement is generally immaterial.

The fight for ethics generates new norms and rules of behaviour and almost inevitably eventually gives rise to values, ideals and principles because an ideal is nothing but the generalisation of an ethic and a social movement nothing other than the actuality of a principle.

Ethical politics is the process of generalisation of the experiences of alliance politics, which recognises that, despite itself, participation in alliances is a relation which reciprocally modifies all the 'parties' (agents) engaged in collaborative political action, and actively promotes that process towards the development of a new subjectivity.

While it is true to say that ethical politics opens up new possibilities, entering the domain of ethical political struggle also entails confronting *resistance*. There are several successive ethical arena, each of which goes a little deeper and each of which generates stronger resistance. The successive arena are as follows.

Rights

Rights is the base level of ethical struggle. The demand for recognition from, say, people with disabilities, or the demand for equality and liberty, take first of all the struggle for new *rights*. For centuries the arena of rights has been the legitimate place for ethical political struggle, and the dominance of liberalism has meant that proponents of new rights can expect to get a hearing. Even here though, barriers are going up.

The "communitarian" Amitai Etzioni has called for a "moratorium on the minting of new rights" on the basis that the proliferation of rights has undermined traditional community. The good old fashioned community doesn't really have room for black, gay, female atheists who value their privacy.

Duty

Conservatives, however, don't mind ethical rhetoric about duty, in fact

they are the moralistic advocates of duty *par excellence*. Liberals on the other hand will resist any attempt to cross the boundary of ethical struggle from rights into duties, from what you are *allowed* to do, to what you *ought* to do. In the domain of duty, ethical politics is the opponent of liberalism. Ethical politics certainly aims at the use of peer pressure and the passing of new laws if necessary to further the progressive cause.

Constitutive Ideals

Inseparable from the struggle over the rights attached to this or that group (what that group is allowed to do), is the struggle to *constitute* a group (who is it that has these rights). Group or class *consciousness*, group or class rights, and group or class *organisation* are inextricably linked. The struggle for organisation and recognition is a form of ethical politics and draws on all the forms of struggle of ethical politics.

Virtue

If an *ethics of duty* (what you should do) meets more resistance from liberals than an *ethics of rights* (what you are allowed to do), then an *ethics of virtue* (what you desire to do) is regarded by liberalism as beyond the pale. Virtue however constitutes a most important domain for ethical political struggle, inseparable from the struggle for consciousness, organisation and rights.

Values

Discussion of values has already been proposed by others as a means of tackling the problems of alliance politics. The idea is that people involved in working together should disclose their values and give recognition to the values of others. Behind this also is the hope of discovering shared values which could underpin the notion of collectivity lacking in alliance politics, notions such as democracy and freedom. By the end of the shooting war in Iraq, the Victorian Peace Network arrived at *Peace*, *Social Justice* and *Human Rights* as their shared values. This was seen as important to facilitate the continued work of the Network as the work of the network entered a new phase.

Value-debate is the arena of choice for liberalism, for it is in values more than anywhere that individual choice flowers. Nevertheless, the fostering and interrogation of values is one of the domains of ethical politics, and insofar as it unites rather than divides it is valuable.

Regulative Ideals

Regulative ideals are the "utopian" images of society which allow us to make sense of ethical propositions. A regulative ideal is the abstract generalisation of an ethic, how the world would be if an ethical principle were to be generalised. *Laissez faire*, the idyllic village community, the socialist utopia, are examples which demonstrate that regulative ideals need to be used with care. Nevertheless, I believe they have an important place in ethical political struggle.

Ethical politics is not utopianism however. Ethical politics does not begin with *carte blanche* - a flight of the imagination counterposed to actuality, but is an articulation of *existing* norms and practices with *new*, resistant norms and practices emerging the process of political struggle, a struggle

to extend or *change* of the scope of norms constituting social groups, which exclude or stigmatise some people for the benefit of others, the struggle against legal and bureaucratic *hypocrisy*, and so on.

Methods of Struggle

Ethical politics opens up possibilities for political struggle which have hitherto been under-utilised.

Opening up the political Arena

In the first place, politics today has become a profession, a profession which requires a considerable body of knowledge and skill in judgment, and the time and energy to pursue it. But even political experts can hardly lay claim to extraordinary levels of "scientific precision" in what they do, and very often the consequence of a given policy decision is an open question. The ordinary person may rightly feel that they have very little right to pass judgment on political matters. Public participation in politics is thus largely reduced to the right to vote for the winning team of experts. Radical politics has only made the situation worse. It is laughable sometimes to witness people who look like they've dropped down from Mars calling for "community" control or participation, usually code for amateurism. While people feel inclined to rule themselves ineligible for participation in politics, there is a tendency for manifest idiocy to be an attractive trait for conservative politicians.

The complexity and opacity of modern politics is an obstacle to emancipatory politics for which *participation* is a fundamental pre-requisite. But it is a problem for *instrumental* politics, for politics which bases itself on the question: "What are the consequences?" - a *technical* question, which can be answered only by the "expert" elite.

Ethical politics however, bases itself not so much on the consequences of an action, but primarily on the inherent ("deontological") value of the policy or action itself.

The problem of public participation in politics is thereby transformed. Every person has an equal right to determine what is right and to govern their own activity according to what they believe to be right and to criticise the behaviour of *other* people on the same basis. You don't have to be an expert to know right from wrong.

Ethical politics is absolutely non-elitist. It essentially rests in the day-to-day activity and values of masses of people and their moral common sense. The political activist can and should appeal to people to conduct themselves at work, in the street, at school or wherever according to what is claimed to be ethical - and *vice versa.*

The problem of organisation

In the second place, it is not at all necessary to "have the numbers," set up a massive bureaucracy or to muster a sufficient number of people around an ethical principle in order get to work with it. It is in the domain of ethical action that one single individual can have the most profound effect even if they are absolutely alone.

There are thousands and thousands of people who have in the past been active in political parties and social movements who currently feel utterly

isolated, demoralised and unable to make any contribution to progressive politics. Voting for the Greens or turning up at an Anti-War rally where no-one is bothering to listen to the speeches is all that is open to them. *Ethical politics* opens up a genuine avenue for political activism. Taking a stand on broad ethical issues within one's profession can be transformed into something with profound political impact, for example. It is not necessary to go into the streets to practice civil disobedience or to be in possession of national secrets to be a whistle-blower. Being all alone can in fact create the aura of heroism which can be a catalyst for change.

Public Intellectuals

Thirdly, the scope for activity by artists and public intellectuals is profound. It is not necessary to join a party or social movement in order to intervene on the ethical political field.

For the public intellectual, the most vital kind of activity is the analysis of political speeches and programs and public life in general in order to discover the underlying values and ideals which are driving them. What are the values that John Howard appeals to? Mateship? Country? Safety? If the majority of people support these values, what is the way forward? *Semiotic analysis* is required to reveal the nature and identity of the values, constitutive and regulative ideals, prejudices and dichotomies structuring political debate.

I think Norman Mailer's recent Commonwealth Club speech was insightful in many respects in a way which is relevant to our topic. He categorises American conservatives into two types: value conservatives [Pat Buchanan] and flag conservatives [George W.]:

> "Old-line conservatives like Pat Buchanan believed that America should keep to itself and look to solve those of its problems that we were equipped to solve. Buchanan was the leader of what might be called old-value conservatives who believe in family, country, faith, tradition, home, hard and honest labour, duty, allegiance and a balanced budget. The ideas, notions and predilections of George W. Bush had to be, for the most part, not compatible with Buchanan's conservatism"

Mailer explains Bush's push for an American Empire as follows:

> "From a militant Christian point of view, America is close to rotten. The entertainment media are loose. Bare belly buttons pop onto every TV screen, as open in their statement as wild animals' eyes. The kids are getting to the point where they can't read, but they sure can screw. So one perk for the White House, should America become an international military machine huge enough to conquer all commitments, is that American sexual freedom, all that gay, feminist, lesbian, transvestite hullabaloo, will be seen as too much of a luxury and will be put back into the closet again. ... To flag conservatives, war now looks to be the best possible solution." [*Only in America*, Norman Mailer, 2003]

Whether Mailer is right on this, I don't know, but the connection he makes between ethical concerns and big power politics is worth paying attention to.

It must be emphasised: even if we could successfully expose John Howard as a crook and a fool, all that would achieve is to open the door for his Deputy, Peter Costello, and even if the entire Liberal Party were to be exposed as a bunch of opportunists, this would only open the way for the Labor Party to carry out the Liberal Party program. And not only that, if it were to be shown that the policies of the liberal party will not achieve what they are claimed to achieve, we are still no further forward. It is necessary to aim our fire at the very social goods which *both* government parties claim to pursue and which condition the entire popular political discourse.

For artists, comedians, satirists, writers and so on, there is a dual project. Firstly, they must find how to depict the ethical principles (Mateship, My Country, etc.), so that they can be firmly grasped and understood by the population at large - identified explicitly as what a given politician or program promotes. Secondly, and most importantly, is the assault upon those commonly accepted values and constructs, their criticism, derision and parody. (The promotion of *new* values capable of inspiring social action, cannot be the object of political suggestion, being the preserve of art as such.) How can we bring about a situation where most people perceive that anyone arguing for country is advocating *Balkanisation*? Where "mateship" is seen by everyone as synonymous with *tribalism*? Where the obsession with security is seen as social *agoraphobia* and *scaremongering*?

The achievements of the populist right in subverting the language for their own political ends is extraordinary. Consider some of Dexter Pinion's favourite epithets: "the chattering classes," "political correctness," "tree-huggers," "bleeding heart," "black armband version of history," "latte-sipping, Chardonnay-swilling," etc., etc. The ease with which populist imagery can be brought to bear in the service of social conservatism is frightening, but issues the challenge to ethical politics to find how to respond. "Economic rationalism" is one of the few terms which Left has coined which has succeeded in isolating a genuine social elite while connecting up with popular consciousness, but even this term was eagerly adopted by right-wing populists for their own purposes.

It is unfortunate that most political satire today serves only to comfort the disaffected, rather than serve to disable the support of reactionary ethical values, to undermine political leaders, policies and parties, without touching the values which cause people to continue supporting them. To portray John Howard as a frog-eyed idiot can only serve to make left-wing people feel a bit better about being on the outer, but is unlikely in itself to change anyone's political persuasion.

On the other hand, individuals express and actualise values. So for example, a leader may at one moment express the spirit of their time and be a hero but times change, and when the spirit with which an individual is identified has passed, satire is hardly necessary because it can only imitate life. Contrariwise, a well aimed attack on a person may be the vehicle for attacking the value with which they are identified. But this

means precisely attacking the very *source* of their fame and virtue, *not* their dark side.

There is a *huge* constituency for social justice. The idea that the majority of people are motivated by self-interest is nonsense now more than ever it was. And yet political people (themselves motivated by *ethical* notions) feel obliged to reframe ethical demands in the form of instrumental claims: Pauline Hansen's racism is wrong, not because it unjustly stigmatises innocent people, but because it might damage relations with Australia's Asian trading partners; sending refugees back to certain death is wrong not because it discounts them as human beings and violates all notions of justice, but because these people are diligent workers who could make a contribution to the economy. And so on.

Ethical politics is not sentimentality. Ethical politics does *not* just mean appealing to emotion and feeling as opposed to calculation and self-interest. Appeals to the heart are of course as old as politics, but ethics goes far further than empathy, solidarity and altruism. Most people understand that the very fabric of society rests on ethical foundations and the struggle over ethics is one of life and death for any society. So, it is OK to argue against interning refugees on the basis of the need to observe common humanity, but perhaps the group which calls itself "No-one Is Illegal" goes even deeper. After all, you can't build a society on the maxim of "Love Thy Neighbour," but *no* modern society can exist without a notion of rights and justice which extends to all human beings.

The Trade Unions

Trade unionists have a special challenge. This is not the place for a broad consideration of the trajectory of trade unions, but everyone knows that there are severe challenges in front of trade unions today. Even the best have become somewhat pragmatic about their strategies for wage and conditions bargaining. It is not enough to win wage increases or shorter hours if the means of doing so is manipulation of those who are the beneficiaries. It is better to take a setback if this is the unavoidable result of relying on people to gain control of their own working relationships. Unions need to challenge for the moral and intellectual leadership of their industry. (The custodianship of the Walkley Awards for excellence in journalism by the journalists' union, the MAA, is an excellent move in this respect.)

Employees need to take the *Nuremberg principle* to heart and disobey orders that are not ethically sound.

The meaning of Left and Right, of what functions to support and what challenges the existing power relations, depends on circumstances and cannot be *prescribed.* However, any recourse to *populism* is bound to fail. Ethical politics has to be germinated within the relations formed in struggles of resistance, in the specific conditions defined by each such struggle.

The intersection Ethics & Politics: An Arena of Struggle

This article makes the case that ethical politics offers a completely new way of doing politics, and that in the current juncture it may offer a focus for the convergence of a diverse range of political currents. While a case has been made here according to the author's own understanding of the

relevant issues, it is more a question of proving that there are urgent questions needing to be answered, than the claim to have answered any of them. Nevertheless, there is a lot of room for misunderstanding and the issue could perhaps be made a little clearer, by looking critically at some political practices which are *not* recommended, but which nevertheless exist somewhere in the contested space defined by the intersection of ethics and politics.

Populism

It is inconceivable that the current dominance of the Right over the political agenda can be reversed and a popular mood created conducive to progressive political change, genuinely capable giving support to a real challenge to the hegemony of corporate capital, without constructing a discourse which succeeds in isolating the ruling elite from "us" - the mass of the population, "the people."

Any attempt to *directly enter* such a discourse, however, in the current juncture, sketched in the first part of this work, must draw on the imagery and meanings available in the public domain, which unavoidably joins up with or slides into a *right wing* form of populism. This is precisely what is *meant* by the concept of hegemony. In *other* circumstances, such as perhaps during the Great Depression or in the aftermath of a War, populism could connect up with progressive, democratic, egalitarian, socialist or broad communitarian tides, but this is not possible today.

The *point* of ethical politics is to take the first steps towards creating the conditions where a new, emancipatory kind of populism would become *viable.* In the meantime, efforts to muster popular sentiment against the ruling elite cannot draw on popular imagery and prejudice, but must rather draw on what we have described as "moral common sense" which pays respect to the equal moral worth of all persons. The task of developing such a discourse lies ahead of us.

The contradiction between popular prejudice and moral common sense is perhaps reflected in the anti-Semite who claims "some of my best friends are Jews." Very confused social theory can co-exist with sound moral common sense, but once common sense steps outside of its own front yard, it is easily deceived. What we have referred to as "riding the tiger of popular moralism" is a dangerous business. But trying to flee the tiger may be even more dangerous.

Right-wing populism is very easy stuff though. For example, "political correctness" was easily co-opted by the right-wing as a term of *derision* because the implied skill in language-use required for "political correctness" could be used to separate the "chattering classes" from the "battlers" who weren't lucky enough to get a University education.

This is the nature of the domain of ethical politics. Failure to understand the dynamics which operate in this domain can lead to right-wing populism transforming each and every move into a representation which defends actual elites at the expense of those whose lives are really on the line.

Moralism

Moralism is a pejorative term. Robert K Fullinwider [Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics] cites Kant to suggest that "morality requires that we be strict toward ourselves and generous toward others" which is why we disapprove of those who are too quick to criticise the morals of others. In modernity, moral principles have been subject to critical devalidation, relativisation and reflexive tolerance. In this situation, then, moralism takes on a further meaning. A "moraliser" is nowadays someone who criticises the morals of others without any consideration of the *problematic* or even *obsolete* status of the moral code they claim to advocate for.

This process of *devalidation* of ethical and moral norms which has characterised modernity requires that anyone who makes moral criticism should be able to *substantiate* their claim on the basis of *reason* in such way that the person criticised should reasonably be expected to agree. The "moraliser," on the other hand, is unable to convincingly justify their moral criticism.

A further dimension which ensures the opprobrium attached to "moralists" in modern society is "multiculturalism" and libertarianism in values and life-styles, which up to a point, *rightly* defend the autonomy of individuals and communities from outsider criticism.

But have we arrived at a moral vacuum? I don't think such a claim could be substantiated. While most culturally determined moral codes have suffered relativisation, on the other hand, we have no qualms in condemning the financier who absconds with millions, leaving creditors in the lurch, the politician who manipulates planning regulations so as to profit selling real estate, or for that matter, the committee member who systematically disparages a less confident member or a unionist who divulges strike plans to the bosses.

Within the domain of everyday life, and within the separate functional domains created by the social division of labour, we still rely upon a moral code to sustain the social fabric.

Furthermore, it would be impossible to imagine how *any* politics, progressive politics included, could be conducted without shaming and/or punishing those who transgress relevant moral norms.

Over and above the requirement that "he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone" [John 8:7], ethical politics is concerned not so much with distributing shame as with fostering the moral consciousness which would *cause* shame to be attached to those practices which express and maintain the hegemony of corporate capitalism.

Moralistic criticism which bases itself on premises which are patently *not* shared by others, even when formulated in the language of instrumental politics, is the hallmark of precisely the kind of bankrupt leftism which ethical politics distances itself from. For example, left-wing agitation is still inclined to call upon *egalitarian* sentiments to make a point against the ruling parties. But negative egalitarianism is not a widely-shared value nowadays, and hasn't been for a long time. Social justice and welfare yes, but appeals to negative egalitarianism would today be a form of moralism.

Having dealt with the pitfalls of moralism and populism, let's look at some proposals for addressing the ills of modern society from a moral or ethical point of view which have come from various quarters.

Re-moralisation of the public sphere

The Rev David Holloway of the Anglican Church in Britain claims that modernist tolerance has led to the withdrawal of moral discourse from the public arena, leading to *indifference* rather than *tolerance of difference*. Pointing to times when the great British humanists campaigned not only against slavery and religious intolerance, but gambling and homosexuality, Holloway has issued a call for the re-moralisation of the public sphere, aiming to enlist public figures and institutions in a campaign against whatever the Anglican Church deems sinful.

"For Ethical Politics" is *not* a call for the "re-moralisation of the public sphere." The exclusion of this kind of moralism from the public sphere is one of the gains of modernity which must be defended.

"Cleaning up" the political landscape

Especially in countries still in the process of shaping western-style democracies there is frequently a call to "clean up the political landscape," as recently in both Japan and Korea. Such calls could surface in the wake of corporate scandals in the U.S. and elsewhere. The point is that modern society does not suffer so much from corruption and *bending* of the rules as by their very *application*. While the perception of corruption and self-seeking among social elites can help create an *opening* for ethical politics, this is *not* its aim. Should ethical politics be channelled into "cleaning up the political landscape" this could only function to *support* the class interests which are vested in the current order.

Ethical politics is generally aimed not so much at failure to observe the norms of bourgeois society but at those very norms themselves.

Restoring the "Lost Balance"

There are a plethora of analyses of modernity stemming from *opponents* of modernity, which assert that there is a need to restore balance: "restore the lost balance between reason and revelation," between "life and death," "the material and the spiritual," "nearness and distance," "individuality and community" or "dependence and independence" to name but a few.

It is *not* the thesis of "For Ethical Politics" that there is a need to "restore the balance" in modern political life by introducing a more ethical element into the currently largely amoral political discourse, or any such formulation.

There may well be truth in one or many of the above claims, but what is proposed here is a *new way of doing politics* for the purpose of *tipping the balance* back from right-wing populism and mainstream conservatism in favour of the left, and by no means aims at "restoring the balance" in this effort.

Limiting Executive Powers

From the dawn of the bourgeois epoch, and indeed long before, people have sought to moderate the ills of bad government by erecting fences around the powers of government, the separation of powers and "checks and balances." One of the modern forms of this endeavour is the creation of "ethics committees" attached to hospitals, research institutions and universities, arms of government and industry to monitor and discipline professionals in diverse spheres of activity.

"For Ethical Politics" is *not* such a proposal.

Libertarians claim that government is an inherently evil institution. Reflecting on the excesses of the French Revolution, Thomas Paine wrote:

> "All these things have followed from the want of a constitution; for it is the nature and intention of a constitution to prevent governing by party, by establishing a common principle that shall limit and control the power and impulse of party, and that says to all parties, thus far shalt thou go and no further. But in the absence of a constitution, men look entirely to party; and instead of principle governing party, party governs principle." [*Dissertation On First Principles of Government*].

Describing the "science of government" as an "experimental science" capable of making irreversible mistakes Edmund Burke argued that "governments do things for 'reasons of state' which individuals could not justly do, basically because the state is founded on violence and is 'contrary to nature'."

Mikhail Bakunin argued (among many other things) that the State was *immoral*:

> "... the entire history of ancient and modern states is merely a series of revolting crimes; why kings and ministers, past and present, of all times and all countries - statesmen, diplomats, bureaucrats, and warriors - if judged from the standpoint of simple morality and human justice, have a hundred, a thousand times over earned their sentence to hard labour or to the gallows. There is no horror, no cruelty, sacrilege, or perjury, no imposture, no infamous transaction, no cynical robbery, no bold plunder or shabby betrayal that has not been or is not daily being perpetrated by the representatives of the states, under no other pretext than those elastic words, so convenient and yet so terrible: 'for reasons of state.' ...

> "Machiavelli was the first to use these words, or at least the first to give them their true meaning and the immense popularity they still enjoy among our rulers today. ... the first to understand that the great and powerful states could be founded and maintained by crime alone ..." [*Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,*

Bakunin, 1872]

Today, it appears to be a widely held view that not only states, but *all institutions* are intrinsically immoral, and the established means of combating this essential immorality of institutions and functional spheres of activity is the establishment of "checks and balances" in the form of statutory of self-regulatory bodies or other forms of bureaucracy such as *ethics committees*, which to a greater or lesser degree scrutinise and regulate the activity of professionals and constrain them within the bounds of socially accepted ethical practice.

While without a doubt ethics committees will become arenas of struggle for ethical politics, it is *not* the proposal of "For Ethical Politics" that such ethical committees, or any form of the *separation of powers* so beloved of bourgeois constitutionalism, constitute a viable mechanism for the cure of the social and ethical crisis manifested in modern society.

All these institutions have to be *transformed*. This article argues that the people working within them, who are also citizens of society at large with a conscience and the capacity to subject their own work to criticism, must be engaged for the purpose of an ethical-political struggle over the kind of transformation required.

The Sovereignty of "Public Values"

In Britain and other countries, a practice has developed whereby questionnaires, focus groups and other techniques drawn from the market research industry are mobilised to determine the scale of "pubic values" in relation to government services and priorities. Faced with ethical dilemmas, the government can then consult "public values": for example, if 60% of the public value "quality of service" over "accessibility," then the government is mandated to organise priorities for the health service accordingly, cutting equity and access budgets.

The cry that governments must act only in accordance with "public values" is the very opposite of what is proposed in "For Ethical Politics." If this mentality had been consistently adhered to we would probably still be witnessing public executions and the stoning of adulterers.

The point is not to use appeals to "public values" to place limits around the scope of government action, but rather to actively join in the process of challenging "public values." The inverted commas around "public values" are retained insofar as the concept remains connected to the impressionistic methodology of the market research industry.

Utopia

Possibly relying on Marx's famously derisory attitude towards ethical and moralistic rhetoric, and the association of such rhetoric with "utopian socialism," "ethical politics" could be accused of "Utopianism." Such a charge is misconceived, but it is certainly worthwhile exploring exactly what would constitute Utopianism in the field of ethical politics.

Karl-Otto Apel put it well:

> "... ethics seems to be fundamentally distinguished from utopia in the following manner: ethics, like utopia commences from an *ideal* that is distinguished from

existing reality; but it does not anticipate the ideal through the conception of an empirically possible alternative or counter-world; rather it views the ideal merely as a *regulative idea*, whose approximation to the conditions of reality - e.g. discourse consensus formation under the conditions of strategic self-assertion - can indeed be striven for but never completely assumed to be realizable."

"... the most basic connection between *ethics* and *utopia* - and that also means, between *reason* and *utopia* ... is evidently one that is embedded in the "condition humaine" as unavoidable. Human beings, as *linguistic beings* who must share *meaning and truth with fellow beings* in order to be able to think in a valid form, must at all times *anticipate counterfactually* an *ideal form of communication and hence of social interaction*. This "assumption" is constitutive for the institution of argumentative discourse;" [Karl-Otto Apel: *Is Ethics of the Ideal Communication Community a Utopia? ...* in *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*, ed. Benhabib and Dallmayr]

In other words, the regulative ideals by means of which a person organises their norms and values ought not to be taken as a future state of the world at which history must one day arrive. One can be a Christian without believing in the Second Coming, a Communist without believing in a future world lacking in all social conflict and a liberal without believing in the end of history - that is in fact precisely what it means to be an "ethical Christian," an "ethical communist" or an "ethical liberal."

There *does not yet exist* a regulative ideal (Utopian idea) which answers to the multiple value contradictions posed in modernity: autonomy *vs.* community, freedom *vs.* equality, positive and negative freedom, virtue *vs* happiness, and so on. Nevertheless, actual collaboration and social action is *necessarily* determined by reference to norms and rules, norms and rules which are constantly changing and under challenge, and the values and maxims lying behind the norms and rules change accordingly. Inevitably the regulative ideal implicit in every such value and maxim is constantly brought into focus and counterposed to reality. This process of *thinking ethically* about what you are doing is an essential part of forming the social and spiritual conditions for a new life-world.

Ethical politics is *not* "Utopian." The struggle over values and norms of behaviour is part and parcel not only of changing social conditions, but of testing and exploring what is and is not possible in the present situation, and how and by whom the present situation is supported and maintained. Any attempt to significantly change the current political alignment *without* an ethical political program which goes to the values and norms underpinning the status quo would *indeed* be Utopian.

Ethical politics does *not* mean that the power of the multi-national corporations and police-state machines can be confronted by *moral pressure* alone as an alternative to political action. *All* political action rests on conceptions which are properly speaking part of the ethical

domain. Economic, social, political and ethical change are inextricably connected. The sense of social justice, empathy and moral outrage, solidarity and enmity are powerful motivating forces for political and social change. Politics *drawing* on them today is however always in danger of descending into *populism* or *sentimentality*.

Liberalism *vs.* "Communitarianism"

This brings us to some issues which come out of disputes in the academy in the domain of ethics. In particular there is the debate initiated by the liberal theorist John Rawls with *A Theory of Justice* (1971), in which liberal political dogma emphasising individual autonomy, laid claim to a kind of ahistorical validity, and the various critical responses, which were referred to collectively as "communitarianism," emphasising anthropological notions of the primacy of community. If by "communitarianism" we mean that brand of conservative politics which harks back to the conformism of bygone days, flies the flag or appeals to parochialism, then we utterly reject the idea of a political or ethical field defined by the opposition between liberalism and "communitarianism."

The identification of "moral common sense" as the embryo of a new universal consciousness arising on the basis of the world market and the modern division of labour, could mistakenly be taken to indicate siding with "liberalism" in this debate. Conversely, the identification of ethics as the site of a counterattack against the dominance of liberalism and the hegemony of corporate capitalism, might mistakenly be taken to indicate that "For Ethical Politics" sides with "communitarianism" against liberalism. Both suppositions would be wrong.

The abovementioned debate established the absurdity of any *theory* of society or of the individual, whether of modernity or otherwise, which sets out from one of these poles, being made the basis of the political struggle against neo-liberalism.

Ethical politics must develop an approach to understanding how *regulative ideals* condition social and interpersonal relations. How do *Autonomy* (self-determination of individuals and of communities, etc., difference, negative freedom, freedom of expression, association, etc.) and *Community* (nation, group and family; identity and belonging), structure ethical struggle and the search for the good life? How do these intersect with the other axis in this matrix: *Equality* (distributive justice, fairness, positive freedom) and *Democracy* (recognition, participation, representation)?

Each of these four *ideals* has its own utopia: ideal *laissez-faire* competitive capitalism, the insular, conformist village commune, the egalitarian Jacobin republic, and the ancient Greek *polis* respectively. All these regulative ideals ("Utopias") are not only impossible in themselves but also mutually incompatible. Useless for the purpose of sociological or psychological analysis or as political objectives, they nevertheless mark out an ethical-political field which help people to make judgments and evaluate ethical norms and values.

What kind of social arrangements can give form to these ideals? This author is not able to answer such questions, but the development of ethical-political practice poses these questions nonetheless.

Recognition

In Hegel's very early *System of Ethical Life* (1802) *recognition* occupied a central place in the unfolding of *Geist*, in the form of respect for property rights especially, which constitute the basic conditions for community and ultimately the rule of law. The struggle for recognition occupied but one, albeit famous, section of the *Phenomenology* (1807) and in his mature social philosophy, the *Philosophy of Right* (1821), recognition appears as *Property*, and recognition, in the sense it has in the Subjective Spirit, plays a secondary role behind *mediation*. So when Alexandre Kojève, in his 1937 lectures on Hegel, transformed the whole of Hegel's system around the master-slave dialectic, this could be argued to be doing justice to the young Hegel, but it was certainly original. Kojève introduced his Hegel to that generation of French philosophers among whom Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon formulated their ideas in the 1940s. So, via France, the young Hegel's philosophical notion of recognition made its way into a world-wide movement for recognition.

During the first phase of development of radical subjectivity, recognition was not a significant axis; radicals mobilised for the overthrow of property, and for the freedom of the *majority* from the domination of a minority. Forms of decision-making emphasised the status of the propertyless as the majority, and had little regard for recognition of a minority. During the second phase of development of radical subjectivity, recognition came to the fore, and consensus decision-making was preferred to majority voting.

Recognition remains a primary value, but the post-world war two compromise which pacified the majority has collapsed. The majority, which lack property, have been atomised and stratified by modernity, and is also in need recognition. Majority rule, which requires forms of *mediation* which can expand the radius of trust mobilised by radical movements, has to be merged with the recognition of difference; not in property but in action.

The first phase established the "we"; the second phase established the "you" and the "me"; the third phase must reconstitute the "we" inseparably with the "you" and the "me."

The "Priority of Right over Good"

Another liberal epithet which may be deemed to be relevant to the issues under discussion here is the so-called "priority of right over good." Broadly, the position of ideological liberalism here is that since it is impossible to rationally justify the values deployed in intersubjective activity, any attempt to do so leads to infinite regression, circularity, or dogmatic assertion, and since it is formally impossible to know the social consequences of your action (a final Good), all those ethical theories which rest on a notion of the Good, utilitarianism included, must prove theoretically unsustainable. Consequently, the only consistent position which can be defended in ethics is the specification, or at least prioritisation, of *rights*; any attempt to place a concept of the Good at the ground of ethics must lead to dogmatism or inconsistency.

While a number of observations have already been made above about the

impact of this liberal dogma and its political expressions, the author does not see any way through the theoretical problems facing us by means of the *counterposition* of Good to Right or of concepts of virtue to procedural justice.

While the Good Life has always been the ultimate aim of political struggle, political struggle has always had as its foundation the struggle for *Rights*, and ethical politics is unlikely to change that fact.

The Balance between Legality and Authority

With the growth of the complexity of modern forms of governance and regulation, and most particularly in the European Community, there has been growing debate about the question of "the balance between legality and authority." That is to say, concern about the growth of the bureaucratic apparatuses and businesses which assume a decisive role in the control of daily life and national policy, but lack effective accountability or even operate outside the law.

The author does not believe that the restoration of "the balance between legality and authority" constitutes a viable way posing the dilemma, since the existing apparatuses of legislation and political participation are themselves already patently lacking in legitimacy. It is *not* the proposal of "For Ethical Politics" that bureaucratic and corporate responsibility needs to be reined back under the control of elected and judicial authority. *All* these apparatuses need to be transformed, and such transformations are far more likely to disperse and decentralise power, than to regulate and centralise it.

"Ethical Business" and Social Contracts

As a result of criticism from the anti-corporate movement, a number of corporations have developed policies to ensure that they can defend the ethical status of their brand. "Mission statements" and "Statements of Values" are now routine components of corporate restructure. There is also an "ethical business" movement including the "ethical investment" movement and a substantial environmental movement amongst small business people. All these movements constitute an arena of struggle for ethical politics, and concrete ethical-political analysis is required in each case. Suffice just to state the obvious, that the declarations of values which accompany corporate restructure are invariably nothing more than a combination of public relations and employee management instruments which should be treated with the contempt that they deserve.

Possibly the most sophisticated theory of business ethics is the *social contract* theory as outlined in Donaldson and Dunfee's *Ties that Bind*. This theory is a simple extension of Rousseau's *contrat social* which has long been discounted as a viable political conception, and its application to corporate behaviour fails to overcome the well-known defects of the theory.

Nevertheless, it is hardly tenable that anyone affected by corporate activity would distain to engage the corporation in negotiations if they had the chance. It seems that the "social contract" negotiated by, for example, indigenous landowners and a mining company, stand in relation to the abolition of corporate power in much the same relation as

wage-bargaining stands to revolutionary socialism.

Consequently, "For Ethical Politics" rejects the adoption of binding "social contracts" as a transparent means of legitimising the exploitative and inequitable activity of large-scale businesses but sees efforts by corporations to legitimise their profiteering in this way as a welcome *arena for ethical-political struggle*.

Redistributive Justice and Recognition

The tension between calls for redistributive justice and for recognition can only be resolved by transforming the contradictions within the social formations in which these struggles are located.

> "Feuerbach starts off from the fact of religious self-estrangement, of the duplication of the world into a religious, imaginary world, and a secular one. His work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis. He overlooks the fact that after completing this work, the chief thing still remains to be done. For the fact that the secular basis lifts off from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm can only be explained by the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter must itself be understood in its contradiction and then, by the removal of the contradiction, revolutionised. Thus, for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must itself be annihilated theoretically and practically." [Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* 4]

Recently, the Latrobe University branch of the National Tertiary Education Union negotiated with its employer the creation of a Foundation to which members could donate a portion of their pre-tax salary, for the purpose of providing scholarships. Senior academic staff who are members of the union are often voices against high wage demands because they feel that they are well enough paid already, and that salary increases put pressure on University finances and therefore on services to students. At the same time, the union cannot unduly mess with salary relativities, and have to ask for high wage increases to achieve wage justice for low-paid members of staff. The criteria for allocation of scholarships are still to be set; indigenous students is one proposal. I believe that this gesture is an example of the kind of action which can square the circle defined by the tension between distributive justice and recognition.

Loyal Communist Party member and employee of the Meatworkers Union, Zelda D'Aprano, is famous for having, in 1969, chained herself to the doors of the Industrial Relations Commission, refusing to move until the Commission granted equal pay for women. She is perhaps less famous for the on-going struggle she fought within the Communist Party and the union for recognition for women. Caught in both movements, for distributive justice and recognition for women, Zelda expressed the pain and conflict in trying to square that circle.

In 1971, the powerful NSW Builders' Labourers Union agreed to a

request from a community group to ban demolition of valued heritage buildings in their area. The series of "Green Bans" that followed remains an icon for progressive social action by the organised working class. The bans did generate considerable *tension* inside the union and the campaign eventually faltered, but its effects will never die. Recently, a Committee called Earthworker was established within the Victoria Trades Hall Council. One of the projects of this group was to bring about a formal process of reconciliation between forestry workers and the Anti-logging activists. This campaign came close to fruition, but currently lies in the too-hard basket.

The Victorian Greens contested the recent Victorian elections on a social justice platform, de-prioritising their environmental platform. This coincided with a huge increase in their vote and an even greater influx of trade unionists into their ranks. They have become in fact a pole of attraction for militant trade unionists deserting the Labor Party. This process has generated considerable *tensions* within the Greens, but all the more is it a gesture of great significance.

Organisations like Medical Association for the Prevention of War and Lawyers for Peace, relatively small organisations which are engaged in ethical and social activism within important professional social bases offer great prospects for a very lively field of activity for ethical politics.

Right throughout the period since the rise of the social movements, women, indigenous people, environmental and peace activists have penetrated the union movement and pressed their demands in just the same way they have pressed their demands in *every institution*. The union movement has everywhere responded, for example, with special women's committees or claims reflecting special needs. However, the unions are essentially *self-help* organisations for the under-paid. This kind of *adaptation* does not resolve the tension between distributive justice and recognition, but merely constitutes its intersection.

I think the Latrobe University initiative mentioned above, is a modest gesture, but one which comes closest to the kind of action that is required. There are other instances where unions have taken initiatives on issues of recognition, but they are fairly rare. (A building union which banned work on an office block where a gay man had been sacked is an example I have heard of). The point is that the creative resolution of the tension between redistributive justice and recognition is not a theoretical task but a practical one. The efforts of anti-corporate "brand" activists to coordinate with labour activists is certainly an important contribution as well.

The signs of equality and liberty, and of recognition and difference are constituted in the social formations which particularise and materialise them in social life. Initiatives taken from *within* these formations which go beyond *accommodation* of the claims of the others to the *active* and *creative expression* of the other, are what is required.

Such moves cause *tensions*, and the resolution of these tensions is *ethical politics*.

Hegelian, Kantian and Communicative Ethics
In this article, I have freely drawn on the ideas of communicative ethics

in the tradition of Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Otto Appel, Axel Honneth, and of Agnes Heller and others in the Kantian tradition, as well as resting the analysis on a transparently Hegelian historical development with a Marxist flavour. This may have the appearance of a somewhat eclectic approach. The author has no interest in taking the part of this or that stream of moral philosophy against another, far less of choosing to "belong to" this or that tradition. However, ideas have a history, and if one is to draw on such ideas, one must be mindful of the criticisms and support that have been offered from this or that standpoint in their real history.

In particular, there is a basic conflict between the Hegelian and Kantian approaches to ethics, chiefly that Hegel situates ethical theory in the historical unfolding of the ethical life of a real community (*Sittlichkeit*), while Kant draws on transcendental, apodeictic reflection, "pure reason," so to speak.

For example:

> "The neo-Aristotlean and neo-Hegelian insistence on the centrality of a shared ethos or of a concrete *Sittlichkeit* in the conceptualisation and resolution of moral questions, has unavoidable implications in the domain of political action as well. If this shared ethos and this *Sittlichkeit* are viewed not primarily as the unavoidable hermeneutical horizon over and against which moral questions and problems can be formulated, but if they are considered the normative standard in light of which to assess individual actions, then morality becomes subordinated to the collective ethos of a community." [Afterword by Seyla Benhabib in *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*]

An ethics which simply rested upon the ethical life of an empirical community would be hopelessly conservative and contingent. In any case, the *Sittlichkeit* of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* bears only a remote resemblance to the *actual* society of his time: it was an ideal.

What I have done is to trace the essential development of the form of emancipatory subjectivity which has unfolded throughout the period of modernity. It is *this* essential development that takes the place of the *Sittlichkeit* in my reasoning and which forms the real basis of the ethical politics which is my subject. It is from this standpoint that I perceive that ethical politics is posed.

Kant's ethics reflected the spirit of his times. The emergence of Habermas's communicative ethics in the 1980s has clear historical roots in the same genesis that I have taken as my source, marking the emergence of "networks" among the participants in social movements. The relevance of communicative ethics to the activity of alliance politics is self-evident. That is, the *basis* of these quasi-mathematical ethical theories has itself emerged historically alongside the elaboration of the theories themselves.

The *Sittlichkeit* of a real community which may give substance to the ethos in gestation in alliance politics is *real* to the extent that the multiplicity of the practical and theoretical critiques being brought

forward really constitutes a new society *in gestation* within the present. Consequently, it makes perfect sense to base oneself critically upon that *emergent* ethos.

Far from being conservative or contingent, this ethos is revolutionary-critical and unfolding on a world-wide arena.

Ethical Politics and Theory

I have proposed above that the "golden rule" of ethics ought to be further modified as "What *we* do is decided by *you and me*," in order to reflect what I claim as the genuinely human relation, *collaboration*, as opposed to the mutual instrumentalisation implied in economic theory and contemporary ethics. Whether such a move is sustainable is yet to be established. The main thrust of my criticism of the critical theory of Habermas, is that he takes an *utterance* as the basic unit of analysis for a theory of communicative action, abstracted from the practical activity within which the utterance is made, whereas I believe that *activity* must be the basic unit of analysis.

In *The inclusion of the Other. Studies in Political Theory*, Habermas goes some way in the direction I suggest:

> "Under the pragmatic presuppositions of an inclusive and noncoercive rational discourse between free and equal participants, everyone is required to take the perspective of everyone else and thus to project herself into the understandings of self and world of all others; from this interlocking of perspectives there emerges an ideally extended 'we-perspective' from within which all can test in common their shared practice; and this should include mutual criticism of the appropriateness of the languages in terms of which situations and needs are interpreted. In the course of *successively* undertaken abstractions, the core of generalisable interests can then emerge step by step." [Habermas, 1998, p. 58]

However, I remain of the view that an ethics which takes an *utterance* as its basic unit of analysis cannot resolve this problem. I also suggest that while communicative ethics has much to offer, it is insufficient to refer communications just to the agents' *values*, as the interconnection of the regulative ideals involved in communication and collaboration in modern society - recognition, equality, community and autonomy, and their particularisation by different individual agents - cannot be adequately conceptualised in terms of values. It is a person's conception of themselves as part of an historically articulated *practice*, as suggested by MacIntyre, which lies at the more fundamental level than values.

While the analysis of *constitutive* ideals from the standpoint of *cognitive* activity has been extensively studied, I am not aware of work on the structure of the *regulative* ideals involved in *collaboration*.

An urgent practical task is the creation of a decision-making procedure which sublates the conflict between formal (majority-voting) meeting procedure and consensus decision-making. All receive recognition in what we do together. I have suggested that "agreeing to differ" is something which has to be built into collaborative actions.

I have suggested that semiotics needs to be brought to bear in a systematic way to disclose the way in which values are articulated in political communications.

Theories of group dynamics suffer largely from the defect that they focus on *task oriented groups* (*i.e.*, groups with a professional facilitator), and the issues posed in going beyond alliance politics raise the need to make a systematic study of the group dynamics at work in groups which do not have a facilitator and whose tasks are self-defined.

Freedom and democracy seem to be universally recognised values, but it may be that their content is too indeterminate to function in analysis alongside recognition, equality, community and autonomy.

The incompatibility between autonomy, community, equality and liberty, justice, freedom, democracy, stability and recognition have tortured the minds of social reformers and revolutionaries for centuries. Ethical politics is the practical field in which the tension between these ideals is played out.

There are many unanswered questions.

Conclusion

Ethical politics widens the scope for political action and in particular facilitates the "politicisation" of everyday life in a new way. Ethical politics opens the political field to all people, irrespective of whether they have a "following" or a political affiliation, or even political knowledge and expertise. Ethical politics is radically non-elitist while at the same time challenging both mainstream and academic political, sociological and ethical theory at a demanding level. Most importantly, *ethical politics opens a common space* for the productive engagement of all strands of political thinking which are challenging the dominant economic-rationalist and right-wing populist forces from radically different standpoints.

Ethical politics does not mean a re-moralisation of the public sphere, which could only be a pernicious moralism: a substitution of moral judgment for rational justification as powerless as it would be strident; nor a concern with public values as opposed to "reasons of state" which would be another effort to curtail the *legitimate* use of government authority and exercise of responsibility; nor a call for the restoration of the balance between legality and authority which would be a species of communitarianism, advocating the return to a singular collective good, and imposing the necessary consensus by authoritarian means under the sign of a reversal of the "priority of right over the good." Nor is ethical politics an attempt to set limits to the science of government by means of ethical committees, which would begin as an impotent cavilling and end as a species of casuistry.

Ethical politics is none of these things. It is not a moralism. It is not a utopia. It is not a mask for communitarianism, nor a political voodoo that might re-animate liberalism. It does not seek to restore the "lost balance." It does not imagine that the power of the multinationals can be confronted by extra-political moral pressure alone. It is not a confederation of "concerned citizens." It is - above all - not an attempt to

"clean up" the political landscape.

"For Ethical Politics" is not an effort to launch a political temperance society. Opposition to the agenda of mainstream politics cannot become a moralistic cavilling or a defence of actual elites at the expense of those whose interests are really at stake in neo-liberal policies and their populist smokescreen: the increasing numbers of ordinary people for whom economic, political and cultural globalisation brings new uncertainties and declining living standards, nor a call for social contracts to legitimise the exercise of corporate and imperialist power.

The hope guiding this inquiry is that ethical politics might be the focal point for the convergence of a broad spectrum of political tendencies breaking with the hegemonic neo-liberal political agenda of both Liberal and Labor parties. Whether these tendencies are republican, socialist, communitarian, feminist, multi-culturalist or environmentalist is less important than their potential coalescence around the need for a *different way of doing politics*. All of these tendencies have highly articulate criticisms of mainstream politics and definite agendas for their respective political alternatives. The only thing lacking is a common public perception of how such alternatives could be approached. In the absence of this awareness, the agenda of government is driven by the "unholy trinity" of economic neo-liberalism, the politics of the "war on terrorism" and populist prejudice, and the assault on social cosmopolitanism and ethical universality in the name of a reduction in the power of so-called cultural elites, attempting to manage the impact of globalisation not through governance of social processes but through ideological scapegoating.

What is ethical in the opposition to the dominant agenda is the focus on respect for the moral worth of all persons, whether this takes the form of the legitimacy of group identities, respect for cultural diversity and equality of opportunity, or the defence of human dignity through wage justice, social welfare and democratic rights. Underlying this opposition is the latent concept of political justice linked to an ideal of democratic ethical life in modernity as characterised by rational universality and social diversity.

The task of working out how the political atmosphere could be changed so that the broad array of activists currently collaborating through alliance politics can make their voices heard among the mass of the population is surely one that should concentrate our minds.

How is the link between social justice and cultural diversity to be framed? What are the just, and what the unjust, modes of governance that can be imagined for world of self-governing political communities? What sorts of links can be established between authority and legitimacy? How might democratic citizenship and civic virtues promote a culture of democratic politics within which egalitarian agendas might flourish? What are the public values that support freedom, and what are the forms of universality that sustain and contribute to diversity? Ethical politics sets itself to respond to these questions, not solely with new ideas, but also with new laws, new policies and new political directions.

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