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civilization — to be criminals, a danger not just to their order, but to the populace at large. This is how a totalitarian regime deals with revolt.

During these demonstrations one heard a lot about direct action as well. One didn't see any, but the word was bandied about quite a bit. Thanks to such left activist groups as the Ruckus Society and the Direct Action Network, the term "direct action" has lost its original meaning. The term originally meant precisely what is implied by the two words that make it up — acting directly for oneself without delegation and without demanding that another act for one to achieve what one desires. As such it is the direct opposite of democracy in which delegation, representation, demands, negotiation and compromise are the essential defining qualities. It is, therefore, no surprise that leftists whose aims are precisely "more democracy" would not even be able to conceive of what direct action is. Their usurpation of the term to describe the more acrobatic and showy forms of petitioning that some of them use comes across as an attempt to draw some more truly rebellious sorts into the democratic processes.

For those of us who truly want our lives to be our own, democracy — which acts to make all lives the property of the social order which is to say of its rulers — is an enemy. We have no desire whatever to participate in its processes, processes which vampirize the vitality and passion of rebellion. It may criminalize us, but it will not make us a cog in its machine. Those who continue to petition it for table crumbs, who continue to demand that they have their say before this faceless monster will eventually be chewed up by it and become, at best a Tom Hayden or a Ralph Nader — that is a loyal opposition that upholds the present order. Freedom is not found here. It is found in uncompromising revolt against democracy and all the other deceptions of the social order.

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the efforts of a loyal opposition to reform the present state of affairs so that it can continue to run smoothly. I won't go into the absurdity of those who recognize the totalitarian nature of the present order and the necessity of destroying it if we are to really have the freedom to create our lives as we see fit marching side by side with those who merely want this order to be more what it claims to be here. What should be clear is that the democratic system — as tolerant and flexible as it is — obviously cannot tolerate those who see it for what it is and refuse its faceless form of total control with the same vehemence as they refuse the more blatant (but less total) dictatorships of the likes of Hitler or Pinochet. Those who reject the democratic farce top to bottom are criminalized by this order — called thugs, vandals, hooligans, "bad apples". The left, themselves democrats, concur in this criminalization, at times coming out more vehemently than the state itself and doing the state's policing work for it. At this point the criminalization of those who truly revolt has even reached the point that some are called "hate groups" in spite of their firm stand against all bigotry. What the state and its media are calling hate in this instance is not bigotry, but the decision on the part of these rebels to hold the rulers and their lackeys responsible for their actions. But as any democrat knows, in a democracy, power has no face, no personality, and therefore no one can be responsible. But we don't accept this sham — it is a flimsy excuse for an ever-increasing control over our lives by an invisible system, but an invisible system that has a material existence in institutions, in instruments and in individuals. And no matter how often I hear "I'll do what I can", I know these individuals will in fact do what serves the interest of maintaining the social order in which they hold some portion of power no matter how fragmentary. This is why I do not dissent or make demands of this democratic social order, but rise up in revolt in order to destroy it. And I recognize that this order can only maintain its totalitarian hold on reality by declaring its true enemies — those who would destroy all social control, demolishing capital, the state and their

in observing the ways in which any potentially challenging possibilities were either recuperated as part of the democratic process or marginalized by the media and the general consensus of the left. Democratic totalitarianism is by its nature a tolerant totalitarianism — it can allow a broad spectrum of opinions and even make room for unusual methods of expressing these as long as the hegemony of the democratic state is not threatened — that is, as long as what is being expressed is a demand that one's grievance be heard by the democratic state not a desire to destroy it. Thus the democratic state is really just a faceless version of an old feudal monarchy where even the serf could present a grievance to the king, but the rebel was an outcast facing exile, the dungeon or death. It is precisely the flexibility of the democratic system that allows it to be the most thorough and all-encompassing totalitarian system that has ever existed. The media correctly pointed out that most of the protesters merely wanted to exercise their right to participate in the democratic process — the left is after all simply a collection of small time politicians, and the few who were actually marching for their own cause had clearly been bamboozled by politicians into following the line of participation rather than rebellion. In fact, these left politicians actual warned local people away from participating in a march against police brutality that was happening in their neighborhood "for their own safety" — an excellent job on the activists' part of keeping their specialized role by "looking out for the welfare of others" who are certainly quite capable of deciding for themselves what risks they want to take — a typical politician's ploy. One might wonder if what these organizers feared was that the local folk would not keep to the rules of non-violent, democratic protest, having first-hand experience with the cops in the area.

Another aspect of the media portrayal of the protests was that those few who actually attempted to rebel in this highly orchestrated situation were simply "a few bad apples" in an otherwise well-behaved group of democratic dissidents, hooligans spoiling

Introduction

One would think that a political doctrine and system that was propagated by the bourgeoisie in their rise to power, that is promoted world-wide by the Western ruling class and that has only existed in its so-called "pure" form on the backs of slaves, would at least be suspect in the eyes of those who oppose the present social order. But such is not the case. The "new movement" of opposition to the global order that is said to have been born on January 1, 1994 with the Zapatista uprising and had its coming out party in Seattle at the demonstration against the WTO has taken as its slogan: "This is what democracy looks like." And that without a hint of irony. But this is fitting for a movement which looks to the EZLN — that "revolutionary" army which made such radical demands as a more democratic Mexican government and more participation by the indigenous people of Chiapas in the democratic processes of that government — as a founding inspiration.[1] As it presently exists, this movement is thus a reform movement — a movement demanding that the present social order live up to its claims. In other words, it is a *loyal* opposition.

A lack of analysis with a consequent lack of understanding of what democracy actually is lies behind this acceptance among so-called radicals of the political system promoted by the ruling class. Therefore, it is important to examine this political doctrine and system both as an ideal and as a social system. The origins of democracy go back to the ancient Greek city-states. These are considered "direct democracies" as opposed to the present "representative democracies" by which most modern nation states are ruled, and are idealized by such libertarian ideologues as Murray Bookchin.

[1] I recognize that the popular uprising in Chiapas is a complex movement that extends beyond its official face, but the EZLN and its spokespeople have precisely promoted an ideological line consistent with the left wing of the capitalist, democratic ideal and this is the face of the movement that western radicals know and support.

"Democracy" is said to mean "government by the people". But "people", in this case, means "citizens" not individual human beings. In the ancient Greek city-states, all the *citizens* did, indeed, meet in the *agora* and made political decisions in assembly. Of course, the citizens only comprised about ten percent of the population. The other 90 percent — women, children and slaves — were the property of the citizens, and it was the existence of this large slave class who did all the physical (and much of the mental) labor, that allowed the citizens to practice this "direct democracy".

The only other example given of "direct democracy" is the town meetings of New England. Of course, what is forgotten in this example is that the town meetings are not autonomous assemblies. They exist within the context of the representative systems of the county, state and federal governments, and cannot override any laws passed by the representative bodies of the higher governing institutions. Furthermore, the decisions made in these meetings are not directly carried out by those who make them — rather they are delegated to various elected or hired officials who constitute the town government. Thus, these town meetings can no more be called "direct democracy" than neighborhood watch programs, which would have to embrace vigilantism and lynching to be true direct democracy.

So direct democracy that incorporates all of the people who make up a society is a utopian ideal. But is this ideal worth pursuing? First let us keep in mind that democracy is a social and political *system*, a form of *government*. As such, from its inception, it has prescribed limits for the freedom of individuals, the primary limit being "the good of all" — that is, the good of the social system. Thus, what one decides within a democratic system — no matter how direct it is — is not how to freely create one's life and relationships as one sees fit, but rather how to maintain the social system and exercise one's rights and roles within it. These decisions are not those of individuals, but of the group as a whole — whether the decision-making process is by majority by unanimous consen-

is a historical project. We are not free to decide whether or not we are born into it, but we can decide *whether* and *how* to live with it. From the moment we accept taking on one of its roles, participating in its administration, we accept the responsibilities implicit in this. Being easily interchangeable particles of a very complex system does not free us from our responsibilities, because we could have chosen to refuse that system. Thus, even in this case one cannot excuse herself by saying that he only obeyed, that she only followed the current, that he only did what everyone else did. Because before obeying, before following the current, before imitating others, a human being poses herself, must pose himself, a question: would I consider it appropriate to do this? And then she must answer himself. Just like the Germans of whom Hannah Arendt spoke — we too are in the situation of having to choose whether to give our support or at least our consent to this social organization or not. Once again choice comes into play. In the myth of Er, Plato makes the destiny of each person depend on the choice each one makes of their model for life: "There was nothing necessarily preordained in life because each person had to change according to the choice she made." Now, we can choose to give our contribution to the maintenance of this world. Or else we can choose to withhold it. In either case, we make a choice for which we alone are responsible, not *someone else*. If it is true that "the original choice is always present in each subsequent choice", then we must also know how to accept the consequences of our actions. All of us, no one excluded.

Editor's Afterword

I began typing this up during the week immediately after the Democratic National Convention 2000. This convention was met with a week of protest — mostly of the sort typical of the eclectic American left. While some observers seemed most interested in pointing out the excesses of the police, I was far more interested

who shot the adolescent "black shirts" without posing themselves too many ethical questions well knew. On the other hand, when power has no name or surname, no single person is more responsible than any other. Thus, the very people who justify the shooting of a 16-year-old "black shirt" are horrified, at the same time, by the violent death of a personage of the democratic state. But were these young "black shirts" of yesterday actually more responsible than the president of the United States for rendering our existence intolerable? We can't get rid of the thought that personal responsibility persists not only under the Nazi dictatorship but under the democratic one as well. It doesn't nullify the responsibility of its functionaries. If it dilutes this responsibility, it does do to disguise it, to render it impalpable, invisible to our eyes. In the threadbare dialogue with which dominant thought has entertained itself for decades now, Responsibility is said to have gone through the same shipwreck that is supposed to have made History, Meaning, Reality sink forever. All one needs to do is stop listening to this chattering for a moment and here is what one would see: these alleged shipwrecks that never were such reappearing.

* * *

All discourse that sets out to compare human life to the functioning of a machine, in that unrelenting process of making the individual disappear, omits one thing: individuals are not cogs, they are human beings. They were human animals under the Nazi dictatorship and are such under that of the democratic state as well. The difference between a cog — which is a mere piece of metal — and a human being should be evident. A person is always in a position to discern and choose. If this is not so now, if one has indeed become a mere cog, this would be further confirmation of the totalizing and totalitarian reality in which we find ourselves unable to live, and of the urgent necessity of its overthrow. In any case, the social system in which we live is not an inherent aspect of the world; it

sus or through elected representatives — and the individual's life is subject to these decisions. In other words, she is ruled by the democratic system, his life is determined by its needs. So for those of us who consider self-determination, the freedom of each individual to create her life as he sees fit in relationship with whoever and whatever she chooses, democracy — even direct democracy — is useless or even detrimental to our movement toward this freedom.

But the ideal of democracy examined above and the democracy we confront in our daily lives are two different things. The latter is the political system that the bourgeoisie put in place when they came to power after the overthrow of the feudal aristocracy. There are several reasons why the new ruling class chose to wed democracy to the representative system — it certainly is not possible to practice direct democracy on the scale of the nation-state, the other new institution that the rise of capitalism brought into being. But more significant to the new rulers who came to power with the bourgeois revolutions was the fact that representative democracy allows the active and voluntary participation of the exploited classes in their own exploitation and domination while keeping real political power in the hands of the capitalist class who can afford to run for office or pay others who will support their interests to do so. In M. Sartin's essay, "The Representative System", the feudal origins of political representation and the reasons behind the bourgeois marriage between this and the democratic system are exposed.

My own essay, "A Desolate Landscape", points out the reality that the repressive police state that has arisen in the United States over the past several years has been developing through *democratic* processes — a social consensus produced by media-induced fear. To oppose this police state in the name of democracy is therefore an absurdity — it most be opposed as part of our opposition to the democratic and all other forms of state.

"The Lesser Evil" by Dominique Misein exposes how the logic that is so basic to a democratic system — the logic of compromise

and negotiation, mediocrity and making do — comes to permeate every aspect of life to the point where dreams and desires fade, passion disappears (what passion can one feel for a lesser evil?) and revolution loses all meaning. This domination over all of life is the purpose of the participatory social system the bourgeoisie imposed. This permeation into every aspect of life makes the democratic order the most successful totalitarian social system to ever exist. In "Who Is It?", Adonide compares classical dictatorships with the totalitarianism of the democratic system where everyone can excuse himself because she is only a cog in this vast social machine, and individual responsibility, which is the basis for individual self-determination, seems to disappear.

Occasionally within these pages, readers may notice language with somewhat moralistic overtones. I reject the moralism and any implications that there is a universal standard of "right" and "wrong". However, I do accept the ethical (as opposed to moral) conception that each of us is responsible for the choices we make and the actions we take (though certainly not for the circumstances in which we are forced to make those decisions). I consider such responsibility to be the basis of the concrete freedom to create one's own life. Thus, if I desire to live in a particular way in a world of a particular sort, it is my responsibility to act projectually toward the fulfillment of this desire. And when others act to obstruct this, I hold them responsible for their actions — not as wrongdoers or criminals, but rather as my enemies and as enemies of what I desire and love. However, the moralistic language here is minimal and the main thrust is that of an insurgent ethic of responsibility. Furthermore, the essays expose the underlying opposition between democracy and the freedom of individuals to create their own lives as they see fit.

At present, capitalism and the socio-political system that best corresponds with it — democracy — dominate the planet. They undermine real choice, creativity and self-activity…all that is necessary for individuals to be able to create their lives as they desire

control, we are facing a natural fact in which we are unable to intervene and to which we can only submit; but when these tremors destroy the modern cities of Greece causing deaths and injuries while leaving the acropoli intact, then we are facing a social question. To build houses, apartments, entire cities, using building techniques and city planning projects intended to bring the highest level of economic profit and social control without considering even the most elementary safety precautions cannot be considered among the *inborn* human characteristics.

In the end, *who* is responsible for the thousands of deaths on the job? *Who* is at fault for poisoning nature? *Who* do we hold accountable for the wars, the massacres, the deaths of millions of people? Is it possible to exit from this dense fog?

* * *

In a famous essay entitled "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship", which took a polemic that arose from the trial of Nazi Adolf Eichmann as its starting point, Hannah Arendt recalled that the principle argument of the defense was that Eichmann had been a mere cog, but regardless of whether the defendant is incidentally a functionary, he is in fact accused because a functionary remains a human individual. In order to clear the field of a confusionism that could only serve self-interest, the writer invites one to consider the functioning of wheels and cogs as a global support to a collective undertaking, rather than to speak in the customary manner of obedience to leaders. In this light one would never have to ask those who collaborated and obeyed "why did you obey?" but "why did you give support?" If these observations don't minimally shake up the conscience of anyone who finds themselves reading them today, naturally it is because they refer to persons who served a dictatorship of the classical type. Under Nazism — Hannah Arendt tells us — all those who collaborated with the regime were equally responsible. When power is embodied in one man, the Man himself is responsible for it as well as the "black shirt", as the partisans

seen the unfortunate fellow dragged away, condemned and locked up by the hired thugs of the dictator who would have been considered responsible for the injustice perpetrated. In modern democracies, on the other hand, no one is held responsible. The police officer who arrested him is not responsible since he was limited to carrying out orders from *someone else*. Nor can we blame the prosecutor although he asks for the sentence, because he does not decree it; this is done by *someone else*. Even the judges are not at fault since they have to make a decision on the basis of evidence presented to them by *someone else* and then apply the provisions of a penal code compiled by *someone else.* Finally, one cannot blame the guard, who as the last link in this chain, is certain to have a clean conscience unlike *someone else.* Yet that man finds himself there in prison, and it is his body that is enclosed behind bars, not that of *someone else.* Thus, in the dictatorships that once existed the fact that power was embodied in one man made him responsible along with his underlings, but in modern democracy the distribution of power through out the social apparatus removes responsibility from everyone without distinction.

This exists as a social reality that is quite tangible, concrete and above all tragic. It is able to grind up human life without anyone being blamed. And if this happens when human responsibility is indisputable, we can imagine what would happen when other factors can be planned.

Here is another example. Numerous "experts" have had to agree that the origins of the huge storms that periodically strike the coasts of the United States and eastern Asia are undoubtedly found in climactic changes brought about by human activity. On the other hand, in the face of the series of earthquakes that shook the entire planet in the summer of 1999, the experts thought it good to reassure public opinion that in this case at least the responsibility lies elsewhere, in the unfathomable workings of nature. This may be true, but whatever they say about the causes, they fail to consider the effects of these cataclysms. If seismic tremors escape human

and for the exploited to be able to rise up intelligently against their exploitation. For this reason, it is necessary that those of us who want to make our lives our own and live in a world where every individual has access to all she needs to create his life as she sees fit stop demanding that this system become more of what it claims to be and instead start attacking it in all of its aspects including the democratic system in order to destroy it. At this time such insurgence is the truest expression of real choice, self-determination and individual responsibility.

And what of those times when we need to act together with others and need to decide what to do? In each instance, we will figure out how best to make decisions without turning any such process into a system or an ideal to strive for. A decision-making process is a tool to be taken up as needed and laid down when not; democracy is a social system that comes to dominate all of life.

What does democracy look like? The jackboot that you voted to have in your face.

Wolfi Landstreicher

The Representative System by M. Sartin

> *"Saying that a government represents public opinion and public will is the same as saying a part* ***represents*** *the whole."*
>
> — Carlo Pisacane

The representative system is a political expedient by means of which the bourgeoisie attempts to realize the principle of popular sovereignty without renouncing its privilege as ruling class.

The idea of popular sovereignty in its modern sense has been the dominant political conception since the revolutions of the 18th century. Before that sovereignty resided in the monarch, in the noble and theocratic classes, which held and exercised it through the

right of conquest, through hereditary right and by virtue of a mystical divine investiture — in each case by virtue of brute force.

When the Third Estate demolished the power of the aristocracy and destroyed the myth of the divine right of monarchs by beheading the king, the bourgeoisie, heirs to the wealth that had belonged to the lords of the old regime, looked for a system that would let them legalize the privileges delivered to them thanks in particular to the insurrectional actions of the people, and to justify the exercise of political power without which they would not have been able to maintain their monopoly over such wealth for long. They found such a system by grafting the idea of popular sovereignty to that of representation through which the sovereign people entrust the functions of power to an elected body for shorter or longer periods. In every case the elected body consists of people from the bourgeois class.

The idea of representation is independent from the idea of popular sovereignty and has different origins. Whereas the latter was born in the simmering of revolution, the former came out of the thickest darkness of the Middle Ages.

"The idea of representatives" — wrote Rousseau — "is modern: it comes from feudal government, from that unique and absurd government in which the human species is degraded and the name of the human is disgraced. In the ancient republics as well as in the old monarchies, the people never had representatives: this word was not even known. It is very strange that in Rome, where the tribunes were so sacred, no one would ever have thought that they could usurp the functions of the people; nor would they have ever considered neglecting to take a plebiscite into account in the midst of such a great multitude…According to the Greeks, whatever 'the people' had to do it did itself; in fact, it was continually assembled on the plaza…"

Thus, the Greeks conceived of democracy not only as sovereignty, but also as the direct government of the people. This would not have provoked insoluble problems, because the demo-

— precisely when there is no dictator — in a situation where a governing functionary becomes the object of a widespread challenge, the normal interplay of institutions can even act to eliminate him in order to mollify at least a part of the discontent. The lack of a king whose head can be cut off, of a strong authoritarian figure capable of drawing popular hatred onto itself, in other words of someone to whom we can attribute the responsibility for the exercise of power, constitutes the genuine great bulwark in defense of democratic totalitarianism. In the old and caricatured dictatorships, power had the moustache of Hitler or the jaw of Mussolini, and it could be seen goose-stepping in the street or wearing the black shirt. But today in the modern democracies, *who is power?* And the aim of the question is not to identify the particular people who exercise power, which is still possible on some level, but to attribute the responsibility for the existence that we lead to them.

* * *

Over and over again it is said that today there is a single social system managed by people who are mere cogs in a machine, petty functionaries who cover most administrative roles. The very concept of responsibility comes to lose all meaning. Responsibility is the possibility of foreseeing the effects of one's behavior and changing this on the basis of such foresightedness. But the cog in a machine has no foresight; it has no need of foresight; it can never do anything but spin. Therefore, it is no longer possible to attribute the fault for an action to anyone, even if the action was most aberrant.

Let's look at an example taken from the realm of what is commonly called "judicial errors". Consider a man who has been sentenced to prison for life but actually did not commit the crime of which he was accused. He is placed under investigation, arrested, incarcerated, tried, sentenced and kept segregated for the rest of his life. *Who* is responsible for all this? In the old totalitarian systems, the response was much too simple. Everyone would have

multiplicity of parties, which has been proclaimed as a sure sign of democratic health because it supposedly guarantees the possibility of choice, thence of "freedom", is seen ever more clearly for what it is: a competition between identical things.

Today more than ever before, politics is action as an end in itself, particularly in its parliamentary form in which the shuffling of people and things serves no other purpose than that of disguising not only the uselessness of the work, but also its essential unity. The numerous political parties that throng into the parliament today are the "natural" heirs of the different factions that battled inside the old single dictatorial party. As in the case of the factions, the various parties share the same vision of the world, the same values, the same methods. Only the details differentiate them.

* * *

Totalitarianism has met with almost universal condemnation everywhere, and yet every day we can see how democracy is just another form of totalitarianism. And one of the worst. A modern democracy is rarely shaken by revolt. Democracy has taken hold as the political system most impermeable to the risk of revolt. Even if such a revolt managed to emerge, it would have difficulty fueling the passions of individuals since it no longer has a role in the collective imagination. And this still doesn't take into account that even in such a hopeful case, the wrath generated would not find anyone against which to direct itself, precisely because in democratic systems power is not embodied in a human being, but is represented by an entire social system.

It goes without saying that the parliamentary and union institutions never furnish the governed individuals with adequate means for making their claims, while dissatisfaction — even when generalized — leads in the best of cases to the formation of some current of opposition. When there is not a figure in a position to polarize the totality of the opposition against itself in an enduring manner

cratic republics of Greece were founded on a slave economy, only free men were citizens and constituted the people. They were exempted from material labor which was carried out by the slaves and had all their time to devote themselves to the public thing.

Modern democracy is different. The emancipation from slavery and servitude slowly elevates all people to the dignity of citizens, creating a numerical problem that did not exist in ancient times.

But the representative system was developing independently of this problem. Before the emancipated slaves had yet aspired to the dignity of citizens, the monarchs felt the necessity of giving them the illusion of participating in the public thing…The origins of the representative system go back to the obscure times of the Middle Ages when christianity and feudalism shared in the management of the human herd. The position of the "serfs" eventually became unbearable, so they delegated some people…to present a list of their complaints before the lord. Thus, before the absolute and divine right these poor pariah personified the miserable existence of the governed clod. It was the first representation; England was its cradle. Its mission barely ended, this wretched delegation dissolved and we do not know how the obscure work of the centuries transformed this delegation into today's powerful parliamentary assemblies.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that in those remote times of royal absolutism the peasant delegations had spontaneous origins. It is more probable that the dissatisfied peasants resorted to revolt than to petitioning the sovereign by means of unanimously selected representatives who might well lose their heads if the sovereign found them unbearable.

In the archives of the English monarchy, one can find the documentation of the most humble and utterly undemocratic origins of the representative system. Here one finds an ordinance of Henry III that dates back to 1254. In Britain, up until very recently, the nobles — the temporal and spiritual lords — were still to be seated, personally and by law, in the parliament where they represented

themselves and the class that they constituted together. In the document mentioned above, Henry invited the lords to take up their posts in parliament and, furthermore, gave the sheriffs of all counties in the kingdom the order that they provide "two good and discreet knights" selected by the people of the county for the purpose of representing them before the council of the king "in order to examine the whole of the knights of the other counties who give help to the king." (*Encyclopedia Britannica,* entry: Representation)

Here, in the regime of economic and political privilege, the essence of the representative system is already found. The peasants do not take the initiative to send their own representatives to the king; rather the king orders the dispatch of representatives to the council through the sheriffs, and he does not want them to be peasants, but gives the order that they be "good and discreet knights". The king wants the funds that will be allocated in his favor to have the consent of the representatives of the people, but the sheriff must make sure that these representatives are people of high birth, which is to say' people devoted to the king. In other words, it doesn't matter whether the elected representatives of the counties represent the people of their counties; rather he wants to be certain that they represent the interests of the king.

The pretense of the representative politics is already transparent in this ancient document. In the current form of the representative system, the names change, but the substance is the same. "The sovereign people" elects its representatives, but these representatives — like the good and discreet knights of Henry III of England — must be good citizens above all, devoted to the constituted order, which is to say, respectful of the right to private property, of the capitalist monopoly over social wealth and of the authority of the state. In other words, rather than representing the will, the aspirations or the interests of those who elected them, they must represent the power, authority and privilege that the constituted order consecrates and protects.

tension; the individual dissolves and her alienation from the world becomes irreconcilable.

* * *

Freedom is simply self-determination. It is the choice each individual makes concerning his existence and the world in which she lives. But a choice in a situation in which there is nothing to choose, because conditions determined by others limit the situation, is a choice only in name. Thus, a regime that represses challenges with blood is denounced as totalitarian; it hinders different choices. But what can one say about a regime in which no significant social tumult ever breaks out, a regime that has nothing to hinder because it does not even provide for the possibility of different choices. As someone has said, " The most perfect police state has no need for police." A decisive aspect of the totalitarian form — the single party — can express itself completely now even within the western political systems. Contemporary political analysts themselves are forced to admit that when one takes the economic bonds and the increasingly clear agreement on the principles of the market economy between the left and the right into account, the discourse and the programs of the great parties overlap more and more. Instead of presenting objectives that obviously differ from one another, developed through the use of opinion polls, the great governing parties have reached the point where they no longer divide on specific objectives… These considerations no longer succeed in rousing amazement, expressing a situation that has in fact become familiar. Among the apologists for the totalitarianism of the market, this familiarity loses all shame and becomes inescapable. In his last book celebrating global capitalism, journalist Thomas Friedman — columnist for the New York Times, winner of two Pulitzer Prizes — does not hide his satisfaction in establishing that political choice has been reduced to Pepsi against Coca Cola — slight nuances of taste, slight political variants, but never any deviation from the respected assumption of the rules of gold, those of the main street, the

system is not so much who holds the power as how it is exercised. It does not matter what reasons such a system adopts to justify absolute control whether racial purity or the development of markets. It isn't even particularly important whether control is secured violently through the presence of tanks in the street or gently by means of media anesthesia. It is the inexorable application of this control to all aspects of life that counts, the fact that it leaves no loophole, it gives no possibility of escape.

Thus, democracy itself is also a form of dictatorship — certainly less obvious, but not for this less effective, quite the contrary — that must impose its values in *every* field on all individuals and social classes for its own self-preservation. From this perspective, many consider it the most perfect totalizing system. The main reason that it has succeeded in replacing the old and obsolete forms of power is that it is not merely one of the various forms power can assume; democracy corresponds to the very essence of capitalism, to the normal functioning of market society in its expansion. Within the marketplace, social classes don't exist; there are only "free and equal" consumers. This "freedom" and "equality" covers a basic role in the gathering of consensus, that consensus which represents the highest virtue of the democratic system in the eyes of its supporters.

In fact, the classic totalitarian regimes are based on an exercise of violence that is, paradoxically, a profound sign of weakness. The conditions of life that are imposed are intolerable — everyone knows this — and it is up to the forces for the maintenance of order to materially obstruct the realization of a different life, the possibility of which still remains as the conscious aspiration of the majority of people. On the other hand, in democratic systems the very *possibility* of a different life is to be eradicated. To maintain order, the democratic state does not take out its cudgels except under very specific circumstances; rather it uses the organs of information. These don't leave bruises on the skin, but preventatively nullify all awareness, extinguish every desire, placate every

"Representative government," — the Russian anarchist Kropotkin wrote — "is a system elaborated by the bourgeois classes to gain earthly respect from the monarchic system, maintaining and increasing their own power over the workers at the same time. The representative system is the characteristic arm of power of the bourgeois classes. But even the most passionate admirers of this system have never seriously sustained that a parliament or municipal body really represents a nation or a city: the most intelligent among them understand quite well that this is impossible. By supporting parliamentary government, the bourgeoisie has simply sought to raise a dike between itself and the monarchy and between itself and the landed aristocracy without granting freedom to the people. Nevertheless, it is evident that as the people slowly become aware of their own interests and the variety of those interests increases, the representative system reveals itself to be inadequate. This is the reason why democrats of all lands bustle around searching for palliatives and correctives that they never find. They try referendum and discover it is worthless; they babble about proportional representation, representation of minorities and other utopias. In other words, they seek the impossible, namely a method of delegation that represents the infinite variety of interest of a nation; but they are forced to admit that they are on a false road, and faith in representative government vanishes little by little."

…Political power has its roots in economic power, and since this remain a monopoly of small powerful minorities, it is inevitable that it is utopian to hope in the triumph of pure democracy, where the management of the public thing is truly the task of the people to the benefit of these same people.

The representative system is, in the final analysis, a contrivance conceived in order to give governments deprived of divine investiture the appearance of popular investiture. Anyone who is not satisfied with appearance and searches for substance in human rela-

tionships must necessarily find fault with the illusions perpetuated through this contrivance…

A Desolate Landscape by Wolfi Landstreicher

In the United States at this time, the social landscape is certainly desolate. Meager, stingy people creep about this psychologically post-apocalyptic landscape thanking those in power for the jackboot in their face and begging to be kicked even harder into the dirt in order to be "safe and secure". A democratic police state is developing at a rapid pace.

I can hear the cries of those so-called radicals who feel obliged to uncritically defend democracy in order to maintain their ideology: "But the United States is not a true democracy; the corporations control the politicians." This statement reflects the delusive ideology of these would-be "anti-authoritarian" and "revolutionary" leaders which views people as nothing more than passive, manipulated victims. In fact, when enough people choose to resist fiercely enough, the ruling class is forced to make concessions, even to retreat or stand down. But in the U.S.A. at present, people are demanding the clampdown that those in power are so glad to give.

In several states, voters have voted the "three-strike" policy or something similar into effect. Such policies make a 25-year to life sentence without parole mandatory for anyone on their third felony conviction regardless of their crime. In a similar vein, three states have reinstituted chain gangs with popular support. Snitching has been institutionalized in television shows like "America's Most Wanted", in "WeTip" hotlines, in "Neighborhood Watch" programs and in reward systems in schools — along with numerous other programs. All these programs attempt to portray the cowardly act of snitching as heroic — and the success of these programs indicates their popular support. I could go on and on with exam-

Not that Utopia is immune to the logic of the lesser evil — that is not guaranteed. During revolutionary periods, it has been precisely this logic that has stopped the assaults of the insurgents: when the tempest rages and the billows threaten to sweep everything away there is always some more realistic revolutionary who rushes to detour popular rage toward more "reasonable" demands. After all even someone who wants to turn the world upside down fears losing all. Even when from that *all*, there is really *nothing* that belongs to him.

Who is it? by Adonide

When one speaks of totalitarianism, thought runs immediately to a form of implacable domination that has historically been embodied in the figure of a single dictator. Hitler the Fuhrer, Mussolini the Duce, Franco the Caudillo, Stalin the Little Father, Ceausescu the Leader, Mao the Great Helmsman, Pinochet the generalissimo: all are examples of dictators from a not too distant past that is nevertheless considered difficult to repeat. In the course of the past few years we have been experiencing the end of the era of individual dictatorship as this form of power receives nearly unanimous condemnation. And if in a few parts of the world, regimes still survive that are led by strongmen, the tendency to replace them with modern democracies is taking hold without much dispute. The Fuhrer, the Duce and their like have had to give up their place to somewhat disembodied, cold systems of domination, without surprise, from which the human element is almost completely banished.

But a dictatorship — a totalitarian system — does not necessarily have to be led by a single individual to be considered such. One can consider any regime in which power is concentrated absolutely into the hands of a group of people who, thus, come to have control over all aspects of everyone's existence to be such. From this one can deduce that the most important element in a totalitarian

more closes in on this ideological whitewash, without leaving a way of escape. And as long as the question to resolve is that of how to manage domination rather than considering the possibility of getting rid of it and figuring out how to do so, the logic of those who govern and manage us will continue to dictate the measures to take with regard to everything.

After the injury, the mockery cannot be lacking. At every turn of the screw, we are assured that the result obtained cannot be worse than that which came before, that the persecuted politics — always aimed toward progress — will block the path of more conservative politics, that after having suffered so much difficulty in silence we are now on the right road at last. From lesser evil to lesser evil, the countless reformists who overrun this society drive us from war to war, from catastrophe to catastrophe, from sacrifice to sacrifice. And because one accepts this mortifying logic of petty (change) accounting and of submission to the state, by dint of making calculations to weigh between evil and evil, a day could come when one places one's very own life on the scale: better to croak right now than to continue to languish on this earth. It must be this thought that puts the weapon in the hand of the suicide. Because one plugs one's nose in order to vote for the benefit of power, one ends up no longer breathing.

As we have seen, remaining within the context of the lesser evil does not raise too many difficulties; the difficulty begins at the moment one leaves this context, at the moment one destroys it. All one has to do is affirm that between two evils the worst thing one could do is to choose either one of them, and there it is: the knock of the police at the door. When one is the enemy of every party, every war, every capitalist, all exploitation of nature, one can only appear suspicious in the eyes of the authorities. In fact it is here that subversion begins. Refusing the politics of the lesser evil, refusing this socially instilled habit that induces one to preserve one's existence rather than living it, necessarily leads one to put everything that the real world and its "necessity" drains of meaning into play.

ples of the democratic support of police state programs and policies, but anyone with open eyes can see it all around us, and such lists become tedious.

I'm quite aware of the manipulation of public opinion by those in power, but — as I've said — people are not just passive lumps to be molded to any shape. Manipulation of public opinion can only work on tendencies that are already there, guiding them in the direction that is most useful to power. The development of a police state here has been a *democratic* process, an expression of "the will of the people" — that is to say the general consensus. Any anarchist in this country who still has illusions about a connection between democracy and the freedom to determine ones own life and interactions (or about creating a mass movement) deserves only the most merciless ridicule.

What is happening in the United States is part of a world-wide trend: rabid nationalism, even openly fascist movements, in many places; an upsurge in religious fanaticism in the middle east, eastern Europe, here and in many other places; leftist causes and liberation movements embracing identity politics, often with a corresponding separatism. People feel so small, so weak, so pathetic, that they would rather lock themselves in prisons of social identity, protected by laws, cops and the state than create their lives for themselves.

Within a social system in which suicide may show a greater love for life than the impoverished existences that most people embrace, people are demanding that authority defend their pathetic way of "life" by suppressing anyone who disturbs their illusions. Certainly this is not a new situation. Though at times its methods are more liberal or more harsh, the policies of the ruling order always serve one purpose: the maintenance of social control. So we are documented and required perpetually to ask permission. But I will not ask permission — nor will anyone who would take their life as their own — and I will avoid documentation to the extent that I am able to without impoverishing myself, while striving to destroy all that makes

documentation necessary. My friends and I, together because, and for as long as, we enjoy each other, will create projects, desires and dreams that enrich our lives, which run counter to the meager fare offered by society. Wanting so much, my greedy generosity, my hunger for vitality and passionate intensity, demands that I attack this society and the puny and desolate existence it offers. We who demand the fullness of life cannot wait for the masses to be convinced that they would prefer life to security; our revolt against society is now. Democracy has always been a desert; we want a lush and verdant jungle.

The Lesser Evil by Dominique Misein

Several years ago during an election, a famous Italian journalist invited his readers to hold their noses and fulfill their duty as citizens by voting for the party then in power. The journalist was well aware that to the people this party sent forth the stench of decades of institutional rot — abuse of power, corruption, dirty dealings — but the only political alternative on the market, the left, seemed even more ominous. There was no choice but to hold one's nose and vote for the rulers already in power.

At the time, though it was the subject of much debate, this invitation had some success and can be said, in a sense, to have won the day. This is not surprising. Basically, the journalist's argument used one of the most easily verified conditioned social reflexes, that of the politics of the lesser evil that guides the daily choices of the majority of people. Faced with the affairs of life, good common sense is always quick to remind us that between equally detestable alternatives the best we can do is choose the one that seems to us to be the least likely to bring unpleasant consequences.

How can we deny that our entire life has been reduced to one long and exhausting search for the lesser evil? How can we deny that that concept of choosing the good — understood not in the

does that mean? Briefly, the knife with which the masters of the earth slice the pie of the world's wealth would change and maybe they would add another place to the table of merry guests. The rest of humanity would have to continue to be content with crumbs. Finally, who would dare to deny that the exploitation of nature has caused countless environmental catastrophes. But it isn't necessary to be experts in the matter to understand that making this exploitation "more prudent" will not serve to impede further catastrophes, but solely to render them "more prudent" as well. But does a "prudent" environmental catastrophe exist? And within what parameters can it be measured?

* * *

A small war is better than a big war; being a billionaire is better than being a millionaire; circumscribed catastrophes are better than extended catastrophes. How can we not see that along this road the social, political and economic conditions that render the outbreak of war, the accumulation of privilege and the continuing occurrence of catastrophes possible will continue to perpetuate themselves? How can we not see that such politics does not even offer a minimal practical utility, that when the bucket is full to the brim a drop suffices to make it overflow? From the moment we renounce questioning capitalism as a totality common to all the varieties of political regulation, giving preference instead to the mere comparison between various techniques of exploitation, the persistence of "evil" is guaranteed… Rather than asking oneself whether one wants to have a master to obey, one prefers to choose the master who beats one the least. In this way, every outburst, every tension, every desire fore freedom is reduced to a tamer decision; instead of attacking the evils that poison us , we blame them on the excesses of the system. Within this context, the greater the virulence with which these excesses are denounced, the more the social system that produces them is consolidated. The plague once

thought", the abuses of liberalism. Even for this reality this is all an evil. But it is an inevitable evil, and the most one can do is to try to diminish its effects.

The evil in question, from which we cannot be freed — as should be clear — is a social order based on profit, on money, on merchandise, on the reduction of the human being to a thing, on power — and that has in the state an indispensable tool of coercion. It is only after having put the existence of capitalism, with all of its corollaries, beyond debate that the political attaches can ask themselves which capitalistic form can represent the lesser evil to support. Nowadays, the preference is granted to democracy, which is presented — not inadvertently — as the "least bad of known political systems." When compared with fascism and stalinism, it easily gets the support of western common sense, more so since the democratic lie is based on the (illusory) participation of its subjects in the management of the public thing that, therefore, comes to seem perfectible. Thus people are easily convinced that "more just" state activity, a "better distribution of the wealth", or rather a "more prudent exploitation of resources" constitute the only possibilities at their disposal for confronting the problems of modern civilization.

But in accepting this, a basic detail is omitted. What is omitted is an understanding of what essentially unites the different alternatives advanced: the existence of money, of commodity exchange, of classes, of power. Here one could say it is forgotten that to choose an evil — even if it is a lesser evil — is the best way to prolong it. To use the examples above once more — one "more just" state decides to bomb an entire country to convince a "more evil" state to stop the ethnic cleansing operations within its own borders. There's no use in denying that the difference exists, but we perceive it only in the repugnance that, in this situation, inspires a state logic capable of playing with the lives of thousands of people who are slaughtered and bombed. Similarly, a "better distribution of wealth" tries to avoid concentrating the fruits of the labor of the customary many into the hands of the customary few. But what

absolute sense, but most simply as what is esteemed as such — is generally rejected *a priori*? All of our experience and that of past generations teach us that the art of living is the hardest and that the most ardent dreams can only have a tragic conclusion: victims of the alarm clock, of the closing titles of a film, of the last page of a book. "It has always been this way" — we are told with a sigh, and from that we conclude that it will always be this way.

Clearly, all this does not keep us from understanding how harmful everything we have to face is. But we know how to choose an evil. What we lack — and we lack it because it has been taken from us — is not the capacity to judge the world around us, the horror of which imposes itself with the immediacy of a punch in the face, so much as the ability to go beyond the given possibilities — or even merely attempt to do so. Thus, accepting the eternal excuse that one runs the risk of losing everything if one is not satisfied with what on already has here, one winds up going through one's existence under the flag of renunciation. Our own daily lives with their indiscretions offer us numerous examples of this. In all sincerity, how many of us can boast of reveling in life, of being satisfied by it? And how many can say that they are satisfied by their work, by these hours without purpose, without pleasure, without end? And yet, faced with the bugaboo of unemployment, we are quick to accept waged misery in order to avoid misery without wages. How do we explain the tendency of so many to prolong their years of study for as long as possible — a characteristic that is quite widespread — if not in terms of the refusal to enter into an adult world in which one can see the end of an already precarious freedom? And what can we say then of love, that spasmodic search for somebody to love and by whom to be loved that usually ends up as its parody, since merely in order to remove the specter of loneliness we prefer to prolong emotional relationships that are already worn out? Stingy with amazement and enchantment, our days on earth are only able to grant us the boredom of serial repetition.

So in spite of the numerous attempts to hide or minimize the injuries brought about by the current social system, we see them all. We know all about living in a world that damages us. But to render it bearable, which is to say acceptable, it is enough to objectify it, to furnish it with a historical justification, to endow it with an implacable logic before which our bookkeepers' consciousness can only capitulate. To render the absence of life and its ignoble barter with survival — the boredom of years passed in obligation, the forced renunciation of love and passion, the premature aging of the senses, the blackmail of work, environmental devastation and the various forms of self-humiliation — more bearable, what is better than to relativize this situation, to compare it to others of greater anguish and oppression; what is more effective than to compare it with the worst?

Naturally, it would be a mistake to believe that the logic of the lesser evil is limited to merely regulating our household chores. Above all it regulates and administers the whole of social life as that journalist knew well. In fact, every society known to the human race is considered imperfect. Regardless of their ideas, everyone has dreamed of living in a world different from the present one: a more representative democracy, an economy more free from state intervention, a "federalist" rather than a centralized power, a nation without foreigners and so on even to the most extreme aspirations.

But the desire to realize one's dreams goads one to action, because only action resolves to transform the world, rendering it similar to the dream. Action resounds in the ear like the din of the trumpets of Jericho. No imperative exists that possesses a ruder efficacy, and for anyone who hears it the need to go into action imposes itself without delay and without conditions. But anyone who calls for action to realize the aspirations that enliven her quickly receives strange and unexpected replies. The neophyte learns in a hurry that an effective action is one that limits itself to realizing circumscribed, gloomy and sad dreams. Not only are the great utopias

apparently beyond reach, but even much more modest objectives prove to be barely realizable. Thus anyone who considered transforming the world according to his dream finds herself unable to do anything but transform the dream, adapting it to the more immediate reality of this world. With the aim of acting productively, one finds oneself constrained to repress their dream. Thus, the first renunciation that productive action demands of anyone who wants to act is that she reduce his dream to the proportions recommended by what exists. In this way, she comes to an understanding, in a few words, that ours is an epoch of compromise, of half measures, of plugged noses. Precisely, of lesser evils.

If one considers it carefully, it makes sense that the concept of reformism, a cause to which all are devoted today,[2] represents an accomplished expression of the politics of the lesser evil: a prudent act subject to the watchful eye of moderation which never loses sight of its signs of acceptance and which proceeds with caution worthy of the most consummate diplomacy. The preoccupation with avoiding jolts is such that when some adverse circumstance renders them inevitable, one hurries there to legitimate it, showing how a worse calamity was avoided. Didn't we just go through a war last summer that was justified as the lesser evil in respect to a savage "ethnic cleansing", just as fifty years ago the use of atom bombs on Hiroshima an Nagasaki was justified as a lesser evil in respect to the continuation of the world war? And this in spite of the claim of every government on the planet to abhor the recourse to force in the resolution of conflicts.

Indeed. Even the ruling class recognizes the basis of the critiques formulated with regards to the present social order for which it is otherwise responsible. Sometimes one may even find several of its spokespeople in the frontline in formally denouncing the discriminations of the laws of the market, the totalitarianism of "single

[2] or "a cause for which everyone votes today" — I suspect both meanings were intended in the Italian. — translator