

Urban Democracy

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An Interesting Proposal Towards The Democratization Of Society: The "Memorandum On The Shaping of Technologies" Of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation

Urban democracy is a necessity if democracy in society at large is to be real. Without meaningful ways for ordinary people to influence and shape the most vital conditions of their lives in their immediate surroundings, the democratic process is a mere façade, and political democracy is offering only the – perhaps illusory – promise of our potential, as ordinary citizens, to achieve real democratization, a real say, in our own affairs.

*Local Freedom Presupposes
Society-Wide Freedom.*

*But Society-Wide Freedom Also
Presupposes Local Freedom.*

“Trust me =► tell me =► show me =►
involve me”, they say.

Let's Discuss The 'Green Proposal' on Economic Democracy

Recently, the Working Group on Future Technologies (Arbeitsgruppe Zukunftstechnologien) of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation came forward with their “Memorandum on the Shaping of Technologies” [Memorandum zur Technikgestaltung].

Decades ago, Herbert Marcuse and others were well aware that technological developments and the constraints implicit in them had severe implications for society at large. Gone was the naive optimism that technology as such promised a better and more humane world; that it was simply a question of taking good technology out of bad hands – making it serve human needs instead of profit-minded, particular interests. No, technologies in themselves could be dangerous; it was vital therefore that the population, in civil societies, would have a say, with regard to their application or non-application.

The working group on future technologies of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation zooms in on biotechnologies and more especially, genetically engineered food.

This is, so to speak, the “practical, political context” for them. They are aware that the Green Party forms part of a government which is determined to create the legal frame of reference that will allow large German corporations to exploit the “growth potential” of these “technologies of the future.” They fall back on undefined values vaguely described as “generally accepted, basic ethical positions” [allgemeine akzeptierte ethische Grundpositionen] to formulate certain reservations against cloning, against medical experimentation with stem cells, etc.

Perhaps their most basic conclusion is referring to „irreversible consequences of technology“ [nicht umkehrbare Technikfolgen]. Such irreversible consequences limit future free choice [Zukunftsoffenheit], they reduce the options still open for future generations.

The decision to take vast risks cannot be left to certain individuals; in these cases, the society at large must be able to influence the outcome of decisions.

„Für uns bedeutet Demokratie, eine weitreichende Beteiligung aller BürgerInnen an den Entscheidungen, die in unserem Staat getroffen werden [...] Wir wollen direkte Beteiligungsmöglichkeiten für BürgerInnen fern von Parteien und Lobbyorganisationen. Politische Debatten hinter verschlossenen Türen lehnen wir ab. Entscheidungen und Meinungsbildungsprozesse müssen mitgestaltet werden können. [...] Wir setzen auf Meinungsvielfalt und Diskussionen.[...] [Es geht darum,] die Demokratie voranzubringen. [...] Aktionen und Demonstrationen gehören für uns unzertrennlich zur Demokratie.“

“For us, democracy implies far-reaching participation of all citizens, with regard to the decisions reached in our country. [...] We want direct means of participation unconnected with parties and lobbying agencies. We reject political debates behind closed doors. Decisions and processes leading to the shaping of opinions have to be open to the influence of everyone. [...] We advocate a plurality of opinions and we advocate discussions. [...] [What matters is,] to achieve democratic advances. [...] Actions and demonstrations are an intrinsic part of democracy.”
(From a statement by Werner Graf, Ines Eichmüller, Katrin Schmidberger, Daniel Kühne, 4 young German Greens, published in the internet under www.joschkas-nachwuchs.de)

This challenges the assumed ‘right’ of entrepreneurs, of boards of directors, of high-ranking corporate managers, and of investors, to take whatever decision is deemed profitable. The short-termism and profit-mindedness of big business, in other words, cannot be the last word if future risks of often considerable dimensions are to be assessed. Decisions taken within corporations, in the fields of research and development, as well as production and transport have to be subjected to public scrutiny. Democratic participation in corporate decision-making processes is an absolute and inescapable necessity in civil societies concerned about the consequences of relying on outmoded technologies as well as developing and applying new technologies.

The Greens, in the tracks of Juergen Habermas, make democratic change a question of communication and trust.

They aim at decision-making processes that are “open with regard to outcome, open with regard to participation, and characterized by transparency”[“ergebnisoffene.

*We would wish very much that the same could be said about decision-making processes by local, regional, and federal governments. Certainly, what the paper of the **working group** demands is a truly democratic process.*

- *Every process of deliberation is meaningless if the outcome is already decided behind closed doors and thus a foregone conclusion.*
- *Every democratic process should be open in that sense that every citizen may join in.*
- *Every democratic process must go on “under the eyes” of those who are not directly participating. As a matter of necessary democratic control, transparency is indispensable.*

While it is true that the decision-making processes within the Green Party or their coalition partner, the SPD, are no more transparent and open to outside participation, or even open-ended (with regard to results) than those of the opposition parties, and

while it is equally true that local, regional, and federal governments do not measure up to the democratic ideals pronounced by the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation's Working Group on Future Technologies, we still welcome their suggestions.

We especially embrace the suggestion that democratic participation must be extended and should also include participation in vital decision-making processes of private business that affect the entire population, including future generations.

The concerned scientists and professional politicians who have worked on the proposal suggest a number of democratic channels, institutions, and/or instruments of participation.

These include:

- institutions of “power sharing” [“Gewaltenteilung”], presumably normal democratic institutions such as local / municipal assemblies, regional and federal parliaments;

as well as the instruments of

- citizens participation (Bürgerbeteiligung)
- courts of appeal (Berufungsinstanzen)
- professional ethics (Berufsethik)
- methodological discipline (methodische Disziplin)
or
- quality management (Qualitätsmanagement).

The problem here is that democratic institutions which may either present the interests of ordinary citizens or of big business (local, regional, national parliaments) and *new instruments of direct democracy (citizens participation, etc.)* are mixed with institutions which so far have betrayed a strangely conservative bend, for the most time (the German court system is as conservative and as biased as the U.S. Supreme Court was, in his ruling against hand counts, in the wake of the last presidential election).

What is more, other categories are thrown in which are rather abstract (professional ethics; methodological discipline) and which do not represent ‘subjects’ or ‘agents’ of democratization as such, but at best expectations we harbor with respect to the scientific community in democratic societies.

We know, however, that these expectations, more often than not, are being disappointed. We must not address an undefined ‘fetish,’ *the abstract category of professional ethics*, but be more precise what we expect from democratic scientists. Civil society is not to be equated with the status quo; it is still to be achieved; it is an aim, a task, a goal – perhaps one that can only be approximated. In the interest of achieving a more democratic, more humane, more civil society, it is desirable that scientists ask themselves what might be implied in the demand for a more progressive and humane variety of “professional ethics.” Today, reference to one’s “professional ethics” is often defensive. Salaried scientists who sell their labor and their know-how to major corporations refer to it in order to say, *Don’t criticize me. I know what I’m doing. I’m not answerable to the crowd; I’m only answerable to my conscience and to the professional ethics of my peer group (a group usually just as involved in selling their research efforts to big business and just as reluctant to face public questions and public criticism).* Of course, there are concerned scientists, outsiders, whistle-blowers, dissidents. Of course, the debate they and the more awake part of the public may unleash, could very well lead to a debate on professional ethics and a more historically concrete formulation of such a set of ethical “basic rules,” as is required in the present situation.

Methodological discipline is even more of an empty phrase, suggesting a generally respected approach.

And finally, what are we to make of “quality management.” It is a corporate strategy or tool applied in the interest of maximizing profits. It brings in the corporation the policy of which is to be democratically controlled, as one of the controllers. On the other hand, the citizens are pushed into the role of a political body either indirectly represented (in often questionable ways) or, via citizens participation, a *minority* tolerated at best.

What is the positive side of the GREEN proposal?

It is the demand for public participation in corporate decision-making processes (the demand for “Öffnung des Unternehmens oder gar einer Beteiligung der Öffentlichkeit an Entscheidungsprozessen”).

This is a great step ahead if it is taken seriously, that is to say, *as the assertion of the right of citizens to control their own fate* instead of being at the mercy of the decisions of the few *who “own (and/or control) everything,” in terms of factories, distribution channels, the financial system, etc. etc.*

“We must not leave topics like *the hours of work or job training (professional education)* to the entrepreneurs”

“One of the three good news the Nice summit has brought [...] is that many employees are now getting the right of being informed and of participation in decision-making processes.”

(Nicole NOTAT, leader of the French trade union CFDT)

We fear, however, that these rights, important as they are, do not go far enough.

We have to press for real democratization, full transparency, a complete restructuring and modernization of that sphere where we actively take part in the production of social wealth, but enjoy hardly any democratic rights!

What is the downside of the proposal?

The enterprise is asked to understand that it is good to be open. They should “*trust*” the public, trust ordinary citizens.

“A good example [of actual participation] is the Aventis Corporation, where German and French trade unions have installed a system of information, consultation, and participation that is ‘made-to-measure’ [suited to concrete needs]”

Nicole NOTAT (CFDT)

We hope the relationship between trade union officials and the top management of AVENTIS is not too cozy, at the expense of the rank-and-file. This would be exactly the strategy of building trust the German Greens seem to recommend...

“Trust Us,” Mr. Wolf Said to Miss Goat

Trust us, the German *Greens* (or rather, a bunch of their expert advisers and top politicians) say. For all we can tell they are addressing **BIG BUSINESS**. “Trust us, the Greens,” they say. Perhaps also implying, “Trust us, the people, ordinary citizens *with legitimate concerns about what you are doing or not doing.*” Of course, they are right: we, the citizens, have legitimate concerns over what **BIG BUSINESS** is doing or not doing.

But isn’t the question: “Should we trust *them*?” Should we trust corporations, billionaire shareholders, politicians in league with them, governments bowing to their demands and eager to anticipate their requirements? It would be too much to ask the people to trust its rulers.

“Confidence is alright,” the first leader of what claimed to be a workers’ state said, “confidence is alright. But control is better.” Maybe not so stupid. He only forgot to settle one question: Who should have confidence in whom, and who should do the controlling?

The respected civil rights leader, Senator Jesse Jackson, has been known to do for his beautiful attempts to reduce racial inequality and help diminish the exclusion of Black Americans. The strategy of the Rainbow/PUSH coalition has been to threaten boycotts in order to make corporations abandon discriminating practices. This is absolutely necessary and a positive action. But if Senator Jackson declares that it is his aim to let Afro-Americans participate in the wealth of Corporate America, he implicitly and tacitly consents to a situation when Corporate America allots us small portions of the wealth it controls, in the form of wage employment, of wages paid... They run our lives; they tell us what do to; they expose us to safety hazards on the job; they poison the environment of our children and grand-children. And all we are to expect, is the chance of getting a job and being paid a wage.

We still remember 1953 when Bertolt Brecht suggested that the leaders of the G.D.R. should go and elect for themselves “another” people, a different one from that which they felt they could no longer trust.

Liberals and conservatives in representative democracies (bourgeois democracies, the left once called them) agree with the abstract, theoretical principle that governments need to be controlled - by members of parliament! That is to say, the Conservative Prime Minister or Chancellor is [in theory] controlled by the Conservative MPs. And while their election victory made

possible a Conservative government, no one is astonished *that the bunch forming the government is also the bunch that is supposed to control it. The people in control? Come off it - : The people, we are told, should not meddle in political affairs but be content to go to the polls.*

“Trust us,” what does it mean then – when supporters of the Green Party in Germany suggest that corporations should not resist democratization?

It means, strangely enough, trust the people, the citizens.

This is what Ulbricht wanted to do, but could not do.

Perhaps, BIG BUSINESS cannot trust us, the citizens, either.

Too bad for them, isn't it?

However, there is one point still to be made.

We, the people, are the sovereign.

The few who own everything have only one vote, just as we have. Let them join the debate. Let them cast their vote. Their undue influence will have to go once we, the ordinary citizens, decide to take out fate, to take history, into our own hands.

We know that governments do not trust us, the people. Lenin didn't. Ulbrecht didn't. Neither Churchill nor de Gaulle, Adenauer or Eisenhower did. Orwell was right, the like to supervise us. They like to stay in control. For them we are dumb and need to be guided. They would make a perfect Fuehrer if things come to the extreme.

But we don't trust them either. Not too much, at least. Not as much as the fire department or the local police officer.

That's why we have to enter the ring and speak out for ourselves.

That's why we demand more direct democracy – a democracy to be extended into every sphere of social life: the work process, education, the production and provision of housing, the shaping of the urban or rural world we inhabit, the ecology, culture, you name it.

We the have the right to shape the conditions of our lives.

[We, the people.de]

“...the CFDT is also organizing strikes. But not for the sake of agitation. We want to force [business] to talk with us. And we want to obtain the most positive results that are positive, for our members.”

(Nicole NOTAT, CFDT)

This is again the position of those who want to act ON OUR BEHALF. Professional trade unionists. Professional politicians. Those who think they know best. They see us as “clients,” “customers” to be served. Passive. At best “the steam” driving the engine, as the poet, Volker Braun, put it. The bureaucrats of EAST BLOC “real socialism” saw their subjects just like that.

*What Nicole NOTAT seems to aim at is the work of a lobbyist, for a small group of people. Keeping an eye on their restricted, particular interest. Mediating a solution, a compromise with the restricted, particular interests of the firm. **This way, a fuller democracy will hardly be achieved. The deep and fundamental problems of our society as well as our habitat, the earth, the environment, will not be solved.** It is the way chosen by the U.A.W. which achieved fine material benefits for those employed by GM. But left the black labor force of Detroit (shed by the BIG THREE during their “restructuring process”) out in the cold. The misery and degradation of an entire city was peanuts to the BIG THREE and to the U.A.W.! This is the limited view of we reject. This is the pragmatism of “socially responsible partnership” between unions and Big Business which we reject!*

“The methods of observation are manifold: hidden cameras, control of e-mails, infinitely small microphones [...], listening in to private conversations via satellite, genetical testing conducted without consent or even knowledge of the person concerned [...]“
(DIE ZEIT, a German weekly, March 15, 2001, p. 13, commenting on the “dangers democracy is exposed to“ as we are increasingly being “watched by Big Brother“)

The innovative potential of the Arts and of Science

*„Die Innovationspotentiale in der Kunst und Wissenschaft hängen davon ab, dass Bezüge zur Lebenswelt bestehen bleiben und vertieft werden.“
(Julian Nida-Ruemelin)*

The innovative potential of the arts and of science depend on keeping the relationship to the ‘real life’ or everyday life of ordinary human beings intact; in fact, this relationship has to be strengthened. This is what the Secretary of Culture of the German government recently let us know.

This is fine. Is it? We may well ask ourselves what he means by “relationships” of arts and science to the “Lebenswelt”. Subordination to business interests, the calculation of profits that pervades every sphere of our present-day society? But what if the arts and society should flourish exactly if they prove resistant to the pressures of business, if they prove to be not that easily exploited?

And what if the ‘Lebenswelt’, the world of the living is, often enough, a world of tenderness, of slow movements, of patience, of looking closely and with much care at life in all its forms? And if accumulating zeros added to a preceding figure from 1 to 9 is an inane, in fact deadly, affair? We don’t eat money, after all, you know. And bank accounts are merely a peculiarly dull form of socially forceful fiction.

Mr Nida-Ruemelin, we would like to know the precise intention of your enigmatic statement. Is it just an utterance of a ‘belle esprit,’ a beautiful soul

The French President, Monsieur Chirac, recently said that “the time is ripe for a right to enjoy an environment that is “intact.” This refers to our “Lebenswelt” (the milieu of our daily lives). It concerns one of many rights they have taken away from us, robbing us of it. They – that is: politicians and business, that unholy alliance.

*telling us to subordinate the arts and science to neoliberal demands that everything be marketable, a commodity, exploitable by business?
Or are you trying to say all in one word, one sentence, trying to please your boss, Mr Schroeder as well as the radical artist and committed scientist who thinks his labor should be related to the specific (cultural and material) needs of the common folks?
What, for instance, do you think of the following equations:*

e-gov. = orw.gov ?

e-gov. = o.gov ?

***There are good reasons to be concerned about e-government, aren't there?
At the recent meeting (last year) in Davos, Mr. Gates was pointing out the beautiful headway made by e-gov. in Germany.***

Isn't e-gov. an example of the looming interconnection of science, politics, and our everyday lives, our ,Lebenswelt'?

*The tendency of government is to embrace the internet and so-called e[lectronic]-government in order to streamline government and make it more efficient. More efficient, as they see efficiency. Their main idea is to define the citizen as a **client**, a **customer** and to pretend that better government is equivalent to better service.*

But by consenting to their definition of the citizen as a client, we end up, again, in a passive role. A comfortable role, they suggest. For aren't we "served," as "customers"? Yes, served. And supervised. Controlled.

The internet allows two-way communication. It should allow us to look into a glass house of government. It should allow debate. It should allow us to give directives, in democratic manner, by way of majority vote, subsequent to intensive debate. Our debate. Not the shadow boxing of two (almost) indistinguishable 'candidates', on television.

But instead, their *transparency* is a farce. Secrecy is the rule. Only small compartments are opened and exposed to our scrutiny. If we engage in two-way communication with 'them,' it is to fill out forms. To require standardized information. The entire communication process is rudimentary, restricted, structured by those in control of it. Not by us. By them!

*It will help them fire personnel. It will help them 'restructure' and 'rationalize' their bureaucracy. The bureaucracy will function more smoothly, efficiently. It will acquire new, more dangerous technological tools. **More dangerous for democracy, if these tools are controlled by them.***

In the German town of Giessen, a timid ATTEMPT is being made to introduce real two-way communication and encourage participation of ordinary citizens in the affairs and decision-making processes of their town.
[www.forum-giessen.de]
But is it "integrative," meant to calm down anger, frustration, and resentment of voters? Are they merely allowed to decide trifling, secondary questions?

More conducive to a (more real, more direct) democracy, if we succeed to place control of these instrument **into the hands of the people.**

In the Cassel region, in the state of Hesse (Germany), a new “experiment” in regionally-based participation in government affairs is about to be staged!
Another attempt at lean government, a public-private partnership in managing regional affairs They call it the “Förderkreis Pro Nordhessen”. It is seen as a “steering circle” made up by representatives of business, science, and politics: by business-men, professors, and professional politicians. Its task will be “regional management.”
This is **exactly the alliance** debating the fate of mankind, the fate of you and me behind closed doors in Davos.
If this is an increase in **citizen participation**, an advance of **direct democracy**, I’m nuts!

The big question today is: should we have a government controlling the tools Orwell predicted, tools used already for supervising us, the people (the populace, ordinary citizens)? Or should we determinedly demand, again and again, that these electronic tools be used for democratic debate and as one of the means to enhance direct democracy?

We can have either Orwellian “democracy” or a more real, more direct democracy. **E-government**, the use of electronic means of communication can either mean **Orw. Gov**, Orwellian government. Or it can lead us closer to **O-gov**, Zero government, a reduction of government functions, a reduction of the power of those who rule us, the people, as we learn to administer our affairs on the various levels (local, regional, “national,” worldwide) when and where this is necessary.

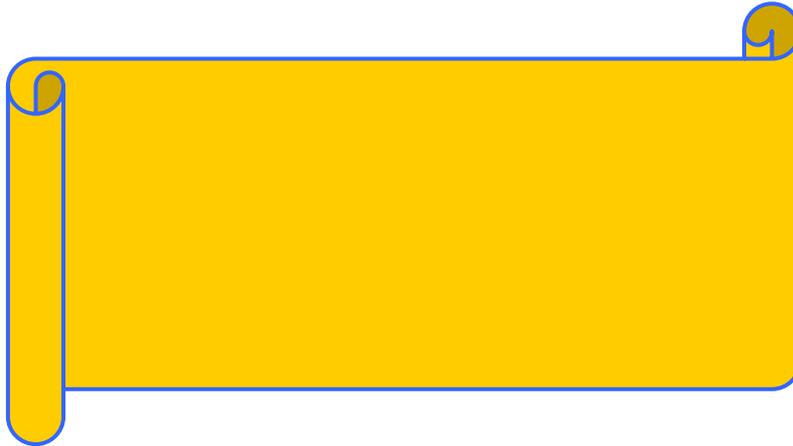
The innovative potential of electronic communication is obvious.

The question will be, “Who owns it? Who controls it? Who uses it? For what purpose?”

Yes, Mr. Nida-Ruemelin, this concerns our everyday lives, our ‘Lebenswelt’, as you put it so nicely.

We still hope that scientists and artists will stand at our side.

In Holland, authorities include chips in passports of resident aliens, making them readable by computer.
In Britain, video surveillance in public places is vastly on the rise.
In Germany, a social security number that is also your number as a taxpayer is envisioned. It would make cross communication between several branches of government easily possible, enabling them to access a joint pool of data concerning you, the citizen.
THEY WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT US!
But what they are doing remains in the dark.
As in Brecht’s song about the shark. About Mack The Knife. “die im Dunklen sieht man nicht” (those in the dark, remain invisible men!)...



For continued learning!
Informal, organized by ourselves!
For increased local democracy!

We, the citizens, can well replace Congress, or Parliament. We can replace the European Commission, the boards of directors of corporations.

The army. Prisons.

Schools and universities (as they are presently run).

The necessary resources are available, in our rich societies. And in such vastness that we are very well able to support countries with poor resources in the Third World, in order to aid the effort to built more real, more direct local and regional democracies and ‘network’ them globally.

Für lebenslanges Lernen!
Informell und selbstorganisiert!
Für mehr lokale Demokratie!

Wir können, als Bevölkerung, *informell und selbstorganisiert*, den Bundestag ersetzen, übrigens auch die Europäische Kommission, die Aufsichtsräte und das Management von Daimler-Chrysler oder VW, die Bundeswehr, die Gefängnisse, die Schulen und Universitäten (so wie sie jetzt organisiert sind).

Die benötigten Ressourcen sind in unseren Gesellschaften, in West-Europa und Nord-Amerika, vorhanden – sogar in solchem Überfluß,

daß wir die ressourcenärmeren Länder der Dritten Welt solidarisch unterstützen können in ihrem Versuch, es uns im Aufbau lokaler sowie regionaler Demokratie und ihrer weltweiten „Vernetzung“ gleichzutun.

Local democracy stands for a stronger voice for individual citizens. It supports their attempts to organize in pluralist fashion. It favors relative local autonomy, not as a force of social disintegration but as a stronger local base of a world-wide, *cooperative human society*.

DISSOLVE YOUR STATE!

TEAR DOWN THE “BERLIN WALL” OF YOUR BOUNDARIES!

The aim: the united communities and confederated regions of the world.

Not today, perhaps.

But as soon as possible.

The dominant point of view in international law in the case of the disintegration of Yugoslavia has upheld the right of democratically legitimated secession.

This point of view upheld the legitimacy of the declaration of independence of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and it later on provided the basis for a referendum in Montenegro.

As a consequence of the right of democratic secession, the right of secession of the Krajina from Croatia should have been maintained, as well as the right of secession of overwhelmingly Croatian parts of Mostar, from Mostar.

Ultimately, the right of secession is based on the will of a local majority of the population; it is implicit in local democracy.

Sovereignty does not reside at the top of states, with governments, but at the grass roots, with the populace of local units which form ties and are the vital democratic cornerstones, the elements which are involved in building larger political entities, be it regions, “nations,” or federations of “nations.” In so far as the “people” (or populace) is no “ethnic entity” – it never really is - , the sovereign people is the addition of local populations with recognizable democratic bodies and specific, though debatable interests.

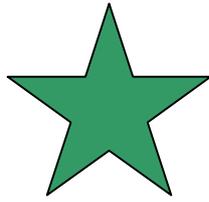
This is one side of the matter.

The other is that advanced material and cultural production relies on cooperative links – links of exchange, that is.

Society as the basis of human production forms the overriding context or necessary condition of all social activity of the grass roots at the local level.

Local self-rule and local democratic decision-making can only realistically and legitimately cover *so much ground*, that is to say, it can only refer to restricted matters of exclusively local importance. In matters where cooperation across the limits of local units is *a must*, democratic decisions *have to be taken jointly by all the “local units” involved*. Layers of democratic decision-making are required above the local level. In the last analysis, in a situation where the perspective of global exchange and cooperation is becoming inescapable, the society we live in tends to become a global or world-wide society. Thus, the **tendency of respecting increased democratic self-rule in various matters on the local level** that is increasingly asserting itself with full justification **has to be balanced by an increasing tendency to coordinate and decide in a democratic way all globally important matters on a global level**.

The vital question here is: Do we want a global technocratic management of global affairs in the interest of powerful corporations (in the last analysis, a global dictatorship), or do we succeed to have democratic channels by which the grass roots representatives can be chosen to express the interests, aims, and wishes of local and regional populations in global democratic bodies?



Local freedom presupposes society-wide freedom. But society-wide freedom also presupposes local freedom. In countries like Britain, the U.S., in France, Italy, today's Germany – aren't we free? What sense does it make to speak about URBAN DEMOCRACY. Why should we make it an issue?

For one thing, there is a truth in it that no matter how “free” we are, we never feel free enough. The concept is oceanic, without bounds. The reality finds us conditioned. There are those of us who, like the author of these lines, revolted against sayings that were preached, in certain circles, even by governments: “Freedom is insight into necessity.” Today, neo-liberal “pragmatists” try to tell us something similar. Freedom to them is to bow to the necessities of the market place. To face the realities and adapt to them. A student of Niclas Luhmann, Niels Werber, summed up a central position of *systemic* thought by quoting the well-known theoretician who wrote that the “differences which the economy produces and leaves us as a heritage cannot become the object of political choice.” Werber added, “It is possible to elect parties, but you cannot elect economic success or technological progress.”

But isn't this the old fallacy that the economy is by no means a political economy?



Thank you, Mr Schroeder!

The German government recently declared that it seeks to achieved the “reform and democratization” of the European Union (or, for short, EU).

We wholeheartedly support every genuine effort at democratization of the EU. We fear, however, that the thrust of the present proposal of the Schroeder government is not so much in the direction of real democratization, but rather aims to invest the bodies of the EU with wider powers, at the expense of member states, and without the needed democratic channels of effective participation and decision-making that the population of the EU is direly lacking, today. Member states have at least minimal democratic legitimacy although it must be pointed out that democratic reform and increased direct democracy at every level (from the local level to the ‘national’ level) is direly needed. What is unacceptable in a democratic society, is the present-day lack of intra-party democracy and the near-hermetic existence of a *classe politique* relying on careful mechanisms of screening, cooptation, and corruption of conscience by way of manifold promises of political ‘careers’ (and concomitant material benefits). But even this all but perfect level of democracy is not attained by the bodies of the EU, farcically controlled by a caricature of a parliament.

Many critics see the EU as an outright instrument of European big business. Small wonder at a time where conservatives and social-democrats alike embrace the neo-liberal credo.

But how dangerously anti-democratic the EU has become (if it wasn’t anti-democratic from the very beginning), became obvious when a statement to trusted members of the press accredited with the EU was made public by accident, some time ago.

Published as an appendix to the documents EuGH C-215/96 and EuGH C-216/96, this text stated that journalists should not be “more popish than the pope” (“päpstlicher als der Papst”, that is, they should not take the question of truthful reporting too seriously).

“Too much information sometimes results in disinformation,” the EU bureaucrats claimed – insisting on their right to keep essential things

hidden from the public. Openly they stated that sometimes “suppression of facts” was to be preferred, and that “certain informations” should be “consciously concealed” (“bewußt verschleiert”)!

This attitude towards the press, towards the public, towards the need of democratic societies to have the facts openly on the table, in the interest of an open and free and informed debate, is scandalous.

Both Jaques Santer (not a Conservative! it shows how far social-democrats and ex-socialists are implicated, as well!) and his press secretary, Martine Reicherts, tried to play it down, suggesting that the document was merely a draft copy, the work of some irresponsible underling, and distributed by mistake.

However, we have seen that during the NATO involvement in KOSOVO and YUGOSLAVIA, as well as in the context of the Rambouillet “peace” talks, all governments of the European NATO member states have practiced exactly the politics of “secret diplomacy” that Mr. Kissinger once recommended, a policy that is deeply anti-democratic. Disinformation and suppression of facts were the order of the day. The public was distrusted and was lied to. *This* is the professional ethics of our stalwarts of Western democracy, this is the ethics of the powerful politicians and business tycoons, as well as their entourage of professors, journalists, and entertainers who meet at Davos, Aspen, the Bilderberg Club, and elsewhere to coordinate policies and sort out differences in the interest of CORPORATE POWER. Thank you, Mr Schroeder! If this is what we have to expect from the EU, we do not want a “more powerful EU”!

Instead, we seriously urge you, the public, to demand from your governments that proposals for the democratization of the EU be made public. These government proposals must be publicly debated, amended or rewritten after democratic grass-root debate, and adopted by referendum

National parliaments have become untrustworthy stalwarts of EU democratization. Every government has relied on parliamentary majorities as ‘rubber stamp’-like backers of their proposals. Parliamentary control of governments is totally insufficient. The dependencies of delegates on party machines and the control of party machines by the party leadership needs to be subjected to critical, scientific analysis, in order to search for remedies. Today, business interests dominate major parties of every tendency. WE, THE PEOPLE are left out of the game, except as ‘sheep’ counted, every four year or so. Our interests may be manifold, may be in need of clarification, and to formulate them better may need debate after debate after debate. WE, THE PEOPLE, are not perfect, are not ‘pure,’ we are entangled in particular interests – some rational, some destructive. The self-proclaimed ‘elites’ claiming to know “what is best for us” have long decided that the defense of the interests of BIG BUSINESS is what is best for us. Shortsighted as they are, they screw up the

future of the earth. They create private, sterile wealth *in a few hands*, and let the material infrastructure (sewers, bridges, the rail system, roads, school buildings) rot away. They let the cultural infrastructure fall apart, backing the ‘successful’, profitable ventures in education, film, television, theater, literature, and art as if intent that we should all go down and become really as stupid and lacking in phantasy as possible. And all the while, the *classe politique* that is responsible for this turn to the worst is finding the educated pimps and whores who sustain their cynical intention to make profit the ultimate goal, by their ‘learned views’ published in ‘serious research studies’. *Thank you, Mr. Schroeder! The totalitarianism of the profit system and of CORPORATE POWER is no better than Stalin’s or Brezhnev’s variety! Thank you, Mr Schroeder – but we don’t want a Western Deng Xiao Peng who thinks that a booming economy profiting a few hundred scoundrels is enough, who believes in the filtering-down effect that will makes us eat the ‘delicious crumbs left for the populace’, who thinks that the farcical drappings of “democracy” are good enough for us! Thank you! But we want a say in our affairs! We want direct democracy – more of it, more and more and more! We know the survival of the earth, of its eco-system, the survival of humanity depends on it. We know the pursuit of happiness, our unalienable right, depends on it. NO TO CORPORATE POWER, to democratic bodies subjected to the interests of BIG BUSINESS. People’s power! as they shouted when they toppled Marcos. “Wir sind das Volk![We are the people]”, as they shouted, in Leipzig.*

AFTER READING THE BRIEF NOTE IN THE PRESS

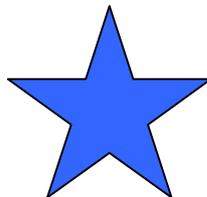
On a press release that occurred by chance
when the European Commission published it
as an appendix of EuGH C-215/96 and C-216/96

While they are inviting
their friends to the club
in Davos, in Aspen,
at the Bertelsmann Foundation
or, on the occasion of another ‘art show’
to Prince Bernhard’s hotel
they let them, once more,
‘in’ on things
Hey, the say,
you correspondents
aren’t you really
part of our crowd?
part of the elites?, they say

grinning at each other
Maybe we could have
your salary increased
Or better still, make your job
more secure
For we know them all too well -
your editor-in-chief
the owner of the newspaper you work for
or of the chain of t.v. stations
It wouldn't be nice, therefore
if you talk too much
You shouldn't be
more popish than the pope
Too much information sometimes leads to
disinformation, you know
Some *repression of the facts* at times may be better
A small dose of *hypocrisy and cynicism*
wouldn't be bad for you
Certain informations should be
consciously veiled, in the future

Ah well!, nothing of the sort was known
to Martine Reicherts!
nor Jacques Santer after delivering these recipes to the press
They just turned up, as if a product of sleep
Maybe some part-time worker
had been dusting old files

Note: Italics refer to direct quote from the EU document



Who is the ordinary citizen?

In a way, the ordinary citizen does not exist.

There are those who love dogs, who are neutral on them, who fear or abhor them.

There are lovers of snowmobiles, or mobile phones, and those who'd rather have these devices banished to Dante's hell.

But in the end, all these differences come to next to nothing if community virtues are at stake.

And in the end, this crowd of different individuals is sharing another experience: they are powerless, in the face of Corporate America, or in France, Corporate France, in Japan or Italy, Corporate Japan or Corporate Italy. Powerless, that is - unless they unite and defend their democratic rights.

Their different views and interests with regard to this and that minor item fade when it comes to this big issue: that democracy was devised as an instrument of settling questions, by majority decision, in a society thought to consist of free and equal women and men.

No longer equal, economically, the platform on which the democratic process rests, is out in question, it is jeopardized, on the brink of collapse or of becoming a mere stage for a "make-believe democracy."

Bush's election, in 2000, proved once again the power of big money, of corporate donors. It produced a relative advantage, in terms of the spending budgets of candidates. It decided the influence of their public relations campaigns. It helped sway the gullible - those

It isn't that politicians are bad people, worse than you or me, for instance. It is the "temptation of power" that spoils them.

Let us embrace decentralization.

Let us decentralize power, distributing it to as many people as possible: giving it to ourselves, the people.

The population.

The populace.

This is what direct democracy is about.

If we need delegates, let's instruct them what to do.

Let's control them and recall them, if necessary.

A delegate - that's not a professional politician.

That's you or your neighbor, as a recallable individual, serving for a clear purpose, for a brief time, to represent the point of view of a local majority, on that specific occasion.

Politicians want to coopt (or exclude) us, just like they have been co-opted (fearing the penalty of exclusion).

impressed by smiles on t.v. and the bias of the business-dominated media.

In the context of advocating the rights of the people, especially the right to increased local democracy, it is not uncommon to question the role of big business in the political process and especially the predominance of corporate power in our formally democratic societies.

Is this juxtaposition of "the people" (the population, the populace, the rank-and-file) and "big business" justified?

We think it is although we know that shareholders worth hundreds of millions, top managers with salaries that easily make them millionaires, are part of the population and as citizens deserve to be heard, just as you and me. It is not that they have the vote which it has become necessary to object to, it is that their political weight and influence often surpasses that of thousands, of tens of thousands, sometimes even of hundreds of thousands of voters.

The "people" certainly is no ethnic entity; it is manifold and diverse in its social character, made up by different strata, groups, or classes of people.

Still, we discover mainly two "camps."

On the one side, there are the "common folk", people with not much control over social processes, mostly folks in more or less *dependent working positions*.

Besides these salaried people and wage-earning people in dependent jobs, there are *those who are "independent"*: artists, beggars, physicians not attached to a hospital but practicing medicine on their own premises, writers, traveling salesmen working to sell certain products while receiving no fixed salary, and so on and so forth. We may call them "independent" for mainly one reason: they are those are working either factually or legally (formally) for themselves.

The salaried people (except for those earning large salaries and bonuses while occupying positions in the upper echelons of mid-sized and large corporations), as well as the wage-earners, we may well

lump together with the independent ones: All of them, salaried clerks, employed workers, independent professions, basically live by what they do: what they produce, what they teach or heal or advise, what they help distribute as a saleswoman, a driver, a docker... They are, mostly, a hard-working, sturdy, independent-minded bunch of people. Varied in their tastes and the way they dress, they share one thing: they are the vital support of every democracy, attached to values of good neighborhood and cooperation, to ideals of fairness, justice, and humanity.

For business, these values are, in truth, all secondary.

Supported if and as long as they help make a GOOD PROFIT, abandoned if they come in the way of PROFIT.

The dictatorships propped up by business in the last 100 years or so are numbered by the dozens. The dead that had to pay for wars unleashed because they profited business are millionfold.

The second "camp," the camp of BIG BUSINESS, is not wholeheartedly democratic.

But is the equation BUSINESS = BIG BUSINESS correct?

There are, of course, a lot of businesses which aren't BIG...

The fact, therefore, is that there are many types of business, super-big, big, mid-sized, small, tiny.

The very small and tiny don't count, except as voters, for the defenders of BUSINESS INTERESTS. Their position is close to the category we called "independents."

The mid-sized firms of today fit already in the category BIG BUSINESS.

But what about all the firms that survived as family ventures and never grew big? Or that originated, more recently, due to outsourcing strategies of large corporations?

What about the subcontractors, the suppliers of parts?

Aren't their owners and top-managers like the *contre-maitres* of the 18th and early 19th century? People who are formally independent while supervising production (or distribution) processes whereas, in

truth, they are factually controlled by some large "customer," some large corporation?

Much of what we call mid-sized and small business is dependent in one way or other on big business. This is true not only of parts suppliers, textile firms producing clothes at the behest of some large trading corporation, mid-sized developers that effectively are merely a pawn in the hands of banking corporations, or construction firms acting as subcontractors of corporations engaging in property speculation... It also is true of law firms, public relation agencies, job recruiters, and so on and so forth. It is their position of dependence that enforces their loyalty to big business. It is the fact that they are often *squeezed* and *milked* that makes them pay wages and benefits which by and large trail those of the larger, unionized corporations. But the fact that they are being squeezed is also at the origin of contradictions between BIG BUSINESS and dependent, MID-SIZED and SMALL firms. It is a secondary conflict; it concerns their rate of profit which suffers because BIG BUSINESS is above all concerned to better its own rate of profit. It is secondary because in their common concern about PROFIT they are ready to join hands and establish a common policy, regarding the legitimate interests and rights of the "common folk:" regarding the right to decent standards of living, decent housing, safe working conditions, good schools for one's offspring, a cultural infrastructure of museums, theaters, etc.

This, then, is our views of the basic dichotomy in present-day society, our view of where the line runs, between those interested in a greater say for every citizen, and those defending the privilege of exorbitant political influence of the few. We are sure that you, whether a conservative or a liberal, a Democrat or a Republican or Third Party Voter in the U.S., a Tory or Labor supporter in Britain, a Social-Democrat or Conservative on the European continent, can see the point.

The question, for all of us, should be: How can we limit the political influence of BIG BUSINESS in the interest of democracy?

How can we make sure that each voice counts in equal fashion, that there is no indirect way of back-room influence buying which makes the democratic process a farce, and makes governments serve the interest of the few?

It is mistaken to think that this is a question raised by just one side of the political spectrum, social-democrats, liberal Democrats in the U.S., "radicals", you name it.

The question is raised by more and more people on both sides of the political spectrum.

It is raised by those disillusioned by **politicians** who swell the ranks of non-voters, abstaining as well, now.

It is raised by the councilman in some small town who feels rage facing the demands and, in fact extortions of some investor - demands that the community pay for infrastructure, amenities, job training, that it forego the collection of taxes that investor would normally have to pay during the next 5 or 10 years...

The issue of *how democratic our society is* does not concern just one political side of the spectrum, it concerns you and me. What we are dealing with is more than an abstract ideal; it is the survival of democracy itself that may well depend on debating this issue and thus, on our search for better, more just solutions...

IT WON'T WORK...

Yes, it won't work.

If we don't become responsible for ourselves.

Responsible for our community, our environment.

Nobody can do the job for us.

That's the lesson we have to learn.

And we will not be able to do the job, and will go down, as a humanity doomed, if we don't embrace the fact that we are responsible.

It is OUR JOB.

We have to grow up.

We have to change the course of history.

The course of that vast ship called Globalization which will go down like another Titanic, taking us with it.

If we don't preserve the environment that is such a "cheap commodity" for big business.

If we don't close the gap between RICH and POOR.

If justice and democracy and community values are empty words for us.

For in the end, in a democratic society, we are ALL "ordinary citizens." We are supposed to be free and equal women and men. And it does not work out too well if some are "more equal than others."

The ordinary citizen: Between a Desire to be Told What To Think and Do - And Frustration At Being Made A FOOL?

Are we all harboring the secret urge for "charismatic leaders"? Too lazy to think, too tired to think and act when we come home, exhausted, from stressful jobs?

There are always those who pose as trustworthy, as the final political savior who will not disappoint us.

Isn't Chirac sounding swell when he proclaims that finally the time to acknowledge our citizens' right to an "intact environment" has come? He is the same politician who is desperately denying involvement in Parisian corruption scandals, facing overpowering evidence. Tiberi, the mayor of Paris before Monsieur Delanoë's triumph, was part of the same morass.

Small wonder that the candidate of the Parti Socialiste, Monsieur Delanoë, is attracting support by articulating his belief in the desire of ordinary Parisians to see a "renewal of democratic culture and practices".

A renewal from the top? Better behavior of those elected? Cleaner hands? That may all prove possible. Some are less corruptible than others. We wish Monsieur Delanoë luck.

And still, wasn't Madame Martine Aubry reputed to be a respectable, straightforward person? A different politician? In the end, they all cannot but be loyal to their party, that is to say, its leadership. To Lionel Jospin, that old fox, in the present French case. Who always managed to appease the man in the street and the woman in the street when something was cooking, when protests were increasing. And who still made more headway with neoliberal, false "modernization" than even the French conservatives (Chirac, and the rest).

What are we to expect of them?

Is it really a question of personal integrity?

Or is there something more deeply flawed, something that corrupts the political process, turning every candidate we choose against us, once she or he begins to respect the "logic" of "globalization," la force des choses, the inherent demands of big business that governments play to their tunes or they will obstruct the economic development of an entire country...

We cannot trust them, this is the point.

We have to take things into our own hands.

We have to take protests into the streets, peacefully. And to the offices of our locally elected members of parliament. And to their kitchen. And make them see and understand what we want and what we demand: A policy that respects us, our lives, our environment, our communities. That doesn't put profit first. That doesn't bow to the pressure of industrial & trading corporations, financial conglomerates, currency & property speculators...

But let's also add a footnote to the history of the Parisian mayoral race this year:

Intra-party democracy was a joke in the Parisian mayoral race, at least on the right. (We don't know the details, of choosing Monsieur Delanoë as a candidate of the P.S.)

It was Monsieur Chirac himself who first picked Tiberi, then Séguin as the Conservative candidate for the office of mayor of Paris.

It was Chirac who rejected the candidacy of the mayor of the 17th arrondissement, Madame Françoise de Panafieu (a conservative far more popular with the rank-and-file of her party than either Tiberi or Séguin).

That local candidates are picked by those on top is not the exception. If the interference isn't a direct one, it often is indirect. Chirac, for instance, cared enough to throw his weight behind Monsieur Charles Millon as candidate for mayor in Lyon.

In Germany, it has even been noted recently that candidates of major parties have to **pay** for their nomination. (Frankfurter Rundschau, Feb. 24, 2001, p.5) AS A "REPAYMENT," THE REGIONAL OR LOCAL PARTY LEADERSHIP SUPPORTS THE CANDIDATE. In fact, these "old hands" have often chosen the candidate first, in a backroom session, before making him pay for being put on the party's slate. The system is establishing a web of mutual loyalties within the party's establishment. It also strengthens the dependence on donors, that is to say, on big business. According to Professor Gero Neugebauer (Free University, Berlin), this system permeates the influence of established, professional politicians able to pay because they can tap "sponsors." It thus diminishes the chances for nomination of those freshly and enthusiastically entering the political arena, with a will to accomplish change. And this even when they are supported by the party's rank-and-file.

How are we to expect democracy to work if slates of candidates are drawn up by an inner circle of top politicians, in both mayor parties?

Remember the dioscussion of internal party reform of the SPD in North Rhine Westphalia?

How are we to expect democracy if leaders of both parties share positions as closely related in many respects as those of Mr. George W. Bush and Mr. Al Gore?

How are we to assume that what separates them, apart from their thirst for power, are minor political differences at best, an allegiance to different sponsors, different sections of Big Business, oil interests in Bush's case, the pharmaceutical companies in Gore's case? A simplification, this, of course, but not without a grain of truth. They meet in Davos, Jospin and Chirac, Blair and Schroeder and George W. Bush, Al Gore and what's left of the "big shots" of the German CDU, Berlusconi, Prodi, the Italian "left," and they all are good friends, in agreement with regard to the basic principles of the policies to be pursued. Isn't the democratic game becoming farcical? Isn't it time for the grass roots to speak up, instead of accumulating frustrations and giving one's vote in sheer protest to some right-wing, extremist nit-wit?

How are we to assume that what separates them, apart from their thirst for power, are

„Die politische Führung [der nordrhein-westfälischen SPD] ...konzentriert sich künftig beim Landesvorstand, der auch die bisher bei den Bezirken verankerten Zuständigkeiten für alle Personal- und Finanzangelegenheiten übernimmt. [Wer die Finanzen kontrolliert, hat die Hosen an!]" (FR April 2, 2001,p4)

"The leading political role, from now on, is concentrated with the State party leadership [in the state capital, Düsseldorf] which takes on all responsibilities with regard to personnel and finances which up to now were controlled by the districts." In other words: more centralization. More control from the top down, instead of vice versa. In the name of "efficiency"! Efficiency for whom? In whose interest?

The influence of the rank and file on district "party big shots" was small enough. It is even smaller now that the instruments of control (finances, decisions regarding the employment and promotion of party workers) rest with the distant State leadership of the Social Democratic Party.

Is the Tolbin tax important?

Yes, it is.

But is it enough to attain this goal?

In France, a new movement is gaining ground and grass roots support. It is called: *Association pour une Taxation des Transactions financières pour l'Aide aux Citoyens*, or *Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions For the Aid to be given to Citizens*.

The opposing "camps" are clearly defined:

Here, there are the mutual funds, the billionaires like Mr Soros, the banking corporations, industrial and trading corporations who move billions of dollars into and out of countries, into and out of currencies.

There are "we, the people": the citizens, the sovereign, we were told by the text books.

It is plain to see for everyone: there is as much money as never before, rolling around in the world. Sent by e-mail or telex to distant destinations. And recalled overnight, throwing entire economies into the abyss of a financial crisis.

On the other hand, even in the richest countries of earth, we see more and more poverty. The face of poverty is visible again. It is becoming a mass phenomenon.

And again, on the other hand, public coffers, in many countries are empty. Budgets are shrinking. Education and the health sector are in disarray. Bridges are crumbling. School buildings, public pools, theaters and museums, but also sewers, railroads and roads - in ill repair.

What is wrong, people ask.

Why these distortions, this lack of balance, this uneven, unequal development where growth zones boom, and bypassed regions fall into unattended misery. Where the new office buildings can't be expensive enough, but there is no money for a mere kindergarten?

Perhaps no more than 200 people, we were recently told, own one half of everything on the earth. Their ownership takes many forms: shares, money, factories, ocean going vessels, air planes, trading corporations, landed property, buildings... Half of everything. The truth is even more scandalous. In every country, it is less than 2 or 3 percent of the population that owns "everything." Everything that is, except the private car, the house, the garden plot, of Mr. and Mrs. Little (Wo)Man. Everything, except the family farm, or ranch. But even the farms have been bought up by the thousands, by large farm-operating corporations, in America. And the car or house often is bought on credit, that is, you are formally the owner, but realistically it is owned by the bank.

We have always been told that "socialists" would expropriate us. Forget about socialism.

We have long been expropriated. By capitalism. By 200 women and men, and a few more playing in a minor league...

The bulk, 90 per cent or more of us, own what is essential (more or less). A bed, other furniture. Clothes. Money that won't take us far if we lose our job tomorrow. A house maybe, a small boat, a car - if we consider us well-off. What is this? Much. Much that others don't have. But nothing that gives us control over thousands of people, perhaps tens of thousands, perhaps more. In the league of those "who own everything", the owner of a house, a garden, a car, a caravan and a little boat will not figure at all.

They talk about envy. The politicians do, the journalists do. Those who defend the interests of those "who own everything" do.

But this distribution of man-made social wealth that is so unfair, so unequal, so distressing in the control it gives the few over the many, is no question of envy.

It is a question of democracy gone wrong. Democracy bought.

It is a question of how to establish control again, of the many, over their own lives.

The Tolbin tax is a cure for a symptom, a small remedy for a grave problem, to be sure. It is a pragmatic first step. It seems possible to win, tackling this issue. It is important to go ahead with this, to write

that tax into the laws of as many countries as possible. But it is not challenging the position of those "who own everything" in a dramatic way. It hurts them, a little. They will be able to pay it, easily. Their power, and the bases of their power will not be touched.

We are going to touch it, though. We, the people.

We shall demand the right to decide all matters that concern our everyday lives. Democratically.

The sway of BIG MONEY over our daily affairs, the "res publica", "public affairs," will be broken. As citizens, it is by increased direct democracy that we shall learn to take things into our own hands: all socially relevant decisions, that is, from plant closures to environmental problems, from world hunger to the question of better schools for our children, from the neglect of inner cities to rural poverty...

The Tolbin tax movement, as a one issue movement, will wither away once it wins. To make it last, let's make it a LOCAL DEMOCRACY movement, a DIRECT DEMOCRACY movement, a movement for the global NETWORKING of GRASS ROOTS initiatives... A movement, that is, for rational, humane, and democratic COORDINATION and COOPERATION.

PLEASE read the journal [PLAN+debate](#) on the internet.

As urbanists supporting local democracy, we want to present advanced solutions especially if they entail increased citizen participation in planning processes. And we also want to focus on planning conflicts, with regard to land use, zoning, densities, lack of infrastructure, specific (dangerous or undesirable) uses rejected by local populations, and so on.

[PLAN+debate](#) is a forum of debate for laymen and experts alike.

Pierre Bourdieu, in France, has contributed to the consciousness of intellectual circles that support the Tolbin tax movement. His role as a critic of modern inequality has long been essential and challenging. Grass roots movements, initiatives concerned with local democracy or with ecological issues sometimes tend to isolate themselves and to embrace particular interests. What is necessary, however, is RESISTANCE to particularization.

We want a pluralist movement.

We want unions and workers' groups to join in. Syndicalism is alright but it is not enough. And unions too often are representatives of "special interests."

So we want to spectrum enlarged:

We want citizens' groups to join in.

We want socially committed church groups to join in.

We want the ecological movement to join in.



CITIZENS!

In order to find out whether you can work together and take a stand against those who have disempowered you, the sovereign, find out whether you can agree on the basic issues of the LOCAL DEMOCRACY movement!

***Disregard all minor divergences.
Take a stand, together!***

Start networking and forming world-wide ties of mutual support & debate.

***Make your village,
your city, your
region, your country
part of a larger
community
of concerned citizens!***

The values of "communitarianism", good old neighborhood values, self-reliance, honesty, decency, are all beautiful and important if connected with the values of mutual help and sisterly/brotherly love.

If we empower ourselves, act for ourselves as concerned groups of citizens, as communities, if we disempower big business and the "elites" of so-called professional politicians, we have a good chance to realize fuller direct democracy, social justice and equality, a sustainable economy, a livable environment.

How this is to be achieved?

Which concrete, historic form this should take?

This is for you, the citizens, to debate and decide.

This is for you to carry through.

It doesn't matter whether you have supported the Tory or Labour ticket in the past, whether you have seen yourself as a Republican or a Democrat or an Independent voter, whether you have favored Conservative or Liberal or Social-Democratic or Green candidates.

The question is:

- *whether you support increased **intra-party democracy**;*
- *whether you want more **direct democracy**, increased local and regional self-rule;*
- *whether you accept that you deserve a voice that is truly heard, in all matters concerning your life, your immediate existence,*
- *whether you are prepared to grant that voice to your neighbor, too;*
- *whether you are prepared to oppose the vast political influence of **BIG BUSINESS**, not only by advocating campaign reform, but in every possible way;*
- *whether you want a democratic society that doesn't end at the factory gates, at the entrance of an office building or supermarket;*
- *whether you want a democratic society of free and equal women and men, enjoying their rights and exercising their duties as citizens (or whether you prefer the dominance of **corporations** in the political world, on a global scale).*

If you have a good reason to doubt the self-asserted wisdom of so many "experts" at the service of governments and their corporate clients,

*if you are fed up with a **classe politique** [**caste of politicians**] held together by **privilege** (both legal and illegal),*

if you loathe the "arrogance of power" of professional politicians,

why not bring yourself

into the ring,

not as a politician

but as a citizen,

*challenging the monopoly
of political parties
to decide your "fate"!*

*We welcome contributions to
URBAN DEMOCRACY, the internet journal.
Why not join the debate?*

We direct this request especially to readers in the South.

***We in the rich North
cannot really speak for you in the Third World.
Listen, sisters and brothers,
listen, you who are living DOWN SOUTH.
We desire to hear your voice.
To know your opinion.
To become more aware of the obstacles obstructing
justice for you, perpetuating poverty and
underdevelopment even more than here, in the neglected
neighborhoods, towns, and regions of our "rich world".
We want to be "solidaire" with you. But of course, we
are clumsy, and ignorant.
Tell us, if you can, if you dare. If it's not too risky. If
repression at home is not making it dangerous for you.
Tell us. Send us your articles, criticize us, help us
become more aware!***

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