

Notes

On
Democracy



Bill Longstaff

Notes On Democracy

by Bill Longstaff

Published by:
Ballot Publishing
308, 1506-9 Street SW
Calgary AB T2R 1H8
403-245-9587
ballot@shaw.ca

Distributed by **Smashwords**

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

ISBN 978-0-9689029-3-6

Table of Contents

[Preface](#)

[Part I: Introduction](#)

[Note 1: On Defining Democracy](#)

[Note 2: On Why Democracy](#)

[Part II: Government](#)

[Note 3: On Representative Democracy](#)

[Note 4: On Direct Democracy](#)

[Part III: The Workplace](#)

[Note 5: On Conflicting Rights](#)

[Note 6: On Labour Unions](#)

[Note 7: On Worker Owners](#)

[Part IV: The Wealth Problem](#)

[Note 8: On A Capitalist Economy](#)

[Note 9: On Wealth and Politics](#)

[Note 10: On Wealth and the Media](#)

[Note 11: On Democratizing Wealth](#)

[Note 12: On Alternatives to Capitalism](#)

[Part V: Change](#)

[Note 13: On Technology](#)

[Note 14: On Global Democracy](#)

[Part VI: Fundamentals](#)

[Note 15: On Preparing the Citizen](#)

[Note 16: On Equality](#)

[About the Author](#)

Preface

The book *Democracy Undone: The Practice and the Promise of Self-governance in Canada* was published in 2001. *Notes on Democracy* is taken largely from that book. The material has been edited down, with many of the references and examples omitted, and much has been updated for conditions in the new century. And, like the times, one's views change. Whereas *Democracy Undone* was written primarily for Canadians, *Notes* addresses a wider audience, although Canadian references may predominate.

The content is presented as independent notes. The book may, therefore, be read satisfactorily from cover to cover or just by picking and choosing areas of particular interest to the reader. The notes begin with the what and why of democracy and then go on to cover politics and government, those areas we are usually referring to when we mention democracy. Next they discuss the state of democracy in our workplaces, to many people the most important place of all, and then that old comrade of power—wealth—and its affect on democracy through a range of institutions, including economics, politics and the mass media. Change, technological and global, is covered. And finally, fundamentals, the basic needs of democracy—education and equality—are addressed. If we are to think of ourselves as a democratic society, we cannot limit our study to politics. We need to examine all our institutions.

Together, the notes evaluate the state of democracy in our society comprehensively, and often prescribe as well as analyze. They are not bound by what might be immediately practical. After all, if we restrict ourselves to ideas that are deemed practical at the moment, we hold ourselves to an arbitrary standard, bound to our current limits and prejudices.

I do not write as an expert in political science. That I am not. I speak only as a citizen addressing his fellow citizens who has observed and participated in democracy for well over six decades and who begs your indulgence. I admit freely to bias—I am a confirmed democrat. I will attempt to be fair, but if I lapse into bias for democracy, for people freely deciding together on their own governance, I will make no apology.

Part I: Introduction



Note 1: On Defining Democracy

JUST WHAT IS this ancient and much admired concept we call democracy? What does the word mean? If we examine its roots, we find that it derives from the Greek *dēmokratia*: *dēmos*, the people, and *kratia*, rule. A simple concept really—the people rule.

There are no qualifiers here. The definition doesn't say the majority rules, it says the people rule—all the people. If we are to be democratic, we must include everyone in our governance.

But people disagree. How can we include all of them in those decisions where they are of different minds? Choices are not only often incompatible, but individual choices rarely affect only the individual that makes them. If they affect others, those others deserve a say in them. Issues that affect us all require collective decision-making, everyone sitting down and working out a solution. The happiest result is consensus—a solution acceptable to all. If, however, there is no such solution, then as a last resort, the group must rely on majority vote. This does not mean that the majority may dismiss or bully the minority. On the contrary, the majority are obliged to incorporate the views of the minority into the final decision as much as possible, keeping in mind the degree of support those views have.

Majority vote is not democracy. It is no more than a tool that democracy may use when consensus cannot be reached. The *dēmos* is the people, not Christian people, not heterosexual people, not the majority of the people, but the people—everyone. The majority have the right to decide issues; they do not have the right to exclude minorities from full participation in the decision-making. We barely have a democracy at all when the majority behaves as a tyranny.

Although our definition insists on all the people ruling, it does not insist that they rule personally. They may decide instead to choose representatives to govern for them. Usually that means election, but not necessarily. A body of citizens may “elect” to choose their leaders by lot or, in a small group, by rotation. As long as that is their free and equal choice, it is equally democratic. The point is that in a democracy the only legitimate governance is that which derives, in one way or another, from the consent of the governed.

When we refer to the people, we must sensibly refer to them equally. Once again, there are no qualifiers. Political equality and democracy are virtually indistinguishable. If one citizen has less power than another, then that citizen has less democracy, and we have to discount democracy that far from the ideal. Full democracy demands full political equality. We may refer to an institution as democratic when it is in fact only partly so, but that, in practice, is forgivable—we

rarely achieve perfection in anything. Our definition, however, is not forgiving. Democracy in the ideal is an all or nothing affair.

We might also keep in mind what democracy is not. It is not an ideology. It is not dogma. On the contrary, by allowing the people of each time and place to choose their own rules to live by, it is an anti-ideology.

Nor is democracy freedom. The two are often combined, like salt and pepper, but they are different things. Some freedoms are essential to democracy. Freedom of speech, for example, is critical—democracy could not function meaningfully without it. Yet it can also undermine democracy. For example, setting limits on the funding of election campaigns might be considered as limiting freedom of speech, yet without limits money can overwhelm political equality.

It is within these constraints, then—rule by all the people equally, either directly or through freely chosen representatives—that democracy must be measured in our institutions. To the degree that an institution lacks self-governance, it lacks legitimacy to that same degree.

When we measure democracy, we should not think of it as simply an instrument. It is an instrument, a powerfully effective instrument for governance, but it is much more. It embodies other concepts such as freedom and civil rights. It is not these things; however, they are essential to it. Consequently we come to think of democracy not only in concrete terms of practical governance—getting things done—but also in moral terms, about such things as compromise, cooperation and tolerance, about how we treat our fellow beings.

Note 2: On Why Democracy

THE FIRST QUESTION we might ask about democracy is, why? Why choose this form of governance? After all, alternatives have always been and are available.

The first advantage of democracy derives from its very structure: the participation of all its citizens. Democracy asks, demands really, that all citizens offer their ideas, intelligence, wisdom, effort and commitment to governing. Every other form of governance assumes that the abilities of a few, or even of one, will suffice for leadership. Simple arithmetic tells us that the more ability available the better the job we can do. And practice tells us that governing anything well tends to need all the intelligence and wisdom it can get.

And with participation comes commitment. To the degree that people are involved in their governance, that governance belongs to them. They feel a sense of responsibility towards it, a loyalty to it, and a trust in it, that strengthens both governance and society generally. When people in a democratic society lose trust in their government, they may need to look in the mirror and ask if they are doing their share. Are they matching their rights with responsibility?

By calling for the participation of all its citizens, democracy enhances all of them. It challenges, involves, educates and improves them. Sharing in their governance helps citizens develop to their utmost. By developing the art of compromise, they become their most agreeable as social creatures. We may doubt this when we observe incivilities in a legislature or on the hustings, but we might reflect upon alternative incivilities such as those of China or Egypt.

Some critics of democracy have assumed that the people are a rabble, incapable of higher behaviour and responsibilities, and therefore require the leadership of some sort of elite. In fact, people generally live up to the degree of responsibility they are given, and democracy gives them the most. It makes leaders of everyone. As for elites, insofar as people need them they are best able to choose their own.

Democracy best solves the problems of the multiplicity of tribes that exist in a modern society as well as the rights of individuals. Which tribe should rule? In a democracy, all can, proportional to their numbers. And individuals can best pursue their own interests. No one, no group, is omitted or bullied in the ideal democracy. Participation and resources are maximized, hostility is minimized.

Because it includes everyone in its deliberations, a democratic society may seem cumbersome. A dictatorship, with decisions being made by one or a few men (or, infrequently, women), may seem much more efficient—and may be in the short term. But in the long term, quite aside from bringing more ideas, wisdom and intelligence to bear on its decision-making, democracy is also open

to analysis and criticism, and thus to constant improvement. Indeed, adaptation and improvement are part of the natural state of democracy. It incorporates the idea of its own imperfections. Regardless of the initial vigour of other forms of government, they resist analysis and criticism, thus their natural state is ultimately stagnation and decline.

Democracy is flexible. If a government isn't doing a good job, it can be readily changed. Leaders of other forms of government may claim to know what the people want, but only democracy verifies it.

Even when a democratic society doesn't seem to be working very well, most likely it's because it isn't being sufficiently democratic. Somehow the people, in whole or in part, are being excluded from decision-making. Society is not tapping into the hearts and minds of all its citizens. If rapid change is afoot, people may feel that things are out of control. They may feel alienated, begin to lose faith in their institutions, and start to yearn for easy answers and simple solutions. Easy answers, the stock-in-trade of demagogues, will always tempt us—after all, we did not evolve to live in great complexity. But this is panic and desperation, not a real answer. The real answer lies in society pulling up its democratic socks, involving all the people, and allowing them to come up with the solutions. A former governor of New York, Alfred E. Smith, put it nicely, “All the ills of democracy can be cured by more democracy.”

But the proof of the pudding is in the eating of it. Has democracy provided the best leadership or are we just mouthing theory?

Democracies, at least nominal democracies, have certainly failed large parts of their constituencies in the past. They have allowed groups to exploit and oppress and exclude other groups and individuals. The Athenians, credited with the first democracy, excluded women and slaves, with the result that Greek “democracy” included only a minority of the adult population—a shabby effort by today's standards. These exclusions were replicated in the modern world. The Constitution of the United States is one of the principal documents of modern democracy, a noble document indeed, yet in its immediate application, Americans, like the Athenians before them, excluded women and slaves from their governance. Other democracies, too, have excluded women and ethnic groups and people without property from full citizenship for much of their histories.

Nonetheless, democracies have recognized their sins, and today all those formerly excluded groups are becoming fully incorporated into the res publica. Furthermore, it is within democracy that their equality has been debated and won, and those countries long-described as democracies have been the leaders in recognizing the rights of all people everywhere.

Part II: Government



Note 3: On Representative Democracy

WHEN WE CONSIDER democracy, we consider first politics and government. Government is, after all, the overarching law-maker that, within the bounds of the constitution, constructs the framework of rules by which we live our daily lives. If the rules are ultimately to come from us, government, more than any of our other institutions, must be democratic. Indeed, the democracy of other institutions depends largely on the democracy of government. The buck stops here.

Early democracies, whether that of wandering hunter-gatherers or that of the Athenians, were direct. All the citizens of a community sat down and made their decisions and rules together. People were their own governors. But those societies were very small. In very large societies like modern states, where everybody no longer fits around the campfire or into the Assembly, we must choose from among ourselves representatives to make the rules and set the policies our communities abide by.

Representative democracy is often thought of as second-rate, justified only by necessity, but in fact it has powerful advantages:

It allows for democracy in societies so large that democracy might otherwise prove impossible.

It allows citizens to choose their governors from the best among them. In effect, it allows them to choose their own aristocracy.

Electing professional representatives provides us with lawmakers that have the time and expertise to thoroughly acquaint themselves with the issues. When issues were fewer and simpler, this was less important, but today, when issues are many and complex, it is of vital importance. Citizens at large simply no longer have the time to develop a profound understanding of all the issues facing society. Elected representatives on the other hand, as full time decision-makers, can research issues, weigh conflicting priorities, negotiate compromises among different groups and make well-informed decisions.

In order to achieve a fully democratic system of governance under representative democracy, we need to achieve two goals: first, fair representation of the electorate in the legislature, and then fair representation of the legislature in the government.

3.1 A Fair Legislature

Unfortunately, three of the world's leading democracies—the United States, Great Britain and Canada—use an archaic voting system that fails, often badly, in fairly representing the people in their legislatures. This is a simple plurality system commonly referred to as first-past-the-post (FPTP).

Under FPTP the voters elect the candidate in their constituency who receives the most votes, i.e. a plurality. Often winners have fewer votes than their opponents combined and cannot be said, therefore, to represent the views of most of their constituents. In such cases, a majority of votes do not go toward electing someone who represents most voters—those votes are, in effect, wasted. Similarly, a political party that wins the most constituencies may form the government even though it received fewer votes than its opponents combined. The will of the people is thwarted. A party that, strictly speaking, only represents a minority of the people gains 100 per cent of the power. This is an electoral system but not a democratic one.

Fortunately, most democracies use some form of proportional representation (PR). Under a PR system, political parties are represented in the legislature proportional to their share of the popular vote. Every vote goes toward electing a representative who represents the voter. Every vote counts.

In PR systems electors always choose from a list of candidates. There are a variety of systems on this theme. In some systems, the list is for the entire country, i.e. the whole country is one constituency. In other systems the lists are applied to local constituencies. A country can tailor-make a system for its specific needs.

A system may use closed lists in which the voter only chooses a party or open lists in which the voter can choose particular candidates from a party. The latter offers the voter more choice than FPTP in which each party in a constituency offers only one candidate. Furthermore, PR offers better local representation. Under FPTP a dominant party may sweep all the constituencies in a local area, but under PR, where constituencies are multi-candidate, all parties will gain representatives depending on their share of the vote.

The most common criticism of PR arises from its frequent need for coalition governments which are perceived by many as inherently unstable. In fact, most PR countries are quite stable, and in any case, FPTP countries also often require coalitions. Another criticism arises from PR allowing small, even tiny, parties seats in the legislature. This is easily mitigated by setting a minimum number of votes a party must obtain to gain seats in the legislature—say two to five per cent.

3.2 A Fair Government

With some form of PR providing fair representation in the legislature, how then do we achieve our second goal: securing fair representation in governance. Fair representation in governance means that the decisions made by government fairly reflect the views of the people. If, for example, 75 per cent of the people supported view A and 25 per cent view B, then a piece of legislation would ideally be 75 per cent A and 25 per cent B. This, however, is generally impractical as

issues do not tend to be neatly divisible. Nonetheless, all citizens should be equitably represented in the decision-making.

Even under PR, many citizens are not. Supporters of the party or parties who form the government are represented, but the supporters of other parties often are not, even though they are represented in the legislature. Unfortunately legislatures are often more rubber stamps than governors. Governance is left for the most part in the hands of cabinet, i.e. the executive, a body chosen by the prime minister or president. Other legislators, on both sides of the house, become spectators to the process, obediently casting their votes yea or nay as instructed by caucus.

How then do we involve all legislators in governance?

First, we can allow them to vote their consciences in their legislatures as opposed to demanding strict party discipline. Western democracies exhibit a wide range in their tolerance of legislators' independence. In Canada, for instance, parliamentarians almost invariably defer to caucus and vote as party blocks while in the U.S. Congress, representatives and senators are allowed considerable leeway in their yeas and nays. The latter not only have greater opportunity to vote their consciences but also greater opportunity to represent the interests of their particular constituents.

Our representatives deserve the right to state their views openly and freely, to vote on them just as openly and freely, and we deserve the right to measure their performance as our, not their parties', representatives. They should not become mere ciphers.

Elected members do owe a loyalty to their parties as it is largely through their parties that they get elected. And there is at least one caution in allowing freedom from party discipline and that regards the business of lobbying. Party discipline helps protect legislators from the undue influence of powerful lobby groups. Lobbying requires stringent rules at any time, but especially when representatives are unleashed from party discipline. The influence of lobbies is also mitigated by banning political contributions from corporations (see Note 9).

If democracy prefers power to lie with legislators, why not have legislative committees initiate legislation rather than the executive branches of government? Committees can bring a personal touch legislatures lack; the individual legislator can assume a greater importance; committees can be less partisan, less strident; and committees can be more efficient than the often cumbersome legislatures.

Legislatures use committees now: standing committees on everything from Human Resources to Finance to National Defence; legislative committees appointed to review bills; and special committees set up to investigate particular issues. They do a great deal of important work. Ultimately, however, they are subject to the whims of the executive, which is inclined to ignore any committee recommendations it frowns upon. This ultimate impotence need not be the case.

Not all legislatures are little more than debating clubs—representatives in the U.S. Congress are quite capable of making law.

Giving committees teeth would require transferring law-making power to them. Standing committees could be responsible for initiating legislation in their areas, special committees for issues that arose outside of the regular jurisdictions. Committees could bring other appropriate government business under the rule of the legislature as well.

Parties would be allocated committee membership proportionate to their share of seats in the legislature. Committees could then choose their own chairpersons, the choices to be approved by the entire legislature. The chairpersons of the committees would become the cabinet. Currently, the prime minister, who is chosen not by all the people but by his party, selects the cabinet, which in effect becomes the government. In the parliamentary system, cabinet ministers are chosen from the legislature, but they have no more of a mandate from the people for their portfolios than does the prime minister. If cabinet ministers are to be responsible to the legislature, to the representatives of the people, they must be chosen by the legislators.

Strong legislative committees, combined with free votes, would give legislators the power they deserve as the people's representatives.

Legislative committees as law-making bodies would allow all parties in the legislature to participate in government and therefore allow all citizens to be represented in government. All legislators would make law. By holding open hearings and accepting written submissions on proposed bills, committees could incorporate the views of a cross-section of individual citizens and interest groups. Bringing more views into the process would result in better legislation, reduce friction, facilitate the acceptance of legislation, and create a climate more amenable to new ideas.

By bringing all the political parties together, as well as other social groups, the process of creating our laws, and indeed governing ourselves, would become a much more co-operative, less adversarial, process. The very concept of official opposition, loyal or otherwise, would be diluted, and the hostile, macho, obstructionist behaviour it instigates finally subdued.

Note 4: On Direct Democracy

ALTHOUGH THE SIZE and complexity of modern democracies requires representative government, as discussed in Note 3, direct democracy remains powerfully attractive as the unfiltered voice of the people.

4.1 The Referendum

Not all vehicles for direct democracy are equal however. Some can be much less effective than representative democracy at achieving informed decision-making and fair representation, including almost certainly the most popular vehicle for direct democracy, referendums. These offer citizens a chance to make their own decisions; however they suffer from major drawbacks.

Simply wording the question is in itself problematic. Questions can be both difficult to frame and manipulated by their framers.

Other problems arise from the yes/no nature of referendums. Yes or no sucks one of the vital ingredients of democracy—compromise—out of the issue. It also divides, creating an atmosphere of us and them, winners and losers, breeding hostility in the process. Referendums are the hammer of majority rule, more in-your-face than face-to-face.

Few issues are as simple as yes or no. Referendums relieve citizens of the need to think below the surface. Some citizens will research the issue, think it through calmly and thoroughly, and discuss and debate it with others. Some won't. The ignorance component of referendums can, therefore, be very high. One of the powerful advantages of representative democracy is having decisions made by people whose job is to study issues thoroughly before deciding. Referendums short-circuit this advantage. A decision made by elected representatives after thorough consideration might well be closer to what the people would decide if they deliberated rather than simply voting in a referendum. The best solution will almost certainly come from deliberation, not a battle between hostile viewpoints inflamed by sensationalist media.

Timing, too, is critical. Whereas a referendum held during a general election may get a turnout that represents a cross-section of the electorate, a referendum held on its own may get a turnout disproportionately representing those who are emotionally involved in the issue or those who have a vested interest.

Money can also be a problem unless steps are taken to ensure both sides have relatively equal means. Referendums require spending and media access rules as rigid as elections to ensure equitable debate.

If I am being hard on initiatives and referendums as forms of direct democracy, I make no apology. Democracy, healthy democracy, requires a great

deal more than the people's voice and the people's will; it requires fully informed, thoughtful voices and wills, and these are often absent, to a greater or lesser degree, from referendums.

So is there something better? Is there a vehicle that will combine the desire for direct participation with the need for deliberation? The happy answer is yes, there is. That answer is citizens' assemblies.

4.2 Citizens' Assemblies

A citizens' assembly simply means bringing together ordinary citizens to decide issues. The participants in an assembly become a sort of mini-parliament. Free of any grip of party loyalty, allowed to deal with their fellow participants on an equal, open, intimate and informal basis, they are also more willing to allow the heartfelt views of others to influence their own. The competitive, adversarial nature of conventional party politics is sharply reduced. By bringing people of all sorts together, assemblies create a more consensual, inclusive democracy as opposed to the hostile, partisan, macho democracy of party politics. In effect, they take the "politics" out of decision-making.

All groups in society can be equitably represented in an assembly, but they are there as individuals, not as representatives of groups, as they are with party politics. Referendums force citizens to take sides, and the majority hammers the minority. As referendums divide people, assemblies unite them; where referendums are exclusive, assemblies are inclusive. And, unlike a referendum, every citizen involved will generally be well-informed.

Assemblies not only bring citizens together as individuals but as equals. They eliminate not only political inequality but social and financial inequality as well. The CEO of a large corporation sits down with the welfare mother; they can get to know each other and understand each other's views and problems. Not only can they conclude the issue under discussion, but they can build bridges for the future. People isolated in their own domains tend to obsess on their own world views, constantly reinforcing their prejudices. Assemblies bring people together, rich and poor, humble and proud, as did the Assembly of ancient Athens.

Particularly important in assemblies is the dialogue between participants. Good talk—vigorous, well-informed conversation, especially debate with those whose views differ from one's own—remains the main ingredient of healthy democracy. It not only ensures better decision-making, it engenders respect for other views and refines the art of compromise. It both educates and civilizes. It offers the possibility of a politics of shared goals rather than a politics of angry difference.

Democracy at its richest, at what it really ought to be, not only allows citizens to govern themselves, directly or indirectly, but it also offers them an opportunity

to improve themselves. Fully democratic citizens are superior citizens: better educated, in the broadest sense of that word, and more civil. Assemblies encourage all this.

What criteria then should we apply in constructing an assembly? I suggest three:

First, participants must be chosen by random selection. Anything else does not accurately represent the people in microcosm. Other means, choosing participants as voices of interest groups, for example—labour, business, the handicapped, etc.—would be slipping back to representative governance.

Second, attendance must be mandatory, as it is with jury duty. A citizen who refused to attend without good cause would be in contempt. If we relied on volunteers, the voice of the assembly would be skewed toward those with a special interest or those who simply enjoy political activism. That wouldn't do. We seek the voice of the people, all the people.

And third, if assemblies are to have meaning they must ultimately have legal clout. Their decisions must be mandates for government.

Citizens' assemblies could even be established as permanent bodies. Assemblies of appropriate size could be brought together to deal with an issue within a set period. Once they had deliberated and drawn up their conclusions, that assembly would be dissolved and replaced by another to deal with the next issue. And so on. Assemblies could be another branch of government at all levels of government.

The idea of selecting people by lot (sortition) for governance isn't new. The Athenian Assembly chose its Council of 500 this way. The council served as a sort of combined executive/administration, managing the business of the assembly, ensuring that decrees were carried out, supervising and funding officials, administering pensions, etc. Many other offices were also filled by sortition. Although some officers were elected, the Athenians used that practice sparingly.

Citizens' assemblies, whether as a permanent part of our constitutional system or just used ad hoc, have the ability to transfer substantial decision-making from legislatures to citizens in a wave of direct democracy that would improve citizens as it involved them. Every citizen would share the prospect of becoming a legislator, and if assemblies were part of all levels of governance, the prospect could be very good indeed. Citizens would expect to be called to assembly duty just as they can now expect to be called to jury duty. Citizens would be kept on their democratic toes, creating a more aware and confident citizenry. And, no doubt of some small satisfaction to politicians, citizens would have no one to blame, or credit, for how the country was run, but themselves.

4.3 Civil Society

Our concern for political democracy quite naturally focuses on government in its formal sense: federal, state or provincial, and municipal. Yet there is another set of institutions that are fundamental to a healthy society and a sound democracy, which are not part of the state. Indeed they are often described as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They are collectively entitled civil society.

Civil society includes those many forms of community and association that lie outside the formal structure of state power—communities of citizens whose purpose is to help each other or to involve themselves in society in a way they believe is helpful to it. This includes a remarkable variety of groups and institutions: business groups; labour unions and professional associations; co-operatives; charities and foundations; art and sports groups; ethnic, fraternal and social groups; educational organizations; churches; community and condominium associations; and interest groups focused on everything from the economy to the environment to poverty to government excess to women's rights. We might even include families and perhaps even political parties as distinct from government itself. The field is extensive.

A particularly important role is played by those civil organizations referred to as "interest groups," sometimes disparagingly as "special interest groups" by critics who feel that their influence is disproportionate to their numbers or just disapprove of their views.

Some groups do merit disapproval, at least from a democratic perspective. First among them are those who don't function democratically within their own organizations. Then there are those funded by big money—corporate or oligarchic—often promoting political agendas while posing as charities. Interest groups deserve our democratic applause only when their funding is transparent and derived from citizens, either individually in modest amounts or collectively through government grants, and they conduct their affairs in a democratic fashion.

And when they meet these criteria, they do indeed deserve our applause. They provide citizens an opportunity for direct, collective action on issues that concern them without having to subject those issues to the dilution of party politics. Many people have turned from party politics to an interest group for precisely that reason. Interest groups can bring issues to the fore in a way that political parties, with their broader mandates, cannot. They can also serve to inform parties and governments on issues. Environmental organizations have even taken democracy beyond Homo sapiens, becoming in a sense the representatives in our affairs of species not our own.

Interest groups and all the other institutions of civil society form the skeleton of democracy. Without them, fleshing out democracy in our major institutions would be much more difficult. They are a fundamental vehicle for habituating

citizens to democratic process. They inform citizens that they can participate, that they can make a difference—that democracy works. And, in the new age of the Internet, they form a framework for global democracy.

xxx

Part III: The Workplace



Note 5: On Conflicting Rights

PEOPLE HAVE FOUGHT for rights in their workplaces as long as there have been workplaces. The first labour strike in recorded history took place in Egypt in the reign of Ramesses III (1186-1155 BC) when tomb-builders at a site in Western Thebes, frustrated at delays in receiving their wages, laid down their tools and walked off the job.

The struggle was rejoined with particular ferocity with the massive changes to the workplace brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Various philosophers entered the fray, from the industrialist/reformer Robert Owen to the revolutionary Karl Marx. The 19th and early 20th centuries saw the development of the principal advocate and guardian of workers' rights, the modern trade union. Workers did not gain democratic workplaces, but they did earn a stronger voice, and they saw major improvements in working conditions. After the Second World War, the struggle abated as the industrial countries settled into a period of unprecedented prosperity.

Now a new period of workplace change, driven by automation and globalization, overwhelms working people and undermines the gains they've made. Millions of manufacturing jobs, jobs that provided middle class incomes, have been lost and replaced by service sector jobs, often with low pay, poor benefits and arbitrary hours—precarious jobs. Many jobs are contracted out, an arrangement that relieves management of collecting personal taxes, from the cost of providing benefits, from union representation of workers' interests and from the constraints of labour legislation. Full time work is often replaced with part-time work, the latter often bereft of security or benefits. This transformation from jobs that put people in the middle class to jobs that dump them into the precariat has become perhaps the biggest challenge in the job market. The struggle cries out for renewal. The need for democratization of the workplace becomes increasingly acute.

Indeed, if we are to have a society worthy of the label democratic, self-governance must inform the workplace no less than it does politics and government. If government is democratic but the workplace remains autocratic, our liberty is incomplete. We are free men and women evenings and weekends, servants during the week.

Yet this largely describes the relationship between employer and employee, between capital and labour. Underlying this relationship lurks the stubborn conflict between the proprietary rights of owners and the democratic rights of workers. Owners seek maximum control over their property, and that means maximum control over their employees. Workers seek maximum control over their lives, including their working lives.

Here is the very serious question about whether ownership (property) should have power over people. This question can never be far from the surface in a capitalist democracy. The answer depends to some extent on how much ownership we are talking about. If one man hires another to help him out on an enterprise, we can't expect the hired man to have an equal say in running the enterprise, given that the employer has a far greater stake, financial and otherwise. But in a large corporation, where everyone is a hired hand, it is a very different matter.

In a corporation, the owners are the shareholders. (Even here, there isn't much democracy. Property votes, not people. The rule is one share/one vote, the rule of plutocracy, not one share owner/one vote, the rule of democracy.) Management is accountable to the shareholders as owners of the corporation's assets.

Even as we recognize this accountability, we cannot avoid the democratic right of all the employees, not just those at the top of the pyramid, to share in the governance of the organization of which they are members and which so powerfully affects their lives. All the hired hands are equally capable of accepting responsibility for their duty to the owners.

A corporation organized to meet the democratic ideal would have supervisors accountable to the supervised, managers accountable to the managed, and all accountable to the shareholders within the envelope of owners' rights. The proprietary right would not be threatened by allowing democracy to thrive within the envelope; democracy could have a vigorous life, starting at the bottom, in grass roots fashion, with workers choosing their supervisors and managers, managers choosing vice-presidents and vice-presidents, perhaps in partnership with the board of directors, choosing the CEO.

The current situation is just the reverse. Accountability flows up, against the democratic grain, from workers to supervisors to managers to upper management to shareholders.

If the spirit of a democracy-saturated society prevailed, shareholders would insist that their organizations be democratic. This, unfortunately, is not the case, so if share ownership remains an excuse for a lack of democracy in corporations, perhaps the powers of governance should be removed from shares. Most shareholders own so few shares they have no real influence anyway. Investors in mutual and index funds often don't even follow what specific companies they own shares in and give no thought to their management.

Little would be lost if shares became simply investment vehicles rather than governing vehicles. After all, when I buy an investment certificate from a bank, I don't expect to run the bank. Shares could be treated similarly. They would still represent ownership but without voting privileges, as is the case with some shares now. If shareholders didn't approve of the way the organization was functioning,

they could put their money elsewhere, which is the only meaningful influence most of them have in any case. Everyone within the organization would then be free to work co-operatively and democratically to ensure a successful company that attracted both investors and customers.

This could go a long way to resolving the conflict between ownership and democracy in publicly-traded companies; however, the problem would still exist with privately-owned companies. In public corporations, employees and shareholders are segregated entities—the owners are outside the envelope. In private companies, the owners are often the managers, tucked inside the envelope with their employees. Here the question of whether property should carry power over people becomes acute. One partial answer is the German model, a range of democratic rights for workers mandated by law, from very limited in small companies to substantial in public corporations, a model discussed in some detail in Note 6.

Much of what we have said for private business applies to government; however with government, the owners are the citizens at large. The employees of government, therefore, find themselves in an interesting situation: they are both bosses and workers. They are citizen owners, concerned with maintaining control over their institutions, but they are also “citizens” of those institutions, concerned with their democratic rights within their “societies.” The rights of one are constrained by the rights of another.

This dilemma is not uncommon. The federal and provincial or state governments frequently quarrel over where one’s rights begin and the other’s end. Similarly, municipal governments commonly find themselves constrained by provinces or states. As citizens of both jurisdictions, we are in both camps, in effect quarrelling with ourselves. And so civil servants are “citizens” of the organization they work in and citizens of the municipal, provincial, state or federal jurisdiction that owns it. Just as we must seek just accommodations between levels of government, we must seek just accommodations between civil servants and their government employers.

Accommodating the owners when they are the public has a legitimacy that it doesn’t have with private ownership simply because this ownership is, unlike shareholder ownership, democratic—all citizens own their institutions equally. Ownership, the proprietary right, is particularly secure in the public sector, protected by layers of power: the power of cabinet, then that of the legislature, and ultimately that of the people. Other than the right to organize associations or labour unions, the democratic rights of civil servants are by contrast hardly protected at all. There is more imposition than accommodation: supervisors imposed on staff, managers imposed on both, and deputy ministers imposed on all. Given that the proprietary right is so secure, there is no reason why noblesse oblige cannot accommodate a thoroughgoing democracy within the envelope of

power. Our democratic instincts ought to insist that our employees enjoy self-government in their workplaces. We, the public, should be setting an example.

People generally live up to the responsibility they are given. A democratic workplace gives workers maximum responsibility. As their leaders are accountable to them, they are responsible for their leaders, and accountable to the mandates of their organizations, mandates established by the proprietary right. Responsibility for success falls equally on all shoulders. It is better supported, not less. In the case of the public sector, accommodating both proprietary and democratic rights has a certain symmetry: the employees are carrying out their own mandate—they, too, are citizen owners.

In any case, although a society of fully democratic workplaces is only a gleam in democrats' eyes, elements of self-governance do exist. These include labour unions (Note 6) and worker co-operatives (Note 7.1).

The ultimate question, of course, is what kind of control/ownership workers themselves want. It must, after all, be their choice if it is to be democratic, and it may differ from one group of workers to the next. Workers in a small shop may want something different from workers in a large factory, part-time workers something different from full time workers, professionals something different from tradesmen, and so on. Democracy should prevail in each instance, allowing workers to choose what is best for them. Flexible workplaces should come to mean flexibility for workers to choose their own style of governance.

Here is a role for labour unions: to create discussion and debate among workers on the subject of democracy and how they feel it should be incorporated into the workplace generally as well as specifically for them. Education has historically been a principle function of the labour movement. Just as democratic citizens need to be educated in the workings of their society, democratic workers need to be educated in the workings, including the management, of their enterprises. We talk a lot about training these days; an integral part of training should be training in the democratic control of workplaces. Workers need to be involved not only in setting the terms of work but in defining what work is and who it belongs to.

For this, they need the support of their governments. Governments should be supporting democratic workplaces as a national principle—democracy is a national principle, is it not? They can do this with both the carrot and the stick. They can provide incentives through the tax system (what better service for a tax to deliver than democracy?) and through outright grants to support worker ownership. And they can do it by legislation that empowers workers, through elected works councils and worker representation on boards of directors, for example, and legislation that makes it easier for workers to organize. And they can do it by example. Governments have in the past set examples—in pay equity

and minority hiring, for instance—they can do it now by democratizing their workplaces.

There is a challenge to every political party. Any party that doesn't include a program for workplace democracy in its platform isn't serious about democracy.

Note 6: On Labour Unions

THE SUPREME COURT of Canada has described labour unions as the “mini-democracy of the workplace,” and indeed they are the one component of the workplace that has consistently and persistently delivered some element of self-governance to workers.

Not only are unions democratic institutions themselves, they offer workers a powerful, united voice to confront the hierarchal, autocratic system of industry. Individually, a worker is hopelessly mismatched in dealing with an employer, who can take away his or her very livelihood, an advantage that cannot be answered in kind. In a nonunionized workplace, one side hires, fires, promotes or demotes, chooses technology, defines and organizes work, fixes wages and benefits, and unilaterally declares whether to expand, modernize or close workplaces.

But with unity comes leverage, and unionized workers gain a voice in at least some of the decisions that affect their work lives. Nor is the leverage limited to the shop floor. Unions also represent workers’ interests in the larger society. Business has a host of organizations to promote its interests but workers must rely principally on unions to research subjects of interest, educate workers on these subjects, and collate and promote workers’ views.

The mini-democracy is much more closely approached in Western Europe than in North America. Worker participation in Western European countries is generally mandated by law and convention. In Germany, for instance, worker participation is required at both the shop floor and management levels. By law, workers in a business with at least five employees may initiate a works council which has a say in staff affairs and a right to information regarding financial affairs. The councils cannot engage in industrial action but may take disputes to an employment court. Government agencies also have works councils. Corporations with between 500 and 2000 employees must have one-third of their board of directors appointed by employees and those with greater than 2000 employees must have one-half appointed by employees.

Unions in Europe have the advantage of negotiating sectorally rather than locally as is the case in North America. Labour agreements in Germany are negotiated industry-wide between national unions and national employer associations, and local companies then meet with their works councils to adjust the agreements to local circumstances. Negotiating sector-wide not only allows unionized workers to have a stronger voice but it also avoids any particular plant or company opposing wage or benefit increases because it would put them at a disadvantage to their competitors.

This sort of structure is increasingly valuable as manufacturing jobs decline relative to the rise in service sector jobs which tend to involve smaller and

“nontraditional” workplaces. Organizing the latter presents a daunting challenge and often precludes meaningful access to collective bargaining and thus to transforming the service sector from a precariat workplace to a middle class workplace.

6.1 But Is the Mini-democracy Democratic?

Labour unions tend to be fully democratic within themselves, partly out of an intrinsic respect for their members’ rights but also because they are generally covered by legislation that requires them to operate honestly and democratically, and to genuinely represent the workers in their bargaining units. Union members not only elect their officers, they vote on the collective agreements negotiated by those officers. The governing body of a union is typically its annual or biennial convention where the membership is represented by elected delegates.

Unions usually require government certification if they want to hold exclusive bargaining rights. Furthermore, the individual members are also offered various protections, with unions prohibited from acting in a discriminatory manner toward any of the bargaining unit members. Unions, like all organizations, will always have to deal with conflict between the rights of the individual and the rights of the collective.

Another question revolves around membership. If constitutions guarantee freedom of association, mustn’t they also guarantee freedom from association? And shouldn’t they? In the case of unions, often they don’t. Most jurisdictions specifically or by implication authorize the negotiation of a term in the collective agreement making union membership a condition of employment. This would seem reasonable because the union has, through the collective agreement, essentially contracted to do a piece of work. If someone wants to participate in the work, they must therefore join the union, just as if I hire a contractor to build a house for me he decides who he subcontracts, not me.

Furthermore, if workers are not required to at least contribute to the union that represents their workplace, unions become highly susceptible to union-busting. Employers, holding the ultimate control over both capital and employment as they do, can easily divide and conquer an association that lacks security of solidarity. If unions are to serve as the mini-democracy of the workplace, they need that security.

A sensible approach to union security was established in Canada when a long and acrimonious strike ended with both sides agreeing to binding arbitration. The arbitrator, Mr. Justice Ivan Rand, a Supreme Court judge, settled the issue of union security by stipulating that although employees should not be required to join a union, they should be required to pay dues because they benefited from the union contract, “the law of their employment.” The Rand formula is a brilliant

compromise. By requiring workers to pay dues to a union as their negotiating agent but leaving them free to join or not, it satisfies both union security and freedom of association.

Some free-enterprisers argue that unions aren't needed at all, that in a free market workers can always quit and seek another job if they don't like the one they've got. Not only is this a glib attitude to a person's living, in a democratic society it's no answer at all. It's rather like telling someone who lives in a country run by a dictator not to complain because if they don't like it they can move to Canada. Maybe they can, but running away isn't much of an answer. And if there's no "Canada" for a worker to run to, if all employers are dictators, as in fact almost all are, then exchanging one dictatorship for another isn't much of an answer either. The freedom to leave your job isn't democracy. The right to participate fully in the decisions that affect your work life is. Any foe of unions who calls himself a democrat must be challenged to offer a reasonable alternative for creating democracy in the workplace; otherwise, he cannot be taken seriously.

6.2 Solidarity Forever?

As the workplace increasingly transforms from manufacturing to the service sector, unions today face a host of challenges. Service sector workplaces tend to be small and as a result have little leverage against an employer. Part-time work presents the challenge of organizing an often transitory work force. Contracting out, or outsourcing (buying parts or services from outside individuals or companies, often non-union, to reduce costs), presents an even greater challenge. It not only isolates workers—divide and conquer in action—but drains unions of their members as well. And, of course, behind many of these challenges lies the relentless advance of technology, of automation.

Labour's biggest challenge is more than big, it's global. As employers globalize their operations, they increase their ability to divide and conquer—in effect to blackmail—employees both locally and internationally. The ubiquitous mantra "We must compete in the global marketplace" has become a hammer for opposing improvements in working conditions, indeed for opposing attempts to halt a decline in working conditions. Workers in one country are pitted against workers in another in what has been referred to as a race to the bottom. The adversary isn't foreign workers, it's the global corporations that are able to exploit resources—natural, financial, market or human—anywhere, anytime.

The reason that global corporations are so influential, often exercising more power than citizens even in democracies, is precisely because they are global, capable of acting beyond the constraints of the nation-state. If labour wants to be a player, to introduce the voices of workers into a global marketplace that is becoming a global workplace, it too must globalize. It must form global

organizations that can act as swiftly and surely, and influence governments as effectively, as global corporations. It must balance competition in the global marketplace with solidarity, indeed democracy, in the global workplace. As governments become less able to defend workers, or less willing, unions must take up the slack. The workers of the world must unite.

xxx

Note 7: On Worker Owners

THE IDEA THAT workers ought to own or at least control the means of production has paralleled the growth of modern capitalism. Or preceded it. As early as the 11th century, craftsmen in Europe were forming themselves into guilds to protect their livelihoods. Early in the Industrial Revolution, utopians like Robert Owen idealized workplaces that belonged to workers. Men like Marx and Engels went further to advocate a society re-created in the name of the workers. This latter prescription was ultimately and tragically perverted out of all recognition into brutal dictatorship, bringing workers little in the way of control of their workplaces or anything else. Our political democracy/capitalist economy approach has avoided the dictatorship of the state but not, unfortunately, of the workplace.

Capitalists quite naturally favour ownership from the top, i.e. share ownership, presumably believing that this is the most ideologically correct—and safest—way to give workers a sense of control and an interest in the success of the venture, and indeed of the system. Everybody becomes a capitalist. This approach has grown through ownership by individual workers and through union-based investment and pension funds. Given the individualistic preferences of capitalists, to say nothing of their antipathy towards unions, the former is much preferred by management. Unions, on the other hand, suspicious of the divisive tendencies of individual ownership, and possibly of capitalist thinking generally, incline towards collective ownership.

With voting power allocated by share rather than by owner, share ownership is more plutocracy than democracy. And shareholders tend to be subservient to upper management. The question then is whether workers actually gain much power by individual share ownership or whether it's just a gesture to stimulate their loyalty and mitigate labour problems. The answer depends to some degree on how many shares the employees hold and how they hold them, individually or in a trust. Collective ownership of shares tends to give the workers more influence in a company's affairs than individual ownership.

Employee share ownership has, in some jurisdictions, been encouraged with tax incentives, and in some instances governments have provided ad hoc support for worker ownership to save companies in grave financial trouble, a practice sometimes described as “lemon socialism.” Such cases range from workers becoming minority shareholders to workers literally buying out the company.

Group ownership of shares by workers is also becoming increasingly important through bulging pension funds, potentially the heaviest hitters for labour in investment circles. Pension funds control assets of trillions of dollars and are major players in stock markets. Most important are trusteed funds, funds

administered by trustees on behalf of the plans' sponsors, which may be employers, unions or both in a joint sponsorship.

We might imagine that the enormous financial clout of pension funds could be used to promote a variety of worker-oriented goals, including better labour legislation, more union shops, greater local investment, and yes, even more workplace democracy. In practice, however, they are committed, usually by law, to protecting pensions and thereby generally required to maximize return on investment as opposed to influencing economic or political decisions that favour workers or unions.

For ownership fully committed to workplace democracy we must look at worker co-operatives, enterprises owned and operated by the workers themselves.

7.1 Worker Co-operatives

The first worker co-operative was formed by a group of cotton workers, the Rochdale Co-operative Manufacturing Society, who set up their own mill in Rochdale, England, in 1854. The Rochdale principles have inspired and guided co-ops ever since. They have been revised every thirty years or so, the current set being drafted after a long series of consultations, in 1995. These include voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; co-operation among co-operatives; and concern for community.

The Rochdale members ran their co-op from top to bottom, participating in shop floor decision-making and electing the board of directors. Ironically, the co-op's considerable success spelled its demise. Deciding to expand, the members faced a common problem of worker co-ops—raising capital—so they sold voting shares to outside investors. These shareholders eventually gained more votes than the worker-members and voted to convert to private ownership.

The modern inspiration for worker co-ops is the phenomenally successful Mondragon group in the Basque region of Spain. Inspired by a parish priest, Don José María Arizmendi-Arrieta, who had in turn been inspired by Robert Owen and Rochdale, this system now has tens of thousands of worker-owners in dozens of worker co-ops, enterprises that include construction, manufacturing, finance, insurance, food services, computer/software development, health, etc. In addition to the worker co-ops, Mondragon includes housing co-ops, research and development institutes, a university, and a credit union with hundreds of branches and billions of dollars in assets. Mondragon has worldwide sales, and corporate offices and production plants in dozens of countries.

The community nature of Mondragon, particularly its own financial base, is of special importance. Co-operatives often lack the connections, expertise and

capital required to start successful enterprises. Mondragon's credit union helps neophyte co-ops with both their financing and business planning.

As is commonly the case with consumer and producer co-ops, Mondragon exhibits the dichotomy of having democratic ownership/control for members but a conventional autocratic relationship for their non-member employees—second-class stake-holders, we might say. In order to compete with multinational corporations, the Mondragon co-operatives adopted a strategy of “internationalization” and started acquiring subsidiary businesses both in Spain and around the world. This could have been an opportunity to spread the Mondragon model of worker-ownership globally, but instead of converting their new subsidiaries into sister co-ops, they continued to administer their subsidiaries as capitalist businesses. The employees of the subsidiaries in essence became employees of the Mondragon co-ops, rather than worker-owners in their own right. Only a minority of the Mondragon group's total workforce are now member-owners.

In some consumer and producer co-ops, this situation is mitigated by the ability of employees to become members themselves. In such cases, because co-ops have one member/one vote rather than the one share/one vote of private business, the employees can gain considerable clout if they rally their forces.

Unfortunately, in the world of worker co-ops, Mondragon remains unique in scale and reach. Although worker co-operation is well established across Western Europe and North America, most enterprises are small and in total make up only a fraction of economic activity. Nonetheless, they remain an intensely democratic form of economic activity, a model of self-governance in the workplace.

Not only are they democratic within themselves, they offer the opportunity to keep economic control local, within communities, of particular importance at a time of increasing globalization. They therefore deserve strong encouragement through tax policies and other measures. They deserve, too, co-operation from the larger co-operative community to provide financial and entrepreneurial mentors. Co-operatives have always been the product of idealism. Perhaps these turbulent and uncertain times will spark the ideal of countering the growth of corporate power in the workplace with the growth of democratic ownership of the workplace. Here is the perfect solution to the fundamental conflict between democratic and proprietary rights.

Part IV: The Wealth Problem



Note 8: On A Capitalist Economy

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN political democracy and a capitalist economy is as old as capitalism itself. Capitalism is about accumulating wealth, and because wealth readily translates into power, capitalism is also about accumulating power, political as well as economic. Democracy, on the other hand, is about sharing power, about equality.

The greater the accumulation of power, the less the equality, and the greater the threat to democracy. With the growth of multinational corporations in the 20th century, and the accelerating power of these corporations with globalization, democracy is faced with its greatest challenge since the collapse of communism. The corporate sector, through its lobbyists, political largesse, media control and sheer economic force, has become the single most influential interest in the world today. The accumulation of wealth affects democracy not only through economics but also through a range of other institutions from politics to the media to education.

A discussion of wealth and its effect on democracy requires looking at its primary source, the free market: its values, its relationship to capitalism, and capitalism's taxing of the marketplace for its political purposes.

8.1 Sins and Successes of Commerce

The biggest drug dealers are not the stereotypical swarthy men with gold chains hanging around their necks and blondes hanging off each arm. They are for the most part law-abiding citizens, good husbands and fathers, and friendly neighbours. At least in their personal lives. But when they don their dark suits and pick up their briefcases, these respectable family men metamorphose into commerce men, the CEOs of the world's tobacco companies, dealers in nicotine—an addictive recreational drug that kills millions of people world-wide every year.

We should not, however, single out the bosses in the tobacco business. Their companies include accountants, secretaries, janitors—a diverse host of employees who voluntarily serve this nefarious trade. Nor are only tobacco companies involved. Farmers grow the tobacco, small and large retailers sell the cigarettes, and governments collect taxes from them all.

Millions die while our economy realizes billions of dollars, and they represent a pervasive influence at work in the marketplace: the corrupting nature of commerce. We can provide example after example—advertising alone is replete with them—without falling back on the old standby, the used car salesman. The sad fact is that most of us who find ourselves in commerce are to

some extent used car salesmen, Jekyll and Hydes, Dr. Jekylls in our personal lives, Mr. Hydes in the marketplace. We engage in constant moral compromise. As in war, our conventional morality often disconnects.

We do so collectively as well as individually, internationally as well as nationally. We promote trade with any devil who might turn a dollar for us, including dictators such as the Saudis and the Chinese Politburo. On those occasions when we apply economic sanctions over moral issues, we choose countries with which we have little trade.

Our relationships within businesses are affected as well as our behaviour without. Most business people are undoubtedly decent folk who prefer to treat their employees well. Unfortunately, in a competitive market decent business people don't set the standards. If the unscrupulous competitor down the street exploits his workers with low wages, he can run the good guys out of business with low prices. They must reduce the wages of their employees to compete. The law of the lowest common denominator prevails. Praise and reward go to the CEO who wrings the most profit out of downsizing the most employees. Dr. Jekyll may want to be a generous and fair employer, but Mr. Hyde, he of the invisible hand, must compete. In a moral system, the good man sets the standards; in a market system, he does not. Good employers, not just employees, are victimized.

Yet even as we find fault with the values of commerce, we recognize that we have not yet discovered a better vehicle than the free market for distributing the goods and services required for daily living. The free market has historically offered people the greatest choice, a fine democratic value in itself.

Consumer culture also tends to encourage equality and undermine tradition and rank. And the market has been more than just a place of trade. Throughout its history, it has been a meeting place, for community members and even, on a broader scale, for cultures—a place to socialize, to get to know strangers and foreigners and establish rapport with them. In Athens, the market was an integral part of the democratic process, a place to exchange ideas and information as well as goods, a place to debate issues, a public forum.

This doesn't sound like the place of commerce we just described. And it isn't. The capitalist marketplace retains some of the characteristics of the traditional marketplace, but it also contains significant differences. In the traditional marketplace, local people buy goods and services from other local people, essentially their neighbours. In the capitalist marketplace, the major players are corporations who act on a global scale rather than a local one, and have enormous power over thousands of employees, customers and communities. They are giants dominating a marketplace of bewildering complexity that often overwhelms its customers.

8.2 Individualism and Isolation

The traditional marketplace is not capitalism; it is a free market with millions of small decisions made by all of us in relative equality. The modern or capitalist marketplace subsumes the traditional one and overlays it with very big decisions made by small elites. It retains elements of the traditional marketplace, but even these are often transformed.

How free, for example, are the choices we make in a capitalist marketplace? Advertisers spend billions of dollars promoting products. Much of this is spent not on useful information like price and availability but on manipulation—flashy, creative, occasionally entertaining information of little value to informed choice. If the manipulation works, that is if we can assume advertisers aren't foolish enough to throw money away, then our choices may be a great deal less free than the "free" market would suggest. Considering further that research and development of new products is dominated by corporations, not by us directly (see Note 13.2), we might wonder if we buy what we need or what we are offered.

Furthermore, choices in a modern marketplace have ramifications well beyond their immediate intent. Market choices arise from self-interest. If we lived solitary lives, pursuing our self-interest would affect us alone, but we don't. The choices that we make as individuals affect other members of society, including those who don't make those choices. Each marketplace choice has a web of consequences that involves many, perhaps ultimately all, members of society.

A man may buy cigarettes thinking he is only satisfying his own craving with his own money, and perhaps contributing to the financial well-being of those who grow tobacco and those who manufacture, transport, and sell cigarettes, and perhaps to the governments who tax tobacco, but he is also involving the rest of us if we have to pay the cost of his smoking-related cancer or stroke, to say nothing of the cost to those who get cancer or stroke from his secondhand smoke.

Someone who shops at Wal-Mart may think she is simply saving a few dollars because goods are a little cheaper there, but by encouraging a non-union employer, she may be indirectly lowering wages overall, including her own. The market may thus set individuals against each other and against the community. Acting on her own, the Wal-Mart shopper is reluctant to pass up an opportunity to benefit her family even if doing so would be in the broader public interest. She doesn't know if anyone else will accept the sacrifice, and if she accepts the sacrifice alone, it will do little good, anyway. She makes not so much an individual choice as an isolated choice.

The marketplace, traditional or capitalist, but particularly the latter, tends to atomize us, treat us as unconnected individuals, when in fact we are social creatures. Isolation is unnatural to us. We live in communities. We are virtually defined by our relationships with others. Individualism is more than wearing your

own style of clothes and listening to your own style of music; at its finest, it is deliberating with your fellow citizens to make choices that are in the best interests of the community. It is making your unique contribution to the public good. Our freedom depends after all on civic engagement.

Choices that we make together as a society may be very different from those we make in isolation. When individual citizens abandon isolation, act collectively as an association or through elected representatives who obtain thorough, expert advice, often discover that what may have seemed in the self-interest of individuals wasn't after all. The whole is often very different from the sum of its parts. Acting alone as consumers, rather than collectively as citizens, people may not even know what the ramifications of their decisions are.

Because marketplace decisions are made in isolation, we can never know if the aggregate result is what we really want. Only if we decide collectively can we hope to know. Decisions made in isolation are often decisions made in ignorance, including the ignorance of the views and feelings of others. We cannot even be entirely certain of what we want until we know what others want. In a purely market society, we become trapped in our individualism. The market has neither collective conscience nor collective will, so it can never comprehend the collective good and can act on its behalf only accidentally.

8.3 Plutocratic Decision-making

The greatest divergence of the capitalist marketplace from a traditional marketplace is in its overlay of "big" decisions. In a traditional marketplace, whether one is opening a shop or buying a product, the decision is personal, involving only buying and selling, and the effects local. In the capitalist marketplace, many decisions only indirectly involve buying and selling but affect thousands of people, even entire communities, decisions like opening or closing factories, moving production to another country, altering the environment in significant ways, replacing full-time work with part-time work, directing advertising at children, owning media, and so on. These decisions are not made by the people they affect, by employees, by customers, by citizens, but rather by small elites, by plutocrats. They include little social consideration and no democratic involvement. Democracy is not done.

And the plutocratic power is mighty indeed. The mere threat of withdrawing capital, or simply to not invest it, tends to send governments scurrying to placate the angry investment god.

The traditional marketplace's virtues are founded on two criteria: decisions by individuals to enter transactions must be free, i.e. voluntary, and the transactions must be mutually beneficial. Are these criteria satisfied when an employer fires dozens of workers? Hardly. Only the employer acts voluntarily.

The great majority of those involved are not free to choose—they have no say in the decision at all. They are coerced, and coercion is anathema to a free market. And is the transaction mutually beneficial? Obviously not. Beneficial to the employer, whose profit will increase, but not to the employees unless they can find other jobs at better pay. If they can't, if they are unemployed for a long period, or if they can find only lower paying jobs, the transaction may be a disaster. This sort of decision fails to meet the criteria necessary for virtue in a marketplace. Capitalism may include elements of a free market but it must by its very nature exclude others.

Making the larger economic decisions democratically may slow them down. It may detract from the vaunted efficiency of the marketplace, but efficiency is not necessarily a democratic value. Democracy takes time. The market puts product ahead of process, yet process—the ways in which we associate—is the most important in human terms, and certainly in democratic terms.

8.4 Greed Is Not Good

The contradiction between our commercial selves and our social selves arises from a conflict between market values (acquisition, individualism and competition) and social values (sharing, consensus and co-operation). These values are capable of living in relative balance, even harmony, in a traditional marketplace, where vendors simply try to make a living and consumers try to meet the needs of daily life, but they lead inevitably to conflict in a capitalist marketplace where vendors endeavour to maximize profit and consumers, isolated in their decision-making, rely increasingly on the accumulation of goods to find satisfaction. The market of exchange becomes a market of acquisition. Capitalism is after all not simply about making money but about accumulating it. It is about greed.

Greed is very powerful. One of the tragedies of human nature is that the forces of darkness—greed, fear, anger, envy, hate, etc.—are often more effective motivators than the forces of light—love, kindness, tolerance, etc. (Try imagining Hitler mobilizing the German people as effectively as he did by preaching love and tolerance.) And of all the dark motivators, greed is the most persistent if not the most powerful. The Ojibwa had a bogeyman they called Weendigo, described as "... the spirit of greed. It is a hideous, man-eating and insanely unhappy giant that comes in both genders. It can never get enough to eat. It stays skinny and only gains height. The taller it grows, the hungrier it gets and the worse its torment becomes." Weendigo sounds disturbingly like a global corporation contemplating its market share.

Even market values that have merit in small doses, such as competition, are carried to excess by capitalism. Market competition doesn't reward those who

become the kindest, the wisest, or the most democratic, just those who become the richest.

Occasionally, greed even squares off against competition—and usually wins. Competitors, often unsatisfied with the slim operating margins that vigorous competition tends to provide, conspire to reduce the competition to a more gentlemanly and lucrative level by forming a monopoly. When competition, a fundamental market value, no longer serves greed, even it is abandoned.

A greed-driven philosophy devalues anything that doesn't create wealth. We mouth the importance of "family values," yet when a poor, single woman stays home to raise her children, because home work produces no profit she is accorded the lowly status of welfare recipient, lowest rung on the social ladder, and provided with little more than a subsistence income. Family values, apparently, aren't valuable enough to merit a decent reward. In a world of market values, if you can't put a price on it, it's worthless.

Adam Smith's idea that individuals pursuing their own isolated interests would maximize the public good was sound as far as it went. He meant it to apply only to certain economic matters, not to every facet of our lives, and he couldn't have foreseen a marketplace with values so badly bent out of shape by capitalism. He advocated a marketplace of small buyers and sellers, not giant corporations. With the rise of neo-liberalism, we seem to be increasingly subject to what has been called "economic fundamentalism," a pseudo-religion which promises that the market will answer our every problem.

The argument for capitalism, essentially the argument for greed, is that it creates wealth, which in turn creates opportunities for all citizens to both improve their material well-being and to participate in discussion, debate and decision-making about those things that affect their lives. Certainly, sufficient wealth to guarantee all citizens a decent standard of living will provide a secure base for democracy. Nonetheless, those things of greatest importance to society and to democracy—family values, civic virtue, sense of community, compassion, equality—have nothing to do with, and are often antithetical to, the values of the capitalist market.

The struggle for democracy over the last two hundred years, indeed the struggle to create an equitable and compassionate society generally, has been largely a struggle to contain the forces of capitalism, to replace capitalist values with social values, against individual capitalists in the 19th century and increasingly against corporate capitalists in the 20th and 21st. The struggle has been particularly successful since the Second World War. With the welfare state, we seemed at last to have civilized the capitalist market. Yet if we had begun to think that, except for a bit of mopping up, Western history was over, we were premature. In the last few years, market values have begun to run rampant again.

CEOs chant their mantra “We must compete in the global marketplace” as global corporations undermine the nation-state and democracy along with it.

8.5 The Business Levy

Two institutions hold the keys to the money vaults of the country. One is concerned about the welfare of society generally, the other about its own welfare only. One is concerned about compassion, equality and democracy, the other about profit. One is democratic, the other is not.

The first is government, the second is business. Most of the money most of us will ever have we will eventually hand over to one of these two. Governments collect their share by taxing us. This is the way we pay for the services government provides us, or perhaps I should say the services we provide ourselves—communally. We are very much aware of these taxes. We fill out an income tax form every year and the media and a variety of politicians and think tanks hardly let us forget it.

We are very much less aware, and it is never discussed in the media, that we are also “taxed” by business in order to support its social and political pursuits. Every time we buy a pair of underwear or a box of cereal, we pay the cost of manufacturing, transporting and retailing the product; we pay for a profit; we pay for advertising; and we pay a tax or levy—a little something extra for business largesse.

Hidden in the price of everything we buy are all the expenses that business incurs, including the expense of funding its friends and favourites. Via this levy we support a host of business associations, lobby groups and public relations firms (there are now more public relations professionals in North America than journalists). We support political parties. We support arts and sports organizations whose sponsorship is seen by business as amenable to their image. And we support those organizations generally referred to as think tanks—also referred to as “idea launderers” and “dogma tanks”—that serve up views flavoured to satisfy their business patrons.

It is impossible to avoid. You may prefer not to buy products from companies that contribute to groups you don’t approve of, but because this is private business, you can never be sure who contributes to whom. And almost all businesses contribute to one or more of the sorts of organizations mentioned. Even discovering who owns a business can be a challenge, corporate ownership has become so vast and complex. Short of retiring to the north woods and living off nuts and berries, you will consume goods and services, you will pay the business levy and you will support a panoply of business-approved special interest groups. You are not free to choose.

Conservatives often criticize government funding of special interest groups. They ask why taxpayers should have to support groups they may disapprove of. A good question. But they don't ask the same question on behalf of consumers, even though we pay a great deal more to support special interest groups as consumers than we do as taxpayers. I doubt that this inconsistency—I won't say hypocrisy—is intentional, that conservatives overlook this coerced subsidization of business-approved special interest groups because they share an economic philosophy. I suspect they simply haven't thought it through. We can't blame them. The invisibility of the business levy is one of its most insidious features. It is so embedded in the cost of consumption that we simply never think about it. We can only speculate with dark amusement about how many Marxists fail to realize they support a host of capitalist organizations every time they go shopping.

Government grants merely ensure that some nonbusiness-approved special interest groups have a voice in public debate. This is a modest, almost trivial assurance compared to tapping into the business levy, but at least some balance is achieved. The balance is strictly limited, however. Groups receiving government grants are expected to serve a public interest, not a political one, such as promoting equality for women or improving the prospects of the poor. For those groups that are too partisan for government help but on the wrong side of the philosophical spectrum to partake of the business levy, raising cash means slogging from door to door, or from mail-out to mail-out, accumulating small contributions, and facing a huge disadvantage in public debate and political influence.

This distortion of public debate and political influence by the business levy is one of democracy's biggest and most intractable problems. The tax allows the business community, most disturbingly the corporate community, to propagandize us and influence our leaders, all with our own money, and often in ways that are difficult to discover and understand. We pay to undermine our own democracy.

But what to do?

Dealing with this problem is extremely difficult because it involves freedom of speech. We don't want to infringe on this basic freedom, yet we do want to give every voice a roughly equal opportunity to be heard, the very thing the business levy undermines. Freedom isn't enough, equality is essential too. Freedom untempered with equality advantages not democracy but he who can afford the biggest voice. It can pervert democracy into a tool for the wealthy to preserve their power.

To begin with, we might stop granting charitable status to business levy-funded organizations whose job is to wave the corporate banner. Further, we should restrict contributions to any organizations that have a political component. Contributions to a group that isn't transparently charitable or serving some other apolitical purpose should be limited in amount and restricted to individuals. If an

organization engages in any political activity—broadly defined—it should lose its charitable status and no longer be allowed to accept money from organizations, only from citizens and only in modest amounts. Needless to say, it would have to be democratically constituted. Its freedom of speech would in no way be compromised, just the right to have the public pay for it via the business levy. Businesses should not be spending our money promoting their agendas.

We could go further yet and politically neuter corporations. The right to incorporate could include a restriction on political activity of any kind. If a corporation violated this restriction, it would be charged with an offence under the law or even have its charter revoked. We might remind ourselves that corporations operate at our pleasure, to provide us economic services, not to involve themselves in our democratic process.

The particular problem of business levy funding of political parties is tied up with political funding generally, a topic thoroughly deserving a discussion of its own, which is provided in Note 9.

The democratic goal must be to confine participation and influence in public affairs to individual citizens and ensure those citizens a reasonably equal opportunity to play their part. Eliminating the pervasive influence of the business levy is an essential part of that goal.

Note 9: On Wealth and Politics

THROUGHOUT MOST OF Western history, the main source of political power was that prince of the free lunch, inheritance, interrupted occasionally by theft. Political power, as well as land and wealth, were handed down from generation to generation, except when freebooters of one kind or another took up arms and effected a more violent transfer. After which, inheritance would resume its more gentle approach. Those not to the manor born made little encroachment on the wealth and power of those who were.

The Industrial Revolution changed all that. It not only expanded wealth creation, it expanded the distribution of wealth, divorcing it from inherited land and rank. Power flowed along with the wealth, of course, and went to those with money—capitalists—regardless of their accident of birth. The capitalists, however, were as jealous of their privileges as the aristocracy had been, and the wealth, although distributed more broadly, was nonetheless distributed as inequitably. Those who created it got a lot less of it than those who manipulated it. The long and bitter struggle against this state of affairs resulted in a fairer distribution of both wealth and power. All people, first men, then women, got a better share. Western countries took on the forms of democracy. Inheritance's importance greatly declined, particularly in providing political power, although it still puts golden spoons in a lot of mouths.

The 19th century saw the growth of individual capitalism, the 20th of corporate capitalism. The latter held a certain promise for democracy. By allowing shares to be widely distributed, ownership and therefore power could also be widely distributed. Unfortunately this promise has only been marginally realized. Corporate capitalism divorces control from ownership as far as the vast majority of shareholders are concerned, concentrating it in the hands of top management and those shareholders who own large blocks of stock, i.e. the very rich, the oligarchs.

One thing has not changed. Wealth still converts into political power, and as the corporate sector grows, as corporations expand into global giants, that power threatens political democracy, insinuating itself into our governance in a number of ways.

The most direct way is of course the funding of political parties via the business levy, as discussed in Note 8.5. The levy is also applied to the funding of think tanks, lobby groups, etc. that promote agendas amenable to business interests.

Business can also resort to economic blackmail. If politicians don't create conditions—labour law, environmental rules, etc.—that satisfy corporate demands, then capital will migrate elsewhere.

Media outlets are generally owned by oligarchs and corporations and thus available to nudge politics in an amenable direction, a subject discussed further in Note 10.

And politicians can profit from serving the interests of the corporate sector in other ways. Voters can be fickle and political office transient. Politicians must always be thinking about life after politics. Consulting fees, corporate directorships, fat fees for speaking engagements and other gratuities await the politician who has been kind to the corporate interest.

Most jurisdictions have instituted rules to contain the influence of wealth, at least in the political domain. Among these rules are limiting the amount of donations, even banning corporate and union donations outright; limiting election spending limits; offering free time on television or tightly restricting paid TV advertising or banning it entirely; offering tax credits for donations by citizens; requiring disclosure of campaign funding; and providing public funding to political parties through reimbursement of election expenses or directly.

Direct funding is a particularly useful method of ensuring that democracy belongs to all the people equally. One method of achieving this would be to charge each citizen who files a tax return a “democracy fee.” Only a few dollars from each taxpayer would generously fund all the political parties. The most democratic way of allocating the funding would be to allow citizens to make their own choice by ticking off a box on the tax form that listed all the registered parties. The price of democracy need not be high and can be easily affordable by all.

Funding rules vary greatly among jurisdictions with a resulting variance in the effectiveness of inhibiting the influence of wealth. Even those jurisdictions that have achieved considerable success must remain vigilant as wealth relentlessly seeks a route to power. And capital has other ways than funding politicians and political parties directly to promote its agenda.

Money is a fluid commodity. A system that confines political party spending within democratic constraints may see a flow of money to third parties. Business interests might feel that donations to advocacy organizations would better serve their political goals than a conservative but democratically-constrained political party.

Limits on funding must be applied to everyone in the political game, not just political parties. The rules for political and third parties should be similar: contributions from organizations banned and contributions from individuals strictly limited—the rules considered in the discussion of the business levy in Note 8.5. In order to qualify for donations, any group engaged in political advocacy, strictly interpreted, should be required to register as such, and full disclosure would apply.

As the Canadian Supreme Court observed, in regard to a province's referendum law, "Limits on independent spending are essential to maintain equilibrium in the financial resources available to candidates and political parties and thus ensure the fairness of elections." Unfortunately, supreme courts in other countries have not always agreed, apparently equating free spending with free speech. Rules to equalize speech do not preclude free speech. They do not prevent anyone from expressing any idea. They simply ensure that everyone has the same opportunity to have their say.

Any political party that claims to be democratic should have a policy in their platform that ensures political equality.

xxx

Note 10: On Wealth and the Media

MEDIA SPEECH IS not free. Speech over coffee tables and back fences may be free, but media speech is expensive. A television station or a daily newspaper is an expensive property, and today TV stations and newspapers tend to be owned in bunches, putting their ownership in the realm of corporate, increasingly global corporate, business. American journalist A. J. Liebling's observation, "Freedom of the press belongs to those rich enough to own one," is more relevant than ever. Actually, Liebling was only half right. Freedom of the press also belongs to those who advertise, and that, too, is a very expensive business. The mass media, excepting public broadcasters, are doubly the servants of wealth, owned by business and in thrall to it via advertising.

Yet the need for balance in both views and news in the mass media has never been greater. In the past, there were many newspapers with many owners, providing opportunity for a great variety of news and views. Today, newspapers are relatively few, and ownership is concentrated and corporate. Furthermore, the Internet has opened up mass communication to the spread of information that has no loyalty to fact and spreads lies as readily as truths. Responsible journalism has become increasingly precious.

What then, a democrat must ask, is the effect of the twin effects of wealth on the mass media's democratic function as public forums? Does it yield a bias in the information we receive? In the points of view we read and hear? Does it hinder the democratic process? And what might we do about it if it does? This note attempts to answer these questions.

10.1 Fruits of a Commercial Media—Ownership

Arguably the most powerful man in the Anglosphere is not a politician. He is a press baron. He has been instrumental in electing governments to his liking and in toppling those that aren't. He has played a major role in destabilizing the world's leading democracy. He has promoted and profited from the current wave of right-wing populism, and was a major enabler of Britain exiting the European Union. He is of course Rupert Murdoch. Since Margaret Thatcher, who aided and abetted him, no party in Great Britain that failed to win his support has won an election. When Tony Blair became leader of the Labour Party, one of his first chores was to fly to Australia and genuflect before Murdoch (the mountain doesn't come to Muhammad). Blair won his blessing and went on to shift his party hard right.

The Murdoch empire's conservative bias is hardly surprising. Media owners are business people and business people are mostly conservative, often liberal, rarely socialist. They share the views and interests of their peers and carry those

views and interests into the media world. Those views percolate down. Subordinates know what the boss wants and find life much simpler and, if they're ambitious, more rewarding if they accommodate the boss. And less rewarding if they don't. As one columnist put it "The ink-stained wretches ... have been reminded who owns the ink."

It is no coincidence that talk show hosts on commercial radio and TV generally slant to the right. We can imagine the reluctance with which business owners, to say nothing of their advertisers, would tolerate a persistently left-wing, or anti-corporate, view on the airwaves for a couple of hours every day. Even when owners insist that they don't interfere with editorial views but at the same time demand maximum profit, they are with a wink and a nudge insisting that their publishers stay sweet with advertisers.

Ownership of the mass media by the business community presents a tangle of conflicting interests. Foremost is the perennial conflict between wealth and democracy, between governance by the few and governance by the many. Then there are the conflicts between the interests of business and those of other groups in society, even with the public good itself, on everything from environmental laws to labour standards to consumer protection. Can the corporate media be seen as objective commentators on these areas? Corporations who own media have investments in other industries—how are their media to be seen as dispassionate observers of those industries? How can they report objectively on organized labour, the traditional foe of capital, or on the behaviour of advertisers, their patrons?

Our mass media is rather like a town hall meeting where the richest man in town gets to set the agenda. Town hall meetings are a democratic institution, and if everyone can speak their mind without fear, a free institution, but what does the democracy and the freedom mean if discussion always revolves around issues chosen by one man or by a small group of men and their loyal servants? Freedom of speech without equality of speech easily becomes more a tool for propaganda than democracy.

10.2 Fruits of a Commercial Media—Advertising

Advertising—not information, not ideas, not debate, not even entertainment—is the main business of the mass media.

Advertising is yet another form of the business levy (see Note 8.5). We may not want it, but we pay for it every time we buy something. Some advertising does provide a public service: knowing when bananas are on for half price or when a new laser printer is available can be useful. Unfortunately, much advertising chooses not to provide useful information about products and prices but rather to sell products by exploiting fears, creating fantasies, and promoting

lifestyles—in short, by propaganda. The object isn't so much to serve needs as to create wants.

Consumers spend billions of dollars extra on goods and services every year in order to feed advertising's appetites. You may not like your daily newspaper, you may not buy it, but you pay for it, or at least most of it. You may not watch commercial TV or engage in social media, but you pay for those, too.

We are paying to propagandize ourselves. We are quite likely the most propagandized people ever. No other people, not the Soviets under Communism, nor the Germans under Nazism, have been subjected to such incessant indoctrination, manufactured by such brilliant, creative minds, as we have. We are not being propagandized in a political or theological ideology but in the ideology of the marketplace, the buy-buy-buy ideology of consumerism.

At one time, this may have seemed innocent, even beneficial in an economy dedicated to growth, or it may at least have seemed neutral. Not anymore. Ask an environmentalist. Ask anyone interested in the health of the planet. At a time when we are drawing down the planet's resources, while at the same time polluting it, growth has become suspect and consumerism far from neutral. This is a political and moral issue, a case of marketplace values vs. social values, materialism vs. the public good. And the commercial media has chosen sides.

Our indoctrination starts early. Saturday morning cartoon shows for preschoolers are rife with sales pitches for everything from toys to cereals. Insiders in the business talk about developing "pester power" or "the shin-kicking factor"—nagging mommy and daddy until they buy it for you.

We often wind up in the ridiculous position of waging war against ourselves. The fast food industry sells us on junk food while sensible people struggle against the industry's multi-billion dollar resources to promote healthy eating. Advertisers defend their rights with an appeal to freedom of speech, and freedom of expression is indeed essential to democracy, but it is not license. Hawking food that contributes more to obesity than nutrition wanders well into the territory of license, if not social suicide. It is a perversion of free speech and deserves little defence.

A sensible society would promote that which is beneficial to society, not that which is harmful or which merely makes a profit, an obvious concept utterly distorted by advertising.

Aside from the consumer ideology created by advertisements, when the mass media is dependent upon advertising for its very existence, the selection and presentation of news also becomes suspect.

Advertisers demand mass audiences. This means the media must maximize their market share. Unfortunately, this commonly involves appealing to the easiest emotions and the most superficial thinking; it involves sensationalizing and dumbing down, seeking out the lowest common denominator.

This corruption of motive not only distorts public debate, as the advertising itself does, it also distorts our image of society. An example is the public image of crime. News in the daily press, and both news and entertainment on TV, is obsessed with crime, the more violent the better. The media create a picture of a society riddled with crime, crimes that are horrifically violent, and criminals that are depraved monsters. The truth is that violent crime has been retreating in most advanced countries for years. But this isn't sensational, and sensational sells more papers, and therefore more products, than analysis. Approaches to crime that are less punitive, less reliant on courts, more reliant on community and focused on respect for the victim have received short shrift in the commercial media. The legendary American television producer Fred Friendly once observed, "Because television can make so much money doing its worst, it often cannot afford to do its best."

As we would expect, peoples' perception of crime reflects the mass media picture. Quite aside from the tragedy of people, particularly older people, living with unnecessary fear, the informed debate that society needs to have about crime is difficult to achieve when our information-providers distort reality. And the mischief goes further. Unfounded fear creates mistrust, alienation and isolation that undermines society itself.

The media passion for sensation seeps into other areas as well. Election campaign coverage tends heavily to the political horse races and candidate conflicts, and only lightly to issues and candidate qualifications. By concentrating on the dark side, the media does a fair job of turning us against our own institutions.

Democracy needs news and opinion that informs and encourages reasoned debate. The corporate media, by providing an excess of news and opinion designed principally to excite passions, undermines democracy and becomes the ally of demagoguery.

10.3 Toward a Democratic Media

Why do we tolerate such a critically important servant of democracy being left to the tender mercies of wealth? Part of the answer may be simple apathy. Another part, and I suspect this is a very large part, is ignorance about how the business levy works. We debate the cost of public broadcasters to the taxpayer, but never mention the cost of the private media to the consumer. Critics often want to privatize public broadcasters because they eat up too much of their taxes or they don't like paying for programs they don't watch. This may sound like "common sense"; however, it reveals a profound ignorance about how media financing works.

The commercial media is as greedy for public subsidy as public broadcasters, but because the subsidy is advertising—a levy buried in the cost of all the products we buy—it escapes notice. In fact, the cost of commercial TV and radio per year via advertising greatly exceeds the cost of public broadcasting via tax dollars.

Some benighted folk even believe commercial TV is free! Or that they only pay for the newspaper they subscribe to. Or that they aren't supporting those dreadful radio talk shows because they never listen to them. We pay a form of the business levy to support the commercial media whether we like it or not, supporting programs, even entire media, we disapprove of—but this doesn't enter the debate.

The private media deserve to be more a subject of debate than the public media precisely because they are servants of a special interest group and not of the general public. But no such debate exists, and this brings us to the last part of the answer to why we tolerate the condition of the mass media—yet another conflict of interest. We cannot reasonably expect the corporate media to involve us in a debate that would threaten their very existence. Consequently, they offer us the wrong debate. We should be debating public-izing the private media, not privatizing the public one.

How and where are we to have such a debate, or any debate that is not framed by arrangements between press magnates and advertisers? How do we put the mass media in the employ of free speech and democracy rather than in the employ of advertising and profit? Obviously, we need public forums, truly public forums, forums owned by, controlled by, and accountable to the public, forums that allow for thorough debates on the business levy, on media concentration, on corporate governance, on all those issues that discomfort wealth. We need a strong public presence in both broadcasting and the daily press—at the very least, national, publicly-owned newspapers to supplement public broadcasters.

We might imagine an objective editorial board, driven by a social rather than a market imperative. All sectors of society are covered. Business is no longer the favoured child either editorially or in the news. Corporate behaviour is scrutinized as thoroughly as government behaviour. The economic section includes business, labour and workplace news. It relies on economic indicators that truly reflect the health of society in preference to the socially and environmentally challenged gross domestic product. We find a consumer reports section—something much more useful to consumers than advertising. Indeed, advertising claims are, when necessary, challenged. We see a solid public service section; a great deal more coverage of scientific, technological and environmental news; and, I suspect, a much-shortened sports section. We see a much-reduced emphasis on crime and sensation generally. In other words, we see a very different-looking medium. It presents a different world, the real world. We need hardly add that a democratic

newspaper would be self-governed with the newsroom staff choosing their own editors.

In the meantime we must continue to firm up the public broadcasters. Only they can be counted on to meet the democratic imperative of providing a full range of vigorous and equitable democratic discussion. The marketplace media will not do this. The choices they offer the public, whether news, opinion, or entertainment, will always be constrained by what is good for business. If that coincides with the public good, everyone wins—if it doesn't, the public good loses.

A public sector with a strong TV, radio, newspaper and Internet presence should be the objective. As democracy's public forum, the mass media ought to be fundamentally devoted to public service and only incidentally, if at all, to consumerism.

10.4 Last Thoughts

Before leaving the issue of wealth and the mass media, a word needs to be said about bias. Bias is always to some degree in the eye of the beholder. We tend to find what we are looking for. If we are left-wing, we are convinced we see a right-wing bias in the media; if we are right-wing, we may be equally convinced of a left-wing bias. Moral conservatives swear they see a "liberal" bias in the media and perhaps they do. Journalists tend to be more open-minded, more cosmopolitan and better educated than the average citizen, so their perspective may indeed be more liberal, but it almost has to be to allow them to do their job professionally.

In any case, perception of bias is subjective. What is not subjective is the ownership of the mass media by one special interest group, and its financial dependence on that same group through advertising, a group with its own agenda. Our media is oligarchic, not democratic. This is the hard, irreducible fact we must deal with if we are to have the independent and accessible forums democracy requires.

In dictatorships, government is the enemy of a free press. In democracies, government enacts much legislation that affects the media, from broadcasting acts to tax law, but where information and opinion are involved, it holds little command over the media. Wealth, particularly corporate wealth, is the enemy. When a small group, even one man, can affect the way we perceive ourselves, in effect change our culture, not through the force of his ideas but through his money, we are less a democracy than an oligarchy.

Through its media arm, wealth decides what the issues are, provides the information on these issues and frames the debates. Giovanni Sartori of Columbia University described our governing institutions as subject to an "echo-effect." The

mass media create public views through selection of news content and editorial opinion; polls reflect the public's adoption of these views; and the politicians, increasingly reliant on polls, respond to "public opinion." The public's concern about crime exemplifies Sartori's echo chamber. As does suspicion of government.

Wealth is ambivalent about democratic government. It wants to control it, yet remains suspicious of it—its main rival for power. Its media arm reflects this suspicion and drags us into it. Our challenge is to create a mass media, a public forum, that does not oppose us to government but that involves us in it, that presents information and opinion with a breadth, a depth and an objectivity that allows us to not echo views but to develop views rooted in our own hearts and minds.

The Internet promised us liberation from the tyranny of the media barons, but unfortunately it has not quite lived up to its promise. It would, the digital prophets predicted, allow everyone the ability to have all knowledge at his or her fingertips. We would all become well-informed and therefore wise. However, the prophets perhaps didn't realize that it's as easy to spread lies on the Web as it is to spread facts. And, of course, people often prefer lies to the truth. The result has been a flood of rubbish information often difficult to distinguish from quality information, and a public even worse informed. It turns out we still need gatekeepers to filter the wheat from the chaff.

Furthermore, dot-com capitalists have become adept at reaping the rewards of advertising while avoiding the expense of actually gathering real news, offering no more than links. They are, in a word, parasites. The mainstream media who have to shoulder the expense of searching out good information suffer financially and newspapers die in droves, a matter of great concern to democrats.

Despite the biases imposed by wealth, thanks to responsible journalists the traditional media does supply the careful reader with information he or she can believe. The choice of stories may be questionable, but they do attempt to adhere to the facts and make corrections when they err. Unfortunately, as the traditional media falter, we lose the responsible journalism along with newspapers. The end result is that, in this digital age, we need publicly-owned and controlled media more than ever.

Note 11: On Democratizing Wealth

11.1 The Tax Man and the Free Lunch

“THERE IS NO such thing as a free lunch”—Milton Friedman, American economist.

Rather a silly thing for an economist to say. As Note 9 points out, the free lunch, in the form of inheritance, has always been a great deal more important to economics than economists. Inheritance has throughout history been the main route to property, wealth and power. Keeping in mind the aristocrats, monarchs and assorted oligarchs that have sponged up its largesse, and the very large amounts they have sponged up, we might more appropriately refer to the free banquet. It is not as important today as it once was but it still bestows massive wealth and therefore power, even in ostensibly democratic countries. The free lunch still invests an aristocracy.

Indeed, the rentier class is growing along with inequality. And inequality is anathema not only to a just society but also to a healthy and democratic society.

Most inheritance is in relatively small amounts, of no great concern to democracy, but the large chunks, the kind that allow for augmenting already substantial fortunes, the kind that substantially increase inequity and the maldistribution of power, are of great concern. We need to constrain the free banquet. We need, at the very least, inheritance taxes with teeth.

A tax on inheritances and gifts that is trivial at the level of a family home or small business but escalates rapidly beyond say a million dollars so as to capture most of large fortunes would be a good start toward breaking up large concentrations of wealth while easing the tax burden on the middle class. We might go a step further and impose a small annual wealth tax on the assets of great fortunes.

Ethically, inheritance ought to be the most heavily taxed of income sources, precisely because it is unearned. It doesn't even create incentive, which is the main capitalist argument for wealth. (If the poor get something for nothing, we argue that it discourages incentive.)

We might take a peek as well at corporate concentrations of wealth. In North America, corporate income taxes have been making up a decreasing share of the tax burden. Corporations have at their beck and call the best brains available to exploit avenues in tax legislation, including good old-fashioned loopholes, to minimize their taxes. When reduced corporate taxes are made up by increased personal taxes, the middle class, who pay the lion's share of income taxes, develop hostility toward government. This phenomenon saps not only the middle

class's faith in democratic institutions but also their willingness to support the equality that democracy requires.

Increasing taxes on the wealthy, particularly the free banquet wealthy, balanced with decreasing taxes on individuals and small businesses is an essential part of creating the equality that democracy thrives on.

11.2 A Fair Share

An equitable distribution of wealth must of course include an equitable distribution within the workplace. Unfortunately, in recent years the spread between executive and worker incomes has been steadily increasing. For example, in the U.S., where the trend has been greatest, the ratio of CEO pay to an average production worker's has risen from 20:1 in 1965 to over 300:1 today. The disparity has been less extreme in other industrial countries but has followed the same trend of excess.

The idea that CEOs need lavish compensation to motivate them is nonsense. CEOs tend to be high achievers and status-seekers who will work hard regardless of what they are paid. Nor do the fat pay packets reflect high market demand for unique skills. CEOs are no more exceptional than they were 50 years ago. In any case, their compensation is largely determined by boards of directors who include executives from other firms, politicians being rewarded for good service, and so on, i.e. the old boy network in action.

Various approaches have been suggested to rein in executive excess, including higher marginal tax rates, eliminating tax breaks on corporate perks, giving shareholders more say in setting compensation, disclosure of compensation, and setting maximum wages.

Great attention needs also to be paid at the other end of the income scale, to the working poor, a class rapidly increasing as middle-class manufacturing jobs give way to precariat service sector jobs. The working poor need legislation, including inflation-indexed minimum wages, and unionization to guarantee them a fair piece of the economic action. They, along with the most vulnerable in society, the non-working poor, also need a solid social welfare system to protect them from the vagaries of a fickle, rapidly changing economic system.

One suggestion, attracting more attention lately, is the idea of a basic income or guaranteed annual income, i.e. a modest allowance provided to poorer, or perhaps all, citizens, by the state. An ancient concept, it dates back at least to Demosthenes who, in 348 BC, proposed a regular stipend to every Athenian citizen for the performance of whatever state duty best suited him (the Assembly failed to adopt the idea). Two hundred years ago, the revolutionary Tom Paine detailed a scheme for annual allowances in his *The Rights of Man*. Nobel Prize

winner George Stigler and Milton Friedman both suggested a negative income tax.

The minimum income level would be set so as to guarantee everyone a frugal, but dignified, standard of living, modified for age, number of children, handicaps, etc. It could replace a host of current programs including welfare, employment insurance, grants to students and artists, and old age pensions. Other than the poor, the income would be useful for people who wanted to advance their education, work on an invention, start a small business, or write a book on democracy. In order to provide an incentive to work, the allowance would decline as a person earned income but never as much as the additional income earned—a person would always be better off working. Social programs would still be necessary, targeted at specific problems such as dysfunctional family life, drug abuse, criminal rehabilitation, etc.

Most constitutions, even legendary ones like that of the United States, have surprisingly little to say about the most fundamental rights of all, the rights to the basic necessities of life. Constitutions guarantee rights such as freedom of speech and assembly, vital rights indeed, but of limited value to men and women who lack the even more basic rights of adequate food and shelter. Freedom of speech, for all its splendour, is small consolation to a starving citizen. Perhaps the oversight occurs because the people who drew up constitutions were invariably warm and well fed. Rights to the basic necessities are not only fundamental to life, they also serve as a foundation for the economic equality needed for democracy.

Redistributing wealth is a good start in democratizing it—but only a start. We need to go further and ensure that the control of wealth, too, answers to the democratic imperative.

11.3 Maintaining Control

We need spend little time on small business in considering democratic control of our economy. Big business, however, demands our close attention. Our concern is not the free market but the capitalist market. We need to look at how concentrated wealth is held accountable to the democratic project.

Big can be good. Compare your grocery bills after shopping at the supermarket and after shopping at the corner grocery store. Or compare the variety of products offered. And even as undemocratic as corporations are, they generally offer their employees more than small business, with better pay and benefits, more opportunity for advancement, better educational opportunities, etc., and a better opportunity to participate in the major democratic presence in the workplace—labour unions. In some ways at least they offer more opportunity for democratic workplaces than small businesses.

We have a variety of ways to keep them under our democratic thumbs: enforcing regulations, setting codes of conduct, influencing investment and, in our more generous moments, offering favours to do our bidding.

Even the most rabid free-enterprisers recognize the need for government to referee the market with, at the very least, anti-monopoly legislation to maintain healthy competition. In current practice, regulation goes well beyond that.

Federal, provincial and state governments enable dozens of regulatory agencies whose job is to confine industrial behaviour within the bounds of the public good. They regulate communications, energy production and supply, investment, liquor sales, transportation, etc., performing both administrative and quasi-judicial functions. Regulatory agencies serve democracy in a number of ways: by ensuring businesses follow the rules and act in the public good; by ensuring equitable behaviour by and between companies; by giving visibility to government decisions thereby helping citizens to hold both government and industry accountable; and, by accepting submissions and holding public hearings, giving individual citizens and interested groups access to the system.

To reduce the democratic deficit even further, we might not only regulate corporate public behaviour but corporate internal behaviour as well. Part III discusses democracy within the corporate structure as well as within the workplace generally, a topic that melds into and is part of the topic of economic democracy as a whole. After looking at the basic owner/worker conflict, the notes inquired into the degree of internal democracy in private and public corporations, and considered how it might be enhanced. Democratizing workplaces, central to a democratic economy, is the major challenge in restructuring corporations, but we want also to restructure corporations to democratize all their decision-making. We move from micro to macroeconomic democracy, so to speak.

We might start by legislating corporate codes of conduct. Codes could, for instance, require companies to include worker and perhaps community or consumer representatives on their boards of directors. They might require democratic forms in workplaces as well. Democracy is as worthy a corporate goal as profit.

And the codes could set standards for socially responsible behaviour in other areas such as accountability to communities and responsibility to the environment. Targets could be set for corporations to satisfy the codes, monitored by the enabling authority. Corporations not meeting their targets would be punished accordingly, even to the extent of having their charters revoked. Corporations are just too big, too powerful, too unaccountable, to be left undemocratic.

Central to controlling corporate structure is controlling what makes it run, and that of course is investment. Democratizing wealth must include democratizing investment. Small scale investment doesn't concern us here—we

can leave that to small scale investors—but large scale investment, with all its social ramifications, is very much a public matter. Big investment decisions, including corporate mergers, plant closings, foreign investment, and many others, affect society broadly and therefore require a broad accountability. The idea of a social rate of return is largely missing from conventional investment, where market values alone reign supreme.

Pension funds, for example, with their the immense clout in the stock markets are sleeping giants when it comes to influence in the economy and in society generally. Understandably, they are primarily concerned with maximizing rates of return—their members' pensions must come first—but this need not preclude them from investing in socially responsible ways. Sovereign wealth funds, accumulated from royalties on natural resources, should serve a similar purpose.

And ultimately, investment can be driven to achieve specific public objectives by offering government largesse. Government, on behalf of the people, has often been generous with the private sector in order to stimulate investment in the right direction. In North America, for example, land grants to the railways directed development of the west of the continent. Irrigation has been built to promote agriculture, and grants are used to enhance culture and science, as are other mechanisms such as special tax rates—in all, a widely-used carrot.

Economic partnership between government and the private sector has become part and parcel of modern states, and it will no doubt continue to be. It does contain dangers, however. It can descend into blackmail by industry—no favours, no investment. It becomes particularly insidious when cities, states and provinces, and even countries, bid against each other for the hand of business. It is a useful tool to be used with great discretion.

Via co-operatives, regulatory agencies, corporate codes of conduct, investment vehicles, government largesse, and other methods, citizens are by no means unarmed in the struggle to control their economy.

Nonetheless, their control is slipping as globalization progresses. As globalization takes hold, investors and corporations slip the leash of the nation-state. The values of the market, particularly the capitalist market, are in the ascendant. Commerce man dominates social man. As one billionaire put it, “You know the golden rule. He who has the gold makes the rules.” Indeed, we seem to have entered a new gilded age where great wealth and great inequality reside side by side while politicians seem unable or unwilling to grasp the growing alienation that results.

Democracy idles while the corporate state thrives. The latter wields its own formidable array of weapons with which to foist itself upon us. Not the least of these is the business levy (Note 8.5) in its various forms, the very best kind of weapon because it is supplied by the victims themselves, and for the most part unconsciously. The corporate armoury includes ownership of the mass media and

the purchase of politics. The corporate state dominates economics, and insinuates itself and its interests and values into other institutions including, with an eye to the future, education. Capitalism has done more than outlast communism; it has replaced it as the major threat to democracy.

What most people want, I suspect, is balance: government big enough to ensure a compassionate, equitable, smoothly-functioning democratic society, and no bigger. Big government is necessitated by the complexity of modern society. It is also the result of big business. Without big government we would become creatures of the market, not the free market of simple buy-and-sell but the capitalist market of corporate control.

If downsizing government meant redistributing the downsized power equally to all citizens, most of us would applaud. But it doesn't. Capitalists are much better positioned to absorb that power than the rest of us. When government reduces its macro-economic decision-making, economic power flows to corporations, increasingly global corporations, not consumers, not citizens. Government gained these powers in the first place largely to constrain the few who used it selfishly without regard to the public good, to exercise the moral discipline capitalism is incapable of.

As the economy globalizes, so must democracy. Wealth can only be fully democratized through co-ordination among countries. But that is a plateful unto itself. Note 14 discusses globalization and its meaning to democracy at length.

Note 12: On Alternatives to Capitalism

12.1 Co-operatives

IF WE WANT an alternative to capitalism, there is no need to start tearing up the paving stones and building the barricades. We simply need to buy a membership in our local co-op and go shopping. Established in the 19th century as a more equitable and democratic approach to production and consumption, co-operatives are now significant players in all Western economies. The world's three million co-ops represent over 12 per cent of humanity.

They exist in many forms. Note 7.1, for example, discussed worker co-operatives. Producer co-ops are a similar form. In these, workers produce independently but market their product collectively as opposed to worker co-ops in which workers both own the means of production and produce their product collectively. The most prominent producer co-ops are those in the agricultural sector. Agricultural marketing co-ops sell grains, oilseeds, dairy products, livestock, poultry and eggs, and fruit and vegetables. Also in the agricultural sector, although perhaps better described as consumer co-ops, are the supply co-ops, which provide farmers with a variety of their needs, including animal feeds, fertilizers, seeds, and machinery.

Financial co-ops are perhaps the most familiar among consumer co-ops. In many European countries, they are dominant in retail banking and insurance. They may also perform other financial services such as brokerage and providing development capital.

Co-operative housing has provided not only a co-operative alternative but also a highly successful social service. Housing co-ops, in return for government financial assistance, typically set aside a number of their units for low-income people. A Canadian study reported that co-ops' operating costs were significantly less than government-run public housing, largely because residents are member/owners, in charge of their own communities. The study credited the skills that members develop in running their co-ops for their higher rates of educational upgrading, re-entry into the work force and formation of small businesses, relative to residents of public housing.

In order to promote and strengthen both autonomous co-ops and the movement generally, co-operatives have formed both national and international organizations. The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), for example, is an independent, non-governmental association which unites, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. The ICA was one of the first non-governmental

organizations to be accorded United Nations Consultative Status. Today it holds the highest level of consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council.

Consumer and producer co-ops represent an essential democratic alternative to private corporate enterprise. They are not only democratically run, they are successful without profit being the only bottom line, and they have close ties to their communities, a valuable component of democracy in itself and something that the corporate sector usually lacks. They are a vital part of a democratic economy and deserve the strongest encouragement and support from government through tax and other policies. Unfortunately, political parties and governments tend to focus myopically on capitalism as the sole engine of economic activity and as a result largely ignore this democratic alternative.

12.2 A Pinko Fantasy

In the future, we might consider an even more comprehensive vision for democratic control of the economy and revisit communism—a democratic version of it, of course.

The nation-state's first attempt at communism, the Soviet Union, went very badly, producing a crushing combination of incompetence and brutality. It got off to a bad start, beginning in a nation emerging from feudalism even though its chief theorist, Karl Marx, had made it clear it was to be the evolutionary sequel to an advanced and decaying capitalism. Furthermore, it began in a nation with a tradition of brutal and oppressive tzars and, in keeping with that tradition, quickly enthroned the most brutal and oppressive tzar of them all.

Its biggest weakness, its fatal flaw, was its lack of democracy. Quite aside from the notion that such a massive enterprise as the Soviet Union could be run in all respects from the centre—particularly a centre in constant fear of its master—the rigid, dictatorial hierarchy mocked democracy while rendering ridiculous the idea that here was a system that served the people. Unfortunately, this form of communism became the model for those that followed.

A new form, a democratic form, just might work. If workers, farmers and others managed their own enterprises, made their own decisions and chose their own and the nation's leaders, dictatorship and its accompanying brutality would be precluded. People responsible for their own enterprises and benefiting from the success of those enterprises would preclude the incompetence problem. The state would still own all enterprises. It would provide assistance to enterprises in trouble and help to establish new enterprises and phase out old ones. Common needs such as social services and infrastructure would be funded proportionately more by the more successful enterprises, according to rules established by the democratic citizenry as a whole, in keeping with Marx's principle, "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs."

The idea of a philosophy climbing out of the abyss isn't new. Christianity, ostensibly a doctrine about loving God and man, has had to morally resurrect itself from the Inquisition, the Crusades, witch hunts, and various other peccadilloes. Communism, too, may yet recover from its sins. The modern version is still very young.

While philosophizing along these lines, we might think about ridding ourselves of the very concept of "owning" property, and about developing a better approach to allocating it, one based on need and service and equality and flexibility. Driven as it so often is by greed, ownership of property has indeed been the root of much evil.

Having reached the stage where we have the technical ability to provide amply for everyone, where our biggest concern is equitably distributing what we can produce while not exhausting our planet, it's time to think about post-capitalist society. We have accepted capitalism because of its capacity to generate wealth even while we have constantly fought its capacity to generate inequality. Now perhaps its job is done and it's time to look for a comprehensive cure for its inherent inequities, for a more humane, more moral, more sustainable economic system.

Part V: Change



Note 13: On Technology

“EMBRACE CHANGE.” YET another of the mindless slogans that dot the verbal landscape of the new century. Nonetheless, great change is afoot, whether we like it or not apparently, and much of this change affects democracy. And in no area has change been more dramatic than in technology.

We need to look at technological change, at what it has done for us and what it has done to us, from the standpoint of how we can begin to embrace democracy first and change, at least useful change, second.

13.1 King Ludd Had a Point

In the early 19th century, groups of British weavers, angry at seeing their jobs lost to power looms, attacked the machines and destroyed them. They rioted under the name of King Ludd, a possibly fictitious character described variously as a village idiot named Ned Ludd and a youth named Ludlum who destroyed a weaving machine his father had told him to fix. The revolt soon succumbed to flogging, jailing, transportation and hanging, and the Luddites passed into history, leaving only their name to ponder upon.

As a former engineer, I long shared the common view of the Luddites as benighted fellows, tragically incapable of embracing change. I have revised my opinion. Not that I oppose technological change, nor do I condone vandalism as political statement, although when workers can neither vote nor form a union, as was the case at the time, strong measures may be justified as a last resort.

My sympathy for the Luddites arises from the fact they were subjected to innovation that would not only throw them out of work but would change their entire way of life, their values as well as their employment, and it was being done without their consent, or even participation. It was imposed change, and therefore—to a democrat—illegitimate change. Prior to the Industrial Revolution they did not live in a democracy but they at least had control over their work. They were craftsmen. Now they were to become servants of the machines and, in turn, of the owners of the machines. They were to be dehumanized. King Ludd was warning against change that allied technology to market values rather than social values.

By the 1950s we thought we had brought technology to heel as we confidently predicted a future of leisure and pleasurable work, with machines doing the dirty jobs. The fantasy has not materialized. Instead we find ourselves faced, like the Luddites, with technological change that seems to run roughshod over us in mindless service to the market. Millions of workers are displaced from middle class manufacturing jobs into precariat service jobs with no more say in the transition and how to cope with it than they have in the weather.

Technology hasn't brought us to the promised land. We have seen some of the most spectacular technological change ever, including the silicon chip and its marvellous offspring, yet we might properly wonder if there was any point to it. If we anthropomorphized technology, we could accuse it of treason. But technology isn't sentient, it is the inanimate servant of whoever controls it.

And just who does?

13.2 Who's the Boss?

As Marshall McLuhan pointed out, when a new technology is introduced we don't just have the old system with the new technology. Everything is changed. Our values change along with our physical world and often we are quite unaware of it. When the automobile arrived, we didn't just have the old system with a new means of transportation; we developed a new way of living. We changed the way we built our cities. When television appeared, we didn't just have the old system with a new form of communication; our perceptions of our society, our attitudes towards it and our social behaviour changed. Note 10.4 discusses how the Internet promise turned into a threat not only to the integrity of information but to democracy as well. The automobile, TV and the Internet are big technologies, but even small ones echo and re-echo throughout society. This is what the Luddites saw and were enraged at. They didn't like their way of life being changed without having any say in it. And neither should we. Not if we are democrats.

Technological change creates imperatives that we seem bound to respond to. It creates an environment in which like amoeba we all swim but over which we have no control, prospering only by reacting properly to technology's stimuli. Nonetheless, technological change is directed, but less by we the people than by commerce man. Since at least the Industrial Revolution, technology has largely been in the service of capitalism. Technological change has been driven less by community consideration and need than by capitalists acting in their pursuit of profit.

Even universities have become caught up in the pursuit. Here is a place we should be able to rely on a dispassionate search for knowledge, but increasingly as government grants shrink, universities become increasingly dependent on commerce. Technology-transfer programs and partnerships with corporations become the rage. This may be all very helpful for cash-strapped universities but raises the questions of who's in charge and whose values dominate. When universities seek clients and business partners, and sell ideas as products, a major philosophical shift has occurred. The role of the university as a place of independent inquiry serving the whole community begins to blur into the role of an entrepreneur serving the corporate sector.

When the editor of the Canadian Medical Association Journal tried to enforce a policy that editorials about a product be written only by experts without ties to the firm that made it, he discovered that it was simply too difficult to find such experts. Very few medical researchers weren't doing research for pharmaceutical companies. How do citizens make responsible decisions when information from their own scientists is tainted?

This tendency is precisely backwards: society should be increasing its say in corporate research, not the corporate sector increasing its say in public research. Democracy is losing ground. In a democracy, technology must, like other determinants of our way of life, be controlled by the citizenry, not by corporations.

What concerns us as democrats is not technology in its particulars—that we can leave to the marketplace—but rather the directions in which technology is taking us. Do we want technology designed to create local self-reliant industries, or do we want technology designed for transnational production? Do we want technology that creates efficiency and lays off workers, or technology that creates jobs and lays off machines? Do we want technology that makes workplaces more satisfying to workers, or technology that just increases efficiency? Do we want technology that serves materialism, or do we want technology that serves social and environmental needs? We ought, at the very least, to be talking about these things, about who decides.

Not that democratic process hasn't had a say in technological change. Quite the contrary. Citizens have long had an influence on technological development beyond their marketplace choices. Democracy has had a voice. Indeed, direct democracy has had a say in such areas as fluoridation of water supplies, construction of oil pipelines and many other areas through public hearings and other mechanisms. In many jurisdictions, legal requirements for environmental assessments of major projects give the public a direct voice. Government initiatives in other areas too, including communications and transportation, have directed technology toward broad social objectives. Governments have funded research in areas like agriculture, defence, forestry, fisheries and the environment generally, for economic reasons and for the preservation of heritage. Government subsidies, too, have pushed industries in desired directions.

In Europe, various governments and universities have taken steps to involve the public more in research in order to give ordinary people a say in which directions technology goes.

The word to emphasize here is “directions.” We can't predict all the results of new technologies. We are not prophets. Even the inventors often have very little idea where their new technologies will lead. Nor do we want to be constantly looking over researchers' shoulders. But we do want technology moving in directions broadly determined by public deliberation. At the very least, when we

bring it under democratic control we are alert to what it is doing to us and are in a position to discuss, debate and change its direction.

13.3 Rate of Change

Quite aside from the effects of technology on society in themselves, the rate of technological change is in itself so rapid we don't have time to reflect on those effects, to assess whether they are taking us where we want to go. There seems to be no alternative to simply adapting. We have a tendency to evaluate our success as a society more by our technological, or at least material, progress than by our social progress. At times it seems that we consider progress to be technological change and nothing else. We are obsessed with efficiency at the expense of reflection.

We might remind ourselves that our modern healthy way of life was brought about by only four technological advances—clean water, effective sewage disposal, good nutrition and immunization—and only one of these is high-tech. Throw in literacy and the mass media to satisfy democracy's need for good communications—print alone would suffice—and we realize that most technology may be nice to have but isn't necessary for a healthy democratic society. More technology fleshes out our material way of life but it imposes no need to proceed with change at more than a leisurely, non-disruptive pace. The rat race of "embrace change" is masochistic.

Technology has allowed us to create enough wealth to ensure everyone a decent standard of living, and we are grateful, but perhaps it's time to turn it away from the service of competition and materialism toward the service of more important values: equality, compassion, pleasant work, a healthy environment and of course, democracy.

Note 14: On Global Democracy

ON THE 6TH of September, 1522, fifteen survivors on the sailing ship Vittoria, all that was left of Ferdinand Magellan's fleet that had sailed from Seville three years earlier, returned to Spain. Four other ships and 250 men, including Magellan himself, lay scattered along a route westward from Patagonia to the Cape of Good Hope, but humankind, for the first time, had tied the globe together. Globalization had begun.

The Vittoria was laden with spices from the Moluccas. Magellan, in the employ of Charles of Spain, was attempting to break the Portuguese hold on the eastern spice trade by sailing west rather than east—by taking advantage of the entire globe. Then, as now, economics was the prime mover in globalization.

Global trade has been around for five centuries, and even earlier traders peddled their wares across broad areas of the world, but recently the globalization of trade has greatly intensified, driven by rapidly advancing electronic technology. Indeed, globalization in the modern sense is characterized by the ability to almost instantaneously distribute ideas, information, and capital. This technology allows for a speed and complexity of trade that would have amazed Magellan. The new global commerce in turn affects social and political life to a degree that might also have amazed him. Of primary interest to democrats is the decline in power of the nation-state counterpointed by the rise in power of the global corporation.

14.1 Whither the Nation-state?

Whether the nation-state declines or not is in itself irrelevant. It has done good service as the primary political and social jurisdiction, but as needs change more suitable ones may emerge. And clearly, needs are changing. The environment, for example, was once a local concern. Not any more. When global warming threatens the entire planet, the argument "don't tell me what to do on my property" becomes as silly as it is selfish. Species extinction and exhaustion of the planet's resources are problems that also transcend borders. And with nuclear, biological and chemical weapons poised to do their dirty work, war is everybody's business, not just the belligerents'. These are challenges we must face as members of humanity rather than as members of our tribes. Globalization imposes itself upon us even outside of economics, and global problems require global structures. How the nation-state fits into all this is problematic. A United Nations Human Development Report commented, "The nation-state now is too small for the big things and too big for the small."

Our problem here is that the nation-state as the major repository of government is also the major repository of political democracy. There are other

levels of democratic government within the nation-state and other democratic institutions, but even these operate within the purview of the nation-state. If the nation-state withers away, we want to be sure democracy doesn't wither away with it.

Unfortunately, there is a lot of withering going on, driven primarily not by environmentalists or peacemakers but by the heirs of Magellan, the men and women of commerce.

14.2 Global Colossi

A few hundred international currency traders, including big banks, mutual fund managers and other investment dealers, shift trillions of dollars and other currencies around the world every day. These commercial adventurers travel the globe not under sail but by the modern miracle of telecommunications. Money itself has become the thing most traded.

Fifty years ago roughly 80 per cent of these foreign exchange transactions involved trading of goods and services with the remaining 20 per cent involved in speculation. Today the numbers have been reversed—over 80 per cent of currency trades are speculative. While currency speculation aids in the smooth operation of international trade and investment, it has also contributed to the disruption of trade, leading to the stagnation of economic development and economic crises. It has affected the ability of nations to develop equitable and just economic policies. Indeed it threatens the sovereignty of nations. Furthermore, with profit coming from economic ups and downs it has little interest in stable economies. A good rumour can be as profitable as a good fact, and the Internet adds greatly to both rumours and the speed at which they can spread, aggravating the already abbreviated attention spans of the dealers.

And the money-shufflers are only one brand of corporation operating at the global level, one of a variety of many that now pose the major threat to the nation-state. These autocratic organizations are experiencing a rise in power that now places them as equals, in economic terms at least, to nations. Most of the world's largest economies are corporations, not countries. Note 10 discusses corporate control over the media. This concern, too, has globalized. A handful of giant corporations control much of the global media.

As technology and trade agreements facilitate their ability to operate across borders, global corporations increasingly find democracy a hindrance and the nation-state useful only as a source of bureaucrats to make and enforce rules for the benefit of trade and investment. As their transnational capability increases, their influence over the nation-state, whose power is bound largely within its borders, also increases. If the nation-state is to be replaced by a globalized order

we need take care the masters of that order are not corporations and their plutocratic owners.

Global corporations can dictate a range of government policy. If they don't like the tax regime or any other local circumstance in a country, province, state or city, they can make broad hints about moving on to a more amenable locale. Whether due to this sort of blackmail, or just generous political support, the corporate tax rates have been dropping for years. Governments have fallen all over themselves in haste to privatize and deregulate power from themselves to the corporate sector in the name of free markets. The relative rank of governments and corporate leaders is illustrated at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where government leaders, elected and autocratic alike, kowtow before the world's top corporate executives, the emperors of business.

When governments are in bed with corporations they don't have to be told to privatize and deregulate any more than hookers have to be told to wear low-cut tops and miniskirts—they know what the boys want. And what about those governments less inclined to give good *laissez-faire*? Governments that promote public ownership, or co-operatives, or workers' rights? When economic buoyancy depends on the favour of global corporations, those governments will not fare well, regardless of how strongly they appeal to the people.

14.3 The Challenge Redux

John Maynard Keynes, commenting on internationalism, said, "Ideas, knowledge, art, hospitality, travel—these are the things which should of their nature be international. But let goods be homespun whenever it is reasonably and conveniently possible; and, above all, let finance be primarily national." Keynes was talking about the conservative virtue of self-reliance—let us be open to the world but let us take care of our own needs.

Certainly ideas, knowledge (or at least information) and art are now international, travelling about the world borne by electrons. But finance, too, and economics generally, has become instantaneously global. Self-reliance seems almost quaint in light of currency trading, global corporations and a proliferation of trade agreements. But Keynes may have been concerned with more than material self-reliance. The globalization of ideas, knowledge and art does not threaten democracy—indeed, it almost certainly enhances it—but the globalization of economics does.

Government, our means of controlling economics, of ensuring it is our servant and not we its, has been lagging in the globalization race. Political democracy remains largely trapped within the nation-state. Furthermore

democracy, with its slow, deliberate ways, may even be seen as an impediment to trade in an age when financial transactions can take place in milliseconds.

Two hundred years ago political power, as always the tool of economic power, lay with capital. Labour was pure servant. But generations of struggle for labour unions, labour laws, extension of the franchise and ultimately the welfare state, brought ordinary people a measure of economic power and consequently a measure of control over political institutions. Governments became increasingly their governments and the protectors of their welfare.

Now, as global corporations break the bounds of the nation-state and its political institutions, the balance of power reverts to that of the Industrial Revolution. Capitalism has slipped its leash. Two hundred years of progress begins to erode, and labour, indeed society generally, is once again increasingly at the mercy of capital and market forces. A minority prospers increasingly at the expense of the majority. The class struggle is rejoined. “We must compete in the global marketplace” becomes the mindless mantra of the new world order, almost as if after thousands of years of philosophical inquiry we have finally discovered the answer to the question, “What is the purpose of life?”

The atmosphere is particularly uncondusive to democracy. People feel a lack of control, a sense of helplessness that leads to apathy, resentment and scapegoating, the sort of helplessness and insecurity that led to fascism in the 1930s. The confidence and trust that democracy requires declines.

This simply won't do. If the economy doesn't serve the environment and society generally, and if it doesn't enhance citizens' control over their lives, what good is it? Just as we had to develop democratic structures to control the capitalist market within the nation-state, now we have to develop democratic structures to control capitalism within global society. We must bring global political change up to the pace of global economic change.

14.4 Reining in the Rogues

For a democrat, the direction of globalization should be determined by the people of the globe—all the people. Unfortunately, technology and globalization sweep along with a dearth of reference back to the people. We need, therefore, to promote and create structures that ensure the new world is ordered by the people of the world. We need global democracy. We can start by bringing the current masters of the universe, the currency traders and global corporations generally, to heel.

John Maynard Keynes, James Tobin and other prominent economists have through the years suggested taxing currency or securities transactions or both in order to suppress market volatility and curb excessive speculation that harmed national economies. A small tax would not only dampen the markets and add

sober second thought to transactions, it would provide a generous revenue that could be used for, say, institutions that promoted global democracy.

At the very least, currency and securities markets should be regulated sufficiently to curb excessive influence over the policy-making of democratically elected governments. Government's right, if not obligation, to regulate markets has been recognized even by free-marketers back to Adam Smith. If we can extend this right to negotiate a World Trade Organization, we can extend it to negotiate supranational regulations for financial markets.

We can challenge the supremacy of other global corporations as well, in various ways. We could simply break them up and limit them to a democratically manageable size.

We could return to protectionism, a tempting retreat, at least in ensuring that Keynes' "goods homespun," particularly cultural goods and goods that make for a compassionate and equitable society, are in no way disadvantaged to goods foreign, and ensuring, too, that we can practice financial self-reliance. We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that trade in itself is healthy, a unifying factor that brings people together both economically and socially. Retreating into isolationism can be a recipe for disruption and division.

The challenge is to restore power to citizens while not sacrificing the benefits of trade. Parallel to or as part of international trade agreements, we can negotiate regulations and codes of conduct for global corporations. Just as we need codes for corporations' national conduct, we need codes for their supranational conduct. Global corporations should be treated more as social institutions than private ones. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development has a quite extensive set of guidelines for corporate behaviour regarding labour, the environment and human rights, complete with national contact points where citizens can take complaints, however the code is voluntary. Mandatory codes could not only cover corporations' treatment of workers and the environment but also push them towards democratic governance. If they were in themselves democratic, they would become much less of a dictatorial and imperialistic threat to democratic nation-states.

14.5 Trade Agreements

In economic matters, the premier global structure is the World Trade Organization (WTO), the granddaddy of trade agreements. Nations are strongly drawn to the WTO for its ability to enhance wealth-creation through increased international trade. The sovereignty that nations have to forgo to join does not seem to be much of a deterrent. Even China, known for taking its sovereignty very seriously indeed, has signed up.

The benefits economically are substantial but, although it matters little to nations such as China, democrats must ask whether the sovereignty we transfer is handled democratically. The answer seems to be mostly yes. The highest authority is the Ministerial Conference which can decide upon all matters affecting the package of agreements to which the members are committed. It includes all the members and meets every two years. The General Council, which concerns itself with the day-to-day work, meets as necessary and reports to the Ministerial Conference. It also includes all the members. It further convenes as the Dispute Settlement Body to oversee the settlement of disputes and as the Trade Policy Review Body to monitor members' trade practices. The members elect a Director-General to oversee the bureaucracy, the WTO Secretariat. Each member country has one vote. Votes require more than bare majority to succeed (three-quarters to adopt an interpretation of a trade agreement or waive an obligation for a member; all or two-thirds to amend provisions of agreements, depending on the nature of the provision; and two-thirds to admit new members). The WTO prefers to make decisions by consensus rather than by voting.

Of concern is the selective nature in which the WTO promotes trade. Countries are allowed in even if they condone coerced labour or ignore their environmental problems. While these behaviours may offer major competitive advantages, they are not considered subsidies. Barriers that interfere with the corporate interest are struck down or restricted but those that interfere with workers or environmental interests are allowed. The interests of workers is left primarily to the International Labour Organization (ILO), a UN agency representing government, employers and workers recognized as the "international vehicle for raising international labour standards issues in a worldwide forum." The ILO applies both recommendations and conventions to set labour standards. Unfortunately, it depends largely on voluntary compliance and its enforcement mechanisms are weak.

International trade agreements and organizations such as the WTO, even if run democratically, are very distant from the ordinary people whose interests they should ultimately be representing, and require therefore especially close scrutiny. A certain decline of national control is inevitable in a global agreement—nations give a little to get a little—but the distancing of citizens from decision-making can create distrust of the process and even of their own governments. A healthy democracy within countries becomes even more important in order to maintain that trust.

Negotiations of trade agreements should be transparent, with publics kept fully informed of progress. This has often been far from the case. Subjecting our national laws to the rules of global bureaucracies such as the WTO without vigorous debate is unacceptable. During negotiations, governments should undertake an open process so that public disclosure and consultations can be

carried out in a timely manner, to the extent that this is strategically possible. A full analysis of the effects on a country's economy, environment, social programs and culture should be part of the process.

Agreements should build in workers' rights along with investors' rights. Linking standards on the environment and workers' rights, and even social conditions and democratic governance, to economic standards is ultimately possible. The European Union (EU) does it. The EU has the power to enforce labour and environmental standards for its member nations, and workers have the right to pursue jobs anywhere in the union. In most trade agreements, only investors have that mobility, giving them a considerable advantage over workers. Citizens of the EU can take their own governments to court when national regulations conflict with benefits from EU policies.

High standards need not impose equal demands on rich and poor nations alike but should expect poorer nations to improve their social and environmental performance as their economies improve. Although workers' wages must depend on the level of their countries' economies, there is no good reason why their rights should—democracy isn't just for the rich. The suppression of workers' rights and low environmental standards are as much a tilt in the playing field as a subsidy or a tariff. Recognize this and the race can be to the top rather than to the bottom.

Trade agreements that are negotiated with as much vigour applied to non-economic issues in order to create a relative balance between the market, social justice and environmental protection will find little opposition. And finally, whatever economic arrangements we make we must ask if they are hospitable to democracy. Any involvement that isn't should be challenged as illegitimate.

14.6 Structures for a Global Village—NGOs

As corporations extend their reach beyond that of nation-states and thereby increase their power over them, citizens' organizations, too, if we are to have global democracy, must develop global power. National governments remain the primary representatives of peoples in the larger world but they, unlike global corporations, are constrained by their jurisdictions. Organizations in other areas recognize this and, although they are lagging the global corporations and lack the influence that comes with economic muscle, they too are developing global presences.

Note 6.2 discusses the need for organized labour to develop international capacities. The clout that unions have locally fades away when employers can shift operations to non-union locales. Unions need to be able to deal with global employers globally.

Aside from labour unions, a host of civil society or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are active internationally in the areas of poverty, education,

health care, public policy, human rights and the environment. The UN even holds an annual conference of NGOs.

NGOs, often working with sympathetic states, have achieved many successes, including a code for marketing breast milk substitutes, improving working conditions in developing countries, and the international agreement to ban land mines. NGOs have also brought citizens' voices to the international arena by pressuring their national governments.

Some NGOs have taken a page out of the corporations' book and become active internationally in trade by helping organize small producers in the developing world and acting as intermediaries to bring their products to consumers in the developed world. The focus is on ensuring that the producers get a fair price for their products. Prominent among these is the co-operative movement (Note 12.1).

Local co-ops belong to associations at the provincial or state, national, regional and world levels, including the International Co-operative Alliance and the World Council of Credit Unions. The Alliance represents over 300 co-operative federations and organizations in over 100 countries, providing a global voice and a forum for expertise and action for co-operatives. The World Council performs a similar function for its 90,000 credit unions in almost 120 countries. National associations are also active in promoting co-operative enterprise internationally. The Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada, for example, has helped create and strengthen co-operative enterprises and networks around the world. Such efforts not only improve these countries economic prospects but also further global democracy. Co-ops provide local control combined with the co-operation of peoples from the local to the international level, unlike global corporations which, obsessed with market share, undermine local control and plague the world with relentless competition. Co-ops are centred around people's welfare, not profit. They are an excellent model for global economic development, a superbly humane and democratic answer to global corporations. They deserve the greatest encouragement.

Unfortunately, not all NGOs are as democratic as co-ops, sometimes raising the question of who they really represent. Some have been criticized for a lack of democratic accountability, others for being so heavily subsidized by business they are little more than corporate fronts.

NGOs are an enormously diverse group and will no doubt have diverse problems, proper governance among them. Nonetheless they do journeyman service for people power on the global front. They promote interests often poorly represented globally; link the local to the global; bring together diverse peoples to discuss issues of global interest and give them a voice in setting international standards; and offer the global community an informal form of direct democracy.

They are the global civil society, and a healthy civil society is vital to healthy democracy.

14.7 Structures for a Global Village—The United Nations

The principal institution of global governance is the United Nations. The UN is not, unfortunately, a paragon of democracy. It tends to vest power in the executive branch, in this case the Security Council, which consists of five permanent members—China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States—and ten elected members. Resolutions of the General Assembly, where all members of the UN sit, are only recommendations to the Security Council. The General Assembly may however consider any matter within the scope of the UN Charter. It elects the ten non-permanent members of the Security Council, approves the UN's budget and, together with the Security Council, elects the International Court of Justice. It also appoints the secretary-general, the administrative head of the organization, but only on the recommendation of the Security Council.

The permanency of five members on the Security Council, each of which has veto power, is an obvious problem, particularly when much of the world is left without representation.

China illustrates another problem. Its 1.4 billion people have no more representation in the General Assembly than the 340,000 people of Iceland. It does, at least, have a seat on the Security Council; India, with about the same number of people, doesn't even have that.

In effect, each Icelander has over 4,000 votes for each Indian's—a tad short of the one citizen/one vote democratic ideal.

And China illustrates yet another problem. Like a number of UN nations, it is represented by a government its people did not choose. Are the Chinese people being represented at the UN? Or the Chinese Communist Party? Or just a ruling clique? We don't know—from a democratic perspective the representation is fundamentally illegitimate. The Icelandic delegates may in fact be representing more people than the Chinese delegates.

Clearly, the UN desperately needs a reformed Security Council, proportional representation and, to confront perhaps the most intractable problem, some assurance that countries represent their people legitimately.

While the UN's record on human rights has been a bit ragged, its Universal Declaration of Human Rights remains a beacon for human progress. As various observers have pointed out, the United States won a revolutionary war in the name of man's inalienable rights—then practiced slavery for four generations. Let us, therefore, have a little patience with the UN.

One organization that has something to teach the UN about democratization is the European Union (EU). In addition to its ruling Council of Ministers and the European Commission, the EU has established a European parliament. Members of the parliament are elected directly by the citizens of the EU proportional to each country's size. Despite some disagreement of the relative powers of the three bodies, the idea is sound and could serve as a model for the UN. A world parliament would mitigate the problems of undemocratic governments (if elections were supervised by the UN and ultimately a condition of membership) and of the disparate sizes of member countries. It would promote democracy, foster a sense of global citizenship, and bring the UN closer to the people.

Another suggestion has been citizens' assemblies, as discussed in Note 4.2. The idea is intriguing. Global citizens' assemblies could be part of UN governance just as they could be an increasing part of our local, provincial, state and national governance. They would reduce the distance from decision-making that globalism creates.

For all its problems and for all their gravity, the UN is the best we've got. It is our only global government (if I'm not underestimating the WTO) and it actively pursues, however imperfectly, those issues of equality, decency and human rights that have found little room in economic agreements or may even be subverted by them. Here is the best bet for enhancing global democracy.

14.8 Global Government

UN agencies such as the International Labour Organization and the UN Human Rights Council provide the forums necessary for democratic discussion of and the development of global strategies for matters as or more important than facilitating trade. Organs like the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), which the New York Times once referred to as "one of the most successful humanitarian programs the world has ever known," and the World Health Organization even form a rudimentary global welfare state.

The principal judicial organ of the UN is the International Court of Justice which settles legal disputes submitted by states and gives opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized UN organs and specialized agencies. The UN also establishes ad hoc tribunals to deal with specific crimes. In addition, there are independent judicial bodies including the International Criminal Court, which has jurisdiction over persons charged with genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Perhaps trade, too, should be brought under the umbrella of the UN: specifically, establishing the World Trade Organization as a UN agency, like the International Labour Organization. Making the WTO a special agency might invigorate the UN on economic matters while bringing broader concerns into the

WTO. This might create an opportunity to consider global tax regimes and controls on international currency traders and global corporations.

On the financial front, the major global institution is the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with 189 countries as members. The IMF works “to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world.” The structure of the IMF is essentially that of a shareholder organization in that voting power is tied to financial contributions. The result is that rich countries have more say in the making of rules. This has not always worked out in the best interests of the developing countries. In effect, the developed countries are the creditors and the developing countries the borrowers—the two interests often conflict.

The IMF’S sister organization is the World Bank, also consisting of 189 members. Its current mission is “to end extreme poverty by reducing the share of the global population that lives in extreme poverty to 3 percent by 2030, and to promote shared prosperity by increasing the incomes of the poorest 40 percent of people in every country.” Its function is to provide loans to member countries for capital projects. Like the IMF, voting power is related to wealth and as a result the policies and philosophies of rich western countries have dominated the institution.

In addition to agencies and institutions such as the above, there are a host of agreements, treaties, protocols and conventions on various matters—the environment, health, heritage, crime, aviation, sport, and so on—that help tie us into a global village. It is the job of democrats to ensure that the village is democratic. International governance has become both a necessity and an opportunity—an opportunity to break down barriers, to mitigate the dangers we collectively face and to offer everyone the best we are capable of.

14.9 Reconciling the Tribes

The very idea of global citizenship is problematic for a species whose primary loyalty is to the clan or tribe. Yet we cannot deny globalization. Technology alone imposes it upon us. As do our greatest challenges. For the first time in our history, the biggest threats we face are not local, not national—they are global. These include climate change, species extinction, depletion of the planet’s resources and nuclear, chemical and biological warfare. We must deal with these challenges as members of the human race rather than as members of our various tribes.

Globalization, nonetheless, involves loss of sovereignty for the guardian of our democracy, the nation-state, and for other levels of community as well.

We are presented with two challenges. First, we want to maintain as much national and local sovereignty as offers a sense of agency in affairs close to home. Second, we want to ensure that any democracy that slips out of the grip of the

nation-state is assumed by democratic structures at the global level, not expropriated by undemocratic forces such as transnational investors. In summary, an ideal global society would be one which provided a generous amount of local autonomy within a framework of global rules, both answering to democratic processes.

Tribes can, after all, come together to form a larger society. A society such as my own illustrates this. Canada has managed to move well along the road to democracy and develop a strong sense of citizenship despite containing a host of ethnic and religious tribes. And we do not ask their members to forgo their tribal allegiances. All we ask is that they set them aside when the issues affect all of us. And they do set them aside. They do because they know that what is best for Canada is best for their ethnic or religious group. Similarly, we can appreciate that what is best for humanity is best for Canada—and all other nations.

Some caution is advised, however. The nation-state has often contained tribalism by creating a broader loyalty, a broader citizenship. As the nation-state weakens, tribalism re-emerges, often in its ugliest forms. The trick is to contain the ugliness while creating a new global citizenship. We can't do that rushing pell-mell into change, forcing people to seek security in the only place available: the tribe.

The process is perhaps similar to individuals needing a strong grounding in family to gain the confidence to face the larger community. It is in the family and the tribe that people develop the skills for broader citizenship. Assuming of course that the family and tribe instil the right attitudes and skills. As is tragically obvious, they can just as easily turn out narrow-minded bigots full of distrust and hostility as they can turn out tolerant democrats full of confidence and generosity. People can withdraw into their tribe or grow out of it. This is largely a matter of education (discussed in Note 15). With the right attitudes and skills democracy can grow from family to community to nation-state to the globe.

Part VI: Fundamentals



Note 15: On Preparing the Citizen

THE AMERICAN EDUCATOR John Dewey once said, “Democracy has to be born anew in each generation, and education is its midwife.” As true as Dewey’s observation is, while writing this note, I encountered a quote that seemed even more pertinent to the moment. Sara Kreindler, a 16-year old who won two prestigious scholarships to the University of Manitoba, addressed the other award winners, their families and an assortment of dignitaries, concluding her speech by explaining what an education meant to her:

Education means knowing about the political and social forces operating in our society. Education means the skills to examine and assess the choices we’re given, and to discern alternatives. Education means freedom of thought. Education means the preservation and transmission of culture. Education means a foundation for a vision of the world we’d like to create.

Sara’s perspective is not only reassuring at a time when “practical” education often seems to monopolize the agenda, it also exemplifies the confidence necessary for democracy, a confidence we desperately need in the face of the sense of helplessness imposed by rapid change. Sara’s words remind us that we should be the boss, that we, not the corporate sector, not technology, not competition in the global marketplace, should create the future. There can be no more important lesson for young people to learn than that they are citizens first and workers second.

The confidence implicit in Sara’s view, the passion to know how society works and how to become involved in its workings, the strong sense of social commitment, describe what might be called democratic consciousness—a prerequisite for fully realized self-governance. Modern society often lacks this consciousness: people complain about politicians but don’t participate in politics, submit to tyranny in the workplace, fail to recognize the business levy and its influence (Note 8.5), only superficially consider the function and accountability of the media, and accept the dictates of technological change, globalization and corporate economics with apprehension and subservience. Without a lively democratic consciousness we will fail to protect, improve and, where necessary, create democracy in all the various areas of our public life. The democracy we have will languish and the democracy we lack will remain elusive. Education’s responsibility has never been greater.

15.1 Status Quo

Forming a democratic consciousness in the schools requires both instruction in the theory of self-governance and the application of it. Students need to know how democracy works, and what its rights and responsibilities entail. They also need to practice it.

Inasmuch as democracy is taught in the public schools, it generally appears in social studies. A typical program of studies will manifest a progression in citizenship instruction through all grades, beginning with immediate topics like “my school” and “my family,” moving on to communities and local government, and eventually including national and possibly global citizenship. Senior grades may add courses in political science. Participation objectives may include taking turns in discussion, promoting co-operation and responsibility, participating in group work, abiding in group decisions, using parliamentary procedures, exercising one’s role as a citizen, resolving differences with rational debate, and so on. The courses commonly provide a solid introduction to democratic theory. How much the theory carries over into practice depends very much on the teachers and the school.

Many schools along with other groups hold model parliaments or model United Nations. Model parliaments are, of course, just models, useful for students who enjoy formal debating and who may see careers for themselves in politics, but of limited use to the great majority of students.

In some school systems, students have become key players in the traditional parent-teacher interviews. Instead of a two-way parent-teacher huddle, the students participate in a three-way conference. Typically, students invite their parents to the conference, conduct them around the school when they arrive, show them some of their work, do some work with them, and then meet with the teacher to discuss the work and other concerns. Parents can, of course, still meet with the teacher privately if they wish. Although this is something less than governance, it is a great deal more than passive observance of the forces that affect one’s life and is a suitable step on the road to self-governance for elementary school students.

High schools commonly have student councils, elected by the students or, sometimes more patronizingly, chosen by the teachers. Councils offer limited scope for decision-making, generally being confined to items like school dances, intramural sports, etc. High school student representatives may also sit with parents and teachers on school or parent councils.

All of this is good but far less than it could be. Practice in the real thing, actual participation in governance, remains limited. If we are to create a democratic consciousness we need to integrate the civic arts not only into the curriculum but into the very life of schools.

15.2 Democracy in Action

Many schools in dozens of countries around the world have gone well beyond the introduction to self-governance practiced in conventional schools. They are, accordingly, referred to as “democratic schools.”

A discussion of democratic schools must begin with the oldest such school still operating—Summerhill, an English private school founded by A. S. Neill in 1921. Summerhill may be the freest school in the world, a “children’s democracy.” The school has about 75 students ranging in age from five to eighteen, who have equal votes with the staff in deciding rules, punishments and organization of the Summerhill community. Lessons are compulsory for teachers but optional for students, who learn at their own pace in their own direction. Students are encouraged to attend lessons but decide for themselves whether to attend or to play. Arts and crafts are freely available, and the school’s sports facilities include a swimming pool and a tennis court. According to Neill, “The function of the child is to live his own life—not the life that his anxious parents think he should live, nor a life according to the purpose of the educator who thinks he knows what is best.”

An example on a more familiar level might be the Alternative High School (AHS) in Calgary, Alberta. At AHS all school decisions that can be made in-house are made at weekly assemblies with equal votes for staff and students. The assemblies are run by the students, specifically by a chairperson and secretary, positions that all students assume on a rotational basis. The students prepare for assemblies by discussing the agenda items, which can be suggested by staff or students, in small groups with mentors beforehand. As AHS has only about 90 students, the groups are quite small. The assemblies decide on everything from school rules to spending of the budget. Decision-making is constrained by the curricula set by the Alberta Department of Education and, because AHS is publicly funded, by the regulations of the Calgary Board of Education.

Staff and students interview prospective students to determine their suitability for the AHS environment. If accepted, students must pass an apprenticeship to obtain full student status. For students who experience difficulty in fulfilling their commitments, AHS has a four-point Step System, in which step four is withdrawal from the school.

Although there is structure in place—students are required to attend classes twenty-two hours per week and report absences—students have considerable autonomy in setting their own timetables.

In the full spirit of democratic life, students at AHS are encouraged to participate in community. They recycle, clean local parks and collect money for the food bank. They participate in a range of political activities including running candidates in local school board elections. They may earn credits “for community

service, for educational life experiences, and for risk-taking both within and beyond the school.” An egalitarian ethos pervades the school with students encouraged to call teachers by their first names.

The size of AHS makes direct democracy possible—all students and staff can attend the assemblies. Representative democracy could extend the model to larger schools. A school of 900 students with every ten electing a representative would have an assembly of the same size as AHS and retain a very grass roots connection between the decision-makers and their constituents. Participation could be broadened by limiting representatives to one semester. Another approach would be random selection of representatives, creating citizens’ assemblies as discussed in Note 4.2.

An important element in the success of democratic assemblies at AHS is the pre-assembly meetings of students with their mentors. The small size of the meetings (about twelve students per mentor) provides an intimacy that allows for easy give-and-take. Students can develop a comfort with, an understanding of, and an interest in the agenda issues that would be difficult if they attended the larger assembly without preparation. In a larger school, elected representatives could have similar pre-assembly meetings with their constituents. The reps could, in preparation for the meetings with their constituents or for the assembly, meet in small groups with faculty mentors.

15.3 Creating a Democratic Consciousness

Education in modern self-governance requires a solid command of oral and written language complimented by a solid grounding in the civic arts. By this I mean knowledge of the skills of discourse and debate, of the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizens, of the organization and operation of democratic structures, and a sense of history and where our society stands comparatively in time and space.

Young democrats need to develop the art of conversation, of debate (although debate might well be subordinated to other less combative, less competitive, more sharing forms of exchanging views) and of written communications, and they need, too, to study the mass media. Understanding the media is not only prerequisite to understanding how we communicate in a modern democracy but to understanding the effects on democracy of media itself, of the effects of advertising and corporate ownership.

Important as well are the skills of mediation, of resolving differences non-violently, and techniques of non-competitive democracy, such as rotating or consensual leadership in small groups and citizens’ assemblies in large groups, techniques that emphasize co-operative, rational discussion rather than power struggles.

Students need to know how democracy structures itself. This means everything from running a meeting to organizing a small society to understanding the major institutions of the nation-state, and even to global organization. They need to know, too, the democratic methods of dissent and their appropriate use.

And students need to develop those attitudes of mind, those methods of thinking, that are essential to healthy democracy. First among these is respect for the process of deliberation—the thorough, informed, fair consideration of issues. Closely associated is critical thinking—as Sara put it, “the skills to examine and assess the choices we’re given, and to discern alternatives.” Students need to understand that democracy offers the individual more rights than any other form of governance but at the same time demands more responsibilities. It requires character—ethics and morality. The student should realize that with democracy we create governance that is as good as each and every citizen is prepared to make it, no better, no worse. Government in a democracy is a project of its citizens.

And, most importantly, students need practice, lots and lots of practice. They need real involvement in democratic governance, not just in exercises. We need more than democracy taught in schools, we need democratic schools. People learn best what they use.

Schools need to become thoroughly democratic at least within reasonable constraints. Constraints arise from the fundamental conflict discussed in Note 5, from the conflict between those who have proprietary rights, in this case the citizens at large who own the schools and fund education, and those within the envelope of those rights, the students and teachers. The envelope is typically represented by government departments of education, who set curricula, and local school boards, who set the rules by which the curricula will be satisfied. These two layers of power firmly secure the rights of the citizens. They can have little to fear from establishing a thorough democracy within this envelope. Indeed, if they are democrats they ought to insist upon it.

15.4 How Young the Democrat?

A fundamental question is the age at which young citizens should join their governance. How deep down into the grade system can democracy reasonably go? Senior high students are certainly capable of extensive involvement in the governing of their schools but what about junior high or elementary students? We now have a variety of models to suggest answers.

At Summerhill, students of all ages have an equal say. The weekly meeting of staff and students, the heart of the democratic system, elects an ombudsman “who helps and protects the younger children and speaks for them in the meeting if they feel they cannot speak for themselves.” Even if issues raised by children seem

trivial to adults they are taken seriously at the meetings, as indeed they ought to be. Even a very young child can be involved in, for example, the design of a playground or a discussion of rules. Yaakov Hecht of the Democratic School of Hadera in Israel answers the question “Can a young child understand the meaning of democracy?” as follows:

Most can't, particularly not the abstract idea of democracy. But in a democratic school a child lives and develops in a democratic environment; he knows that what is permitted and what is forbidden is not determined by teachers but by a body called the parliament, and that he has the right to participate and vote on laws with a vote equal to that of any person in the school. The child grows in an environment which respects his wishes and thoughts, and demands of him to respect others. The premise in a democratic school is that if a person lives in an environment which respects him, he will respect others.

15.5 Lifelong Learning

By the time students leave public school, they ought to have been so thoroughly immersed in democratic process that it should come as naturally as the alphabet or the times tables. They should expect as a matter of course to find it practiced everywhere: in government, in their workplace, at university or trade school—everywhere; and they should look with disapproval if they encounter an organization that functions any other way than democratically.

Where they don't encounter it, they ought to not so much demand it but have the will to impose it, and have been so well trained in practice and theory that they have the skills to do so with confidence. Society, if it is committed to the democratic project, must ensure that they have the legal right to do so.

Young people must be prepared for perhaps the greatest political challenge of the 21st century: building the structures for a democratic globe. They must be educated in larger loyalties than we have been accustomed to. We commit an unpardonable sin when we tell young people, “This is the way it's going to be and you'd better adapt to it.” We should be asking them what kind of a world they want and challenging them to go out and build it. Education's job is to make sure that they have the skills and knowledge for the work.

Much of the distrust of politicians that we see about us today arises out of most peoples' inexperience with politics, their ignorance of the difficulty of reconciling a multitude of strongly held opinions in an enormously complicated world. By introducing young people to the practice of politics, of governance, very early in their lives and habituating them to it, we can diminish this distrust.

We will also get better politicians. We might even revive the Athenian ideal of every citizen's highest responsibility being to governance.

Nor should education in democracy end with formal schooling. It should be an integral part of adult education. Workers can be educated in expanding workplace democracy. Labour unions can contribute here, and technical institutes should include in their curricula courses on workplace governance, including the rights and responsibilities of labour union membership.

Disadvantaged groups could use self-governance skills to enhance control over their lives. The rich have the money to buy political influence and the sophistication to use it, the poor have only their minds and bodies—they need instruction in how best to apply them. They could learn how to set up and run organizations to promote their interests, contributing to the system while making it work to their advantage. People in subsidized housing projects, for example, could learn how to manage their own projects in a democratic way. Immigrants, too, particularly those from countries where democracy is least known, would benefit from democratic education and encouragement to participate.

In an era of lifelong learning, learning self-governance should be at the forefront.

Note 16: On Equality

THE STRUGGLE FOR democracy has in large measure been a struggle for equality, what former Canadian Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin called the “Leviathan of rights.”

Throughout history, one group has always claimed right of domination over another: monarchs over all, aristocrats over commoners, the military over civilians, masters over slaves, owners over workers, men over women and adults over children. And the dominant groups have always justified their domination by insisting that they know what is best for their subjects. Perhaps they do, given that they are inclined to keep their subjects in ignorance and submission, but when the submission is relieved and equality obtained, their subjects prove to be at least as capable of governing and society is improved.

When we talk about equality in the context of democracy, we are not talking about physical, mental or even financial equality, but of equality as citizens, of equal political rights, of the right to participate equally in our governance.

Political equality is fundamental to democracy; nonetheless, justifications for inequality have always been with us. Plato complained about democracy distributing equality to those who were not equals, and Aristotle worried about justice being enjoyed on the basis of arithmetic rather than merit. In our own histories, we have often heard that some group or another should more of a say than the masses. Exclusions of one kind or another kept most Western peoples from the vote until well into the 20th century.

Political inequality has been accepted throughout most of history on the basis of status. Kings and priests had the right to dominate because that was the natural order ordained by birthright and by the gods. This arrangement arose as tribal societies grew into civilizations and ultimately empires, and elders became chiefs and chiefs became kings and kings became emperors. Egalitarian hunter-gatherers unwittingly became peasants. Eventually, however, society regained its wits and recognized that there was nothing natural about the order, that a man born to a king was just a man, no more no less, and had earned no more right to rule than any other man, or indeed any woman. Today in Western society, while patrimony has not passed entirely out of politics, leadership is thought of as something to be earned rather than inherited.

Nonetheless, the idea that we should all be political equals isn't universal. In some minds, certain citizens should be more equal than others. For example, it was long the case that the vote was restricted to men of property, the idea being that the acquisition of wealth made them more worthy. Their wealth in turn gave them a greater stake in society and therefore deserving of a greater voice.

The accumulation of wealth may reflect skill and intelligence, valuable assets to good governance, but it may also reflect greed and ruthlessness, qualities gravely inimical to a healthy society. Or it may arise from nothing more than the great good luck of inheritance, reflecting no sort of character whatsoever.

If not wealth as an arbiter of political rights, what about intelligence, measured say by degree of education or IQ? Here is certainly a better criteria than wealth, yet it too is flawed. No necessary connection exists between intelligence and other qualities more essential to the democratic soul such as wisdom and tolerance. In the 1930s, thousands of university students in Nazi Germany enthusiastically burned books and leading scientists dutifully designed weapons for Hitler, the Antichrist of democracy.

What about age, assuming that it brings with it knowledge and wisdom? Deference to age goes back to our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Something can be said for this from a democratic perspective—everyone after all has an equal chance to become an elder. Unfortunately, age isn't what it used to be. Hunter-gatherer elders could know just about everything there was to know; knowledge changed little from generation to generation. Today, young people often know more than the old, although they may be wanting in the ability to apply that knowledge as wisely. In any case, age usually takes care of itself; leaders tend to rise to power with age and older citizens tend to be more committed voters.

Finally then, what about those qualities that bring out the best in us as citizens, qualities like wisdom, tolerance and compassion? If we offered those who were eminent in these qualities special consideration, assuming we could even meaningfully measure the qualities, I suspect they wouldn't want it. They would probably be much too egalitarian (or too wise?) to ask for privileges.

For a democrat, consideration of anything other than equal political rights is precluded by the very definition of democracy provided in Note 1, which states that the people rule, all the people equally, without qualification. The ideal—the basis for our entire analysis—insists that an unequal democracy can be no more than a partial democracy, an unfinished democracy.

We must all equally choose our leaders. And, with proper preparation, which will include a thorough democratic education (Note 15), we can all do that perfectly well. Indeed, with a democratic education we are capable of leadership ourselves, capable of filling that role routinely in direct democracy, through citizens' assemblies for example. Under representative democracy, we must elect our leaders, but we can still have an aristocracy—perhaps we should have an aristocracy—but it must be our aristocracy, chosen by us from the best among us.

Let us look then at how finished our democracies are, how equal we are as citizens. Note 3.1 discusses how, ironically, equality can be undermined by a society's voting system. Let us look now at how political equality can be

undermined by such circumstances as economic status, gender and age, and how this affects our ability to participate equitably in our self-governance.

16.1 The Class Structure

“Good people, things cannot go right in England and never will until goods are held in common and there are no more villeins and gentlefolk, but we are all one and the same.” So preached the revolutionary priest John Ball. Perhaps driven by his Christianity, Ball joined Wat Tyler’s great Peasants’ Revolt in an attempt to end serfdom in England. Like Tyler, he died for the cause. Gallantly refusing a pardon for his participation, he was taken from Coventry down to St. Albans and hanged, drawn and quartered on the 15th day of July, 1381.

The debate about the effect of economic equality on political equality is an old one. In earlier democracies, economic equality mattered much less than it does today. In Athens, rich and poor citizens mingled easily in the marketplace and all debated issues in the assembly. There were no political parties to influence, no mass media to be owned and controlled, and no global corporations to undermine the state. Today the opportunity for wealth to influence the political landscape has increased enormously, and as discussed in Part IV, Notes 8, 9 and 10, it has exploited that opportunity.

Particularly troubling is that even the economic equality we have gained is now threatened. In the years following the Second World War, we achieved not only the highest standard of living in the history of Homo sapiens but one of the most equitable, a time that has been described as “the Golden Age for ordinary people.”

Various factors led to the golden age. Fifteen years of pent-up demand (ten years of depression and five years of war), combined with a host of new products for households to purchase, produced a huge buying spree. North America particularly enjoyed the spree, being in an advantageous position to produce and sell goods while its competitors struggled to recover from the war. Then came the baby boomers with their burgeoning consumer power followed by a steadily increasing flow of women into the workforce. All this produced a unique prosperity.

Paralleling the prosperity was a unique sense of social solidarity carried over from the war, from the marvellous unity of effort that defeated the greatest evil in history. This sense of solidarity in turn inspired an effort to equitably distribute the new-found prosperity through a set of social and economic inventions that became known as the welfare state. While all this was going on, capitalism was encouraged to behave itself, to curb its appetites, by a competitor waiting in the wings. If free enterprise couldn’t take care of people, communism offered an alternative.

Now a number of these factors have dissipated. The Second World War and its ethic of solidarity across social and economic lines is ancient history to younger generations. Communism has been routed, in large part by the welfare state, and now capitalism fears no rival. Global competition has become intense, often at the expense of working people. Automation displaces millions from manufacturing jobs into less rewarding and less reliable service sector jobs while labour unions, the champion of working people, suffer major losses in membership. While globalization has reduced inequality between nations, inequality within nations steadily grows and has become one of the defining issues of our time.

One result of this growing inequality is a growing distrust of democracy. Across the Western world we have seen the spread of a populism that preaches mistrust of the “elites.” Among the “enemies of the people” are traditional political parties, the mainstream media and intellectuals. Artists are often suspect and scientists disparaged, not praised, as “experts” to be ignored. All this is unhealthy not only for democracy but for society itself. Democrats must respond by pursuing greater economic equality as a pillar of democracy. Responses are discussed at length in Parts III and IV.

16.2 Gender Bias

One of the more persistent areas of political inequality is gender. Women lagged well behind men in gaining the vote and remain highly underrepresented in our legislatures. In Western democracies, the proportion of women in legislatures ranges from about a quarter in Canada and the U.S. to approaching half in Sweden.

The imbalance isn't surprising when you keep in mind that politics was developed by men for men. Its rules and behaviours reflect a masculine, indeed macho, ethos. It isn't always a place congenial to women. Former Canadian parliamentarian Jan Brown described politics as “an unnatural and combative setting that does not support positive relationships. ... A place where power and gamesmanship determine the rules.” Power struggles tend to override rational discourse.

The lack of women in politics not only means half the population is under-represented, it means many critical social values are under-represented as well. Women are consistently more concerned about social values, partly because they are much more reliant on social services. Politics is not only more civilized with greater participation by women, society itself is more civilized. And, with more complete representation, more democratic.

How then do we achieve political equality for women and all they can bring to governance?

We can mitigate the natural disadvantages of the child-bearing sex generally by closer integration of family and work, by making child-rearing more a part of work life. We can provide day care centres and schools in workplaces, consider breast-feeding a natural phenomenon acceptable in workplaces, and make maternal (or paternal) leave a part of the work routine with no career or income disadvantage. For women in politics as well as in other areas.

We can, at the same time, guarantee women equality in leadership roles. This requires first, affirmative action to overcome the current masculine-determined rules, and ultimately, changing the rules. Accomplishing the former should facilitate the latter. The argument that affirmative action for women is unfair to men doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Leadership as a matter of aggression and competition stems directly from male dominance. The rules have been set by men to the disadvantage of women. Until the rules are changed, which will almost certainly mean many more women making them, affirmative action brings equality to women, not advantage.

The amount of affirmative action necessary is the only real question. Given that it is in the nature of the masculine to dominate, women may require a solid majority just to achieve equality. We need legislatures and cabinets guaranteeing women at least their fifty per cent share of representation. As the number of women increase, the influence of the feminine will increase and the rules will change, becoming less competitive, more consensual. Jan Brown states, "Validation of the feminine in the political domain would open up new paradigms of leadership, including joint problem-solving that emphasizes win/win rather than lose/lose situations." Ms. Brown illustrated her convictions with one of the classiest gestures ever to grace the Canadian House of Commons. When Lucien Bouchard, arch-separatist and bitter ideological foe of Ms. Brown's party, lay gravely ill with flesh-eating disease, she placed a yellow rose on his empty desk in the House.

Ms. Brown's new paradigms are illustrated by the remarks of former United States surgeon general, Joycelin Elders, describing the change if women dominated the U.S. Senate:

Women, for the most part, use their power, prestige and position to try to make a difference in the lives of people, to make the world a better place. Men, on the other hand, look at power in terms of money and control. We'd see a great shift in how we treat our children. We wouldn't have one in four children being poor. We would have more early childhood education centres, more good day care, better schools. Women would consider it most important that we have healthy, educated, motivated children with hope. They would know that's the best way to prevent violence in our streets, to prevent crime and teenage pregnancies.

We need the political equality of women, or at least the equality of the feminine, to achieve this more civilized world. Indeed, under the cloud of nuclear weapons and the despoliation of the planet, we may need more than equality, we may need matriarchy, not just for democracy but for survival.

16.3 Family Values

Note 15 discusses the critical importance of educating/immersing young people in democracy. This need is obvious. Not so obvious is how equal children should be as citizens. Most democrats would, I suspect, prefer to consider them as having the same human and civil rights as the rest of us, yet we hardly expect them to leap from the womb and head for the ballot box.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child not only concerns itself with children's needs, such as protection from abuse and an adequate standard of living, but goes on to provide for rights such as "freedom of expression" and "freedom of thought, conscience and religion." Although these rights are restricted by such slightly ominous phrases as "the protection of national security" and "to protect public safety, order, health or morals," the fact that they are rights formerly considered the prerogative of adults constitutes major progress.

The convention recognizes the child as a citizen in progress in that it respects "the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her rights in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child." The child, we might say, is recognized as an equal person who matures into an equal citizen.

While the convention recognizes parents or legal guardians as having the primary responsibility for raising children, governments too share a responsibility. States are charged with providing "appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities" and ensuring "the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children."

We cannot leave the discussion of the equality of children without commenting on the smallest unit of society—the family. If the family is our introduction to social life, our preparation for society at large, then it would seem that society can never become fully democratic unless the family is. Rick Stradecki, a family counsellor and education consultant, suggests that all parents ask themselves, "How do we prepare a child to live in a democratic society if we raise him autocratically?"

Dr. Thomas Gordon, a founder of the parenting movement with his book *Parent Effectiveness Training*, is one of the better known promoters of the democratic family. Like Stradecki, he doesn't believe in punishment and appropriately applies Lord Acton's famous comment "Power corrupts and

absolute power corrupts absolutely” to family life. Describing the ideal family, he states, “Instead of parents setting rules and making limits, rules and limits are set by the family with kids participating.” He suggests that parents who listen to each other and to their kids, know their kids developmental stages, and practice self-discipline themselves, produce children with self-discipline who act out of a sense of family belonging. He points out that autocratic parenting tends to produce anti-social behaviour and that children from democratic families are more likely to become leaders in school.

With thousands of parents now taking courses in effective parenting, the democratic family may fully emerge, leaving the patriarchal model to gather the dust it richly deserves—probably an essential development if democratic behaviours are to prevail in society.

16.4 A Last Word

Perhaps the greatest challenge of building democracy is ensuring the political equality upon which it must rest, equality of class, of gender, of age, and of ethnicity. The poor, women, and ethnic minorities, have all obtained voting rights and expanded opportunities generally; however, the weight of history remains heavy upon their shoulders. The sins of the past stay long with us. The poor beg for the free lunch of welfare as a handout while the rich enjoy the free banquet of inheritance as a right; women must still function in politics and commerce that are dominated by masculine values and structures; and minority ethnic groups continue to suffer from the afflictions of bigotry.

These inequities are often closely related. Economic inequality, for example, is born most heavily by women and children. Most single mothers are poor, and although the great majority of children in Western society grow up happy and healthy, the thousands who live in poverty can hardly be said to have an equal opportunity in life. Without the participation of the poor, government tends to become an instrument of privilege rather than of democracy. Programs that empower the poor and redistribute wealth generally are needed as much to maintain democratic vigour as they are to exercise compassion.

One democratic instrument with the potential to override inequalities, a technique we have already mentioned in various contexts, is the citizens’ assembly. Through random selection of participants, inequalities of class, gender and ethnicity disappear. Citizens’ assemblies would also preclude the domination of politics and government by certain professions, e.g. lawyers, at the expense of others, e.g. trades people.

Rousseau’s 18th century observation remains relevant today: “It is precisely because the force of circumstances tends continually to destroy equality that the force of legislation should always tend to its maintenance.”

About the Author

Now retired, Bill Longstaff has served diverse careers in construction, banking, land titles, oil and gas, commercial art, cartooning and education (communications). He has written and published technical papers, poetry, short stories, articles, non-fiction books, and a blog. His views stem from experience, copious reading and a life-long observation of society from the perspective of a democrat.



Books by Bill Longstaff:

Democracy Undone: The Practice and the Promise of Self-governance in Canada
Confessions of a Matriarchist: Rebuilding Society on Feminine Principles
No Free Lunch and other myths