

AN EXAMINATION OF SOME MODERN LIBERAL THINKERS

AN EXAMINATION OF SOME MODERN LIBERAL THINKERS

BY

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ABSTRACT

Liberalism appears to have two meanings; one having an ethical component, which strives to allow individuals to fulfil their capabilities and be full members of society; the other, simply being a market-like relation between consumers. In this thesis I argue that there is a meaning left to liberalism other than enforcing the minimal rules of the competitive arena and that liberalism must encompass the new problems of growing unemployment and poverty in liberal democratic societies.

This thesis considers modern liberal thinkers who address the meaning of liberalism and the contemporary crises faced in Western democratic nations. These thinkers, Guy Debord, John Kenneth Galbraith, Norberto Bobbio, and Ralf Dahrendorf, provide a convenient overall perspective on the problem of liberalism.

Guy Debord views liberal societies as just a spectacle of mindless consumption which has gone beyond the grasp of thoughtful citizenship. However, while his arguments do have some valid points and remarks to make about our society, because Debord chooses to ignore the plight of the increasing numbers of those who do not fit into the general parameters of

society, his argument that liberalism necessarily excludes ethical principles is flawed.

John Kenneth Galbraith addresses the issue of the growing number of poor and unemployed which raises the issue as to whether liberalism can address the needs of society as it changes.

Norberto Bobbio attempts to find a system which would solve the present shortcomings of our liberal democratic system. However, he offers a utopian vision which would not solve contemporary problems.

Finally, Ralf Dahrendorf addresses problems faced in contemporary liberal democracies and believes ethical liberalism has a future. While he recognizes the conflict between the market side and the ethical side of liberalism, he believes that this conflict, given the will, can and must be worked out to benefit every human being.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: PRESENTATION.....	13
CRITIQUE	25
SECTION 2	26
SECTION 3	35
CHAPTER TWO: PRESENTATION.....	54
CRITIQUE, SECTION 2.....	61
CHAPTER THREE: PRESENTATION.....	74
CRITIQUE.....	104
CONCLUSION:	113
BIBLIOGRAPHY	121

INTRODUCTION

This thesis began with the intention of examining the implications of a very interesting view of civil society - that offered by Guy Debord in his books on the society of the spectacle. Debord argues that in modern economic liberalism, man the citizen has become nothing more than man the consumer. While my thesis started with despair, it led me to contemplate the nature of our western liberal democratic societies and to search for some conception of what liberalism might mean.

The liberal democrats who followed the spirit of John Stuart Mill, took liberalism to mean "a society striving to ensure that all its members are equally free to realize their capabilities."¹ Unfortunately, as C.B. MacPherson explains, liberal democracy can also mean "freedom of the stronger to do down the weaker by following market rules."² MacPherson explains why the difficulty arises in the following passage:

Its life began in capitalist market societies, and from the beginning it accepted their basic unconscious assumption, which might be paraphrased "market maketh man." Yet quite early on...it pressed the claim of equal individual rights to self-development, and justified itself largely by that claim. The two ideas of liberal democracy have since been held together uneasily, each with its ups and downs.³

It appears that in the last few decades the ethical side of liberalism, that is, a form of liberalism which

adheres to a set of moral principles, has been increasingly on the down. We have increasingly moved into a system of what MacPherson terms equilibrium democracy, where "democracy is simply a mechanism for choosing and authorizing governments, not a kind of society nor a set of moral ends."⁴ It is a system where voters choose between sets of politicians from time to time who offer one set of political goods as opposed to another. Such a liberal democracy lacks any ethical content and has become merely a market mechanism where participation is not valued and does not lead to a "higher, more socially conscious set of human beings," but where "voters are the consumers, the politicians are the entrepreneurs."⁵ This system lacks any means for the improvement of human beings.

Under a liberal democratic system which does not follow a set of moral principles, people are seen to be nothing more than maximizers of their own good, that man is essentially a consumer, and that what citizens want from a government can only be met through an "entrepreneurial system like that which operates in the standard model of the competitive market economy."⁶ It is just this system which has turned people into nothing but mere spectators for Debord. In Debord's reading of modern democratic liberalism, citizens are treated as consumers, whether it be economically or politically. Liberalism lacks any ethical component where political society is treated in simply a market-like relation

between citizens demands and the suppliers of political commodities.

Debord argues that humanity has become absorbed into the process of commodity production in a way that renders it a mere spectator with only the illusions of reason and freedom. This leaves both civil society and the state without any significant function in providing a realm for civic life - for the life of the citizen has been replaced by the life of the passive consumer. Debord sees that all cultures are moving in the same direction towards embracing the values and principles of an economic liberalism void of any ethical component, which is driving wage earners to become individual consumers who apply their freedom of choice to a vast range of commodities.

Debord holds that man's true aim is to be, to fulfil his potential, but it has been replaced by producing, having and possessing. As a result, man has become a robot and what society really offers is a show, a spectacle, where the commodity has attained the total preoccupation in social life. However valid this view may be in describing the place of the citizen in modern society, it leaves any vision of mankind as having an active part to play in the making of society with little else but despair. In particular, it leaves those of us who still believe that a liberal vision of man in society has not exhausted itself with the liberation of mankind from the ancien regime, and means more than its current standard

bearers, the so-called neo-conservatives, would allow.

In the last few decades, we have been witnessing the up side of the belief in the market, the rise of neo-conservatism. Neo-conservatives view big government as more of a threat to freedom than big business and thus ally themselves with business interests in many political and economic issues. The recurrent theme in neo-conservative discourse consists of "realism, pragmatism and workability."⁷ Their first principle is signified by a return to economic growth.

The neo-conservatives read their conservative brand of liberalism as having no role for either the state or civil society in the affairs of civic life other than in promoting competitiveness and private consumption. In this respect, they are not as opposed to Debord's analysis as they would first think. They see the ethical liberalism to which they are opposed as being an irresponsible, empty-minded, reflexive inclination to pump more money into the economy, even at the expense of increased indebtedness, if this will keep the system as it now is afloat for a while longer. They oppose such thinking as muddle-headed, for the debt must be paid off, or the price must be paid in destructive inflation and the inability to borrow further.

Although those who follow the neo-conservatives philosophy distrust big government, they do promote the

necessity and efficacy of affirmative government. The federal government must remain as the guarantor of freedom, opportunity and equality. They criticize modern government for promising too much, that it was unable to deliver these promises and hence, disillusionment has resulted, fragmenting society. According to neo-conservatism, the proper role of government is to decentralize certain functions and assert that the market has a place in reform. It further maintains that the economic health of a nation depends on increased government investment in education and training, yet at the same time, training institutions must be subject to the demands of the market for peak efficiency.

This neo-conservative view of liberal-democracy fails, according to MacPherson, because "what it does is to register and respond to what economists call the effective demand, that is, the demands that have purchasing power to back them. In the economic market, this means simply money."⁸ This process can scarcely be said to be democratic given the substantial inequality of wealth and opportunities of acquiring it. As MacPherson points out, "we may still call it consumer sovereignty if we wish, but the sovereignty of an aggregate of such unequal consumers is not evidently democratic."⁹

Civil society becomes further complicated with the increase in the numbers of an impoverished class of the unemployed and poor, who seem to have little opportunity for being useful in society. Western nations have increasingly

witnessed the decline and polarization between rich and poor, whites and non-whites and minorities, between part-time, low-paid people, and well-paid people.

One is left wondering if there is no meaning left to liberalism other than enforcing the minimal rules of the competitive arena or going further into debt to keep demand up in the hopes of the economy taking a turn for the better. Is there no way within liberalism to address the needs of society as it changes - as the globalization of the economy and the deindustrialization of our society leaves millions without their former place and role? Can liberalism offer no new responses to the new problems of society? Is it frozen in the hands of the neo-conservative? Is our society just a spectacle of mindless consumption which has gone beyond the grasp of thoughtful citizenship?

There is substantive debate going on as to whether civil society has been so corrupted by capital that it has been reduced to a circus for spectators, rather than a realm of human action. My concern is not the question of civil society as it has been thought since Hegel and Marx, nor is it concerned with the history of liberal thought. This thesis is concerned about whether there can be a liberalism which follows a set of moral principles that is responsive to a society being reconstructed by market forces. It examines whether an ethical liberalism has a future, whether capitalism necessarily has to exclude any moral principles, and can a

liberal-democratic system be humanitarian? Finally, it addresses the very important problem which Western democracies are facing, the increase of those who are poor and unemployed, who have no stake in a society which answers to the demands of only those with purchasing power.

My thesis examines the views of some modern liberal thinkers who focus their attention on these questions and the contemporary problems, of society, that is, growing unemployment and poverty, the decline in law and social order and the lack of belief in our institutions.

The first chapter will examine the works of Guy Debord who believes that civil society has completely lost any meaning because all social, political and civil life has become completely absorbed by the commodity where the citizen's primary function is to consume. Debord argues that under liberalism, man becomes simply what he desires and possession becomes his identity. The second half of this chapter will be a criticism of Debord's views, first by showing the validity of his arguments, that they were worth considering, and then by offering criticisms that demonstrate his focus to be too narrow. Section 2 of this chapter then will argue that Debord's observations do have some merit by examining Adam Smith's analysis of man's desire to possess commodities. However, whether the market system has meant the total destruction of civil society, and thereby rendered an ethical liberalism meaningless, is debatable for a variety

reasons, which will be touched upon in this section.

While it certainly can be argued that the present liberal democratic system lacks any ethical component which follows a set of moral guidelines, and where citizens are treated as consumers, whether economically or politically, and political society is treated "as simply a market-like relation between them and the suppliers of political commodities,"¹⁰ still leaves out a fundamental observation by Debord. While many of our daily lives are preoccupied by consumerism, and, in addition, are highly dependent on public and private provisions and regulation, the argument that the distinction between the state and civil society is obsolete and liberalism is dead remains unconvincing. In recent years, the Western states' ability to control their economies have noticeably decreased. They are experiencing deindustrialization, growing unemployment and jobless growth trends. The present economic crisis exposes the problem of a growing number of people who no longer seem to fit into a system which is based on the labour market, where an individual's worth is measured by his or her labour power.

As a main criticism of Debord's observations, Section 3 of this chapter will address these phenomena of the growing poor and unemployed by examining the arguments of John Kenneth Galbraith in The Culture of Contentment. Galbraith raises the issue of a growing functionless underclass and how society has come to exclude this class. This important issue must be

addressed when considering the question of civil society. The problem of the growing underclass of poor and unemployed is integral to any consideration of in which direction a society is to move. The question of civil society becomes relevant when addressing these contemporary conditions.

Ignoring the poor and unemployed, those who have become apathetic towards participating in the liberal democratic system, those who are without a voice, where the demands of the wealthy are met, will leave us with a process which is scarcely democratic. However, an undemocratic system will continue "as long as we in western societies continue to prefer affluence to community (and to believe that the market society can provide affluence indefinitely)."¹¹ What is required is a further inquiry into a system which would not lapse into dictatorship but would solve the shortcomings of our present liberal democratic system. There has recently been much debate on a form of a new social contract. Norberto Bobbio seeks to solve the problems of inequality and democracy through some form of social contract.

Chapter Two will discuss Bobbio's views which sees a purpose in distinguishing between civil society and the state. Bobbio believes that democracy has a future by strengthening civil society which he differentiates from the state. Civil society for Bobbio is the place where conflicts originate and take place, whether they be social, economic, religious or ideological, and the state exists to solve these problems.

The two are separate but interdependent. Bobbio looks for a social contract that would include the principles of distributive justice and, therefore, is compatible with the tradition of socialism. He thus seeks a new social contract and believes that John Rawls has designed this new type of social contract.

Bobbio's model, however, was inadequate to my search for the future of liberalism. As a criticism to Bobbio's answer to the problem, Section 2 of this chapter will analyze Rawl's concept of a just society. Both Bobbio and Rawls attempt to combine the basic principles of the social welfare state with justice by ensuring that every individual not only has access to material goods but, also to an equal sense of one's own worth. Whether Bobbio or Rawls deal adequately with the contemporary crisis will be examined.

MacPherson points out that a democratic system where everyone has a say in every issue is impossible and not the answer to the problem. Who will formulate the questions and who will decide what questions need to be asked? How will inconsistent demands be reconciled, for to avoid such a scenario would "require of each voter a degree of sophistication impossible to expect?"¹² So, for such obvious reasons, representative democracy still works best. The problem, then, is to find a way to make people participate more in the system, and to reach as many members of society as possible. I believe Ralf Dahrendorf offers a step toward the

future, for the central issue is not to provide the exact formula of how such a system would operate, but how to move towards it.

Chapter Three will therefore examine Ralf Dahrendorf's The Modern Social Conflict. Dahrendorf believes that civil society is an inclusive concept which provides a framework for understanding citizenship and social entitlements. He seeks to address the contemporary problems and to suggest the way forward to achieve a more balanced and just society.

Many theorists have addressed the question of civil society but Bobbio and Dahrendorf were chosen because they seek to address the future of liberal democracy and how it can embrace every individual. They believe in a liberalism in which individual rights remain central, but in which civil society is not allowed to collapse into a passive defence of property at the expense of the needs of people who have become the victims of processes which they neither made nor can influence.

This thesis was not meant to be a review of literature but a search, an attempt to understand what could be done for the liberal-democratic society, which embodies humanitarian values, by working within the institutions we have developed over time and still preserves our liberties. I believe that Ralf Dahrendorf offers a useful analysis of the predicament adequate to the present and points towards the goals for which liberalism must strive.

NOTES

1. MacPherson, C.B. The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy (Oxford University Press: 1977), p.1.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 1-2.
4. Ibid., p. 78.
5. Ibid., p. 79.
6. Ibid., p. 78-79.
7. Rothenberg, Randall, The Neo-Liberals (New York, Simon and Schuster: 1984), p.45.
8. MacPherson, C.B., op. cit., p. 87.
9. Ibid., p. 87.
10. Ibid., p. 80.
11. Ibid., p. 91-92.
12. Ibid., p. 96.

CHAPTER ONE

PRESENTATION

In The Society of the Spectacle, Guy Debord discusses the concept of the spectacle and spectacular society by which he means the social relations among people which are mediated by images. He does not mean a collection of images nor an abuse of a world vision spread by mass media, but, a "Weltanschauung which has become actual...it is a world vision which has become objectified." ¹ In all its specific forms whether as information, advertisement or entertainment, it affirms all social life as mere appearance as he explains in the following passage:

It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice already made in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals. The spectacle is also the permanent presence of this justification, since it occupies the main part of the time lived outside of modern production.²

Debord is concerned about the extension of the capitalist market to all areas of social life and its implications. For him, it indicates the making of everyday life into commodities. He is disturbed about the manipulation of consumers, the passivity and poverty of leisure activities, and the extinction of creativity in the modern state.

The spectacle has become the object not for its own sake, but as representative of displaying oneself for the impression made. This inclination to the spectacle is inherent in the lack of social identity and commodities are sold for their spectacular value as they become a way of presenting oneself. Capitalism then develops institutions which mediate this process and modern life offers nothing to believe in except the freedom to possess. Indeed, spectacular image "has no goal, it aims at nothing other than itself."³ In Comments on the Society of the Spectacle, Debord demonstrates the essence of the modern spectacle as being the "autocratic reign of the market economy which had acceded to an irresponsible sovereignty and the totality of new techniques of government which accompanied this reign." ⁴

Debord describes the spectacular society as driving wage earners to become individual consumers who apply their freedom of choice to a vast range of commodities. Man's true aim is "to be" but society has "degraded human realization of being into having."⁵ Thus man's concrete life has been degraded into a speculative universe where the world is seen through "various specialized mediations." According to Debord however, man does not realize this situation, since it "escapes the activity of men and escapes any reconsideration or correction of their work."⁶

The spectacle is supported by the perpetual spread of technical rationality which developed out of the western

philosophical project. In a sense, it is the material reconstruction of religion where men place their powers not in God but in the spectacle. Indeed, for Debord, "the modern spectacle is its own product and it is a pseudo-sacred entity."⁷ Its power is developed through the growth of productivity and through the continual refinement of the division of labour, which in turn is dominated by technology and working for an ever expanding market. As workers and products are separated with the division of labour, the worker not only loses the accomplishment of his activity but loses the communication among his fellow producers. Since the world is shaped by labour, according to Debord, "the success of the economic system of separation is the proletarianization of the world."⁸

Isolation is the basis of such an economic system and moreover, all the goods it produces - whether it be televisions, cars, etc,- are continually reinforcing conditions of isolation. The individual is not only alienated at work, but he is alienated through the entire system itself. Thus, the individual is not only faced with alienated production, but also with alienated consumption, as Debord explains in the following passage:

All the sold labour of a society becomes a total commodity and this cycle must be continued by returning a fragment of the commodity to the fragmented individual, that is, absolutely separated from the production forces as a whole.⁹

Debord refers to this as the Second Industrial Revolution

where "alienated consumption becomes for the masses a duty supplementary to alienated production."¹⁰

The commodity is the essential movement of the spectacle. Society is dominated by things and the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images. For Debord, "this is the principle of commodity fetishism," which dominates society by tangible and intangible things and "which reaches its absolute fulfilment in the spectacle, where the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images."¹¹ Hence, the commodity has become the total occupation of social life and the alienated worker has become the alienated consumer.

Debord explains that in the primitive phase of capital accumulation, the proletariat was given a minimum on which to subsist in order to conserve his labour power. This changed when the production of commodities reached such a level of abundance that the workers were needed to collaborate in the industrial process. The worker became "suddenly redeemed from total contempt" and found himself "outside of production in the general guise of consumer, seemingly treated as an adult, with zealous politeness."¹² At this point, the workers' leisure and humanity are taken charge of by the commodity and these spheres come to be dominated by political economy. Thus, the "perfected denial of man has taken charge of the totality of human existence."¹³

Debord refers to the spectacle as a permanent opium war which aims to make people identify satisfaction with a

consumable survival that continually increases. While in primitive economies the commodity sector represented a surplus of survival, with large scale commerce, the accumulation of capital has taken over. The continual expansion of economic power in the form of the commodity, "which transformed human labour into commodity labour, into wage labour, cumulatively led to an abundance in which the primary question of survival is undoubtedly resolved but in such a way that it is constantly rediscovered."¹⁴

Modern man is a "consumer of illusions" for he is led to believe that he must possess certain products in order to exist and find happiness in the modern world. He is led to believe in the form of privation that the capitalist economy develops and thus, he is endlessly pursuing the attainment of some image. The commodity becomes a power which occupies social life and all that the individual is concerned with is his relation to the commodity. Hence, "the spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life"¹⁵. Economic necessity has thus been replaced by a need for boundless economic development so that "the satisfaction of primary human needs is replaced by an uninterrupted fabrication of pseudo-needs."¹⁶ The tragedy for Debord is that people do not realize its domination over their lives because they are bemused by the spectacle. However, under its "shimmering diversions," modern society has become simply trite.

For Debord, the distinction between civil society and the state is non-existent and has become obsolete. He hardly mentions the state for he sees it as one with civil society in the society of the spectacle. Freedom is thus only an illusion. We are not free to choose and create our own lives because we are caught up in material consumption. There is no means for improvement under the liberal system. Man is led to believe that happiness can be achieved by owning and displaying what one has, and one's identity is based on what others believe we possess and not on what we are. Modern man seeks to distinguish himself through his possessions which provide an image.

Since civil society and the state have been merged in the modern world of consumerism, capitalism and communism are simply two evil aspects of the same enslavement of the ~~civilization~~ ~~by a~~ consumers, according to Debord. He maintains that all cultures are moving in the same direction towards embracing the values and principles of economic liberalism. Until recently, the two major challenges to liberalism have been communism and fascism. As an alternative ideology, fascism was destroyed at the end of the second world war, and since the first world war, the appeal of communism today is at its lowest. Since fascism and communism are no longer significant, we are faced with a third form of totalitarianism which is a rational combination of the two on the basis of liberal consumerism and it has not only proven stronger, but

has tended to impose itself globally.

Debord distinguishes between the two rival forms of power before the decline of fascism and communism. They were the concentrated and the diffuse. The concentrated was centred around a dictatorial personality found under communism and fascism. It belongs essentially to bureaucratic capitalism since in this form, it is the bureaucracy which chooses everything leaving the masses with no significant margin for choice. The spectacle under totalitarian regimes becomes the image of what "officially exists" and its star commodity is concentrated in one man with whom everyone must identify or disappear.

In contrast, the diffuse form drives wage earners to apply their freedom of choice to the vast range of new commodities now on offer and for Debord, it is represented by the americanization of the world. All sorts of star commodities are available from which to choose, each one making claims to providing satisfaction. The commodity fights for itself, it does not acknowledge other commodities and tends to "impose itself everywhere as if it were the only one."¹⁷ Indeed, as Debord writes, "the spectacle is the epic poem of this struggle. [It] does not sing the praises of men and their weapons but of commodities and their passions."¹⁸

Consumers only touch a fragment of this commodity happiness however, where every "product represents the hope for a dazzling short cut to the promised land of total

consumption and is ceremoniously presented as the decisive entity."¹⁹ Debord significantly points out that the satisfaction of abundant commodities does not come from their use but in the recognition of their value as commodities.

Products can only be brought forward for the admiration of the masses if they are produced in large enough quantities for mass consumption because a product can only gain prestige when it is "placed at the centre of social life as the revealed mystery of the ultimate goal of production." However, as soon as the prestigious object is taken home by the consumer and all other consumers, "it becomes vulgar for its essential poverty is revealed."²⁰ By then however, a new commodity has emerged demanding to be acknowledged and thereby carries the "justification of the system."²¹ The fraud behind this satisfaction is exposed by being replaced and that which has been acknowledged for its complete excellence, nonetheless changes in both the diffuse and the concentrated spectacle. Indeed, "Stalin and the outmoded commodity are denounced precisely by those who imposed them, and every new lie of advertising is an avowal of the previous lie."²²

In Comments on the Society of the Spectacle, Debord continues his criticism of modern society by a discussion of the third form of totalitarianism. He emphasizes that the spectacle has grown more powerful and outlines the political consequences of the spectacle's rapid extension over the last twenty years. Debord calls this third form the integrated

spectacle.

The integrated spectacle is simultaneously concentrated and diffuse. According to Debord, it is concentrated because the controlling centre is the occult never to be occupied by a known leader or clear ideology," and it is diffuse because the spectacle has reached all aspects of life. Indeed, it "has put its mark on almost all social behaviour and objects and has spread itself to the point where it permeates all reality."²³ Debord further maintains that nothing in nature or in culture has remained untransformed by the means and interests of modern industry. It is under these conditions "that the parodic end of the division of labour appears which coincides with the disappearance of real ability."²⁴ Debord points out that in modern life, anyone can do or be anything, "a financier can be a singer, a lawyer a police spy, a baker can parade his literary tastes, an actor can be president."²⁵ Indeed, anyone can join the spectacle and practice either secretly or publicly a completely different activity from one's specialization. This occurs because recognition has become more important than what one is really capable of doing, so that it becomes "normal for the status to be readily transferable for anyone, anywhere, to have the same right to the same kind of stardom."²⁶

The integrated spectacle is characterized by five principle features; incessant technological renewal; integration of the state and economy; generalized secrecy;

unanswerable lies; and an eternal present. Technological renewal is an essential component of capitalism and since the second world war, its acceleration has put everyone at the mercy of specialists thereby reinforcing spectacular authority. Scientists for example, are no longer asked to understand or improve the world, but instead are asked to justify everything that happens. Science is now in the service of spectacular domination which "has cut down the vast tree of scientific knowledge in order to make itself a truncheon."²⁷

Contemporary society cannot distinguish between state and economy so that both the United States and the Soviet Union can be said to own each other. This union between state and economy has further developed spectacular domination and the final three features are direct effects of this. Unanswerable lies have succeeded in eliminating public opinion. What the public thinks or wants is of no importance. We live in a world of image which has been chosen and constructed by someone else and these images have become the individual's connection to the world which he uses to observe for himself. These images "portray a simplified summary of the sensible world."²⁸ We live in a world full of disinformation where there is no room for verification, reflection or reply, "where respect for those who speak through the spectacle is so widespread, when they are held to be rich, important, prestigious, to be authority itself, the

spectators tend to want to be just like them" and will proudly display an "individual reflection of authority."²⁹

With reference to the eternal present, Debord refers to a circularity of everything from the manufacture of clothes to music. We are always "returning to the same short list of trivialities passionately proclaimed as major discoveries."³⁰

Meanwhile, genuinely important news and news of actual changes are rare. The reason for this is that the first priority of the spectacle is to eradicate historical knowledge, "beginning with the most recent past."³¹ Furthermore, people who do not understand anything about history are easily manipulated. With a lack of historical knowledge, the spectacle is able to cover its tracks and "contemporary events themselves retreat into a remote and fabulous realm of unverifiable stories, uncheckable statistics, unlikely explanations and untenable reasoning."³² When the spectacle ceases to address something for three days, it ceases to exist because it is gone on to "talk about something else and that henceforth exists."³³

The uses of the media guarantees this kind of social insignificance which, according to Debord, is "attributed to what is immediate and to what will be immediate immediately afterwards."³⁴ In a sense, the media is the spectacle because it is "a form of communication whereby decisions taken are presented for passive admiration" and the spectacle has become the "excesses of the media."³⁵ The media is

believed to be good since it offers a public service which facilitates mass communication with impartial professionalism. As Debord points out however, the media is bound by wages and rewards and its members know they are dispensable. Hence, they must answer to spectacular authority.

As for secrecy, Debord believes society is built on it. He points out that, "in this world which is officially respectful of economic necessities, no one ever knows the real cost of anything produced. In fact, the major part of the real cost is never calculated and the rest is kept secret."³⁶ In the following passage, Debord gives another example which tells of this generalized secrecy:

So mysterious has the power become that after the affair of the illegal arms sales to Iran by the U.S. presidency, one might wonder who was really running the U.S., the leading power in the so called democratic world. And thus who the hell was running the democratic world?³⁷

Once the stage of the integrated spectacle has been attained, it becomes generally accepted that democracy is the realization of a fragile perfection. It is thereby no longer open to attack since no other society has proven better. Indeed, "never before have those who are still led to believe in a few countries that they remain free citizens, been less entitled to make their opinion heard wherever it is a matter of choices affecting their real lives."³⁸ It is fragile because of the dangers in trying to manage technological expansion. At the same time it is perfect for governing since those who seek to govern it do so without ever trying or

wanting to change anything significant.

The democratic society like the commodity is beyond criticism. The majority watch to see what will happen next but they never act. To put itself beyond criticism, democracy creates its own enemies- terrorism - so that it can be judged by its enemies rather than by its achievements. Furthermore, "the spectacle never knows anything about terrorism, but it has to know enough to convince them that, compared with terrorism, everything else must be acceptable, or in any case, more rational and democratic."³⁹

What the extensions of capitalism has meant for Debord is the transgression and restructuring of whole areas of private life, free time, leisure and personal expression. Furthermore, it indicates a new phase of marketing whole areas of social practice, that is everyday life, into commodities. Hence for Debord, it means the destruction of civil society.

CRITIQUE

If Debord's basic argument is given serious consideration by examining the world in which we live, act and think, his general observations have some merit. We live in a society in which the higher one sells his or her labour power for, the more he or she is esteemed. We need only take the example of a housewife who remains at home to raise her children, our future citizens. Her work is just about least recognized in our society as compared to a businessperson whose goal it is to accumulate wealth and display it.

The need for recognition is not to be dismissed. Our present liberal capitalist system has channelled this need for recognition into possessing things more than developing our individual capabilities or serving our fellow man. Man's need for recognition can be said to be fuelled by consumerism. Even Adam Smith in his Wealth of Nations, recognized that the motive of prestige lay behind the desire to possess commodities. The next section of this chapter will examine Smith's analysis on how the rise of commerce and industry came about through man's preoccupation with recognition and honour. That Smith dealt with this observation, demonstrates the importance commodities have come to play in our modern lives and hence Debord's analysis must be given serious consideration.

2

Smith saw that the drive for economic advantage is a means by which the desire for recognition and individual distinction can be satisfied. In the more advanced economic societies, men do not seek to procure goods in order to satisfy "the necessities of nature." Smith stresses the non-economic motives that are behind this observation. If man's bodily needs are limited, Smith asks, why do men pursue wealth, power and preeminence? His answer is vanity. Indeed, the goods acquired by the rich do not provide any useful function but supplies them with frivolous and trifling conveniences. Therefore, the purpose of "all the toil and

bustle of this world"⁴⁰ is to fulfil the desire for the recognition and admiration of others. As Smith writes in The Theory of Moral Sentiments, it is:

...to be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of...it is the vanity not the ease or the pleasure which interests us. But vanity is always founded upon the belief of our being the object of attention and approbation. The rich man glories in his riches, because he feels that they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world, and that mankind are disposed to go along with him in all those agreeable emotions with which the advantages of his situation so readily inspire him. At the thought of this his heart seems to swell and dilate itself within him and he is fonder of his wealth, upon this account, than for the advantages it procures him.⁴¹

Although Smith asserts that man should be emulating the wise and virtuous as opposed to "proud ambition and ostentatious avidity," he claims that "the great mob of mankind are the admirers and worshippers...of wealth and greatness."⁴² In fact, most men admire the presumption and vanity of the wealthy, rather than the real solid merit of the poor and humble. Therefore, the pursuit of wealth is to attain the recognition and distinction that having and displaying wealth provides. Thus Smith again writes in the Wealth of Nations, "with the greater part of rich people, the chief enjoyment of riches consists in the parade of riches which in their eyes is never so complete as when they appear to possess those decisive marks of opulence which nobody can possess but themselves."⁴³

So strong is this need for recognition in men that the great proprietors of the feudal system bartered away their

authority. Smith explains that under the feudal system in Europe, the great proprietors were not concerned with cultivating and improving their land, nor were they concerned with manufacture or the condition of their dependents. Since agricultural products were perishable, it had to be consumed fairly quickly, and since there was no foreign commerce or industry, the great proprietor could not exchange the surplus of his lands. Consequently, he had to "consume the whole in rustic hospitality at home [and] if this surplus produce is sufficient to maintain a hundred or a thousand men, he can make use of it in no other way than by maintaining a hundred or a thousand men."⁴⁴ With the introduction of commerce and manufacture however, the great proprietors were able to exchange their surplus produce for merchandise that they could keep for themselves and that they did not have to share with their dependents. Consequently, "for a pair of diamond buckles perhaps, or for something as frivolous and useless, they exchanged the maintenance, or what was the same thing, the price of the maintenance of a thousand men for a year, and with it, the whole weight of authority which it could give them."⁴⁵

These frivolous vanities caused the barons to acquire more expense and thus to require the available surplus from their land. Hence, they dismissed their retainers and any unnecessary tenants, raised their tenants rent and in return gave them long leases. As a result, the tenant became

independent and the great landlords sold their birthright for "trinkets and baubles." They rendered themselves as insignificant as any tradesman or burgher and consequently, they "were no longer capable of interrupting the regular execution of justice, or of disturbing the peace of the country."⁴⁶ Therefore, by seeking to increase their own consumption and material improvements, the feudal lords unwittingly gave up their power.

While Smith praised the consequences of industry and commerce, as they introduced "order and good government, and with that, the liberty and security of individuals,"⁴⁷ he did not however, offer the same praise for the motivations and chain of events that brought about this result. According to Albert Hirschman, the explanation for Smith's ambivalent stance "may lie...in the delight [Smith] took...in uncovering and emphasizing the unintended results of men's vanities and self-interest"⁴⁸ as Smith indicates in the following passage:

A revolution of the greatest importance to the public happiness was...brought about by two different orders of people who had not the least intention to serve the public. To gratify the most childish vanity was the sole motive of the great proprietors. The merchants and artificer, much less ridiculous, acted merely from a view to their own self-interest, and in pursuit of their own pedlar principle of turning a penny wherever a penny was to be got. Neither of them had either knowledge or foresight of that great revolution which the folly of one and the industry of the other was gradually bringing about.⁴⁹

Thus Smith explains how the powerful non-economic drives, as

Hirschman points out, "feed into the economic ones and do nothing but reinforce them..."⁵⁰ and in this way, the need for recognition and the problems of self-esteem are steered into conspicuous consumption.

While Smith talks about childish vanities as the sole motivation of great proprietors, he did earlier point out that under the feudal system, men gained recognition through rustic hospitality. Under capitalism, the route to individual distinction came about through the acquisition of goods. Therefore, it appears that the need for individual distinction and recognition is the motivator.

It becomes apparent that in order to gain recognition and self-esteem, possessing wealth and power is not enough. It must be perceived by others, for self-esteem requires evidence. Today all classes of society can achieve this recognition by engaging in conspicuous consumption. As Debord points out, in the early phases of capitalism, the worker was only given enough to conserve his labour power. However, when the production of commodities reached such a level of abundance, the workers were needed to become consumers outside the production process. The worker now spends much of his leisure time consuming and with the advance of communication processes and population mobility, the individual is exposed to "the observation of many persons who have no other means of judging of his reputability than the display of goods...which he is able to make while he is under their

direct observation."⁵¹

Thorstein Veblen in the Theory of the Leisure Class, further explains this phenomenon:

The modern organization of industry works in the same direction also by another line. The exigencies of the modern industrial system frequently place individuals and households in juxtaposition between whom there is little contact in any other sense than that of juxtaposition. One's neighbours...often are socially not one's neighbours, or even acquaintances and still their transient good opinion has a high degree of utility. The only practicable means of impressing one's pecuniary ability on these unsympathetic observers of one's everyday life, is an unremitting demonstration of the ability to pay...therefore, the present trend of the development is in the direction of heightening utility of conspicuous consumption...⁵²

Therefore, while capitalism evolved as Smith explained out of the need for recognition, the modern world as described by Debord can be said to perpetuate that need, for individual classes can observe each other in their leisure time:

at sport, or while travelling... or again, in proportion to the degree to which every status symbol is within everyone's reach - at least on the instalment plan - because it is here, within the framework of a democratic and broadly egalitarian sphere of comparison, that remaining class barriers... make themselves fully felt.⁵³

Hence Debord's observations are valid. In addition, he also points out that in reality, although we all believe we are free citizens, our opinions are not heard on issues affecting our real lives. He further maintains that politicians seek to maintain the status quo. Our present liberal societies provide citizens with the opportunity to choose between sets of politicians. There is little

opportunity to choose the kind of society in which we wish to live or what moral ends we wish to attain. As Macpherson explains in the Life and Times of Liberal Democracy:

...the mechanism consists of a competition between two or more self chosen sets of politicians (elites) arrayed in political parties, for the votes which will entitle them to rule until the next election. The voter's role is not to decide political issues and then choose representatives who will carry out those decisions. It is rather to choose the men who will do the deciding.⁵⁴

Indeed, democracy has become merely a "market mechanism: the voter's are the consumers, the politicians are the entrepreneurs." ⁵⁵

It appears that modern life seems often more consumed with the desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow. It must be asked whether civil society has been so corrupted by capital that it has been reduced to a circus for spectators, rather than a realm for human action? One need only look at how the earth has been betrayed with overdevelopment. The resources of the earth have been used in an excessive and haphazard way. Yet, at the same time, world wide attention on the need to protect our environment has been slowly increasing. Hence, the call for sustainable development. While it is slow to come about, this new awareness indicates that human beings are interested in other matters than just consuming and that instruments of government can begin a course for change.

In addition, while Debord has argued that people are lead and numbed into being nothing but consumers, one need

only look at the outbursts and calls for democracy around the world. Debord sees human beings as hardly more than spectators, yet the world has seen periodic eruptions across four continents calling for democracy. What we are watching are calls for the right to choose a way of life, not a commodity. Perhaps ultimately, as Debord would argue, that call for democracy may lead to economic consumerism, yet, there lies something more fundamental under these calls for democracy. Ideas have become predominant, not just the desire to have more commodities. While materialism does pervade western societies and Debord's arguments do carry a certain amount of truth, spectacularism is only one aspect of modern life and it is one which I believe we can and must go beyond.

Debord criticizes the media and its manipulation of information. It is undeniable that the media has been guilty of distortion and half truths. However, again, it must also be recognized that it was the spread of information about other democratic countries that were getting more goods and services, more fairness in their distribution and stronger guarantees for human rights, that it is this spread of information which has moved many to act to change their governments. The world has watched the educated young of China influenced by the governmental systems of Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong that compelled them to demand for change and will again. Eastern Europeans were well aware of their western neighbours' way of life. It was leaked

information which could not be stopped that finally caught up with communist leaders.

The spread of knowledge has changed the world and has drawn into question assumptions about the need for nuclear weapons, that poverty is unavoidable, that pollution is an unavoidable consequence of economic growth, that loans made by the World bank have to be repaid, or that secrecy is essential for governance. These assumptions and more have become debatable. The continued spread of information around the world slowly erodes power structures, wealth and discrimination that were once believed to be unchangeable. In addition, this spread of knowledge implies choice. Choices of different ways of governing and managing one's society, choices about one's own destiny.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly when considering the nature of our society and the present problems we face, Debord's thesis ignores the increasing numbers of those who are becoming destitute in the Western World. The growing numbers of unemployed and poor are more concerned with daily existence than with their image. In The Culture of Contentment, John Kenneth Galbraith examines this phenomenon and the growth of a new underclass of poor. While Galbraith maintains that Americans have lapsed into a self-serving economic and social status, which seems to suggest that Debord was on the mark, he also observes the fate of a growing functionless underclass, people who are caught in a cycle of

poverty. Debord simply ignores the rise of this phenomena and the plight of those who no longer fit into this society of consumers. What happens to their place in the society of spectators? The third section of this chapter will examine Galbraith's The Culture of Contentment and how society has come to be dominated by those who seek to maintain their comfortable existence at the expense of the less fortunate.

3

In the Culture of Contentment, Galbraith denounces the fact that the well off have come to dominate the political arena and do so in order to guarantee their continued comfort at the expense of the less fortunate. Galbraith explains that capitalism has created a larger and wealthier elite than ever known before, who ensure that those leaders are elected who will perpetuate their self-satisfied existence. The result is a society defined by the "culture of contentment." As Galbraith explains in the following passage:

What is new in the so-called capitalist countries ...is that the controlling contentment and resulting belief is now that of the many, not just the few. It operates under the compelling cover of democracy, albeit a democracy not of all citizens but of those, who, in defence of their social and economic advantage actually go to the polls. The result is government that is accommodated not to the reality or common need, but to the beliefs of the contented who are not the majority of those who vote.⁵⁶

While Debord claimed that people were manipulated by consumerism and the media, Galbraith sees modern society as being manipulated by what he has termed the contented majority. Indeed, "the leaders...are a reflection of their

supporting constituency."⁵⁷

Governments are chosen by them so as to perpetuate their lifestyle.

In the past, those that were more economically and socially fortunate constituted a small minority. Today however, they form a majority, though Galbraith importantly points out, "a majority not of all citizens but of those who actually vote."⁵⁸ This self-satisfied majority is able to "rule under the rich cloak of democracy, a democracy in which the less fortunate do not participate."⁵⁹ According to Galbraith, voting for the poverty-ridden has become an idle exercise since voting means choosing between parties on issues that have little consequence on their daily lives. Hence, voting becomes pointless for the poor and as a result, "the majority rule of the contented is or has been ensured."⁶⁰

The contented majority can be broadly defined in terms of income however, they are in no way a homogeneous group. According to Galbraith, "it includes the people who manage or otherwise staff the middle and upper reaches of the great financial and industrial firms, independent businessmen and women and those in lesser employments whose compensation is more or less guaranteed."⁶¹ It further includes those in the modern professional class such as doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, journalists, professors and scientists. As well, those who were once considered the proletarians, "those with diverse skills whose wages are now,

with some frequency, supplemented by those of a diligent wife. They, like others in families with dual paychecks, find life reasonably secure."⁶² Finally, this contented majority also includes farmers supported by Government subsidies and those that are living comfortably on pensions and other retirement allowances.

Members of the contented majority speak out only when their comfortable existence or their future well-being becomes threatened, that is, when government and the "seemingly less deserving"⁶³ appear to intrude on them, largely by way of taxes. This is not to say there are not those of this group who are concerned with the needs of others or the inherent dangers in the preoccupation with individual comfort and short run goals. There are scholars, journalists, professionals and others who are sympathetic to those that are excluded and are concerned about the future. However, they do not pose a serious threat to the electoral majority. Furthermore, they serve to legitimate the democratic system for "by their dissent they give a gracing aspect of democracy to the ruling position of the fortunate."⁶⁴ In addition, they give hope to the less fortunate and "at a minimum, assure that they are not both excluded and ignored."⁶⁵ Indeed, as Galbraith points out, "much social concern is genuinely and generously motivated. Nonetheless, self regard is...the dominant, indeed, the controlling mood of the contented majority."⁶⁶ This is more than evident when public action is demanded on

behalf of those outside of this electoral majority.

Galbraith insists that government has solidly reflected the economic and social wishes of the majority of those who vote, "the electoral majority".⁶⁷ Indeed, he claims that Reagan and Bush were but "faithful representatives of the constituency that elected them," and "that we attribute to politicians what should be attributed to the community they serve."⁶⁸

The contented majority is characterized by the fact that its members believe they are getting their just deserts. What the individual has, he or she attained by his or her own effort, intelligence and virtue. The second characteristic of the contented majority is its preoccupation with the present, with the short-run as opposed to long-run plans of action. They simply look to their present good because long-run benefits will benefit others. The contented majority conveniently invokes the laissez faire doctrine to justify that everything will work out fine in the end. This role of the short-run can be seen for instance by government inaction on the environment and infrastructure.

The contented majority is loath to see money spent on social needs such as public schools and health care which would benefit the less fortunate. Such spending is seen as wasteful. At the same time however, this majority is selective in its abhorrence of government spending which brings us to the third characteristic of the comfortable

majority, "a highly selected view of the role of the state."⁶⁹ Government is seen as a burden. Indeed, as Galbraith states, "no political avowal of modern times has been so often reiterated and warmly applauded as the need "to get government off the backs of the people."⁷⁰ However, exempt from criticism is any program benefiting the contented. Investment in social security, rescuing failed financial institutions and military defence is seen as public money well spent. These make up the largest portion of the federal budget in recent times. What does not serve the interests of the contented majority, "welfare, low-cost housing, healthcare for those otherwise unprotected, public education, and the diverse needs of the great urban slums - is what is now viewed as the burden of government."⁷¹

The final characteristic of the contented majority is its tolerance towards a great disparity of incomes which is tolerated out of fear of losing one's own income. Redistributing the income of the very rich may lead to higher taxes for the comfortable as well. Indeed, "the plush advantage of the very rich is the price the contented electoral majority pays for being able to retain what is less but is still very good."⁷²

Galbraith points out that the existence of the contented majority is supported and enhanced by those who do not share in the comfortable existence of the favoured in society. He applies the term the functionless underclass to

the group of people who do not share in the well-being of the comfortable. They "are concentrated ...in the centres of great cities or less visibly, on deprived farms as rural migrant labour or in erstwhile mining communities."⁷³ The majority of the underclass is made up of minority groups, blacks or those of hispanic origin.

The functionless underclass is an integral part of the economic process and serve to maintain the higher living standards of the contented majority. They are necessary to perform the work that the more fortunate refuse to do. This functionless underclass must be continually replaced as their children will not follow in their parents footsteps. The Western European solution has been to bring in more immigrants to perform the tasks "for which indigenous workers are no longer available."⁷⁴ In Germany, it is the Turks and Yugoslavians, in France, those coming from the North African colonies, and in Britain, immigrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the West Indies. The jobs that these people perform vary from manufacturing and factory assembly lines to restaurants, household and personal services. These immigrants, coming from worse conditions, are impressed by their new relative well-being. They do not vote or participate, hence they are not an assertive group that will make demands on wages and other claims as would local workers.

Thus, according to Galbraith, the market system is "sustained by this underclass and it must reach out to other

countries to sustain it and refresh it..."⁷⁵

The growing underclass in the inner cities of the United States and on a lesser extent, in Europe, has brought with it the "continuing threat of social disorder, crime and conflict. Drug dealings, indiscriminate gunfire, other crime and family disorientation and disintegration are now all aspects of everyday existence."⁷⁶ This is in part a result of industries relocating to more economically favourable locations and thereby denying the underclass of employment. More importantly however, it is because they have been barred from moving up the economic ladder. In fact, "the underclass has become a semi-permanent rather than a generational phenomenon."⁷⁷ That they are not more violent is because, for many, however tenuous their present situation, it is still better than from where they escaped. However, Galbraith warns that this tranquillity should not be indefinitely expected.

In the past the underclass was in a transitional period, coming from a worse life with a prospect of their children doing better. However, "as this process comes to an end - as membership in the underclass becomes stable and enduring - greater resentment and social unrest should be expected. A blockage in the movement upward and out of the underclass will not be accepted."⁷⁸ Unfortunately, with the short-term preoccupation of the electoral majority, Galbraith sees little countervailing action on which to venture. Such

planning would require educational programs, healthcare, family services etc, and these programs are "systematically resisted by the contented electoral majority."⁷⁹ Indeed, the contented majority justify their non-action by claiming that those in the underclass need the spur of their own poverty to change their situation.

As indicated, commitment to laissez-faire is paramount to the economics of contentment. This attitude fosters the belief that state intervention is unnecessary and that things work out best if left to themselves. So influenced is the electoral majority by this belief that those working in government departments are viewed as "an inferior part of the citizenry."⁸⁰ Hence, those working in tax collection or social services have a negative reputation as being bureaucrats, incompetent and self-serving, while those working in government agencies which benefit the electoral majority are exempt from such criticism.

The laissez faire doctrine is the accepted economics of contentment. The electoral majority questions the need for government action and demands strong proof for any specific intervention. Commitment to the doctrine of laissez-faire becomes theological for the culture of contentment, as Galbraith points out in the following passage:

As you must have faith in God, you must have faith in the system; to some extent the two are identical. Over the centuries this faith has, indeed, been subject to waves of strength and weakness. In the age of contentment, not surprisingly it is strong. Perhaps

more than any other belief, it has a sustaining force for the contented. It supports the powerful commitment to the short run and to the rejection of longer run concerns.⁸¹

Again, it is stressed that the modern commitment to laissez-faire is not applied to state action which serves the contented. Rescuing of financial institutions, the support of the military establishment, public pensions for the more comfortable and other lesser matters serving the contented are not confined to the laissez-faire doctrine.

According to Galbraith, there are three basic requirements to serve the contented. The first is "the need to defend the general limitation on government as regards the economy," hence, the general acceptance of the laissez-faire doctrine; "the second, more specific need is to find social justification for the untrammelled, uninhibited pursuit and possession of wealth," it must be demonstrated that "spectacular well-being" serves a serious social purpose; and finally, "the third need is to justify a reduced sense of public responsibility for the poor."⁸² Those in the functional underclass must be seen and believed to be the architects of their own fate so as to avoid any slight feelings of guilt on the conscious of the contented.

The doctrine required to serve these ends need not be empirically proven nor need it be "seriously persuasive." Indeed, according to Galbraith, "it is the availability of an assertible doctrine that is important; that is that availability and not the substance that serves."⁸³ That

doctrine has been found in Adam Smith and his Wealth of Nations. Unfortunately, Smith's doctrines were conveniently used to serve the contented with a large measure of contrivance. As Galbraith points out, "few, perhaps none, who so cited Adam Smith had read his great book. He was, the supreme pragmatist and, with much else, was fully open to a necessary or useful role for the state."⁸⁴ Indeed, Galbraith observes that Smith's position on the role of the state was closer to that of a U.S. liberal democrat.

Galbraith also notes that Smith was "doubtful about some of the more cherished capitalist institutions of our time."⁸⁵ He was opposed to our modern version of corporations as indicated in the following passage:

the directors of such companies...being the managers rather of other people's money than of their own, it cannot well be expected that they should watch over it with the same anxious vigilance with which the partners in a private copartnery frequently watch over their own...Negligence and profusion, therefore, must always prevail, more or less, in the management of the affairs of such a company."⁸⁶

In addition, Smith believed that only barbarous countries did not have many necessary expenses. Moreover, Smith would have been no strong supporter of the age of contentment, as Galbraith explains in the following passage:

On any recent visit to the United States, Smith the pragmatist would almost certainly have been troubled by the extensive relegation of the central cities to a primitive barbarity. He would have noted with distress that a strong and partly autonomous military power had united industry and government in a manner that, under the mercantilist cognomen, he had stringently deplored. He would have noted how

extensively deregulation-the release of industry, commerce and finance from government supervision and intervention-was being pursued in his name. He would have been less than pleased that when it was applied to the savings and loan associations, government insurance of deposits had been retained and that this had led on to the licensed use, misuse and larcenous appropriation of...government funds. Here, indeed, was a mercantilist association between the state and private pecuniary accumulation.⁸⁷

Yet, for the third requirement of untrammelled pursuit of wealth, Smith was recognized as not being satisfactory for this purpose. Instead, George Gilder and his volume Wealth and Poverty proved to be most useful. Gilder called for faith in material progress which requires sacrifice, diligence and risk, and he claimed that material progress "cannot be explained or foreseen in mechanistic or mathematical terms."⁸⁸ According to Gilder, material progress exalts a few great men who "produce wealth over the democratic masses who consume it."⁸⁹ Finally, Gilder held the convenient belief that regressive taxes help the poor for it gives them the needed incentive to spur them to get out of their poverty.

Galbraith appropriately points out that most modern production is in the hands of corporate enterprises and hence, "the concept of a corporate genius inspired to superior effort in the great bureaucratic enterprise only by the prospect of unlimited reward is, to say the least, exotic."⁹⁰ In addition, much of the great wealth of the eighties was attained from "corporate raiding, leveraged buyouts, the related junk-bond promotions..."⁹¹ Indeed, monetary rewards gained from the manufacturing sector have vastly declined.

The genius in Gilder lay in the fact that he "saw a demand and filled it...he made socially serviceable in the strongest terms the uninhibited accumulation of wealth that was essential for the age of contentment. This was the faith he ably affirmed."⁹²

It had become accepted that the poor would remain impoverished by welfare payments which would be substituted for their personal initiative. Thus, the poor were taken off the conscience of the contented majority and more importantly, off the federal budget and tax system."⁹³ Unfortunately, in the last ten years, the number of poor Americans, that is those living below the poverty line, increased by 28%, from "24.5 million in 1978 to 32 million in 1988."⁹⁴ Nearly 1 in five children in the United States was born in poverty. (Similar statistics can be obtained in Canada where 1 in 4 children are born in poverty today, and furthermore, according to U.N. economists, worldwide unemployment is surging.) Galbraith identifies this present situation of the underclass as the most serious social problem of our time for it poses "the greatest threat of long-run peace."⁹⁵

While the underclass does not "live in a homogeneous sense of adversity," life for them is however, "poor, mean and on frequent occasions dangerous."⁹⁶ Hence, the occurrence of violence, alcohol and drugs. Even though for those immigrating from such places as Haiti, Mexico, Turkey, and North Africa, it is an improvement, the possibility of an

underclass revolt does exist and is growing stronger. With the slowing and ever shrinking economy, the prolonged recession or depression, the past promise of escape and improvement is diminishing. Yet, the contended majority is ignoring this long-run danger.

This danger could be avoided by public action, "better schools with better-paid teachers, by strong, well-financed welfare services, by counselling on drug addiction, by employment training, by public investment in the housing...by adequately supported health care, recreational facilities, libraries and police."⁹⁷ According to Galbraith the "question ...is not what can be done but what will be paid,"⁹⁸ and he furthermore maintains, "every action that would remedy and reassure involves the relationship between the citizen and state."⁹⁹

This present age of contentment may end once its comfortable well-being becomes challenged by the adverse developments it fosters. It could happen through a widespread economic disaster, adverse military action associated with international misadventure, or an eruption of an angry underclass.¹⁰⁰ The importance of these observations is that Galbraith, as he himself claims, has provided a "chance to see and in some small measure to understand the present discontent and dissonance and the not inconsiderable likelihood of an eventual shock to the contentment that is the cause."¹⁰¹

Questions concerning civil society today therefore must embrace the growing phenomenon of the functionless underclass which extends to all Western countries. Civil society involves more than the right to vote and majority rule. As Galbraith has demonstrated, voting becomes an idle exercise for the growing functionless underclass in society. The problem of the increasing numbers of unemployed and poor people in the Western world must be addressed. The question remains in what direction can society move? A discussion of civil society then becomes relevant when asking what type of civil society is adequate to contemporary conditions and appropriate to the modern democratic polity?

Debord's view of civil society, that it has become obsolete, is too narrow a focus and is out of touch with the conditions of the increasing numbers of those who do not fit into the general parameters of modern Western society. How is this problem to be solved? How can democracy be achieved when the numbers of those who are left out of the general parameters of society are increasing, and where only the demands of the wealthy for continued affluence and comfort are met? As MacPherson has pointed out, we cannot consider to be living in a truly democratic system where wealth is preferred to community and if we believe that the market will be able to provide a continued supply of wealth.

A further inquiry into the search for a system that would solve the shortcomings of the present liberal democratic

system led to an examination of the works of Norberto Bobbio who seeks to solve the problems of inequality and democracy through some form of new social contract. The following chapter thus will discuss Bobbio's view of civil society and its indispensability for democracy. He believes there is a future for democracy, that the ideal of democracy can be met, and that his vision will embrace every individual.

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CHAPTER TWO

PRESENTATION

1

Norberto Bobbio examines the central issue behind the ungovernability of democratic societies. He claims that with the emancipation of civil society from the political system by first, the liberal state and then by "the extension of the democratic state," a situation has been created whereby civil society has increasingly placed inexhaustible demands on the government. The government then must respond to these demands but the difficulty arises when the demands "generated by a free society are increasingly numerous."¹

While Debord believes that liberalism has brought about the demise of civil society and therefore, freedom, for Bobbio, civil society is indispensable for freedom. He believes "liberalism provides those liberties necessary for the proper exercise of democratic power, democracy guarantees the existence and persistence of fundamental liberties."² Hence, only a liberal state can ensure the proper workings of democracy and an undemocratic state cannot guarantee basic liberties. In addition, it was the liberal state followed by the extension of democracy which "contributed to the emancipation of civil society from the political system."³

Yet, it was this very process of emancipation which lead to a situation where the demands generated in civil society are increasingly too numerous for government to cope.

Civil liberties are the necessary precondition for a democratic government and these include freedom of the press and association; avenues through which citizens can make demands on the government. Bobbio points out however, "the quantity and rapid turnover of these demands are such that no political system, however efficient, is able to cope with them. This results in overloading the government."⁴ Hence, choices must be made which inevitably leaves some dissatisfied. The slowness of the decision-making procedure of the democratic political system cannot keep up with the speed of demands. Consequently, "the mechanism for inserting demands into the system and the one for extracting responses are increasingly out of phase, the first working at an ever faster rate while the second slows down more and more."⁵

Bobbio is concerned with the fact that although democracy is the natural progression of liberalism, they, liberalism and democracy, are no longer compatible "once democracy has been taken to its logical extremes...as a democracy of mass parties, so as to produce the welfare state."⁶ In contrast, under an autocratic system, the demands of civil society can be controlled since civil society is stifled. Autocratic systems do not have to observe any parliamentary decision-making procedures. Thus, while

democracy is good at generating demands, it is "bad at satisfying them" and autocratic systems which stifle demands are "better placed to meet them."⁷ Therefore, the problem for Bobbio is how to create a state apparatus which is efficient without being oppressive, which can function effectively as the agent of civil society without at the same time lapsing into a dictatorship.⁸

Bobbio views civil society as indispensable for democracy because state power tends to become dictatorial whenever it ceases to be subject to its countervailing power. He defines civil society as the place where "economic, social, ideological and religious conflicts originate and occur and the role of state institutions is to solve these conflicts by mediating or preventing them."⁹ Social classes are the agents of civil society and the groups and organization that represent them. Civil society then refers to the "sphere of social relations, household communications, media, markets, churches, voluntary organizations, social movements, which are not directly controlled by state institutions."¹⁰ He views civil society and the state as two necessarily separate but interdependent aspects of contemporary life.

Democracy is superior for Bobbio as it remains the strongest antidote to the abuse of power. He believes that those who exercise power always want more of it and for longer periods of time. Since democracy monitors itself "through its own agency, a bad democracy for this reason is always better

than a good dictatorship."¹¹ Yet, Bobbio is aware of the disadvantages and limits of democracy. He recognizes that democracy has failed to eliminate the influence on decision making that certain individuals have as a result of inequalities in wealth and power and knowledge. He further recognizes that the representative system is limited by the accumulation of social power within civil society, that the vast majority of citizens have no say in major decisions, and that many institutions in civil society are insufficiently democratic.

Bobbio also notes that the problems requiring technical expertise and professional solutions are increasing and this reduces the applicability of the democratic principle where everyone can decide everything. Finally, he regrets the undemocratic impact of the media which is manipulative and which decreases the space saved for informed judgements by playing on the emotions or passive imitation of others. Even with all its defects however, the democratic method for Bobbio remains superior for it allows "for the approval of decisions of interest to the whole collectivity by or at least the majority of citizens."¹²

The future of democracy is identified with the western liberal tradition. In his book The Future of Democracy, Bobbio offers a minimal definition of democracy as a "set of rules...which establish who is authorized to take collective decisions and which procedures are to be applied."¹³ The

decision making power of the electoral franchise must be conferred to a large number of members of the group and decisions themselves must be made by the majority. Those making the decisions "must be offered real alternatives and be in a position to choose between these alternatives."¹⁴ Being in a position to choose requires a guarantee of individual rights. Liberalism and democracy are thus interdependent and liberal rights facilitate the democratic process which in turn guarantees the "existence and persistence of fundamental liberties."¹⁵

Bobbio goes on to claim that only institutions establishing this equilibrium can avoid autocracy. Hence, he emphasizes not only individual liberty, but the extension of democracy beyond state politics where democratic progress is no longer indicated by the number of people who vote, but the number of contexts or spaces where the right to vote is exercised.

The ideal of democracy contains the notion that individuals must be bound by obligations only if decisions are chosen from a variety of alternatives without restraint or force. In order to meet this criteria, "not only equal civil and political rights" are required, "but social rights as well."¹⁶ Social rights are necessary because they provide the precondition for democratic control of different aspects of social life. Hence, Bobbio accepts the claim made by the Left that the inequalities of wealth and influence and the

increasing complexity and specialization of modern societies, along with the growth of bureaucratic and corporative organizations, all undermine the democratic accountability of governments. His solution is to call for a reform of "liberal justifications for civil and political equality as the natural extensions and partners of the two."¹⁷

(While liberalism may not be perfect and may hold many contradictions, according to Bobbio, it cannot be rejected. It continues to thrive because it "is rooted in a philosophical outlook, which, like it or not, gave birth to the modern world; the individualistic conception of society and history."¹⁸ Bobbio berates the Left for never having come to terms with this concept. He contends it must be accepted that "the starting point for every scheme for human emancipation is the individual with his passions (to be channelled or tamed), his interests (to be regulated or coordinated), and with his need (to be satisfied or repressed.)"¹⁹ Therefore, the task for the Left:

is to see whether, starting with the same incontestable individualistic conception of society and using the same institutional structures, we are able to make a counter proposal to the theory of social contract which neo-liberals want to put into operation; one which would include in its conditions a principle of distributive justice and which would hence be compatible with the theoretical and practical tradition of socialism.²⁰

Bobbio asserts that the contractarian tradition provides the best foundations for establishing agreements in an individualist society. Thus, he writes, "it is my

considered opinion that the only way liberal socialism can be discussed without straying into abstraction or outright contradictions is to devise a new social contract."²¹ Bobbio believes that John Rawls has designed such a new type of social contract.

Bobbio terms the renewed interest in the contractarian theories "neo-contractarianism" and claims "the interest is due in part to the success of Rawls' book on justice."²² Neo-contractarianism arises "from a recognition of the chronic weakness which the power of the state displays in the most economically and politically advanced societies or from the growing ungovernability of complex societies."²³ According to Bobbio, the greatest difficulty with which contract theories must contend, is that all individuals remain partially a sovereign power, each independent from others and therefore, such individuals are the "protagonists of the continuous process of legitimation and religitimation of the bodies charged with taking collective decisions."²⁴ Therefore, it is the individual who by right determines the terms of the new social contract. He further contends that people are no longer satisfied with exchanging their obedience for the protection of rights and property. Instead, they demand "an equal redistribution of wealth so as to diminish if not eliminate the inequalities between the position which people start out from in life."²⁵ It is for this reason, according to Bobbio, that John Rawls' book has been a success

because he devises a way of meeting this demand. However, whether the majority of people are demanding a redistribution of wealth is questionable. As Galbraith has pointed out, such demands are made by few and are drowned out by the contemporary "electoral" majority.

Rawls' theory of justice also appeals to Bobbio because Rawls' concept of "pure procedural justice" undercuts the idea that the market system which rewards individual abilities is intrinsically fairer than any other system. Rawls' system intends to demonstrate that showing people equal respect requires giving them certain political, civil and social rights. His concept of a new type of social contract as the basis for a democratic society appeals to Bobbio and provides him with a framework for his proposed extension of democratic practice.

To understand Bobbio's visions of a just society then, it is necessary to examine Rawls' Theory of Justice. Therefore, the next section will investigate Rawls' concept of the just society and why his vision, and therefore Bobbio's, is unrealistic.

CRITIQUE

2

In A Theory of Justice, John Rawls attempts to undercut the idea that the market system, which rewards individual abilities, is intrinsically more fair than any other system. He proposes to demonstrate that showing people

equal respect entails giving them certain social and political rights.

Rawls' primary concern is with social justice which is determined by the basic structure of society, since the way in which advantages and responsibilities are distributed has profound effects on an individual's life. Thus for Rawls, "the justice of a social scheme depends essentially on how fundamental rights and duties are assigned and on the economic opportunities and social conditions in the various sectors of society."²⁶ Hence, Rawls seeks to discover what principles free and rational persons placed in an original position of equality, and who desire to further their own interest, would accept as the basis for regulating all further dealings. He refers to his approach as a "justice of fairness" and assumes a hypothetical situation of equal liberty which corresponds to a contract theory, because "it conveys the idea that principles of justice may be conceived as principles that would be chosen by rational persons, and that in this way conceptions of justice may be explained and justified."²⁷

Rawls puts forth two principles of justice:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.

Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and b) attached to positions and offices open to all.²⁸

These two principles are part of Rawl's more general conception of justice where "all social values - liberty and

opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect - are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage."²⁹ Injustice then is inequalities which are not beneficial to all. Hence, social benefits would thus be maximized by being distributed to the least advantaged person in society, and this "difference principle" points to his efficient distribution scheme as the just one. Therefore, the higher expectation of those better situated are just only if they work to the advantage of the least favoured. Rawls thus seeks to redress those undeserved inequalities which are biased by natural and social contingencies in the direction of equality.

In his theory, man in the original position is assumed to be rational, advancing his own interests, and he does not suffer from envy, or the need for recognition and self-distinction, at least where inequalities are not great nor founded on injustice. Being mutually disinterested, men are not "moved by affection or rancour" nor are they "envious or vain," rather they strive to promote their own plan of life.³⁰ Hence, Rawls implies that superiority does not exist. People will choose a conception of justice which will allow them to maximize their opportunities for fulfilling their plan of life. This is to be achieved by choosing a concept of justice whereby one can gain more rather than less primary goods.

For Rawls, primary goods are "things that every rational man is presumed to want,"³¹ and he distinguishes between natural goods and goods that are a direct disposition of society. Rawls maintains that qualities "such as health, vigour, intelligence, and imagination" are natural goods, but for simplicity he assumes that "the chief primary goods at the disposition of society are rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth."³² Subsequently, self-respect is integrated into the account as a social primary good because Rawls maintains that one's self-respect is determined by the basic structure of society.

Rawls defines self-esteem "as having two aspects (which) includes a person's sense of his own value...and second...a confidence in one's ability...to fulfil one's intention."³³ He is concerned that men view each other as equals and this can be achieved by propping up a man's sense of self-worth. Since he regards self-worth as a primary good which allows one to achieve happiness, and since all have an equal right to happiness, it becomes one of the foundations of a just society to ensure that everyone can respect themselves. Therefore, "the fact that justice as fairness gives more support to self-esteem than other principles is a strong reason"³⁴ to adopt it, according to Rawls. Furthermore, Rawls recognizes that "unless our endeavours are appreciated by our associates, it is impossible for us to maintain the conviction that they are worthwhile."³⁵ Thus, it appears

that Rawls' system of justice calls for a society of mutual admiration.

In section 80, Rawls assumes, as earlier indicated, that "a rational individual is not subject to envy, at least when the difference between himself and others are not thought to be the result of injustice and do not exceed certain limits."³⁶ Rawls places envy into a category of "special psychologies" because rational people would not suffer from it. However, he does recognize that envy can pose a problem because the inequalities sanctioned by the difference principle may be so great as to arouse envy to a socially dangerous extent."³⁷

Rawls goes on to distinguish between general envy which is "envy experienced by the least advantaged towards those better situated...in the sense that they envy the more favoured kinds of goods and for the particular objects they possess," and in particular, envy which is "typical of rivalry and competition."³⁸ Rawls seeks to determine "whether the principles of justice, especially the difference principle with fair equality of opportunity, is likely to engender in practice too much destructive general envy."³⁹ He feels it is necessary to deal with envy for it is "collectively dangerous" and it is connected to the harmony and stability of a just society. While in the original position, man was described as being free of envy, Rawls now seeks to determine "whether a well-ordered society corresponding to the

conception adopted will actually generate feelings of envy...that will undermine the arrangements it counts to be just." For if it does, Rawls maintains that the "conception of justice must be reconsidered."⁴⁰ Therefore, he argues that if it is rational not to be envious and to choose the difference principle by means of rational self-interest, then a social system which decreases envy will be desirable because envy will be recognized as irrational. Furthermore, it will be judged to be so because it is to everyone's mutual disadvantage and will offer an inferior position than that of a just state.

Rawls is concerned with the type of society which encourages the outbreak of envy. He assumes that men are inclined to become envious from "a lack of self-confidence of (their) own worth combined with a sense of impotence," and when the "discrepancy between oneself and others is made visible by the social structure and style of life of one's society."⁴¹ This could result in experiencing humiliation and pain and remind one of his disadvantaged position which offers no constructive alternative to opposing the circumstances of the more advantaged."⁴² Consequently, the less favoured seek to take away from those who are advantaged. Liberalism would appear to exacerbate envy and therefore, Rawls believes that the kind of liberal structure his line of justice exemplifies would ameliorate it.

Since it is social institutions according to Rawls

which can appease envy, he believes that his "contract conception of justice" offers the solution to the problem of envy. Rawls' just society would achieve this because it upholds a citizen's self-esteem for there would be a common sense of justice where all are equal and have the same initial basic rights perceived to be fair. In addition, "the greater advantages of some are in return for compensating benefits for the less favoured, and no one supposes that those who have a larger share are more deserving from an amoral point of view."⁴³ Under these circumstances there would be no cause for citizens to feel inferior. Indeed, according to Rawls, "the disparities between themselves and others...should be easier for them to accept than in other forms of polity."⁴⁴

Rawls furthermore maintains that although the difference principle allows for inequalities as long as the less favoured benefit from it, in practice, the disparity between income and wealth would not be excessive. Finally, natural duties will be honoured in his conception of the just society and not one's property and possessions so they will not be paraded to make those who have less feel debased.

Whether Rawls' principles of justice, or any conception of a just society, can ameliorate envy or the need for recognition is questionable. "De-envifying" human beings seems improbable, as Helmut Schoek explains, it is a mistake to believe that "reorganizing social life in terms of a society devoid of envy can free people from the need to envy

or the possibility of being envious."⁴⁵ Schoek, in his work entitled Envy, claims that many theorists are wrong to believe that once what is being envied is removed, an envious person would cease to envy. Furthermore, "envy is usually able to create its own targets and is in no way dependent on the degree of inequality."⁴⁶ Therefore, Rawls' solution cannot succeed.

Schoek maintains that a society cannot exist without envy since envy is the glue that binds it together. He explains that "in order to be able to fit into his social environment, the individual has to be trained by early social experiences, which of necessity involve the torment, the capacity, the temptation of envying somebody something."⁴⁷ While he recognizes that envy must be controlled and sublimated for a society to exist, envy is necessary to the process of maturing. Thus Schoek explains the antinomy with which we are confronted:

Envy is an extremely anti-social and destructive emotional state, but it is at the same time, the most completely socially oriented. And without universal consideration of at least a potential or imaginary envy in others, there could not be the automatic social controls upon which all association is based.⁴⁸

Rawls' claim that his difference principle would decrease the spread of income and wealth and thereby lessen the opportunities for envy to arise. He further claims that the "plurality of associations in a well-ordered society, with their own secure internal life, tends to reduce...the painful

visibility of variations in men's prospects."⁴⁹ However, as Schoek points out, a system such as Rawls' would actually produce envy for envy is aroused more by "minimal inequalities which inevitably causes the envious man to think: I might almost be in his place."⁵⁰ Envy is likely to arise amongst equals or those who are almost equal. Hence, Schoek explains that "envy and resentment are always the product of relative social propinquity. The resentment of the proletarian is virtually never aimed at the highest classes, but at the bourgeois...who he sees immediately above him."⁵¹

While Rawls recognizes the role of self-esteem and envy, he seeks to create a system where man would be void of the negative aspects of envy. He sees man as a rational being who pursues his own interest and believes that socially corrupting envy can be removed from man given the right social setting. He assumes that a form of civil society can be devised which reconciles the public interest with that of the private. Rawls holds that the purpose of society is to strive to satisfy the individual's view of his own good so long as the individual does not harm others, and so long as no view of the good is imposed on anyone for any collective end.

Bobbio has called for a new social contract along the lines suggested by Rawls. Rawl's contract leaves serious doubts about its foundations and in addition, consideration is not given to the growing numbers of those who are unemployed. Both Bobbio and Rawls attempt to combine the basic principles

of the social welfare state with a just society by ensuring that every citizen has not only access to material goods, but access to an equal sense of one's own worth to be recognized by all. Rawls' scheme would create a very active government whose goal is to provide primary goods, but as Bobbio has pointed out, the increase in bureaucracy has been part of the problem with modern civil society.

In western societies, one's value is measured by one's labour power. This poses a problem with the increasing rates of unemployment in the Western world. How this fact will be altered in Bobbio's scheme is not addressed. While Bobbio maintains that increased democratization will be provided not by "the number of people who have the right to vote, but by the number of contexts outside politics where the right to vote is exercised,"⁵² he "does not demonstrate how and under what conditions newly democratized spheres can influence the less democratic spaces of society."⁵³ Bobbio claims not to be seeking new forms of democracy, but wishes to infiltrate new spaces of civil society, by expanding the area of democratic decision making. Thus, he mentions areas that can be democratized, in particular, family, occupational and educational roles. He especially stresses, democratizing the two major institutions of the school and the workplace, because that is where "most members of modern society spend the majority of their lives."⁵⁴ The problems of the growing numbers of unemployed and poor however, or even those who

choose not to work, do not fit into this democratizing process. Therefore, Bobbio fails to point the way forward.

The final chapter will address the situation of the growing unemployed and poor in more detail by examining Ralf Dahrendorf's thesis. Dahrendorf addresses the problem of the increasing numbers of those who do not fit into society. While Bobbio offers a scheme that would require a restructuring and rethinking of civil society, Ralf Dahrendorf is not looking for visions of an alternate or perfect society, as he contends this is a useless exercise. Chapter three will discuss Ralf Dahrendorf's Modern Social Conflict and his views of the future of liberal society and the way to move forward.

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CHAPTER THREE

PRESENTATION

In the Modern Social Conflict, Ralf Dahrendorf is concerned with citizenship and the extension of the rights to which all members of society are entitled. Freedom for Dahrendorf means increasing the "life chances" of citizens, which he identifies with social claims, and denies that anyone can be regarded as a citizen in the fullest sense who does not have an assured place in the structure of economic entitlements. Indeed, the central theme in the Modern Social Conflict is that liberty is a matter of enhancing the "life chances" of citizens. These chances are a product of entitlements and provisions. Entitlements include civil rights and welfare - the components of citizenship - and provisions include economic initiatives and growth - providing objects from which to choose.¹ Liberty requires both prosperity, which means an ample supply of provisions, and citizenship, which implies the abolition of barriers to access. Dahrendorf further explains the relationship of liberty and life chances in the following passage:

There is an undertone of liberty in the concept of life chances. A society which tries to enforce life styles, which tries to control the actual lives of people, is not a free society, whether

such control is exercised by Big Brother and his secret police, or merely by a moral tyrant of social democratic persuasion.²

For Dahrendorf, a free society is one which offers chances but does not impose ways of using them. The task of liberty then is to work and, if necessary, to fight for an increase in life chances. At times this calls for paying attention to entitlements, and at other times, provisions come to the fore, but at all times there is more that needs to be done, for Dahrendorf maintains "there are never enough life chances for enough people..."³

Entitlements are entry tickets, or socially defined means of access to valued goods and services. These "entry tickets open doors, but for those who do not have them, these doors remain closed. In that sense, entitlements draw lines and constitute barriers."⁴ Privileges and deprivations belong to the sphere of entitlements. Provisions denote the range of material or immaterial goods or values that those with given entitlements may choose to enhance their well-being and range of satisfactions. Dahrendorf explains that provisions supply:

...alternatives in given areas of activity. These alternatives are themselves highly structured by what economists call taste and by organized preferences of many kinds... Provisions will be defined as things which can grow incrementally. In principle, the concept is quantitative rather than qualitative, economic rather than political.⁵

The most predominant conflict in modern society for Dahrendorf is that between wealth and citizenship or provisions and entitlements. Thus, "in order to advance human

welfare, one needs both entitlements and provisions. People need access to markets and politics and culture, but these universes also have to offer numerous and manifold choices."⁶ Indeed, according to Dahrendorf, "no society can be regarded as truly civilized which does not offer both."⁷

The modern social conflict then is concerned with entitlements. Although new entitlement barriers that emerge may not be enforced by law, they nonetheless raise solid barriers to achieving full citizenship rights for all. These include social discrimination, real incomes, and barriers to participation. Therefore, the modern social conflict "is about attacking economic or political means, and establishing the entitlements which make up a rich and full status of citizenship."⁸

At a time when there is a call for the need to produce wealth through entrepreneurship and deregulation, Dahrendorf wants to redress the balance by stressing the demands of citizenship, indeed, its priority, for citizenship "is a set of entitlements. The language of supply side economics on the other hand belongs to the world of provisions; innovation, incentive, competition, are part of this vocabulary, as is the notion of choices in education and health care."⁹ Modern capitalism requires constitutional rules to prevent the inevitable differences in wealth from turning into new barriers, into "the power to deny the citizenship rights of others."¹⁰

Dahrendorf does not wish to discuss absolute perspectives but to examine real people in real conditions, and through this examination, he calls for the domestication of power as opposed to its absolution. Society is neither nice nor benevolent but it is necessary. Therefore, it is important to examine "how power and the inequalities generated by it can be turned to advantage in terms of liberty."¹¹ That society is not "nice" is a good thing for "man's unsocial sociability is the sting which produces the antagonisms from which progress flows, including more life chances within an improved social contract."¹² Inequalities emerge from power, creating interest in the status quo, but so does conflict which creates interest in change.

Central to the modern world is civil rights which include the basic elements of rule of law; equality before the law. Law is important as it constrains power. Indeed, "the notion that all members of society are citizens, all citizens are subject to laws and all are equal before the law, was the first definition of citizenship,"¹³ writes Dahrendorf. Although he recognizes the obvious weakness of laws being biased, favouring some over others, Dahrendorf argues that "unless all citizens have an opportunity to feed their interests into the law, the rule of law leaves serious inequalities of entitlement. This is why political rights were a necessary supplement to civil rights...Political rights are the entry tickets to the public."¹⁴ Civil rights cannot

only be reduced by those having excessive power, but also by the many who are weak economically. As Dahrendorf states, "it makes a difference whether one can afford to defend one's interest, or one's honour, in a court of law or not."¹⁵ Political rights have little value if education in how to use them is lacking. Social and economic costs can also prevent their use. Indeed, "unless everybody can live a life free of elementary fears, constitutional rights can be empty promises or worse, a cynical pretence of liberties which in fact stabilize privilege."¹⁶

The modern social conflict is further about "attacking inequalities which restrict full civic participation by social, economic or political means, and establishing the entitlements which make up a rich and full status of citizenship."¹⁷ Dahrendorf claims that inequality is a medium of liberty as long as it is not inequality of entitlements, but rather of provisions. Qualitative inequalities may stimulate an increase in life chances, but quantitative inequalities are "incompatible with free societies."¹⁸ It is important to note that citizenship does not remove inequalities or conflict, but changes their quality.

Civil society is important for Dahrendorf, as it provides a framework for understanding citizenship and social entitlements. He describes civil society in the following passage:

A civil society is a society of citizens in the full sense of the word. It is a product of civilization rather than nature...Civil societies ...are not necessarily capitalist, though they offer opportunities for initiative and growth if they are to deserve the name; They are democratic at least in the sense of providing basic rights for all. Thus the connection between the life chances of modern societies and civil societies are numerous. Above all, there can be no liberty without the conditions of civil society.¹⁹

Dahrendorf's sense of civil society in The Modern Social Conflict focuses on political economy; the structure of rights that allows economic activity to flourish. He examines the tension between economic growth, prosperity and distribution on the one hand, and unemployment and poverty on the other. He argues that we should use citizenship and civil society to bridge this gap.

Separating civil society from the state may be useful analytically according to Dahrendorf, but "misleading in practice."²⁰ This is so because civil society for Dahrendorf is an "inclusive concept for social units in which citizenship is the guiding principle."²¹ It is not a theoretical discussion which can be set apart from governmental institutions. As Dahrendorf explains, all members of civil society;

..possess certain equal entitlements which have the quality of social norms. They are enforced by sanctions and protected by institutions. This is effective only if there are structures of power to back them up. The search for civil society, and ultimately, world civil society, is one for equal rights in a constitutional framework which domesticates power so that all can enjoy citizenship as a foundation of their life chances.²²

The term citizenship is focused upon because it "describes the rights and obligations associated with membership in a social unit, and notably with nationality."²³ Hence, citizenship is something all members share in common effecting one's identity and sense of belonging. The turbulence in the history of citizenship is made up of the question of just who can or cannot be a member. Thus, it is "a set of rights and obligations for those who are included in the list of members"²⁴ and it is a social contract valid for all members.

Dahrendorf questions whether man has made any great strides in civilization since he believes that a "civilized society is one in which common citizenship rights combine easily with differences in race, religion or culture."²⁵ He further adds, "it is also one which does not use its civic states as a weapon for exclusion but regards itself as a mere step on the road to world civil society."²⁶ Hence, citizenship is not an ideal or a value, but plays a concrete social role by providing entitlements.

Dahrendorf strongly presses for extending citizenship rights to more members of society. Many of the issues in the developed countries have focused on inclusion. For instance, the rights of women meant more than obtaining the right to vote. The focus has had to touch more cultural obstacles requiring a change in attitudes and prevailing norms, just as for the blacks in the Southern American states, where the

right to vote meant little without programs to make the segregated blacks part of society through literacy and affirmative action programs. As Dahrendorf points out, the "crucial momentum of change in the last two centuries has been the extension of citizenship to new dimensions of social positions."²⁷ Thus, he argues that the struggle of advocates of minority or women's rights makes sense only if a citizen has achieved full status.

Dahrendorf is further concerned with the extension of civil rights to every human being, for he envisions a world of citizens. While he recognizes that such a world would be hard and costly to achieve, it is the goal towards which we should be striving because "the establishment of civil, political and social citizenship rights for all marks true progress."²⁸ Furthermore, "if it is coupled with significant growth in the quantity and diversity of provisions it creates a highly desirable state of civilization and of liberty."²⁹

There are three major issues which citizenship and struggles for entitlement must address. First, there still remains much work in assuring all members of even the OECD countries their citizenship rights. The rights of women and of minorities are still much underrecognized. These conflicts concern millions of human lives and while this may be an old theme, the struggle must continue until it is won. A second issue on the agenda of citizenship is that while there are those who enjoy full citizenship rights and are

discovering new kinds of entitlement issues, they are also affected by threats to their natural environment. A deprivation of one's natural habitat affects everyone. The final issue is one which encompasses new social problems. Not only is Dahrendorf concerned that many have been left out of the process, he laments the emergence of new groups that are being "pushed to the margin and beyond" as he explains in the following passage:

Persistent poverty and long-term unemployment are new issues of citizenship, and the old instruments of the social state do not seem able to cope. It is not easy (yet?) to tell what form the conflicts arising from a new exclusion will take. They are not likely to be traditional class conflicts, because those at the margin are scattered, disorganized and weak. But they represent a living doubt in the contract of society which cannot fail to affect the rest.³⁰

The modern world has witnessed a steady rise in unemployment and poverty. This phenomenon is occurring all over the United States, Canada and in many European countries. Like Galbraith, Dahrendorf is concerned about the appearance of the phenomenon of persistent poverty and that those experiencing this phenomenon have become an underclass. Furthermore, this phenomenon is not only occurring within countries, but is one which is pitting North against South. The developed world is sinking ever deeper into a quagmire of hunger, illness and tyranny. In the 1980's, of the five billion inhabitants in the world, "one billion are in one way or another a part of the world of increasing life chances. At the other end however, one billion find themselves at the very

margin of existence."³¹ The vast majority of these people have little chance of surviving. The rest of those inbetween can expect to continue in their traditional cycle of poverty. Wealth from the North is not spilling into the South, rather it is the reverse and for Dahrendorf, this is unbearable to those who believe in liberty. Thus, Dahrendorf seeks citizenship rights for all human beings.

While it is necessary to start building a civilized society of citizens in one's own country, if it remains confined to the "boundaries of nations it is also coupled with attitudes, policies and rules of exclusion which violate the very principles of civil society."³² He realizes many will think this a utopian goal but points out that "as Pericles' Athens turned citizenship from a dream to a reality on which to build modern societies, so the civil societies of Europe and North America and some other places on the globe prefigure what is evidently possible everywhere."³³ Such a process requires action and for Dahrendorf it is well worth embarking on. Indeed, action is necessary, otherwise the achievements of citizenship will be jeopardized. He further laments that the studies of international relations is not taken as seriously as it should be and that there are only rudiments of a genuine international law.

The answers to the problems of modern society cannot be achieved simply through democracy for it is only part of the solution. Dahrendorf prefers Friederich von Hayek's

phrase "the constitution of liberty,"³⁴ (though not his definition), because it "describes the objective of the solutions which we are looking for, liberty and the means by which this objective is sought, a constitution in the wide and not necessarily formalized sense of the term."³⁵ The elements of constitutional liberty are, rule of law, which allows citizens equal membership in an equal society; democracy, which enables citizens to make their voices heard; and leadership, which keeps society moving, cutting through the continual discourse of total democracy and from getting stuck in bureaucracy. Economic growth is not "strictly an ingredient of the constitution of liberty, though its presence helps."³⁶

Dahrendorf claims that liberalism offers a just vision of the future, one which requires "an image of the future and a notion of how we might get there."³⁷ The socialist or communist vision requires a utopian image and a faith that progress will take us to that utopia. For Dahrendorf this "takes us out of the real world and ineffect, if not in intention, away from freedom."³⁸ The real interests of the poor today must be the focus since faith in utopian fantasies will not feed their children or put a roof over their heads.

An exact formula towards achieving a more just society is not offered by Dahrendorf, for he believes that, as Karl Popper wrote, "we live in a world of uncertainty and we err. No one knows quite what the right way forward is, and those

who claim to know may well be wrong."³⁹ The real world is full of differing views, conflict and change. These, however, constitute our freedom, for without them, freedom cannot exist. The risks we face today in losing such freedom is entropy which is the result of combining bureaucracy and democracy. Entropy leads to inertia as Dahrendorf explains in the following passage:

If the reality of the rational administration of lives is coupled with the illusion of democratic participation, then nothing moves anymore...It is hard to deny that the rise and fall of nations has something to do with their inability to keep going to explore new ways and to increase life chances both by raising common entitlements and by expanding diverse and varied positions.⁴⁰

In the face of this threat, what is needed according to Dahrendorf is a "lively interplay of leadership, control and popular input..."⁴¹ Citizenship and equal opportunities can never be fully accomplished but must be continually pursued.

While many argue against democratic institutions for countries unfamiliar with such practices, countries which lack the social structures, political and cultural traditions, Dahrendorf argues that successful countries should "be the world's midwife to democracy."⁴² This indeed is an obligation for those who believe in liberty. He urges the use of international organizations in pressing for a world civil society claiming that while the international system was cracked by the cold war and broken by U.S. abandonment in the seventies and eighties, the idea should not and does not have to be forgotten:

The United Nations as an organization to promote both peace and human rights; the International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to guard the rules of the game of growing economies; the World Bank system as an instrument for promoting development - these were not bad markers on the road to a world civil society.⁴³

Dahrendorf argues that it is not necessary for social and economic systems to converge in order to have peaceful and mutually beneficial relations, for "the whole point of international relations and even world civil society, is to manage difference."⁴⁴ This however requires conviction in one's own values and there should be no relenting in the insistence on human rights everywhere. At the same time, conviction in values cannot be used to justify paranoia or intervention. Strong convictions do not have to lead to armed conflict or tolerating the arms race.⁴⁵ A further discussion on world civil society will be returned to later.

As explained, the life chances of a citizen or of a particular nation state are a product of the balance between entitlements and provisions. Social upheavals may occur when they are not at least roughly balanced. In particular, if entitlements are increased, but provisions are not available, there is a revolution of rising expectations. Conversely, increasing provisions but restricting entitlements leads to class warfare. Dahrendorf explains that class conflict arose from an unequal distribution of life chances where those who were in a disadvantaged position demanded more from the advantaged who had more provisions and entitlements. Classes

for Dahrendorf "are categories in a common relationship to the exercise of power. They are either typically in or out, and thus in conflict."⁴⁶ If the conflict is about entitlements than it becomes politically relevant. The interplay between provisions and entitlements fueled the intense class struggles of the 19th and early 20th century and thus the "history of citizenship is also the history of class conflict. This was true for the bourgeois struggle for civil rights; it was true more recently for the battle for social citizenship rights,"⁴⁷ but class struggles have now been replaced by the democratic class struggle.

It was sometime in the 1960s or seventies, that the class struggle ceased to be a great political force and lost its momentum for change. this occurred because "the principle which it strove to establish had become accepted - citizenship."⁴⁸ According to Dahrendorf, once most of the people living in the OECD countries had become full citizens, they "no longer needed to join forces with others in the same position for equal rights and thus social inequalities and political differences assumed a new complexion."⁴⁹ People were now able to advance their lifechances through their own effort and through representation by political parties or interest groups. Hence, these conflicts were domesticated and institutionalized and "eventually resulted in the creation of a majority class of those who belong and can therefore hope to realize many of their aspirations without fundamental

change."⁵⁰

Until the sixties, political and social trends in the West led to increased productivity and the lessening of inequalities of entitlements. This was achieved by raising the floor on which every citizen stands and by lowering the ceiling for those equipped with exceptional wealth or prestige. All citizens in the welfare state were allowed to participate in the political and social process regardless of their economic status and social prestige. In short, the social power of the elite was curtailed while the social weight of the majority was increased.

Post-war Europe and North America saw the rise of the welfare state, although in different forms and in different speeds in the various Western nations. This rise widened the range of entitlements and at the same time, led to an increase in productivity, allowing government to provide ample provisions. Consequently, the proletariat all but disappeared. As a historical force, the working class in Europe lost its momentum "not because it has been pervasive and dominant throughout the century," according to Dahrendorf, "but because after a century of class struggle, it has at last largely arrived."⁵¹ A balance between entitlements and provisions had seemed to be achieved in both Europe and North America. Indeed, in many countries, "social welfare policies were advanced a further step in the direction of communal obligation rather than individual initiative." For

Dahrendorf, this "was to turn out to be the last step on the road."⁵² It was taken moreover, at a time when countries could no longer afford it. Dahrendorf laments the fact that the seventies marked "the end of the social democratic century," since "the social and democratic model remains a humane and reasonable political perspective."⁵³

Thus, the closing years of the sixties marked the end of a historical epoch for Dahrendorf. The vast majority of the population was convinced of the beneficent role of the government, the mixed economy and the social state. Beginning in the late sixties, however, the beneficent trends that had marked the postwar world began to unravel. There occurred a gradual rise of corporatism where organized interests made mutual agreements. The 1970s thus marked both the climax and the beginning of decline of widespread interest in the social prerequisites of liberty."⁵⁴ This was so because liberal democracy required not only the rule of law, popular participation, control of the rulers and effective leadership, but also conflict. In the fifties and sixties, however, conflict gave way to the rise of corporatism and by the social democratic consensus.

Government seemed unable to cope with problems of increasing unemployment, decline in the industrial sector, the oil crisis and other problems. Government simply became overloaded. Indeed, the cost of good intentions was high as Dahrendorf explains in the following passage:

The welfare state is the embodiment of social citizenship rights. In order to achieve the objective of a full status of citizenship for all, formal entitlements, income transfers and programmes of health care, education, etc, are necessary. The resulting package has to be financed, and it has to be administered. Finally there comes a point at which the machinery of the social state defeats its objective.⁵⁵

Many reforms required more government involvement or para-governmental activity which had to be administered. Paradoxically, democratization led to bureaucratization. Dahrendorf explains that, "democratization means the creation of instances of appeal for every decision and by the same token more red tape: Democracy means the substitution of elaborate and explicit reasons for personalized judgement; such routinization requires forms and archives and administrators."⁵⁶ Indeed, in such a heavy and impersonal system many fail to use their entitlements.

The social democratic road ended up with Big Government or perhaps it can be said, "a weak government and a strong bureaucracy."⁵⁷ The seemingly endless spread of bureaucracy bred a general desire for security, which civil service jobs provide. Indeed, except for the United States, one-quarter of all people in the rest of the OECD countries were in public service types of jobs by the mid-seventies. There occurred a rapid increase of taxation on the employed, who had to support the young, the old and the unemployed, and the increasing share of national income devoted to public expenditures. According to Dahrendorf, the crisis then of

the seventies was that of Big Government.⁵⁸

Decades of economic growth and social progress ended up creating problems which defied proven methods of coping. Thus for the first time, political and social thought came from the right as opposed to the left. Hence, the rise of Thatcherism and Reaganism, the right, representing the ultimate provisions party. The success of radical conservatism was a result of the provisions explosion that the majority enjoyed. However, extreme emphasis on provisions eventually highlights entitlement issues. The question which remains for Dahrendorf is "whether the old majority will reassert itself and another episode of social democracy will be ushered in, or whether a new liberal radicalism will emerge which accepts the gains of a greater diversity of provisions and more scope for those who are enterprising but concentrates the attention of politics on entitlements."⁵⁹

The 1980s witnessed a new crisis of unemployment even during a time of significant economic growth. Persistent unemployment in Western Europe resulted from the ability to produce more with less human input.⁶⁰ Governments have been bent on competitiveness and consequently, the labour force has been reduced to an indispensable minimum. The eighties witnessed profound changes in the nature of work which has not only affected individual lives but social structures as well. Indeed, "work is no longer the obvious solution to social problems, but a part of the problem itself"⁶¹ and economic

growth is no longer necessarily associated with employment.

Dahrendorf holds that there are new entitlement issues despite the earlier progress of equality. Jobs, previously made possible through the working contract by modern citizens, have now become the "entry tickets to the world of provisions. They determine peoples incomes, including those from transfers, their social standing, their self-esteem and the way in which they organize their lives."⁶² Hence, the neo-conservatives and the socialists, both of which "extol the virtues of hard work"⁶³ when there is not enough jobs for all, help to create new exclusions. Today, work has become not a burden but a privilege.

The fact that we are still living in a work society is proven by the fate of the unemployed who do not fit into the calculus. As Dahrendorf explains:

It is all right to be a student, a pensioner, an accountant on a trip around the world and even a visiting scholar on a sabbatical; it is objectionable to some, though pleasing to others to be a housewife; it is sad but unavoidable to be physically or mentally handicapped and unable to work; but to be unemployed is not alright. It destroys peoples self-esteem, upsets the routine of their lives and makes them dependent on the dole. It defines them out and thereby creates a new entitlement issue.⁶⁴

The eighties saw a new boundary emerge between those who have seemingly purposeful and good jobs and those who do not. The entitlements created by such developments are serious for "as long as access to markets and thereby provisions depends on employment, unemployment means by implication that access is denied. This is true even if unemployment pay is such that

people are able to survive."⁶⁵

The American situation was somewhat different than the European. The notion of scarcity of work was not understood in the U.S. and this was in part because of the all pervasive work ethic in American life, and in the other part, because of the downward flexibility of real wages which began in the seventies. The decline of American real wages has resulted in employed people remaining poor. Hence, "persistent poverty is the American equivalent to persistent unemployment"⁶⁶ elsewhere.

Dahrendorf is disturbed by the appearance of a permanently unemployed underclass, people whom the majority working class has no interest in helping. He defines the underclass as "a group in which social pathologies accumulate to create a long-term condition. The absence of skills, and unemployment, residence in particular areas, dependence on welfare support are its characteristics."⁶⁷ Institutions and organizations only tend to benefit the majority leaving completely out those who lack access or motivation. Many of the underclass are "functionally illiterate and all but unemployable."⁶⁸

Unfortunately, while unemployment has been expressed to be the greatest concern, during elections, the parties making promises to help the pocket book are more likely to win "than those who demand sacrifices of redistribution in order to help those who are out."⁶⁹ The majority class, those

having had a secure and comfortable existence, protects its own interest like the ruling classes did before it. The difference for Dahrendorf is one of dimension. Up until recently, the overwhelming majority have found a comfortable existence and have had chances their parents and grand parents never even dreamed of. Faced with the economic situation, they are uncertain that their comfortable existence will last and as a consequence, draw boundaries which exclude others. The majority class has all kinds of justifications for drawing such lines and are not prepared to remove them.

The modern social conflict will see no class struggles in the old sense, for it is difficult to take in "the heavy hand of the majority"⁷⁰ especially for those who are left out. In addition, the individualization of the social conflict tends to make people try to get ahead by their own efforts. The only real organized groups remaining are special interest groups or social movements. This has resulted because citizenship rights are general. People fight for certain beliefs such as comparable worth for women, the environment, etc, but they do so from a common basis of citizenship. In that sense, social movements are formed strictly within the bonds of civil society.⁷¹ As for the underclass, they do not join forces because their preferences are the same as those of the official society and those who can look for their own way out. The rest have become lethargic and care little about current issues.

What is important to know about the underclass and persistently unemployed is "that they have no stake in society." Indeed, "society does not need them."⁷² Unfortunately, this sense of not having a stake in society has spread to other groups as well. Modern society is bearing witness to the fact that many do not care about the norms and values of official society and this situation "will be the most telling feature of OECD societies in the last decades of the 20th century."⁷³ Dahrendorf fears not the violence of new conflicts but anomy, the collapse of social norms that occur when the basic values of law and order are unenforced and violations go unpunished. It is anomy rather than civic participation which pervades the cultural climate. Anomy includes child abuse, rape, tax evasion, etc, and it is a feeling that "people have no stake in society and therefore, do not feel bound by its rules."⁷⁴

This underclass phenomenon can be significantly seen by what Dahrendorf terms the "no go area" of youth, for such areas exempt "those who are supposed to learn from the norms which hold society together..."⁷⁵ The serious ramifications of the acceptance of the continued existence of the underclass, which has no stake in society, is that it puts the very existence of society at stake. In effect, it means that the majority class has no more confidence in its own position, "it draws boundaries where there should be none and it wavers when it comes to enforcing its rules."⁷⁶ The final "risk of

anomy" for Dahrendorf, "is tyranny in whatever guise."⁷⁷

Dahrendorf is also concerned about the willingness of liberals to "accommodate the separatism of minorities" instead of insisting on a common floor of civil rights over which cultural differences would be allowed. Thus, he writes:

Separate but equal was a slogan much scorned by liberals in the 1960s, and in the 1980s it has become very topical, and often separateness is stressed more than equality. There is a clamour for homogeneity which rejects all attempts to build civilized societies by having civilized societies first and cultural differences within them second.⁷⁸

Indeed, of the OECD world, there is hardly a country which does not encounter some demands for the recognition of separateness of some particular group. Worst still, outside the OECD countries, new nations are faced with violent ethnic assertions. While the recognition of ethnicity meant progress for civilization, since it was realized that cultural distinctions need not conflict with common citizenship rights, these differences have now "come to be used as a weapon against citizenship."⁷⁹ One need only look at the brutal war in Yugoslavia, or the rise of racism in France or Germany for example, to see the extent to which this has taken place. Unfortunately, "membership is not conceived as a pattern of rights which can be extended, but of unchanging, ascriptive features which must be preserved against contamination by strangers."⁸⁰ Such conflicts defy solution because the past experiences which brought about the democratic class struggle, such as organization, regulation and institutionalization,

cannot be applied to active minorities demanding separatism or even imposing their "fundamentalist creed on the rest."⁸¹

The civilizing forces of citizenship have been attacked "in the name of minority rights or cultural, religious, ethnic autonomy"⁸² and this for Dahrendorf is a big step backward in the history of civil society. Not only has the strengths of the international community leading toward a world civil society been rejected, but even citizenship rights guaranteed by the nation-state has been turned away from. The deeper cost is in terms of the progress towards a world civil society, for a world civil society can only be achieved if it is understood that citizenship does not mean everyone has to be the same, for "citizenship is not a levelling but an enabling process."⁸³ Therefore, Dahrendorf calls for heterogeneity not homogeneity as the only way forward to achieving universal citizenship and for him this is paramount. Thus, he writes, "we can return to the tribe, but if we wish to remain human, we must move forward to the civil society."⁸⁴

Liberalism is the only solution for Dahrendorf since "it follows the passages of modern times, insisting only on the need for progress in the interest of extending the life chances of individuals to as many as possible."⁸⁵ A liberal agenda for the nineties requires accepting past lessons of the seventies and eighties. This means that dismantling past policies will only fail to "advance the real life chances of

living human beings,"⁸⁶ and moreover, as the seventies have demonstrated, unilateralism does not work for it is only self-defeating especially in the fields of defence and the economy. In the long run, closing economic borders will bring only considerable negative results, since, as Dahrendorf writes, "the winds of international economic relations blow into every nook and cranny of domestic policy."⁸⁷ Unilateralism is simply no longer an option unless a country chooses to live in defenceless poverty. For both political and economic reasons, internationalization has become imperative at a time in which the international order is weak. However, Dahrendorf is quick to point out the risk of economic internationalization in the following passage:

Given the obvious need for all actors on the scene to respond effectively to quickly changing circumstances, entitlement issues may fall by the wayside. As long as there is no genuine world order and thus no international law worthy of the name, international action tends to concentrate on provisions in any case.⁸⁸

Indeed, volatile world economic conditions encroaches on political decisions everywhere and such decisions tend to neglect questions of people's rights in favour of ensuring a continued flow of provisions. Globally this means "the systematic neglect of some of the underlying issues of development which are as much socio-cultural and socio-political as they are socio-economic."⁸⁹ Amongst the OECD countries, the focus is on managing the storms of the world economy which thereby detracts from domestic citizenship

issues.

The major task of a liberal policy for Dahrendorf is to open up the "barren world of democracy" and one of the most important tasks is to work towards basic common entitlements for all citizens. We cannot return to the comfort of social democracy, according to Dahrendorf. The agenda must be about citizenship which is above all social questions having "to do with the tendency to define people out of the social universe of the majority with persistent unemployment, inner-city blight, regional disparities and the underclass."⁹⁰ Encouraging innovations and entrepreneurship is as important as replacing corporatist structures by individual participation "and an affective interplay of democratic leadership."⁹¹

Since unemployment remains the major issue, and given that working continues to be significant as the key to income and self-esteem and the way in which we organize our lives, full employment must be a desirable objective. This can be either achieved by following the American method by lowering wages and having poverty, or new ways of redistributing work must be found, either by shortening working hours, providing flexible working conditions, reducing overtime, etc. While such methods may be difficult for the haves in society, Dahrendorf believes they are necessary if society is to hold together.

In addition, institutional issues must be addressed,

such as law and social order, especially in the areas of anomy. While attempts to make the criminal justice system more humane were in order, it "has overshoot the mark where it has tended to impute all aberrant behaviour to society until it is no longer the criminal but his victim who is guilty."⁹² The attempts to humanize the law in areas of youth and the acquittal of the guilty has resulted in the disintegration of institutions. Indeed, the term liberal has "come to be synonymous with a lax attitude to rules and norms."⁹³ If society does not guard its institutions, not only will there be nothing to sustain us but there will be no instrument for enhancing the life-chances of every citizen.

Modern and bureaucratic societies are characterized by the proliferation of norms and rules. Institutions must be rebuilt by reconstructing them from their objectives and intention and this requires "discourse, rational debate, and reasoned argument."⁹⁴ This is not to suggest that Dahrendorf envisions a society of activists and permanent political debate, but rather, it is a view of politics which calls for a society of "alert citizens who are ready to defend the institutions of liberty and sensitive to violations of their principles."⁹⁵ At the same time, this requires those individuals who are ready to take an interest in developing, guarding and working these institutions. The more that take such an interest the better for Dahrendorf since the "politics of liberty is never a luxury."⁹⁶

Yet the most difficult task remaining for Dahrendorf is that concerning the Third World. The majority in OECD countries is doing fairly well and only a minority is defined out. However, the OECD countries make up but a small minority of mankind. The overwhelming majority of all people are poor and deprived. Indeed, "just as economic and social policies made in capital cities do not reach the underclass, so the grand designs of international institutions fail to have a sustained effect for the better in Africa, Asia and latin America."⁹⁷

Dahrendorf argues that "civil societies cannot be maintained unless they are seen as steps on the way to a world civil society."⁹⁸ This will be the final human task to be achieved, if it indeed can ever be fully achieved. However, a world civil society is necessary since war or the continued preparation for it, stunts "the full development of human nature."⁹⁹ Extending life chances requires civil societies, but if civil society remains a privilege for the few while the majority of mankind struggles to stay alive, than it remains stunted and incomplete. For Dahrendorf, the moral case for a world civil society is hard to deny.

In steps towards achieving a world civil society, Dahrendorf calls for the creation of a body of international law and the recognition of the universal rights of all men and women. What laws exists today are limited and weak. Fighting for the recognition of human rights is an important task and

it can be achieved through approach and mindset.

The major focus of Dahrendorf's essay is on the direction for change, which at times requires more emphasis on provisions and at other times for greater entitlements. Aiming at both is the most desirable change. The politics of liberty for Dahrendorf requires more people being brought in and the same time, more opportunities being offered. This is not a matter of course, for "it requires awareness of unacceptable inequality even as taxes are lowered and incentives provided for the enterprising, but it also requires a consciousness of the need to keep choices open as privileges are broken in order to emancipate the deprived."¹⁰⁰

The modern world is full of growth and poverty and the creation of wealth is often in conflict with the extension of civil rights. For Dahrendorf, however, "liberty needs both prosperity and citizenship, though perhaps citizenship rights for all are a condition of the enduring wealth of nations."¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, both have more often than not been at odds. Dahrendorf's *Modern Social Conflict*, is not simply a "plea for a new emphasis on citizenship." In achieving this objective, he calls for "strategic changes which extend people's choices by enabling more people to choose."¹⁰² However, in seeking such strategic changes, one must be wary there is no one valid answer to the problem. Dahrendorf's view instead is that "the politics of liberty is the politics of living with conflict. Diversity and equality

each have their place in a constitution which seeks the greatest life chances of all."¹⁰³

Dahrendorf would see the views such as those advocated by Debord as "the extreme version of the politics of cultural despair"¹⁰⁴ and this, he believes, is incompatible with the politics of liberty for there is a long way to go to achieving a world civil society. Dahrendorf advocates a constitutional liberalism "which is as interested in the method of progress as in the next steps along the way." The Modern Social Conflict thus focuses on citizenship, life chances and liberty.

CRITIQUE

Dahrendorf's essay emphasizes citizenship which is to be achieved by extending people's choices by enabling more people to choose. Like Galbraith, he is concerned about the modern world focus on increased flexibility, reduced social services and tax cuts, while the number of poor are growing. Dahrendorf seeks to address contemporary problems and points out the goals for which liberal democracies should be striving. He does not seek visions of a perfect society but calls for progress, and offers a direction in which to head.

Dahrendorf has called for a new emphasis on liberty which requires not only change and innovation, but prosperity and citizenship rights for all. Throughout history, the advance of both prosperity and citizenship rights by one set of policies or by one group remains rare. Usually, those

advocating more choice have fought against those advocating more rights. Dahrendorf advocates that both are necessary to improve the human life chances of every human being. By no means does he see this as a simple solution. Indeed, for him, liberty requires living with conflict for equality and diversity both have their rightful place in a constitution which aims to provide the greatest life chances for all. In his views, man requires a larger vision of civil society in order to identify himself for what people are comes from a joint reflection of how they live in the ordinary everyday world. This larger vision of civil society is one which would include every human being.

Dahrendorf has pointed out formidable new problems that economic growth can no longer solve because it no longer necessarily provides the answer to unemployment. Despite progress made in equality, there are new entitlement issues. Employment has now become the entry ticket to the world of provisions. Dahrendorf is disturbed by the growing number of permanently unemployed, people whom the majority class has no interest in assisting, and he strives to fight against this situation. He also expresses concern about accommodating the separatism of minorities, the denial of civil rights to immigrants and he fears anomy, the collapse of social norms that occurs when the basic rules of law and order are not enforced and offenses go unpunished. Finally, Dahrendorf pleads for a world civil society where human rights are

universally recognized and an effort is made to bring economic development and full citizenship to the countries of the Third World.

His is an ambitious agenda which points out the insufficiency of the neo-conservative programs as well as the undesirability of returning to the social democratic program. Dahrendorf has exposed the severe problems Western countries are facing today and while his agenda is clear, he does not offer an actual program nor a detailed course of action, but seeks some sort of new radical liberalism which concentrates the attention of politics on balancing both entitlements and provisions. In his defence however, as Dahrendorf himself explains, an exact formula for achieving a just society is not possible, for no one can know the exact way forward. The real world is full of conflicts and diversity and it is within such a world that entitlements and provisions must be balanced.

Dahrendorf demonstrates the neither past attempts by social democracy to achieve a just society nor the attempts by neo-conservatives to solve some of the problems created by the welfare state, offers a solution to present problems. Importantly, he points out that the present employment crisis offers the possibility for change within civil society. For instance, it makes possible a radically different relationship between working time and income. It facilitates an equal reduction and redistribution of paid employment through the gradual development of schemes which would allow currently

unemployed to engage in productive activity, guaranteeing individuals rights to withdraw temporarily from employment. Once the problems are addressed, the way forward is the next step. Dahrendorf points towards that way forward. if society is to move in the right direction, it does require concerned citizens and leadership.

A discussion of Dahrendorf's call for a world civil society would take the reader off the main focus of this paper, that is, a vision of liberalism which offers the direction of civil society given the contemporary problems of the growing functionless underclass. Given his approach of examining the world as it is however, and rejecting a perfect world view, it would be fair to assume that Dahrendorf's call for a world civil society would avoid a too big a gap between what is and what ought to be. it is not implausible to believe that ways can be sought to reach a stage in international affairs where protecting the good of the nation is not incompatible with the good of mankind.

Dahrendorf seeks to be realistic while at the same time reconciling reality with the demands of morality. He offers a non-nationalistic and non-perfectionist ethic which accepts society as it is, both as a point of departure and as the material to work not just with but on. His approach is non-nationalistic because while he aims at realism by recognizing that there is no one way to achieve the perfect society, that our attempts should be to seek a more just

society, he refuses to sanctify the present situation of the poor and lack of human rights for all and recognizes the need to go beyond our own borders. At the same time, his approach is non-perfectionist because he starts from examining societies as they are, and acknowledges that disparities cannot be washed away in one fell swoop, but lessening disparities are goals to which we should be striving. Therefore, it is important to examine how power and inequalities generated by it can be turned to advantage in terms of liberty.

Civil society is an inclusive concept for Dahrendorf, which cannot be set apart from governmental institutions, because members of civil society possess entitlements that become social norms, and these are enforced by sanctions and protected by institutions. Differentiating between civil society and the state then is a useless exercise which does not address what must be done. The importance of civil society is that it must be used to bridge the gap between economic growth, prosperity and distribution on the one hand, and unemployment and poverty on the other.

NOTES

1. Dahrendorf, Ralf, The Modern Social Conflict: An Essay on the Politics of Liberty (New York: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1988), P. ix.
2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 4.
4. Ibid., p. 3.
5. Ibid., p. 12.
6. Ibid., p. 16.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 37.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 27.
12. Ibid., p. 28.
13. Ibid., p. 39.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 40.
17. Ibid., 37.
18. Ibid., p. 42.
19. Ibid., p. 24.
20. Ibid., p. 34.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid, pp. 34 - 35.
23. Ibid., p. 32.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p. 36.
28. Ibid., p. 45.

29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 46.
31. Ibid., p. x.
31. Ibid., p. 46.
33. Ibid., p. 46.
34. Ibid., p. 70.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p. 71.
37. Ibid., p. 73.
38. Ibid., p. 75.
39. Ibid., p. 86.
40. Ibid., p. 91.
41. Ibid., p. 92.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., p. 105.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., p. 111.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., p. 112.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., p. 117.
52. Ibid., p. 116.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., p. 123.

55. Ibid., pp. 132-133.
56. Ibid., p. 131.
57. Ibid., p. 167.
58. Ibid., p. 133.
59. Ibid., p. 170.
60. Ibid., p. 141.
61. Ibid., p. 143.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., p. 144.
65. Ibid., p. 148.
66. Ibid., p. 149.
67. Ibid., p. 151.
68. Ibid., p. 153.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., p. 158.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid., p. 161.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid., p. 164.
75. Ibid., p. 161.
76. Ibid., p. 164.
77. Ibid., p. 165.
78. Ibid., p. 156.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid., p. 157.
81. Ibid., p. 158.

82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. ibid.
85. Ibid., p. 174.
86. Ibid., p. 175.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., p. 122.
89. Ibid., p. 123.
90. Ibid., p. 176.
91. Ibid., p. 178.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.
94. ibid.
95. Ibid., p. 186.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid., p. 187.
99. Ibid., p. 188.
100. Ibid., p. 193.
101. Ibid., p. 1.
102. Ibid., p. 1.
103. Ibid., p. xi.
104. Ibid., p. xiii.

CONCLUSION

The numbers of unemployed and poor have been on the increase in the last few decades, and it has affected everyone. Those who have lived in relative security in the past have been catapulted into poverty because of plant shut-downs, abandonment of one-industry towns and cuts in social programs. Everyone is affected by the insecurity of being at the whim of a market over which no one seems to have any control. Unemployment and poverty deprives people of adequate income for basic necessities. It undermines self-esteem and dignity.

The neo-conservative free market ideology has been increasingly endorsed by our governments, who capitulate to the free market forces as the only means for recovering from the deep economic recession and they wait for the Gross National Product to grow and restore jobs. The market ideology has flourished among government and business at a time when we are more aware that we have been unable to advance human development among all people. Thus, we are living under an equilibrium democracy, as MacPherson has labelled it, and the ethical side of liberalism is all but disappearing.

Under modern economic liberalism, Debord sees man as

working not merely to maintain his family, but to acquire houses, cars, television sets and other material possessions that will give us a sense of social superiority over less diligent or talented neighbours. The strife for distinction through consumption and possession is the greatest single incentive to the production of goods. Citizens are nothing more than consumers, spectators of goods. There is no ethical component to the liberal system where political society is treated in simply a market-like relation between citizen's demands and the suppliers of political commodities where, for Debord, the life of citizen has been replaced by the life of active consumer.

For Debord, our society is just a spectacle of mindless consumption which has gone beyond the grasp of thoughtful citizenship. However, society has been complicated by the increase in the numbers of the impoverished class of unemployed and poor, who seem to have little opportunity for being useful in society. As a result of the problem of the growing underclass of poor and unemployed, many find themselves outside the parameters of society. Galbraith has pointed out that a small portion of society has lapsed into self-serving economic and social status, while at the same time the numbers of those caught in a vicious cycle of poverty are increasing. Debord's thesis has ignored these people, where are they and what is to be done with them?

Galbraith has explained that the wealthy have come to

dominate the political arena and do so in order to guarantee their continued comfort at the expense of the less fortunate. However, people's lives cannot be abandoned to the free market because any newly created wealth seems to be going into the pockets of those already wealthy or have security in their employment. This is hardly democratic and our liberal system is failing for it simply responds to the demands of those with purchasing power to back them. As MacPherson explains, "the sovereignty of an aggregate of such unequal consumers is not evidently democratic." ¹

Since promised social programs are being slowly eroded, and because of the growing struggle for scarce jobs, a new ethic of self-interest and group greed appears to be on the rise. Never before has such cynicism been prevalent towards our institutions and governments. Voting has become an idle exercise for the growing functionless underclass. The question then becomes how can a liberal democratic system be achieved when the numbers of those who are left out of the general parameters of society are increasing, where only the demands of the wealthy for continued affluence and comfort are met?

Bobbio attempted to find a system which would not lapse into dictatorship but would solve the present shortcomings of our liberal democratic system. He believes liberalism is the only system that provides the freedom to exercise democratic power which in turn guarantees that our

basic liberties will be continued. He points out some of the problems with modern democratic societies, that it has been overloaded and bogged down with bureaucracy, and recognizes that it has failed to eliminate the influence on decision making that certain individuals have as a result of inequalities in wealth, power and knowledge. However, for Bobbio, liberalism remains the strongest antidote to the abuse of power. He seeks to bring the liberal and socialist traditions together through a principle of distributive justice.

Bobbio's claim that people are demanding an equal redistribution of wealth to eliminate inequalities, however, is not an accurate understanding of the times. He and Rawls call for a well-ordered society that will not generate feelings of envy which our present liberal system appears to exacerbate. Rawls' just society would achieve this because it upholds one's self-esteem from a common sense of justice where all are equal and rights are perceived to be fair. Under his system, no one would feel inferior. Such a utopian system which would de-envify people is highly improbable. Furthermore, how this just society would address the increasing rates of unemployment, when employment is one of the chief sources of our self-esteem, is not considered.

While Bobbio seeks to embrace every individual by expanding areas of democratic decision making and through some sort of new social contract, his scheme does not address the

contemporary problems of the increasing functionless underclass. He seeks to democratize institutions outside of politics, such as family, work and education. However, how the poor and unemployed, who are not participants in these spheres, will fit in is not addressed. Therefore, Bobbio's and Rawls' schemes do not offer genuine promise to liberals who think that society can again become integrated and address its real problems while protecting individual liberty.

I believe that Ralf Dahrendorf offers a direction for the future by not providing an exact formula, but by pointing towards the way forward. Dahrendorf calls to put back the ethical component into liberalism. While he recognizes the continual conflict between strict adherence to market rules and to providing a society in which all citizens are free to realize their capabilities, he advocates that choices, change and innovation, and rights, prosperity and citizenship rights for all, are necessary to improve everyone's life chances. He does not see the conflict between the market side of liberalism and the ethical side of liberalism as necessarily bad, for this conflict aims to provide the greatest life chances for all. While Dahrendorf recognizes that inequalities emerge from power which creates interest in the status quo, he also believes that conflict creates interest in change.

Liberalism can offer new responses to the new problems of society, and Dahrendorf believes that liberalism does have

a future, that liberalism can and must mean more than enforcing the minimal rules of the competitive arena, and that liberalism through strategic changes as pointed out in his essay can address the needs of society as it changes.

Dahrendorf calls for a larger vision of civil society to include every human being. He identifies the problems of our modern liberal societies, problems which economic growth can no longer solve. He further recognizes that neither past social democratic attempts towards achieving a just society, nor the neo-conservative agenda, offers a solution to present problems. For him, the present crisis offers a possibility for change.

Liberty for Dahrendorf will always allow some medium of inequality, but it must be an inequality of provisions, not entitlements. Through civil society and citizenship we can bridge the gap between economic growth, prosperity and distribution, and unemployment and poverty. He seeks a civil society in which equal rights are protected in a constitutional framework which domesticates power. Therefore, the free market must be limited within a strong legal framework which places it at the service of human freedom and the good of society.

Liberalism is the only solution for Dahrendorf since it insists only on progress in the interests of extending the life chances of individuals to as many people as possible. The task of liberal policy is to work towards basic common

entitlements for all citizens. This requires leadership and popular input as well as alertness on our part to defend institutions of liberty, for the politics of liberty is not a luxury.

The neo-conservatives wish to depoliticize civil society. They stress identifying the freedom of civil society with that of the market. Dahrendorf does not believe that it can be depoliticized because members of civil society possess entitlements that become social norms which are in turn enforced by sanctions and protected by our institutions. He also recognizes that freedom means nothing to those who lack entitlements. Civil society must be used to bridge the gap between the market which supplies provisions, and those who are unemployed and poor.

People's lives cannot be abandoned to the free market. The market is useful, but only if human needs are the central goal. It cannot be entrusted to solve our social problems. All governments and citizens must face the moral challenges given the rapid globalization of the economy and the deindustrialization of our society which has left millions without their former place and role. Indeed, "in the final analysis, a just and peaceful world can be built only on the twin pillars of respect for the human dignity of every person on the planet, and global solidarity which takes seriously the fact that we are one human family."²

This is what Dahrendorf believes and he urges us all

to be vigilant and to strive to ensure that all members of society participate in the liberal democratic community.

NOTES

1. MacPherson, C.B., The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy, p. 87.
2. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Message by the Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs." The Edmonton Journal, 18 April 1993

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