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This

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C. WRIGHT MILLS

From *The Power Elite*

THE POWERS of ordinary men are circumscribed by the everyday worlds in which they live, yet even in these rounds of job, family, and neighborhood they often seem driven by forces they can neither understand nor govern. "Great changes" are beyond their control, but affect their conduct and outlook none the less. The very framework of modern society confines them to projects not their own, but from every side, such changes now press upon the men and women of the mass society, who accordingly feel that they are without purpose in an epoch in which they are without power.

But not all men are in this sense ordinary. As the means of information and of power are centralized, some men come to occupy positions in American society from which they can look

down upon, so to speak, and by their decisions mightily affect, the everyday worlds of ordinary men and women. They are not made by their jobs; they set up and break down jobs for thousands of others; they are not confined by simple family responsibilities; they can escape. They may live in many hotels and houses, but they are bound by no one community. They need not merely "meet the demands of the day and hour"; in some part, they create these demands, and cause others to meet them. Whether or not they profess their power, their technical and political experience of it far transcends that of the underlying population. What Jacob Burckhardt said of "great men," most Americans might well say of their elite: "They are all that we are not."

The power elite is composed of men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences. Whether they do or do not make such decisions is less important than the fact that they do occupy such pivotal positions: their failure to act, their failure to make decisions, is itself an act that is often of greater consequence than the decisions they do make. For they are in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society. They rule the big corporations. They run the machinery of the state and claim its prerogatives. They direct the military establishment. They occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure, in which are now centered the effective means of the power and the wealth and the celebrity which they enjoy.

The power elite are not solitary rulers. Advisers and consultants, spokesmen and opinion-makers are often the captains of their higher thought and decision. Immediately below the elite are the professional politicians of the middle levels of power, in the Congress and in the pressure groups, as well as among the new and old upper classes of town and city and region. Mingling with them, in curious ways which we shall explore, are those professional celebrities who live by being continually displayed but are never, so long as they remain celebrities, displayed enough. If such celebrities are not at the head of any dominating hierarchy, they do often have the power to distract the attention of the public or afford sensations to the masses, or, more directly, to gain the ear of those who do occupy positions of direct power. More or less unattached, as critics of morality and technicians of power, as spokesmen of God and creators of mass sensibility, such celebrities

and consultants are part of the immediate scene in which the drama of the elite is enacted. But that drama itself is centered in the command posts of the major institutional hierarchies.

The truth about the nature and the power of the elite is not some secret which men of affairs know but will not tell. Such men hold quite various theories about their own roles in the sequence of event and decision. Often they are uncertain about their roles, and even more often they allow their fears and their hopes to affect their assessment of their own power. No matter how great their actual power, they tend to be less acutely aware of it than of the resistances of others to its use. Moreover, most American men of affairs have learned well the rhetoric of public relations, in some cases even to the point of using it when they are alone, and thus coming to believe it. The personal awareness of the actors is only one of the several sources one must examine in order to understand the higher circles. Yet many who believe that there is no elite, or at any rate none of any consequence, rest their argument upon what men of affairs believe about themselves, or at least assert in public.

There is, however, another view: those who feel, even if vaguely, that a compact and powerful elite of great importance does now prevail in America often base that feeling upon the historical trend of our time. They have felt, for example, the domination of the military event, and from this they infer that generals and admirals, as well as other men of decision influenced by them, must be enormously powerful. They hear that the Congress has again abdicated to a handful of men decisions clearly related to the issue of war or peace. They know that the bomb was dropped over Japan in the name of the United States of America, although they were at no time consulted about the matter. They feel that they live in a time of big decisions; they know that they are not making any. Accordingly, as they consider the present as history, they infer that at its center, making decisions or failing to make them, there must be an elite of power.

On the one hand, those who share this feeling about big historical events assume that there is an elite and that its power is great. On the other hand, those who listen carefully to the reports of men apparently involved in the great decisions often do not believe that there is an elite whose powers are of decisive consequence.

Both views must be taken into account, but neither is adequate. The way to understand the power of the American elite lies neither solely in recognizing the historic scale of events nor in accepting the personal awareness reported by men of apparent decision. Behind such men and behind the events of history, linking the two, are the major institutions of modern society. These hierarchies of state and corporation and army constitute the means of power; as such they are now of a consequence not before equaled in human history—and at their summits, there are now those command posts of modern society which offer us the sociological key to an understanding of the role of the higher circles in America.

Within American society, major national power now resides in the economic, the political, and the military domains. Other institutions seem off to the side of modern history, and, on occasion, duly subordinated to these. No family is as directly powerful in national affairs as any major corporation; no church is as directly powerful in the external biographies of young men in America today as the military establishment; no college is as powerful in the shaping of momentous events as the National Security Council. Religious, educational, and family institutions are not autonomous centers of national power; on the contrary, these decentralized areas are increasingly shaped by the big three, in which developments of decisive and immediate consequence now occur.

Families and churches and schools adapt to modern life; governments and armies and corporations shape it; and, as they do so, they turn these lesser institutions into means for their ends. Religious institutions provide chaplains to the armed forces where they are used as a means of increasing the effectiveness of its morale to kill. Schools select and train men for their jobs in corporations and their specialized tasks in the armed forces. The extended family has, of course, long been broken up by the industrial revolution, and now the son and the father are removed from the family, by compulsion if need be, whenever the army of the state sends out the call. And the symbols of all these lesser institutions are used to legitimate the power and the decisions of the big three.

The life-fate of the modern individual depends not only upon the family into which he was born or which he enters by marriage, but increasingly upon the corporation in which he spends the most alert hours of his best years; not only upon the school where he is educated as a child and adolescent, but also upon the state which

touches him throughout his life; not only upon the church in which on occasion he hears the word of God, but also upon the army in which he is disciplined.

If the centralized state could not rely upon the inculcation of nationalist loyalties in public and private schools, its leaders would promptly seek to modify the decentralized educational system. If the bankruptcy rate among the top five hundred corporations were as high as the general divorce rate among the thirty-seven million married couples, there would be economic catastrophe on an international scale. If members of armies gave to them no more of their lives than do believers to the churches to which they belong, there would be a military crisis.

Within each of the big three, the typical institutional unit has become enlarged, has become administrative, and, in the power of its decisions, has become centralized. Behind these developments there is a fabulous technology, for as institutions, they have incorporated this technology and guide it, even as it shapes and paces their developments.

The economy—once a great scatter of small productive units in autonomous balance—has become dominated by two or three hundred giant corporations, administratively and politically inter-related, which together hold the keys to economic decisions.

The political order, once a decentralized set of several dozen states with a weak spinal cord, has become a centralized, executive establishment which has taken up into itself many powers previously scattered, and now enters into each and every cranny of the social structure.

The military order, once a slim establishment in a context of distrust fed by state militia, has become the largest and most expensive feature of government, and, although well versed in smiling public relations, now has all the grim and clumsy efficiency of a sprawling bureaucratic domain.

In each of these institutional areas, the means of power at the disposal of decision makers have increased enormously; their central executive powers have been enhanced; within each of them modern administrative routines have been elaborated and tightened up.

As each of these domains becomes enlarged and centralized, the consequences of its activities become greater, and its traffic with the others increases. The decisions of a handful of corporations bear upon military and political as well as upon economic develop-

ments around the world. The decisions of the military establishment rest upon and grievously affect political life as well as the very level of economic activity. The decisions made within the political domain determine economic activities and military programs. There is no longer, on the one hand, an economy, and, on the other hand, a political order containing a military establishment unimportant to politics and to money-making. There is a political economy linked, in a thousand ways, with military institutions and decisions. On each side of the world-split running through central Europe and around the Asiatic rimlands, there is an ever-increasing interlocking of economic, military, and political structures. If there is government intervention in the corporate economy, so is there corporate intervention in the governmental process. In the structural sense, this triangle of power is the source of the interlocking directorate that is most important for the historical structure of the present.

The fact of the interlocking is clearly revealed at each of the points of crisis of modern capitalist society—slump, war, and boom. In each, men of decision are led to an awareness of the interdependence of the major institutional orders. In the nineteenth century, when the scale of all institutions was smaller, their liberal integration was achieved in the automatic economy, by an autonomous play of market forces, and in the automatic political domain, by the bargain and the vote. It was then assumed that out of the imbalance and friction that followed the limited decisions then possible a new equilibrium would in due course emerge. That can no longer be assumed, and it is not assumed by the men at the top of each of the three dominant hierarchies.

For given the scope of their consequences, decisions—and indecisions—in any one of these ramify into the others, and hence top decisions tend either to become co-ordinated or to lead to a commanding indecision. It has not always been like this. When numerous small entrepreneurs made up the economy, for example, many of them could fail and the consequences still remain local; political and military authorities did not intervene. But now, given political expectations and military commitments, can they afford to allow key units of the private corporate economy to break down in slump? Increasingly, they do intervene in economic affairs, and as they do so, the controlling decisions in each order are inspected by agents of the other two, and economic, military, and political structures are interlocked.

At the pinnacle of each of the three enlarged and centralized domains, there have arisen those higher circles which make up the economic, the political, and the military elites. At the top of the economy, among the corporate rich, there are the chief executives; at the top of the political order, the members of the political directorate; at the top of the military establishment, the elite of soldier-statesmen clustered in and around the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the upper echelon. As each of these domains has coincided with the others, as decisions tend to become total in their consequence, the leading men in each of the three domains of power—the warlords, the corporation chieftains, the political directorate—tend to come together, to form the power elite of America.

The conception of the power elite and of its unity rests upon the corresponding developments and the coincidence of interests among economic, political, and military organizations. It also rests upon the similarity of origin and outlook, and the social and personal intermingling of the top circles from each of these dominant hierarchies. This conjunction of institutional and psychological forces, in turn, is revealed by the heavy personnel traffic within and between the big three institutional orders, as well as by the rise of go-betweens as in the high-level lobbying. The conception of the power elite, accordingly, does *not* rest upon the assumption that American history since the origins of World War II must be understood as a secret plot, or as a great and co-ordinated conspiracy of the members of this elite. The conception rests upon quite impersonal grounds.

There is, however, little doubt that the American power elite—which contains, we are told, some of “the greatest organizers in the world”—has also planned and has plotted. The rise of the elite, as we have already made clear, was not and could not have been caused by a plot; and the tenability of the conception does not rest upon the existence of any secret or any publicly known organization. But, once the conjunction of structural trend and of the personal will to utilize it gave rise to the power elite, then plans and programs did occur to its members and indeed it is not possible to interpret many events and official policies of the fifth epoch without reference to the power elite. “There is a great difference,” Richard Hofstadter has remarked, “between locating conspiracies *in* history and saying that history *is*, in effect, a conspiracy ...”

The structural trends of institutions become defined as opportunities by those who occupy their command posts. Once such opportunities are recognized, men may avail themselves of them. Certain types of men from each of the dominant institutional areas, more far-sighted than others, have actively promoted the liaison before it took its truly modern shape. They have often done so for reasons not shared by their partners, although not objected to by them either; and often the outcome of their liaison has had consequences which none of them foresaw, much less shaped, and which only later in the course of development came under explicit control. Only after it was well under way did most of its members find themselves part of it and become gladdened, although sometimes also worried, by this fact. But once the co-ordination is a going concern, new men come readily into it and assume its existence without question.

So far as explicit organization—conspiratorial or not—is concerned, the power elite, by its very nature, is more likely to use existing organizations, working within and between them, than to set up explicit organizations whose membership is strictly limited to its own members. But if there is no machinery in existence to ensure, for example, that military and political factors will be balanced in decisions made, they will invent such machinery and use it, as with the National Security Council. Moreover, in a formally democratic polity, the aims and the powers of the various elements of this elite are further supported by an aspect of the permanent war economy: the assumption that the security of the nation supposedly rests upon great secrecy of plan and intent. Many higher events that would reveal the working of the power elite can be withheld from public knowledge under the guise of secrecy. With the wide secrecy covering their operations and decisions, the power elite can mask their intentions, operations, and further consolidation. Any secrecy that is imposed upon those in positions to observe high decision-makers clearly works for and not against the operations of the power elite.

There is accordingly reason to suspect—but by the nature of the case, no proof—that the power elite is not altogether “surfaced.” There is nothing hidden about it, although its activities are not publicized. As an elite, it is not organized, although its members often know one another, seem quite naturally to work together, and share many organizations in common. There is nothing conspiratorial about it, although its decisions are often publicly un-

known and its mode of operation manipulative rather than explicit.

It is not that the elite "believe in" a compact elite behind the scenes and a mass down below. It is not put in that language. It is just that the people are of necessity confused and must, like trusting children, place all the new world of foreign policy and strategy and executive action in the hands of experts. It is just that everyone knows somebody has got to run the show, and that somebody usually does. Others do not really care anyway, and besides, they do not know how. So the gap between the two types gets wider.

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ROBERT DAHL

The Ambiguity of Leadership

From *Who Governs?*

IN A POLITICAL SYSTEM where nearly every adult may vote but where knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials, and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually governs?

The question has been asked, I imagine, wherever popular government has developed and intelligent citizens have reached the stage of critical self-consciousness concerning their society. It must have been put many times in Athens even before it was posed by Plato and Aristotle.

The question is peculiarly relevant to the United States and to Americans. . . . Americans espouse democratic beliefs with a fervency and a unanimity that have been a regular source of astonishment to foreign observers . . . [such as] Tocqueville and Bryce. . . .

Now it has always been held that if equality of power among citizens is possible at all—a point on which many political philosophers have had grave doubts—then surely considerable equality of social conditions is a necessary prerequisite. But if, even in America, with its universal creed of democracy and equality, there are great inequalities in the conditions of different citizens, must there not also be great inequalities in the capacities of different citizens

to influence the decisions of their various governments? And if, because they are unequal in other conditions, citizens of a democracy are unequal in power to control their government, then who in fact does govern? How does a "democratic" system work amid inequality of resources? These are the questions I want to explore by examining one urban American community, New Haven, Connecticut. . . . In the course of the past two centuries, New Haven has gradually changed from oligarchy to pluralism. Accompanying and probably causing this change—one might properly call it a revolution—appears to be a profound alteration in the way political resources are distributed among the citizens of New Haven. This silent socioeconomic revolution has not substituted equality for inequality so much as it has involved a shift from cumulative inequalities in political resources . . . to noncumulative or dispersed inequalities. This point will grow clearer as we proceed.

The main evidence for the shift from oligarchy to pluralism is found in changes in the social characteristics of elected officials in New Haven since 1784, the year the city was first incorporated after a century and a half as colony and town. . . .

In the political system of the patrician oligarchy, political resources were marked by a cumulative inequality: when one individual was much better off than another in one resource, such as wealth, he was usually better off in almost every other resource—social standing, legitimacy, control over religious and educational institutions, knowledge, office. In the political system of today, inequalities in political resources remain, but they tend to be *noncumulative*. The political system of New Haven, then, is one of *dispersed inequalities*.

The patrician-Congregationalist-Federalist elite that ruled New Haven prior to 1840 was a tiny group that combined the highest social standing, education, and wealth with key positions in religion, the economy, and public life. The entrepreneurs drove a wedge into this unified elite; social standing and education remained with the patricians, but wealth and key positions in corporate and public life went to the new men of industry. With the rise of the ex-plebes there occurred a further fragmentation of political resources. Rising out of the newly created urban proletariat, of immigrant backgrounds and modest social standing, the ex-plebes had one political resource of extraordinary importance in a competitive political system: they were popular with the voters. Popularity gave them office, and office gave them other political resources,

such as legality and city jobs. Office, legality, and jobs gave the ex-plebes influence over government decisions.

Within a century a political system dominated by one cohesive set of leaders had given way to a system dominated by many different sets of leaders, each having access to a different combination of political resources. It was, in short, a pluralist system. If the pluralist system was very far from being an oligarchy, it was also a long way from achieving the goal of political equality advocated by the philosophers of democracy and incorporated into the creed of democracy and equality practically every American professes to uphold.

An elite no longer rules New Haven. But in the strict democratic sense, the disappearance of elite rule has not led to the emergence of rule by the people. Who, then, rules in a pluralist democracy?...

One of the difficulties that confronts anyone who attempts to answer the question, "Who rules in a pluralist democracy?" is the ambiguous relationship of leaders to citizens.

Viewed from one position, leaders are enormously influential—so influential that if they are seen only in this perspective they might well be considered a kind of ruling elite. Viewed from another position, however, many influential leaders seem to be captives of their constituents. Like the blind men with the elephant, different analysts have meticulously examined different aspects of the body politic and arrived at radically different conclusions. To some, a pluralistic democracy with dispersed inequalities is all head and no body; to others it is all body and no head.

Ambiguity in the relations of leaders and constituents is generated by several closely connected obstacles both to observation and to clear conceptualization. To begin with, the American creed of democracy and equality prescribes many forms and procedures from which the actual practices of leaders diverge. Consequently, to gain legitimacy for their actions leaders frequently surround their covert behavior with democratic rituals. These rituals not only serve to disguise reality and thus to complicate the task of observation and analysis, but—more important—in complex ways the very existence of democratic rituals, norms, and requirements of legitimacy based on a widely shared creed actually influences the behavior of both leaders and constituents even when democratic norms are violated. Thus the distinction between the rituals of

power and the realities of power is frequently obscure.

Two additional factors help to account for this obscurity. First, among all the persons who influence a decision, some do so more directly than others in the sense that they are closer to the stage where concrete alternatives are initiated or vetoed in an explicit and immediate way. Indirect influence might be very great but comparatively difficult to observe and weigh. Yet to ignore indirect influence in analysis of the distribution of influence would be to exclude what might well prove to be a highly significant process of control in a pluralistic democracy.

Second, the relationship between leaders and citizens in a pluralistic democracy is frequently reciprocal: leaders influence the decisions of constituents, but the decisions of leaders are also determined in part by what they think are, will be, or have been the preferences of their constituents. Ordinarily it is much easier to observe and describe the distribution of influence in a political system where the flow of influence is strongly in one direction (an asymmetrical or unilateral system, as it is sometimes called) than in a system marked by strong reciprocal relations. In a political system with competitive elections, such as New Haven's, it is not unreasonable to expect that relationships between leaders and constituents would normally be reciprocal. . . .

In New Haven, as in other political systems, a small stratum of individuals is much more highly involved in political thought, discussion, and action than the rest of the population. These citizens constitute the political stratum.

Members of this stratum live in a political subculture that is partly but not wholly shared by the great majority of citizens. Just as artists and intellectuals are the principal bearers of the artistic, literary, and scientific skills of a society, so the members of the political stratum are the main bearers of political skills. If intellectuals were to vanish overnight, a society would be reduced to artistic, literary, and scientific poverty. If the political stratum were destroyed, the previous political institutions of the society would temporarily stop functioning. In both cases, the speed with which the loss could be overcome would depend on the extent to which the elementary knowledge and basic attitudes of the elite had been diffused. In an open society with widespread education and training in civic attitudes, many citizens hitherto in the apolitical strata could doubtless step into roles that had been filled by members of

the political stratum. However, sharp discontinuities and important changes in the operation of the political system almost certainly would occur.

In New Haven, as in the United States, and indeed perhaps in all pluralistic democracies, differences in the subcultures of the political and the apolitical strata are marked, particularly at the extremes. In the political stratum, politics is highly salient; among the apolitical strata, it is remote. In the political stratum, individuals tend to be rather calculating in their choice of strategies; members of the political stratum are, in a sense, relatively rational political beings. In the apolitical strata, people are notably less calculating; their political choices are more strongly influenced by inertia, habit, unexamined loyalties, personal attachments, emotions, transient impulses. In the political stratum, an individual's political beliefs tend to fall into patterns that have a relatively high degree of coherence and internal consistency; in the apolitical strata, political orientations are disorganized, disconnected, and unideological. In the political stratum, information about politics and the issues of the day is extensive; the apolitical strata are poorly informed. Individuals in the political stratum tend to participate rather actively in politics; in the apolitical strata citizens rarely go beyond voting and many do not even vote. Individuals in the political stratum exert a good deal of steady, direct, and active influence on government policy; in fact some individuals have a quite extraordinary amount of influence. Individuals in the apolitical strata, on the other hand, have much less direct or active influence on policies.

Communication within the political stratum tends to be rapid and extensive. Members of the stratum read many of the same newspapers and magazines; in New Haven, for example, they are likely to read the *New York Times* or the *Herald Tribune*, and *Time* or *Newsweek*. Much information also passes by word of mouth. The political strata of different communities and regions are linked in a national network of communications. Even in small towns, one or two members of the local political stratum usually are in touch with members of a state organization, and certain members of the political stratum of a state or any large city maintain relations with members of organizations in other states and cities, or with national figures. Moreover, many channels of communication not designed specifically for political purposes—trade associations, professional associations, and labor organizations, for example—serve as a part of the network of the political stratum.

In many pluralistic systems, however, the political stratum is far from being a closed or static group. In the United States the political stratum does not constitute a homogeneous class with well-defined class interests. In New Haven, in fact, the political stratum is easily penetrated by anyone whose interests and concerns attract him to the distinctive political culture of the stratum. It is easily penetrated because (among other reasons) elections and competitive parties give politicians a powerful motive for expanding their coalitions and increasing their electoral followings.

In an open pluralistic system, where movement into the political stratum is easy, the stratum embodies many of the most widely shared values and goals in the society. If popular values are strongly pragmatic, then the political stratum is likely to be pragmatic; if popular values prescribe reverence toward the past, then the political stratum probably shares that reverence; if popular values are oriented toward material gain and personal advancement, then the political stratum probably reflects these values; if popular values are particularly favorable to political, social, or economic equality, then the political stratum is likely to emphasize equality. The apolitical strata can be said to "govern" as much through the sharing of common values and goals with members of the political stratum as by other means. However, if it were not for elections and competitive parties, this sharing would—other things remaining the same—rapidly decline.

Not only is the political stratum in New Haven not a closed group, but its "members" are far from united in their orientations and strategies. There are many lines of cleavage. The most apparent and probably the most durable are symbolized by affiliations with different political parties. Political parties are rival coalitions of leaders and subleaders drawn from the members of the political stratum. Leaders in a party coalition seek to win elections, capture the chief elective offices of government, and insure that government officials will legalize and enforce policies on which the coalition leaders can agree.

In any given period of time, various issues are salient within the political stratum. Indeed, a political issue can hardly be said to exist unless and until it commands the attention of a significant segment of the political stratum. Out of all the manifold possibilities, members of the political stratum seize upon some issues as important or profitable; these then become the subject of attention within the political stratum. To be sure, all the members of the

political stratum may not initially agree that a particular issue is worthy of attention. But whenever a sizable minority of the legitimate elements in the political stratum is determined to bring some question to the fore, the chances are high that the rest of the political stratum will soon begin to pay attention. . . .

In any durable association of more than a handful of individuals, typically a relatively small proportion of the people exercises relatively great direct influence over all the important choices bearing on the life of the association—its survival, for example, or its share in such community resources as wealth, power, and esteem, or the way these resources are shared within the association, or changes in the structure, activities, and dominant goals of the association, and so on. These persons are, by definition, the leaders. . . .

The goals and motives that animate leaders are evidently as varied as the dreams of men. They include greater income, wealth, economic security, power, social standing, fame, respect, affection, love, knowledge, curiosity, fun, the pleasure of exercising skill, delight in winning, esthetic satisfaction, morality, salvation, heroism, self-sacrifice, envy, jealousy, revenge, hate—whatever the whole wide range may be. Popular beliefs and folklore to the contrary, there is no convincing evidence at present that any single common denominator of motives can be singled out in leaders of associations. We are not compelled, therefore, to accept the simple view that Moses, Jesus, Caligula, Savonarola, St. Ignatius, Abraham Lincoln, Boss Tweed, Mahatma Gandhi, Carrie Chapman Catt, Huey Long, and Joseph Stalin all acted from essentially the same motives.

To achieve their goals, leaders develop plans of action, or strategies. But actions take place in a universe of change and uncertainty; goals themselves emerge, take shape, and shift with new experiences. Hence a choice among strategies is necessarily based more on hunch, guesswork, impulse, and the assessment of imponderables than on scientific predictions. Adopting a strategy is a little bit like deciding how to look for a fuse box in a strange house on a dark night after all the lights have blown.

Ordinarily the goals and strategies of leaders require services from other individuals. (Both Christ and Lenin needed disciples to increase and rally their followers.) To perform these services more or less regularly, reliably, and skillfully, auxiliaries or subleaders are needed. The tasks of subleaders include aid in formulating strategies and policies; carrying out the dull, routine, time-consum-

ing or highly specialized work of the eternal spear bearers, the doorbell ringers, the file clerks; recruiting and mobilizing the following; and, in a country like the United States where there exists a strong democratic ethos, helping by their very existence to furnish legitimacy to the actions of the leaders by providing a democratic façade.

To secure the services of subleaders, leaders must reward them in some fashion. Here too the range of rewards seems to be as broad as the spectrum of human motives. However, some kinds of rewards are easier to manipulate than others. In business organizations, the rewards are mainly financial ones, which are probably the easiest of all to manipulate. In many other kinds of associations—and evidently to some extent even in business—either financial rewards are too low to attract and hold subleaders capable of performing the tasks at the minimum levels required by the leaders, or within a certain range other kinds of rewards are more important to the auxiliaries than financial ones. Leaders may therefore contrive to pay off their auxiliaries with nonfinancial rewards like social standing, prestige, fun, conviviality, the hope of salvation, and so on.

Thus the survival of an association of leaders and subleaders depends on frequent transactions between the two groups in which the leaders pay off the subleaders in return for their services. To pay off the subleaders, leaders usually have to draw on resources available only outside the association. Sometimes leaders can obtain these resources from outside by coercion, particularly if they happen to control the single most effective institution for coercion: the government. This is one reason—but by no means the only one—why government is always such an important pawn in struggles among leaders. Ordinarily, however, the association must produce something that will appeal to outsiders, who then contribute resources that serve, directly or indirectly, to maintain the association. Probably the most important direct contribution of these outsiders—let us call them constituents—is money; their most important indirect contribution is votes, which can be converted into office and thus into various other resources. . . .

It is easy to see why observers have often pessimistically concluded that the internal dynamics of political associations create forces alien to popular control and hence to democratic institutions. Yet the characteristics I have described are not necessarily dysfunctional to a pluralistic democracy in which there exists a considerable

measure of popular control over the policies of leaders, for minority control by leaders within associations is not necessarily inconsistent with popular control over leaders through electoral processes.

For example, suppose that (1) a leader of a political association feels a strong incentive for winning an election; (2) his constituents comprise most of the adult population of the community; (3) nearly all of his constituents are expected to vote; (4) voters cast their ballot without receiving covert rewards or punishments as a direct consequence of the way they vote; (5) voters give heavy weight to the overt policies of a candidate in making their decision as to how they will vote; (6) there are rival candidates offering alternative policies; and (7) voters have a good deal of information about the policies of the candidates. In these circumstances, it is almost certain that leaders of political associations would tend to choose overt policies they believed most likely to win the support of a majority of adults in the community. Even if the policies of political associations were usually controlled by a tiny minority of leaders in each association, the policies of the leaders who won elections to the chief elective offices in local government would tend to reflect the preferences of the populace. I do not mean to suggest that any political system actually fulfills all these conditions, but to the extent that it does the leaders who directly control the decisions of political associations are themselves influenced in their own choices of policies by their assumptions as to what the voting populace wants.

Although this is an elementary point, it is critical to an understanding of the chapters that follow. We shall discover that in each of a number of key sectors of public policy, a few persons have great *direct* influence on the choices that are made; most citizens, by contrast, seem to have rather little direct influence. Yet it would be unwise to underestimate the extent to which voters may exert *indirect* influence on the decisions of leaders by means of elections.

In a political system where key offices are won by elections, where legality and constitutionality are highly valued in the political culture, and where nearly everyone in the political stratum publicly adheres to a doctrine of democracy, it is likely that the political culture, the prevailing attitudes of the political stratum, and the operation of the political system itself will be shaped by the role of elections. Leaders who in one context are enormously influential and even rather free from demands by their constituents may reveal themselves in another context to be involved in tireless efforts to

adapt their policies to what they think their constituents want.

To be sure, in a pluralistic system with dispersed inequalities, the direct influence of leaders on policies extends well beyond the norms implied in the classical models of democracy developed by political philosophers. But if the leaders lead, they are also led. Thus the relations between leaders, subleaders, and constituents produce in the distribution of influence a stubborn and pervasive ambiguity that permeates the entire political system.

17

MICHAEL PARENTI

From *Democracy for the Few*

A GLANCE at the social map of this country reveals a vast agglomeration of groups and governing agencies. If by pluralism we mean this multiplicity of private and public groups, then the United States is a pluralistic society. But then so is any society of size and complexity, including allegedly totalitarian ones like the Soviet Union with its multiplicity of regional, occupational, and ethnic groups and its party, administrative, and military factions all competing over policies.

But the proponents of pluralism presume to be saying something about how *power* is distributed and how *democracy* works. Supposedly the desirable feature of a pluralistic society is that it works through democratic means and produces democratic outputs. Policies not only are shaped by competing groups but also benefit the human needs of the populace. . . .

Power in America "is plural and fluid," claims Max Lerner. In reality, power is distributed among heavily entrenched, well-organized, well-financed politico-economic conglomerates that can reproduce the social conditions needed for continued elite hegemony. Of the various resources of power, wealth is the most crucial, and its distribution is neither "plural" nor "fluid." Not everyone with money chooses to use it to exert political influence, and not everyone with money need bother to do so. But when they so desire,

those who control the wealth of society enjoy a persistent and pervasive political advantage.

... The political advantage enjoyed by the moneyed class is fortified by a variety of institutional and governmental arrangements. The pluralists have not a word to say about the pervasive role of political repression in American society, the purging and exclusion of anticapitalist dissidents from government, the labor movement, the media, academia, and the entertainment world, along with the surveillance and harassment of protest groups and sometimes even mild critics. Nor do the pluralists give any recognition to the way that the moneyed power controls the communication industry and most other institutions of society, setting the terms for the socialization, indoctrination, and recruitment of governmental and nongovernmental elites. Pluralists seem never to allude to the near-monopoly control of ideas and information which is the daily fare of the news and entertainment sectors of the mass media, creating a climate of opinion favorable to the owning-class ideology at home and abroad. Nor are the pluralists much troubled by the rigged monopoly rules under which the two major political parties operate, and an electoral system that treats private money as a form of free speech, and vast sums of it as a prerequisite for office.

... The pluralists make much of the fact that wealthy interests do not always operate with clear and deliberate purpose. To be sure, elites, like everyone else, make mistakes and suffer confusions as to what might be the most advantageous tactics in any particular situation. But if they are not omniscient and infallible, neither are they habitual laggards and imbeciles. If they do not always calculate rationally in the pursuit of their class interests, they do so often and successfully enough. It is also true that the business community is not unanimous on all issues.

... Is then the American polity ruled by a secretive, conspiratorial, omnipotent, monolithic power elite? No, the plutocracy, or ruling class, does not fit that easily refuted caricature. First of all, it cannot get its way on all things at all times. No ruling class in history, no matter how autocratic, has ever achieved omnipotence. All have had to make concessions and allow for unexpected and undesired developments. In addition, the ruling elites are not always secretive. They rule from legitimized institutions. The moneyed influence they exercise over governing bodies is sometimes overt—as with reported campaign contributions and control of

investments, and sometimes covert—as with unreported bribes and deals. The ruling class controls most of the institutions and jobs of this society through corporate ownership and by control of management positions, interlocking directorates, and trusteeships, the elite membership of which, while not widely advertised, is well-documented public knowledge. However, these elites do often find it desirable to plan in secret, to minimize or distort the flow of information, to deny the truth, to develop policies that sometimes violate the law they profess to uphold. Instances of this have been treated in this book.

... American government is not ruled by a monolithic elite. There are serious differences in tactics, differences in how best to mute class conflict and maintain the existing system at home and abroad. Differences can arise between moderately conservative and extremely conservative capitalists, between large and not-as-large investor interests, and between domestic and international corporations—all of which lends an element of conflict and indeterminacy to policies. But these conflicts seldom take into account the interests of the public. Given the wide-ranging interests of the corporate class, policy is dictated by a variety of elites that cut across various financial circles and governing agencies. When push comes to shove, what holds them together is their common interest in preserving a system that assures their continued accumulation of wealth and enjoyment of social privilege...

One might better think of ours as a dual political system. First, there is the *symbolic* political system centering around electoral and representative activities including campaign conflicts, voter turnout, political personalities, public pronouncements, official role-playing, and certain ambiguous presentations of some of the public issues that bestir presidents, governors, mayors, and their respective legislatures. Then there is the *substantive* political system, involving multibillion-dollar contracts, tax write-offs, protections, rebates, grants, loss compensations, subsidies, leases, giveaways, and the whole vast process of budgeting, legislating, advising, regulating, protecting, and servicing major producer interests, now bending or ignoring the law on behalf of the powerful, now applying it with full punitive vigor against heretics and "troublemakers." The symbolic system is highly visible, taught in the schools, dissected by academicians, gossiped about by news commentators. The substantive system is seldom heard of or accounted for...

We might ask: Why doesn't the future arrive? Why is funda-

mental change so difficult to effect? Why is social justice so hard to achieve? The answer is twofold: First, because the realities of power militate against fundamental reform, and second, because the present politico-economic system could not sustain itself if such reforms were initiated. Let us take each of these in turn:

... Quite simply, those who have the interest in fundamental change have not yet the power, while those who have the power have not the interest, being disinclined to commit class suicide. It is not that decision makers have been unable to figure out the steps for change; it is that they oppose the things that change entails. The first intent of most officeholders is not to fight for social change but to survive and prosper. Given this, they are inclined to respond positively not to group *needs* but to group *demands*, to those who have the resources to command their attention. In political life as in economic life, needs do not become marketable demands until they are backed by "buying power" or "exchange power," for only then is it in the "producer's" interest to respond. The problem for many unorganized citizens and workers is that they have few political resources of their own to exchange. For the politician, the compelling quality of any argument is determined less by its logic and evidence than by the strength of its advocates. The wants of the unorganized public seldom become marketable political demands—that is, they seldom become imperatives to which officials find it in their own interest to respond, especially if the changes would put the official on a collision course with those who control the resources of the society and who see little wrong with the world as it is.

Most of the demands for fundamental change in our priorities are impossible to effect within the present system if that system is to maintain itself. The reason our labor, skills, technology, and natural resources are not used for social needs and egalitarian purposes is that they are used for corporate gain. The corporations cannot build low-rent houses and feed the poor because their interest is not in social reconstruction but in private profit. For the state to maintain a "healthy" economy within the present capitalist structure, it must maintain conditions that are favorable to investment, that is, it must guarantee high-profit yields. Were the state instead to decide to make fundamental changes in our economic priorities, it would have to redistribute income, end deficit spending by taxing the financial class from whom it now borrows, stop bribing the rich to get still richer with investment subsidies and

other guarantees, and redirect capital investments toward not-for-profit public goals. But if the state did all this, investment incentives would be greatly diminished, the risks for private capital would be too high, many companies could not survive, and unemployment would reach disastrous heights. State-supported capitalism cannot exist without state support, without passing its immense costs and inefficiencies on to the public. The only way the state could redirect the overall wealth of society toward egalitarian goals would be to exercise democratic control over capital investments and capital return, but that would mean, in effect, public ownership of the means of production—a giant step toward *socialism*...

But can socialism work? Is it not just a dream in theory and a nightmare in practice? Can the government produce anything of note?... Various private industries (defense, railroads, satellite communication, aeronautics, and nuclear power, to name some) exist today only because the government funded the research and development and provided most of the risk capital. We already have some socialized services and they work quite well if given sufficient funds. Our roads and water supplies are socialized as are our bridges and ports, and in some states so are our liquor stores, which yearly generate hundreds of millions of dollars in state revenues. And there are the examples of "lemon socialism" in which governments in this and other countries have taken over industries ailing from being bled for profits, and nursed them back to health, testimony to the comparative capacities of private and public capital...

How do we get to socialism? Only time will tell. Better to know where we want to go and not yet be able to get there, than to go full speed ahead without knowing where we are going—which is the modus operandi of capitalism. Capitalism is a system without a soul and without a direction. It has nowhere to go, for it has nothing it wants to accomplish except the reproduction and expansion of its own capital accumulation process.

Whether socialism can be brought about within the framework of the existing modern capitalist state or by a revolutionary overthrow of that state is a question unresolved by history. So far there have been no examples of either road to socialism in modern industrial society. But because something has never occurred in the past does not mean it cannot happen in the future. In the late nineteenth century, knowing persons, relying on the fact that a successful workers' revolution had never taken place, concluded

that one never would. Yet early in the next century the Bolshevik revolution exploded upon the world. And bourgeois pundits scoffed at the idea that "native" peoples could overthrow modern colonial powers and achieve self-rule, yet such things have happened.

The question of what kind of socialism we should struggle for deserves more extensive treatment than can be given here. American socialism cannot be modeled on the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, or other countries with different historical, economic, and cultural developments. But these countries ought to be examined so that we might learn from their accomplishments and problems. Whatever else one wants to say about existing socialist societies, they have achieved what capitalism cannot and has no intention of accomplishing: adequate food, housing, and clothing for all; economic security in old age; free medical care; free education at all levels; and the right to a job—in countries that are not as rich as ours but which use productive resources in more rational ways than can be done under capitalism.

The destructive and unjust effects of capitalism upon our nation, the pressures of competition between capitalist nations, the growing discontent and oppression of the populace, the continual productive growth within socialist nations, the new revolutionary victories against Western imperialism in the Third World, all these things make objective conditions increasingly unfavorable for capitalism. Yet people will not discard the system that oppresses them until they see the feasibility of an alternative one. It is not that they think society *should* be this way, but that it *must* be. It is not that they don't want things to change, but they don't believe things *can* change—or they fear that whatever changes might occur would more likely be for the worse.

What is needed is widespread organizing not only around particular issues but for a socialist movement that can project both the desirability of an alternative system and the *possibility* and indeed the great *necessity* for democratic change. Throughout the world and at home, forces for change are being unleashed. There is much evidence—some of it presented in this book—indicating that Americans are well ahead of the existing political elites in their willingness to embrace new alternatives, including public ownership of the major corporations and worker control of production. With time and struggle, as the possibility for progressive change becomes more evident and the longing for a better social life grows stronger,

people will become increasingly intolerant of the monumental injustices of the existing capitalist system and will move toward a profoundly democratic solution. We can be hopeful the day will come, as it came in social orders of the past, when those who seem invincible will be shaken from their pinnacles.

There is nothing sacred about the existing system. All economic and political institutions are contrivances that should serve the interests of the people. When they fail to do so, they should be replaced by something more responsive, more just, and more democratic. Marx said this, and so did Jefferson. It is a revolutionary doctrine, and very much an American one.

18

BENJAMIN BARBER

From *Strong Democracy*

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY has been one of the sturdiest political systems in the history of the modern West. As the dominant modern form of democracy, it has informed and guided several of the most successful and enduring governments the world has known, not least among them that of the United States.

Liberal democracy has in fact become such a powerful model that sometimes, in the Western world at least, the very future of democracy seems to depend entirely on its fortunes and thus on the American system of government and its supporting liberal culture. This perceived monopoly not only limits the alternatives apparent to those seeking other legitimate forms of politics but leaves Americans themselves with no standard against which to measure their own liberal politics and with no ideal by which to modify them, should they wish to do so.

Furthermore, successful as it has been, liberal democracy has not always been able to resist its major twentieth-century adversaries: the illegitimate politics of fascism and Stalinism or of military dictatorship and totalitarianism. Nor has it been able to cope effectively with its own internal weaknesses and contradictions, many of

which grow more intractable as the American system ages and as its internal contradictions gradually emerge.

It is the central argument of the first part of this book that many of these problems stem from the political theory of liberal democracy itself. Liberal democracy is based on premises about human nature, knowledge, and politics that are genuinely liberal but that are not intrinsically democratic. Its conception of the individual and of individual interest undermines the democratic practices upon which both individuals and their interests depend.

Liberal democracy is thus a "thin" theory of democracy, one whose democratic values are prudential and thus provisional, optional, and conditional—means to exclusively individualistic and private ends. From this precarious foundation, no firm theory of citizenship, participation, public goods, or civic virtue can be expected to arise. Liberal democracy, therefore, can never lead too far from Ambrose Bierce's cynical definition of politics as "the conduct of public affairs for private advantage." It can never rise far above the provisional and private prudence expressed in John Locke's explanation that men consent to live under government only for "the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates." And it can never evade the irony of Winston Churchill's portrait of democracy as "the worst form of government in the world, except for all the other forms." A democracy that can be defended only by mordant skepticism may find it difficult to combat the zealotry of nondemocrats.

In fact, Churchill's remark suggests that liberal democracy may not be a theory of political community at all. It does not so much provide a justification for politics as it offers a politics that justifies individual rights. It is concerned more to promote individual liberty than to secure public justice, to advance interests rather than to discover goods, and to keep men safely apart rather than to bring them fruitfully together. As a consequence, it is capable of fiercely resisting every assault on the individual—his privacy, his property, his interests, and his rights—but is far less effective in resisting assaults on community or justice or citizenship or participation. Ultimately, this vulnerability undermines its defense of the individual; for the individual's freedom is not the precondition for political activity but rather the product of it.

This is not to say that there is anything simple about liberal democracy. It is an exotic, complex, and frequently paradoxical form of politics. It comprises at least three dominant *dispositions*,

each of which entails a quite distinctive set of attitudes, inclinations, and political values. The three dispositions can be conveniently called *anarchist*, *realist*, and *minimalist* . . .

The American political system is a remarkable example of the coexistence—sometimes harmonious, more often uncomfortable—of all three dispositions. Americans, we might say, are anarchists in their values (privacy, liberty, individualism, property, and rights); realists in their means (power, law, coercive mediation, and sovereign adjudication); and minimalists in their political temper (tolerance, wariness of government, pluralism, and such institutionalizations of caution as the separation of powers and judicial review).

The anarchist, realist, and minimalist dispositions can all be regarded as political responses to *conflict*, which is the fundamental condition of all liberal democratic politics. Autonomous individuals occupying private and separate spaces are the players in the game of liberal politics; conflict is their characteristic mode of interaction. Whether he perceives conflict as a function of scarce resources (as do Hobbes and Marx), of insatiable appetites (as do Russell and Freud), or of a natural lust for power and glory (as does Machiavelli), the liberal democrat places it at the center of human interaction and makes it the chief concern of politics.

While the three dispositions may share a belief in the primacy of conflict, they suggest radically different approaches to its amelioration. Put very briefly, anarchism is *conflict-denying*, realism is *conflict-repressing*, and minimalism is *conflict-tolerating*. The first approach tries to wish conflict away, the second to extirpate it, and the third to live with it. Liberal democracy, the compound and real American form, is conflict-denying in its free-market assumptions about the private sector and its supposed elasticity and egalitarianism; it is conflict-repressing and also conflict-adjusting in its prudential uses of political power to adjudicate the struggle of individuals and groups; and it is conflict-tolerating in its characteristic liberal-skeptical temper . . .

Liberal democracy's three dispositions, while distinct in their concerns and inclinations, are nevertheless linked in a single circle of reasoning that begins as it ends in the natural and negative liberty of men and women as atoms of self-interest, as persons whose every step into social relations, whose every foray into the world of Others, cries out for an apology, a legitimation, a justification. For all three dispositions, politics is prudence in the service

of *homo economicus*—the solitary seeker of material happiness and bodily security. The title of Harold Lasswell's early classic, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How?* could stand as the epigraph of each disposition. In these stark terms, democracy itself is never more than an artifact to be used, adjusted, adapted, or discarded as it suits or fails to suit the liberal ends for which it serves as means.

The uninspired and uninspiring but "realistic" image of man as a creature of need, living alone by nature but fated to live in the company of his fellows by enlightened self-interest combines with the cynical image of government as a provisional instrument of power servicing these creatures to suggest a general view of politics as zoo-keeping. Liberal democratic imagery seems to have been fashioned in a menagerie. It teems with beasts and critters of every description: sovereign lions, princely lions and foxes, bleating sheep and poor reptiles, ruthless pigs and ruling whales, sly polecats, clever coyotes, ornery wolves (often in sheep's clothing), and, finally, in Alexander Hamilton's formidable image, all mankind itself but one great Beast.

From the perspective of this political zoology, civil society is an alternative to the "jungle"—to the war of all against all that defines the state of nature. In that poor and brutish war, the beasts howl in voices made articulate by reason—for zoos, for cages and trainers, for rules and regulations, for regular feeding times and prudent custodians. Like captured leopards, men are to be admired for their proud individuality and for their unshackled freedom, but they must be caged for their untrustworthiness and antisocial orneriness all the same. Indeed, if the individual is dangerous, the species is deadly. Liberal democracy's sturdiest cages are reserved for the People. "Democracy is more vindictive than Cabinets," warned Churchill, a prudent custodian if ever there was one: "the wars of peoples will be more terrible than those of kings."

Although they vary in their portraits of human nature, all three dispositions share a belief in the fundamental inability of the human beast to live at close quarters with members of its own species. All three thus seek to structure human relations by keeping men apart rather than by bringing them together. It is their mutual incompatibility that turns men into reluctant citizens and their aggressive solitude that makes them into wary neighbors....

What we have called "thin democracy," then, yields neither the pleasures of participation nor the fellowship of civic association, neither the autonomy and self-governance of continuous political

activity nor the enlarging mutuality of shared public goods—of mutual deliberation, decision, and work. Oblivious to that essential human interdependency that underlies all political life, thin democratic politics is at best a politics of static interest, never a politics of transformation; a politics of bargaining and exchange, never a politics of invention and creation; and a politics that conceives of women and men at their worst (in order to protect them from themselves), never at their potential best (to help them become better than they are)....

Strong democracy is a distinctively modern form of participatory democracy. It rests on the idea of a self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogeneous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their civic attitudes and participatory institutions rather than their altruism or their good nature. Strong democracy is consonant with—indeed it depends upon—the politics of conflict, the sociology of pluralism, and the separation of private and public realms of action. It is not intrinsically inimical to either the size or the technology of modern society and is therefore wedded neither to antiquarian republicanism nor to face-to-face parochialism. Yet it challenges the politics of elites and masses that masquerades as democracy in the West and in doing so offers a relevant alternative to what we have called thin democracy—that is, to instrumental, representative, liberal democracy in its three dispositions....

The theory of strong democracy offers a different and more vigorous response: it envisions politics not as a way of life but as a way of living—as, namely, the way that human beings with variable but malleable natures and with competing but overlapping interests can contrive to live together communally not only to their mutual advantage but also to the advantage of their mutuality.

Because democratic politics makes possible cooperation and an approximation of concord where they do not exist by nature, it is potentially a realm of unique openness, flexibility, and promise....

The stress on transformation is at the heart of the strong democratic conception of politics. Every politics confronts the competition of private interests and the conflict that competition engenders. But where liberal democracy understands politics as a means of eliminating conflict (the anarchist disposition), repressing it (the realist disposition), or tolerating it (the minimalist disposition), strong democracy also aspires to transform conflict through a poli-

tics of distinctive inventiveness and discovery. It seeks to create a public language that will help reformulate private interests in terms susceptible to public accommodation; and it aims at understanding individuals not as abstract persons but as citizens, so that commonality and equality rather than separateness are the defining traits of human society.

Open to change and hospitable to the idea of individual and social transformation, strong democracy can overcome the pessimism and cynicism, the negativity and passivity that, while they immunize liberalism against naïve utopianism and the tyranny of idealism, also undermine its cautious hopes and leave its theory thin and threadbare and its practice vulnerable to skepticism and dogmatism. Under strong democracy, politics is given the power of human promise. For the first time the possibilities of transforming private into public, dependency into interdependency, conflict into cooperation, license into self-legislation, need into love, and bondage into citizenship are placed in a context of participation. There they are secure from the manipulation of those bogus communitarians who appeal to the human need for communion and for a purpose higher than private, material interests only in order to enslave humankind....

In strong democracy, politics is something done by, not to, citizens. Activity is its chief virtue, and involvement, commitment, obligation, and service—common deliberation, common decision, and common work—are its hallmarks....

... The creation of community here becomes a concomitant of the creation of public goods and public ends. Conversely, the creation of public ends depends on the creation of a community of citizens who regard themselves as comrades and who are endowed with an enlarging empathy. Community, public goods, and citizenship thus ultimately become three interdependent parts of a single democratic circle whose compass grows to describe a true public....

... Strong democratic theory begins but does not end with conflict: it acknowledges conflict but ultimately transforms rather than accommodates or minimizes it....

... Politics in the participatory mode does not choose between or merely ratify values whose legitimacy is a matter of prior record. It makes preferences and opinions earn legitimacy by forcing them to run the gauntlet of public deliberation and public judgment.

They emerge not simply legitimized but transformed by the processes to which they have been subjected....

... Where voting is a static act of expressing one's preference, participation is a dynamic act of imagination that requires participants to change how they see the world. Voting suggests a group of men in a cafeteria bargaining about what they can buy as a group that will suit their individual tastes. Strong democratic politics suggests a group of men in a cafeteria contriving new menus, inventing new recipes, and experimenting with new diets in the effort to create a public taste that they can all share and that will supersede the conflicting private tastes about which they once tried to strike bargains. Voting, in the bargaining model, often fixes choices and thereby stultifies the imagination; judging, in the model of strong democracy, activates imagination by demanding that participants reexamine their values and interests in light of all the inescapable others—the public.

19

BERNARD CRICK

A Defence of Politics
Against Democracy*From In Defence of Politics*

THERE ARE THOSE who would tell us that democracy is *the* true form of politics. Some would even say that it *is* politics, or that it is clearly and always a form a government, value or activity superior to mere politics. But politics needs to be defended even against democracy, certainly in the sense that any clear and practical idea needs defending against something vague and imprecise. We will argue that while democracy as a social movement must exist in nearly all modern forms of political rule, yet, if taken alone and as a matter of principle, it is the destruction of politics.

Democracy is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs. She is everybody's mistress and yet somehow retains her magic even when a lover sees that her favours are being, in his light, illicitly shared by many another. Indeed, even amid our pain at being denied her exclusive fidelity, we are proud of her adaptability to all sorts of circumstances, to all sorts of company. How often has one heard: "Well, at least the Communists claim to be democratic"? But the real trouble is, of course, that they do not pretend to be democratic. They are democratic. They are democratic in the sound historical sense of a majority consenting to be ruled in a popular way.

So while democracy has most often been used to mean simply "majority rule" (which at the size of a state can only mean majority consent), all kinds of special meanings have arisen (many to refute rather than to refine this common view). Perhaps its primary meaning to most people at the moment is no more than "all things bright and beautiful," or some such rather general sentiment. Then others hold that, surprisingly enough, democracy "really means" liberty, even liberalism, or even individualism, even to defend the (democratic) individual against the (democratic) majority—this is certainly an amiable view. . . .

The word can be used, as De Tocqueville used it, as a synonym for equality, or, as Andrew Carnegie used it, to mean a highly mobile free-enterprise society with great (Darwinian) differences in station and wealth. Or it may be seen as a political system which places constitutional limitations even upon a freely elected (democratic) government (the most sought-after use, but the most historically implausible and rhetorical); or, on the contrary, as the "will of the people," or the "general will," triumphing over these "artificial" restraints of constitutional institutions. To many democracy means little more than "one man, one vote"—to which others would hopefully add: "plus real choices." And in broad terms embracing all of these usages, democracy can be seen as a particular recipe of institutions, or as a "way of life," some style of politics or rule, as when it is said that the "spirit of democracy" is more important than any institutional arrangements, or a democracy is where people behave democratically in their speech, dress, amusements, etc. . . .

Majoritarian democracy appears in its most unsatisfactory and unpolitical form in the famous doctrine of the "Sovereignty of the People" (which people?). . . .

The democratic doctrine of the sovereignty of the people threatens, then, the essential perception that all known advanced societies are inherently pluralistic and diverse, which is the seed and the root of politics. Few have understood more clearly than Alexis De Tocqueville the importance of group loyalties intermediate between "society" and the State. He was the first to see clearly why "the species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced is unlike anything that ever before existed in the world . . . I seek in vain for an expression that will accurately convey the whole of the idea I have formed of it; the old words *despotism* and *tyranny* are inappropriate: the thing itself is new . . ." Thus he wrote even in his *Democracy in America* in which he sought to show that there were diversifying institutions in American society which *could* mitigate the danger of a "tyranny of the majority." In his *L'Ancien Régime et la Revolution* he christens this new thing "Democratic Despotism" and characterises it thus: "No gradations in society, no distinctions of classes, no fixed ranks—a people composed of individuals nearly alike and entirely equal—this confused mass being recognised as the only legitimate sovereign, but carefully deprived of all the faculties which could enable it either to direct or even to superintend its own government. Above this mass, a single officer, charged to do everything in its name without consulting it. To control this officer, public opinion, deprived of its organs; to arrest him, revolutions, but no laws. In principle a subordinate agent; in fact, a master."

That the word "democratic" can now be used to describe what earlier writers would have termed "mixed-government" (which is a clearer interpretive translation of Aristotle's *politeia* than simply "polity"), is a dangerous loss to political understanding. The older tradition of political theory in using the term "democracy" had exemplified Aristotle's tri-partite usage: democracy as, intellectually, the doctrine of those who believe that because men are equal in some things, they should be equal in all; constitutionally, the rule of the majority; sociologically, the rule of the poor. Democracy he saw as a necessary element in polity or mixed-government, but alone it was destructive of the political community, attempting the impossible feat of the direct rule of all—which in fact meant the unrestrained power of those who were trusted by most. Democracies were particularly prone to fall by "the insolence of demagogues" into tyrannies. Modern experience seems to bear out Aristotle's precise description of democracy rather than that of those

who would have it stand for "all things bright and beautiful."

... Take the case of the United States. Here indeed must be an uncontested example of a political system which can be clearly, and by popular usage must be, characterised as democratic. But even here it is necessary to remind oneself that the word came to be applied very late to the system as a whole, rather than to these parts of it which were uniquely and from the beginning democratic—the franchise (with the great Negro exception) and what was, certainly by comparison with any other country, the broad equality of social conditions. Not until this century have all Americans, except political eccentrics, called American government unequivocally a democracy. The old Aristotelian distinction, well understood by the Founding Fathers, between democracy as a force on its own and democracy as one element in mixed-government, long survived the attacks of democratic rhetoric. . . .

... The dispute continues between those Americans who regard their system as too democratic to provide effective government—if not in the domestic field, at least in the great jungle of foreign affairs—and those who regard it as not democratic enough—popular democracy is still frustrated by the checks and balances of the Constitution, the division of powers, particularly the Senate, on occasion the Supreme Court. American writers can still be found in abundance who are simply naïve democrats. The business of government to them is simply to find out the wishes of the people. "Democracy," as Mr. Justice Holmes said sarcastically, "is what the crowd wants." "Populist" direct democracy is one of the great animating myths of American politics for both left and right. Nearly half the States of the American Union, for instance, have provision in their constitutions for popular initiative, referendum and recall. They forget that the first business of government is to govern—which may at times, even in America, call for the deliberate endurance of unpopularity. . . .

So if democracy is best understood as one element in free government, not as a characteristic of the whole system, then it will always be possible to argue that *more* or *less* democratic institutions or democratic spirit is needed in any particular circumstance. Once again, Aristotle more clearly defined the relationship between politics and democracy than the usually over-complicated, or purely ideological, writings of modern authors. The best form of government was to him political rule—'polity' or mixed-government. Such a government combined the aristocratic principle and the

democratic; good government is a matter of experience, skill and knowledge—not just opinion, but is subject to the consent of the governed. If there is no democratic element, a state will be oligarchic or despotic; if democracy alone prevails, the result is anarchy—the opportunity of demagogues to become despots. Democracy, then, is to be appreciated not as a principle of government on its own, but as a political principle, or an element within politics. As an intellectual principle, the belief that because men are equal in some things they are equal in all, it can be disastrous to the skill and judgement needed to preserve any order at all, let alone the special difficulties of a conciliatory political order. . . .

Democracy, then, if we give the word the fairest meaning we may want to give it—if we value liberty, free choice, discussion, opposition, popular government, all of these things together—is still but one form of politics, not something to be hoped for at every stage of a country's development or in every circumstance. Politics is often settling for less than what we want, because we also want to live without violence or perpetual fear of violence from other people who want other things. But democracy, in its clearest historical and sociological sense, is simply a characteristic of modern governments both free and unfree. If industrial societies need governments of unparalleled strength, activity and energy, they must be based upon active consent.

So while democracy can be compatible with politics, indeed politics can now scarcely hope to exist without it, yet politics does need defending on many occasions against the exclusive claims of many concepts of democracy which can lead to either the despotism of People's Democracies or the anarchy of the Congo. But perhaps it needs most of all that most unpopular of defences: historical analysis applied against the vagueness of popular rhetoric. Democracy is one element in politics; if it seeks to be everything, it destroys politics, turning "harmony into mere unison," reducing "a theme to a single beat."