

# Class Struggle and Democracy

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**A**s America enters a protracted period of scarcity, the government must be able to do some effective long-range planning. Until recently there has been no apparent contradiction between the existence of disparate veto groups and the ability of government to plan reasonably well. Basically, this was because outcomes in the principal areas of planning—fiscal policy, maintenance of adequate aggregate demands, space research, and defense—usually had the effect of increasing the power and profits of large corporations without interfering with market mechanisms to any great extent. Because planning was limited chiefly to the magnitude and disbursement of public funds, it was not unduly important to the overall success of the plans whether, for example, one corporation's bid to build missiles was favored over another's bid to build bombers. High appropriations were agreed on and the allocation of shares left to pressure politics. In this way, long-range planning could be compatible with in-fighting among key private and public actors within the fragmented network of Washington power wielders.

However, as energy and environmental crises called up the spectre of a non-growth economy, the political conditions required for effective long-range planning became quite different from those of planning within a growth economy. In a period of increasing scarcity, planning cannot leave the market system in place: it must allocate resources to achieve a reasonably unambiguous objective within a given period of time. An energy policy that would assure the nation an adequate and stable source of energy, free from oil imports, would be central to a national plan of this kind. However, such a plan is not viable as long as the giant oil companies, rather than the government, control the alternative sources of energy. Since profit maximization is their principal objective, these companies are not prepared to develop such sources until, as they argue, "free market conditions" warrant their development. It has become clear even to congressmen that "what's good for Exxon is not necessarily good for the country," to quote the House majority leader, Jim Wright.

What has emerged as a substitute for national planning for the public interest is a form of corporatism characterized primarily by the inclusion of business elites and other social interests in government for the purpose of establishing public policy. According to some observers, such a system would successfully bypass the "sources of instability" believed by them to be endemic to "democratic" politics.<sup>1</sup> By avoiding the instabilities of "democratic" politics, which would continue to operate in less crucial areas and thus supply a legitimate gloss to the political system, central planning under corporate- and political-elite domination could well achieve business's primary goal of "reindustrialization." The consequences would undoubtedly include a further dismantling of the welfare state, the relaxation of environmental controls, and a further degradation of the working poor and the underclass.

There is a democratic alternative to corporatism. This alternative demands a reconstruction of democratic theory to focus on the dismantlement and redistribution of corporate power. Admittedly, one could reasonably argue that the focus of attention should be instead on the reform of political structures, such as the revitalization of the two-party system, creation of a more democratically responsible Congress, or democratization of the federal bureaucracy. There is no question, for example, that the arbitrary and irresponsible exercise of power by the federal bureaucracy rivals the abuse of corporate power. A more democratic reordering of either sector would have an important beneficial impact on the other. Owing to the decline in the perceived legitimacy of corporate power, however, it is the corporation that is more vulnerable to democratic attack. The force of its traditional claim to autonomy—supported by the separation of "economy" and "polity" long rooted in liberal thought—has been eroded in recent years by its own practices, such as abuse of the environment, arbitrary plant closings, and glaring mismanagement in, for example, the costly delay by the automobile industry in converting to the production of small cars and the reluctance of the steel industry to modernize. But most importantly, corporate immunity from democratic values is now being penetrated by a growing acceptance both within and outside industry of the principle of "workplace democracy."

A growing number of companies—now well exceeding 500—have adopted some form of worker participation program. "Quality of work life" (QWL) programs, as they are called in industry, include self-management work teams, steering committees, "quality circles" (patterned after the Japanese), and redesign committees that encourage new ideas in the work process. Trade unions,

<sup>1</sup> Martin Shefter, "New York City's Fiscal Crisis," *The Public Interest* 48 (summer), 1977, pp. 98-127.

traditionally hostile to these kinds of programs, have recently become more amenable to their inception. For example, in 1980 the United Steel Workers Union negotiated a work participation program as a means of combating low morale among the workers and to increase productivity. In the early 1970s Irving Bluestone, retired vice-president of the United Automobile Workers, was the only member of the union's executive board to support worker involvement in shop floor decision making. Today, a majority of the board favors an expansion of QWL programs.

The reasons for the growing support for these programs are obvious: industry in America, in sharp contrast to Japan and Germany, is saddled with declining productivity. And younger, better-educated workers are increasingly less willing to tolerate mind-killing, dehumanizing work despite increasing wage rates. Their anger and frustration have been expressed in wildcat strikes, absenteeism, sabotage, tardiness, turnover, etc. Numerous workers complain chiefly about jobs that provide no mental challenge and allow for insufficient workers' control over job assignments. In a survey, workers were asked "whether it was a good idea for corporations in America to become more like they are in Europe, in offering workers more involvement in corporate governance. In 1976, 50 percent said yes; by 1979, it was 74 percent."<sup>2</sup>

There is no question that these programs have, on the whole, been eminently successful in meeting the two-fold goal of increasing productivity and profits and of enhancing job satisfaction and a sense of control over work.

This "reform" movement can also be seen as an integral part of an emerging corporatism in America. For the process of establishing worker participation, "consensus management," and the "nonadversarial relationship" on the shop floor has led, according to *Business Week* (May 11, 1981), to a more cooperative bargaining relationship generally between management and labor. The next step is for government to join the partnership to form what one labor leader describes as a "new social contract" in which conflict is replaced by consensus.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of the growing institutionalization and acceptance of the principle of worker participation constitutes both a threat and a challenge to democracy: a threat because it can serve to legitimize corporatism along structural and ideological lines; a challenge because it squarely locates democracy in the corporate sector and asserts that democratic decision making should be extended to all levels of the corporation, not confined to the shop floor. This claim is central to the reconstruction of democratic theory.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, July 2, 1979, p. B10.

<sup>3</sup> *New York Times*, May 31, 1981, p. F22.

**F**rom a democratic perspective, the worker participation programs that have been established up until now are basically flawed. Created and shaped by management, their continued existence depends upon the tolerance of management and upon workers making decisions that support increased profits. But workers have gained only a privilege, not a right—and a privilege in which participation is separated from power. To put it somewhat harshly, they acquire therapeutic benefits from participation but remain subjugated as before to the will of others. They become engaged in what George Kateb has dubbed “repressive participation.”

Some proponents of participatory democracy tend to be insensitive to this danger. Intent upon the value of self-development gained through participation, Carole Pateman, for example, does not consider whether participation, in its various forms, can elicit recognition of an incongruity between feelings of well-being and a loss of individual autonomy; a sense of well-being might serve to mask the subordinate status of the participant and, in fact, might abet it. By participating, the individual may reinforce his or her own repression.

This danger is not averted even if one assumes that under the QWL program workers have gained power on the shop floor (as they have in Britain and other European countries). Such assumptions ignore the fact that decisions made at a higher level of the corporate hierarchy may well undermine those made below. For example, allocating job assignments democratically on the shop floor would be almost meaningless if management were to decrease the work force substantially or close the plant. Similarly, to curb corporate abuse of workers on the shop floor but ignore corporate abuse of society is again to separate democratic participation and power. Democratic decision making on a micro-level will always be affected by antidemocratic decisions on the macro-level. For the same reason, the democratization of industry can hardly be sustained within a society dominated by an antidemocratic government.

Democratic worker participation should be judged therefore in terms of both the scope and process of decision making that involves workers and the degree to which their decisions are effectively implemented and are not subverted. Viewed in this way, a democratic participatory society—which strives to maximize equality of power in decision making among its citizenry—is a necessary condition for democratic worker-participation to be realized fully.

For our purposes, the important question is: what constitutes genuine workers’ participation within the context of a relatively nonparticipatory, class-dominated society such as the United States? Within this context, genuine worker participation may be said to exist when workers’ demands and actions challenge the power structure of the corporation and thus produce the conditions conducive to raising workers’ consciousness. Full consciousness demands an awareness of two overriding realities: first, that their participatory demands cannot

be met without subsequently being subverted until, through their efforts, the entire corporation is democratized. Second, that owing to the close corporate-government connection, they must in the course of their struggle confront the antidemocratic structure of the federal bureaucracy.

There are two obvious difficulties with this position: it ignores the co-optation problem, and it assumes at the outset that workers are interested in engaging in class struggle. Although workers and their potential allies are not particularly interested in provoking class struggle at this time, they may become more interested as the rich and Reagan continue to wage class war against the poor. Dismantling the welfare state and redistributing income in favor of the rich will not only create widespread suffering among a significant number of people—including organized labor—but may also jeopardize the capitalist system as the rich, ignoring the prophecies of the supply-side economists, forego investing sufficiently to maintain economic activity at a tolerable level. By provoking class struggle, Reagan and his supporters may prove Marx right.

It is true that the reaction of the poor, minorities, and workers to a Reagan-induced depression, at least during its early stages, is likely to be manifest in an intensification of intra-class rather than inter-class conflict as these groups compete among themselves for increasingly scarce jobs and public support. But this need not continue to be the case, especially if a reconstructed democratic theory could provide ordinary people with an alternative to intra-class warfare.

Class struggle is seldom regarded by mainstream social scientists as a vital ingredient to the health of a democratic polity. On the contrary, it is usually perceived as a threat to the stability, if not to the very survival, of democracy. These social scientists often take special pride in consensual politics and the institutions and procedures that “regulate” conflict and keep it well within bounds. This position is outmoded, particularly at this time, when the political system is increasingly nonparticipatory and nonpolitical, when the gulf between the mood and the needs of the people and the actions and nonactions of the government appears to be widening. We need a catalytic force, a spur within the system which would once again give credibility to democracy. This force, if properly encouraged and nurtured, could well find expression in class struggle; a struggle not merely to reestablish the welfare state, as some have argued, but one that is directed toward structural changes in the decision-making process throughout the polity.

**G**ramsci rightly observed that workers are often locked into the hegemonic grip of the ruling class and are unable to recognize—much less take advantage of—the inability of the ruling elites to govern. What is needed consequently is an “appropriate political initiative . . . to liberate the economic

thrust from the dead weight of traditional policies.”<sup>4</sup> In the absence of a democratic theory that effectively connects the concerns of working-class people with the need to radically diminish corporate power and domination, there is no reason to believe that the objective factors discussed above (primarily, corporate vulnerability to democratization and a declining standard of living for a large stratum of the population) will affect the distribution of power. The challenge is to relate these factors to the deep-seated everyday concerns of working men and women, and in so doing, to demonstrate to them that participation in corporate decision making on all levels should be asserted as one of their essential political rights—a right worth struggling for both for their own and the nation’s well-being.

It is also essential that the concept of the right of participation be broadly conceived as something that all men and women have in common, whether as residents of communities or as workers locked into manufacturing, professional, and governmental bureaucracies. The legitimation of this expanded version of the right to participate would be supportive of workers’ demands for its recognition in the workplace, would provide the principle upon which workers could build a majority coalition not only with community and neighborhood organizations but also with other groups, including blacks and women who have an equally legitimate claim to this right.

If any lesson can be learned from the rich history of working-class struggle in America, it is that militancy and radicalism have been nurtured and developed within the existing hegemonic order. Consequently, the mistake of trying to inculcate “socialist consciousness” within the working class must not be repeated while the idea of democracy can still be made to live. Within the context of American experience, democracy, rather than socialism, is subversive; our history shows that democracy, taken seriously, disrupts the existing distribution of power.

What are the sources of this subversive potential in democracy? The first is the inability of the hegemony to fulfill its promises. Almost without exception, American participants in mass protest—whether the struggle was on the western frontier or in southern towns, in the factories or in black ghettos—regarded their grievances as a denial of the principles of equality and freedom in the traditional idea of American democracy. And each of these struggles, whether it advanced the right to vote, the freedom from servitude, or from ethnic, racial, or sexual discrimination, was provoked by the political system’s failure to be democratic. The second is the way the concepts of equality and freedom adopt new and expanding interpretations as socioeconomic and political conditions change. Claims to new and expanded rights, such as protection from occupational hazards, toxic

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 168.

wastes, and unemployment, the availability of adequate health care, and the right to privacy, have been fought for by diverse groups as reasonable extensions of rights firmly embodied in democratic thought. Significantly, rights from this list that have been accepted, either formally or tacitly, reflect an expanding concept of democracy, an expansion that has seen the transformation from property to human rights. All of these claims, both those accepted and those rejected (the latter includes the right to welfare and the right to work), had one important characteristic in common: their claimants considered them eminently justifiable and legitimate in terms of American democracy. Democracy was a moral spark in the struggle for greater equality and freedom. There is no reason to believe that the idea of democracy cannot continue to serve as a disruptive force in the polity.

But has not democracy usually sustained, rather than subverted, capitalism? It is beyond dispute that since its inception, democracy in both Europe and America has served capitalism nobly. Despite the rise of the welfare state and the expansion of human rights, the distribution of income and wealth between the upper and lower classes has remained surprisingly stable; although democratic subversion may have manifested itself in the expansion of rights, economic reform and nationalization of industry have been largely integrated and stabilized within the capitalist system. In fact, as revisionist historians such as James Weinstein and Gabriel Kolko have shown, economic and social reforms have been indispensable to the legitimation and maintenance of corporate power. Because of its resilience and resourcefulness, capitalism has not only been able to cope with democratic subversiveness but has thrived on it.

Owing to recent developments, this argument is becoming less and less tenable. It ignores the vulnerability of capitalism to a deepening legitimation crisis, and it ignores the growing resource and ecological constraints on the capitalist system. The tensions between capitalism and democracy have become increasingly severe as corporatism surfaces in response to these constraints.

The democratic left should begin to see democratic subversiveness in a new light, as the most likely, albeit problematic, route to the expansion and renewal of democracy. Rather than seeing the disruptive force of democracy as a temporary phenomenon that, in one way or another, will be inevitably purged, we should see it as the basis of a potential radical democratic movement that, with proper theoretical support and guidance, can sustain a formidable challenge to corporatism. More concretely, we need a political strategy that initially promotes working-class struggle aimed at democratizing industry and, once the struggle has begun, prevents its demise through co-optative or repressive efforts on the part of industrial and political elites. The demand for workers' participation becomes a catalytic force providing new *content* as well as expanded *form* to democracy.

A strategy that succeeds in arousing workers' consciousness of their right (not privilege) to participate in decision making in the workplace will underscore

the contradiction between the democratic right of participation and autocratic corporate rule. The reality of this contradiction—in spite of the QWL programs—is well within the daily experience of all workers and can be understood within a traditional view of democracy. Here the crucial point is that large corporations are not private enclaves but public spaces—therefore workers, as citizens, have both the right and the duty to become involved in determining policy on all levels within this public sector.

The source of this contradiction between democracy and corporate autocracy stems, as I have indicated, from the liberal conceptualization of the “economy” and “politics” as two separate autonomous entities. As long as workers conceive of their participatory rights in the workplace as “nonpolitical,” the chance that workers’ participation will get out of hand and encroach upon the prerogatives of management is remote. Not until workers see these rights as political—as a vital part of their rights as citizens—will workers’ participation become a force for social change. This transformation of workers’ consciousness, I suspect, must await their exposure to class struggle, which they must initiate to gain these rights. Within this context, the legitimation of class struggle becomes key to the revitalization of democracy.

**I**t may be helpful to compare and contrast my notion of democratic class struggle to the Marxian conception. For Marxists, the overriding aim is the destruction of the bourgeois state; this is a precondition to the establishment of socialism. Socialism in turn is the precondition to the emancipation of all members of society including the working class. For the radical democrat the extension of participatory rights and the redistribution of power in favor of subordinate classes is the goal of class struggle. Each step toward the achievement of this goal is both an end in itself and a basis for further democratic advancement. In the course of this struggle the strategy is not to destroy the bourgeois state, but by means of mass political pressure to transform it from a hostile to a supportive force. The contagion of the democratic demands of the Polish working class—triggered and supported by class struggle—and its impact upon both the party and the state bureaucracy lends credibility to the democratic strategy.

The gradual and incremental nature of this approach to class struggle, however, is regarded by the Marxist as fundamentally flawed since it affords ample time for corporate power and the state to either crush or subvert the participatory movement. The radical democrat foresees the risk, but accepts it as unavoidable. Education of workers in self-rule, acquired in the course of long and periodic struggle for democracy, is essential to achievement of a participatory society. In sharp contrast to Marxism, the *means* by which power is realized is of paramount importance.

There is also a substantial difference between the Marxian and radical-democratic concept of class conflict. Although Marxists often disagree on the nature of class they agree that class conflict is fundamentally a product of the relations of exploitation of production in mature capitalist societies. Exploitative relations, in turn, are an outgrowth of the contradiction between the socialized nature of production and the private appropriation of the means of production.

From the radical democratic perspective, a more useful concept of class conflict derives from E.P. Thompson's concept of class. "Class happens," he writes, "when some men . . . feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs."<sup>5</sup> A class can therefore be defined only in the context of its power relationship to another class. Women, for example, who are organized in an effort to change their subordinate status relative to men, as a collective entity, become a class. On another axis, working men and women become a working class when they "feel and articulate the identity of their (common) interests" as subordinate salary and wage workers against other men and women who occupy positions of domination over them. Recognition that class conflict is generated by relationships of domination and subordination allows one to go beyond the Marxian concept of class conflict and see that the source of domination can be political, ideological, social, cultural, and psychological as well as economic exploitation. This recognition has important practical consequences. Most importantly, it sensitizes the democrat to the likely abuse of power *after* a socialist revolution has eliminated "relations of exploitation of production." Under the Marxian concept of class conflict, capitalist exploitation is its root cause; as class conflict undermines exploitation it creates a classless society and thus its own demise. This line of reasoning legitimates one-party rule in societies believed to have eradicated capitalist exploitation. However, when the inordinate power of some elites becomes rooted in the positions they occupy in political structures, then the conclusion of the Marxian argument collapses: abolition of economic exploitation does not necessarily destroy—and may, indeed, create—politically significant centers of domination.

Even assuming the establishment of a democratic participatory society as a result of a "long revolution," undemocratic, if not despotic, structures of hierarchy and domination are bound to persist in old and new forms. One can anticipate that after a democratic revolution, class struggle may develop, for example, among different strata of the working class—between black and white, male and female, mental and manual workers.

<sup>5</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 9.

Furthermore, the radical democrat would expect that as society became more democratic it would encourage a broadening of class struggle in areas of life that were previously politically quiescent. Leaders tend to solidify and increase their power and followers tend to become more acquiescent and subdued, and one of the key functions of democracy is to combat this tendency by continually promoting and legitimating class struggle and thereby fostering widespread participation. This is yet another reason why a concept of class struggle must be an integral part of a theory of participatory democracy.

Finally, a deep division exists between radical democrats and Marxists on the correct use of class struggle as a political strategy. This issue was the focus of an interesting exchange of views between Leon Trotsky and John Dewey. Trotsky argued that class struggle is always the correct means; that "the liberating morality of the proletariat . . . deduces a rule for conduct from the laws of the development of society, thus primarily from the class struggle, this law of all laws."<sup>6</sup> The appropriate means, in other words, follow from the inevitable outgrowth of the dialectical forces of history, which are reflected in class struggle.

Dewey rejected this position on the ground that Trotsky "*deduces* the correct means from the law of social development, rather than deciding the issue on the grounds of an independent examination of measures and policies with respect to their objective consequences."<sup>7</sup> It could well be true, Dewey argued, that class struggle is the best means to attain the end of human liberation. But as a means it should be justified from the findings of a critical analysis of the probable consequences of class struggle, not deduced from a supposed scientific law of history.

In line with Dewey's position I offer that, given the critical state of American democracy, the concept of class struggle could be an invaluable means toward the democratization of society. I am not prepared, in other words, to accept either an absolute and mechanical justification of class struggle or the proposition that class struggle and democracy are inherently incompatible. The issue of the relative merits of class struggle should focus on whether there is a rational nexus between it and democracy. If such a nexus were shown to exist, its utility would be based on the crucial assumption that the promotion, shape, and goals of class struggle would be responsive to democratic theory, values, and practices. This assumption, in turn, rests on the belief that the free and creative use of collective intelligence is still a potential force in America.

6 George Novack, *Their Morals and Ours: Marxist vs. Liberal on Morality* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), p. 48. Trotsky's and Dewey's articles first appeared in 1938.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

**T**here is no denying that the promotion of class struggle as a legitimate, democratic strategy for the American working class involves risks. A prolonged corporation/worker confrontation could threaten the existing pseudodemocratic system. If the workers' efforts to change industry were defeated, it would not be surprising if democracy itself floundered in an ensuing wave of cynicism. However, if the workers' demands were met, even partially at first, class struggle could indeed foster the transformation of democracy into a subversive, if not a revolutionary, idea. To the extent that we have a choice, this risk is eminently worth taking. Given the magnitude of the democratic crisis, which we now face, does any alternative exist?

The process of democratizing industry through class struggle would, on the one hand, diminish the immense arbitrary power wielded by corporate elites in government and politics, and, on the other hand, would provide the psychological and educative sources for working-class men and women to organize as a self-conscious political class.

A certain kind of political education becomes accessible to workers during the process of class struggle. In groups, and as individuals, workers are likely to learn through everyday experiences that self-interest is bound to class interest and that in the absence of class support, for example, demands for genuine participation in the workplace are summarily rejected by management. It is not unreasonable to presume that periodic struggles of this kind in numerous factories and bureaucracies throughout the nation would lead to the mobilization of militant worker and union organizations on a national level, and to the building of a majority coalition composed of worker, neighborhood, and community organizations as well as other participatory groups. Such a coalition could provide a popular power base upon which the political process could operate effectively and democratically, including the capacity to engage in effective and democratic long-range planning.

Further, it is likely that new democratic structures outside of industry will come into being as the outgrowth of an increasingly politically-educated working class. Expanded education would also provide the impetus for a broad-based working class movement to struggle for the democratization of the bureaucratic structure. State workers within the bureaucracy are potential allies, if not initiators, of such a struggle. An even partially successful attack upon this structure of power is bound to initiate the transformation of presently defined technical and administrative problems into political issues—issues to be decided openly and democratically. As public problems are freed from bureaucratic, invisible enclaves and begin to surface within the political arena, politics may once again capture the interest of the general public and thus generate greater popular participation in deciding what the collective needs are and how they can be met.

Moreover, it is possible that the working-class struggle to democratize industry could reach a stage at which it threatens the very existence of capitalism and thus creates a political environment in which the issue of socialism would be seriously considered. The merits of socialism aside, the surfacing of this issue would be a healthy phenomenon from a democratic point of view, since the values which undergird capitalism and have heretofore been relegated to nonissues (economic growth, distribution of wealth and power, corporate autonomy and private profits) would be publicly scrutinized and evaluated. Furthermore, the issue of socialism would focus on what I consider to be the key question: to what extent and in what form can socialism contribute to the well-being of democracy? Socialism, in other words, would be considered as it ought to be—as a means rather than as an end in itself.

To regard working-class struggle as an essential force in the revitalization of democracy will no doubt be criticized on the ground that the expansion of democracy would lead to further growth in the number of interest groups, thereby creating even greater fragmentation of politics and governmental overload. This unwarranted assumption overlooks the real possibility of the emergence of *class* politics in America—politics in which interests are represented by class-oriented parties. “When working-class parties,” wrote Sidney Verba and Norman Nye, “provide the working class with greater organizational involvement, raise issues directed to their concerns, and give them tangible evidence of working-class citizens having an effect, the difficulties of participation are reduced and the class gap in participation is either reduced or eliminated.”<sup>8</sup> Along the same lines, Ira Katznelson notes that the United States, in sharp contrast to other Western capitalist democracies, lacks “a regular political vehicle for securing a social democratic surplus.”<sup>9</sup> A workers’ participation movement, if successful in gaining a foothold, could become the foundation for this political vehicle.

The linking of working-class struggle and democracy can also be objected to on the ground that workers, in the name of democratic participation, may well utilize their new-found power to dominate industries and plants for their own parochial and selfish interests. Why should it be assumed, in other words, that working-class power, unlike other forms of power, will be bound to democratic principles and norms? I find it inconceivable that the working class can win its claim to self-management in industry without the aid of government and thus the support of a substantial majority of the electorate. It must therefore persuade the widespread and disparate participatory groups that now exist and

8 *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

9 Ira Katznelson, “A Consideration on Social Democracy in the United States,” *Comparative Politics* 11, no. 1 (October 1978), pp. 77–99.

the relatively disinterested sector of the political community, which is likely to control the balance of power, that workers' participation will enhance the well-being of the democratic society as a whole. Consequently, workers would be imprudent not to define "workers' participation" to mean sharing, not controlling, the decision making in industry with other affected groups, including consumers, environmentalists, and other public interests.

Finally, it can be argued that to interpret democracy in terms of class action and class interest, rather than in terms of individual freedom and well-being, is to detach democracy from humanist values. In a pseudodemocratic class society, such as the United States, upper-class political dominance and the comparative lack of individual freedom and personal development of the lower classes is closely related. Thus, we find ourselves in a basic dilemma: without developing working-class power, a large number of workers have no opportunity to develop a political voice. But without such political development, working-class power is nonexistent.

We might begin to resolve this dilemma if democratic theorists stopped trying to bolster the old myth that if only people, *as individuals*, would vote, democracy would flourish. As long as we persist in the view that individual preferences in elections combine to create collective power—especially for the democratic left—democracy as an idea will remain moribund. We must face up to what we know to be true, that "power is organization," and that one of the most effective ways for workers and members of the subjugated classes to organize politically is along class lines.

Once class is recognized as a crucial variable in democratic theory, democratic theory can become a theory of social change, one in which working-class struggle becomes a principal means of achieving rights to which workers are entitled as citizens. To repeat, one of these rights—and a fundamental one—is the right of workers employed by public institutions, *which therefore should include large corporations*, to participate on all levels of institutional decision making.

It is now beyond argument that large corporations are political entities, but until the myth to the contrary is shattered, these rich and vast public spaces will not be available to ordinary men and women for political dialogue and action, and the legitimacy of corporate hierarchical and antidemocratic structures will remain immune from public attack.

We live in unique times when democratic doctrine has a chance of being transformed into a revolutionary and humanistic idea. The key to this transformation, as I have argued, is the legitimation of class struggle as an indispensable democratic principle. In the context of democratic theory, this transformation requires the nullification of the systemic and antidemocratic bias that is anchored in the liberal principles of individualism and the separation of politics and economics—principles that have stood as effective barriers against the democratic

rise to power of the people. I would contend that to discount the chance of this transformation in both theory and practice on the ground that it is beyond possibility or on the ground that class struggle may endanger existing (albeit democratically ineffectual) political institutions is to abandon a strategy that could result in the democratic vitalization of these institutions.

At the time that he wrote, Tocqueville was perhaps right when he said that the "great advantage" of America lay in the fact that it did not have to "endure a democratic revolution." Over a hundred and fifty years later it is doubtful whether the nation can now afford *not* to endure a democratic revolution.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I wish to express my appreciation to Chuck Dyke, John Forester, James Fratto, Steven Lukes, Jane Mansbridge, and Sheldon Wolin for their comments on a previous draft of this article, and to the American Political Science Association/American Historical Association Committee of Project 87 for its generous support.