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SOME PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY  
OF THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

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## ABSTRACT

### Some Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy

The essay reviews some theoretical and methodological problems involved in the study of the transition to democracy. Two explanations frequently cited to explain breakdowns of authoritarian regimes are examined first. I argue that loss of legitimacy is not a sufficient condition of breakdown of such regimes and that what is required for liberalization is an open break within the ruling bloc. The coherence of the ruling bloc is highly vulnerable to any signal that a conflict may be impending.

The latter part of the essay is devoted to the analysis of conditions for a democratic compromise. The argument is that substantive compromises are not possible since democracy means that outcomes of conflicts are at least to some extent uncertain. Institutional compromises can be developed, however, in such a way as to provide sufficient guarantees for the conflicting parties. The only problem is that these guarantees may have to be so strong that democratization will be limited to formal political arrangements, with no consequences for the social and economic structure of the society.

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The purpose of this essay is to identify and analyze some problems involved in studying processes of liberalization of authoritarian regimes and their replacement by democratic forms of political organization. My concerns are predominantly theoretical and methodological rather than descriptive. What we need to know is whether and under what conditions transformation toward democracy is possible today in those countries which suffer from authoritarian rule. The question orienting this paper is on what bases--with what information and under what interpretation of this information--can we provide a reasonably believable understanding of this possibility.

I. Strategies of Research

The first problem concerns the strategy of research. Studies of regime transformations tend to fall into two types. Some are macro-oriented, focus on objective conditions, and speak in the language of determination. Others tend to concentrate on political actors and their strategies, to emphasize interests and perceptions, and to formulate problems in terms of possibilities and choices. Macro-oriented investigations, of which Barrington Moore's is perhaps the prototype,<sup>1</sup> tend to emphasize objective conditions, mostly economic and social, often at the cost of neglecting the short-term political dynamic. They see political transformations as determined, and seek to discover the patterns of determination by inductive generalizations. These studies demonstrate that democracy is typically a consequence of economic development, transformations of class structure, increased education, and the like. Micro-oriented studies, and I would place here Marx's writings on France between 1848 and 1851<sup>2</sup> as well as Juan Linz's recent analysis of the breakdown of democratic regimes,<sup>3</sup> tend to emphasize the strategic behavior of political actors embedded in concrete historical situations.

In practical terms, the question is whether there are indeed good grounds to expect that regime transformations are strongly determined by some economic, social, or political conditions, whether these consist of the stage of accumulation (exhaustion of import-substitution, product cycles, changes in the major export, etc.), social structure ("balance of classes," patterns of land ownership, family structure), or whatever. If regime transformations are indeed strongly determined by such conditions, that is, if in principle a

full specification of such factors would uniquely account for regime transformations, then the proper research strategy would be to conduct comparative statistical studies of patterns of historical covariations, and the only possible political strategy would be to wait for such objective conditions to mature.

Clearly, since the number of such factors can be expected to be rather large and the instances of successful transition to democracy rather infrequent, one would have to face tactical problems. But I want to make a much stronger claim--namely, that objective factors constitute at most constraints to that which is possible under a concrete historical situation but do not determine the outcome of such situations.

Suppose that one does discover a set of factors which jointly account for the observed historical patterns of regime transformations. The epistemological problem which immediately appears is whether one is willing to derive the conclusions that (1) some transformations were inevitable given these conditions, and (2) the observed transformations were uniquely possible given these conditions. It seems to be the fact that universal franchise was established in Western Europe when the proportion of the labor force employed outside agriculture passed 50 percent. Are we willing to conclude that once this magic threshold was reached the old system could no longer be maintained and changes alternative to democratization were not possible? Moreover, even if we are satisfied with this kind of an answer, how are we to explain the fact that the actors involved in extending franchise and building democratic institutions experienced the situation as one of conflict and indeterminacy? Were all the intentional, self-reflective, strategic actors merely unwitting agents of historical necessity?

Objective conditions do delimit the possibilities inherent in a given historical situation and, therefore, they are crucial. But to inquire about objective possibilities does not translate into the same research strategy as would a study of "determinants." Questions concerning possibility are quintessentially theoretical in the sense that they are not reducible to the description of the actual outcomes. Assertions of possibility necessarily involve propositions about actions that are contrary to fact, that is, statements that "if someone had done something different under the same conditions, the outcome would have been (or might have been) different."

Unfortunately, we are still far from being able to define the logical and empirical conditions under which the validity of counterfactual claims can be assessed. None of the approaches to the study of historical possibilities takes us sufficiently far to make counterfactual claims inter-subjectively acceptable.

One approach to the study of possibility is structuralist. It consists of specifying some list of invariant elements of which all systems of a particular kind (grammars, kinships, modes of production)



are composed and a list of admissible combinations of these elements. A particular state of the world is thus possible in this perspective if, and only if, it is admissible as a combination of elements. This approach, for all its seductiveness, is of little interest in the context of our problem (as Balibar<sup>4</sup> admitted), since it does not specify how one gets from one state of the world to another possible state. At best, if one is willing to accept this bivariate and a prioristic vision of the world, one can list all the possible states in abstraction from any history.

Another approach is given by modal logic, out of which grows an interesting recent formulation by Jon Elster, according to whom "a state  $s'(t)$  is possible relatively to [the actual] state  $s(t)$ , if in the past history of  $s(t)$  there is a state  $s(t-k)$ , such that there is a permitted trajectory from  $s(t-k)$  to  $s'(t)$ ; that is, if there is some branching point from which the process may diverge to either  $s(t)$  or  $s'(t)$ ."<sup>5</sup> To paraphrase, I hope without changing the author's intention, the notion is the following: if from some past state  $s(t-k)$ ,  $k = 1, 2, \dots, t$ , it was possible to get to the state  $s'$  at the time  $t$  rather than to the actual state  $s(t)$ , then  $s'$  is possible at time  $(t+1)$ . Elster then asserts that the larger the  $k$  the less likely is the possibility of  $s'$  relative to  $s$ ; that is, the longer in the past the branching point that would have led to  $s'$  the less likely the possibility of  $s'$  at the current time  $t$ . This approach is designed to describe the actual practice of historians, and as a description of their procedures it has great merits. Moreover, Elster's conceptualization establishes a link between observations of the actual past and the current possibilities--always a thorny problem in the study of possibility.

Nevertheless, Elster's approach has two flaws, each of which is fatal. First, it implies that opportunities are never irrevocably missed. This implication is just too counter-intuitive to be acceptable. Indeed, this definition is inconsistent with the author's earlier analysis of "situations," which he defines as the current state of affairs and all possible alternatives, and in which he points out that a situation becomes altered when a possibility is missed even if the actual state of affairs remains the same. Secondly, on purely logical grounds Elster's approach suffers from infinite regress: we are told that there is a permitted trajectory from  $s(t)$  to  $s'(t)$  if and only if there is a permitted trajectory from  $s(t-k)$  to  $s'(t)$ , but how are we to know that there was a permitted trajectory from  $s(t-k)$  to  $s'(t)$ ?

Finally, the third approach to possibility originates from the theory of constrained optimization. According to Majone's notion of "political feasibility," one would say that a state  $s'$  is feasible relative to  $s$  "insofar as it satisfies all the constraints of the problem which it tries to solve; where 'constraints' means any feature of the environment that (a) can affect policy results, and (b) is not under the control of the policy maker."<sup>6</sup> This approach is fine as far as it goes, but in fact it goes one step behind Elster. The problem is to discover what these constraints are, and Majone's own attempt is not very helpful.

All of this is not very encouraging. The model of political change as uniquely determined by conditions is epistemologically flawed (as Elster put it, and in fact Hempel much earlier, a theory limited to the actual occurrences is not a theory but a description) and politically impotent. The orientation which views political transformations as a choice among alternatives satisfying the objective conditions qua constraints thus far did not produce a satisfactory way of asserting these constraints. Learning from history involves wishing, but whether this wishing can indeed be made "thoughtful," as O'Donnell and Schmitter suggest,<sup>7</sup> remains doubtful at this moment. Nevertheless, forced to choose between the two approaches as they stand, I opt for the second on pure grounds of utility. Even if we misjudge the possibilities inherent in a given historical situation, ignoring some alternatives that are in fact possible or mistakenly hoping for the impossible, we will at least have a chance to identify correctly some feasible alternatives and the paths that lead to them.

## II. The Breakdown of Authoritarian Regimes

Let me first review some conditions under which the survival of an authoritarian regime may be threatened. Four kinds of factors are often put forth to explain why cracks begin to appear in an authoritarian regime and the possibility of a liberalization becomes opened:

(1) The authoritarian regime has realized the functional needs that led to its establishment. It is, therefore, no longer necessary (or even possible), and it collapses.

(2) The regime has, for one reason or another, with one possible reason being (1), lost its "legitimacy," and since no regime can last without legitimacy (support, acquiescence, consent), it disintegrates.

(3) Conflicts within the ruling bloc, particularly within the military, for one reason or another, with one possible reason being (2), cannot be reconciled internally, and some ruling factions decide to appeal to outside groups for support. Hence, the ruling bloc disintegrates qua bloc.

(4) Foreign pressures to "put on a democratic face" lead to compromises, perhaps through the mechanism of (3).

I deliberately emphasize that these explanations need not be strictly competitive, but I will discuss them one by one. I have nothing to say about the functionalist explanation and I do not believe that the effect of foreign pressures can be unambivalently assessed. Hence, I will concentrate on explanations that rely on the loss of legitimacy and on conflicts within the elite.

The "loss of legitimacy" theory is an "up" theory of regime transformation in the sense that it postulates that first the regime loses its legitimacy in the civil society and only when this loss is somehow manifested and recognized as such the ruling bloc responds.

From the empirical point of view, this theory has the virtue of providing clear predictions: if this theory is valid, one would expect to observe mass unrest or at least mass non-compliance before any liberalization occurs.

The theory runs as follows: (1) any regime needs "legitimacy," "support" (with some Eastonian distinctions), or at least "acquiescence" to survive; (2) when a regime loses legitimacy it must reproduce it or collapse. Now, I will immediately make the claim that under any non-tautological definition of legitimacy this theory is false.

Why would survival of any regime require legitimacy, whatever it is? Clearly, by raising this question I do not intend to plunge into an analysis of Max Weber's complex and not-always-consistent intellectual patrimony. Let me merely note that Weber's first thesis--that "every system [of domination] attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy"<sup>8</sup> or, even more abstractly, that there exists "the generally observable need of any power . . . to justify itself"<sup>9</sup>--does not necessarily imply that a system of domination cannot survive without this belief. Indeed, Weber did entertain the possibility that not "every case of submissiveness to persons in positions of power is primarily (or even at all) oriented to [by?] this belief. Loyalty may be hypocritically simulated by individuals or by whole groups on purely opportunistic grounds, or carried out in practice for reasons of material self-interest."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, to anticipate the point which in my view is crucial, Weber continued to assert that "people may submit from individual weakness and helplessness because there is no acceptable alternative."<sup>11</sup> Hence, even for Weber, compliant, acquiescing behavior does not necessarily originate from beliefs in the legitimacy of a system of domination.

But the question is not whether legitimacy--in Lamounier's definition the "acquiescence motivated by subjective agreement [concordancia] with given norms and values"<sup>12</sup>--is, as Lamounier formulates it, the only factor in maintaining a given political order. What such theories must defend is a stronger thesis--namely, that legitimacy is a necessary condition of regime survival. Stinchcombe's definition of legitimate power is of some help to these theories, since his conception has the virtue of making one step away from mentalistic notions of legitimacy by specifying a behavioral attribute of legitimate power.<sup>13</sup> Stinchcombe defines legitimate power as one that can call upon others for its own defense. But when Stinchcombe qualifies that this capacity to call upon stems from "the doctrines or norms which justify it [this power]," we are right back where we started. Could not the occupants of positions of power be able to call upon others for defense by virtue of something else than the belief in the legitimacy of this power?

The "loss of legitimacy" theories of regime transformation must make good two claims: (1) that legitimacy is irreducible to anything else, whatever it might be, with self-interest and fear being the prime candidates, and (2) that legitimacy is a necessary condition of stable domination. If legitimacy is reducible,<sup>14</sup> as I have argued

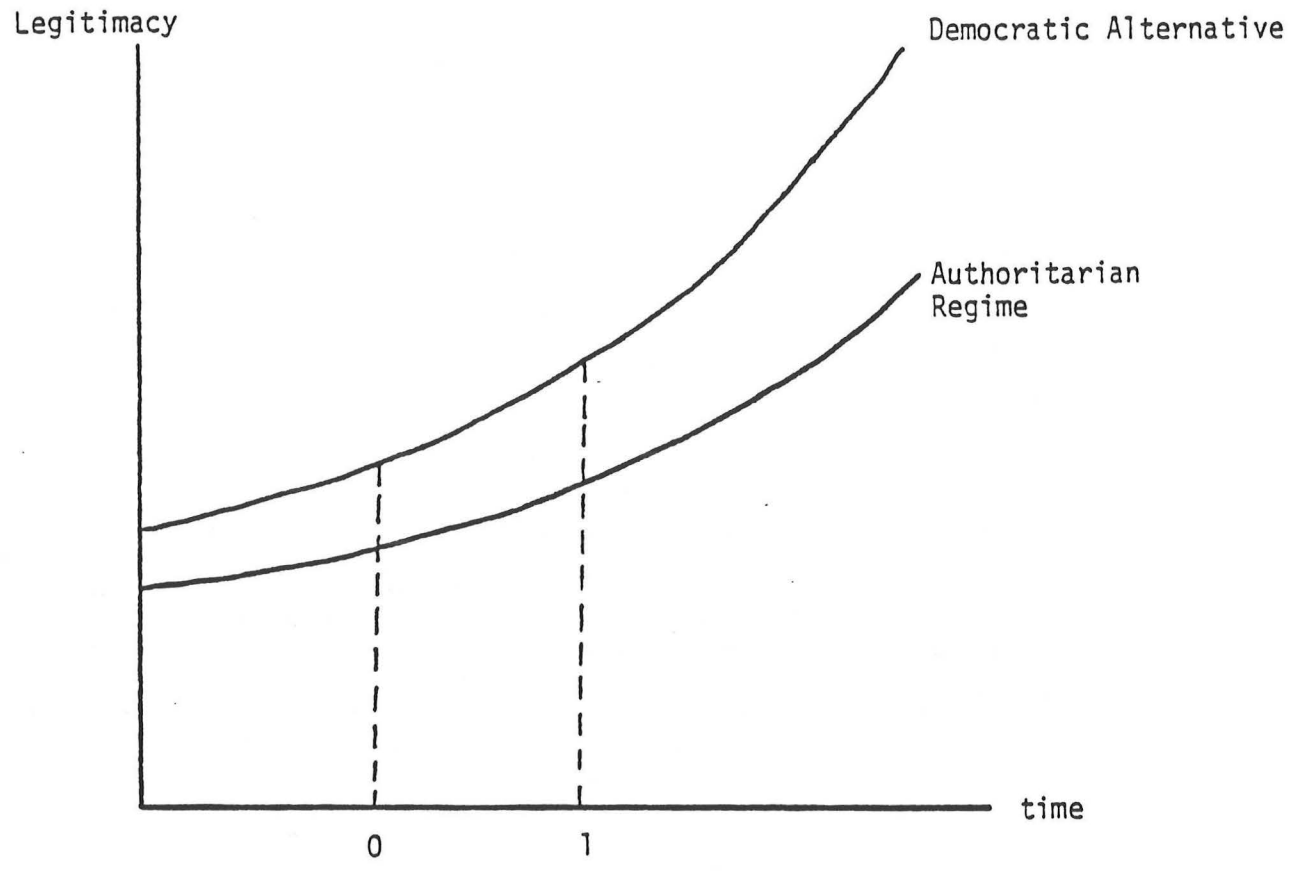
at length at an earlier occasion,<sup>15</sup> then it cannot be the source of the dynamic of regime transformation. But more importantly, even if legitimacy is irreducible but not necessary, then the converse proposition does not hold: one cannot maintain that withdrawal of legitimacy is a sufficient cause for a regime collapse. If legitimacy is only sufficient (even if uniquely sufficient) for regime survival, then loss of legitimacy at most implies that some other mechanisms of regime reproduction would come into play. The inference to collapse is invalid.

The entire problem of legitimacy is in my view incorrectly posed. What matters for the stability of any regime is not the legitimacy of this particular system of domination but the presence or absence of preferable alternatives. Consider some stipulated situations. In one, the legitimacy of a regime is in fact increasing but some other political system is still viewed as more legitimate. This is not a farfetched case: many if not most authoritarian regimes face precisely this competition from democratic ideals. Examine Figure 1, in which the legitimacy of an authoritarian regime improves over time but the democratic alternative always hovers above it as more legitimate. Now, if it is indeed legitimacy that keeps a regime together, then this society should move to a more legitimate regime even if no loss of legitimacy is suffered by the authoritarian system.

In contrast, imagine that the authoritarian regime suffers a loss of legitimacy but no alternative regime is accessible, that is, no coherent alternative is politically organized. What would then happen? This is clearly a question opened to and inviting an empirical investigation, but I do have a guess: nothing much. A regime survives when parents discipline their children and each other, when workers regularly turn out and leave factory gates, and when the handful of people not occupied with disciplining children or gaining a livelihood is prevented from organizing by repression or cooptation. A regime does not collapse unless and until some alternative is organized in such a way as to present a real choice for isolated individuals. Only when one has the option of not disciplining children, not leaving the factory but occupying it instead, not lowering the voice when speaking about politics but actively mobilizing others, only then a regime is threatened. If these options are not present, if one cannot engage in such behaviors without risking an almost certain extinction, one may believe that the regime is totally illegitimate and yet behave in an acquiescing manner. If legitimacy is in fact efficacious in maintaining a particular regime, it is precisely because it constitutes organized consent. If the belief in the legitimacy of the regime collapses and no alternative is organized, individuals have no choice.

Since I am never sure how one determines states of mind, I should be careful with making empirical statements. But let me put it this way: I can think of regimes which have lasted for tens of years and which must be illegitimate, whatever meaning one attaches to this term and however one measures legitimacy. What reproduces

Figure 1



consent is the threat of force, and short of moments of true desperation this threat is sufficient.

### III. The Impetus for Liberalization

How do alternatives become organized? I do not want to tackle this question in such a frontal manner. Instead, I should like to focus on those explanations of the impetus for liberalization which see it as a result of power struggles within the ruling bloc.

One obstacle to understanding the processes of liberalization and democratization is the difficulty of identifying on a priori grounds the actors relevant to these processes. One way to approach this problem is to begin with interests, and classify the particular groups by imputing to them the interests which they may be expected to defend and promote in the face of conflicts. Another approach is to distinguish the actors directly by their strategic postures.

The overall structure of interests involved in the transition to democracy seems the following. The armed forces have an interest in preserving their corporate autonomy; the bourgeoisie in preserving their property of the means of production and the authority to direct production; the state apparatus, particularly the technocrats and the police, in basic physical and economic survival. The working class has an interest in being able to organize itself in pursuit of its economic and political goals; other popular groups may have more narrowly economic interests. I have no particular attachment to this specific list, but something of this sort would have to be asserted in each concrete situation if one wanted to predict group behavior on the basis of class positions. The problem with this approach is that it appears to be of little predictive value, at least as one impressionistically surveys the dynamic of the situation in Spain or in Greece.

The other approach is to focus on the strategic postures directly and to distinguish the hard-liners and the soft-liners (blandos) within the ruling bloc, the moderates and the maximalists (and perhaps the principalists or moralists) among the opposition. The problem with this approach is that strategic postures may remain the same but the particular groups or important individuals that hold them may change, and we would clearly want to know why, which puts us back in the first approach.

In fact, neither approach seems sufficiently dynamic to account for the kind of volatility that seems to be characteristic of the processes of regime transformation, in which alliances are extremely shaky and particular groups and pivotal individuals at times shift their positions by 180 degrees. The difficulty, however, may turn out to be more apparent than real if we take into account not only interests but also perceptions of the likelihood of success in transforming the regime in a particular manner. Although interests may be quite stable, if calculations are made on the basis of expected benefits, that is, by taking into account not only the



benefit of particular outcomes but also their probability contingent upon the actions of others, then strategies will be quite volatile. Indeed, one way to think of strategic postures of different actors is to classify them by their risk aversion: the hard-liners and the maximalists, not to speak of the moralists, are risk insensitive; the blandos and the moderates are risk averse.

It may be helpful at this moment to engage in a Schelling-like analysis.<sup>16</sup> Figure 2 portrays the benefit to a particular member (individual or group) of the ruling bloc as a function of himself participating in a move toward regime transformation and the number of others who go along. Let  $k$  be the number of actors necessary and sufficient to make a move toward liberalization successful. The strategic situation is then as follows. If I move and fewer than  $(k-1)$  others join, then I am likely to suffer highly unpleasant consequences. If I move and  $(k-1)$  others join, I will belong to a victorious movement and can expect to be rewarded appropriately. If I do not move and fewer than  $k$  others do, I will remain on the side of power and benefit from it. Finally, if I do not move but more than  $(k-1)$  others do, I will again find myself on the losing side. Note that the value of the outcome increases as the number of actors making a move approaches  $k$ , from both sides.

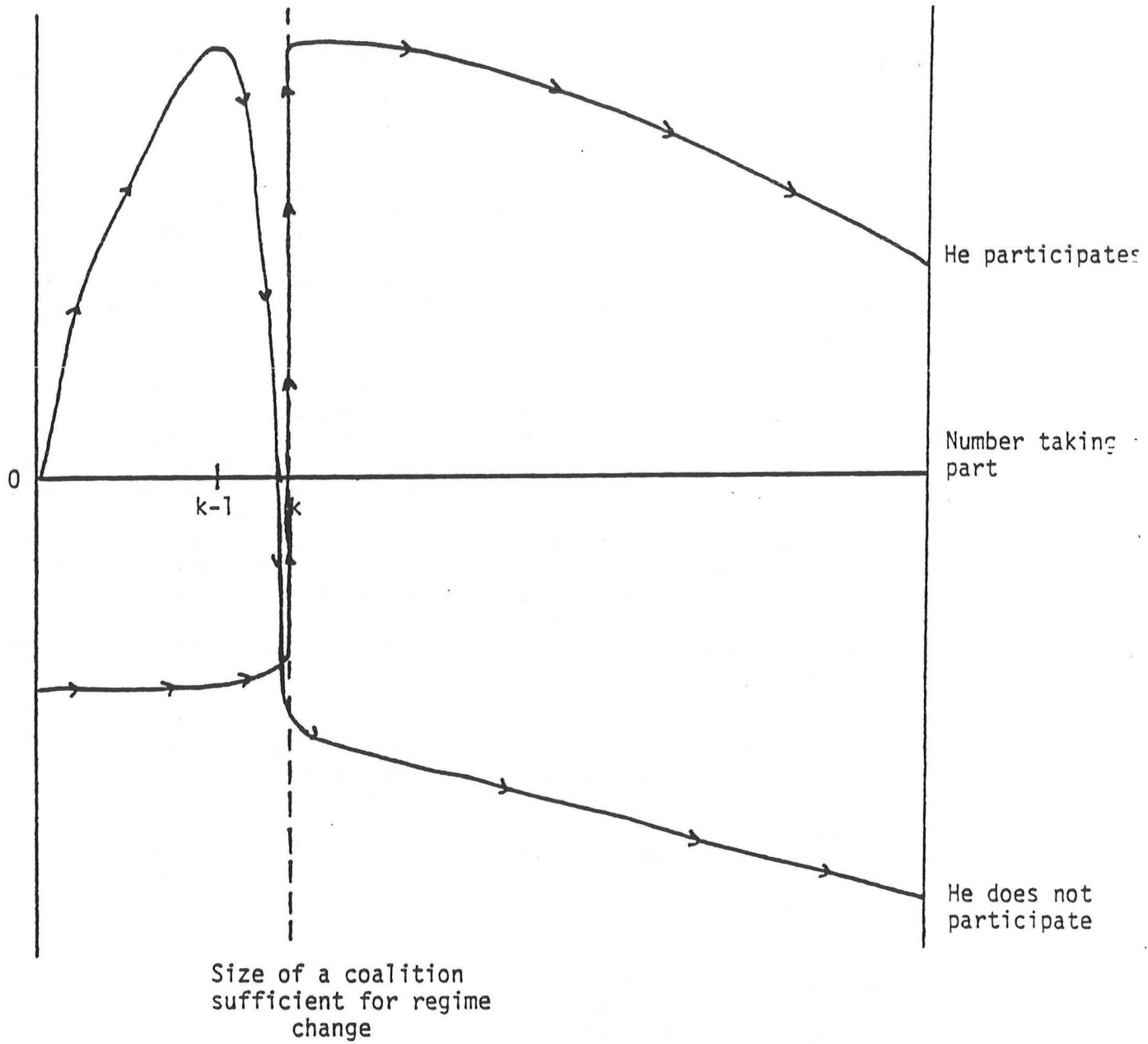
Without making specific assumptions about the value of the particular outcomes, one cannot make any predictions about strategic behavior. But what is apparent is the importance of expectations of success. Neither position is safe under the circumstances: to make a precipitous move is as dangerous as not joining in a movement that is successful. What this analysis implies, therefore, is that interests may be quite stable throughout the process but that they will be a poor predictor of behavior when expectations of success shift rapidly. This is why group analysis may generate weak predictions when groups are identified only by their interests, and this is why particular strategic postures may be embraced at particular moments by the same groups.

Furthermore, this analysis implies that what matters most for the initiation of the process are signals, and what I would like to suggest is that several factors that are often viewed as "causes" should be regarded precisely as such signals. These signals are of a two-fold variety. Some are "objective," in the sense that all the relevant actors have good grounds to expect that some conflict within the ruling bloc will arise. Others are purely "putchist," that is, they consist of rumors that someone will make a move.

What are the likely candidates for the objective signals? An imminent death of the founding (and not yet succeeded) leader of a regime constitutes one such signal. The problem of succession appears, and if mechanisms of succession are not yet institutionalized, a conflict appears imminent. More abstractly, one such signal is given by an impending collapse of the authoritarian institutions, whatever the cause of this collapse. Another signal may consist of a forthcoming economic crisis. Yet another of a manifest loss of legitimacy, as evidenced by mass unrest or mass non-compliance. Still

Figure 2

Benefit to an actor





another may be given by strong foreign pressures to reform. All of these situations may produce cracks in the regime, precisely because they all make it more likely that some move toward liberalization would occur and, therefore, make it unsafe to miss the opportunity of joining a movement in this direction. Note that a loss of legitimacy may indeed constitute a persuasive signal of this kind, if this loss consists of more than a change of the individual states of mind and is manifested in a clear message that something will have to be done.

A regime begins to crack if some members of the ruling bloc go outside for support. If the regime itself is highly cohesive or tightly controlled, then a compromise solution cannot emerge. This is why most dictatorial regimes we have known fell only on the battlefield, in an external or civil war. Popular unrest in the face of a cohesive power bloc places the resolution of political conflicts in the relations of physical force. Where some perspectives of an "opening" (apertura, the "thaw") have appeared, they have always involved some ruling groups which sought political support among forces until that moment excluded from politics by the authoritarian regime. This is not to say that once liberalization is initiated, only such chosen partners are politically mobilized: once the signal is given, a wave of popular mobilization often ensues. But it seems to me that the first critical threshold in the transition to democracy is precisely the move by some group within the ruling bloc to obtain support from forces external to it.

#### IV. Characteristics of Democracy

For a variety of reasons, some of which will be discussed below, it is perhaps useful to think of transition from an authoritarian to a democratic system as consisting of two simultaneous but to some extent autonomous processes: a process of disintegration of the authoritarian regime, which often assumes the form of "liberalization," and a process of emergence of democratic institutions. While both of these transformations are shaped by the particular features of the old regime, at some point specifically democratic institutions must be established. It is important, therefore, to analyze democracy as the final telos of these transformations.

Democracy is a particular system of processing and terminating inter-group conflicts. This system has a number of characteristics that distinguish it from other political arrangements:

(1) The existence and the organization in pursuit of conflicting interests are explicitly recognized to be a permanent feature of politics. This norm implies specifically that (a) multiple groups can be organized to promote their interests, (b) these groups have an institutionally guaranteed access to political institutions, and (c) losers who play according to the rules do not foresake their right to keep playing.

(2) Conflicts are processed and terminated according to rules which are specified a priori, explicit, potentially familiar to all participants, and subject to change only according to rules. These rules specify (a) the criteria for being admitted as a political participant, (b) the courses of action that constitute admissible strategies, and (c) the criteria by which conflicts are terminated. (Conflicts are "terminated" rather than "resolved" in the sense of Lewis Coser's On the Function of Social Conflict. Conflicts are rarely resolved, but under democracy some states of affairs are recognized as temporarily binding in the sense that they are alterable only by going through the same rules by which they were brought about.)

(3) Some courses of action are excluded as admissible strategies. They are excluded in the sense that permanently organized physical force can be legitimately used if any group resorts to them. Such uses of force are regulated by rules which specify the contingencies in which it can be applied universalistically and ex ante. Yet, since physical force is permanently organized in anticipation of such contingencies, the element of intimidation as well as the potential threat that this force might become autonomous is inherent in a democratic system.

(4) As any system, democracy constitutes a set of stable relations between actions of particular groups and the effects of these actions upon them. Conflicts are organized in a specific manner and their outcomes bear some relation to the particular combinations of strategies pursued by various actors. Characteristic of a democracy is that each group has some choice of strategies and that strategies have consequences.

(5) Since each participant (individual and collective) has a choice of strategies and all strategies do not lead to the same outcome, the results of conflicts in a democracy are to some extent indeterminate with regard to positions which the participants occupy in all social relations, including the relations of production. Capitalists do not always win conflicts which are processed in a democratic manner; indeed, they have to struggle continually in pursuit of their interests. In a democracy, no one can win once and for all: even if successful at one time, victors immediately face the prospect of having to struggle in the future. Even the current position within the political system does not uniquely determine the chances of succeeding in the future. Incumbency may constitute an advantage in electoral competition, but it is not sufficient to guarantee re-election.

(6) Outcomes of democratic conflicts are not simply indeterminate within limits. They are uncertain. Since any particular organization of conflicts constitutes an ordering of outcomes upon actions, associated with each institutional arrangement is a distribution of the probability that conflicts result in particular outcomes. Democracy thus constitutes an organization of political power in the sense of Poulantzas:<sup>17</sup> as a system it determines the capacity of particular

groups to realize their specific interests. Given a distribution of economic, ideological, and other resources, this organization determines which interests are likely to be satisfied, which are less likely to be satisfied, and which are almost impossible to satisfy.

The distribution of the probability of realizing group-specific interests--which is none less than political power--is determined jointly by the distribution of resources which participants bring into conflicts and the specific institutional arrangements. This point merits some attention since descriptions of democracy at times emphasize its formal character and the bias which results when resources are unequally distributed. Clearly, a universalistic law which prohibits everyone from sleeping under bridges in fact prohibits only some people. Nevertheless, we can look at this relation inversely. The probability that a basketball team composed of players who are seven-feet tall will beat a six-feet-tall team by a number of points is determined by the height of the basket. Given a distribution of resources, the probability that any group will advance its interests to a definite degree and in a definite manner depends upon the way in which conflicts are organized. Electoral systems, judicial procedures, collective bargaining arrangements, laws regulating the access to mass media or land use all shape the prior probabilities of the realization of group-specific interests. Extensions of franchise to workers did have consequences for the improvement of their material conditions, as did the right to organize, the legalization of collective bargaining, and several other reforms. Reforms are precisely those modifications of the organization of conflicts which alter the prior probabilities of realizing group interests given their resources.

To summarize this description, let me extract three aspects of democracy which are crucial for the process of transition. First, democracy is a form of institutionalization of continual conflicts. Secondly, the capacity of particular groups to realize their interests is shaped by the specific institutional arrangements of a given system. Finally, although this capacity is given a priori, outcomes of conflicts are not uniquely determined either by the institutional arrangements or by places occupied by participants within the system of production. Outcomes that are unlikely can and do occur: as El Mercurio put it in the aftermath of Allende's victory, "Nobody expected that a marxist president would be elected by means of a secret, universal, bourgeois franchise."<sup>18</sup>

#### V. Uncertainty and the Transition to Democracy

It may have seemed strange to describe democracy in such an abstract, almost game-theoretic, way rather than to simply point out the institutional arrangements typical of democracy where it exists: parliaments, parties, elections, etc. Yet such a point of departure is necessary to understand the transition to democracy as a process of creating specific institutions, with their effects upon the capacity of various groups to realize their interests.

The process of establishing a democracy is a process of institutionalizing uncertainty, of subjecting all interests to uncertainty. In an authoritarian regime, some groups, typically the armed forces, have the capacity of intervening whenever the result of a conflict is contrary to their program or their interests. This may mean that the situation is highly uncertain from the point of view of some groups--those that are excluded from the power bloc and which must consider the intervention of armed forces as an eventuality. But there exist some groups which have a high degree of control over the situation in the sense that they are not forced to accept undesirable outcomes. In a democracy, no group is able to intervene when outcomes of conflicts violate their self-perceived interests. Democracy means that all groups must subject their interests to uncertainty. It is this very act of alienation of control over outcomes of conflicts which constitutes the decisive step toward democracy.

Such a step was, for example, gingerly attempted in Poland in 1965 during elections to the gromada councils--the elected body of the smallest administrative division of the rural areas of the country. As a departure from previous practice, voters were allowed to reject during pre-election meetings the originally proposed candidates and to replace them from the floor. Hence voters were given a chance to replace some of the local bosses and to make those elected more sensitive to popular pressures. The election did take place as planned and a subsequent analysis showed that this process of replacement did not have any macro-political content. (I had the doubtful pleasure of co-authoring this analysis, which was officially published and then almost simultaneously dubbed as trotskyite, anarcho-syndicalist, and revisionist.) The partisan composition of those eliminated and those who replaced them was almost identical; there was no movement whatsoever against the ruling party and certainly none that could be interpreted as directed against the regime. And yet the party leadership could not tolerate even this absolutely minimal degree of uncertainty. While spontaneous protests have been tolerated at times and on some occasions have become uncontrollable, an institution that would contain uncertainty could not be tolerated in principle.

I mention this minor episode because it illustrates dramatically the political and psychological breakthrough involved in the creation of democratic institutions. If one set of policies is seen as superior for the welfare of the society and this set of policies is assumed to be known, then it seems irrational to introduce uncertainty as to whether this set of policies will be chosen. Even in a situation of an economic crisis, when the economic policy of a particular government is recognized to have been mistaken, some other policy always appears to authoritarian bureaucrats as uniquely destined to improve the situation. Recognition of past mistakes does not constitute a demonstration that the authoritarian system is inherently flawed but only that past mistakes must be corrected and a new, proper, policy must be followed. The only lesson authoritarian bureaucrats draw from past failures is that some additional repression is needed until things get straightened out. Rationality and democracy appear as mutually

exclusive to authoritarian bureaucrats. The appeal to democracy cannot be formulated in terms of the values of authoritarian bureaucrats; they cannot be promised more of their kind of rationality; they are forced to contend with what, from their point of view, clearly appears to be "anarchy" in the sense described by Marx in 1851. For authoritarian bureaucrats, the introduction of democracy constitutes an ideological defeat, a collapse of their very vision of a world that can be rationally commanded to one's will. Uncertainty is what they abhor ideologically, psychologically, and politically.

This brings me to the principal thesis which I want to propose. Democratic compromise cannot be a substantive compromise; it can be only a contingent institutional compromise. It is within the nature of democracy that no one's interests can be guaranteed: in principle, workers endowed with universal franchise can even vote to nationalize the privately owned means of production, to dissolve the armed forces, and so on. Nobody can guarantee that the rate of taxation of highest incomes will not surpass 53 percent--even if the current leadership of the existing parties commits itself to such a compromise, this leadership could change its mind under more auspicious conditions, or be replaced, or a new party could appear and capture electoral support with a program of redistribution of income. Under democracy, no substantive compromises can be guaranteed. As Adolfo Suarez put it in a speech during the campaign of elections to the Constituent Assembly, "el futuro no está escrito, porque sólo el pueblo puede escribirlo."<sup>19</sup>

What is possible are institutional agreements, that is, compromises about the institutions that shape prior probabilities of the realization of group-specific interests. If a peaceful transition to democracy is to be possible, the first problem to be solved is how to institutionalize uncertainty without threatening the interests of those who can still reverse this process. The solutions to the democratic compromise consist of institutions.

One source for learning about the dynamic of this process is the experience of the introduction of democracy in western Europe. For example, the package negotiated in Sweden between 1902 and 1907--a period of rapid industrialization, organization of the working-class movement, and popular unrest--involved the following issues: (1) whether to extend franchise and to whom (males with a certain income, all independent males, all males; at what age); (2) whether reforms should include the upper house or only the lower house; (3) whether parliamentary seats should be allocated to single-member districts or to multi-member constituencies with proportional representation; (4) whether, if single-member districts were to be retained, there should be a first-past-the-post or a run-off criterion; and (5) whether the executive should continue to be responsible to the King rather than the parliament. Each of these institutional details had an impact on the chances of particular groups and was perceived as having an impact. Conservatives, once they recognized that some extension of franchise was unavoidable, sought guarantees. As Bishop Gottfrid Billing put it, he would rather have "stronger guarantees



and a further extension of the suffrage than weaker guarantees and a lesser extension."<sup>20</sup> The Conservatives' guarantee was proportional representation, which, they thought, would prevent Liberals and/or Social Democrats from winning a majority. Social Democrats would have preferred to extend franchise as widely as possible and to stay with a single-member, first-past-the-post system.<sup>21</sup> They were willing to compromise on proportional representation but not on the single-member system with run-off, since this arrangement would have favored the Liberals, who as a center party would have picked up second-round votes.

This, then, is the kind of a compromise which is possible. I would venture even further: the experience of democracies demonstrates that institutional guarantees are quite effective in preventing some interests from coming to the fore and in preventing certain interests from being politically articulated at all. It is possible to design democratic institutions in such a way that some basic interests, such as the private property of the means of production, are virtually guaranteed. Without being cynical and without exaggerating excessively the importance of institutions, we do have to confront the fact that democracy--contrary to so many hopes and expectations--never produced an electoral mandate for socialism. One is reminded of the words of one of the first Latin American democratizers, Roque Sáenz Peña, who said in 1913: "El triunfo alternativo de dos partidos extremos ha despertado inquietudes en algunos espíritus, que miran aquellos actos como un peligro para la sociedad conservadora. . . . Desde luego se trata de partidos que operan dentro del orden y de la libertad, con sus doctrinas y con sus banderas, amparados por la Constitución. Por el hecho de votar no son partidos revolucionarios, y quienes no participan de sus aspiraciones y tendencias, tienen franco el camino comicial para contrarrestarlas o limitarlas por los resortes de la misma ley."<sup>22</sup>

#### VI. Class Compromise and Capitalist Democracy

As the recent history of Iran demonstrates, a breakdown of one authoritarian regime can result in the establishment of another. Ominously, the jocular reference in Poland is to Ayatollah Wyszynski: the forces of the opposition, led by the Catholic Church, seem as authoritarian as the regime itself. As Andrei Sinavski pointed out recently, an opposition is a product of the regime against which it is an opposition.<sup>23</sup>

All forces struggling to destroy a particular authoritarian regime represent specific interests and offer specific projects of social organization. In pursuit of these interests, they must not only dismantle the old regime but must create at the same time the conditions that would favor their interests in the newly established political system. Hence each group must struggle on two fronts: to dismantle the old authoritarian system, and to bring about such new institutional arrangements as will be most conducive to the realization of their interests not only against the forces associated with the old regime but also against their current allies. The problem of democracy, therefore, is to establish a compromise among the

forces which are allied to bring it about, not only to provide safeguards for the forces defending the old regime. Once the anti-regime forces are successful, the crucial question becomes whether a democratic compromise can occur rather than a second phase during which the weaker members of the alliance are purged and a new authoritarian system established.

On purely common-sensical grounds, there should thus be a marked difference in the chances of establishing democracy in those countries where political parties have long established traditions, still alive in the loyalties of the current generation. Greece and Chile would stand in contrast to Iran and perhaps Argentina. My confidence in this a priori argument is disturbed, however, by the cases of Portugal and, in particular, Spain. Spain seems to be the country to be studied: democracy was established there without a breakdown of the armed forces, without a purge of even the political police, without much apparent politicization, and with two major parties that sprang up almost overnight.

Rather than engage in a historical analysis, however, I would like to examine theoretically some rudimentary conditions of class compromise necessary to establish and maintain a capitalist democracy.<sup>24</sup> I have argued that capitalist democracy is a contingent institutional compromise, and that the willingness of particular social forces to enter and to adhere to this compromise depends upon the specific project that underlies it. I will now justify these assertions.

Capitalist democracy constitutes a form of class compromise in the sense that in this system neither the aggregate of interests of individual capitalists (persons and firms) nor the interests of organized wage-earners can be violated beyond specific limits. These limits have been specified by Gramsci:<sup>25</sup> profits cannot fall so low as to threaten reproduction of capital, and wages cannot fall so low as to make profits appear as a particularistic interest of capital.

Specifically, in a capitalist democracy, capitalists retain the capacity to withhold a part of societal product because the profits which they appropriate are expected to be saved, invested, transformed into productive capacity, and partly distributed as gains to other groups. Wage-earners are persuaded to view capitalism as a system in which they can improve their material conditions; they act as if capitalism was a positive sum system; they organize as participants and behave as if cooperation was in their interest when they expect to benefit in the future from the fact that a part of societal product is currently withheld from them in the form of profit. For their part, capitalists consent as a class when they expect that they will be able to appropriate profits in the future as a consequence of current investment.

This two-class model of democratic compromise is obviously too schematic to be useful in analyzing concrete historical situations. Wage-earners are never organized as a unitary actor. Capitalists

compete with each other, not only on the market but also in trying to push upon one another the costs of reproducing workers' consent. The coalitions that underlie particular democratic compromises rarely comprise capitalists and workers as classes; more often than not, they are based on particular fractions allied against other workers and capitalists. Nevertheless, the very logic of class compromise necessary to establish and maintain a democratic system elucidates the contents of economic projects that are likely to orient the formation of democratic institutions.

The typical democratizing coalition is likely to adopt a Keynesian economic project. Keynesian orientation constitutes a perfect combination for guiding a tolerable compromise among several groups. It leaves the property of the means of production in private hands and with it the authority to organize production. At the same time, it treats increases in lower incomes not only as just but also as technically efficient from the economic point of view. Moreover, it assigns an active role to the state in regulating the economy against cyclical crises. This combination of private property, redistribution of income, and a strong state seems like an ideal package for almost everyone.

Yet several experiences, including the second Peronist period in Argentina, demonstrate that the Keynesian program is extremely fragile. As long as private property is preserved, accumulation requires that capitalists appropriate profits and invest them. A redistribution of income, even if it increases consumption, aggregate demand, and supply in the short run, must eventually lead to crises of profitability and hence of investment. Indeed, where the economic structure is highly concentrated, rapid wage increases seem to result simultaneously in unemployment and inflation. And if wage increases are rapidly eroded by price increases and unemployment, the organizations that represent the poorer sectors of the population in the nascent democratic system are likely to lose their popular support. On the other hand, far-reaching demands for the nationalization of the means of production are likely to meet with immediate resistance from indigenous and foreign capitalists and the withdrawal of their support for the democratic transformation.

Keynesian projects may thus be more appealing from the point of view of building a democratic coalition than they are auspicious for establishing a stable democratic regime: a good net to catch allies, but one highly vulnerable to anyone with sharp teeth. It seems as if an almost complete docility and patience on the part of organized workers is needed for a democratic transformation to succeed. Here again it may be worth noting that the democratic system was solidified in Belgium, Sweden, France, and Great Britain only after organized workers were badly defeated in mass strikes and adopted a docile posture as a result.<sup>26</sup> Or, as Santiago Carrillo put it, "One must have the courage to explain to the working class that it is better to give surplus to this sector of the bourgeoisie than to create a situation which contains the risk of turning against us."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, a striking feature of the Spanish transition to democracy is that the political system has been transformed without affecting economic relations in any discernible manner. Not only was the



structure of ownership left intact (albeit with a large public sector), but to my knowledge not even a redistribution of income took place. It is astonishing to find that those who were satisfied with the Franco regime are also likely to be satisfied with the new democratic government.<sup>28</sup>

We cannot avoid the possibility that a transition to democracy can be made only at the cost of leaving economic relations intact, not only the structure of production but even the distribution of income. Freedom from physical violence is as essential a value as freedom from hunger, but unfortunately authoritarian regimes often produce as a counter-reaction the romanticization of a very limited model of democracy. Democracy restricted to the political realm has historically coexisted with exploitation and oppression at the work place, within the schools, within bureaucracies, and within families. Struggle for political power is necessary because without it all attempts to transform the society are vulnerable to brutal repression. Yet what we need, and do not have, is a more comprehensive, integral, ideological project of anti-authoritarianism that would encompass the totality of social life.

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