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It is a measure of how times are changing that anarchists get a fair hearing in this area that is central to real change.

much progress is achievable through parliament? What level of participation does it even allow? Most importantly, what effect does opting for the parliamentary road have on the broader movement for social change? Particularly on grass root organisations, which are, after all, the bedrock of any pro-democracy movement?

In recent years, there has been a more far searching examination on the left of its history and traditions than at any time previous. Circumstances and the apperance of failure have prompted this. But how far is that re-examination going to go?

One thing is clear. There is a deeper realignment underway than is currently being imagined. And the debate on the nature of democracy and the part it plays in social change is part of this. But, one is not talking about parliamentary democracy here. There is a tradition of democratic struggle on the left that eschewed any involvement with the parliamentary method. This was for clear, practical reasons. Democracy, in this tradition, centred on the union, on the process of struggle and on participation. It was not about representing the ideas of others. It was about building up experience and confidence in the grass-roots on the method of democracy so that, when the time came and inequality was confronted, workers could proceed immediately to the socialisation of production. Centrally, it was about building up a counter-power in society to the power of the state. But importantly, a democratic, grass-roots counter-power.

The editors of Low Intensity Democracy note the importance of this other tradition when they say that the example of the Spanish anarchists earlier in the twentieth century should now be examined as an alternative model of revolutionary social transformation. From this perspective democracy must be painstakingly built up and constantly defended through concrete popular organisations embedded in the workplace and the community.

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This raises a key problem. The role played by parliamentary democracy in demobilising struggles for fundamental change has generally been underplayed. In part this has reflected an enduring weakness in that section of the left that has derived the greater proportion of its politics from formal Marxism.

WORKERS PARTY

Here the arguments in favour of participation, whether this is on the basis of existing parties or by the creation of a new workers party, rest centrally on pragmatism but also on naiveté. On the one hand it is said the arena of parliamentary democracy is too large and too central to much of political discourse to be ignored. To leave the field of parliament to the political parties of the moderate left, centre and right is to abandon one's constituency. Or, so the argument goes.

But, on the other hand, there is delusion about what is possible. The comments of Frederick Engels back in 1895 as he observed the electoral growth of the German socialist party, the SDP, being a case in point :

> *"Its growth proceeds as spontaneously , as steadily , as irrepressibly , and at times as tranquilly as a natural process. All Government intervention has proved powerless against it ...If it continues in this fashion, by the end of the century we shall ...grow into the decisive power in the land, before which all powers will have to bow, whether they like it or not."*

But, pragmatism and naiveté aside, there is also a weakness of critique on the left that centres on the problem of definition and what democracy involves. Many on the left equate parliament with democracy. Few enough, in fact, have criticised the parliamentary road from the perspective of content. Instead they have accepted it and its methodology. Yet, how

ble as well as the practical results achieved. This can be put another way. To what extent has the removal of dictatorship simply led to the replacement of the old order with a newer, more sophisticated form of neo-authoritarianism? As indeed happened in S. Korea. Today, the chaebol conduct their business and exploitation under the cover of being a free democratic society. Concluding then on S. Korea: social and economic oppression has stabilised since the pro-democracy struggles of the mid to late eighties. A result that U.S. interests would, no doubt, be very satisfied with.

This is a central theme emerging from Low Intensity Democracy. The debate on parliamentary democracy has moved on from the stagnant format of past times when only the anarchists had serious reservations about parliamentary democracy. Democracy, that is parliamentary democracy, is now sponsored by U.S. and international business interests — IMF and World Bank — to the extent that it does provide a better cover than any other political system for the *"... generalised offensive for the liberation of market forces ."* In past times it was reasonable to expect a modicum of social reform during a transition from dictatorship to parliamentary democracy. Indeed this was the central basis for supporting such transitions. Not so any more.

The wave of parliamentary democracies that have emerged in past decades have done so under the aegis of a growing domination of all national interests by the interests of international free market politics or, in other words, that system which seeks the ideological rehabilitation of the absolute superiority of private property, legitimisation of social inequalities and anti-statism of all kinds. There are now a significant number of examples of where the onset of parliamentary democracy has actually increased inequality or stabilised it at current levels, particularly where it has caused, as it did in S. Korea, a fragmentation of the pro-democracy movement.

Any discussion on the subject of democracy faces a critical problem early on — a problem of definition. In his contribution to Low Intensity Democracy, Noam Chomsky notes the essential modus operandi of conservative forces in society today and in times past when he states that the guardians of world order have sought to establish democracy in one sense of the term while blocking it in another.

The preferred sense of democracy, also known as parliamentary democracy or Western democracy, is relatively well known to many on the left today. Chomsky himself has done immeasurable work in recent years in further highlighting the undemocratic nature of parliamentary based societies — countries such as Ireland, Britain and the USA being cases in point.

Even so, there is still considerable debate and disagreement on the merits of fighting for the establishment of parliamentary democracy in societies where this form of political structure is not already in place. Broadly speaking, the debate often centres on whether the establishment of parliamentary democracy acts as a stimulus to a further democratisation of society or as a brake.

TESTING TIMES

In past times the debate may have seemed marginal. Few, apart from those influenced by anarchism, questioned their involvement with the parliamentary process. But this has changed. Across the world today there are a greater number of countries in the throes of testing the debate out in practice than at any other time in recent history. Not just countries belonging to the former Soviet block — Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Belarus — but also others such as South Africa, El Salvador, and Thailand to name but a few.

In Low Intensity Democracy, four countries are examined in reasonable depth by the contributors. These are South Korea, Argentina, Guatemala and the Philippines. All differ in the manner by which parliamentary democracy arrived at their doorsteps. Both S. Korea and the Philippines conceded parliamentary democratic regimes under the pressure of popular mass action; Argentina and Guatemala, less so.

In Argentina the current democratic turn began in 1983 when the military stepped down in disgrace, having mismanaged both the economy and the Malvinas war. Significant opposition to continued military rule was growing but at the time of the transfer of power to a civilian administration it was not the decisive element in forcing change. Similarly, Guatemala's democracy came on foot of negotiations between the military and the guerrilla opposition, following a prolonged period of war and repression; broader civilian society was not directly involved in events.

South Korea and the Philippines were markedly different. For the purposes of this review the case of S. Korea will be looked at more closely:

Background — The democratic struggles that shook S. Korea in 1987/88 emerged from a growing resistance to the dictatorship that was installed in S. Korea in 1961, after a military coup. In the early sixties S. Korea was less industrialised than N. Korea. With the military in the driving seat, after the coup, rapid economic growth became a regime obsession. Authoritarianism in S. Korea reached a peak in the 70s. At the juridical core were the national security laws and the anti-Communist laws, the so-called bad laws that effectively banned any political activity outside the consensus of the establishment. Giant conglomerates, known as chaebol, were the main beneficiaries of military largesse. The chaebol were distinctive in their own right in that they were family owned and usually family managed.

Broadly speaking then, the movement for democracy achieved minimal success in S. Korea. Minor, let alone fundamental, economic redress in favour of the mass of S. Korean society did not occur. The regime liberalised when it had to, but later it clawed back these gains made by wider society and the workers' movement in particular.

In looking at the overall developments of events in S. Korea, two other factors are also worth noting. These are the role played by the United States and secondly, the subsequent fragmentation of the pro-democracy movement in the face of some concession from the dictatorship. In regard to the U.S. role, the central point is that on this occasion the U.S. sided with the pragmatic wing of the dictatorship and came out in favour of democratic reforms as outlined in the Eight Point Plan. This reflects a significant shift in the assessment of U.S. strategic interests, a process begun under the Reagan regime (Crusade for Democracy, 1982, p9).

DEBATE

Secondly, in the face of concessions from the regime — the Eight Point Plan — the pro-democracy movement split on its response and future direction. The particular concession of new local, parliamentary and presidential elections succeeded in divesting the movement of its unity and single-mindedness. As Gills states (p249), *"the radical wing of the democratisation movement also fragmented ... Much of this debate revolved around the question of whether to participate in the electoral arena or remain underground. Among those supporting electoral participation there was a further split between those favouring support for one mainstream opposition party and those wanting to form a separate left-wing party."*

Any assessment of the success or failure of any particular democracy movement must base itself on the potential possi-

was later replaced with a pro-chaebol appointee. Proposals on social welfare never saw the light of day.

HARD HIT

In the aftermath of the Seoul Olympics, the new democratic regime dropped its more populist pretensions and moved against the only other force in society had maintained a momentum of struggle against the ruling interests of the chaebol. This was organised labour. Strikes and wage settlements had been at their highest in 1987 — 88 and had caused record damage in production and export loss. Hyundai were particularly hard hit. Demands by labour went well beyond the traditional areas of concern for workers and called for the democratisation process to be brought into the arena of industrial relations. This was not acceptable.

The perceived necessity for the political defeat of organised labour was at the heart of conservative restoration. The Noh regime moved decisively against the workers' movement in the Spring of 1989. An active policy of strike breaking was resumed, along with the arrest of union leaders, using the full force of the state combat police. A ban on public sector unions was enforced — culminating in the break-up of the newly formed National Teacher Union and the sacking of over 1,500 for participating in illegal union activities.

Conclusion — The democratisation process in Korea came full circle. Authoritarianism was challenged by a mass movement for democratisation in 1987. This produced a period of rapid change in which corporatism was weakened and civil society gained more autonomy from the state. However, elites adjusted by forming a broader coalition of the military, business and the middle-class in order to restore conservative hegemony. Therefore, the fundamental nature of the system remained unchanged.

LOW COST

By 1985, S. Korea had one of the highest concentrations of capital in the world. The top 10 chaebol accounted for one-third of total exports and one third of total GNP. The low cost of labour underpinned rapid accumulation by the business class via export-oriented industrialisation. This strategy required political control over labour by the state and by employers… *"By law, organised labour was forbidden to have any political or financial ties to any political parties."* Nevertheless, the authoritarian regime could not entirely ignore the political interests of labour *"..Therefore the state allowed the real wages to rise slowly and steadily behind increased productivity and spurts of economic growth."*

Crisis — Despite recent economic success, S. Korea has been rocked by crisis at periodic intervals. This reflects a tradition of popular resistance to authoritarianism that is a constant in Korean politics. But, also, it is a reflection of economic realities. The crisis of 1986–88 that heralded in the current democratic regime was no different in this respect. Its immediate background lay in the popular perception that S. Korea had finally arrived at the promised land of economic success. The period 85–87 was one of economic boom — a fact reflected in a substantial trade surplus which had not been previously achieved in S. Korea. A number of ancillary factors tied into the mood of optimism:

The Chun presidential term, in effect a dictatorship, was to be the last. Both domestic and international interests had been promised a peaceful transfer of power.

Macros in the Philippines had been overthrown in the popular upsurge known as people's power in 1986. This encouraged anti-dictatorship forces in S. Korea.

The impending Seoul Olympics constrained the options of the military with regard to outright repression of any challenge to its authority.

President Chun effectively announced in April 87 that military rule under his presidency would not end, after all, as had been promised. A popular uprising in June 87 followed. Massive demonstrations occurred, lasting 18 days. Over 120,000 combat police were called in to contain the upsurge. Nevertheless, the democracy movement was overwhelming in nature, linking both workers and middle-class in opposition to continued military rule.

Concession — A number of possible options were considered. Pragmatists within the military regime understood the futility of using military force to repress the uprising. As importantly, the U.S. signalled its opposition to martial law, or a new coup to replace Chun. Concessions to democratic forces were the favoured option to contain a further escalation. An Eight Point Plan for reform was announced which included: direct presidential elections, freedom for political prisoners, *"... an end to press censorship, local government autonomy and guarantees on human rights."* However, there was no concession or promise on economic reform.

Restoration — Economic reform and some, even minor, redistribution of wealth was the ultimate goal of the democratic upsurge of 87. Could the Eight Point Plan deliver this, even indirectly? As the author Barry Gills notes, *"the democratisation that occurred in 87/88 set in motion a re-alignment of political forces.."* But, he continues *"... it would be an error to mistake this as the genuine substance of democracy."* Popular input into the new S. Korea was to be channelled into three legitimate avenues — presidential elections; parliamentary elections and local elections.

ACCOUNTABILITY

In regard to parliament and local authorities, the options open to the S. Korean electorate were limited, to say the least. Parliament in particular, but also the local authorities, had little power in the new order; executive power remained with the presidency. Gills notes that the political parties remained vehicles for leadership cliques and bastions of regionalism rather than true parties based on platform, principle or accountability to constituency. No effective say in South Korean society could be garnered by the public from either of these avenues. What about the presidential office?

The first direct and free presidential elections returned Noh Tae Woo as the first post-Chun president of S. Korea. Noh's success, on only one-third of all votes cast, followed on from the fragmentation of the anti-dictatorship movement in the immediate aftermath of the Eight Point Plan. Noh, billed as an ordinary man, was a former general and the candidate of the dictatorship. In the period up to and including the Seoul Olympics he played a populist front — but the eventual fate of these inclinations, indicate how limited the new democracy in S. Korea was. Noh appointed Cho Soon, a well-known liberal and economics professor to address a number of issues for economic reform — including the possible provision of social welfare to S. Korean society. In fact, Cho Soon never even got around to making proposals in this area.

Initially, he concerned himself with introducing a more competitive domestic economic environment. Essentially he wanted to curb the power of the chaebol in the domestic market where it had a stranglehold on investment funds and resources. He introduced two key proposals — the Real Name System and the Public Concept of Land. Both proposals involved minor constraints on the chaebol: the former would require all financial transactions to include the names of all those actually involved in the deals; the latter was intended to curb rampant land speculation and irresponsible development. Both proposals, however, were ditched in 1989 since they were considered too controversial — Cho Soon lost his job and