

Reformism on a Global Scale? A Critical Examination of David Held's Advocacy of Cosmopolitan Social Democracy

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Abstract

Held argues that globalisation is undermining democracy at the level of the nation-state. Responding to this problem and the escalation of military conflict, mounting scale of environmental problems and the evident increase in global inequality due to the implementation of neoliberalism, he argues for the establishment of a cosmopolitan democracy that would enable the global implementation of social democratic policies. This paper provides an exposition and critical evaluation of Held's cosmopolitan social democracy (CSD), underlining CSD's important strengths and highlighting its main weaknesses. The paper concludes that the only realistic solution to the major problems faced by the majority of the world's people is cosmopolitan democracy, but not the kind advocated by Held and his cothinkers. The classical Marxist vision of socialist democracy, in common with Held, centrally involves a conception of democratically centralised forms of governance operating on the regional and global as well as national and local levels. But, unlike Held, Marxists argue that in order for cosmopolitan democracy to operate effectively on a global scale, with entrenched civil liberties, regular elections, and the extensive involvement of the workers and peasants who constitute the overwhelming majority of the world's population, global capitalism must be replaced by global socialism.

Introduction

David Held argues that 'the focus of modern democratic theory has been on the conditions which foster or hinder the democratic life of a nation', the problem being that 'in a world of regional and global interconnectedness, there are major questions about

the coherence, viability and accountability of national decision-making entities themselves' (Held, 2006: 290-91). This is particularly problematic for social democracy because it has traditionally relied upon nation states to implement domestic policies ostensibly aimed at improving the lives of the majority of working and middle class people inhabiting capitalist societies. On the right wing of the social democratic tradition, uncritical apologists for the 'Third Way' policies of social democratic governments have drawn the conclusion that the central pillars of the neoliberal policy regime must be retained while being softened by incremental policy change, especially in the area of social policy (Callinicos, 2001; Roper, 2005: 220-238). In opposition to the right-wing social democracy of the Third Way, Held argues that much more needs to be done to address issues such as the diminution of democracy at the level of the nation state due to globalization, global inequality and poverty, Third World debt and mass malnutrition, human rights abuses, war, and global warming. Accordingly, he advocates a global or cosmopolitan social democracy (CSD) which centrally involves: 'promoting the rule of law at the international level; greater transparency, accountability and democracy in global governance; a deeper commitment to social justice in the pursuit of a more equitable distribution of life chances; and the regulation of the global economy through the public management of global trade and financial flows' (2004: 16).

In his view, the 'key political opponents' of CSD are 'neoconservatism, neoliberalism and radical anti-globalism' (2004: 17). It is clear that one of the major aims of his recent writing is dissuading young people who have been radicalized by the global justice and anti-war movements from embracing perspectives within 'radical anti-globalism' such as left nationalism, anarchism or revolutionary socialism, all of which he considers to be intellectually weak and politically dangerous, and to convince them instead to embrace CSD's reformist project. Therefore, although he generally displays intellectual honesty and generosity in discussing the views of his opponents, Held's advocacy of CSD is highly charged politically and calls for a response from those who wish to defend the radical anti-capitalism that has been given a new lease of life by the global justice and anti-war movements (Callinicos, 2003; McNally, 2002; Roper, 2004). For this reason, in this paper I will not only outline and acknowledge the strengths of Held's CSD, but also highlight its major weaknesses. The focus of the discussion is exclusively on Held's articulation and advocacy of CSD – there is insufficient space here to consider the work of other authors who also advocate CSD.

1) Globalisation and Representative Democracy

Both liberal and radical thinkers have tended to assume symmetry and congruence between 'citizen voters and the decision-makers whom they are, in principle, able to

hold to account' and 'the "output" (decisions, policies, etc) of decision-makers and their constituents- ultimately, "the people" in a delimited territory' (Held, 2006: 290). It is precisely this assumption that Held argues is problematic because the decision made by a particular government, such as the Bush Administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003, can have major effects on people living elsewhere in the world. More generally, 'the idea of the democratic state as in principle capable of determining its own future' is being undermined by developments in 'the world economy, international organisations, regional and global institutions, international law and military alliances which operate to shape and constrain the options of individual nation-states' (2006: 295). The upshot is that the geographical territorialisation of democracy is becoming increasingly complex due to globalisation and is being reconstituted at regional and global levels. This is highly significant because 'territorial boundaries specify the basis on which individuals are included and excluded from participation in decisions affecting their lives (however limited the participation might be), but the outcomes of these decisions, and of the decisions of those in other political communities and agencies, often stretch beyond national frontiers. The implications of this are troubling, not only for the categories of consent and legitimacy but for all the key ideas of democracy: the nature of a constituency, the meaning of representation, the proper form and scope of political participation, the extent of deliberation, and the relevance of the democratic nation-state as the guarantor of the rights, duties and welfare of subjects' (Held, 2006: 292).

Since the mid-1970s the world economy has been transformed by the growing internationalisation of production networks, increasing concentration and centralisation of capital ownership embodied in the growth of huge multinational corporations, massive expansion of global financial flows due to the extensive deregulation and international integration of capital markets, and the growth of international trade. These and other developments in the world economy have significantly reduced the capacity of nation-states to govern their domestic economies and, in particular, to do so through Keynesian demand management. International political decision-making during the post-war era has been conducted by a growing array of organisations reflecting 'the rapid expansion of transnational links, the growing interpenetration of foreign and domestic policy and the corresponding desire by most states for some form of international governance and regulation to deal with collective policy problems' (Held, 2006: 298). This development is exemplified by the growth of International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs); in 1909 there were 37 IGOs and 176 INGOs, in 1996 4,667 IGOs and 25,260 INGOs (2006: 298). Some of these IGOs focus on technical issues and are relatively uncontroversial whereas others focus on much broader issues of governance and policy-making such as the IMF, World Bank, WTO, European Union, and United Nations. During the post-war era, 'the development of

international law has subjected individuals, governments and non-governmental organisations to new systems of legal regulation' (2006: 300). In particular, international policies and conventions on human rights, such as the European Convention for Human Rights (1950) and the UN's Declaration on Human Rights (1948) and International Bill of Human Rights, have created sets of international rules that transcend, and to varying degrees constrain, the traditional national sovereignty of states (2006: 300-301). As mentioned earlier, global interconnectedness has accelerated dramatically in the areas of transportation, telecommunications, printed and electronic media, and popular culture. Among other things, this has facilitated international discussion and debate not just amongst policy-making elites, but broad masses of people about issues such as war or global environmental problems. Finally, major environmental problems such as non-renewable resource depletion, global warming due to deforestation and the growing emissions of greenhouse gases, ozone depletion, and pollution of oceans, lakes and rivers, clearly are transcending the borders of nation states.

The developments listed above combine to restrict the freedom of action of national governments by blurring the boundaries of domestic politics, transforming the conditions of political decision-making, changing the institutional and organisational context of national politics, altering the legal framework and administrative practices of governments, and obscuring the lines of accountability and responsibility of national governments. Consent and legitimacy through elections becomes problematical once the autonomy of national governments becomes limited and the definition of their constituency becomes blurred. Furthermore, in recent decades the global order has been characterised by 'the progressive concentration of power in the hands of multinational capital (productive and financial), and the weakening role of states faced with global market processes and forces. In this context, the risk is that democratic politics will increasingly be reduced to adapting to global markets – second-guessing their tendencies and accommodating to them' (Held, 2006: 304). The only effective way to counter this is to develop new forms of cosmopolitan democracy and implement social democratic policies on a global scale.

2) Held's Cosmopolitan Social Democracy

In a nutshell, the major problem facing democracy in the twenty-first century is the fact that, with the important exception of the EU, it is largely confined to nation-states when the autonomy of nation-states is being increasingly undermined by globalisation and, in particular, by the growing power of international economic forces including business elites. Held's solution to this problem is to deepen and extend democracy 'across nations, regions and global networks' in order to entrench 'democratic autonomy on a

cosmopolitan basis' (2006: 305). In this vein he argues, 'a cosmopolitan democracy would not call for a diminution *per se* of state capacity across the globe. Rather, it [seeks] to entrench and develop democratic institutions at regional and global levels as a necessary complement to those at the level of the nation-state' (2006: 305). In addition, 'the territorial boundaries of systems of accountability', he convincingly argues, need to be restructured 'so that those issues which escape the control of a nation-state – aspects of monetary management, the rules of the global trading system, environmental questions, elements of security, new forms of communication – can be brought under better democratic control' (2006: 305). As this implies, a cosmopolitan polity 'would need to establish an overarching network of democratic public fora, covering cities, nation-states, regions and the wider transnational order' and 'create an effective and accountable political, administrative and regulative capacity at global and regional levels to complement those at national and local levels' (2006: 305).

Without providing a detailed account here, it is worth noting that this essentially a 'reformist' project in both senses of this term; cosmopolitan democracy is to be created through the reform of existing institutions and the ultimate goal is not the creation of a qualitatively different global society through a fundamental and/or revolutionary transformation of global capitalism and representative democracy as advocated by revolutionary socialists and anarcho-communists, but rather the creation of a more democratic, egalitarian and environmentally sustainable *but still essentially capitalist* global order. In short, as Luxemburg pointed out in her critique of Bernstein's evolutionary socialism long ago, Held's advocacy of CSD differs from revolutionary anti-capitalist perspectives with respect to both the means and the ultimate goals of progressive political change; 'people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform *in place of and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal (1973: 49-50).

With respect to its basic institutional framework, cosmopolitan democracy would require, among other things: 'the formation of an authoritative assembly of all states and agencies – a reformed General Assembly of the United Nations, or a complement to it'; 'the creation where feasible of regional parliaments and governance structures'; 'the opening up of functional international governmental organizations (such as the WTO, IMF and World Bank) to public examination and agenda setting'; 'the creation of new global governance structures with responsibility for addressing poverty, welfare and related issues... to offset the power and influence of market-oriented agencies such as the WTO and IMF'; 'the use of general referenda cutting across nations and nation-states'; and 'the development of law enforcement and coercive capability, including peace-keeping and peace-making, to help deal with serious regional and global security threats' (Held,

2006: 306-7). Crucially, international law would entrench 'a cluster of rights and obligations, including civil, political, economic and social rights and obligations, in order to provide shape and limits to democratic decision-making' and also provide individuals with an avenue via international courts if national or regional governments should infringe upon their basic rights (2006: 307).

The development of these governmental institutions would make possible the implementation of cosmopolitan social democratic policies. These include greater regulation of global markets including tighter controls over financial markets and capital flows, voluntary codes of conduct for MNCs, and ultimately the creation of a 'World Financial Authority', a global tax mechanism, mandatory global labour and environmental standards, foreign investment codes and standards, redistributive and compensatory measures (Held and McGrew, 2002: 132-33). World poverty would be addressed with the abolition of debt for highly indebted poor countries, increasing global pressure on national governments to meet UN aid targets of 0.7% of GNP, introduction of fair trade rules, the removal of EU and US subsidies of agriculture and textiles, implementation of existing global poverty reduction commitments and policies, and ultimately the establishment of a global social charter. As Smith observes, at the core of Held's vision of a CSD is the reform of the global capitalist economic order via a 'Charter of Rights and Obligations' that includes constitutional guarantees of two fundamental economic rights and commitments to two forms of economic policy. These are: 'i) the right to a basic income; ii) the right to "access avenues' to the decision-making apparatus of productive and financial property; that is, to the creation of participative opportunities in firms and in other types of economic organization"; iii) increased social control of global investment through "management of interest rates to induce capital to invest in certain areas" and through the pooling and allocation of democratically-controlled social investment funds; and iv) controls on short-term capital flows' (Smith, 2003: 6-7). In sum, these policies are directed towards 'strengthening multilateralism, building new institutions for providing global public goods, regulating global markets, deepening accountability, protecting the environment and ameliorating urgently social injustices that kill thousands of men, women and children daily' (Held and McGrew, 2002: 136).

3) A Marxist Appreciation of Held's Internationalist Left Social Democracy

The kind of CSD proposed by Held and others is much more critical of the evident failures of the global capitalist order than other forms of social democracy, such as the right-wing social democracy of the Third Way (Giddens, 1998, 2000, 2001) or the more traditional left social democracy which holds that a shift in the balance of political forces in favour of

workers and their allies could lead to a return to the authentically social democratic policies of the past (Hirst and Thompson, 1996). Held's consistent emphasis on creating more democratic forms of global and regional governance is thought provoking and politically important. His critique of the classical Marxist conception of socialist participatory democracy, although seriously flawed in many respects, does raise important issues that require further attention by those working in the Marxist tradition. Consequently Marxists ought to engage with his work in constructive and critical manner rather than rejecting it as a whole in dogmatic fashion.

However, one aspect of Held's work, in particular, makes it difficult for Marxists to do this. This is Held's propensity to present areas of Marxist theory that do require further work and development as if they are fatal flaws inexorably built into the 'deep structure' of Marxism so that the Marxist vision of socialist participatory democracy has to be abandoned (1993a: 264). For example, he repeatedly argues that 'Marxism does not have a systematic account of the nature of "public power", of legitimate claims to authority, of the dangers of centralized political power, and of the problem of political accountability. The question of how "difference" is to be understood, articulated, and nurtured is severely neglected' (Held, 1993b: 300; 1993a: 264-265; 1995: 149, 277; 2006: 121-22, 227-229). There is a limited sense in which Held is correct in this regard. It is the case that there is not a strong body of scholarship in the Marxist tradition focusing on the important role that the constitutional entrenchment of the civil liberties of individuals and minorities ought to play in any conceivably desirable form of socialist participatory democracy, nor upon the 'dangers of centralized power' that he refers to. But it is not at all clear, especially in view of the limited but very important work that has been done within the Marxist tradition with respect to these issues, why one should respond to his arguments by abandoning rather than further developing this tradition (see for example, Callinicos, 1991, 106-133, 1993a-c, 2003; Devine, 1988; Geras, 1986, ch.6; Mandel, 1986; McNally, 1993, 189-213; 2002, 229-271; Molyneux, 1991, ch.7).

Another major contribution of CSD is the critique that it provides of left nationalism. Left nationalism is particularly problematic because, among other things, it assumes a unity of interests in the nation that does not exist in societies shaped by capitalist exploitation and class conflict. In opposition to left nationalist 'anti-globalism', Held advocates a 'new internationalism', which 'builds on the strengths of the liberal multilateral order' and which maintains that 'human well-being is not defined by geographical or cultural locations, that national or ethnic or gendered boundaries should not determine the limits of rights to or responsibilities for the satisfaction of basic human needs, and that all human beings require equal moral respect and concern' (Held, 2004: 171, xi; also see 114-116, 170-178). Thus CSD is perhaps best characterised as an

internationalist left social democracy and, as such, it shares many of the concerns of Marxism and proposes short-term reforms that most Marxists would support. However, revolutionary socialists within the Marxist tradition reject the central assumption that underpins CSD, that is, the reformist assumption that regional and global state structures can be developed which are capable of successfully managing global capitalism to make it more stable, egalitarian, democratic, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable.

4) A Marxist Critique of Cosmopolitan Social Democracy

The Marxist Critique of Reformism

The rejection of reformism by revolutionary socialists is firmly grounded in the wider Marxist critique of capitalism and representative democracy. Since I discuss this at length elsewhere (Roper, 2004; forthcoming: ch.10), here I want to focus on the elements of this critique that pertain directly to reformist strategies for political change, beginning with a consideration of the failures of social democratic reformism at the level of nation-states. Misinterpretations and/or misrepresentations of my central argument are likely in the absence of an intellectually honest recognition of the important distinction between reform, that is actual progressive policy change of the kind that gave rise to welfare states during the Keynesian era, and reformism, that is the broad political orientation of social democrats, greens, liberal feminists, and others, which rejects the idea that revolutionary change is necessary, desirable and feasible to solve the world's major problems, and in contradistinction to revolutionary anti-capitalist perspectives advocates incremental policy reform within the existing system. Marxists join social democrats and others on the left in the struggle for reform while simultaneously arguing that such reforms will never be sufficient to create a genuinely emancipatory, egalitarian, democratic and environmentally sustainable society.

The first, and most obvious, objection to CSD is that the historical record of actual social democratic governments suggests that a reformist political strategy is unlikely to achieve more than relatively minor changes to the existing system. Although in the context of favourable economic circumstances and/or when subject to sufficient pressure from working class movements, such governments have introduced reforms that have significantly improved working class life chances in the advanced capitalist societies (as took place during the so-called 'golden era' of Keynesianism from 1945 to 1973), no such government has eliminated the fundamental problems generated by capitalism such as class inequality, unemployment, alienation within the workplace, major gender and

ethnic inequalities, the destruction of the natural environment, and industrialised military conflict between nations. Furthermore, since the collapse of the post-war boom in the mid-1970s social democratic governments across the globe have implemented neoliberal policies, attacking their own working class supporters in the process.

In emphasizing the greatly tightened international constraints on the autonomy of nation-states, which Held has analyzed at length, he highlights the growing difficulty of successfully implementing social democratic policies at a national level in isolation from supporting changes in the direction of cosmopolitan democracy at regional and global levels. One of the problems with this approach is that it is at the national level that the state economic management and policy-making that impacts most directly on the lives of people in most countries is still being conducted. Highlighting the significance of international constraints on national governments can thus provide a convenient political excuse for social democratic parties maintaining the central core of the neoliberal policy regime when in government.

For example, in New Zealand the (social democratic) Fourth Labour Government from 1984 to 1990 implemented neoliberal 'structural adjustment' more comprehensively and rapidly than virtually any other country. It repeatedly justified its actions by reference to the pressing international constraints on the New Zealand economy and the consequent need to increase the international competitiveness of the economy. The Fourth National Government that followed completed the process of structural adjustment with major changes to the legislative framework governing industrial relations and cuts to social spending (accident compensation, public health, housing, old age pensions, and other areas of welfare). The results are well known. Union membership declined by more than 50% and inequality in the distribution of income and wealth increased at a faster rate than any other OECD country from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s (Roper, 2005: 34-39, 175-249).

Growing awareness of the actual, rather than claimed, redistributive effects of the neoliberal restructuring from 1984 to 1999 fuelled bitterness, hostility and resistance amongst the working class majority of New Zealanders in the run-up to the national election in 1999. Widespread popular disillusionment with neoliberalism played a key role in the election of the social democratic Labour-Alliance coalition government that also enjoyed the support of the Green Party. On the left, Labour polled 38.7% of the party vote and received 49 seats, Alliance 7.7% and 10 seats, and the Greens 5.2% and 7 seats – a combined total of 51.6% and 66 seats in parliament out of 120. On the right, National polled a paltry 30.5% and received 39 seats, ACT 7.0% and 9 seats, NZ First 4.3% and 5 seats, and United 0.5% and 1 seat – a combined total of 41.85% and 54 seats. For one of the few times in New Zealand's political history, and in stark contrast to

the elections from 1984 to 1996, a government was elected with clear support from more than half of the electorate. Labour had been given a mandate to dismantle the most unpopular features of the neoliberal policy regime.

Despite this strong electoral support, which continued through the 2002 election, the strongest and most prolonged cyclical economic recovery since the collapse of the post-war long boom in the mid-1970s, and large fiscal surpluses from 1999 to 2008, the Fifth Labour Government has merely softened and thereby entrenched the neoliberal policy regime. After nearly nine years of social democratic government, with green support, New Zealand remains one of the most unequal advanced capitalist countries in the world (Roper, 2005: 220-238). My empirical research suggests that, contra Held, the most significant forces ensuring that this Government has maintained the neoliberal policy regime are domestic, in particular strident business opposition to any serious alteration of the neoliberal policy regime, which pressured the Government to further entrench all of the central pillars of this policy regime, and the continuing low levels of working class struggle, which meant that there was little counter-veiling pressure on the Government to implement policies that really would 'close the gaps' between rich and poor as they promised prior to the 1999 election (Roper, 2005: 103-116; 2006). If this example is representative of experiences in other advanced capitalist societies then Held is perhaps guilty of underestimating the domestic barriers to the adoption of the social democratic policies that he advocates.

Despite Held's claim that capitalism itself is not the problem, since there are many capitalisms some of which have provided the economic underpinnings for comparatively generous welfare states, the reality is that social democratic governments have consistently failed to bring about fundamental change because capitalism is inherently and unalterably undemocratic form of economic organisation. There is not a single historical or contemporary example of any government extensively democratising economic life in a capitalist society. This is because the real power in capitalist society does not, for the most part, lie in elected governmental assemblies; it resides behind closed doors in the boardrooms of large corporations. Within the state apparatus itself power is heavily concentrated in cabinet and its key advisory bodies— central banks, Treasuries and other similar financial ministries. Furthermore, capitalism generates massive inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth, which means that capitalists can exert far more influence over the formation of policy by governments than trade unions or progressive social movements (Roper, forthcoming: ch.10). The state in capitalist society is constrained by its financial dependence on revenue from the taxation of incomes generated in the process of capital accumulation. Because state power is dependent on capital accumulation, every government in a capitalist society must promote conditions conducive to the continuation of capital accumulation. These

domestic constraints have been compounded by the growing internationalisation of the economic system, as Held correctly emphasises.

These points are well worn but this in no way undermines the contemporary relevance and importance of them. If CSD is to present itself as constituting a feasible and desirable alternative to a world ruled by George W. Bush and neoliberalism, it first has to confront the evident failures of social democratic reformism at the level of nation-states and convincingly demonstrate that the social and economic forces that have consistently operated to prevent social democratic governments from introducing fundamental change within nation-states could be overcome so that social democratic policies can be successfully implemented on a global scale. There are at least three sets of criticisms that can be levelled at CSD in this regard pertaining to the exploitative and crisis-ridden nature of the capitalist world economy, Held's failure to convincingly identify social and political forces capable of successfully promoting social democratic reform, and the considerable social structural capacity that the capitalist class has to mobilize on a global scale in order to exert influence over the central political institutions of the cosmopolitan democracy that Held advocates.

Exploitation, Alienation, and the Crises Tendencies of Capitalist Development

Smith (2003) provides a convincing critique of Held's specific proposals for reforming the capitalist world economy. The basic income proposal assumes that the kind of basic income provided via welfare entitlements in the advanced capitalist societies feasibly can be provided in poor countries with widespread poverty and malnourishment. However, as McNally (1993: 7) has demonstrated, the systematic separation of a growing proportion of the population from access to and effective control over the means of producing an adequate level of subsistence is absolutely central to the historical emergence and persistence of capitalism. Unless there is a generalised and effective socio-economic compulsion to sell the capacity to work for a specified period of time on a labour market for a wage or salary, no capitalist economy can function. This means that basic income must be provided at a lower level than the wages earned by a large majority of wage earners and this means that 'the lower the wages and the worse the work conditions in a particular region of the global economy, the lower the basic income must be if the reproduction of the capital/wage labour relation is not to be undermined' (Smith, 2003: 9-10). Therefore, even if one makes the exceedingly generous assumption that provision of a basic minimum income in poor and middle-ranking countries can be made outside of the advanced capitalist core of the system, the provision of a basic income within a capitalist market framework is unlikely to reduce the wide disparities in income levels within and between different countries.

To his credit Held recognises that economic relationships in the world capitalist economy need to be democratised to a degree. As mentioned above, he proposes the creation of “access avenues” to the decision-making apparatus of productive and financial property; that is, to the creation of participative opportunities in firms and in other types of economic organization’ (Held, 1995: 253). This would enable workers, local communities, consumers and investment fund holders to have some ‘involvement in the determination of the regulative rules of work organizations, the broad allocation of resources within them, and the relations of economic enterprises to other sites of power’ (1995: 253).

This proposal is particularly problematic. There are substantial bodies of work within the Marxist tradition highlighting the generally bureaucratized and frequently undemocratic nature of trade unions, the necessarily alienating and conflictual nature of employment relationships in capitalist societies, and the impact of market competition on the behaviour of individual economic units within the capitalist economic system. This work suggests that even if access avenues were established they are thus unlikely to establish genuine democratic control over the means of production, distribution and exchange because ‘labour representatives’ from trade unions are unlikely to be subject to effective rank-and-file control of their activities and instead pursue their own agendas. Capitalist employers must, as a condition of the survival of the firms that they own and/or manage, maintain managerial authority over workers in order to ensure that the potential capacity to work, which is all that employers purchase on the labour market in the form of labour-power, is realised in the form of actual labour. This basic structural imperative has profound consequences for the life experiences of workers in capitalist societies.

What does it mean to sell your labour power to a boss? In Marx’s analysis, both in his youthful and his mature work, behind this purely formal and legal contractual relation – you sell your labour power, part of your time, to another for money to live on – is in reality something that has profound consequences for all human existence and particularly for the life of the wage labourer. It first of all implies that you lose control over a large part of your waking hours. All the time which you have sold to the employer belongs to him [or her], not to you. You are not free to do what you want at work. It is the employer who dictates what you will and will not do during this whole time. He will dictate what you produce, how you produce, how you produce it, where you produce it (Mandel and Novack, 1973: 21).

Nothing that Held proposes is likely to fundamentally alter this situation. Indeed, as long

as capitalist property relations and market competition continue to prevail, enterprises, even if managed with substantial input into decision-making processes by their employees, will be driven by an imperative to maintain profitability by controlling costs and retaining or increasing market share, thus limiting any possible economic benefits to workers. Furthermore, as Smith observes,

When sufficient profits are not appropriated by a given unit of capital – whether due to product or process innovations successfully introduced by competing units, a general economic slowdown, or any other cause – then the workers employed by that unit of capital necessarily tend to suffer unemployment, lower wages, job speed-ups, and so on. The communities in which they live also tend to suffer significant material losses. Under capitalist social relations, then, a tendency arises for workers enjoying ‘access avenues’ to seek to deflect the social costs of innovation and crises onto other units of capital, other workforces, other communities. Implementing the proposal would thus appear to have the foreseeable consequence of strengthening the bonds between workers in particular enterprises and the managers and investors of those enterprises, at the cost of exacerbating divisions among the workforce as a whole (2003: 13).

The other reforms that Held proposes to democratise economic life are also problematic. He proposes the development of a new coordinating agency at a global level, a ‘Economic and Social Security Council [of the UN] to coordinate poverty reduction and global development policies’ (2004: 164). Among other things, it would work at both global and regional levels and be ‘capable of deliberation about the broad balance of public investment priorities, expenditure patterns and emergency economic situations’ (1995: 260). It would oversee the formation of a social investment fund through the introduction of new taxes on corporate profits and dividend payments to shareholders, combined with greater democratic control over pension funds. It would also use interest rate differentials to encourage investment in poor countries. Because big business is likely to actively oppose such measures, ‘it is essential, therefore, that strategies of economic democratization, if they are to be feasible strategies, work, wherever possible, “with the grain of private property rather than against it”’ (1995: 261).

Apart from the obvious objection that it is almost impossible to imagine an Economic and Social Security Council operating under the auspices of the UN not being dominated by the world’s most powerful governments and largest corporations, Smith convincingly argues that ‘the drive to appropriate surplus profits through technological innovation – an inherent feature of capitalist property relations – systematically tends to reproduce

uneven development in the world market over time', and this means that 'there is no reason whatsoever to assume that the reforms associated with cosmopolitan democratic law will be capable of reversing these tendencies. The most that might be reasonably expected is that the mechanisms underlying the reverse flow of wealth from the poorest regions of the world to the centres of capital accumulation might operate with somewhat less force than they do at the moment' (2003: 21). Furthermore, the amount of credit that would have to be created to provide poor developing countries with lower interest rates would be unfeasibly massive. If the social investment funds generated in the wealthier capitalist countries invested in enterprises in poorer countries with better than average wages and environmental standards, the profit rates of these enterprises are likely to be lower than average with the result that 'there would be a tendency for the democratically controlled funds to be stuck with 'lemons' in the global economy' (2003: 26). If, on the other hand, these enterprises were highly profitable then they would quickly become targets of acquisition by large foreign private investors. At present the global financial and monetary system is dominated by what Gowan aptly refers to as the 'Dollar Wall Street Regime' (DWSR) that accords numerous economic advantages to the US. In order to introduce the economic measures that Held proposes this regime would have to be comprehensively dismantled, something that no US government is likely to allow unless it is forced to do so (Gowan, 1999: Part I; Harvey, 2003, 2005: 19-31, 161-163; Smith, 2003: 23).

Finally, the long-term history of capitalist development demonstrates that capitalism tends to generate crises centrally involving economic instability and stagnation, high levels of unemployment, and greatly intensified attempts by employers to reduce the wages and working conditions of workers. There is now considerable empirical evidence supporting the Marxist view that the underlying cause of these crises is the long-term tendency for the rate of profit to fall (Dunne, 1991; Moseley, 1991; Roper, 2005: ch1; Shaikh and Tonack, 1994). Held's contention that capitalism has also shown itself capable of recovering from one crisis and growing for prolonged periods before entering the next hardly amounts to a convincing justification of the view that capitalist economic development can be successfully managed on a global scale to overcome these crises, especially in light of the fundamental contrast in economic growth and unemployment rates between the long boom from 1945 to 1973 and the prolonged stagnation of the period from 1974 to the present (Armstrong, 1991; Mandel, 1995; Brenner, 2003).

The Question of Agency

Whereas Marxist advocates of revolutionary change have paid a great deal of attention to the question of agency, investigating changes in the class structures of advanced

capitalist societies, associated shifts in class consciousness and class struggle, and so forth, Held suggests that an extremely heterogeneous combination of social and political forces will be able successfully to push for the implementation of social democratic policies on a global scale.

A coalition of political groupings could develop to push the agenda of global social democracy further. It could comprise European countries with strong liberal and social democratic traditions; liberal groups in the US which support multilateralism and the rule of law in international affairs; developing countries struggling for freer and fairer trade rules in the world economic system; non-governmental organizations, from Amnesty International to Oxfam, campaigning for a more just, democratic and equitable world order; transnational social movements contesting the nature and form of contemporary globalization; and those economic forces that desire a more stable and managed global economy (2004: 166).

This is not at all convincing. What interests, capacities, collective psychologies, and socially determined ideological orientations are likely to unite and/or divide these social, economic and political forces? Surprisingly, especially in view of the great length of Held's writing on other issues, he has very little to say about this.

In contrast, the Marxist tradition has focused in depth on precisely the question of what social agency might successfully bring about fundamental change in world history. Marxists contend that in order to create a more democratic and egalitarian world there needs to be a collective social agent capable of overthrowing the global capitalist order. The working class has a currently latent but still real potential to play this role because it is workers, rather than capitalists, who are strategically located at the very heart of the economic system. Whether in factories, railways, airlines, shipping and other areas of transportation, construction, banks, offices, shops, supermarkets, restaurants and bars – workers make the 'wheels of industry' turn, workers produce the wealth that is so conspicuously unequally distributed. This is why a mass strike by the working class is potentially a revolutionary act – it fundamentally challenges the power of capitalists and the state to govern society. Another reason that the working class is potentially very powerful is its size. In the advanced capitalist societies the working class constitutes a substantial majority of the population. Indigenous peoples and other ethnic minorities are concentrated in the working class due to white settler colonialism and historical patterns of labour migration. In the advanced capitalist societies, women are also less likely than men to be employers or self-employed, and more likely than men to be workers paid wages or salaries. As a consequence of the expansion of tertiary education

since 1945, the political allegiances and propensities of students shifted fundamentally, from consistently supporting employers and the state which most students did prior to WWII, towards supporting workers and participating in progressive social movements from the late 1960s onwards. In short, the working class doesn't just constitute a majority in the advanced capitalist countries; it brings together dynamic social forces that have a shared interest in struggling against neoliberal policies and for a better world.

Of course Held is likely to argue that this line of analysis is both reductive and unconvincing. But if he wants to provide a convincing alternative to Marxist conceptions of the progressive and potentially revolutionary capacity of the working class to transform society then he needs to address the question of agency much more systematically than he has done in his writings up to this point.

Global Capitalism and Cosmopolitan Democracy

Finally and more generally, the limitations and constraints that have prevented social democratic governments from introducing fundamental change on a national scale are likely to operate with even greater force with respect to cosmopolitan governance, among other things because capital is much better placed than labour to organise politically on a global scale. Thus, although it is not inconceivable that supragovernmental institutions may be reformed and/or created at an international level to facilitate a significant shift towards the kind of cosmopolitan democracy that Held advocates, if this occurs it is likely to be driven by fractions or subfractional groupings of the world's dominant capitalist classes that see this as necessary in order to ensure the survival and further development of global capitalism.

This argument probably doesn't worry Held too much. There is a sense in which all of Held's work is driven by a fundamentally Keynesian orientation towards capitalism. As Joan Robinson observes,

These three names [Marx, Marshall and Keynes] are associated with three attitudes towards the capitalist system. Marx represents revolutionary socialism, Marshall [a famous neoclassicist] the complacent defence of capitalism and Keynes the disillusioned defence of capitalism. Marx seeks to understand the system in order to hasten its overthrow. Marshall seeks to make it acceptable by showing it in an agreeable light. Keynes seeks to find out what has gone wrong with it in order to devise means to save it from destroying itself (1960: 1).

Held's overall intellectual and political outlook is classically Keynesian in this respect. He

considers that it is neither desirable nor feasible to attempt to create a more egalitarian, democratic and environmentally sustainable socialist world beyond capitalism. Instead of imagining a democratic socialism collectively constructed by the working class and its allies through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, the task for responsible left scholars is to 'find out what has gone wrong with capitalism in order to devise means to save it from destroying itself' since, as neoliberals such as Hayek have shown, there is no 'fully convincing alternative political economy to capitalism' and 'capitalism, in the context of democratic constitutional societies, has strengths, as well as weaknesses – strengths that need to be recognized and defended as well as extended and developed' (1995: 249).

5) Global Socialism and Cosmopolitan Democracy

Despite these points, it is the case that the only realistic solution to the major problems faced by the majority of the world's people is a form of cosmopolitan democracy, but not the kind advocated by Held and his cothinkers. He fails to acknowledge the internationalism of the classical Marxist tradition and its commitment to building democracy on a regional and global scale – a commitment that predates Held's advocacy of cosmopolitan democracy by a considerable margin.¹ As Hallas observes in his account of the Third International, 'Internationalism is the bedrock of socialism, not simply or mainly for sentimental reasons but because capitalism has created a world economy which can be transformed only on a world scale. Anything else is utopianism. The Communist International, which arose out of the Russian revolution of October 1917, was not an optional extra but an essential, indispensable part of that revolution, which, in turn, was part of an international revolutionary upheaval' (1985: 7-8). The Marxist vision of socialist democracy centrally involves a conception of democratically centralised forms of governance operating on the regional and global as well as national and local levels (Callinicos, 2003: 106-143; Devine, 1988; Mandel, 1986; McNally, 2002: 229-267).

Without entering into a detailed discussion of socialist participatory democracy here, I will briefly explore three key sets of issues pertaining to the role of revolutions in

¹ Held also fails to discuss the historical development of the social democratic tradition and its changing relationship to the Marxist tradition. There is, for example, no reference to the debate between Luxemburg and Bernstein nor a consideration of the split of the German SPD following the outbreak of WW1.

facilitating world historic change, the feasibility of fundamental social and political change, and the soundness of Held's critique of socialist participatory democracy.

First, whereas all social democrats are committed to the idea that capitalism can be successfully managed by states, whether national, regional or global, acting in the interests of the disadvantaged within society, revolutionary socialists consider that the capitalist system is inherently and unalterably exploitative, breeds alienation and oppression, generates massive inequalities, and is brutally competitive, frequently violent, and systematically undermines and restricts the participation of the working class majority in the governance of the economy, society, and polity. Therefore the only way in which a qualitatively better world, a world that is egalitarian, democratic, environmental sustainable, and largely peaceful, can be created is through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. This does not involve a commitment to eliminating markets overnight, rather they would gradually decline in significance as goods increasingly came to be distributed on the basis of need, but it does involve a commitment to the forcible expropriation of the wealth and means of production owned by the small capitalist minority that currently dominates the world.

As we have seen, it is precisely the classical Marxist conception of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism that Held rejects. But my research on the history of democracy which focuses, among other things, on Athenian democracy, the English, French and American revolutions, the Paris Commune, and the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, strongly suggests that cosmopolitan democracy, if it really is to bring into being a qualitatively more democratic, egalitarian and environmentally sustainable world, will unavoidably involve a revolutionary upheaval in which the majority of the world's people engage in mass collective action to obtain a larger and fairer share of the world's resources and political power against the violent resistance of the world's ruling classes and the states that serve their interests. At the very least, Held has to show why and how cosmopolitan democracy, unlike Athenian democracy, liberal representative democracy, and socialist participatory democracy, can be brought into being in the absence of this kind of revolutionary upheaval. The problem is, of course, that Held rejects the classical Marxist tradition that has, more than any other, explored the sources, inner dynamics, ideological and political processes, and possible outcomes of revolutionary change. One only has to consider the depth and sophistication of Marxist research into the origins and nature of Athenian democracy (de Ste Croix, 1983; Wood, 1988), the English, French and American revolutions (too many sources to cite), and the Russian revolution (likewise).

Second, this problematic omission of a serious consideration of the inevitability and nature of the kind of revolutionary change that would be required to bring cosmopolitan

democracy into being is accentuated by Held's justification of the feasibility of establishing cosmopolitan democracy and a social democratic policy regime on a global scale. For example, he argues that 'The question of feasibility cannot simply be set up in opposition to the question of political ambition. For what is ambitious today might be feasible tomorrow. Who anticipated the remarkable changes of 1989-90 in Eastern Europe? Who foresaw the fall of communism in the Soviet Union? The growing interconnectedness between states and societies is generating consequences, intended and unintended, for the stability of regimes, governments and states.' (1993: 44-45). In other words, underlying structural causes and large-scale upheavals that are inherently spontaneous and, therefore unpredictable in nature, propel fundamental social and political change. The apparent stability of the status quo should not blind us to the possibility of the transformation of this status quo in the future. In this respect Held's critical rejection of Marxist arguments in favour of the possibility of revolutionary change is inconsistent with his justification of the feasibility of the establishment of CSD.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, Held's critique of socialist participatory democracy is in most, but not all, respects remarkably weak. As I have already conceded, Held's critique of the absence of systematic considerations in Marxist political theory of the constitutional and legal architecture required in order to ensure that a radically democratic workers' state would entrench and extend the civil liberties that individuals currently enjoy in 'liberal democracies' points to a real area of weakness that urgently needs to be addressed. But, apart from this, the remainder of his critique of socialist participatory democracy, in contrast to the generous, subtle and nuanced nature of his critique of neoliberalism, doesn't offer much more than unargued assertions, caricatures, misrepresentations, and claims that are empirically false. Clearly there is not space here to exposit and rebut the various accusations that he makes but it is worth briefly listing them and outlining the direction of a reply.

Marxism is profoundly problematic, Held argues, for six main reasons. First, it reduces everything to class. Thus Marxism 'tends to marginalize or exclude from politics certain types of issue: essentially, all those that cannot be reduced to class-related matters' (2006: 227). 'Important examples are ecological questions, or issues raised by the domination of men over women or of certain racial and ethnic groups over others. Other central matters neglected include the power of public administrators or bureaucrats over their clients, the role of authoritarian resources that build up in most social organisations, and the form and nature of electoral institutions' (1993a: 263). Second, Marxism is irredeemably economic and thus 'raises difficulties by postulating (even in its subtler versions) a direct connection between the political and the economic' and failing 'to treat politics as an autonomous sphere' (1993a: 262; 2006: 228). Third,

The fundamental problem with Marx's view of the 'end of politics' is that it cannot accept a description of any serious political differences as 'genuine' or 'warranted'; that is, as an opinion which an individual or group has a right to hold and negotiate about as an equal member of a polity. ... After the revolution, there is a marked danger that there can only be one genuine form of 'politics'; for there are no longer any justified grounds for fundamental disagreement. The end of class means the end of any legitimate basis for dispute: only classes have irreconcilable interests. It is hard to resist the view that implicit in this position is a propensity to an authoritarian form of politics. There is no longer a place for systematically encouraging and tolerating disagreement and debate about public matters. There is no longer a site for the institutional promotion, though the formation of groups or parties, of opposing positions. There is no longer scope for the mobilization of competing political views (2006: 120-121).

Consequently, 'Stalinism is not simply an aberration of the Marxist project' but rather is an outcome of the 'deep structure' of 'Marxist categories with their emphasis on the centrality of class, the universal standpoint of the proletariat, and a conception of politics that roots it squarely in production' (1993a: 264). Fifth, conveniently for Held's overall intellectual and political project, this means that the experience of Stalinism does in fact indicate that revolutionary attempts to create a democratic socialist alternative to capitalism and representative democracy are neither feasible nor desirable. Finally, as we have seen, 'all those who have sought to articulate the notion of a planned economy with democracy – defending the idea of a self-managed economic system, for instance – have failed to elaborate a fully convincing alternative political economy to capitalism' (2006: 249).

The most generous response to this critique is to suggest that it indicates that Held hasn't read, let alone understood, very much Marxism. Six brief replies to his six key points. First, his claim that Marxism has neglected issues pertaining to male domination and gender, racism and ethnicity, ecology, the bureaucratic administration of trade unions and the welfare state is patently false. A full set of references to demonstrate the falsity of Held's claim in this regard would be considerably longer than the main text of this paper so I will assume that this audience is aware of it. Needless to say, this neglect will come as a great surprise to readers of academic Marxist journals and the publications of the organised socialist left, such as *International Viewpoint*, *International Socialist*

Review (US), *Socialist Review* and *International Socialism* (UK), and the *New Socialist* and *Socialist Worker* (Canada). Second, even if one concedes the point that Marxists fail to place sufficient emphasis on the autonomy of the political sphere, and it is not at all clear to me that they do, then it can be counter-argued that Held in common with the neo-Weberians whose work he leans upon (Mann, Giddens, Skocpol), is vulnerable to the charge that none of his central theoretical contentions concerning the autonomy of the political sphere can be challenged empirically given that from this perspective, as Skocpol puts it, "state autonomy" is not a fixed structural feature of any governmental system. It can come and go' (1985, p.14). Third, Held's account of Marx's conception of 'the end of politics' fundamentally distorts and misrepresents the conceptualisation of socialist participatory democracy by those within the classical Marxist tradition. For example, as Mandel (1991) argues, socialist democracy necessarily requires the constitutional entrenchment of individual civil liberties, including freedom of speech and association, is likely to be a multi-party democracy, be characterised by democratic popular control of the major media and other forms of communication, and be defended by a popular militia rather than a standing army. Fourth, as Callinicos, many others, and myself have pointed out, the rise of Stalinism took place in very specific historical circumstances. Held's suggestion that a primary cause of the degeneration of the Russian revolution was the weakness of Marxist political theory, with its alleged insufficient emphasis on protecting citizens from the arbitrary exercise of state authority and coercion, is not only unconvincing as historical analysis, but also constitutes an example the kind of reductive reasoning that he alleges is a central weakness of Marxism. Fifth, if a social revolution were to occur in one of the major advanced capitalist countries today, it would be taking place in much more favourable and advanced social, economic and geopolitical conditions than the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917. It is perfectly reasonable to argue that the chances of such a revolution succeeding would therefore be much greater. Sixth, Held's claim that the attempts by Callinicos (1991), Devine (1988), Mandel (1986), McNally (1993), and others, to outline the central features of socialist participatory democracy are 'unconvincing' is an assertion rather than an argument. In so far as he does make an argument he simply asserts the soundness of the standard Austrian school critique of central planning, ignores the counter-arguments of the authors just mentioned, throws in the standard point about the difficulties that the size and

complexity of large-scale industrialised societies creates for participatory democracy, and then expects the reader to be convinced by his claim of the unconvincingness of the authors whose views he rejects!

Conclusion

A form of 'cosmopolitan democracy' embodying a number of the features that Held describes needs to be created, but it also needs to be fundamentally anti-capitalist and socialist in nature. So, for example, a cosmopolitan *socialist* democracy would, as Held suggests, constitutionally entrench an international cluster of rights, including the civil liberties that many people falsely assume is exclusive to liberal democracy, but unlike cosmopolitan *social* democracy it would also remove the major social and economic forces that currently systematically undermine the establishment and effective exercise of these rights. Freedom of speech and the freedom to disseminate information, for example, currently exist in most of the advanced capitalist societies, but the heavy concentration and centralization of ownership in media and telecommunications helps to ensure that pro-capitalist views prevail in the world's corporate media. It is hard to imagine how the kind of media required for regional and global forms of democracy to function effectively, that is a media that facilitates genuine popular participation and control as well as a qualitative improvement in the accuracy of the information that the media conveys, could be created without nationalising and socialising all of the world's largest media corporations. Nor is it easy to envisage regional and/or global governments taxing multinational corporations in order to fund social investment in poverty reduction in poor countries as long as these corporations are capable of exerting a disproportionate influence over the formation of government policy because of the far greater resources that they possess relative to workers' and social movements. In short, for a system of cosmopolitan democracy to operate effectively on a global scale, with the extensive involvement of the workers and peasants who constitute the overwhelming majority of the world's population, and with entrenched civil liberties, regular elections, and the existence of multiple political parties, global capitalism must be replaced by global socialism.

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