

## 7 Power in society

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Most people in the world feel powerless. There are three key political questions: 'What's going on?', 'Why?' and 'What can we do about it?' But if you ask 'What's going on?', people say, 'I'm not quite sure.' 'Why?' 'Well, nobody's told me.' 'What can we do about it?' 'Probably not very much.' That sense of powerlessness explains an awful lot of what we talk about as apathy, cynicism and so on, and this is what I want to address. I want to look at some of the sources of power, what they are, how they operate, who controls them, and ask the question, 'How can we get some influence over the powers that exist in order to improve our own lives?'

The most obvious example of power is power by conquest. Julius Caesar tried to get us into the European Union in 55 BC, and we still use the penny, which was a Roman coin. Margaret Thatcher was not the first Iron Lady – Boudicca killed 7000 Romans and raised the Men of Essex in order to deal with the Treaty of Rome. Power by conquest was the basis of all the great empires of the past. The British Empire is one example – when I was born in 1925, 20 per cent of the population of the world was governed from London. Now we live in an American empire. There are certain consequences of that, which impinge upon the way our politics are conducted.

We also live in a monarchy, and monarchy is hereditary. Although you might not think it matters very much, in order to serve in Parliament you have to give an oath: 'I swear by Almighty God that I will bear faithful and true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, her heirs and successors, according to law.'

This lecture was delivered in Cambridge on 18 January 2002, and makes several references to the political situation at that time. In order to retain the contemporary character of the lecture, the editors have not made changes to reflect subsequent events, including the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

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Now I am republican; I think we should elect our head of state. So in order to serve in Parliament I've had to tell 17 lies under oath. You may not think it matters, but perhaps if we're the high court of Parliament we should adopt the other oath used by courts: 'I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.' That might be an improvement in the House of Commons!

We still have a House of Lords. The current Prime Minister very boldly suggested that 20 per cent of them be elected. He will pick the list of course, so it would also be 100 per cent appointed. If you scratch the surface, class in Britain is based on the old idea: it's the landlords and serfs, and power and authority comes from above. The more I think about it, the more I think that the culture of British politics is that you owe your loyalty to the guy above you and not to the people who elected you. Loyalty has replaced, or is intended to replace, solidarity – what you feel for the people you represent – and that's very profound.

The second source of power is power by ownership, because wealth and power are indivisible. If you are rich, you get a lot of power; if you've got a lot of power, it's much easier to get a lot of money. Ownership as a route to political power was demonstrated very vividly when William the Conqueror arrived in 1066 and took over the land. That's what the Robin Hood story is all about. The feudal system was all about the ownership of land. When I was thinking about privatisation a year or two ago, I went to the House of Commons library and said, 'I want to introduce a bill to repeal the Enclosure Act', which took all the common land and handed it to the farmers. They said, 'What do you mean, repeal the Enclosure Acts? There are 10 000 of them.' Of course the land was handed over to private owners. Later we had the Industrial Revolution, the development of British capitalism, which Marx described, and now we have multinational companies which are more powerful than nation states. Having dealt with some of them myself, Esso, the oil companies and Ford, and so on, you were very well aware that they recognised that they had power. I remember when Henry Ford came to see me in my office – it was the grandson of the founder of course – I felt as if the emperor had visited a parish councillor and was telling me what we had to do. The gap between rich and poor in the world is very, very great – five hundred dollar-billionaires have the same income as half the population of the world put together. It is inconceivable that you could have long-term peace and stability with a division between rich and poor as wide as that.

The other thing about money by ownership, business money, is that it is used now to buy political power. The recent Mayor of New York, Bloomberg, spent \$93 per vote for the votes he got. There must be a lot of people in New York who would have preferred to have the \$93! That is on a massive scale. Enron, before their auditing scandal, funded both the Democrats and the Republicans, and apparently even put some money into the Labour Party. A former Governor of Ohio, an old friend of mine called Jack Gilligan, said, 'You'll never have democracy in America when big business buys both parties and expects a pay-off whichever one wins', and I think that was a very profound remark.

Another root of power is power by faith. The religions of the world have a great deal of power. Judaism, of course, not only retains a very powerful force for individuals today, but being the chosen people with a promised land gave them a claim, they believe, to territory. I was talking to a Palestinian who said he didn't know God was an estate agent – but that is the basis of the Jewish claim. Of course Christianity is a very powerful religion in many places, as is Islam. The thing about a faith is that it begins with a commitment to right against wrong, but faith quickly becomes structured and in no time at all the fire in your belly, which leads you to express your faith, becomes a fire you use to burn heretics, which is a very different sort of fire. In 1401, the House of Commons passed an Act, the Heresy Act, which said that any lay person (other than a priest) who read the Bible was guilty of heresy and should be burned at the stake. The Bible was seen by the Church as such a revolutionary document that if it got into the hands of the wrong people, who knew what would happen? And they were right to worry. In the old days the bishops would say to people, 'We know it's a very unfair world, but if only the rich are kind and the poor are patient, it'll be alright in heaven when we're dead.' And people said, 'Well that's marvellous news, bishop, could we have it while we're still alive?' That demand led to a great deal of social unrest.

The Christian church has used a lot of military force to retain such power. The Pope sent two armies to Britain to crush Pelagianism, the heresy founded by the British-born monk Pelagius, who said that justification is by works – it's what you do that decides your future – not justification by faith. That was a very dangerous idea as well. It was for this power that Henry VIII nationalised the Church of England. It is our oldest nationalised industry, and the Prime Minister still appoints the Archbishop of Canterbury. The King had the very clever idea that if you had a nationalised Church of England then there'd be

a priest in every pulpit, in every parish, every Sunday, saying 'God wants you to do what the king wants you do', which was a very clever way of reinforcing your temporal power with a bit of spiritual support.

Another element of power is one that I can only call religious fundamentalism. I think the most powerful fundamentalism in the world today is the worship of money – much more powerful than Islam or Christianity or Judaism or Hinduism. Today the banks are bigger than the cathedrals and the temples. Even these religious fundamentalists have their own paramilitaries. The Mafia make money just by shooting somebody, which is the simplest way of making a profit. You don't even have to run a successful business, but it relies on the idea that the worship of money, the acquisition of money, is all that really matters. On television, we have business news every hour, but why can't we have other information every hour? How many people died of asbestosis? How many people are killed in industrial accidents? If you had the same publicity for social conditions that we've had for what's happened to the euro against the pound sterling, the pressure for change would become very, very strong.

Of course, with the worship of money, we get the cult of management. I was told about a boat race between the BBC and a Japanese crew. Both sides practised long and hard to improve their performance and the Japanese won by a mile. So the BBC, being good managers, set up a working party to find out why, and the working party concluded the Japanese had eight people rowing and one steering, and the BBC had eight people steering and one rowing! When managers are faced with a problem of this magnitude there's only one thing to do: appoint consultants. Eighteen months later and after spending a million and a half pounds, the consultants confirmed the diagnosis of the working party, suggested the BBC crew be completely restructured with three assistant steering managers, three deputy steering managers, a director of steering services, and the rower should be given an incentive to row harder! They had another race and the BBC lost by 2 miles. So they laid off the rower for poor performance, sold the boat, and used the money for a higher than average pay award to the director of steering services! Now you can laugh, but I can't think of any organisation that hasn't got this sort of management in place.

Another source of power is power by knowledge, for those who have access to knowledge. That's where the educational system has a very important role to

play. I sometimes think that the basis of present educational policy is to train an elite to run the world and train everybody else to take orders. Consider the idea of specially gifted children. I remember in Moscow talking about this to Mr Strokin, the Soviet Minister of Education, because I'd heard they had such special schools in Russia. I asked, 'What about that?' 'Well, as a matter of fact', he said with a funny smile, 'they're actually schools for the children of specially gifted parents'. I thought that was quite a shrewd thing to say!

We also have control of knowledge and information through the media. They explain everything and analyse everything. I was thinking that if Moses had tried to explain the Ten Commandments in an interview on *Newsnight*, he would have never got beyond the second one. If Paxman had said to him:

'What do you think about your mother and father?'

'You should honour your mother and father.'

'Ho! Ho! Honour your mother and father! What about adultery?'

'You shouldn't commit adultery.'

'You don't live in the real world, Moses!'

It is important to be able to hear an argument at length, but the normal interview format makes it almost impossible. Of course even to get on the media there has to be a bit of violence. I was with Jack Jones at a pensioners' rally in Blackpool last May. There were 2000 pensioners (you know, there are 11 million of us). I said to Jack, 'This gathering will not be reported unless you take a brick and throw it through McDonald's, and then there'll be two bishops on *Newsnight* discussing the rising tide of violence among old people!' Of course he didn't throw a brick and there was no coverage. The media in a way encourage violence by only reporting events that produce it.

There is power that comes through science and technology. That is tremendously important, because the development of communicating machines, killing machines, travelling machines and calculating machines has created a huge demand which can't easily be met. There's a technological gap. There's a generational gap; younger people know much more than their parents. The old saying 'Don't teach your grandmother to suck eggs' is absolute nonsense! I depend entirely on my grandchildren to sort out my laptop when it crashes. And the expectation gap. I remember when the Russians put a vehicle on the moon, somebody wrote to me in Bristol and said, 'If the Russians can put a vehicle on the moon, why can't we have a decent bus service in Bristol?' It was a very powerful argument. The question is: who controls the machines? In whose

interests are they put? The thing about the killing machines, modern weapons, is that we have a choice in this generation either to deploy our technological ability to meet the needs of humanity, or to destroy the human race. That raises the moral content in all the decisions we take.

Another form of power, in which we begin to see the emergence of some democratic ingredient, is power through organisation. It's quite recent. You've had slavery; you've had feudalism; you've had the Peasants' Revolt; you've had the English Revolution; you've had Tom Paine, whose book *The Rights of Man* was burned by the public executioner because it was seditious; and you've had the Tolpuddle Martyrs. These events have a huge influence on our thinking, though they're not much reported. The Chartists wanted the vote for men and the Suffragettes argued for women. With the development of the Labour movement, you got a new meaning of class, not the old idea of the King and the dukes and the earls and the viscounts and then the common people, but a definition of class in terms of the difference of economic interest between the earners and the owners (the former sometimes called the working class, although nowadays the nature of work has changed so much that if you say 'working class', people think you work in an overall). Nevertheless, if you earn rather than own, you do have a different economic interest, and that was how the Labour Party came to be founded. Party democracy was about the guys at the bottom trying to influence the people at the top, a thing I'll come back to because it didn't make a lot of progress. Similarly, the colonial liberation movements were all about democracy, and self-government, and what a tremendous struggle they had. I've known so many of the colonial national leaders – Gandhi, Nehru, Mugabe, Cheddi Jagan, Nkrumah – all put in British prisons, although they ended up having tea with the Queen. When the demand for self-government first came, it was repressed with considerable force by the colonial power. The demand, both in the old colonial countries and in this country through the development of the Labour movement, was for some democracy, for some control of our future, and for what democracy is about: human equality, representation and accountability.

Somebody asked me recently to define democracy. I thought the best way to put it is like this: if you meet a powerful person – it might be Hitler, Stalin, Bill Gates, anybody you like – ask them five questions. What power have you got? Where did you get it from? In whose interests do you exercise it? To whom are you accountable? How can we get rid of you? That is the democratic question,

because if you can't get rid of the people who make the laws you're expected to obey, you don't live in a democratic society.

Consider the way that democracy flowered in Britain, long before the Labour Party was formed in the nineteenth century. Look at the development of local government in, for example, Birmingham after the Municipal Corporations Act of 1837. Democracy in Birmingham flowered in a very interesting way because people used the vote to buy by voting what they couldn't afford individually. They got municipal schools, municipal hospitals, municipal gas, municipal electricity, municipal museums, municipal art galleries, municipal police – that was what it was about. Very rich people have never had to bother with any help from the State to buy a house, or have their children educated, or look after themselves when they're ill or when they're old. But the ballot paper allowed everyone to buy those rights, and that was why it was so important. It got to the point where the Labour movement, having been founded, and then trying to get control of the Parliament by the extension of a franchise, said it wanted a bit of economic democracy as well. That's what the famous Clause 4 was about: 'To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry on the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.' That didn't really mean nationalisation. I've mentioned that Henry VIII nationalised the Church of England, the Tories nationalised the BBC, the army is nationalised. It's not about nationalisation. It was about some democratic control, i.e. co-operation, municipal enterprise, and so on.

The experience I've had in my life is to find how deeply democracy is dis-trusted under almost any form of government. I used to go to Moscow as a minister and meet the central committee of the Communist Party. They had not been elected of course. I'd meet the Commissars, and they'd not been elected. I would think 'that's awful'. Then I go to Brussels and meet the Commissioners: they haven't been elected! Meet the Central Bank – they hadn't been elected! Both capitalism and communism allow you to change the management but not to discuss the system. You can only decide whether you want Bush or Clinton, and maybe next Hilary Clinton, or Thatcher, or Major, or Blair or whatever, but you're not really encouraged to discuss any alternative way of running society.

If you look internationally, the developments of the United Nations at the end of the Second World War were an attempt to try and build up some idea of international democratic accountability. The old Concert of Europe was just the colonial powers. The League of Nations were very largely the imperial

powers. But when the United Nations was formed, and particularly as the old colonies became liberated, then we did have in the General Assembly something that was beginning to look a bit like the parliament of the world – although of a very primitive kind, and not directly elected because they were sent there by governments. Then came UNESCO, and the importance of saying that war begins in the minds of men and therefore you have to find some way of removing the distrust. Although the UN is very imperfect, it is trying to bring about some change that is likely to be relevant, as with the World Health Organization and Non-Governmental Organisations. We have to look forward to the democratisation of the UN. It seems remote, but remember that the elemental Parliament of 1832 dominated by 2 per cent of the population, all of whom were rich, white men, did in fact gradually get transformed within my lifetime. When I was born, women didn't have the vote until they were 30. Men were so arrogant they said, 'You can't trust the wife until she's 30', so it was only in 1928 that women got the vote at 21. It was only in 1948 that the secondary university vote and the business vote were abolished. We're still not far from the day when we reached one person, one vote. Now we have to take the job on again at a global level.

We'll also have to look again at the question of whether the United Nations should develop an industrial policy. I originally thought sanctions were better than war. They clearly are, but when you see the application of sanctions to a particular country – half a million people thought to have died in Iraq purely because of sanctions – you realise that if sanctions are to be applied for human betterment, they probably have to be applied to multinational corporations and not to nations. If Ford or Gap or Next or these multinational companies couldn't exploit labour in one area in order to undercut the wages in another, then you might make quite a significant contribution. It is a very strange thing that capital can move to wherever the profits are greatest, but people can't move. A company may say to you, 'I'm sorry but wages are lower in Malaysia so we're closing this factory and opening it in Malaysia. I'm afraid that's the law of the market.' But if you live in Malaysia you can't say, 'I understand they're opening a new factory in Cambridge. I want my family to be brought there to get a job and a higher wage.' 'Oh, no, no, no, that's absolutely out of the question!' These matters have to be addressed.

Now look and see how the democratic idea has been eroded. I don't look back on a Golden Age, that would be a foolish thing to do, but I do notice that



in the last 50 years there have been quite a number of major assaults on the idea of democracy. The first undoubtedly was the Cold War. We were told the Red Army was planning to come to Cambridge and force everyone here to read Stalin and Lenin instead of the serious academics produced here, and therefore we had to spend billions of pounds on atomic weapons, but I wonder whether that was really true? Was that really what was going to happen? After all, we know now that the Red Army didn't do all that well against Chechnya, so how could they have taken on and defeated NATO? Then I realised that what they were really saying was they didn't want socialist ideas to spread and therefore what they would do would be to present the threat of dangerous ideas as a military challenge, so if you criticised capitalism you were described as an agent of the KGB or working for the Kremlin. This had a profound effect on the future of the world, because the Russians thought we were going to attack them. Indeed one of the reasons why the Soviet Union collapsed was because they spent an enormous percentage of their national income on weapons, thinking they were going to be attacked. It is convenient to have a foreign enemy.

It used to be communism, now it's Islam which helps to strengthen your position at home. It's weird how Islam has been shifted from providing the agents used by the United States to undermine communism, to becoming the main enemy. I remember leading a delegation to protest to the Russian Ambassador, Mr Lunkov, in 1978, at the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, and he said, 'Well, we're only doing it because the Americans have funded people to destroy the regime.' Who were the Americans funding? Osama bin Laden. He was a freedom fighter sent there by the USA in order to destroy communism. If you look back at the relations with the Soviet Union from the very beginning, we sent an army of intervention in after the revolution to destroy the revolution. That's not in our national history curriculum. During the 1930s, the pre-war Conservative government wasn't really appeasing Hitler. If you look at the captured German Foreign Office documents, you will find Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, was sent there in order to congratulate Hitler on his achievement in destroying communism in Germany and standing as a bulwark against communism in Russia. Even in 1941, when the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, President Truman, later the founder of NATO, said in a speech, 'If the Germans seem to be winning, we should support the Russians. If the Russians seem to be winning, we should support the Germans, in the hope that as many as possible kill each other.'

That gives some understanding, looking back on it all, as to what the Cold War was all about. The biggest surprise of all was when I went to Hiroshima, honestly believing, as most people of my generation did, that, awful as the bomb was, it was used in order to save tens of thousands of American lives from the final task of invading Japan. I discovered when I was in Japan that the Japanese had offered to surrender before we dropped the bomb. The only condition they made was that the Emperor should remain. Well, that was what the Americans wanted anyway, to see Japan didn't go communist. But why did they use the bomb? Was it, as I suspect now looking back on it, the first warning-shot in the Cold War, to tell the Russians that the United States had a weapon of supreme power? We must understand the impact of this on our capacity to think clearly about what was really happening.

Similarly, the World Trade Organization, which is now very powerful, does have the power by treaty to dictate to national governments what they can and cannot do in their own societies, and so does the Brussels Commission. If you want to put money into the railways or whatever, you may find you run foul of the rules of the World Trade Organization that says you can't subsidise your own industries. These are erosions of democracy on an absolutely massive scale. I remember way back in 1975, when I was a minister and produced a White Paper on industrial policy, I was told by the Foreign Office that I couldn't publish a bill about industrial policy until it had been cleared with the Commission in Brussels. When Parliament can't even know what a minister wants to do until it's been cleared by people who've never been elected, you are beginning to see a threat to the survival of democracy.

I was on the Council of Ministers for four years, indeed I was the President of the European Council of Energy Ministers, and I found it an absolutely fascinating experience, for two reasons. First of all, it was the only committee I ever sat on where I was not allowed to put in a document. Only the Commission could put in a paper and, as a minister, you could only say 'yes' or 'no' to what they offered. All the laws are made, in secret, by the Council of Ministers. During my presidency I wrote to every other minister and said, 'Let's meet in public'. They nearly had a nervous breakdown, because the idea that the press and the public would know what was going on in the Council of Ministers terrified them! And yet the laws in Brussels are not made by the European Parliament, but made by the ministers. It's the only parliament in the world that meets in secret, and the directives and decisions of the Council of Ministers

can repeal laws we've passed in our Parliament and every other parliament and can impose laws on us that have never been discussed by our Parliament. That is, in my opinion, a very significant erosion, never discussed in this way.

Of course when the euro comes in, and we have the Central Bank controlling everything, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will simply become the chairman of the finance committee of a sort of local authority based in London. That's why Gordon Brown may not be very keen on it. Similarly, the Governor of the Bank of England is not very keen on it. If you want to see the possible consequences of that, you've only got to look at the Argentine, where the economic crisis they have to cope with came because the peso was linked to the dollar, and whereas Brazil was free to devalue and boomed, the Argentinean economy collapsed. There were 5 presidents in 12 days, which gave you some indication about the extent to which some democratic input into it was frustrated.

Quite apart from all that, there is the centralised executive power now found in Britain. The present government follows a tradition established by Mrs Thatcher. Peter Mandelson, when he was a minister just after the election in 1997, made a speech in Germany in which he said, 'The era of representative democracy is coming slowly to an end.' It was a very important statement, because what he was saying was that legitimacy doesn't any longer depend on being elected, it depends on being efficient. He was citing the Central Bank. And Parliament is now in decline. I left Parliament, I have said, to devote time to politics. I thought at the time I would miss the chamber of the House of Commons, but I don't. The Speaker has very kindly said, as I've been there 50 years, I can use the building. I go to the tea room and the library and meet all my mates. This is the normal right of every peer who has been an MP, so I have all the benefits of peerage without the humiliation of being a Lord!

When I look back on the chamber, I don't miss it at all. I've no urge to ask clever supplementary questions of the Prime Minister. Indeed, Prime Minister's Questions switch me off completely. 'Could I trouble my right honourable friend to remind me of his latest triumph since last Wednesday?' They say there's so many planted questions, it ought to be renamed Gardener's Question Time! And people are beginning to notice. They don't think it matters any more. The Cabinet is so weak. The Cabinet meets for half an hour or 20 minutes now, to be told what the Prime Minister has decided – if he hasn't got a photo opportunity that makes it difficult for him to be there. I looked in my diary: in January 1968, we had eight full-day meetings of the Cabinet in a single month,

morning and afternoon. You may say it took a lot of time, but the people round the table, Dick Crossman, Roy Jenkins, Gerald Gardiner, Barbara Castle – each formidable people, worth listening to, but the key to success was that the decisions that were made were collective decisions. Even if you were defeated, and you were very often defeated in the Cabinet, you were committed to the outcome because you'd been able to participate. All that has gone, and is replaced by patronage.

Prime Ministerial patronage. I mentioned the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury. That goes back to the nationalisation of the Church of England, but the Prime Minister has put 248 people into Parliament. It takes the whole population of the country to elect 650 MPs and it's taken one Prime Minister to put 248 people into the House of Lords. Now, whatever you may say about these people as peers – they may be very, very interesting, and I'm not saying a word against any of them – it is nothing whatever to do with democracy. It is a return to a medieval system, because, although not many people realise this, when peerages began they were not hereditary. The king made somebody a peer for life and then put another one in. The hereditary peerage came in later. So we are now modernising ourselves back to the fourteenth century, namely that the King, or the Prime Minister now, stuffs the House of Lords with his friends. Of course that's a very convenient thing to do because if you've got a newspaper proprietor who's being a bit difficult, a peerage could help – that's why they call them Press Lords. If you want a vacancy to be created in the House of Commons, you offer the sitting member a peerage and then you parachute Sean Woodward in or whoever it happens to be. You realise how convenient patronage is, and also realise it has nothing whatever to do with the democratic process.

In the party the centralisation of power is going on on a huge scale. There is somebody, Charles Clark, who's been announced as Chairman of the Labour Party. He's never been elected, but he's been called Chairman and he is really the Prime Minister's boss of the Labour Party. I think this is what people feel. I certainly felt it very strongly when I was there and so did my constituents. Instead of being represented, we are being managed, and there's all the difference in the world between electing someone to represent you and electing someone who's going to manage you. I used to get a fax every day from the Millbank Tower when I was a Member. They took a lot of trouble; they drafted it with a quote from me. You know, 'Tony Benn welcomes compulsory homework

for pensioners', or whatever the latest gimmick was, and I was expected to take it out of the fax machine, and fax it back again to the *Derbyshire Times* in the hope they'd print it. I did make a speech once saying, 'I feel less and less like a Member of Parliament, and more and more like an Avon Lady who's told what to say when she knocks at the door'! I had a furious letter from the Managing Director of Avon, bitterly complaining that I had compared Avon Ladies to Members of Parliament!

Now we come to the growth of the American empire. The American empire is the greatest empire the world has ever seen. Most empires attempt to get hold of resources. I did a debate at the time of the war in Kuwait with Enoch Powell, who was a classical scholar, about the Peloponnesian Wars, of which I knew absolutely nothing. But he explained that at the time of the Peloponnesian Wars wood was essential for warships and therefore people had wars for wood. And of course if you look at recent wars they've almost all been about oil. As Energy Secretary I was called to the Cabinet committees on the Falklands. I said, 'What have I to do with the Falklands?' 'Ooh', said my Permanent Secretary, 'there's more oil round the Falklands than there is around the United Kingdom'. The Falklands War was a war for oil. The Gulf War was a war for oil. The Afghan War was a war for oil because, three or four years ago, when Bush was Governor of Texas, the Texans invited the Taliban to come to discuss a pipeline from the Caspian oil to the Western market.

That's what it's about. The UN has been bypassed and civil liberties eroded. I don't want to go in any great detail to these prisoners in Guantanamo, but if you have a war against terrorism you'd think if you caught somebody he was a prisoner of war. It turns out now they're a new category called 'Illegal Combatants'. The erosion of civil liberties is very, very frightening and I think what we are now up against is revenge posing as justice. There is a danger in this global alliance against terrorism, which is perfectly understandable, but all the top people in the world are huddling together against any form of dissent in their own countries. I'm sure in Beijing, they'd say, 'That's a good idea. We'll join in the battle against terrorism, and that will help us against the Falun Gong'. You can see, it wouldn't take an awful lot of time for people to begin to realise that you could define terrorism in almost any way you liked. Eco-terrorism is a word I've heard. Maybe the people who go to Seattle or Genoa are thought of as terrorists. But if you criminalise dissent then you are in a very dangerous situation. Historically, before the democratic impetus began to be

felt, the argument was between the government of the day and the people, and now I think that argument is reappearing. It is the governments of the world against the peoples of the world, and this is done in order to maintain the status quo, whatever is convenient to that particular government. Once you begin defining opposition as terrorism, then you create problems.

I remember speaking as a young MP in 1964 in Trafalgar Square, supporting a very well-known terrorist who'd just been convicted of the crime of terrorism, to which he confessed. I was duly denounced in the *Daily Mail* and all that. The next time I met him he had a Nobel Peace Prize and was President of South Africa. When Gandhi was in London in 1931, I met him, when I was six. A journalist said to Gandhi, who had just come out of a British prison and was on his way back in again, 'What do you think of British civilisation, Mr Gandhi?' And Gandhi said, 'I think it would be a very good idea!' Freedom fighters are people who are driven to use force in order to get democracy, just as the imperial powers use force to eliminate democracy, and this is something that has to be thought about very carefully.

The last points I want to make are about the possible impact of a world recession on democracy. I was brought up in a very political family. I bought *Mein Kampf* when I was about 10 and I've still got it in the shelf at home. I've got Mussolini's biography, with a foreword by the American Ambassador in Rome saying Mussolini was the greatest figure of our time and sphere. After the effect of the war on Italy in the '20s and in Germany in the '30s, 6 million unemployed, it was very easy for somebody to come along and find a scapegoat – the Jews, the communists, whatever – and say to the Germans as Hitler did, 'I'll give you work.' And he did. He gave them work as soldiers – which cost millions of lives in the war.

Hitler said, 'Democracy inevitably leads to Marxism.' Now you work that one out! If you think what happened in Stalin's Russia, what he was saying was that if you give people power, they'll move to the left, and that's why democracy is so controversial. I think that the anti-globalisation movement, in a very simple and crude way, is a movement for global democracy.

These people have no common ideological position. The unions, the churches, the peace movement, the environmental movement, and so on – they come together because, they say, the exercise of power in our world is done without any regard to our interests, and indeed without our consent, and what they're trying to do is to put pressure on governments.

I don't believe that the answer to these problems is a tight ideological one. I'm a Socialist. But I went to a meeting not long ago, a Socialist conference in London, about 7000, a huge meeting, and somebody said, 'We're all victims of capitalism. We've got to smash the State.' I said, 'That's a very interesting proposition, but if an old lady comes to me in Chesterfield and says, "Tony, I'm 80 now, my husband just died. Could I have a bungalow?" and I say to her, "Well, you're a victim of capitalism. We must smash the State", she would say, "Tony, that's very, very interesting, but what are the prospects of a bungalow?"' You actually have to approach people through their own experience, not through trying to impose an ideological solution on everybody's problem. That I think is what is needed.

My own experience of progress over the years is that if you come up with a progressive idea, to begin with it's absolutely ignored. The media don't mention it, and if you go on you're mad, absolutely bonkers. I've been accused of that myself. If you go on after that, you're very dangerous. Then there's a pause, and then you can't find anyone who doesn't claim to have thought of it in the first place! And that is how progress occurs, it begins from the bottom. I think of the environmental movement – it's a very vivid example. If you take someone like Swampy, for example, 10 years ago he was a bearded weirdie who'd be taken into custody by the local constabulary. He'll be in the House of Lords next because the argument has been won. No government now dare ignore the environment, even if Bush won't go along with the Kyoto Agreement. My experience of Parliament is that it's the last place to get the message. That's why I'm working at another level now, because when Parliament decides something you can be sure that five years ago everybody else had reached the same conclusion.

We have to try and accelerate the process of justice from the bottom to the top. There are opportunities now, the Internet is very significant in undercutting the Murdochs and the CNNs and has great potential. Certainly I find things on it which I would never be able to discover in any other way. Communication and access to knowledge is so important. But it will be a very long and hard struggle. I don't think that people with power ever, ever, want to give it up, and you have to persuade them and put such pressure on them that they feel their own survival requires concessions. Democracy to me is a means, not an end. It's a route map and not a destination. It's a journey. It's a way by which you discuss things and how you decide them. For that, you have to have understanding. You

have to have self-organisation because you won't get any help from the people at the top – you've got to do it yourself. That's the lesson of all the great changes – anti-colonial movement, women's movement, environmental movement, trade union movement – they've always begun at the bottom and got through to the top.

It is very hard. There are moments when I write my diary at night, and I put such gloomy things in it that I have determined they shall never be published. On the other hand, there are moments when it's so exciting that I wonder if it's good for someone of my age to get as excited as I do. Hope is the fuel of progress, and fear is a prison in which we put ourselves. If we approach the problems of political progress in that spirit, then I think we shall do quite well.