



A Global Civil Society: A New Ethos

By Alvaro J. de Regil ^a

From time to time TJSGA will issue essays on topics relevant to The Living Wages North and South Initiative (TLWNSI). This paper is the Fifteenth in the series “The Neo-Capitalist Assault” –a collection in development about Neoliberalism.

This is the first essay proposing a solution. It develops the concept of a new Global Civil Society as the central element of a new global democratic capitalist system. The objective is to argue that a truly democratic and participatory ethos is absolutely necessary to change the current paradigm, and that, in order for this to occur, a Global Civil Society must emerge. The author opens explaining that the essay presents the concept for the emergence of a long-term sustainable economic paradigm to achieve social justice.

This is the first of three essays that constitute the last part of this work. Together they present what I believe to be a long-term solution to the current situation of great injustice in capitalist societies. Thus, they are devoted to outline the best possible path to achieve social justice, through sustainable economic progress, to be followed by democratic societies, given the historical evolution of Capitalism and the results that have been obtained. Obviously, the whole concept is anchored under the assumption that we are referring to real democratic societies. I have repeatedly discussed in previous essays the lack of a real democratic ethos in most nations. I have pointed out the rapid deterioration of democracy in previously democratically-mature societies, in

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favour of a merely electoral democracy, and I have emphasized the importance of achieving a truly participatory bottom-up democratic process in order to achieve an equitable and sustainable economic system. Thus, for the remainder of this work I will insistently make reference to true democracy as the most critical element in this concept. In this essay I focus on the conceptual framework and ethos necessary to develop a long-term sustainable economic paradigm that will achieve both social justice and sustain the environment, the sole purpose of a truly democratic political system. In essay Two of Part V, I address the concrete actions required to take on the capitalist challenge of achieving social justice and present what I call the “Equitable Way.” This idea is anchored on the absolute necessity of achieving a balance between social prerogatives and market efficiencies with the need to redistribute wealth as the most fundamental and transcendental action. Finally, in the last essay, I focus on the implementation of very concrete actions required in my proposal to achieve the goal of wealth redistribution.

Social Justice Through Equitable Global Progress

Capitalism is, until now, man’s best idea for the economic interaction of individuals, for I believe humanity has not found a less imperfect system. This is because Capitalism fits best with human nature. If it is used with true liberty, it provides the best possible ethos for the development and use of man’s ingenuity in the most productive way, allowing civil societies to achieve true economic and social progress. In spite of its many imperfections, when all the participants of

the system enjoy true liberty, there are many winners and few losers. But when it is used in an authoritarian manner, when the structures of democracy are corrupted by the ambition of very private interests, Capitalism becomes an economic system of oppression, where most are losers for the benefit of a few winners. Unfortunately, for the most part, the history of Capitalism has shown that the private interests of those in power have dominated the scene and thus, except for very few brief periods, inequality has been the dominant situation for most societies. However, it is clear that equality has been more prevalent in those societies where democracy has achieved its greatest degree of development. Thus, it should be clear that those societies that have achieved the greatest and most equitable degree of economic and social development have first achieved a reasonable degree of democratic development. The consolidation of a truly democratic ethos is indeed a precondition for equitable economic and social development. But, achieving true democratic, economic and social development does not imply an assured future with permanent equitable progress and the achievement of social justice in all realms of human activity. There are natural instincts always at play that tend to increase inequity as they struggle to fulfil individual ambitions. To be sure, since the nature of Capitalism is based on the permanent competition of individuals for greater material gain, it is natural to have winners and losers. What is not only morally but also democratically unacceptable is that some compete with all the advantages, whilst many do not even have access to the opportunities to compete. Millions are born completely deprived of the most essential tools to successfully participate in a capitalist society. And yet, some of those that are born with access to all the opportunities, not content with this situation, bend the most basic rules with the sole interest of further increasing the material fulfilment of their individual and very private interests. And so, they profit over people's misery.

Many supporters of Neoliberalism argue that Capitalism is amoral and that, hence, it should not bear any social responsibilities. But regardless of whether it is amoral or immoral, Capitalism has to be shaped to serve all individuals in an equitable manner. This is because the first

natural right of humanity is the freedom of individuals to live a dignified life through their own work and talent. This is what gives substance to the concept of social justice. And, although we can never expect perfect equality, since each individual is different, we need to achieve a reasonable degree of equality in opportunity. Otherwise, if we insist on upholding a Darwinian ethos of the survival of the fittest or, better defined, of the ones who received the most opportunities, we would then resort to permanent human conflict, misery, destitution and violence. Since we are social animals, we must then ensure that all members of our communities receive a fair chance to earn a dignified life. For we either establish social justice or we will have to resign ourselves to live in the midst of violence. Therefore, Capitalism must be subject, at all times, to the moral structure of true democracy, in order to secure a sustainable equitable economic system. Mexican historian Enrique Krauze named his book about the struggle for democracy: "For a Democracy Without Adjectives", which contends that real democracy is a democracy without limitations. Well, in the case of Capitalism what we need is Capitalism with one adjective. For in order to establish and consolidate, on a permanent basis, equitable economic development, with the sole objective of achieving social justice, the only acceptable Capitalism is democratic Capitalism.

It is under this context that Capitalism must be put to work to achieve social justice; for the ultimate goal of democracy is not to provide the conditions for some to achieve enormous wealth at the expense of many that are forced to endure misery. On the contrary, true democracy must give every member of society the opportunity to have a say not just relative to who will govern, but also relative to what the concrete paradigm to be applied in the governance of a nation must be, so that everyone benefits in a reasonably equitable manner. As a consequence, the wealthy will have to accept that many of the economic prerogatives that they enjoy, only because the great mass of poor endure their cost in their daily lives, will have to be cancelled. This is especially true in developing economies where I have abundantly discussed the very unjust distribution of wealth.

Since the centres of power have already embarked much of the capitalist world on a globalization process, where many of the structures that previously isolated the economies of many nations have been destroyed, the way to begin to achieve social justice with a long-term scope is by building an equitable global economic ethos. Indeed, I believe that it would be unrealistic to try to reverse the situation to the previous stage of protectionism. The natural expansion of Capitalism, from the centre to the periphery, has destroyed the previous barriers, albeit for the wrong reasons. Now, what must be done is to focus on the achievement of social justice and a sustainable environment in a global capitalist system. To this aim, the vehicle to achieve it is through the establishment of a paradigm designed to generate equitable global progress in the centre, the periphery and beyond.

On the economic side, I must stress that mitigation of poverty is far short of what is required. The mitigation of poverty alone implies the acceptance of the current ethos that generates a very unjust order. Therefore, the current structures must be collapsed and the construction of a new capitalist system, governed by true democracy, must come about. At the very least, absolute poverty must be eliminated and lesser degrees of misery must be drastically reduced. On the environmental side, the same democratic principles must be applied and, in some cases, specific economic activities in concrete habitats must be stopped altogether, in order to reinvigorate or reinstate the previous ecosystem that existed, whenever salvageable. Most of the destruction of the environment is a result of both the irrational exploitation performed by companies for mere greed or the result of the mass migrations of destitute poor, stripped from their original settlements due to the lack of opportunities. Good examples of the latter are the Sem Terra –the landless– of Brazil and those in other parts of Iberian America and in many regions in Africa. In sum, in the context of a global economic ethos, in order to achieve social justice with a long-term scope, we need to achieve both human as well as nature's sustainability in a balanced way. The mitigation of poverty alone is no real solution, but rather the avoidance of the problem. Preservation of the current habitat is not enough and it must be reversed, whenever possible, to stop the irrational

exploitation of the earth for profit. Global equitable economic progress and a rational management of the earth's resources, under a true democratic context, are the vehicles to social justice and the recovery and preservation of the environment in a sustainable manner. Furthermore, the eradication of abject misery and the reduction of less dramatic poverty will only contribute to sustain the environment. This is the new ethos that mankind must build in order to secure its future for many generations to come.

A High Moral Ground

The overwhelming power of the promise of instant satisfaction implies that it is more than stupid to be frugal. The daily bombardment by corporations, selling the values of sheer pseudo-individualism, of hedonistic pleasure, of the systematic pampering of our superego and of the despise for the idea of community and of the overall welfare of all ranks of society in our local, national and global communities, has exacerbated the meaningless competition for the possession of material things, at all cost, in our search for preposterous bliss. The belied value of people who seek material satisfaction, instead of being true valuable individuals who participate, give and benefit from the overall welfare, has alienated us from the idea of fairness and sharing, and it has exacerbated the selfishness in our spirits. Money is the only true measure of our worth. If we possess money, we possess power; and if this is possible only at the expense of many who were born with no opportunity to live a dignified life, we tend to look the other way and ignore the facts. From a cultural angle, this explains why Capitalism has made societies, since the last two decades, more unjust as time progresses. The natural need of Capitalism, like a shark, to constantly move forward or die, has pushed corporations to impose consumerism per se and has made of us alienated animals that cannot feel at ease if we don't have what we are told that we need. The dazing caused by the daily rattling of both subliminal and overt bundles of messages that impacts us in many fashions and directs us to buy, promising that this will take us to a state of bliss, has made us lose our true individual nature and our capacity to behave accordingly. Instead, we have adopted a herd-like mentality and, thus, we just mindlessly follow the path that we are shown, which will take us to oblivion.

As a result, there is little morality left. From the most basic common sense principles of respect for our fellow human beings, to the values of the world's religions, these rules for human coexistence seem hollow, since we provide lip service to them whilst we increasingly ignore them. The right to own a weapon in the U.S., or the culture of aggression, sex and violence of which we receive daily doses, clearly explains why children and teenagers feel increasingly alienated and resort to violence when they find no meaning to their lives. In their own small school community, the culture of narcissism and hedonism impairs many to experience a feeling of belonging and a meaning for life. For there is really no communal spirit when the concept of the survival of the fittest is inherent to our capitalist society from the very root of our learning process at home and in school. And yet, we think that we are real individuals, when instead we are coerced by an alienating and hedonistic culture to conform and behave like a herd; albeit, to be sure, the marketing to impose this culture promotes a belied concept of individual freedom that consciously promotes selfishness and alienation from our social responsibilities. This culture disregards the need for human solidarity and claims that the right way is for individuals to be responsible and each one look out, individually, for his or her own sake. Of course, it ignores the fact that billions of people were born already handicapped to pursue their own destiny because they have no access to any opportunity to live a dignified life.

The exacerbation of pseudo-individualism, violence and alienation nonetheless, there is clear hope of a change in direction. For despite the constant bombardment by mass media that pulls us in the opposite direction, there is a resilient spirit in many people of positive peaceful coexistence, where the interest for the well being of our fellow human beings is genuine. In the first essay of this work, I elaborated extensively on the fact that we are inextricably dependent on our fellow peers with whom we interact everyday as members of our community. Thus, we should remember that we cannot ignore our role as members of human society, let alone as members of more concrete groups, as members of our nation, of our province or state and of our local community. This is the central principle of this new ethos: that all members of society must

aspire to social justice, meaning that all can have the possibility of securing the access to the opportunities that provide the means for a reasonably decent quality of life, because human solidarity is the only path to human co-existence. And, thus, human solidarity must be above all other values.

Let us imagine what the world would be like if instead of the endorsement of violence and a preposterous narcissism, our vehicles of cultural promotion would be endorsing respect for the individual and the environment as the best way to feel fulfilled, complete, integrated and even materially comfortable. This would still be a market economy in a capitalist society, but without the excesses in our coerced behaviour, which are the direct culprits in the gap between rich and poor and in the deterioration of the environment. For these excesses make us care only for our own material satisfaction. Instead, what we would have would be a global capitalist society that puts the welfare of all ranks of society before the welfare of the individual. To be sure, the individual would be free to pursue his own future, but he would be clearly aware that his future depends, in a very meaningful way, on the well being of all. Simply said, we would all become socially conscious, and we would abide by a set of rules designed to establish a balance between the competitive nature of Capitalism and our responsibility for achieving social justice. A fact that, instead of inhibiting Capitalism, would only strengthen its prospectus for sustainable and consistent growth. For a more equitable distribution of wealth would imbue the formation of widespread aggregate demand while it would curve the power of an elite of too powerful players.

There is a reason, after the demise of the centrally-planned economies, for the overwhelming denunciation of the neoliberal globalization in former communist countries, in developing countries and at the heart of the capitalist centres of power alike. And that is the growing sense of despair when people feel that the world is becoming more and more inhospitable due to the current culture that prevails. The sense of exclusion is depressing, but the sense that despair reigns, even among those who are included in the new global society, is providing many individuals with the will to

force change. And so, the by-now, systematic demonstrations and activism in Seattle, Prague, Washington, Berlin, Cancun, Santiago de Chile, Porto Alegre and other cities and the less overt work of millions of people in thousands of non-profit organizations that work from many angles to reshape the face of Capitalism, is a clear sign that Civil Society is organizing and is imbued in a truly democratic spirit. Thanks to this growing activism, there is now clear hope that Neoliberalism will cease to exist, and a new culture of equitable economic progress will be democratically established.

It would be complete utopism and idealism to expect that those who control popular culture through mass media would change their views. For their only interest is monetary, and, for this, they need alienated consumers and not real individuals. Thus, it is only Civil Society that can make a change of culture come about. Indeed, what the world needs is a change of culture that moves from exacerbated individualism to a community of individuals who are socially conscious; and, to achieve this, we need to reestablish a minimum platform of moral principles, with democracy and Civil Society above all other interests. Mexican economist Julio Boltvinik calls it "the moral economy" and writes to this respect: "the moral economy is called for to exist as a resistance to the "free market economy," for "the increase in the price of bread may balance the supply and demand of bread, but it does not resolve the hunger of people." This idea still envisions a market economy, but not a free market economy in the current practical sense. What we need is a moral economy, indeed, an economy with a human spirit, centred on the welfare of all ranks of society and not on the individual. I must remark, that each member of Civil Society would still be free to pursue its own destiny and still benefit individually. Nonetheless, Civil Society, through a real democratic participatory process, would ensure that the pursuit of individual welfare be balanced with the democratic responsibility for the pursuit of the welfare of all ranks of society, so to achieve equitable and dynamic economic progress. Neoliberals would argue that the market could regulate itself. But we already have two centuries of experience to know that the market's regulation does not deal whatsoever with social justice. And thus, Civil Society must

enforce the regulation of the economy regardless of the dogmas of Neoliberalism to the contrary. French writer Jean Maillard brings up an important moral question about the right to regulate by asking if it is right to make some goods and services and market them, for although the market entails some degree of self regulation, it does not imply that Civil Society has no right to choose what may and may not be traded. Otherwise, the only ethos that would exist would be that of the law of the jungle, where even mankind is tradable.¹ To be sure, each day we are getting closer to an ethos characterized by the disguised and sophisticated practice of massive slavery: the Third World's peons or labour commodities consumed by the MNCs.

As a consequence, what we need is a very well-balanced capitalist economy, and, in order to achieve balance, we must regulate. Certainly, no one holds the ultimate truth about which way is the right way. Thus, we cannot resort to the dogmatic extremisms of Darwinian Capitalism or of a mixed capitalist economy with the government as a big impresario. We have already travelled both paths and have experienced their great shortcomings. Therefore, what we need is not the market to be the regulator of everything or the government to tightly control every move. What I propose is that Civil Society be the centre of the paradigm; and, this, through its various agents of change, would permanently and systematically work to achieve the best possible balance. To be sure, to achieve this, the first and critical step to take is to establish a truly participatory democracy from the bottom-up, locally, nationally and globally. Thus, we would have a capitalist economy run by the consensus of all ranks of society. This is how the bottom-up democracy would work. The initiatives would constantly come from many different ranks of Civil Society and be approved or rejected by consensus. The governments in their various branches would certainly play a major role as agents of regulation, following the mandate of Civil Society, but they would not monopolize at all the initiatives or the resolutions. The practical goal would be to establish a fair economic path, a balanced economy: "The Equitable Way".

Lastly, let me define what I mean by a balanced economy. Since our unavoidable imperfect thinking impairs us to find the ultimate truth, we need to be humble and have the political will to accept our shortcomings. Therefore, instead of arrogantly claiming to hold the truth, we should concentrate on defining the positive elements of our collective knowledge in the social disciplines and apply them in a rational and constructive way to achieve sustained economic and social development. These positive elements of our collective thinking would be structured in ways that generate the most benefit to society at large. As I have mentioned in the first essay, one of the constant flaws in the history of societies is that we tend, all too easily, to claim to hold the ultimate truth. And in that process we have been very prone to move to the extremes with fatal consequences. Thus, despite the many imperfections of capitalist economic theory and our collective thinking on the ideas of social development, we should recognize that taking the best ideas of both would provide us with a balanced conception of the right path to social development. Neither extreme Capitalism nor extreme Socialism bring real equitable progress for the majority of society, but I believe that Capitalism is the least imperfect idea to bring about human development. Nonetheless, this must be complemented by an array of social development ideas that are perfectly congenial with the intrinsic capitalist goal of wealth creation. This is the balance that we must establish.

The achievement of this balance depends on our political will to be supportive of our fellow human beings. If we have the character, as real individuals, to become socially conscious, we will achieve social justice and will greatly benefit from it. On the other hand, if we insist in our hedonistic narcissism and continue to act with herd-like behaviour, we will have to deal with overwhelming conflict and violence. It is up to us, as individuals, and up to the centres of power to choose. For, regardless of how different the set of values of all societies in the world may be, we all need to coexist. If we reject this idea, then we are embracing the idea of the annihilation of our species. In a recent internet opinion survey in the Mexico City newspaper Reforma, one reader expressed an unusually candid opinion about what most readers regarded as a meagre increase

of 6.99% to the minimum wage. He succinctly wrote: "If it were up to me, all the poor should die, I despise the poor, I hate the poor".² This mirrors the attitude of the centres of power and of many selfish individuals. It is this kind of attitude that must be changed; for, realistically, the growing conflict and violence in both developed and developing economies is rapidly decreasing the quality of life of those who possess. As many continue to turn the other way, the chance of being assaulted by people who are literally starving is rapidly increasing everyday. It is the eternal struggle of good and evil. But, as ancient and unavoidable as this problem may seem, the establishment of democracy, despite its currently incomplete form, as the standard for national governance and for international interaction between nations, provides us with the best possibility to change the current trend of deterioration of the world's human development.

The New Ethos

Having explained the conceptual framework and ethos necessary to develop a long-term sustainable economic paradigm, I will explain, in this last part, the structure of the new ethos and the interaction between its critical elements and players. The idea of a new equitable way requires three critical elements to give form to the new ethos, and it also requires three players that encompass all individuals, groups, agents of change and regulation, as well as both public and private interests.

- **Three Critical Elements.** The new ethos requires the permanent existence of the critical elements of democracy, social justice and a sustainable habitat for all species. These are inextricably linked to each other, albeit not at the same level. Furthermore, these central features are concurrently three key objectives that must be achieved, for they do not exist today except in a very incomplete form.

The starting point is democracy. Without democracy we cannot aspire to establish social justice. The countries that have reached the highest level of social equality have first reached relatively meaningful levels of democracy. By the same token, the deterioration of democracy has generally come about when its structures were corrupted by the economic power of corporations and by the lack of involvement of individuals in

their political process when they are alienated by their consumerist behaviour. The case of the U.S. is typical but not at all the only one. The current political struggle for campaign finance reform is the clearest example of the influence of very powerful private interests on the politicians who get elected and the policies that they pursue. Concurrently, the sense in U.S. citizens that there are too many private interests controlling the political process, that there are only two mainstream political parties, that the priorities in the political agenda are fed down from the top, in classic top-down democracy, and their own alienation, or evasion, in consumerist behaviour, impairs many to think collectively. The low rates of voting in local as well as federal elections attest to the apathy that reigns in many voters. And, yet, as we have seen, this is not because things are good for the majority. The gap between rich and poor is increasing, most households are working more hours in order to maintain their living standards, poverty is increasing and the overall quality of life is deteriorating.

In Mexico, the new government is in the middle of the negotiation to pass a full fiscal reform, the greatest in more than fifty years. But the fiscal reform of the Fox Administration intends to increase value-added taxes to basic staples and medicines that represent the greatest portion of the monthly budget for the poor, while it pretends to reduce the maximum income tax rate from 40% to 32%. It also rejects the demands that capital gains and other stock market investments be taxed. This is clearly a regressive reform, also in a classic top-down democracy. And yet, they claim that it is precisely designed to reduce poverty because it intends to increase social spending. However, they refuse to look at other proposals, they intend to negotiate to concede the minimum, claim that this is the only way, and threaten that otherwise the country will fall into mediocrity and will remain indebted. In a classic attitude where they insist that this is the only way, they are now trying to bribe Congressmen and women with additional budgets for their states that could be used with no restrictions in their application. Instead of allowing all the sectors of society to select the priorities by consensus, working with Congress, and then allowing the government to propose a final fiscal reform to congress, the executive branch insists in imposing its top down vision. One thing is certain: this

reform will not put in place the structure to begin to create social justice. It will instead increase the benefits for the owners of the market, and it will be negotiated in Congress with minimum participation from most members of Civil Society. The cohesiveness between the members of the lower and upper chambers with Civil Society is almost non-existent. The access of Civil Society to the document containing the initiative prior to its approval is also very limited. Its opportunity to reject or propose does not exist. The Mexican Civil Society, like many more in the world, is currently limited to electing its representatives.

These two examples illustrate the absolute need to advance in the democratic process from top-down to bottom-up. For the only way to force governments to work for all ranks of society is to systematically set the agenda from the bottom-up. Without this, equality in opportunity and, ultimately, social justice will never come about. By the same token, without a full consensus on the protection of the environment, a sustainable economic paradigm will never occur. Thus, democracy has to be completely revamped in order to become inclusive and not limited to the electoral process. Of course there are various degrees of democracy in the world. In the most mature democracies, the level of participation of the common citizen is much stronger than in fledgling and incipient democracies such as the case of Mexico. But, generally, the idea of a bottom-up democratic process is still in its infant days everywhere. And, without the achievement of this major objective, the achievement of social justice and an environmentally-sustainable economy will not come about. The achievement of these two objectives, as permanent elements in the new equitable ethos, is subservient to the achievement of participatory democracy as the central element. Without a fully participatory democracy, human and nature sustainability are unattainable. Furthermore, we need a global democracy with global sovereignty in its application. The same way that Neoliberalism is attempting to establish the same market standards and international agreements to all participants, we must establish the same standards and regulations for a fully participatory democracy. Some incipient steps have been taken in the prosecution of very famous human rights violators, and the European Union has imposed a lukewarm democratic clause on all its trade

agreements, but we need to fully establish a global bottom-up democratic framework. This may take a generation, but we need to start now.

- **The Players.** In the new global society, composed of fully-democratic nations, there are three key players encompassing the entire spectrum. These are: the representatives of the public interest embodied in the Civil Society; the various representatives of the private interests: the individuals, labour unions, corporations and private organizations; and the national and supranational governments that directly emanate and are mandated by Civil Society.

Civil Society is the engine of change and the soul of the international and national communities. Civil Society represents the public interests, and this specific fact is central to the concept. An egalitarian capitalist economic system is that which balances the social prerogatives with the demands for market efficiencies. That is, it establishes a balance between our responsibility for achieving social justice and the competitive nature of capitalism; or we might simply say that it balances public and private interests. However, Civil Society must be the key player. That is, Civil Society, which represents the public interest, can potentially encompass each individual member of the community. I say potentially because it may not represent someone that rejects the idea of Civil Society and refuses to participate. But, in principle, Civil Society is an umbrella where potentially every citizen has a vested interest. On the other hand, when we refer to each individual person or private group of persons, they represent their private interests individually or in a group, but by no means do they potentially represent the interest of all citizens. For this reason, Civil Society should be placed on top of the other two players for it is the only figure that can genuinely protect the general interest and enforce the common good. Furthermore, since each individual member of Civil Society also has his or her private interest, individually and as a member of one or more groups, when the individual participates as a member of Civil Society, he or she would also look out for the protection of his or her private interest. However, the individual member knows that he or she cannot place his or her private interests against the general interest and, thus, it must seek a balance. For if we were to leave

everything to the individual, without a responsibility to the community, only the private interests would prevail. And, if only private interests prevail, the public interests would be abandoned, and social justice and an equitable society would not be achieved. Thus, this participation provides a balance between public and private prerogatives when individuals make use of their common sense judgment in their participation in the public matter. This common sense is that the public interest cannot impair our individual freedom to seek our own welfare, but this welfare cannot be achieved at the expense of the welfare of all ranks of society. Thus, Civil Society must be above all other players. For both public and private interests can be reconciled with Civil Society in command, whilst public interest would never come about if individuals are left free to seek their own interest. In that scenario we would all be living in an ethos immersed in exacerbated individualism, where the interests of the most powerful would prevail and, thus, they would be imposed on the rest. The present situation is not too far from this scenario.

Some may criticize that this is a direct attack against individual freedom, but it is not whatsoever. It is only a concept that does not allow individuals to abandon their social responsibilities. In the higher moral ground of the new ethos, individuals have a civic duty to get involved in the civic matter, the public matter. Hume, the famous philosopher of individualism said that *there seems a necessity for confessing that happiness and misery of others are not spectacles altogether indifferent to us, but that the view of the former... communicates a secret joy; the appearance of the latter...throws a melancholy damp over the imagination.*³ Hume's remarks simply illustrate that human nature makes us tend to move away from those who are in misery and thus, we tend to ignore them, unless we are constantly reminded that we must work to end their misery. We have no right to reject this responsibility unless we also renounce the benefits that we extract, as members, from the community. And we have no right to enrich ourselves at the expense of others because we purposely cause their demise or because we have access to the opportunities that our own society denied them. If we want to take, we must also contribute to achieve an equitable ethos.

At this point it is necessary to define with precision the concept of Civil Society. Every national community has a social structure composed of various strata. This constitutes the entire society of a nation. However, Civil Society represents only those citizens who are socially conscious and mobilize to oversee the protection and respect of a public interest. Thus, in its current meaning, Civil Society constitutes the citizens who mobilize to oversee the functioning of the government and of the market, who actually get involved in the public matter and who mobilize public opinion to ensure that both government and the market abide by the law, as well as to ensure the protection of the welfare of all ranks of society. The term Civil Society dates back to the classical Greek philosophers. In Aristotle's *Koinonia politike* and in Cicero's *societas civilis*, Civil Society embodies the growth of civilization as expressed in the Athenian polis or the Roman republic. In that sense, Civil Society represented a social order where the citizenry regulated its relationships and settled its disputes according to laws, in an ethos dominated by civility and by the active participation of the common people in the public matter.⁴ At the time of classical liberalism, Civil Society was generally associated with the state and political life. Locke, Rousseau, Tocqueville, Stuart Mill, Kant, Hegel and others regarded Civil Society with Political Society. Tocqueville described three aspects in the realm of society: the state and its system of formal political representation; civil society, which represents the private and economic interests; and political, all the forms of social organization that are politically active, such as the political associations, the local governments, juries, and parties including its civil associations such as churches, schools, scientific societies, and commercial organizations. In this way, for Tocqueville, the political society supplies *the independent eye of society* that oversees the behaviour of the state in order to control the pursuit of private self-interest of the public servants at all levels of government.⁵

In the post-modern world, the apologists of market democracy, especially in the U.S., proclaimed, with the collapse of Communism, the end of history and the triumph of U.S. style Capitalism. And, thus, they tend to regard the role of Civil Society as one that is limited to electoral democracy that chooses from the top-

down choices that are presented to them by those in power. But they forgot that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Indeed, they ignore that market democracy, or the rule of the market, generates many losers and a few winners and has really nothing to do with democracy. Lorenzo Meyer comments to this respect that although the global market does not build concentration camps in Fascist or Stalinist fashion, its victims –the poor and extreme poor that constitute more than half of the people in the globe– are as real as the totalitarianisms of the past.⁶

For these reasons, at the threshold of the Third Millennium, the post-modern Civil Society is one that mobilizes to curb the forces of the market and fills the voids created by governments when they fail to fulfil their social responsibilities. Modern Civil Society is both a political and governmental body of citizens. It is formed by groups organized in various forms to get involve in the civil matters and protect the public interests on specific issues. They get involve in the political process as well as in activities that traditionally fall in the realm of governments that deal with the welfare of local, national and global communities. They fill the vacuums that are left due to the corruption of governments that have grown accustomed to responding more to private interests than to their individual constituents. Civil Society is an amorphous body and is completely autonomous from governments. The agendas and objectives of its individual organizations deal with specific public interests covering together the entire realm of civil matter issues that affect the welfare of specific communities (local, national and global). In many ways, it seeks to parallel government in the most pressing issues of the public matter. However, because Civil Society is dynamic and amorphous, it is not a clearly structured and defined body of groups of citizens. It is a social force of citizens with a social conscious, always changing as it sees fit, that feels the need to participate in the political and governmental process because of the lack of bottom-up democracy in the traditional political structures. The Non-Governmental Organization or NGO is the archetype of organization of citizens in the post-modern sense of Civil Society. They choose the name of NGO to convey their independence from government whilst they devote their work to functions traditionally associated with

government. There are NGOs with macro and micro-economic agendas, in famine eradication programs; they get involved in education, health, and the environment, both at the political as well as the operational levels. They cover every aspect of the social agenda, albeit, as could be expected, there are far more NGOs addressing the most critical problems, locally, nationally and globally, than in less pressing issues of the public interest. Civil Society is, thus, formed by organizations put together by citizens interested in the public interest and conscious of the great shortcoming of the government and of the greatly unjust ethos that we are presently living in. There are now hundreds of thousands of NGOs with millions of people in the world working inside them both voluntarily and professionally. Some of these NGOs manage rather large budgets, such as Oxfam, a famine eradication international NGO, which manages several hundred million dollars a year in aid, and devotes itself to saving the poorest of the poor. More than anything, Civil Society is the most important player of the new ethos because is the only player capable of making bottom-up democracy come about. The creation of the new democratic building, from its very structure to the daily exercise of participation in the public matter, is the major contribution of Civil Society.

Lastly, we have the citizens who are not part of the Civil Society. First we have the victims of the system who belong to the great portion of dispossessed, who have no access to any kind of opportunity, much less access to education and information about Civil Society, and who are barely surviving in this unjust ethos. They cannot at all be criticized for their lack of involvement. However, there are the other citizens of the local, national and international communities who do not belong to the Civil Society, in this sense, for they lack a social conscious and, thus, do not get involved in the activities of Civil Society. They are certainly part of society, but they are alienated, are fiercely individualistic and do not perform their civic duty in this sense. They generally lack a concept of civic duty with their communities or are simply opposed to it. In the traditional term, these people may very well be making a clear use of their citizens' rights and may certainly freely choose not to get involved, except in those civic duties mandated by law, and to keep to themselves. They may choose to limit

their rights to participate in the electoral process, or not even that. But, as long as they do not get involved in the political or governmental agendas that constitute Civil Society's public matter, to oversee and curb the actions of governments and of the market, they are not participating as members of the post-modern Civil Society. They are only citizens in the traditional sense, which is now being challenged by the current ethos, and this puts them in danger of falling into oblivion. The philosophical concept of a free society is based on the idea that it is formed by a social fabric of mature and self-governing individuals who are capable and responsible for selecting the political, economic and moral values that will shape their society and will determine the fate of all its members as an active society in the concert of nations of the world. This is supposed to be passed on to each subsequent generation of citizens for the exercise of a true involvement of individual citizens in the public matter. However, to be sure, in the current ethos of neoliberal market globalization, which is being imposed by U.S. imperialism, this concept is not only challenged but is being aggressively destroyed by the economic forces that control the formal political structure of states and that want to relegate individuals to either alienated and apolitical helpless units of consumption, to labour commodities to be exploited or to outright outcasts of the new capitalist system of overwhelming exclusion.⁷ The current ethos, characterized by the manipulation of public opinion through the incessant bombardment of subliminal and overt messaging, and the already well-entrenched culture of consumerism that invites conformity, constitute the forces that have placed the majority of these citizens in a defenceless situation of alienation.

The new emerging concept of Civil Society is still in its infant stage globally. Naturally, in the most advanced democratic societies, we find a more mature citizenry and greater awareness about the need for an organized community of individual citizens involved in civil matters, and about the benefits that a Civil Society can bring collectively and individually. However, the increasing decay in the moral quality of governments and their great shortcomings in providing an ethos that generates equitable progress and social justice, is mobilizing many people, not just in the First World but also in the Third World. Moreover,

with the benefits of today's communication, and given the globalization of the world, the emergence of this concept of Civil Society is occurring in the form of an international network of NGOs that established alliances to work on behalf of the common good on specific issues globally.

The second player in the new ethos represents the private interests of individual citizens, corporations, labour unions and any other organization with a private agenda of interests. In a truly democratic society, these groups enjoy full freedom to advance and protect their individual and private interests, as long as they abide by the law and do not try to advance their private interests at the expense of the majority of the population. Respect for the law and an equal playing field are the guiding principles. If the law does not equally protect all parties, by providing an equal playing field, then some of the players would be barred from effectively defending their private interests. Or, if corruption allows some players to override the law, then the equal terms provided by the law become a moot point. Civil Society would seek to change the situation.

A typical case is the negotiation between a labour union and a corporation. First, it is the issue of whether the union is a truly independent and democratically elected union or some form of corporatist union, whose bosses respond to other interests and their own personal interests rather than those of its represented workers. If that is the case, then we may already be dealing with a case of corruption. Or, if law sanctions this type of corporatist unionization, then the law does not provide an equal playing field. Another case is when the law provides a balanced field for employers and unions to enter into a free negotiation but the government intervenes and makes use of several instances to force a negotiation for its own benefit but not for the benefit of all of the interested parties. For example, when the government has set out to reduce inflation and needs wages to be kept below a specific benchmark, it tries to force the union to reduce its demands regardless of the past history that the union and the employer have had relative to the share of the labour endowments. In another situation, the government may pressure the employer to accept the demands of a union because an election campaign is approaching and

the government is seeking the support of labour. In democratically-elected and law-abiding societies, the negotiations between private parties must be left free from other interests and allow the parties to reach a free agreement based on their leverage to concede or reject the other party's demands. But, frequently governments tend to act beyond the appropriate legal channels and force the negotiation in the direction that best serves its vested interests. And, as we all know, under the present neoliberal ethos, that direction has been, increasingly, that which benefits the corporations that wield their economic power in support of or against the governments. This is one of the main reasons why Civil Society must be above the other two players. For the only way that private players and the government would refrain from pursuing their own private interests above the law and the common good, is through a body of citizens overseeing the respect of the law and the proper behaviour of government. As a consequence, in the case of a negotiation between a union and a corporation, all other players must not intervene except to ensure that the negotiation is conducted legally. Thus, Civil Society must not get involved in a private issue. Nonetheless, Civil Society must intervene when it sees that the government is unduly interfering or the corporation is corrupting the union's bosses and the government is allowing it despite the denunciation from the workers. This is of key importance because Civil Society's vested interest is that the private interests of some of the players do not violate the ethos of democracy and legality. Without an active Civil Society, as happens frequently, the most powerful players get their way regardless of the rights and the laws that protect all individuals.

The third player is formed by the local, national and supranational governments that directly emanate and are mandated by Civil Society. There is no need to elaborate much further regarding the role of governments. The main role of all levels of government in the executive, legislative and judicial branches is to obey the public mandate and work for the welfare of all ranks of society. Therefore, in following this mandate, governments must work as fair agents of regulation to balance the demands of public and private interests in order to achieve the common good. In this sense, the legislative branch has a mandate for establishing the legal framework that

would provide a fair playing ground for all individuals. The judicial branch must ensure that the respect of the law and its administration of the law are done in such a way that an equitable environment is preserved. The executive branch must follow the agenda of policies that will implement the mandate that Civil Society gave to the government. In the practical sense, all electable officials will have to be far more responsive in their campaigns to the demands of Civil Society and, if elected, will have to deliver on their commitments, for Civil Society will be watching very closely on their performance. Indeed, in post-modern Civil Society, all branches of government will be closely watched to ensure that they abide by their mandate. Furthermore, the NGOs will increasingly be working closely with governments in the most pressing areas, even if governments are not abandoning their mandate in order to pursue the common good.

In the democratic ethos of the global society of the XXI century, much of the political power will be transferred from governments to Civil Society. In a higher moral ground ethos that pursues equitable economic and social progress, substantial political power will be increasingly shared between governments and the citizens' organizations in the management of the public matter. For the less power that is concentrated, the better the general welfare will be protected. As a consequence, bottom-down democracy will be gradually changing to a participatory democracy where most issues will flow from the bottom-up. In this way, we will really achieve a democracy with no adjectives other than participatory or "democratic democracy". How the power will be shared between government and Civil Society is not possible to say with precision, for this is still uncharted territory. But, in this new ethos of participatory democracy, all the imperfections of the human spirit, our lowest passions and worst obsessions, can be best controlled and subjected to the pursuit of the common good, in stark contrast with the traditional structure where society relinquishes power in favour of a tiny elite that claims to own the ultimate truth. We have not arrived at all at the end of history. The emerging global Civil Society is now embarked on the pursuit of the "equitable way".

a Alvaro J. de Regil is Executive Director of The Jus Semper Global Alliance

1 Jean De Maillard, "CRIME, THE WORLD'S BIGGEST FREE ENTERPRISE. The dark side of globalisation," Le Monde Diplomatique April 10, 2000: Internet.

2 Open-ended question survey of December 24, 2000 about the hike of the minimum wage. Reforma News paper internet site.

3 David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, 1751, p 132

4 Charles Kershaw Rowley (Editor), Classical Liberalism and Civil Society (New York: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1998) 2.

5 *ibid.*

6 Lorenzo Meyer, "La democracia no está segura sin una sociedad organizada," Reforma 26 de septiembre de 1999, Internet ed., sec. Editoriales:.

7 Charles Kershaw Rowley (Editor), Classical Liberalism and Civil Society (New York: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1998) 24.