



Anthony Giddens

THE THIRD WAY

The Renewal of Social
Democracy

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Five Dilemmas

of scientific and technological innovation play such an important role.

The theme of philosophic conservatism is central. Modernization and conservatism, of course, are normally treated as opposites. However, we must use the tools of modernity to cope with living in a world 'beyond tradition' and 'on the other side of nature', where risk and responsibility have a new mix.

'Conservatism' in this sense has only a loose affinity with the way it has been understood on the political right. It suggests a pragmatic attitude towards coping with change; a nuanced view of science and technology, in recognition of their ambiguous consequences for us; a respect for the past and for history; and in the environmental arena, an adoption of the precautionary principle where feasible. These goals are not only not incompatible with a modernizing agenda; they presuppose it. Science and technology, as discussed above, can no longer be left outside the scope of democracy, since they influence our lives in a more direct and far-reaching way than was true for previous generations.

As another example, take the family, which figures in some of the most contentious debates in modern politics. Sustaining continuity in family life, especially protecting the well-being of children, is one of the most important goals of family policy. This can't be achieved, however, through a reactionary stance, an attempt to reinstate the 'traditional family'. As I shall try to show below, it presumes a modernizing agenda of democratization.

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The ideas developed in what follows offer the outline – and it is no more than an outline – of an integrated political programme, covering each of the major sectors of society. Reform of the state and government should be a basic orienting principle of third way politics – a process of the deepening and widening of democracy. Government can act in partnership with agencies in civil society to foster community renewal and development. The economic basis of such partnership is what I shall call the new mixed economy. That economy can be effective only if existing welfare institutions are thoroughly modernized. Third way politics is one-nation politics. The cosmopolitan nation helps promote social inclusion but also has a key role in fostering transnational systems of governance.

Each of these concepts will be discussed in some detail in the subsequent sections. I don't want to suggest any of the notions I shall propose are unproblematic. On the contrary, almost all are debatable and difficult. We don't know if we will be able adequately

to control the forces that globalization and technological change have unleashed. The new risk environments have an enigmatic mixture of dangers and advantages. The framework suggested here thus represents a programme in the making.

The third way programme

- The radical centre
- The new democratic state (the state without enemies)
- Active civil society
- The democratic family
- The new mixed economy
- Equality as inclusion
- Positive welfare
- The social investment state
- The cosmopolitan nation
- Cosmopolitan democracy

Democratizing democracy

The neoliberals want to shrink the state; the social democrats, historically, have been keen to expand it. The third way argues that what is necessary is to reconstruct it – to go beyond those on the right ‘who say government is the enemy’, and those on the left ‘who say government is the answer’.

If there is a crisis of liberal democracy today, it is not, as half a century ago, because it is threatened by hostile rivals, but on the contrary because it has no

rivals. With the passing of the bipolar era, most states have no clear-cut enemies. States facing dangers rather than enemies have to look for sources of legitimacy different from those in the past. The modern state was forged in the crucible of war, and war or preparing for it influenced most aspects of state institutions. Citizenship rights and welfare programmes were mainly established as states sought to engage their populations and hold their support, a phenomenon that continued through the Cold War period. This fact has been ignored by many social democratic authors – including perhaps the most influential, T.H. Marshall – who see the development of liberal democracy and the welfare state as more self-contained processes than they actually were.

The advance of the global marketplace and the retreat of large-scale war are not the only factors affecting the structure of states or the legitimacy of governments. Other influences include the very spread of democratization, which is closely connected with the lapsing influence of tradition and custom. The appeal of democracy does not come wholly, or perhaps even primarily, from the triumph of liberal democratic institutions over others, but from the deeper forces that are reshaping the global society, including the demand for individual autonomy and the emergence of a more reflexive citizenry. Democratization is outflanking democracy, and the imbalance must be addressed.

The crisis of democracy comes from its not being democratic enough. While, as discussed in the previous chapter, the proportion of people expressing trust in politicians has dipped over the past three decades, faith

in democracy as such has not. Of the population in the US, 90 per cent are 'satisfied with a democratic form of government.'¹ A survey of eleven European countries covering the period 1981–90 also showed that over 90 per cent approved of 'the democratic system of government'. The same proportion agreed that 'we should look for ways to develop democracy further'.

The issue isn't more government or less, but recognizing that governance must adjust to the new circumstances of the global age; and that authority, including state legitimacy, has to be renewed on an active basis. In a post-traditional society, authority can no longer be legitimated by traditional symbols or by saying 'This is how things have always been done.' What reforms should be pushed for? How can we democratize democracy? The answers depend partly on context, since different countries have followed different trajectories, and have varying constitutional backgrounds. But the overall emphases should be the same everywhere. They can be summarized in the following way:

(1) The state must respond structurally to globalization. The democratizing of democracy first of all implies decentralization – but not as a one-way process. Globalization creates a strong impetus and logic to the downward devolution of power, but also to upward devolution. Rather than merely weakening the authority of the nation-state, this double movement – a movement of double democratization – is the condition of reasserting that authority, since this movement can make the state more responsive to the influences that otherwise outflank it all round. In the

context of the European Union, this means treating subsidiarity as more than a doctrinal term: it is the way to construct a political order which is neither a super-state nor only a free trade area, and at the same time clothes the nation with renewed influence.

(2) The state should expand the role of the public sphere, which means constitutional reform directed towards greater transparency and openness, as well as the introduction of new safeguards against corruption. It isn't by chance that governments all round the world have faced accusations of corruption in recent years. The reason isn't that corruption is on the increase, but that the nature of the political environment has changed. Supposedly quite open, liberal democratic institutions in most countries have in practice depended upon backstage deals, privilege and patronage. One of the biggest changes affecting the political sphere is that governments and citizens increasingly now live in a single information environment. Existing ways of doing things come under scrutiny and the scope of what is seen as corrupt or unacceptable widens.

One of the specific difficulties – or is it an opportunity? – for the UK is that the country needs a two-fold process of constitutional modernization. Constitutional reform of a broad kind has been on the agenda since Charter 88 placed it there ten years ago, and has become part of Labour's policy agenda. When first mooted, such reform was inspired by the idea that Britain needed to catch up with more advanced constitutional models elsewhere. Now it needs in addition to react to more encompassing trends.

Unlike virtually all other liberal democracies, Britain

has no written constitution. Only in custom and to some extent in case law are the functions of government and the rights and duties of citizens set out. Constitutional change should aim not only to make these principles explicit, but to combat the culture of secrecy that has pervaded the higher levels of British institutions. The executive holds too much power and the existing forms of accountability are weak; parliamentary committees reflect the composition of the Commons and rarely have much bite. As it stands, the House of Lords is an anachronism in a democratic society.

At first sight, reform in any one of those areas looks formidably difficult, let alone in all taken together. After all, reform has to take place through the very institutions that are the problem. Yet Labour in power has already made a bold start, and it is just possible that what seem deeply entrenched ways of doing things might prove open to change when actively confronted.

(3) To retain or regain legitimacy, states without enemies have to elevate their administrative efficiency. Government at all levels is mistrusted partly because it is cumbersome and ineffective. In a world where business organizations respond rapidly to change and are more agile on their feet, government can lag behind. After all, the term 'bureaucracy', with its attendant connotations of red tape, was invented to refer to government. The restructuring of government should follow the ecological principle of 'getting more from less', understood not as downsizing but as improving delivered value. Most governments still have a good deal to learn from business best practice – for instance, target controls, effective

auditing, flexible decision structures and increased employee participation – the last of these being a factor in democratization. Social democrats must respond to the criticism that, lacking market discipline, state institutions become lazy and the services they deliver shoddy.

As the American political commentator E.J. Dionne points out, the argument can become a parody of itself, as if government were synonymous with inefficiency, ignoring the existence of fine schools, public hospitals or parks.² The appropriate response is not to introduce market mechanisms, or quasi-markets, wherever there is the glimmer of a possibility. The idea that government should mimic the marketplace was the main thrust of David Osborne and Ted Gaebler's book *Reinventing Government*.³ Their work influenced Clinton's policies in the early 1990s. Reinventing government certainly sometimes means adopting market-based solutions. But it also should mean reasserting the effectiveness of government in the face of markets.

(4) The downward pressure of globalization introduces not only the possibility but the necessity of forms of democracy other than the orthodox voting process. Government can re-establish more direct contact with citizens, and citizens with government, through 'experiments with democracy' – local direct democracy, electronic referenda, citizens' juries and other possibilities. These won't substitute for normal voting mechanisms in local and central government, but could become an enduring complement to them. One model is the approach used in Sweden twenty years ago, when the government drew the public directly into the

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formulation of energy policy. The government, unions, parties and education agencies set up day-long courses on energy. Anyone who took such a course could make formal recommendations to the government. Seventy thousand people participated in an exercise that decisively shaped policy.

(5) States without enemies depend for their legitimacy more than before upon their capacity for risk management. The management of risk, as was stressed earlier, doesn't concern only the provision of security, which is the way risk has ordinarily been understood in the context of the welfare state. Nor does it concern only economic risks: other risks, coming for instance from science and technology, also impinge directly upon government. Government is necessarily and intrinsically in the business of regulating scientific and technological change, as well as dealing with the ethical questions it raises.

Characterizing risk, as discussed earlier, cannot just be left to experts. From the beginning it demands public involvement. Among the many different situations that can arise are those where the hazard is serious but trust in the responsible organization is low. Deliberative procedures are needed at each step leading to risk decisions and normally should involve experts, government and lay individuals. The object of risk characterization is to illuminate practical choices and the limits of available scientific or technical knowledge. The complex nature of many risk situations means that the framework for debate often needs to be large.

The California Comparative Risk Project is an instructive example of how risk assessment and deliber-

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ative citizen involvement can be combined. Three technical committees were set up on health, ecological protection and social welfare, to work independently to rank risks in their categories. Three other committees were established to consider how risks might be managed and their legal and economic implications. The two sets of committees were then brought together and asked to reach conclusions. The lay committees raised many concerns that the technical ones simply ignored, leading to a rich public debate about risk criteria, some of which later fed into public policy.

(6) The democratizing of democracy cannot be only local or national – the state must have a cosmopolitan outlook, while upward democratization should not stop at the regional level. Downward democratization presumes the renewal of civil society, of which more later. These points taken together define a form of government which it should be the aim of social democrats to promote: the new democratic state.

The new democratic state (the state without enemies)

- Devolution
- Double democratization
- Renewal of the public sphere – transparency
- Administrative efficiency
- Mechanisms of direct democracy
- Government as risk manager

The new democratic state is an ideal, and something of an open-ended one at that. I don't pretend to

unpack any of the detail that would be needed to give it real flesh. Moreover, all reforms bring their own complexities. Decentralization and devolution, for example, have an attractive ring to them – return power to the regions, the cities, the neighbourhoods! Like all democratizing processes their benefits come with strings attached. Devolution can lead to fragmentation if not balanced with a transfer of power ‘upwards’. It is not intrinsically democratizing: it has to be made so. As critics point out, devolution can add layers of local bureaucratic power to those that already exist at the political centre. Britain’s ‘poor, sad cities’, it has been said, could be regenerated through greater self-government, and this is surely true.⁴ Among the obvious dangers, however, is that some cities or regions could thereby forge ahead of others, worsening the marked regional inequalities that already exist in the UK.

The question of civil society

The fostering of an active civil society is a basic part of the politics of the third way. In contrast to the old left, which tended to be dismissive of worries about civic decline, the new politics accepts that such anxieties are genuine. Civic decline is real and visible in many sectors of contemporary societies, not just an invention of conservative politicians. It is seen in the weakening sense of solidarity in some local communities and urban neighbourhoods, high levels of crime, and the break-up of marriages and families.

The right tends to deny that economic deprivation is associated with these problems. But it is just as wrong to reduce civic decline to economics, as the old left often did, as to deny the influence of poverty and underprivilege. We can’t blame the erosion of civility on the welfare state, or suppose that it can be reversed by leaving civil society to its own devices. Government can and must play a major part in renewing civic culture.

The renewal of civil society

Government and civil society in partnership
Community renewal through harnessing local initiative
Involvement of the third sector
Protection of the local public sphere
Community-based crime prevention
The democratic family

State and civil society should act in partnership, each to facilitate, but also to act as a control upon, the other. The theme of community is fundamental to the new politics, but not just as an abstract slogan. The advance of globalization makes a community focus both necessary and possible, because of the downward pressure it exerts. ‘Community’ doesn’t imply trying to recapture lost forms of local solidarity; it refers to practical means of furthering the social and material refurbishment of neighbourhoods, towns and larger local areas. There are no permanent boundaries between govern-

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ment and civil society. Depending on context, government needs sometimes to be drawn further into the civil arena, sometimes to retreat. Where government withdraws from direct involvement, its resources might still be necessary to support activities that local groups take over or introduce – above all in poorer areas. Yet it is particularly in poorer communities that the fostering of local initiative and involvement can generate the highest return.

Diminished trust in politicians and other authority figures is sometimes taken to indicate general social apathy. As mentioned, it does not – perhaps the opposite. An increasingly reflexive society is also one marked by high levels of self-organization. Research in the US, the UK and elsewhere tends to indicate a burgeoning civil sphere, at least in some areas and contexts. Some older forms of civil association and civic engagement are losing their purchase, but other sorts of communal energy are replacing them. The point is to harness these to wider social ends in ways that benefit local communities as well as the society as a whole.

Robert Wuthnow has studied the development of the small-group movement in the US. By small groups, he means small numbers of people who meet together in a regular way to develop their common interests. On the basis of extensive research, he concludes that 40 per cent of Americans – some 75 million – belong to at least one small group that meets regularly. In such groups a feeling of community is generated, but not only in the old sense of being part of a local area. Rather, people with similar concerns get together to pursue a ‘journey through life’:

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Small groups are doing a better job than many of their critics would like to think. The communities they create are seldom frail. People feel cared for. They help one another . . . The attachments that develop among the members of small groups demonstrate clearly that we are not a society of rugged individualists who wish to go it entirely alone but, rather, that . . . even amidst the dislocating tendencies of our society, we are capable of banding together in bonds of mutual support.⁵

Many of the groups originated in the 1960s, and reflect ideas about group process that became widespread then. Some quite explicitly aim for the sorts of value Inglehart calls post-materialist. Therapeutic models have influenced most such groups, no matter what their specific fields of concern are. Self-help groups are particularly prominent. As with all groups and communities, small groups obviously have their limitations and problems, but they do give evidence of a rich civic life.

In his study of the UK in the post-1950 period, Peter Hall shows that activity in the third sector – voluntary work – has expanded over the past forty years. More traditional groups have declined, but they have been more than made up for by new ones, particularly self-help and environmental groups. A major change is the increased participation of women. Charitable groups have shown a considerable increase – there were over 160,000 registered charitable groups in Britain in 1991. Nearly 20 per cent of the population engages in some form of voluntary work during the course of the

average year, and about 10 per cent do so on a weekly basis. Hall found that younger people are involved in voluntary work now at least as frequently as was the case in earlier generations.

Significantly, however, most of the increase in civic activity has happened among the more affluent strata. People from poorer backgrounds are more likely to centre their informal social contacts upon close kin. Much smaller proportions of people in the more affluent groups suffer from a complete absence of social support than do those in the poorer strata.⁶

One of the prime concerns of government involvement should be to help repair the civil order among such groups. The integrated working-class community is a persistent image, but now largely belongs to the past. Civic involvement is least developed in areas and neighbourhoods marginalized by the sweep of economic and social change. The renewal of deprived local communities presumes the encouragement of economic enterprise as a means of generating a broader civic recovery. The lessons of 1960s social engineering have by now been learned everywhere. Recent studies indicate that with appropriate external support, local initiative can reverse even strongly embedded processes of decline.⁷

Such studies come from many parts of the world, not just from Europe or the US. Ceara, in northeastern Brazil, is an instance.⁸ The reforms in the area were initiated by a group of young business leaders, working in sectors such as television, retail marketing and services. The traditional elites in Ceara exported agricultural products abroad,⁹ and were interested more in keeping the wages down than in local development.

The reformers subsequently joined with government agencies, using participatory planning techniques and meeting community organizations. In order to promote indigenous development, schemes were set up to introduce new enterprises into the area. Families with the greatest need were allocated one minimum-wage job per household. Day-care centres were set up, run not by the government but by volunteers guaranteed at least the minimum wage. Neighbourhood groups and community organizations were given resources to lend on a small scale – for example, lending a woman money to buy a sewing machine so she can earn a living on her own. Between 1987 and 1994 Ceara's economy grew at a rate of 4 per cent, compared with 1.4 per cent for Brazil as a whole.

Social entrepreneurship is another case in point. An extraordinary variety of schemes of social entrepreneurship have grown up in different countries since the late 1980s. One is 'service credit', introduced in a range of cities in the US and Japan. Volunteers who take part in charitable work are 'paid' in time donated by other volunteer workers. A computer system registers every 'time dollar' earned and spent and provides participants with regular accounts. Time dollars are tax free and can be accumulated to pay for health care as well as other health services, including reducing health insurance costs. The Time Dollar Institute of New York is developing an employment agency that will provide access to job opportunities, training and support schemes. Individuals can use the agency to get job information, and receive a time dollar for every hour worked in addition to whatever orthodox wages

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the job pays. These can be banked and used either for educational courses or as a resource if the person becomes unemployed. A project initiated in 1998 will set up centres in fifty-two cities across the world to provide employer-supported volunteer programmes concerned with education and health. Based on time dollar programmes, it seeks to establish a volunteered time economy, using sophisticated computer technology.

Government should be prepared to contribute to such endeavours, as well as encourage other forms of bottom-up decision-making and local autonomy. Microcredit schemes, for example, have a proven effectiveness as a means of encouraging local economic initiatives. Some activities can be developed by local communities, but often need to be licensed or monitored by government. This is obviously true of education, for example, where schools might be given a range of new powers, but the way these are used has to be regulated by the state.

Sustained investment in inner city areas can create relevant work skills, develop local business ownership and provide capital for the refurbishment of building stock. Government can provide capital in a direct way, but also create incentives for private corporations to make investments, offer training programmes and foster local initiative. California among other states in the US has successful enterprise zones in operation, with others planned. Various further proposals have been suggested. One is to waive capital gains tax if profits are reinvested in businesses in such a way that shares are acquired by employees resident in enterprise

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zones. Another is to do so if the proceeds are reinvested in non-profit organizations that provide skills training or other community resources.

Policies of community renewal must not ignore the public sphere. An open public sphere is as important at local as at national level, and is one way in which democratization connects directly with community development. Without it, schemes of community renewal risk separating the community from the wider society, and are vulnerable to corruption. 'Public' here includes physical public space. The degeneration of local communities is usually marked not only by general dilapidation, but by the disappearance of safe public space – streets, squares, parks and other areas where people can feel secure.

The state can swamp civil society. This happened in the Communist economies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, where there was no developed public sphere and where everyday sociability was largely confined to the home – usually there were few restaurants, cafés or public settings for social interaction. A healthy civil society protects the individual from overwhelming state power. Yet civil society is not, as some fondly imagine, a source of spontaneous order and harmony. Community regeneration can create its own problems and tensions. How much power should neighbourhood watch organizations have? What happens when local activist groups have very different versions of the community's future? Who decides where 'the community' ends and others begin? Government must adjudicate on these and other difficult questions. The state should also protect individuals from the conflicts of

interest always present in civil society. The state couldn't devolve into civil society: 'if the state is everywhere, it is nowhere'.⁹

Crime and community

Preventing crime, and reducing fear of crime, are both closely related to community regeneration. One of the most significant innovations in criminology in recent years has been the discovery that the decay of day-to-day civility relates directly to criminality. For a long while attention was focused almost exclusively upon serious crime – robbery, assault or violence. More minor crimes and forms of public disorder, however, tend to have a cumulative effect. In European and American cities, when asked to describe their problems, residents of troubled neighbourhoods mention abandoned cars, graffiti, prostitution, youth gangs and similar phenomena.

People act on their anxieties about these issues: they leave the areas in question if they can, or they buy heavy locks for their doors and bars for their windows, and abandon public facilities. Disorderly behaviour unchecked signals to citizens that the area is unsafe. Fearful citizens stay off the streets, avoid certain neighbourhoods, and curtail their normal activities and associations. As they withdraw physically, they also withdraw from roles of mutual support with fellow citizens, thereby relinquishing the social controls that formerly helped to maintain civility within the

community. 'Ultimately the result for a neighbourhood whose fabric of urban life and social intercourse has been undermined is increasing vulnerability to an influx of more disorderly behaviour and serious crime.'¹⁰

The implications of this thesis should be clearly understood. It does not mean increasing the powers of the police to sweep undesirables off the streets. Almost to the contrary, it means that the police should work closely with citizens to improve local community standards and civil behaviour, using education, persuasion and counselling instead of arraignment. In his recent book, lawyer Stephen Carter has charted the fate of civility in modern societies. Civility he defines as 'the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together'. It is about our relationships with strangers – feeling secure in encounters in public places with individuals we may never see more than once.¹¹

It is frequently said that people tend to have an irrational fear of crime. Older people, especially those living in poorer areas, are often anxious about being mugged, when the chances of this happening are low. Young men are much more likely to be victims of assault than the elderly. However, this ignores the fact that people who fear crime alter their behaviour so as to avoid potentially threatening situations – not going out after dark and so on. The risk of being a victim of crime thus seems lower than it actually is.

Collaborative policing implies not only drawing in citizens themselves, but changing the characteristic outlook of police forces. Most countries have adopted

the 'professional model of policing', introduced from the late 1950s onwards. 'Professional policing' involves concentrating mainly on serious crime and tackling it through the centralization of police authority, including on a transnational level. Yet the devolutionary implications of globalization apply in policing as in other spheres. A renewed emphasis upon crime prevention rather than law enforcement can go hand in hand with the reintegration of policing with the community. The isolation of the police from those they are supposed to serve often produces a siege mentality, since the police have little regular contact with ordinary citizens.

In order to work, partnerships between government agencies, the criminal justice system, local associations and community organizations have to be inclusive – all economic and ethnic groups must be involved.¹² Government and business can act together to help repair urban decay. One model is the creation of business improvement districts providing tax breaks for corporations that participate in strategic planning and offer investment in designated areas. To be successful, such schemes demand a long-term commitment to social objectives.

Emphasizing these strategies does not mean denying the links between unemployment, poverty and crime. Rather, the struggle against these social ills should be coordinated with community-based approaches to crime prevention. These approaches can in fact contribute directly and indirectly to furthering social justice. Where civil order has decayed along with public services and building stock, other opportunities

decline also. Improving the quality of life in a neighbourhood can revive them.

The democratic family

The family is a basic institution of civil society. Family policy is a key test for the new politics: is there a politics of the family beyond neoliberalism and old-style social democracy?

As with so many other areas, the backdrop is change. The statistics are well known. Divorce has risen steeply in almost all Western countries, although rates in some are much higher than in others. The proportion of single-parent families and of children born to non-married parents has gone up steadily. In the UK in 1994, 32 per cent of births occurred outside marriage. While in Italy the rate was only 7 per cent, in France it was 35 per cent, in Denmark 47 per cent and in Sweden 50 per cent. The numbers of people living alone have also risen. In many countries only a minority of children are now brought up in a 'traditional' context, where father and mother are married and living in the same household as their biological children, where the father is the economic breadwinner and the mother a housewife.

Many now speak of the breakdown of the family. If such a breakdown is occurring, it is extremely significant. The family is the meeting point of a range of trends affecting society as a whole – increasing equality between the sexes, the widespread entry of women into

the labour force, changes in sexual behaviour and expectations, the changing relationship between home and work.

The right has a particular story to tell about the consequences of these changes. The family is in crisis because the traditional family is disintegrating. The remedies proposed flow from this analysis. The sanctity of marriage should be reaffirmed. Marriage is the main emotional training ground for errant males, binding them into duties and responsibilities they would otherwise abandon. Fatherlessness, according to such a view, 'is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation . . . It is also the engine driving our most urgent social problems from crime to adolescent pregnancy to child sexual abuse to domestic violence against women.'¹³ To preserve the family, divorce should be made harder to obtain. Unorthodox family relationships, such as gay ones, should not receive support from either government or religious authorities, or should actively be discouraged. Homosexual marriage must continue to be legally outlawed. Welfare measures that encourage single-parent households should be reformed to remove this effect.

Many on the social democratic left, and also some libertarians, hold a very different view. For them the story of the contemporary family is one of healthy proliferation. After all, if diversity and choice are the watchwords of the age, why should these stop at the threshold of the family? We should accept that people can live happily together without being married, homosexuals can raise children just as competently as the heterosexual population, and, given adequate

resources, single parents are able to bring up children just as satisfactorily as couples can.

How might the new politics approach the question of family? We should be clear first of all how implausible the idea of returning to the traditional family is. It is worth listing the reasons:

- We are dealing with profound processes of change in everyday life, which it is well beyond the capacity of any political agency to reverse.
- Nostalgia for the traditional family idealizes the past. Broken families were almost as common in the UK in the nineteenth century as now, although the main reason was death of a spouse rather than separation or divorce. Historical research is revealing more and more about the dark side of the traditional family, where violence against and sexual abuse of children were much more frequent than most historians used to believe.
- The traditional family was above all an economic and kinship unit. Marriage ties were not individualized as they are now, and love or emotional involvement was not the prime basis of marriage, as they have subsequently become.
- Traditional marriage was based upon the inequality of the sexes and the legal ownership of wives by husbands – women were chattels in English law until well into this century. Children similarly had few legal rights.
- The traditional family generally involved a sexual double standard. Married women were expected to be 'virtuous', partly because of the importance of

ensuring paternity. Men were allowed greater sexual licence.

- Children were the *raison d'être* of marriage. Large families were either desired or accepted as normal. We now live in the era of the 'prized child', where children are no longer an economic benefit but instead a major economic cost. The nature of childhood and child rearing has changed profoundly.

Recapturing the traditional family is a non-starter. Almost any of these points taken on its own would be enough to undermine such a project. It isn't surprising, therefore, that when rightist critics speak of the traditional family, they don't in fact mean the traditional family at all, but a transitional state of the family in the immediate post-war period – the (idealized) family of the 1950s. The traditional family by this point had all but disappeared, but women hadn't yet entered the labour force in large numbers and sexual inequalities remained pronounced.

Is the alternative view to the rightist one persuasive? No, because the notion that a proliferation of family forms is both desirable and unproblematic simply is not convincing. The effects of divorce on the lives of children will always be difficult to assess, because we don't know what would have happened had the parents stayed together. The most exhaustive set of studies carried out to date, however, rejects 'the claim that children raised by only one parent do just as well as children raised by both parents'.¹⁴ A large part of the reason is economic – the sudden drop in income associated with divorce. But about half of the disadvantage

comes from inadequate parental attention and lack of social ties. Separation or divorce, the authors show, weaken the connection between child and father, as well as the link between the child and the father's network of friends and acquaintances. On the basis of wide empirical research, the authors conclude it is a myth that there are usually strong support networks or extended family ties available to single mothers.

All is not well with marriage, the family and the care of children, but the question is what effective political strategies could improve them and what ideal state of the family we should strive for. First and most fundamentally we must start from the principle of equality between the sexes, from which there can be no going back. There is only one story to tell about the family today, and that is of democracy. The family is becoming democratized, in ways which track processes of public democracy; and such democratization suggests how family life might combine individual choice and social solidarity.

The criteria are surprisingly close. Democracy in the public sphere involves formal equality, individual rights, public discussion of issues free from violence, and authority which is negotiated rather than given by tradition. The democratized family shares these characteristics, some of which are already protected in national and international law. Democratization in the context of the family implies equality, mutual respect, autonomy, decision-making through communication and freedom from violence. Much the same characteristics also supply a model for parent-child relationships. Parents of course will still claim authority over

children, and rightly so; but this will be more negotiated and open than before. These qualities do not apply only to heterosexual families – they have exactly the same purchase in homosexual relationships.

The democratized family is again an ideal. How should social democrats seek to promote that ideal and what specifically can government do? As elsewhere, the emphasis must surely be upon securing a balance of autonomy and responsibility in which positive forms of encouragement go along with other sanctions. There is a widespread yearning for the family to provide stability in a changing world, but realistically it is as likely to reflect other qualities of this world as compensate for them. Much stress is laid upon flexibility and adaptability in the workplace: the same needs to be true of capabilities individuals bring to marriage and family relationships. The capability to sustain relationships through change, even radical changes such as divorce, becomes central not only to individuals' happiness, but to the achievement of continuity in relationships with children.

The protection and care of children is the single most important thread that should guide family policy. It is not a solution to propose that divorce should be made more difficult to obtain. Such a measure might lower formal divorce rates but would not prevent separation and would almost certainly mean that even fewer people would marry – the opposite effect to that desired by those who advocate stricter divorce laws.

Democratic family relationships imply shared responsibility for child care, especially greater sharing among women and men, and among parents and non-

parents, since in the society at large mothers are bearing a disproportionate share of the costs (and enjoying a disproportionate share of the emotional rewards) of children. Marriage and parenthood have always been thought of as tied together, but in the detraditionalized family, where having a child is an altogether different decision from in the past, the two are becoming disentangled. The proportion of children born outside marriage probably won't decline, and life-long sexual partnerships will almost certainly become increasingly uncommon. Contractual commitment to a child could thus be separated from marriage, and made by each parent as a binding matter of law, with unmarried and married fathers having the same rights and the same obligations.¹⁵ Both sexes would have to recognize that sexual encounters carry the chance of life-time responsibilities, including protection from physical abuse. In combination with other cultural changes promoting a more positive image of fatherhood, such a restructuring of parenthood would undermine the very

The democratic family

- Emotional and sexual equality
- Mutual rights and responsibilities in relationships
- Co-parenting
- Life-long parental contracts
- Negotiated authority over children
- Obligations of children to parents
- The socially integrated family

idea of the 'single parent'. Enforcing parenthood contracts wouldn't be without its problems. Obviously other modes of seeking to balance risk and responsibility could also be instituted.

Democracy is difficult to achieve and can be hard to live with, in the family as in other areas. As far as the care of children is concerned, it implies co-parenting, however far off this may be in current circumstances. The rightist view of the disintegration of the traditional family tends to go along with a specific thesis about the limitations of men: men are intrinsically feckless and morally irresponsible; unless safely locked into marriage of a traditional kind, they are a socially disruptive force.

Yet research does not support this idea.¹⁶ For most men, as for women, divorce is a painful and distressing experience. The large majority of men don't feel relief at having shed their responsibilities for their children. Most attempt to sustain their relationships with them, even in the face of great difficulties. Many who lose contact do so because of the emotional traumas involved, or the active hostility of the ex-partner, rather than a desire to follow an errant lifestyle.

As one researcher points out, there is a very thin line between those fathers who remain closely involved with their children after divorce and those who do not. The most important determinant is not the attitude of the father, but the responses of others, plus contingent events which sway things one way rather than the other. Many fathers do lose contact with their children and do not support them economically. Contrary to the 'errant male' view, however, this does not seem to be a

gender issue. A study by the US Census Bureau found that non-custodial mothers were less likely than comparable fathers to pay child maintenance awarded by the courts.¹⁷

Co-parenting could be encouraged by a number of innovations. Like 'single mother', the term 'absent parent', widely used in law, helps perpetuate a situation where one parent, normally the father, is seen and treated as peripheral. Economic factors are also relevant. Why shouldn't child minding and out-of-school care be just as available for non-resident fathers as for single mothers? Fathers should have greater parenting rights than at present, but they should be provided, where necessary, with the means to discharge their responsibilities.

Politicians often speak of the need for strong families to promote social cohesion. They aren't wrong to do so, but some qualifications should be made. First, the family doesn't only refer to parents bringing up children. Children should have responsibilities to their parents, not just the other way round. It is worth at least considering whether this should be legally binding. The federal government in the US in 1983, in fact, sought to require children to help support ageing parents, as part of the Medicaid programme. The proposal was never implemented, although some twenty-six states now have statutes requiring children to provide support for needy parents.¹⁸ While these have rarely been enforced, perhaps this is a notion whose time has come. For example, such obligations could be meshed with life-long parenting contracts.

Second, we don't need to look far to see that strong

families do not inevitably create social solidarity. Southern Italy provides an example on a large scale, but something similar can be true in other settings. Poor neighbourhoods, for instance, may have their own criminal families, where strong ties and obligations are the very basis of their law-breaking activities. Even perfectly law-abiding families may close themselves off from the wider world and abandon their responsibilities towards it. Strong family ties can be an effective source of civic cohesion only if they look outwards as well as inwards – this is what I mean by the socially integrated family. Family relations are part of the wider fabric of social life.

4

The Social Investment State

Classical social democracy thought of wealth creation as almost incidental to its basic concerns with economic security and redistribution. The neoliberals placed competitiveness and the generating of wealth much more to the forefront. Third way politics also gives very strong emphasis to these qualities, which have an urgent importance given the nature of the global marketplace. They will not be developed, however, if individuals are abandoned to sink or swim in an economic whirlpool. Government has an essential role to play in investing in the human resources and infrastructure needed to develop an entrepreneurial culture.

Third way politics, it could be suggested, advocates a *new mixed economy*. Two different versions of the old mixed economy existed. One involved a separation between state and private sectors, but with a good deal of industry in public hands. The other was and is the social market. In each of these, markets are kept largely subordinate to government. The new mixed economy

